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**Orientalism, the Gaze, and
Representations of Femininity within
American Tribal Style Belly Dance**

Fat Chance Belly Dance. Left to right: Anita Lalwani, Wendy Adams, Carolena Nericcio, Sandi Ball, Kristine Adams, Marsha Poulin. Photo by Kristine Adams, 2009.



It is Wednesday night at a small café in San Francisco's Mission district where Fat Chance Belly Dance is scheduled to perform. The light is dim, and the bar is hopping; an electronic world beat pulses behind a dozen lively conversations that strive to drown it out. Suddenly the pervasive throb of the sound system begins to fade and is replaced by the solitary drone of a *mizmar* in an improvised *taqsim* as the lights come up on part of the dance floor at the end of the room.¹ Conversation drops to a hush, and the crowd presses around the designated stage as five women elegantly parade into the room, arms undulating above their heads as they make their entrance. They circle around the performance space, facing each other with serene smiles, and giving the audience time to admire their bright, mirrored skirts and tattooed midriffs. As if on a hidden signal, two of the dancers break away to face the crowd while the remaining three set up behind them. The chorus turns admiring eyes on the duet, whose arms execute graceful arcs as they perform a series of dramatic turns in unison. Suddenly the two dancers raise their hands overhead, breaking into big smiles as they strike the downbeat of a fast rhythm with their right hips. The entire

troupe bursts into action as the tempo accelerates; the dancers in the background rapidly strike their finger cymbals and *zaghareet* to call encouragement to the featured dancers, who wrap around one another shimmying and spinning. Finally they make eye contact and separate, while two new performers stride forward to take their place. For the next twenty minutes dancers retire to the chorus to be replaced by their troupe-mates as the music alternates between slow and fast, and the dancers alternate between meditative, undulating movements and high-energy shimmies and hip work. Finally after a drum piece that builds to an explosive spinning finale, the chorus steps forward to join the featured dancers in a bow, signaling to the audience that the show is over. The entire group completes one last circuit of the room to the accompaniment of their cymbals and thunderous applause, turning elated smiles to one another and to the crowd before vanishing the way they came in.

Elegant and graceful: those are the first words that Fat Chance Belly Dance (FCBD) hopes will flash through your mind when you see a performance such as the one described above. Through their weekly classes and shows, director Carolena Nericcio and her dancers have collectively redefined over twenty-two years what it means to be powerful, feminine, and beautiful. The image that FCBD strives to present, both in and out of the classroom, is one of female grace, strength, and dignity expressed by a group of women working harmoniously together. As Nericcio asserts, their signature American Tribal Style (ATS) “is really less about belly dance and more about female positivity. It’s a celebration of all the positive aspects of the feminine and it wants to celebrate the female body in a really upright and uplifted and bright form.”² The “tribe” in ATS

refers as much to this ethos of mutual support and community among the dancers as it does to their preferred sartorial style.

While this message may be easily read in the female-dominated space of the studio, bringing their art to the outside world means FCBD must contend with the history of belly dance representations in the West and Orientalist fantasies of the dancing body as a signifier of feminine plenitude and sexual availability. This essay surveys the historical representations of the belly dancer in Western fantasy, articulating the masculine desire that created the belly dancer as sexual object in colonial encounters, as well as the ways that American women have appropriated the dance to assert their own agency in protest of this objectification, in order to contextualize FCBD’s performances. Understood within this lineage, American Tribal Style’s representation of belly dance as a social, communal, and feminist practice not only challenges this dominant masculinist framework, it also demonstrates that the masculine gaze continues to color our perception of female desire and sensuality today.

The confrontation of native belly dancer and colonial subject in the nineteenth century has, to a large degree, shaped our understanding of performer/audience relations within belly dance. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said interprets the infamous liaison between Gustave Flaubert and Egyptian dancer/courtesan Kuchuk Hanem as a paradigm for relations between East and West:

She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically Oriental.”³

Said's project in *Orientalism* was to catalogue and demonstrate the relative consistency of the stereotypical image of the Orient in nineteenth-century writers' work: "Every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability."⁴ The West, fascinated and threatened by the difference represented by the Orient, went to great pains to describe the Near East as inferior to itself and, thus, in need of European occupation and correction. The West's desire was to reaffirm itself as moral, scientific, rational, and productive; casting the East as its opposite entailed characterizing the Orient as degenerate, mystical, sensual, and languid.

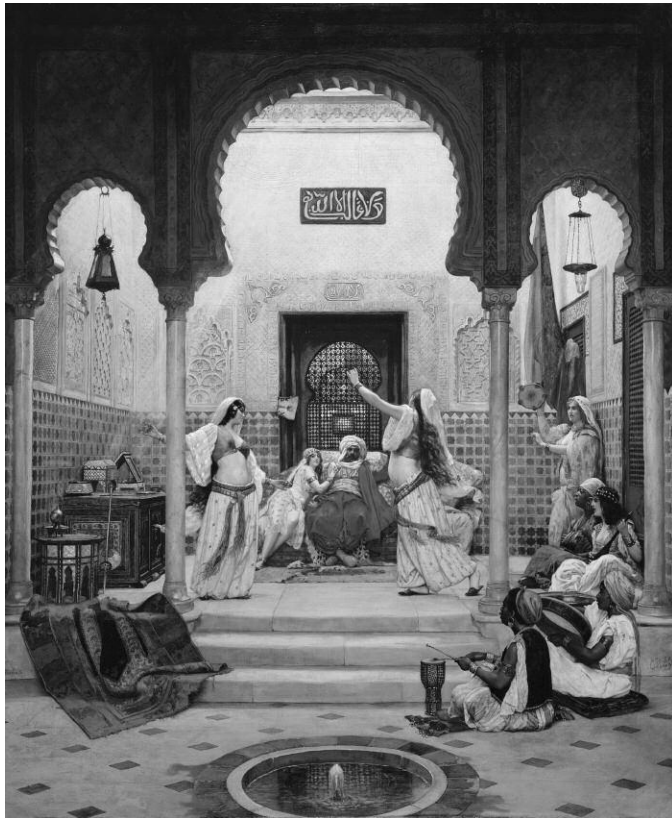
Even in Flaubert's time, this schema of Western fantasy had influenced his image of Kuchuk Hanem as the "typical" Oriental female. The private, domestic lives of Oriental women were largely hidden from Western eyes; women themselves remained secluded inside the harem or women's quarters within the Middle Eastern home, making this space an extremely potent object for European fantasy. Representations of the harem in Western art defined it as a space of leisure, influenced by the aura of luxury and magnificence of the ultimate harem, the Grand Seraglio of the Ottoman sultan. Correspondingly, the nineteenth-century colonial subject fantasized that women within this imaginary harem led lives of self-indulgence, their only duty to attend to the amorous instincts of their husband. The Western imagination assumed that harem life was eventless when he was absent; however, in the pursuit of the sultan's favors, that same imagination pitted women against one another as jealous rivals, competing to make the best display of their charms. It is in this context that the colonial subject imagined belly dancing.

In *Harems of the Mind*, Ruth Bernard Yeazell quotes Paul Rycout, author of the 1668 text *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, who conjures scenes of erotic competition in the garden of the Grand Seraglio: "Here the Women strive with their Dances, Songs and Discourse to make themselves Mistresses of the Grand Signiors affection, and then let themselves loose to all kinds of lasciviousness and wanton carriage, acquitting themselves as much of all respect to Majesty as they do to modesty."⁵

A 1893 painting by Pierre Louis Bouchard entitled *Les Almées* demonstrates that the imaginative links Rycout described between Oriental dance, the harem, and erotic display for male enticement were still strong in the nineteenth century; in the center of the painting a rather bored-looking sultan reclines as two bare-bellied women dance before him, and a third drapes herself over his chest. The harem's remaining female inhabitants are seated on the stairs to the right, each with an instrument in hand to accompany the performance, their eyes fixed on the dancers, who in turn are fixated on the sultan. The harem in the Western mind was thus a women's space constructed solely around male pleasure, the access to which was signified by the sultan's exclusive right to gaze on its inhabitants.

Les Almées points to another trope of the harem scene; it was typically populated by numerous women, reflecting the Western fascination with the permission of polygamy under Islam. Yeazell characterizes the imagined pleasure on offer in images of the harem as "erotic choice without limit."⁶ The centrality of the sultan in *Les Almées* clearly foregrounds his agency—it is his gaze that is solicited, his look that activates the harem, transforming it from a place of idle repose into a sexualized space of unending delights. The equation of vision and

Pierre Louis Bouchard, *Les Almées* (1893). Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.



Thomas Rowlandson, *Harem*, after 1812. The British Museum, London.



erotic possession implicit in Bouchard's work is explicitly illustrated in Thomas Rowlandson's *Harem*, which depicts a seated sultan with a prominent erection who gazes on a seemingly endless crowd of nude women posing for him.

This split of roles where man bears the gaze and woman performs for it follows the model of visual pleasure that Laura Mulvey articulates around narrative cinema. Mulvey identifies two pleasurable structures of looking relative to film: "The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification of the image seen."⁷ In the realm of the harem fantasy, the identificatory pleasure comes from the assumption of the role of the sultan that such scenes imply (either by the presence of a male figure in the painting or the implication that the viewer is occupying his role by seeing the interior of the harem), while the scopophilic pleasure lies in lingering over the languid curves of a number of women posed or performing for the spectator. While Mulvey was addressing cinema, she concisely articulates the gender roles assigned to the gaze and to performance that reflect a specific, Western, phallogocentric subjectivity. Here the gaze is linked explicitly with the male spectator—his ability to see, to penetrate into the harem is symbolic of his ability to sexually possess the women within.

Western male travelers in the Orient, tempted by these visions of Eastern excess but denied access to the mysteries of the harem, often were attracted to public dancers and through them attempted to taste this forbidden fantasy. Here the harem fantasy and the image of the belly dancer intertwine in the Western imagination. The most noted dancers were the *ghawazi*

of Upper Egypt, and two of the most well-known travelers' accounts center around the *ghaziya* Kuchuk Hanem.⁸

American journalist George W. Curtis visited Kuchuk Hanem early in the spring of 1850 and published an account of his travels. Curtis was welcomed into Hanem's home, given coffee, and sat smoking on the divan as Hanem and another *ghaziya* named Xenobi danced for him. Curtis' descriptions of the event maintain an air of artistic moral superiority by comparing the dancers to classical models of beauty (Venus and Terpsichore) on the one hand, while emphasizing their unrestrained, passionate sensuality on the other. Kuchuk's dancing is "a lyric of love which words can not tell—profound, oriental, intense and terrible."⁹ Xenobi follows, prompting Curtis to comment that, "the Paradise-pavilioned prophet could not have felt his heavenly harem complete, had he sat smoking and entranced with the Howadji."¹⁰ The invocation of the harem imagery here, despite the fact that he is manifestly not in one, betrays the desire of the American traveler to experience that forbidden space vicariously through his encounter with the *ghawazi*.

While Curtis restrains himself to scopophilic satisfactions, Kuchuk Hanem's second noted visitor in the spring of 1850 does not. The *ghaziya* invited Gustave Flaubert and his traveling companion, Maxime du Camp, into her home, where they were treated to a night of private dance performances interspersed with sexual intimacies with Kuchuk and her dancers—"intermissions for fucking," as Flaubert explains in his letters to Louis Bouilhet.¹¹ Of particular interest to Flaubert is the Bee dance, a pantomime in which a dancer removed layers of clothing pretending to look for a trapped bee inside. The Western fascination with dancing and undressing as signifiers of the wanton-

ness of the harem find full expression at the end of her dance, when Kuchuk was left as bare as one of Ingres' Odalisques. Though she did not dance the Bee for Curtis, he too was avid to connect the *ghaziya's* dance with nudity: "Kushuk Arnem [sic] rose and loosened her shawl girdle in such wise, that I feared she was about to shed the frivolity of dress, as Venus shed the sea-foam . . ."12 Both men desire the Oriental female body depicted in so many Western harem scenes in order to live out the fantasy of being the exclusive voyeur for whom the eroticized feminine performs. The sexual availability of the *ghaziya* further enhanced the fantasy, as the male spectator was invited into her quarters where she would entertain him in any way he wished. In this manner the Western subject found a number of harem substitutes to fulfill his visual and erotic longings.

Said's articulation of the gendered power structure surrounding the gaze in colonial encounters is useful for understanding the above exchanges and the ensuing dynamic of dominating spectator/objectified performer. Adding Mulvey's elaboration of gender roles in spectatorship, we additionally understand that though the performativity of the feminine appears active, her gestures are considered passive due to a cultural value system that equates agency not with physical action but with symbolic meaning-making linked explicitly with vision.

This theorization, though useful for understanding dominant representations of belly dance, does not adequately account for contemporary American Tribal Style belly dance. ATS's practitioners experience their dance largely as empowering, not objectifying. Once we consider the desires motivating the Western male subject's representations of the colonial encounter, the authority of his "objective" discourse on the

Orient is disrupted, and we move from a fixed relationship of domination to a mutable relationship open to contestation by his objects of knowledge.

Meyda Yeğenoğlu reminds us that all forms of Othering—gendered, colonial, or otherwise—rely on the operation of desire; Orientalism works through the articulation of historical and fantasy productions of the Orient that are linked as the scene of desire.¹³ Said identifies the historical as the manifest content of Orientalism, while fantasy forms the latent content, and he notes that while the former may shift over time, the latter remains relatively consistent into the present day.¹⁴ Where Said assumes a monolithic Western subject that remains essentially unchanged over five hundred years, producing the Orient in opposition to his sense of self, Yeğenoğlu resists this notion of a predetermined Western identity. Relying on Homi Bhabha's understanding of colonial identification in which Western subject and Oriental Other are never fully complete but mutually implicated as both are formed through the process of desire, Yeğenoğlu asserts that "not only the very identity of the Western subject is constituted in the movement of desire, but also the potential resistance to this constitution is . . . inscribed in this very process."¹⁵ The subject's desire for the Other opens up the possibility of response as it seeks to establish a connection between the two.

In the early twentieth century, Western women responded to the colonization of their desire by male subjects by occupying masculine fantasies of the sexual, exotic Oriental dancer and using her image to serve their own ends. The figure of Salome, the biblical dancer who seduced Herod into giving her the head of John the Baptist through her choreographic

Maud Allen as Salome. Source: Walkowitz, "The 'Vision of Salome,'" *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 2 (April 2003).



exploits, is one of the most notorious examples. Though the drama of *Salome* debuted onstage in a tragedy by Oscar Wilde at the *fin de siècle*, it was Maud Allen's dance version of *Salome* on the London stage in 1908 that inspired an army of *Salome* imitators in the theater and in the salons of the wealthy.

Allen's dance collapsed two pivotal moments of Wilde's drama, making *Salome's* desire and its consequences the focus of her wordless performance. Allen eliminated Herod from the scene by locating her *Salome* in a dream after the execution, where she relived her dancing triumph and was confronted with remorse as the disembodied head of John the Baptist appears before her as a phantasm.¹⁶ Allen dressed her *Salome* seductively in bejeweled breastplates and a girdle of pearls draped over a filmy skirt, through which audience members could glimpse the dancer's body. As Allen invited the voyeuristic gaze of the audience through her opulent yet sheer costume, she turned a fetishistic gaze on the silent, decapitated male form, simultaneously destabilizing the boundaries between active spectator/passive performer and foregrounding a self-pleasuring female desire.

"Salomania" spread across Europe and America as numerous women used *Salome* as a vehicle for self-expression and sexual assertiveness onstage, often morphing the role in dynamic ways. Theatrical versions in vaudeville and variety shows ranged from the sexual to the comic, while in the hands of some young suffragists, *Salome* became a vehicle "to claim possession of their own erotic gaze, albeit a hostile and aggressive one."¹⁷ The craze for *Salome* dancing even spread to wealthy socialites who would perform for each other at all-female parties, in this context transforming the subtext of the

dance from male titillation to female liberation.¹⁸

While offering a vision of personal empowerment for a number of women who took it upon themselves to dance Salome, many critics have argued that these performances were circumscribed by conservative ideological space.¹⁹ Salome's seemingly transgressive dance was safely contained by its placement outside of Western morality in the Orient, which was, as Said would remind us, the symbolic location of all that was different from the West. By being located in a foreign space, the performance of Salome transformed the threat of the sexual woman into exotic spectacle while it upheld conventional values surrounding femininity and sensual display. While this may be true, Salome simultaneously provided an articulation of a feminine counter-narrative that embraced the sexual woman as a figure of female power. The Oriental woman of the harem and that of the Salome performance ostensibly cater to a colonial, masculine desire for the sexualized feminine, but Salome's dance troubles his illusion of mastery over the economy of desire; her choreography may outwardly satisfy his scopophilic longings, but her sexuality is exercised to fulfill not his agenda but her own. From 1915 through the 1920s, Hollywood recast Salome as the vamp—the predatory female character in whom the despotism typically attributed to the sultan, the Oriental male, is conflated with the sexually aggressive modern woman. This Salome warned against the threat that the free exercise of female sexuality posed to society—the chaos and total usurpation of the male-dominated social order.²⁰ Such representations neutralized the transgressive potential of the self-reflexive female desire that Salome embodied by reframing her actions within the context of male heterosexuality.

Influenced by Hollywood's theatrical Orientalism, professional Middle Eastern dancers adopted Maud Allen's Salome costume; the bejeweled bra and belt became the uniform associated with the *raqs sharqi* performer.²¹ Popular *raqs sharqi* dancers featured prominently in the growing Egyptian film industry and were frequently brought to America during the 1950s and '60s to entertain in the expanding Greek and Arabic nightclub districts in major cities. During the 1960s, American women began to learn *raqs sharqi* by frequenting the clubs and imitating or learning from native dancers.²² The American women schooled in these community settings gained an appreciation for the nuanced artistic and social role belly dance played in its native context. This led to the American dancer's desire to communicate these meanings to her audience, to have her dance recognized as art. However, mainstream American audiences, influenced by a long history of equating belly dance with female sexual wantonness, insisted on treating the belly dancer as a sexual sideshow and largely thwarted this desire. As a result, a number of dancers in the 1970s turned towards rhetorical and performative strategies that resisted the seductive image of the dancer by emphasizing the experience of female community and the ethnic roots of the dance.

The tribal dynamic has its roots in the rejection of the particular set of seductive relationships between audience and dancer that Carolena Nericcio's teacher, Masha Archer, pioneered in the 1970s. Archer designed her group presentation to direct the audience to regard each dancer with the same respect and admiration modeled by her tribe, who danced behind her, presenting her to the audience.²³ Archer was heavily influenced by her teacher Jamila Salimpour's troupe, Bal Anat, which pre-

sented itself as a collective of many tribes. The group performed an array of folkloric dances costumed in imaginative ethnic dress, the entire troupe standing onstage while individuals and small groups came forward to perform, then melted back into the tableau when finished.²⁴

For Masha Archer the tribe became a strategy for increasing the power of the belly dancer onstage through a rejection of the cabaret mode of performance. Against the standard bra, belt, and sheer, slit skirt of most professional belly dancers at the time, Archer put her dancers in full pantaloons, long-sleeved *cholis* (a midriff-baring top modeled after the blouse worn under Indian *saris*), and covered their hair in turbans. “I locked horns with club owners because they did not want the dancers to look this way. They wanted high heels and legs, filmy open material, bare legs, and long blonde hair,” Archer reminisces in an interview in *Tribal Talk*.²⁵ The covering, ethnic costuming of her troupe rejected the belly dancer as a sex symbol as it articulated the lines of the body so that each gesture could be clearly read in improvisational situations.

Building on the foundation Archer provided, American Tribal Style strategically rejects aspects of the solo cabaret performance that are linked in the American imagination to masculine fantasies of the belly dancer in order to shift the performer-audience dynamic from one of seduction to one of mutual respect and enjoyment. Archer’s interventions—aesthetic and structural—aimed to enhance the belly dancer’s power and presence onstage, precisely because prevailing stereotypes of and venues for belly dance often put the dancer in an objectified position, one that valued titillation over artistry. Similarly, Nericcio affirms that ATS does not rely on

Carolena Nericcio oversees an advanced workshop at the Fat Chance Belly Dance studio, January 2009. Photo by Kristine Adams.



seduction: “Not to say that it’s wrong when other dance styles do it, but ATS is really saying ‘Watch us dance together’ as opposed to ‘Look at me and find me sexy.’”²⁶ In ATS, the dance studio becomes the grounds for resisting phallogocentric representations of the belly dancer as sexualized spectacle. The Fat Chance studio is essentially a feminine space; classes are limited to adult women only. Men are neither permitted to observe classes nor to enter the studio proper except during designated student salons that include friends and family. The exclusion of the possibility of male voyeurism clears a space for women to create new meanings for their dance practice that are shared and validated by other women. Within the structure of group improvisation, everyone is leader and follower, performer and witness, in an ever-changing flow. The practice of improvising together, which depends entirely on communication and cooperation between partners, shifts the emphasis from enticing an outside spectator to forging connections within the dance community. This move from seductiveness to communal identity is reflected in the costuming as well as in the mechanics of the dance itself.

ATS dancers built on the basic aesthetic schema of pantaloons, *choli*, and covered hair initiated by Masha Archer; in addition, they wear layers of tiered skirts, hip shawls, and belts, effectively concealing the movements of the lower body and feet in yards of fabric. Only the face, hands, belly, and back are typically exposed—as Nericcio puts it, “The costume is obviously less about revealing the body and more about revealing the richness of the costume—the textiles are really bold colors and we wear really beautiful folkloric embroideries and jewelry.”²⁷ ATS dancers attempt to shift the audience’s focus away from

revealing the body and onto the larger picture of the group working together; a sense of overwhelming richness and intricacy in the costume satisfies the spectator’s desire to look without compromising the dancer’s integrity. The costuming is also used to proclaim tribal identity, to reveal the dancer as a member of a group that is constituted through similarity of dress as well as of movement.

On the level of individual technique, the strong and athletic posture of the dancers contrasts against Western images of swooning Oriental sensuality or idleness. The body is kept very upright; forward bending gestures used in other styles of belly dance are rejected. The ATS posture emphasizes a lifted, open chest that gives an impression of assertiveness and pride. The arms extend into space in graceful curves, framing and presenting the body at all times. Dancers present to each other and the audience a smile, a level head, and a steady gaze. The fact that the dancers must attend to each other in order to catch the next cue discourages expressions that could be read as timid or flirtatious, such as looking at the floor or individual eye contact with members of the audience. The movements that form the ATS vocabulary are drawn from traditional *raqs sharqi* steps, as well as from folk dances that span North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Stylistic influences from flamenco can be seen in the carriage of the arms and torso, as well as in the turns and the ubiquitous hand *floreo* that accompanies many slow movements. While the Fat Chance aesthetic combines a range of dance styles and costuming influences, the ATS presentation intends not to represent any one real cultural style, but to create an image of empowered femininity that will be communicated to a Western audience. Drawing on a multitude of different



Fat Chance performing a quartet at the San Francisco Mecca Revue, 2008. Photo by Brad Dosland of Taboo Media (opposite top). Wendy Allen and Sandi Ball perform a fast duet while members of the chorus call encouragement. Tribal Fest, 2006. Photo by Brad Dosland of Taboo Media (opposite bottom).



dance languages from different cultures, ATS styles the body in a way that will appear active and engaged to a Western audience.

The dance community Nericcio founded supports the assertive presentation of the individual dancer in bringing the art to life, in performance as well as in the studio. Fat Chance's stage presentation further emphasizes the collective context developed in the separatist space of the studio and transposes it into the public sphere. As demonstrated in the performance that opened this article, a supportive network of women presents each featured dancer—she appears in the context of the camaraderie, grace, and power she shares with her tribe. Her focus is evenly balanced between the audience and her fellow performers as she attends to the nuances and cues happening in the moment, rather than being exclusively directed outward at the crowd. Her performance is witnessed and validated by the chorus of women dancing behind her—they form a counter-audience to the one on the other side of the stage, their appreciative presence both guiding the spectator in how to respond and implicitly pointing out that his opinion is not the only, nor the most important, one.

Fat Chance thus presents an image of feminine sociality, rather than seduction, onstage. The gaze is de-fetishized,

becoming a medium of communication and exchange between dancers in a circuit that includes the audience, but does not pander to it. By destabilizing the authority of the voyeuristic masculine spectator, fragmenting the gaze into a number of looks that are exchanged between performers as well as with the audience, ATS claims the active role of vision for the dancer as well as for the observer. Further, this vision is exercised not from a disembodied, removed point, but a number of embodied, specific, and physically engaged subjectivities that are constantly renegotiating their relationship with one another. In this gesture, Fat Chance points to the heterogeneous and embodied condition of vision, challenging the notion of the stability, permanence, and omniscience of the colonial male gaze. FCBD's performance also provides positive and validating roles with which female audience members can identify; ATS invites female spectators to project themselves into a network of women that allows them to enjoy seeing as well as being seen in an equal relationship of peers. Pleasure in looking, as well as being looked at, is shifted away from a heterosexual, masculine paradigm of desire into another space where alternate meanings can flourish.

In the end, ATS occupies belly dance in spite of it being the site of Orientalist fantasies about the sexualized feminine. FCBD demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of the role the colonial male gaze described by Said has played in denigrating belly dance performances in the West and strategically adapts their practice to counter its influence. In private, ATS excludes the male gaze, providing space for the individual and collective validation necessary to develop a specifically female voice; in public, it positions the community of the tribe against the dom-

Kristine Adams, Carolena Nericcio, and Wendy Allen in a slow trio at Tribal Fest, 2008. Photo by SoozhyQ.



inance of the male voyeur, interrupting his sense of mastery of the scene. As Yeğenoğlu would remind us, representations are created by desire, thus to intervene into the representational sphere is to intervene into the economy of desire that produced it. This destabilizes the gendered roles Mulvey identifies surrounding the active and passive distribution of subjectivity in performance. While the presentation of a group of women belly dancing in ethnic adornment might superficially conform to masculine Orientalist desires for the exotic feminine, in FCBD's representation of belly dance, the imaginary sultan is displaced from his throne; the male spectator meets not the seductive gaze of the harem favorite or the *femme fatale* posturing for his attention, but the collective gaze of a group of women who present themselves as a force to be reckoned with independent of his appraisal or approval. In their adaptation of belly dance to serve a feminist vision, the dancers of FCBD participate in a long history of representations of the Oriental woman that has functioned as a symbolic battleground for the social and sexual freedoms of women in the West since the nineteenth century. Considered within this lineage, the practice of American Tribal Style becomes the site of confrontation and renegotiation of Western subjectivity not only surrounding the belly dancer, but women as a whole.

Notes

- 1 In Arabic music, *mizmar* refers to any single or double-reed wind instrument. *Taqsim* refers to a melodic improvisation style that usually precedes a composition in Arabic and Turkish music.
- 2 Carolena Nericcio, interview with the author, January 29, 2009.
- 3 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 6.
- 4 Said, *Orientalism*, 206.
- 5 Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 108.
- 6 Paul Rycout, quoted in Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind*, 97.
- 7 Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 18. While critics of Mulvey's theory point out that it leaves little space for a female spectator—who, according to this schema, can only identify masochistically with the female form on display or sadistically with the male protagonist—in regards to the fantasy harem scene, her assessment holds true.
- 8 The *ghawazi* were professional performers and members of itinerant tribal bands that were thought to have entered Egypt as part of the Romany migration from India. Native Egyptians looked down on the *ghawazi* because, in addition to dancing in public and associating with foreigners, they were understood to be available for sexual services and became known to Europeans as prostitutes. For more on the *ghawazi*, see Karin van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).
- 9 George W. Curtis, *Nile Notes of a Howadji* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852) Making of America Collection, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=AJL0986.0001.001>, 135.
- 10 Curtis, *Nile Notes of a Howadji*, 135.
- 11 Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: selected, edited and translated by Francis Steegmuller* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 116.
- 12 Curtis, *Nile Notes of a Howadji*, 133.
- 13 Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards A Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 58–59.
- 14 Said, *Orientalism*, 206.
- 15 Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 60.
- 16 Judith R. Walkowitz, "The 'Vision of Salome': Cosmopolitanism and Erotic

- Dancing in Central London, 1908–1918,” *The American Historical Review* 108, No. 2. (April 2003), 352.
- 17 Walkowitz, “The ‘Vision of Salome,’” 370.
- 18 Andrea Deagon, “The Dance of the Seven Veils,” in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy*, eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers Inc., 2005), 251.
- 19 Deagon, “Dance of the Seven Veils,” 251.
- 20 Gaylyn Studlar, “‘Out-Salomeing Salome’: Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism,” in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, eds. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 117.
- 21 *Raqs sharqi* generally refers to the “cabaret” version of belly dancing that integrated Western influences in costume and choreography. The style evolved in the cabarets and nightclubs that sprang up in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East as the Western tourist industry boomed in the early twentieth century. For a detailed description of the various forms of dance in Egypt in the early twentieth century and the development of cabaret style entertainment, see Karin van Nieuwkerk, “‘A Trade Like Any Other’: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt” (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 40–55.
- 22 Paul Eugene Monty, *Serena, Ruth St. Denis, and the Evolution of Belly Dance in America* (1876–1976), PhD diss., New York University, School of Education, Health, Nursing, and Arts Professions, 1986, 232–237.
- 23 Masha Archer, “Grandmother of Tribal Style: An Interview with Masha Archer,” by Nadia Khastagir in *Tribal Talk: A Retrospective*, ed. Nadia Khastagir (San Francisco: Fat Chance Belly Dance, 2005), 38.
- 24 Jamila Salimpour, “From Many Tribes: The Origins of Bal Anat,” *Habibi* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1999), 17; Rina Rall, “The Lineage of American Tribal Style: A Historical Study,” in *Tribal Talk: A Retrospective*, ed. Nadia Khastagir (San Francisco: Fat Chance Belly Dance, 2005), 20.
- 25 Archer, “Grandmother of Tribal Style,” 39.
- 26 Carolina Neruccio, interview with the author, January 29, 2009.
- 27 Ibid.