Modes of Self-Representation among Female Arab Singers and Dancers

– Natalie Smolenski

Recent developments in the field of anthropology, especially feminist anthropology, have brought to light venues and forms of self-expression and self-construction that have classically undergone devaluation or neglect because they defy the formula of a linear, 'objective' textual narrative.[1] In response to anthropologists who made self-consciousness, objectivity and development in conjunction with temporal progression criteria for 'accurate' self-representation, scholars have recently begun to reform the theoretical underpinnings of these assumptions because they privilege a form of self-expression – the heroic, individual-centered, narrative/autobiography – that has traditionally been the purview of Western male authors. Rather, they contend that any form of personal expression, whether verbal or non-verbal, explicit or implicit, that relates to the formulation, perpetualization, or reconceptualization of a 'self' with regards to a wider social 'other' falls under the rubric of 'self-representation'.

The shift in perspective allows us to investigate modes of self-representation employed by women, especially women with non-Western cultural backgrounds, more closely and accurately. Because women's social power globally lags behind that of men, and because they do not as often as men record their experiences in written form through a first-person, 'objective' narrative perspective, perceiving the avenues through which they influence how others perceive them requires more nuanced observation. Female entertainers face an additional battle against preconceptions which place them in a morally ambiguous realm where they must constantly react to the male desire their work is supposed to elicit by denying or minimizing its importance in crafting both their decisions to work as entertainers and their identities as 'respectable' women. However, the literature on female Arab singers and dancers demonstrates that by adopting various culturally-familiar personas whose characteristics challenge or refute the accusations or negative perceptions a woman performer encounters, she may triumph against the odds to win popular sentiment to her side, or at least to some degree mute the disdain her society directs towards her.

Here it is important to note that fame is not necessarily indicative of the extent to which a woman has gained popular approval. The experience of women in performing industries indicates that both famous and local performers achieve public acclaim and acceptance, and both (like the legendary singer Asmahan and her less-famous peers at nightclubs across the Arab world) are susceptible to falls from grace and stained reputations. Moreover, because of the increasing influence of the mass media and Western youth culture beginning in the second half of the 20th century, fame today is less indicative of a performer's acceptance by the public than it was in the past. On the one hand, these two major changes have made it more difficult for individuals to achieve the kind of market dominance enjoyed by singers such as Fairuz and Umm Kulthum and dancers such as Tahiyya Karioka and Samia Gamal; on the other, they have made 'consuming' the artistic production, image, and lifestyle of both loved and hated celebrities easier than ever before. Despite the backlash against them in certain environments, professional female singers are more numerous now than ever before, many despite their perceived 'moral shortcomings'. In contrast, belly dancers have almost completely ceased to be household names; their appearances in films have slowly tapered off since the 1970s, and the Arab market has been flooded by foreign dancers with fewer moral qualms about performing a dance increasingly seen as shameful, 'Westernized' and detrimental to Arab culture.[2]

The increased focus on a singer's appearance and sexuality throughout the 20th century has ensured that the women artists rising to highest prominence at the beginning of the 21st century are beautiful and young, as well as ready and willing to expose their bodies over mass media channels. Artists like Nancy Ajram, Elissa, Ruby, and Haifa Wehbe have exploded onto the Arab music scene in recent years, gaining legions of adoring fans – both male and female – across the world and making considerable fortunes in the process.[3] Their sexually provocative video clips have largely filled (and even overcompensated for) the void left as professional Arab belly dancers are increasingly relegated to the realm of memory.

Of course, the popularity of sexually assertive – even scandalous – female singers stands in ironic contrast to the increased frequency of veiling among the young Arab women and girls who make up a large part of the new female artists' fan bases. Yet I suspect that further anthropological study would reveal that in fact these phenomena represent two aspects of one reaction to the severe socioeconomic and political obstacles Arab populations face: love for the new female singers reflects an increased desire on the part of young Arab women to cultivate an imaginative realm characterized by fun and play, echoing the emphasis on fun and flirtation evident in

Western popular culture since the early 20th century.[4] Veiling, on the other hand, is a strong statement of personal agency on the part of young women to assert that they are not party to the decline in moral values often condemned as a principle source of Arab weakness in the face of external and internal foes. As Ted Swedenbug has demonstrated in his analysis of Middle Eastern youth culture, sexually liberated female performers represent only one face of the entertainment industry; they complement the simultaneous rise in (mostly male) Islamic singers like Sami Yusuf and 'Ali Gawhar, reflecting contradictory but contextually understandable sets of aspirations.[5] Commenting on Ruby for the BBC, Raisa Kader describes the coexisting desire and disdain for fun as expressed through a pop star's sexuality:

> "The fact that the Egyptian society is not getting used to her is understandable. But what I really think is that no matter how much the Egyptian society criticises her, they still do like her songs and moves."[6]

In contrast to the artistry and sociopolitical authenticity for which audiences exalted older generations of singers – generations characterized by real revolutions against colonial rule and high hopes for Arab unity and renaissance – fans of the new stars repeatedly describe their voices and musical styles as "sweet", "adorable", and "cheerful".[7] Though the new generations of singers are not strangers to politics or nationalism,[8] the vast majority of their songs feature a surface-level treatment of love, flirtation, and sexuality. They sing almost completely in colloquial Arabic and slang as opposed to the Modern Standard ('elevated') Arabic often featured in the sung poetry of generations past. In contrast to the West, where political apathy as reflected in pop music and a culture of 'fun' is often the byproduct of material comforts, Arab youth have adopted these trends in part as a response to the perceived impossibility of effecting political, social, or economic change.[9] Indeed, pop has replaced previous generations' folk music and *tarab*[10] as the most frequently consumed form of Arab musical expression.

Nevertheless, prevailing gender norms continue to make criticism from socially conservative forces that condemn female singers on religious and moral grounds an unavoidable occupational hazard that they must gracefully overcome. Some Islamic religious officials have branded Nancy Ajram a *kāfir* (infidel). The Egyptian Parliament banned the broadcast of one of her songs over government television stations in 2003; it has also banned Ruby from its channels.[11] Islamist constituencies in a number of countries, including Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Saudi

Arabia and Kuwait, have succeeded in convincing various ministries to prevent 'provocative' singers from crossing their borders. One such singer, the Lebanese Marwa, was sexually assaulted and would most likely have been raped by groups of young men during a concert on an Alexandria beach if not for the intervention of security personnel. Members of the Egyptian parliament blamed the scenario entirely on her wardrobe choices, which "did not take into consideration the feelings" of the audience, and they began to debate banning her from Egypt.[12] In addition to condemnation by government and religious officials, the singers also face a groundswell of popular opposition. For instance, the website Hamasna.org, an offshoot of the Islamist Hamasna.com, bills itself as the "Campaign to Fight Nudity and Scandalousness". The site carries a 'blacklist' of eight entertainment industry figures its authors believe "disregard the values and morals of the society" by promoting overt sexuality through song, dance, television and film. Singers Ruby, Haifa Wehbe, and the Egyptian belly dancer Dina are included in the list.[13] Though overtly expressing sexual power and desire has now become the norm rather than the exception for female Arab singers, they still must contend with the double standard that rewards them economically and professionally for their sexual appeal while denying them the status of 'respectable women' in public opinion.[14] This points to a complex relationship between a woman's public life and social integration and reflects how changes in public attitudes towards the limits of acceptable sexual behavior allow certain new freedoms while asserting old boundaries.

Today's Arab singers and dancers do employ some of the same self-representation strategies their artistic mothers and grandmothers used, especially deflection of criticism onto other, 'less moral' performers and the projection of sexual innocence.[15] Nevertheless, an extensive review of the popular media and literature surrounding Arabic female pop stars is necessary before their modes of self-representation can be evaluated with more nuance. Because the lives of female Arab entertainers of previous generations and their effects on the societies in which they lived have been recorded and analyzed in greater detail by laypersons and scholars than have those of today's performers, and because they are more deeply rooted in the historical consciousness of the general public, this paper assesses their strategies of self-representation. First, I examine the tradition of female seclusion in Arab societies and its encounter with the profession of individual paid performance during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries; I then move on to discuss the forms of resistance – both successful and ineffective – that female singers and dancers employ against collective attempts to define them and determine the boundaries of their characters and identities.

The Historical Value of Seclusion and Pre-Modern Singing and Dancing

The historically positive connotations of women's seclusion informed how Arab women sang and danced before the advent of modernity in the Middle East. The ways in which creative women traditionally practiced their crafts while taking care to address social concerns about the visibility that performance confers upon the performer must inform our assessment of the social stations of singers and dancers today.

Prior to the advent of Islam, equating honour and respect with restriction, inaccessibility and privacy played a major role in many Middle Eastern and Mediterranean spiritual, social and religious traditions. Nikki Keddie notes

> "The earliest text we know of regarding veiling is an Assyrian legal text of the thirteenth century B.C. It restricts veiling to respectable women, specifically prohibiting prostitutes from veiling. Both then and in later times, veiling was a sign of status."[16]

Veiling and seclusion were initially practiced overwhelmingly by settled or urban people – in other words, by women with enough material advantage to abandon work (i.e. in the fields) and assign errands that required leaving the house to servants. Arabs, who inhabited the Arabian Peninsula and the areas bordering the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires, shared regional notions equating seclusion with wealth and respectability. Because they organized themselves largely by patrilineal tribe like their surrounding societies, they had an especially strong stake in preserving the purity of their lineages and keeping inheritances within the family by ensuring the virginity and post-marital monogamy of their women. There were always exceptions to prevailing norms, but though some Arab tribes were matrilineal and afforded women more decision-making power than did others, the increasing wealth of the Muslim community and its greater diplomatic contacts with surrounding cultures under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad resulted in an increasing trend towards veiling and secluding women, especially as these practices came to be considered religious. The Prophet's own wives were told to veil heavily and speak to unrelated men through a curtain, probably as a mark of their exalted status in the community of believers, but also because they could afford the luxury of veiling and decided to adopt a tradition followed by the prosperous settled people with whom the Muslims came into contact.[17] In the same way, the movement by Arab feminists, both male and female, to *un*-veil women in Middle Eastern countries in the early 20th century came largely as a response to Western cultures, whose prosperity was seen in terms of the freedom its women enjoyed to display more of their bodies before unrelated men.

As the Islamic empire spread outward from Mecca, religious scholars took upon themselves the Herculean task of developing a system of law that took into account both Quranic and Prophetic injunctions as well as the customs and traditions of Arabs and the peoples they came to dominate. Early scholars of Islamic law were also the first to codify the concept of *fitna* – the social disorder that results when women sexually tempt men or engage in sexual relations with men other than their legal husbands – thereby conceptualizing and naming a powerful phenomenon that must be controlled by religious, political and social forces. What later came to be understood as 'Islamic' thus privileges traditions of female seclusion, though these are by no means self-evident in the Quran, nor are they universally practiced within the Muslim community, which includes African and Asian peoples with less stringent standards for covering and gender segregation than their Middle Eastern counterparts.[18]

Etymology provides another clear thread of evidence for the ancient Arab association of respect and sanctity with seclusion. The tri-consonant Arabic root h-r-m designates both respect and restriction. One frequently used term for a holy site is *haram*. Many holy places, such as the *Ka'aba*, Islam's holiest shrine, are accessible only under very limited circumstances and to a small number of individuals. *Haram* can also mean 'wife' – a woman forbidden to men other than her husband. A similar term, *harām*, designates something forbidden or interdicted on religious or moral grounds. Similarly, the holy month of *Muharram* is one in which, during the pre-Islamic era, certain behaviors such as warfare were restricted. The *harīm* refers to the traditional women's quarters of a home, off-limits to unrelated men. Finally, the verb *ihtarama* means 'to respect' something or someone. Accordingly, the Arabic language itself provides the vocabulary for tying respect of a woman to her relative seclusion.

Seclusion itself has no strict definition and is tied to multiple criteria that vary in importance from one community to another and exist according to a woman's socioeconomic class. These criteria include but are not limited to physical confinement (as in the home or in the *harīm*), dress, behaviour in mixed company and the presence of family members to 'shield' a woman moving in public spaces. People may consider women who are not 'properly' secluded to be undervalued by their families or 'floating' without a social support network, and therefore suspicious or untrustworthy.

Seclusion is, therefore, not simply a value in and of itself, but a by-product of good family relations, which rest upon the fulfillment of certain gender roles. Abu Lughod has described how women of the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin tribe in Northwest Egypt express pity towards women who make their livings by themselves and who remain unmarried or childless.[19] Similarly, many Cairene singers and dancers work only out of necessity; they would rather have husbands who provide them with enough material security to devote all of their time to running a home and a family.[20] These contemporary women's views on the undesirability of exposing oneself by entering the public sphere as an unveiled, independent individual reflect very old conceptions about the importance of seclusion in crafting a woman's relationships with others.

Because seclusion was historically tied strongly to conceptions of womanhood and the prospects of raising a well-adjusted, respectable (*muhtaram*) family, women traditionally took great pains to legitimize artistic expression by maintaining several forms of seclusion during performance. For instance, in pre-modern Egypt, female song and dance flourished because, for the most part, women performed away from the eyes of men.[21] Across different Arab societies, when women performed in mixed company as in tribal and ritual contexts, they usually were heavily veiled and performed in the presence of the entire family or village.[22]

Before the commercialization of professional singing began in the 19th century, a centuries-old, well-established station existed for individual expert freewomen singers and poets in Egypt.[23] Known as '*awālim* (sing. '*ālima*), these women were paid to perform in private women's quarters, invisible (though at times audible) to a male audience.[24] Their learning and talent made them objects of admiration, as evidenced by the name they were given, which can be translated as 'the learned woman' in Arabic. It is the feminine counterpart of '*ālim*, the name given to male religious scholars. Indeed, many of these women were well versed in subjects of religion in addition to their musical and literary training. Because '*awālim* limited their performances to female audiences, or veiled themselves heavily and performed with the accompaniment of male relatives, their moral character was rarely called into question.

With the economic hardships and heavy taxation that characterized the beginning of Muhammad 'Ali's reign however, '*awālim* began to perform unveiled for foreigners, who provided a new opportunity for employment.[25] In 1834, Muhammad 'Ali commanded government officials to exile all prostitutes from Cairo to Upper Egypt. Many respectable singers and dancers (including '*awālim*) fell victim to this categorization and often had to pay exorbitant fees to have their names removed from government lists, though not all condemned women could pay such fees or avoid deportation through other means. The government's misrepresentation of singers and dancers likely contributed to their marked loss of social status upon their return years later.[26] Over time the collective reputation of '*awālim* suffered greatly. Edward Said, perhaps reflecting late 20th-century memories of these women, described a '*ālima* as a "courtesan who was extremely literate as well as lithe and profligate with her bodily charms".[27] Nevertheless, despite their 'fallen' status, several '*awālim* managed to win great acclaim and powerful patrons even towards the end of the nineteenth century.[28] Very few '*awālim* exist today, and they are confined to the "lowest common denominator of performance: lower-class weddings and saints' days festivals".[29]

In Egypt, "verbal art...is commonly regarded as individual performance; it is less often participatory or communal".[30] The phenomenon of the individual woman artist, first given expression by the *'awālim* profession, paved the way for Egyptian singers to take over the Arab musical scene in the 20th century. The Egyptian model proved so decisive because in many Arab societies, musical performance more often occurred in a group or tribal context. The communalization of art was another response to the cultural weight placed upon seclusion: sharing the performance avoided the troubling implications of singling out an individual female to be the focus of social attention.

Many societies that still follow folk traditions stress the anonymity of female participants, and organize both male and female musical performance into a group endeavor, sometimes in the form of a "game".[31] Folk entertainment thus blurs the line between the performers and the audience, not least by spatially avoiding a sharp distinction between the stage and the viewing area. Additionally, folk traditions do not relegate creative expression to the domain of expert 'artists'; because creating art is understood to be within anyone's abilities, traditions of group performance democratize art and extend it even to the least capable members of the family or tribe.

Yet this democratic conception of song and dance also has the effect of devaluing the skill involved in professional performance. One Egyptian woman articulated this duality as it relates to *raqs sharqī*, or belly dancing: "But everyone knows how to do it! It doesn't take any special training; we learn from our mothers! So it's not 'an art'".[32] She indicates that there is little to distinguish a professional dancer from an amateur. The professional therefore earns condemnation because of her perceived desire to profit from a very ordinary ability and to gain special acclaim from men. Using this logic, paid dancing resembles prostitution: because, in the popular imagination, any woman has the ability to deliver sexual pleasure to men, there is no cultural vocabulary for a 'sexual artist'. Any woman who engages in sexual activity for profit is only selling her honor: "For most female singers and dancers...prostitution is the measuring rod by which they are reckoned."[33]

Though the acceptability of singing versus dancing varies historically from one location to another,[34] it is safe to say that in general, dancing has long ranked below singing in terms of its adherence to the value of seclusion. In the debate over which is more *'awra* (that is, shameful), a woman's voice or her body, the overarching consensus is that the visible is more exciting than what is only heard and that female bodies are necessarily sexual.[35] This conception continues to inform perceptions of female Arab singers and dancers.

Beyond Seclusion: Tropes of Representation in Modern Singing and Dancing

The modernization pioneered by Muhammad 'Ali and other Arab leaders during the 19th century stressed the adoption not only of Western political and military strategies but of Western cultural norms as well – a change acutely felt in the realm of popular entertainment. By the early 20th century, unveiled, public, and commercialized musical performance had become the norm for professional singers and dancers. These new classes of artists defied traditional standards of seclusion by performing unveiled for men, often without familial supervision, which harmed the reputation of female performers in general. Negative perceptions of female singers and dancers were, and continue to be, more pronounced in some places than in others; some Gulf countries, for instance, have recently witnessed a backlash against all forms of women's singing and dancing, during which the government of Saudi Arabia banned even pre-modern forms of tribal musical performance.[36]

Nevertheless, female singers and dancers have also managed to win great acclaim and respect. This is because the extent of a woman's seclusion describes only one aspect of the way she is seen by her society; her artistic merit, intelligence and the techniques she employs to humanize herself before an audience are equally if not more important. The religious, economic and political orientations of her viewers also influence how they respond to her artistic and personal self-presentation; their impressions and opinions produce something tenuously called her 'reputation'. As Ali Jihad Racy notes, musical aesthetics, the environment in which a woman performs and her skill all greatly influence the way the public receives her.[37] Umm Kulthum, the most successful Arab singer of all time, reached a level of respectability unprecedented for women singers before her (and, arguably, since): "[Musicians] talked predominantly about her musical style, her vocal skills, her habits and preferences in rehearsals and performances, and her treatment of others."[38] Nevertheless, the multilayered nature of her social position came into stark relief when the royal family forbade an uncle of King Faruq from marrying her. Even Umm Kulthum, who became a legend within her own lifetime, could not completely transcend her class background and status as a paid performer.

By shifting the focus from her identity as a performer to an identity more personally or conceptually accessible to members of her society, a woman may gain otherwise unavailable liberties or ensure her access to distant segments of the social fabric. If she becomes a legend, she gains additional privileges: she may eventually defy pre-existing notions of 'type' either by abandoning them altogether or by creating new ones. Particular performers' successes and failures to redefine themselves both in compliance with social norms and through transgressive methods can help to illuminate broader social constructs including the nature of the ties between the observers (in this case, the public) and the observed (entertainers). "Examining these myths offers [performers] a way of understanding what is shared between stars and their audiences."[39]

Adopting Culturally Resonant Personas

Female performers have managed their image to direct public opinion by adopting the characteristics of culturally familiar archetypes – 'roles' that recur in popular consciousness and creative production – with characteristics that carry positive social connotations. Over time, 'types' (even archetypes) of people emerge in every culture as its people strive to resolve the common problems of human existence through literary, religious, mythical and artistic traditions.[40] Some 'types' recur or 'echo' in more than one cultural context, while some are unique to a particular society or grouping of societies. For instance, both Western and Arab societies continue to share the following literary archetypes: father/mother, dutiful daughter/son, prodigal son, ideal husband/wife, virgin, lover, prostitute, saint, holy fool, etc. Other archetypes, like the *bint al-balad* ('country/indigenous' or 'authentic' girl), the woman virtuous through religious piety, and the woman performer as symbol of the emerging nation, have tapered off in Western popular consciousness while remaining powerful in Arab societies. These, then, are the most striking (to a Western observer) 'characters' adopted by female Arab singers and dancers to gain legitimacy and popular approval.

Indeed, the strength of these popular categories is revealed in the tendency of the entertainment industry and the public to typecast certain performers by assigning them professional roles which reinforce their association with a particular cultural 'character', or by ignoring or berating performers who play roles 'out of character'. Some performers embrace such associations and reinforce them in order to elicit a strong public reaction. This technique often aids in increasing the performer's visibility and, by proxy, advances her career. At the same time, typecasting limits the performer's range of expression and restricts her artistic opportunities. At times (for instance when public opinion turns against her character or the character ceases to be interesting or provocative), it results in attempts to erase her from the collective consciousness. In the latter instances, typecasting can spell the end of a career in the public eye. For these reasons, many performers dread typecasting both with regards to the roles they are afforded in a professional setting and with regards to the cultural 'character' the public assigns them.

Being typed as a 'singer' or a 'dancer' is particularly dangerous in societies in which these characters play undesirable or destructive roles. In order to erase or complicate an unwelcome designation, singers and dancers frequently adopt the characteristics of another, positive category. This is often easier than creating an identity independent of or foreign to cultural pre-constructions. Ultimately, "[a]rtistic conventions, understood through performance and discourse, are established relationships" to begin with so each performer must begin by functioning "within the system", at least to some extent.[41] At times, the performer's attempt to re-classify herself is disingenuous and reflects the calculated construction of a false veneer, though the public does not always discover her duplicity.[42] Often, however, the performer truly does possess the 'good' characteristics she emphasizes and uses them to challenge the one-dimensional identity the public seeks to impose on her.[43] In this regard, Virginia Danielson's description of Umm Kulthum can simultaneously apply to many singers and dancers: "Her public self was clearly a construction but it was neither artificial nor false; Umm Kulthum simply learned to present herself in the way she wanted to be thought of and remembered."[44]

Piety, modesty and conservatism

For a performer, cultivating the image of a 'modest and religious girl' can often mean the difference between acceptance and rejection, or even between marginal and legendary status.[45] Umm Kulthum not only highlighted her religiosity as part of crafting a respectable public image, but also succeeded in setting a powerful precedent for what would be considered quality secular art in the Arab-Islamic tradition. Her credentials as a believer never came into question. In fact, her religious background and her ability to recite the Qur'an beautifully and adhere to some of its universally understood forms of recitation even in secular music formed a great part of her appeal.[46]

Umm Kulthum's ability to embody and even to define local values stemmed in large part from her intuitive understanding of them, which helped her produce visible manifestations of adherence to religious and cultural standards. As a singer, she had the special ability and opportunity to induce sublime emotional states in her listeners through a process known as *taswir al-ma'na:* 'describing' sung lyrics by infusing them with particular inflections and feelings. Both her musical expression and personal style – each of which was present in the other – resonated strongly with the wider Egyptian and Arab population. Ordinary Egyptians would not have deemed Umm Kulthum's behavior *as il* (indigenous) had they not seen themselves, or their aspirations, in her. By cultivating an image of modesty and religiosity, she also succeeded in changing cultural perceptions of singers – of literally elevating a class of individuals in the public eye.

> "Umm Kulthum in particular, but other female singers as well, set standards of public behavior for entertainers by carrying concepts of dignity familiar to many ordinary Egyptian women into the domain of commercial entertainment [...] The female singers of Egypt [...] implanted an image in the public eye of the female singer as a talented and accomplished individual."[47]

Similarly, the Lebanese singer Fairuz made her religiosity and shyness a part of her public persona. Raised in a conservative family, her father had been unhappy with the prospect of her singing in public. Even after the launch of her career, she carried her family's reservations about public scrutiny with her. Fairuz compensated for her exposure as a singer by usually choosing to remain at home with her children instead of attending social functions, dressing modestly, and limiting her body language. Sami Asmar writes:

> "This aspect of Fairuz's background and character was often discussed by commentators – the fact that she is a private and conservative woman. Despite her later success as a popular singer, Fairuz shied away from public events and maintained a serious demeanor, in part due to her upbringing and also as a deliberate choice to create a certain image for herself."[48]

Deflection

As we have seen, a woman practicing a profession that could be construed as morally ambiguous must go to additional lengths to prove her compliance with the religious and cultural norms of her society. In addition to behaving in ways that reflect these norms, she may also deflect accusations and criticisms by pointing to professional women whose conduct falls more clearly outside the realm of social propriety. Asmar writes of Fairuz that "[s]he reacted to criticisms that she lacked expression on stage by saying that she preferred to concentrate more on singing than moving her body".[49] In addition to her demure comportment, therefore, Fairuz drew attention to a different 'type' of woman (the dancer), whose behavior made her own appear more desirable in comparison.

Karin van Nieuwkerk explains that dancing is ranked among the least moral of occupations in the Middle East because the degree to which an occupation requires movement and observation of that movement functions as an implicit measure of its level of morality.[50] In general, it is far more difficult for dancers to present themselves within the trope of pious, moral women than it is for singers or other performers. Their profession is so self-evidently scandalous that the belly dancer at weddings symbolizes "the element of pollution [...] a bit of filth, the unspeakable, [which is] necessary in the most powerful of human rituals in order to demonstrate their transforming power and intimacy".[51] Nevertheless, codes of honour, both stated and implied, exist to ensure for dancers a feeling and appearance of respectability.

Like Fairuz and other singers, dancers employ comparison as a method for redirecting condemnation by creating hierarchies of morality within their own trade: many cover their bodies as much as they can without sacrificing their 'marketability' and criticize dancers who perform in more revealing costumes.[52] Older performers compare the more modest standards of their generation with those of the new entertainment industry, and criticize contemporary performers for lacking standards in both artistry and comportment. Nightclub performers and those of Muhammad 'Ali Street,[53] folk dancers and belly dancers and young dancers in general blame each other for sullying the reputations of the entertainment trades.[54] In fact, singers and dancers invoke deflection so often that "jealousy and gossip about the dishonorable behavior of female colleagues contribute to the lack of friendship among female performers".[55]

Debates and conversations away from performance venues – in homes, cafes, workplaces, and the street – determine the reputations of performers all over the world. Gossip comprises an integral part of these conversations. Entertainers thus continue their trade long after their performances have ended, when the public relaxes and enjoys itself by comparing the relative virtue and vice of different singers and dancers. Here, in the market of popular thought, the effects of deflection can truly be felt as women gain and lose virtue and appeal in accordance with how they appear in relation to their peers and competitors.

Association with the countryside

In much of the world, the countryside is seen as a realm of purer, simpler people who remain truer to the core tenets of their religious faith than do their urban counterparts. Attempts to associate with the countryside therefore reflect one way of associating with piety, modesty and conservatism. In Egypt however, the countryside (*balad*) has additional connotations that can be harnessed to a performer's advantage. The word *balad* itself can mean many things, including country, village and city. Its adjectival form (*baladi*) can mean *of the* country, village, middle to lower classes, or simply something indigenous to Arab-Islamic or national culture. Perhaps its closest Western counterpart is 'folk', though the derivatives of *balad* carry connotations of nobility and righteousness in addition to notions of quaintness and provinciality.

In any cultural milieu, the commercial entertainment industry is characterized by fierce competition for patrons and for public attention. Not everyone is trustworthy and the entertainer must rely to a great extent on her own judgment and willpower to make crucial decisions with regards to her own career. In the Arab world, the individual character of a female performer became especially crucial in the 1920s, when

> "[...] the professional guild of female singers who contracted for specific occasions largely gave way to singers (and actresses) who contracted by themselves or through theatrical agents with institutions such as theatrical companies, recording companies, and theater management for seasons or years at a time [...] Newcomers launched themselves immediately into the commercial enterprise."[56]

A performer must learn to anticipate and confront occupational hazards such as violence, theft and betrayal. Outside of a group context, the responsibility for such foresight and alertness rests largely on her. She cannot afford to be too compromising, and her ability to stand her ground and even to intimidate others can be the cornerstones of her professional success. Her ability to defend herself and force others to accord her what is her due further functions as a sign of self-respect, which resonates with people who correspondingly elevate the esteem in which they hold her. Reputation and respectability thus often hinge upon the quality of a woman's disposition. Karin van Nieuwkerk quotes one dancer as saying, "[i]f a woman is not strong in this trade, she is lost".[57]

In particular, singers and dancers employ the image of the *bint al-balad* (daughter of the country), a term that describes women who are "strong, fearless, tough [...] [as well as women who are] feminine, care for their appearances, and are coquettish”,[58] to lend authenticity and acceptance to the toughness and individuality they must exhibit to protect their industry. The *bint al-balad* is an endearing figure who exhibits much of the ‘manly’ behavior necessary to endure in the entertainment business; in Egypt, she is often referred to as a *gid’an*, a term that designates a strong and noble man. She is given permission, so to speak, to behave willfully, loudly and even aggressively, especially when it comes to defending her sexual honour. “[*Banāt al-balad*] will defend their reputation by any possible means and will even publicly beat a man in order to restore their good name”.[59] By identifying with these women, female entertainers can transform their open exercise of power and influence into a quality with which their countrymen and women can identify. As opposed to being threatening, the *bint al-balad* is charming, even a source of pride.

But despite the freedoms her identity allows, the *bint al-balad* is, in the end, a character. She therefore imposes limitations of her own. Modesty and religious devotion are chief among her more restrictive attributes. In the entertainment industry, these standards are somewhat (or even quite) relaxed, but they still exist:

> “Blatantly immoral conduct clearly was not tolerated from star female singers. Badi‘a Masabni’s series of lovers was public knowledge and drew occasional negative comment. Ratiba Ahmad was castigated for her habitual rowdiness and public drunkenness. Whereas a strong, outgoing, fun-loving personality was rewarded, some semblance of decent public behavior was also expected.”[60]

The most respected singers and dancers did not take too many sexual liberties with the *bint al-balad* character – they remained most faithful to the modesty and conservatism of her ethos and as such, were also considered the most ‘authentic’.

The task of creating an aura of the *bint al-balad* often proves difficult, especially for prestigious performers who associate with the more Westernized upper classes. Even Umm Kulthum and Farida Fahmy

> “had some difficulty in successfully manipulating their image as respectable female artists by creating an aura of simple baladi or

> fellahi [peasant] mores, appearing as women who follow local, conservative values and by covering their bodies accordingly in performances.”[61]

Nevertheless, many performers have overcome this obstacle, including the formidable Umm Kulthum. Virginia Danielson notes, “I was told that this well-spoken, richly bejeweled woman was ‘really a country woman’. ‘She was the daughter of the Egyptian village, a *bint il-rīf*’ [daughter of the countryside]”.[62] Umm Kulthum is a classic example of a woman whose ‘rough’ personality and image paved the way for her professional success. She was described as “opinionated [...] and [...] demanding, sometimes unreasonably so”,[63] but her ‘difficult’ nature allowed her “to assert her domination of commercial entertainment [and] the power to choose and modify opportunities as well as to choose her associates and coworkers”.[64]

Women direct their power to intimidate men through socially acceptable channels by way of the *bint al-balad* idiom. As with any environment in which little recourse exists for a woman who has been cheated or physically violated, pre-emption via intimidating behavior can be instrumental in securing for the woman a space in which to act and perform. Due to social stigmas, many women of the middle to upper classes who perform in nightclubs are forced to choose between continuing to perform or to maintaining a marriage, so that those who choose to perform are in fact “women without men”.[65] It therefore becomes necessary for these independent performers to create an image of women who are perfectly capable of defending themselves. For many, the male aspects of the *bint al-balad* idiom suffice. Some, however, go a step further to ‘masculinize’ themselves beyond the framework of a feminine cultural icon – in other words, to adopt a ‘manly’ identity, at least in the workplace.

Gender transgression

For women all over the world, the public sphere is marked by communicative systems and hierarchies that have historically been established and maintained by men. Any woman who wishes to advance her public career must, at least to a certain extent, adopt some masculine mannerisms in order to understand her professional world and make herself understood. Due to the fluidity of gender definition, a female identity often subsumes masculinist mannerisms, as in the case of the *bint al-balad* construction. However, at times it is beneficial for women to identify themselves outright with masculinity. Being ‘one of the men’ or a ‘man’s woman’ can often provide greater access to a world of professional respectability and mobility. Additionally, a woman may masculinize her behavior or image in order to place herself in a more sexually unavailable category and thereby ward off the vulnerability that attends her female body and her profession as a performer. It also helps to safeguard her honour, since a woman interested in sexual relationships with men would naturally accent her femininity, not her masculinity. “The expression ‘I am a man’ finally means ‘I am a respectable working woman’.”[66]

Gender affirmation

While gender transgression offers new opportunities for women, gender affirmation is also employed by women who wish to benefit from the respect that society accords to those who perpetuate gendered norms, chief among them those of wife and mother. Van Nieuwkerk notes that singers and dancers often emphasize their roles as wives and mothers both to humanize themselves and to make apparent the goals towards which they work, namely the betterment of their families as opposed to personal glory or greed.[67] Wifehood is an important aspiration for many women around the world, but it takes on special significance for entertainers. As well as providing fiscal and physical security, “marriage for an entertainer means, among other things, protection of her reputation”.[68] The association of entertainment with prostitution and moral ‘looseness’ on the part of women is greatly mitigated in the presence of a presumably jealous protector to whom the singer or dancer is morally and contractually bound. Children, for their part, serve as visible symbols linking women with their homes and their husbands. The widely accepted notion that a woman’s life work revolves chiefly around raising her children allows the entertainer a certain license to subsume her profession under the rubric of her child-rearing responsibilities. After all, women work in many professions, including entertainment, to help provide for their children. Many singers and dancers work because they are the chief or sole breadwinners for their children, and wish to keep them out of the trade.[69] Yet gender affirmation, like all social constructs, provides only limited space for social acceptance. Only poor or desperate women appear to earn any measure of public sympathy for their need to work in the entertainment trade; women who have achieved a level of material comfort sufficient to allow them to remain at home are expected to either embrace housewife status or to take professions they ‘want’ to take – in other words, respectable professions that do not include working in the entertainment industry.

Nationalism

Over the past century, the multifaceted struggle against foreign and specifically Western political and cultural influences – including the establishment of the State of Israel – has united Arab public sentiment like perhaps no other issue. Despite the many manifestations of Arab resistance to Western impositions – leftist, modernist, Islamist, etc. – the desire to rally around something unique to Arab identity has permeated all strata of society. For this reason, artists and performers who are able to situate themselves within the nationalist or 'indigenous' cause often enjoy large audiences and long careers.

What defines an 'indigenous' artist? Just as the political project of emancipation from colonial oppression defined itself in terms of resistance, indigenous/foreign demarcations were made by comparison: "In some societies, imitations of European dances became a means of upward mobility, much as the speaking of European languages and the wearing of European dress could become markers of prestige and status."[70] Any person who was believed to exploit an association with Westerners or their 'values' in order to gain advantages or prestige could be seen as an 'import' him or herself. Since nobody has ever settled the question of what is 'Western', however, there has been a large debate about who exactly represents an authentic Arab voice. Nevertheless, the debate is larger around some performers than others. Their examples shed light on how artists harnessed and expressed political and national concerns.

The female performer perhaps most prominently associated with a political movement was Umm Kulthum. Though she never explicitly identified herself with any project or ideology, her fame, coupled with her powerful association with Arab and Muslim aesthetics towards the end of the British occupation and throughout the course of President Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime, provided many opportunities for the political contextualization of her songs. Her broad appeal throughout the Arab world became an artistic expression of the Arab unity so desperately sought during the mid-20th century. Her public performances in the wake of the 1967 war with Israel captured public bereavement in the face of such a tremendous slight to Arab pride and hope. She was not averse to associating closely with the Egyptian government: besides famously befriending Gamal Abdel Nasser, she accepted a diplomatic passport that she used to conduct 'state-like' visits in several foreign countries.

Nevertheless, Umm Kulthum never grew close enough to any politician to share his fortunes. In many ways, she transcended politics; indeed, more people attended her funeral than did Nasser's: "The political position suggested by Umm Kulthum's musical sound and public persona – a version of 'Egypt for Egyptians' proceeding from indigenous values and precedents – proved unassailable."[71]

The Lebanese singer Fairuz also associated her work with nationalist sentiments. Throughout her career she collaborated with the Rahbani brothers, who composed and arranged a vast corpus of her music. Each member of the team partook in the professional decision-making process, which included critical political maneuvers at a time when Lebanon was rent by civil strife. Their success in not only avoiding censure but in rising to legendary status can be credited to the very careful crafting of a public image that simultaneously reflected their sincere personal convictions.

Fairuz and her artistic collaborators used a political strategy similar to Umm Kulthum's:

> "[The Rahbani brothers] wrote verses [for Fairuz] extolling the land rather than its leaders. They composed a series of songs for the major Arab capitals [...] that became so popular they were frequently played as second national anthems by those nations. Furthermore, during the long civil war in Lebanon, [Fairuz] did not seek shelter outside the country and refused to perform for the interests of factional warlords. This reflected her ability to rise above local divisions and showed the power of art in uniting people in conflict."[72]

A random sampling of laypeople's quotes regarding Fairuz's involvement in politics highlights the nonsectarian passion and timeless devotion she continues to inspire:

> "She is the only Arabic singer that makes us love our country and be proud of our roots. A CD which is stronger than million political speech [sic]."[73]

> "When I hear Fairuz sing - I know that we are on the side of Angels [sic]. I thank god [sic] for the glory of her voice. I am

> grateful for her politics and she makes me proud to be an Arab. Long live Palestine."[74]

In the case of other entertainers, the consensus is not so positive. Female dancers especially have a hard time making themselves appear emblematic or supportive of a nationalist cause. Their involvement in the political sphere is usually confined to defending against the attacks of (often nationalist) Islamists, who see the actions of these women as contrary to the Arab-Islamic spirit and damaging to the moral righteousness required to face external threats.[75] Despite the fact that certain manifestations of Arab traditional dancing are considered *asil* due to the disrepute of dancing itself, they are not exalted in the resistance discourse. Susan Reed explains that

> "[...] ambivalence about the dancers and their practices is often evident because [...] the very aspects that make the dances appealing and colourful as representations of the past may be precisely the things that do not easily fit into the self-representation of the nation."[76]

The privileging of different kinds of Islamic imagery in both leftist and Islamist nationalist discourses leaves little possibility for the inclusion of dancers under a nationalist rubric. Furthermore, the 'Westernization' of belly dancing – its incorporation of ballet movements, Western-style costuming and an increasing number of Western dancers – does not support its image as a 'local' dance.[77] Though belly dancing is in no danger of being considered 'Western' in origin, the tradition must increasingly defend against accusations of compromise and corruption.[78] Reed further notes that "issues of class and locality can be embodied in changing lexicons of movement, resulting in a form of 'bodily bilingualism'"[79] – which, in the case of belly dancing, can be antithetical to the creation of an 'indigenous dance'.

The conflicts that dancers experience in identifying with widely shared mores and sentiments pre-emptively halts any opportunities for political advocacy. Perhaps the most famous belly dancer of all time, Tahiyya Karioka, was in constant tension, if not conflict, with the religious and cultural establishments of her time. Meanwhile, her exalted rival, Samia Gamal, found herself at the mercy of the Egyptian government's changing sentiments towards her. At one time she was declared the 'National Dancer of Egypt', but at a later point she fell out of favour and public attendance at her funeral was banned.[80] No Arab dancer has risen to the pan-cultural iconic status of female vocalists like Umm Kulthum or Fairuz. Due to these difficulties, perhaps, dancers have chiefly gone on the political offensive, initiating political conversations – rather than just responding or participating – only after leaving the dance profession and adopting stricter standards of Islamic morality.[81] Despite its potential for "shaping nationalist ideology and in creation of national subjects",[82] dance has not been used toward that end in the Arab world.

Many singers and musicians also have trouble situating themselves within a nationalist category that will resonate with the larger Arab public. In fact, nationalists are often the first to condemn 'improper' entertainers who they consider to be corrupting the values that 'bind' the nation together. Due to her perceived transgressions against nationalist aims, the singer Asmahan had less success creating a large and lasting following in the manner of Fairuz or Umm Kulthum. She was widely rumored to be a Western spy and even a traitor to the 'Arab cause' because of her assumed loyalty to the several countries in which she lived.

Lack of a self-representation strategy

The case of Asmahan reveals the possible personal and professional repercussions for women who neglect to employ the self-representation techniques discussed above. Asmahan expended relatively little effort self-consciously identifying herself with any Arab cultural persona. Neither did her religious background ameliorate the way the public perceived her. As she was neither Muslim nor Christian but Druze – a largely Levantine religious minority with no pan-Arab appeal – she could not marshal the more widely recognized power of the Muslim and Christian religious heritages to win admirers. She did develop a large repertoire of classical and traditional Arabic songs, but this did not make her a representative of Arab culture.

In fact, Asmahan appears to have embarked on a lifelong mission to actualize herself as an individual at the expense of tribal and cultural restrictions. Such a 'rebellious' woman was (and still is, in many circles) seen as heavily indebted to the West for introducing her to such possibilities; in other words, her very life appears to have taken a 'Western' trajectory. In her autobiography, Moroccan feminist Fatima Marnissi describes how the 'Harem' women who raised her loved both Asmahan's music and Asmahan as a woman; living vicariously through her lyrics, they hoped that she would achieve the freedom and romance of which she sang.[83] Yet the broader Arab public did not welcome some women's desires to transgress nationalist and gender norms. In the early to mid-20th century, at a time when anti-colonial, nationalist sentiments reached a fever pitch, Asmahan's open embrace of a Western lifestyle and her tendency to very publicly socialize with Westerners cast suspicion on her cultural loyalties. As Judith Tucker has argued, despite women's participation in nationalist movements, "'women's issues' have, by and large, been subordinated to the 'larger' national or revolutionary task".[84] Female individualists like Asmahan found that her people's desire for collective freedom from imperialism stood in the way of her own striving for personal independence.

While other singers employed more traceable strategies of self-representation that authors who later wrote about them accepted and employed (whether consciously or not), there is a relative absence of Asmahan's own words regarding her life and career. One of her most widely known confessions, "her realization that she was not happy away from the world of 'music and art' as she put it,"[85] did not do much to authenticate her in the eyes of the Arab public. In fact, the statement implied "that the honourable life may have been her's by birth but was far from fulfilling or meaningful"[86] – a public slight to her noble Druze family. In the end, her perhaps naïve, perhaps generally unconcerned, omission of 'public relations work' oriented towards a traditional Arab audience resulted in others defining her. The people who publicly spoke and wrote about her were almost exclusively men: her brother, her male friend (both of whom wrote biographies of her), male commentators and other male members of her family.

Conclusion

A review of the literature concerning female singers and dancers in the Arab world reveals the many forces that intersect and conflict to produce the dynamic social perceptions of these women. They work in generally disreputable professions, yet some come to be exemplary and even iconic. Situated on the edges of a vast number of cultural constructions of character, they balance their sacred roles as wives and mothers, as pious, modest women of the country or the nation, with accentuations of their physical and sexual charms. They participate in changing these constructions while remaining beholden to them for senses of self, identity and belonging as well as anomie. At times they succeed in truly ameliorating an oppressive construct; other times their power proves inadequate. In all ways they are players with high stakes in the development of moral and gendered discourses.

Singers and dancers quite literally inhabit the sexual double standards that exist for women in most, if not all, societies. Their livelihoods are often inseparable from their sexual appeal. Yet they share, perhaps in slightly modified form, the values of their wider cultural milieu, including modesty, religiosity and strong family ties. Most locate fulfillment in wifehood and motherhood. In this sense, female entertainers inhabit their contradictory constructions of self more openly and fully than do others.

As Fatima Mernissi demonstrates in her memoir of a Harem childhood, boundaries for women become clear only in their transgression.[87] Because no boundary is ever transgressed in exactly the same way twice, an entertainer can never determine with certainty what outcomes her public and professional behavior will precipitate. The singer and dancer know risk intimately, even subconsciously. Their existence on the borders of acceptability subtracts certain kinds of security from their lives.

Some questions that may prove useful for future investigation include: Are the services of women who give sensory pleasure to paying customers 'necessary'? Will singers and dancers – and, for that matter, prostitutes – always exist? If so, and given trends towards the liberalization of social mores and the backlashes against them, what implications does their existence have for future prospects of assimilation and social cohesion?

Singers and dancers must answer, in a very complicated way, the timeless question of what makes a woman respectable (*muhtarama*). In formulating their answers, these women employ terminology with which their societies are familiar, but even so they fail to win respect as often – if not more often – than they succeed. Yet no matter what verdicts others pass upon them, female singers and dancers will continue to participate actively, often subversively, in representing themselves.

Notes

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[1] Lila Abu Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ruth Behar, "Introduction: Out of Exile," in *Women Writing Culture,* ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 2-28; Sidonie Smith, "Autobiography Criticism and the Problematics of Gender," in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987): 3-19.

[2] "Al-ajnabiyyāt yusaīt_irna 'alā al-raqs_ al-sharqī fī mis_r!" '*Ālam al-funūn* (Cairo: Article archive of the Center for Arabic Study Abroad, 2004).

[3] Haifa Wehbe's physical charms have even bridged the Arab/Western political and cultural divide; she was recently featured by AskMen.com, an American website devoted in large part to ranking and discussing the merits of sexually desirable celebrities, as a 'Singer of the Week'.

[4] Heba Saleh, "Sultry Arabic music videos delight young and alarm elders," *Financial Times,* March 14, 2005 (accessed November 27, 2007) < http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9a85a7f4-94ab-11d9-8dd3-00000e2511c8.html?nclick_check=1>.

[5] Ted Swedenburg, "Imagined Youths," *Middle East Report* 245 (2007) http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9a85a7f4-94ab-11d9-8dd3-00000e2511c8.html?nclick_check=1>.

[6] Heather Sharp, "Sexy stars push limits in Egypt," BBC News, Middle East, Cairo, August 4, 2005 (accessed November 27, 2007) < http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4722945.stm>.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Haifa Wehbe reportedly considered running for the Lebanese Parliament in 2005 and expressed overt support for Hezbollah after their 2006 campaign against Israel (Yara Bayoumi, "Interview: Hezbollah chief wins unlikely fan in sexy pop diva," Reuters, October 30, 2006; "Singer of the Week: Haifa Wehbe",

Askmen.com); Nancy Ajram's song *Law Sa'altak Inta Masry* (If I Ask You, You are Egyptian) is a tribute to Egypt. She has also read stories to children that emphasize themes of Lebanese national unity (Rasha Salti, "Beirut Diary: April 2005," *Middle East Report* 236 (2005): 25).

[9] Sharp, "Sexy stars".

[10] The state of sublime immersion in music – especially song – brought about by emotionally and spiritually powerful compositions and singers. A female singer of previous generations was frequently referred to as a *mut riba* – one who induces *tarab*. Today's artist is more likely to be called simply a *mughanniyya* – one who sings.

[11] Y. Euny Hong, "In the Arab World, Pop Stardom Can be a Touchy Subject," *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2005 (accessed November 27, 2007) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/03/AR2005060301040_pf.html>.

[12] "Majlis al-sha'b yunāqish mana' marwā min dukhūl mis_r," *Majallat al-'arab fī al-sahāfa al-'arabiyya.* , August 26, 2007 (accessed November 29, 2007) <http://arabmag.blogspot.com/ 2007/08/blog-post_2240.html>.

[13] "Al-lista al-sūdā'," Hamasna.org. (accessed November 29, 2007) <http://www.hamasna.org/articles/blacklist. htm>.

[14] Again, Ms. Wehbe's case is instructive: the family of her fiancé, a wealthy Saudi businessman, forced him to break off his engagement to her after determining that she would make an unsuitable bride. Public comments on the numerous fan websites dedicated to Wehbe, Ajram, Ruby reveal hatred, disgust, sadness, and religious admonishments alongside love and admiration.

[15] Sharp, "Sexy stars".

[16] Nikki R. Keddie, "The Past and Present of Women in the Muslim World," in *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology – Vol. I: Images and Realities*, ed. Haideh Moghissi (London: Routledge, 2005): 55.

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Lila Abu Lughod, “Fieldwork of a Dutiful Daughter,” in *Arab Women in the Field,* ed. Soraya Altorki and Camillia El-Solh (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988): 139-161; Lughod, *Writing Women’s Worlds.*

[20] Karin van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

[21] Virginia Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920s,” in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries of Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1991): 292-309; Carolee Kent and Marjorie Franken, “A Procession through Time: The Zaffat al-Arusa in Three Views,” in *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East,* ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998): 71-80; van Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images and Shifting Identities: Female Performers in Egypt,” in *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*: 21-35; van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”*.

[22] John P. Mason, “Sex and Symbol in the Treatment of Women: The Wedding Rite in a Libyan Oasis Community,” *American Ethnologist* 2:4 (1975): 649-661; William C. Young, “Women’s Performance in Ritual Context: Weddings among the Rashayda of Sudan,” in *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*: 37-55.

[23] Before the modern era, most women who trained to be expert singers and dancers to entertain mixed-gender or male audiences in the Arab world were slaves or courtesans, and never Muslim (Nikki R. Keddie, “The Past and Present of Women in the Muslim World,” in *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology – Vol. I: Images and Realities*: 53-79).

[24] Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs”, 293.

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[25] Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images”, 23.

[26] Kent and Franken, “A Procession through Time”, 77.

[27] Ibid., 230.

[28] Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs”, 294.

[29] Kent and Franken, “A Procession through Time”, 77.

[30] Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[31] Kay Hardy Campbell, “Folk Music and Dance in the Arabian Gulf and Saudi Arabia,” in *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*: 57-69; Young, “Women’s Performance”.

[32] Young, “Women’s Performance”, 37.

[33] Van Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images”, 21.

[34] Among the Rushayda of Northern Sudan, women may dance publicly but are forbidden from singing, reciting poetry, and often even speaking in the context of musical performance (William C. Young, “Women’s Performance in Ritual Context: Weddings among the Rashayda of Sudan,” in *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*: 37-55). One possible explanation for this approach is the threat that women’s public literary virtuosity (among the Rushayda, women may only recite poetry and sing in female company) might pose to the presumed intellectual superiority of men, though the *‘awra* of a woman’s voice is almost certainly also a factor.

[35] Van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”*, 12-13.

[36] Campbell, “Folk Music”.

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[37] Ali Jihad Racy, "Music in Contemporary Cairo: A Comparative Overview," *Asian Music* 13:1 (1981): 4-26.

[38] Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*, 3.

[39] Ibid., 15.

[40] For a feminist discussion of such constructs with regards to Western literature, see endnote 1 for Sidonie Smith, "Autobiography Criticism and the Problematics of Gender".

[41] Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*, 17.

[42] In cases when deception is widely discovered, the performer is often cast in anger from the public stage, though even widespread anger can be turned into a force for redemption if the performer can present her story as compelling enough for public scrutiny or can quickly adopt another, "positive" cultural character (i.e. the repentant sinner).

[43] Recent literature, such as Carrie Rosefsky Wickham's *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), has addressed this question with regards to women in the Islamist movement who adopt veiling to assert their modesty and thereby gain entry into the public political sphere.

[44] Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*, 192.

[45] Sami W. Asmar, "Modern Arab Music: Portraits of Enchantment from the Middle Generation," in *Colors of Enchantment: Theater, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001): 306.

[46] Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*.

[47] Danielson, "Artists and Entrepreneurs", 305.

[48] Asmar, "Modern Arab Music", 307.

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Van Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images”, 28.

[51] Kent and Franken, “A Procession through Time”, 73.

[52] Ibid., 30.

[53] Cairo’s Muhammad ‘Ali Street was famous as a center of artistic life during the beginning and middle of the 20th century. Many well-known singers, dancers, and musicians lived there and frequented its cafés.

[54] Van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”*, 164.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Danielson,”Artists and Entrepreneurs”, 295.

[57] Van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”*, 171.

[58] Van Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images”, 31.

[59] Van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”*, 112.

[60] Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs”, 301.

[61] Van Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images”, 28.

[62] Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*, 4.

[63] Ibid., 191.

[64] Ibid., 196.

[65] Van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”*, 93.

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[66] Van Nieuwkerk, "Changing Images", 33.

[67] Van Nieuwkerk, *"A Trade Like Any Other"*, 162.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.; "Changing Images".

[70] Susan A. Reed, "The Politics and Poetics of Dance," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 510.

[71] Virginia Danielson, "Performance, Political Identity, and Memory: Umm Kulthum and Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir," in *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*: 109-122.

[72] Asmar, "Modern Arab Music , 308.

[73] Malek, "Fairuz: Jerusalem in my Heart," Customer Reviews, ARAMUSIC: The Online Arabic Music Source (December 12, 2005) <http://www.aramusic.com/htmls/vdl510.htm>.

[74] Khaldoun Hajaj, "Fairuz: Jerusalem in my Heart," Customer Reviews, ARAMUSIC: The Online Arabic Music Source (December 12, 2005) <http://www.aramusic.com/htmls/ vdl510.htm>.

[75] "Al-ajnabiyyāt", 5.

[76] Reed, "The Politics and Poetics of Dance", 511.

[77] "Al-ajnabiyyāt".

[78] For my general knowledge regarding modern and historical belly dancing traditions, I am deeply indebted to belly dancing instructors in the United States and in Egypt as well as to much lay literature. Published material I have found useful includes *The Belly Dance Book: Rediscovering the Oldest Dance*, edited by Tazz Richards (Concord: Backbeat Press, 2000).

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[79] Reed, “The Politics and Poetics of Dance”, 505-506.

[80] Edward Said, “Farewell to Tahia,” in *Colors of Enchantment: Theater, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East*: 232.

[81] Ibid., 229.

[82] Reed, “The Politics and Poetics of Dance”, 511.

[83] Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1994).

[84] Judith E. Tucker, “Women in the Middle East and North Africa: The 19th and 20th Centuries (an extract),” in *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology – Vol. I: Images and Realities*: 106.

[85] Sherifa Zuhur, *Asmahan's Secrets: Women, War and Song* (Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas Press, 2000): 216.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass.*