

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: RECLAIMING BLACK BELEDI: RACE,
WELLNESS, AND ONLINE COMMUNITY

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In this dissertation, I analyze love, affect, and embodiment online. I specifically focus on belly dance because of its history as a kind of conscious and public laboring on the self. By situating belly dance as an imperial legacy of U.S. military engagement in the Middle East, I unveil its critical utility to bloggers' discussion of wellness, self-care, and the affective consequences of living within imperialist and racist societies. I conclude by introducing the concept of a digital praxis of love, paying particular attention to digital black feminisms, wellness blogging, and dance.

This project draws its exegesis from current scholarship on corporeal, physical feminisms, and digital feminisms in order to point towards a definition of praxis online as incorporating critical reflection, critical action, and everyday public life. This exploratory dissertation incorporates a variety of methodologies in order to investigate the movement of wellness, self-care, and critique as these concepts move

through overlapping knowledge worlds, spaces, and sites of consumption. By doing so, this dissertation highlights the connections between conversations about wellness and conversations about politics. Analyzing these connections offers an important intervention in wellness studies, the digital humanities, and American studies by illustrating the role wellness (and its digital objects) plays in performing citizenship, group membership, and social justice activism.

RECLAIMING BLACK BELEDI:
RACE, WELLNESS, AND ONLINE COMMUNITY

By

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PREFACE: WELLNESS AS CITIZENSHIP

The title of this dissertation, “Reclaiming Black Beledi,” reflects my belief that, belly dance in the United States is about citizenship and politics. So, I use *beledi*, an Arabic Egyptian word that refers to a group of people (the Balad tribe) that has evolved to mean “my people” or “my country.” A *bint al baladi* is a country kind of girl, earthy, kind, and real. She’s also a girl from the inner city. *Raqs beladi* (beledi as a dance style) emerged in the early 20th century, when many members of the Balad tribe immigrated to Cairo for work. In contrast to *raqs sharki*, which was more common in Cairo, *raqs beledi* focused on largesse: big movements, big hip circles, big arm gestures, big women, and big groups, all of which reflected a supposedly “rural” or authentic Egyptian soul.

Think of *beledi* like the word “country” in the United States – it’s as much about the vibe as it is the actual person, thing, dance, or sound being described. What makes something beledi is also just a vibe; other belly dancers in the United States will sometimes say someone’s a *beledi*-style dancer because her dance movements feel earthy and grounded, or if her performance seems to reflect the “bigness” associated with *beladi* as an aesthetic. For example, Fifi Abdou, whose evolving style of dance, costume and music has defined her career, is sometimes described as a *beledi*-style dancer because of how approachable she seems.

I use the phrase “reclaiming black baled” to highlight the fact that that belly dance and its social significance includes a political claim to wellness-as-citizenship

as well as a genealogical claim to a larger black diaspora. To reclaim *beledi* is to seek ownership of a dance form that is the result of the movement of people, ideas, and costume styles. Plus, let's face it: the difference in meaning between *raqs sharki* (dance of the orient) and *raqs beledi* (dance of the people) is a useful jumping point to the questions I use this project to investigate. The tensions between naming belly dance in the United States as *raqs sharki*, *raqs baladi*, Middle Eastern style dance, or Oriental dance help illustrate the importance of the questions this dissertation hopes to answer. In fact, these tensions and the debates they lead to generate hotly debated conversations online about who can or should be a belly dancer. In my dissertation, I use the digital objects associated with belly dance (online conversations, gifs, memes, and mp3s) to trace the movement of belly dance in post-9/11 conversations about wellness. When does blogging about wellness become writing about politics? Are belly dance and yoga invoked as an antidote to the psychological tolls of a racist and sexist society, and if so, how? To what extent can we see affect as undergirding social justice activism and digital praxis? What does this offer me (and others) as a scholar, blogger, and hobbyist dancer as a way to think critically about the role wellness and self-care takes in these projects? Because this is an exploratory dissertation, my questions remained constant even as my methods evolved in response to technological innovation in blogging platforms and image sharing.

In order to investigate these questions, I incorporate autoethnography as well as image tracking in my research. To track images I used TinEye, ImgOps, and (when if possible) the EXIF Exchangeable Image File (EXIF) hidden in the image to find the

earliest source possible.¹ I also used the Wayback Machine² to resurrect links to blogs, forum posts, or webpages that might no longer exist to reflect the conversation as it happened in “real time.” I also incorporated McGrane’s “Zen TV”³ reflection to “pay attention to paying attention.”

Finally, I offer the concept of a digital praxis of love. This concept incorporates the idea of praxis as a mingling reflection and action directed towards infrastructural or social change, as well as digital to reflect the branching of the technological, material, and imaginative worlds of the online activist. Love emphasizes the role of affect in propelling these projects forward. What I found attractive about this idea is that it provides an analytical framework for the labor fans and bloggers do for free, an analysis that moves beyond the curator/creator framework offered by the PEW Research Center’s work on Internet use. I look at gifsets and image manipulations in order to trouble the easy divide between curator/creator, to highlight an evolving conversation on race and wellness. These virtual and material labors of love – blogging projects, metasites collecting historical research, and Tumblrs blurring the line between the personal and the political – often participate in larger social justice movements centered around body positivity, wellness, and well-being.

¹ Tiny Eye, <https://www.tineye.com>; ImgOps, <http://imgops.com>. EXIF data includes metadata, such the date and time a picture was taken, any camera settings used, descriptions, GPS information, and copyright information. While this metadata can be useful, the process of saving, editing, and uploading an image file can result in parts of that data getting removed from the file itself. Also, some sites, most notably Facebook, remove EXIF data when the user uploads an image, in order to preserve the user’s privacy. My use of EXIF data primarily relies on looking at XMP, which is editing information generated by Adobe, Quicktime, iPhoto, and other image editing software, as well as any remnants of the file’s original name. Because this metadata can be edited or incomplete, I augment this information by using ImgOps to run multiple searches for places where that image has appeared and for the image’s first appearance. By doing this, I can get a sense of where the image was, is, and has been.

² Wayback Machine Internet Archive, <http://waybackmachine.org>

³ Bernard McGrane, “Zen Sociology: The Un-TV Experiment.” *Teaching Sociology* 21:1 (1993): 85-89. doi: 10.2307/1318855.

DEDICATION

To those using dance to heal themselves and the world.

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I also would like to thank my CRGE sister scholars, Tamyka Morant, Sylvette

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CHAPTER ONE: “BOOTYLICIOUS AND JINGLING”¹: BLACK WOMEN, WELLNESS, AND BELLY DANCE

The American fascination with technology and its promise of permeable personal, national, and global boundaries has been an enduring feature of the 20th and 21st century. The digital future promises a world with no borders, no race, no gender, a world of unmarked bodies with equal access to technology as tools for surveillance, leisure, and capital. Often, this new world is signified by using *bodies* of difference to reject *identities* of difference, circulating images of unmarked identities as a visual manifestation of global capital.² These conversations about the body, utopia, and freedom from overly fleshy identity markers emerged during the 1990s, and highlight the ways in which the body and community became signifiers of technological advancement. The 1990s is also the decade when obesity became identified as an epidemic, driving headlines, corporate fitness crazes, and the rise of lifestyle gurus, all of whom promised that the weight of your body could one day reflect the ethereality of your true self.

In this dissertation, I describe the connections between the rhetoric of the Information Age, the rise of a black feminist wellness movement, and the emergence in the 1990s of what Anna Everett describes as “black technophilia.”³ I do so using

¹ Akon, “Bonanza,” in *Trouble*, UMVD, 2003, compact disc.

² Lisa Nakamura and others have provided an extensive analysis of the imagery related to late nineties commercials as examples of neoliberal understandings of technology and community. These may be found in Nakamura’s *Digitizing Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Goldman, Papson, and Kersey’s “Speed: Through, Across, and In – The Landscapes of Global Capital” (*Fast Capitalism*, 2004, 1:1, www.fastcapitalism.com).

³ In *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), Anna Everett uses

belly dance. Belly dance may seem like an odd way to explore digital activism and wellness. However, I argue that the connections between black wellness, dance, and black feminist blogging present a unique opportunity to explore some of the central concerns facing the digital humanities, such as those surrounding embodiment, access, creative labor, and intellectual property. My work emerges from an extended engagement with black futurity, cultural survival, and creative play as a key aspect of what my dissertation describes as a digital praxis of love.

I link the histories of bodily transcendence, cultural survival, and technology in order to connect the rise of public, accessible scholarship centering the experiences of marginalized subjects with the exhortation to *feel good*. In particular, I engage the movement of images associated with wellness, self-care, and cultural survival, focusing on their connections to antiracist and antisexist conversations online. In doing so, I illustrate the continued salience of the body in the age of the digital as a signifier of identity and labor. For example, the 2014 *XOJane* article, “It Happened To Me: There Are No Black People In My Yoga Classes And I’m Suddenly Feeling Uncomfortable With It,” incited a series of online conversations about black women, white privilege, and yoga, many of which incorporated images of black women engaged in yoga or other movement-based wellness practices (discussed further on page 10 below). The author of this *XOJane* article literally could not imagine a fat black woman loving her body or doing yoga. While the author’s ignorance is hilarious, her shock over the presence of a black woman in her yoga class as well as

black technophilia to describe the 1990s upsurge in black Internet users who used cyberspace to engage in extended conversations on blackness, wellness, and community well-being. These conversations represent a continuance of the “‘self-help’ politics” (p. 31) found in both print and intellectual activism emergent from the black communities in the United States.

her apparently sincere surprise that black women read stuff online illustrates that blogging about wellness often becomes blogging about embodiment and politics.

I define “wellness” as multifaceted, incorporating individual agency, physical health, mental health, a sense of physical well being, and a sense of social well-being.⁴ This definition of wellness is particularly useful because its emphasis on agency and bodily autonomy is a direct contrast to the antebellum concept of “soundness.”⁵ “The marriage of professional medicine and slavery put a price on black health” and explicitly tied the fitness of black bodies to their ability to labor and not to the quality of their lives.⁶ A slave who was declared “sound” by a doctor was more marketable; some slaves would do what they could to make themselves “unsound” in order to avoid being sold away from their families. In contrast to this focus on labor and value, black wellness practitioners, often women, treated physical ailments as part and parcel of a broader network of possible psychic, spiritual, and social ills, any of which could influence the unwell person’s material being. This conscious willingness to love and care for black bodies, selves, and relationships

⁴ This definition draws on *Body & Soul: The Black Women’s Guide to Physical Health and Emotional Well-Being* (Linda Villarosa and the National Black Women’s Health Project, *Body & Soul: The Black Women’s Guide to Physical Health and Emotional Well-Being* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), the universal definition suggested by the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (Charles B. Corbin and Robert P. Pangrazi, *Toward a Uniform Definition of Wellness: A Commentary*, edited by President’s Council on Physical Fitness & Sports, (Washington, DC: President’s Council on Physical Fitness & Sports, 2001), and Angela Hissong’s “Feminist Philosophy: A Beginning Point for Adult Educators Promoting Women’s Wellness Education” (*PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning* 19, no.1 (2010)-21). Even though it is a contested term because of its association with alternative medicine, I use the term “wellness” instead of “fitness” because of its conceptual emphasis on individual agency, self-care, and *ownership* of one’s bodily autonomy. Fitness is typically defined as “strength, flexibility, and stamina” (*Body & Soul*, 36), incorporating metabolic, cardiovascular, and body composition (Corbin, Pangrazi, and Frank, 2008). In contrast, wellness is a state-of-being, and the sum total of many aspects of the individual’s life. Fitness focuses solely on the body, giving little attention to psychological, emotional, and social well-being, but each of these elements is incorporated into the concept of wellness.

⁵ Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁶ Fett, *Working Cures*, 20.

directly contrasted with the cruelty of slave owners and the indifference of white medical practitioners.

After Emancipation, the political and social struggles over black bodies, definitions of black health, and the political significance of *feeling well* continued. Black middle class women's participation in the growth of the YWCA continued this trend; creating a safe space for black women to play tennis and swim also entailed providing moral guidance from community leaders.⁷ Unfortunately, much of the history surrounding black women's contributions to early physical fitness, nutrition, and wellness movements have been lost or muddled because of the academic dismissal of such work as mere respectability politics or class-passing.⁸ By 1983, however, the black feminist movement began to push against the focus on beauty, poise, and class as the major requirements for "polishing black diamonds."⁹

In 1983, Bylle Y. Avery founded the Black Women's Health Imperative at the First National Conference on Black Women's Health.¹⁰ In her foreword to *Health First!: The Black Women's Wellness Guide*, Avery describes how the National Black

⁷ Jennifer M. Lansbury's *A Spectacular Leap: Black Women Athletes in Twentieth Century America* (University of Arkansas Press, 2014) provides an in depth description of the impact the 1918 opening of the Germantown YWCA had on the black community in Philadelphia and the founding of the American Tennis Association. Lansbury's work also situates the black women's athleticism in the social and political contexts of their time. Her discussion of the black community's shifting attitudes toward black women's athleticism is particularly useful because she highlights the role of classism in the evolving stereotypes surrounding strong black women.

⁸ Ava Purkiss' dissertation '*Mind, Soul, Body, and Race*': *Black Women's Purposeful Exercise, 1900-1939* (University of Texas at Austin, 2015) is one of the few historiographies that interrogates the erasure of black women's wellness-based activism from America's history of physical culture movements.

⁹ Laila Haidarali's "Polishing Brown Diamonds: African American Women, Popular Magazines, and the Advent of Modeling in Early Postwar America" (*Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 10-37) describes the role black women's appearance, skin color, weight, and poise took in both respectability politics and class mobility.

¹⁰ Eleanor Hinton Hoytt, Hilary Beard, and the Black Women's Health Imperative, *Health First!: The Black Women's Wellness Guide* (New York: Smiley Books, 2012).

Women's Health Project combined the concerns of the civil rights movement with the women's rights movement. Over the next decade, this black feminist movement impacted public health strategy as well as the wellness opportunities available to black women across the United States. In fact, "in 1988, there was some kind of Black women's health activity going on somewhere in the United States almost every weekend."¹¹ By 1990, the Black Women's Health Project launched Walking for Wellness.¹² The 1990s would also see the publication of *Body and Soul*, as well as *The Black Women's Health Book*. By 2002, *Essence Magazine* launched its "War on Girls" series, which made a direct and explicit connection between black girls' health outcomes, their own perception of their quality of life, and the implication these two factors held for the black community. Sadly, despite this activism, "Black women's lives play out within a 'perfect storm' of distress, oppression, and misguided optimism....So when our well-being wanes, it rocks the foundations of the whole Black community."¹³

Black blogs on wellness are part of this ongoing struggle. This dissertation highlights the connections between blogging *about* wellness and *feeling well*. My work on online community, black women, and wellness expands this contentious and continuous conversation to incorporate the everyday blurring of timelines, technologies, and histories framing black women's online work on wellness. I situate this dissertation's engagement with cyberspace and women of color's digital labors in a genealogy that includes black intellectual and technological activism reaching back

¹¹ Byllye Avery, "Who Does the Work of Public Health?" *American Journal of Public Health* 92 (2002), 574.

¹² Avery, "Who Does the Work," 574.

¹³ Hoytt et al., *Health First!: the Black Woman's Wellness Guide* (New York: Smiley Books, 2012).

to Ida B. Wells journalism and civil rights activism, which bridged the late 19th and early 20th century, through black student activism emerging in the mid-20th century, framed within the black feminist commitment to rediscovering the theoretical contributions of forgotten black women writers, artists, and researchers extending into the 21st century. It is also important to this dissertation to illustrate the conversations going on in the 1990s on technology, black technophilia, and knowledge production online. These conversations frame this project's engagement with affect, the body, and community online.

I look at the circulation of GIFs, JPEGs, and other digital images in order to analyze their use in conversations on self-love, community activism, and body acceptance. This builds on the PEW Internet and American Life Project's work on the creation and curation of images as social currency online.¹⁴ In addition, I engage Annamarie O'Brien's work¹⁵ on the use of images in "thinspiration" communities online as contributing to larger conversations on women's bodies, images of health, and friendship. However, I go beyond these projects by examining belly dance, race and racism, and the online conversations surrounding wellness as a type of political engagement. I do this because the archival practices associated with creating, curating, and recirculating online images of black women engaged in wellness practices is a powerful example of the amorphous boundaries of these bloggers' virtual lives, where understandings of the body vacillate between the material and the virtual. Further, I challenge the larger field of American studies to incorporate

¹⁴ Lee Rainie, Joanna Brenner, and Kristen Purcell, "Photos and Videos as Social Currency Online," Pew Internet and American Life Project, September 2012, accessed October 8, 2012. <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Online-Pictures/Main-Findings>.

¹⁵ O'Brien, Annamarie L. "Mind over Matter: Expressions of Mind/Body Dualism in Thinspiration." Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2013.

embodiment, wellness studies, and digital humanities into its analysis of knowledge production, discursive play online, and critical making.¹⁶ Finally, I conclude by arguing that a digital praxis of love offers some explanatory power for the interconnections between play, critical analysis, and labor practices associated with this type of intellectual activism.

Place, Space, and Images of Race

In 2014, an article in *The Nation*'s on "Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars"¹⁷ instigated a larger conversation among black feminists working in and outside of the academy on the role academics should take in online feminist conversations. Some black feminist bloggers, such as Dr. Brittney Cooper of *Crunk Feminist Collective*, described the role many white feminists have taken in both erasing the theoretical contributions of feminist women of color working online,¹⁸ reducing the importance of the collaborative works produced by multi-ethnic feminist collectives, such as the #femfuture report, to a mere anomaly.¹⁹ At the same time that this public, online conversation among prominent black feminists came to a head, *XOJane* published "There Are No Black People In My Yoga Class and I'm Suddenly Feeling

¹⁶ ¹⁶ In 2008, Matt Ratto coined the phrase "critical making" to describe a simultaneous engagement with critical thinking and technological crafting, typically centering open-source and accessible software design (Matt Ratto, "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life," *The Information Society* 27, no. 4 (2011): 252-260). An example of critical making might include the Predator Alert Tool for OkCupid, a browser add-on alerting OkC users to potential matches who answered certain questions the way an undetected rapist might. This open source piece of code has evolved to address sites such as Fetlife, Facebook, and Twitter.

¹⁷ Michelle Goldberg, "Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars," *The Nation*, January 29, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2014. <http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars#>

¹⁸ See, for example, Amanda Marcotte's uncredited use of blogger Brownfemipower's work on immigration. Tara L. Conley of *The Feminist Wire* offers a sustained analysis of this controversy in an open letter to Marcotte (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/03/an-open-letter-to-amanda-marcotte/>).

¹⁹ The discursive erasure of this shared project produced by a multi-ethnic feminist collective echoes the historical amnesia associated with inter-ethnic feminist mobilizing in the 1960s and 1970s as described in Katie King's *Theory in its Feminist Travels: Conversations in U.S. Women's Movements* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Uncomfortable With It.”²⁰ As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the online response²¹ to this post by yoga students, practitioners, and teachers of color was vocal and immediate. These responses incorporated circulating images of black and brown women practicing yoga through micro-blogging platforms such as Tumblr, referencing online memes, and reflecting extensively on yoga as a culturally appropriative example of mind/body work that is itself imagined as racially exclusive.²² Using humor and honesty, these responses lambasted a progressive mind/body practice whose practitioners ignored the realities of racism, classism, and imperialism framing the American experience of yoga. These stories showcase the “missing steps”²³ in the utopian fantasy of the digital commons, demonstrating how these discursive absences create an unbridgeable gap in the stepping-stone process of addressing racism, misogynoir,²⁴ and colonialism in ostensibly safe spaces. My experiences with the material, virtual, and discursive community surrounding belly dance and yoga became my first introduction to these missing steps in the imagined

²⁰ Jen Caron, “It Happened To Me: There Are No Black People In My Yoga Class and I’m Suddenly Feeling Uncomfortable With It,” *XOJane*, January 28, 2014, accessed August 15 2014, <http://www.xojane.com/it-happened-to-me/it-happened-to-me-there-are-no-black-people-in-my-yoga-classes-and-im-uncomfortable-with-it>.

²¹ The online response to this blogpost, as well as its movement within and without feminist online spaces, may have been impacted by its circulation by other online publications, such as Slate.com and Salon, as well as its reblogging through Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter.

²² For example, Demetria L. Lucas released a post in response immediately afterward. Entitled “Dear Yoga Girl, You Know that Most of Us Don’t Envy Your Shape, Right?” Lucas uses her blogpost to zero in on the concept of body envy as framing black women’s engagement with wellness practices. She writes, “Black women really don’t spend that much time thinking about white women,” arguing that black women approach wellness practices with their own goals in mind, goals that exist independently of white women.

²³ Cliff Pervocracy, “The Missing Stair,” *The Pervocracy: Sex, Feminism, BDSM, And Some Very, Very Naughty Words*, published electronically June 22, 2012, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://pervocracy.blogspot.com/2012/06/missing-stair.html>.

²⁴ This term was coined by Moya Bailey to describe the specific hatred directed toward black women, in “They Aren’t Talking About Me,” *Crunk Feminist Collective*, 2010. Published electronically 18 Mar 2010. Accessed: 18 Aug 2014. <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/>.

utopia of the digital frontier.

Crowdsourcing Self-Love: Black Women and Wellness Online

Let me make sure you heard me. Heart disease in women causes more deaths each year than breast cancer, colon cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, AIDS, car accidents, suicides and homicides combined!

Add to that the fact that black women are diagnosed much later in the disease process, and that, once we are diagnosed, we die sooner than women and men of other ethnic groups. Now you can see why we should all be thinking of our hearts – not just in the context of heartbreak but also in the context of heart disease.

— Stacey Ann Mitchell and Teri Mitchell²⁵

In historicizing online community, the rise of America's new Orientalism, and black feminist creative output, it is easy to split these cultural strands apart, as though they take place in entirely separate timelines and universes. However, my lived, embodied experience of the connections between blogging about wellness and physical wellness practices show that these are all conversations emergent from the same timeline, incorporating the same speakers, referring to the same sets of historical texts. These experiences, and their connection to a larger wellness movement active online, offer an opportunity to consider trauma as a “structure of feeling” endemic to late capitalism and its relationship to the body.²⁶ Through the body, trauma is both imagined and made visceral and viscera. Engaging with these

²⁵ *Livin' Large: African American Sisters Confront Obesity* (Roscoe, IL: Hilton Publishing Company, 2004), 51.

²⁶ Ann Cvetkovich, *14* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 17.

structures of feeling is as much about grappling with “*how capitalism feels*” as it is the sensory and material.²⁷ Other analyses of the *feeling* of capitalism have situated these feelings in an extended engagement with the American psyche after 9/11 by incorporating digital and visual media analysis in order to capture a sense of the evolving political tempest facing the nation.²⁸ However, none connect the evolving black women’s wellness movement to this critical geopolitical moment. This lack of research is particularly troubling because of the ways in which the militarization of national and public policy disproportionately impact black women’s quality of life and access to healthcare.²⁹

The body’s movement through space matters; it is a way for the subject to articulate complicated discourses about race, gender, sexuality, and class through a myriad of non-academic signifiers. Moreover, this movement is a conscious way for the subject to both articulate and critique these discourses by suggesting and reframing standard discussions of the body, history, and identity. In this section, I offer a snippet of my experiences of the *feeling* of capitalism during a moment when the war on terror and the war for black girls’ bodily autonomy captured national

²⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) 11, emphasis in original.

²⁸ Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) is a particularly powerful and useful text that integrates an analysis of news media with an analysis of online conversation and the movement of images. Puar engages in an analysis of the *feeling* of capitalism by linking the discourses surrounding the war on terror with the discourses surrounding gay life in the United States. Using an extended engagement with online conversations in order to illustrate the “informational flows” (160) sustaining and informing U.S. fantasies of the terrorist body, Puar’s analysis incorporates the temporal, spatial, and material elements framing the production of citizenship and community membership. Her investigation of agency in knowledge production and the circulation of visual rhetoric illustrates the complex interactions between social zeitgeists, political machinery, and individual citizens. Puar’s mingling of textual analysis and the movement of the conversations framing the terrorist body helped to inspire my use of textual and visual analysis in describing black women’s wellness projects online.

²⁹ Angela Davis, “Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: The Politics of Black Women’s Health,” in *Women, Culture & Politics* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 53-65.

headlines.

A Beledi Progression Begins in the Hips

I initially became interested in belly dance as an undergraduate at Smith College. Now, don't worry. I'm not transitioning into torrid story of college love as a metaphor for national heartbreak post-9/11, using my evolution as a belly dancer to signify my personal growth into a more independent person. Actually, I started taking belly dance classes because I figured it would be a fun way to stave off both the heartbreak of heart disease and "the sugar,"³⁰ all without involving the loss of my much-beloved curves.

I took several classes at a local dance studio and became active in the local dance scene, attending performances and going to the same Goth and alterna-rock clubs that many of the other belly dancers I knew attended. When I returned from class, I'd immediately turn on my computer. Online, there were women talking about belly dance – as students, teachers, retailers, and fans. Members of the LiveJournal Bellydance community would post YouTube clips of themselves dancing, looking for technical feedback, song suggestions, and encouragement. Several of the community's members also maintained blogs outside of LiveJournal, or participated avidly in Tribe.net's forums. Some of this was part of these dancers' larger public image. They made their living as dancers and dance instructors: what better way to market their expertise than through their websites and public participation in online forums? Other posters just really, really loved belly dance and the community fostered within the classes themselves. Blogging, image-making, and participating in

³⁰ "The sugar" is slang for type II diabetes, commonly used in African American communities in the South.

online discussions were ways to stretch those few hours in the studio into something longer, something both more tangible and more ephemeral. Plus, my own generational fascination with technology as utopia created an intoxicating distraction from the chaos on campus when combined with the sheer fun of belly dance.

I sometimes wondered if my fellow (sister?) dancers were as scared as I was. While Smith was not a conservative campus, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments were on the rise post-9/11. In Chase, one of the larger houses on campus, international students were verbally harassed over food, language, and politics. In another house, a queer black woman who would eventually become president of our Black Students' Association and her girlfriend were subjected to having police called on them as they waited for a pizza delivery in the living room of her dorm. In my house, someone scrawled DIE NIGGERS on walls of the fourth floor bathroom in purple marker and crayon. I had quit the rowing team by then, but the friends I'd made – a collection of buff, sleep-deprived, and motivated Smithies with access to rowing oars and a campus van – showed up to the poetry and dance nights I organized, and walked first year students of color home to their dorms.

My memory of this year is disjointed. I remember practicing a dance routine in the living room of another dorm, feeling the rayon weave and cheap coins of my first hip scarf; and I remember a campus meeting convened by the college president where the skinny, bespectacled white woman, the one who'd called the cops on Nikki and her girlfriend, screamed into a microphone that she was a human being. Looking back now, Elizabeth Philipose's argument that "healing the wounds of imperialism is

a material, emotional, political, economic and spiritual project”³¹ in the context of the digital, rings particularly true. There was a campus-wide tension that never quite faded, a general sense of incoming disaster.

There were no Arab women in my belly dance classes – only Arab music. I heard echoes of Iraq and Desert Storm everywhere. Orientalist themes and music samples were so pervasive during the early 2000s that they “set imperialism to a new bass-heavy beat.”³² In fact, the title of this chapter is taken from the 2002 song “Bonanza (Belly Dancer)” by Akon. The digital artifacts with which I interacted most frequently were not and could not be innocent. They were enmeshed in the same militaristic national project that defined the Middle East as fantasy, conquest, and opulent treasure house.³³

Eventually I moved to Boston. The Middle East, a popular restaurant in Central Square, hosted a weekly belly dance night that generally ended in a *hafla*, a sort of group dance where everyone is invited to improvise. I started getting into East Coast tribal, a specific form of belly dance centering the odd, eerie, and strange potentiality of Oriental choreographies. I also started writing within the feminist blogosphere, particularly for *The Hathor Legacy*, which primarily focused on sci-fi, fantasy, and popular culture. In my *real* leisure time, I participated in online forums about dance and yoga, where there was a growing push to treat self-love as a kind of

³¹ Philipose, Liz. “Healing the Wounds of Imperialism.” *Works and Days* 29 (2011): 67-80. Access at <http://www.worksanddays.net/2011/File05.Phippose,%20L,%2005.pdf>. 67.

³² Chris Kirkpatrick, “Boom Go the Bombs, Boom Goes the Bass,” *Alternet: Pop Matters*, electronically published June 13 2002, http://www.alternet.org/story/13388/boom_go_the_bombs,_boom_goes_the_bass.

³³ Kristin McGee, “Orientalism and Erotic Multiculturalism in Popular Culture: From Princess Rajah to the Pussycat Dolls,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6 (2012).

radical praxis.³⁴ Dance bloggers posted dance routines, reflected on yoga and size acceptance, talked about belly dancing while fat or pregnant, and discussed their families' responses to a wife or mother taking time away from her womanly duties to go shake her hips with other chicks. For example, Figure 1 features two posts to the Tribal Bellydance Community from 2004. The first post, locked for community members only, describes the experiences a dancer had when asked to dance for a family event. The other post includes the text of a crowd-sourced article on belly dance, as well as the dancer's response. Figure 2 is a screenshot from another LiveJournal belly dance community, where the posters are discussing the sexualization of belly dance as an art form in the eyes of mainstream America.

These bloggers were producing a body of literature on dance and wellness as amateur dancers, scholars, and historians for free because they loved belly dance and the imagined community of women the dance class space implied. Creating belly dance cartoon figures using online icon generators, curating websites, and circulating clips became a way of extending the sense of community fostered by the classes into another domestic space.³⁵

³⁴ My working definition of praxis incorporates Rob Halpern's definition of praxis as "a critical form of action...[transforming] the ideological limits and material constraints that determine a historical situation." See Rob Halpern, "Committing the Fault (Notes Towards a Faulty Narrative Practice)" in *Biting the Error*, ed. Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy and Gail Scott. Toronto, Ontario: Coach House Books, 2004, 61. I have also been influenced by Kimberly J. Lau's discussion of black women's "everyday bodily praxis" in search of wellness as a material and discursive form of activism that both performs and midwives into being an "alternative future" (21) where black women's bodies can be loved, celebrated, and healed in *Body Language: Sisters In Shape, Black Women's Fitness, and Feminist Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 2011).

³⁵ See Lisa Nakamura's *Digitizing Race* or Carla Stokes' "'I'm a Dyme, that's Top of the Line, Cute Face, Slim Waist, with a Big Behind!': Hip Hop, Sexuality, and Body Politics in Black Adolescent Girls' Internet Home Pages," American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, Boston.

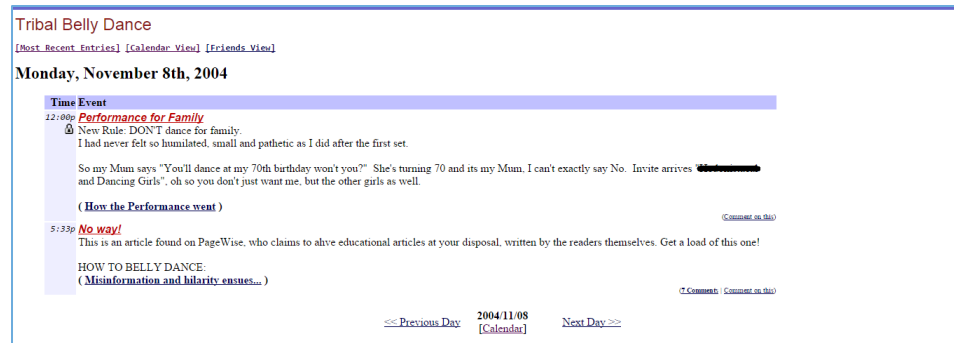


Figure 1: Screenshot from the Tribal Belly Dance LiveJournal Community.³⁶

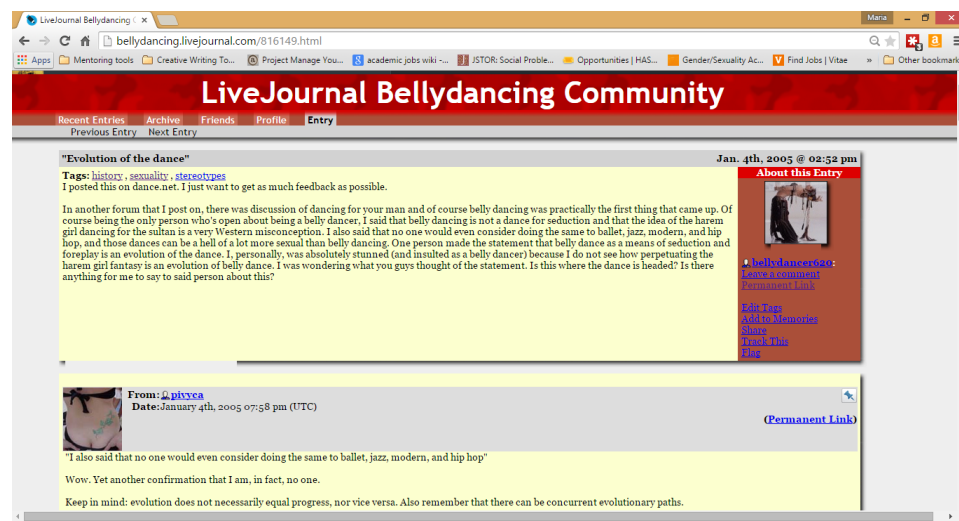


Figure 2: Screenshot of a 2005 entry to the Live Journal Bellydancing Community³⁷

Most hobbyist dancers have day jobs. Mine took me to Washington, DC. My first “real” job (as a research fellow for the Council on African American Affairs) provided me opportunities to begin researching wellness and food-ways in African American communities, as well as enough money and time to bounce from dance class to dance class. I took my first DC classes at Joy of Motion, in Dupont Circle. From there I went on to take classes at Sahara Dance, near Adams Morgan, and

³⁶ From 11/8/2004. The first post is locked for community members only; because of this I have obscured the poster’s community nickname. The second post is public.

³⁷ This entry connecting belly dance’s history to its licentious stereotypes inspired 53 comments on sexuality in belly dance. Its participants refer to past posts on the topic, several of which are indexed on the “sexuality” tag.

finally settled on Go Mamasita! in Takoma Park as my studio of choice. I fell in love with this studio, fascinated by its teaching pedagogies, the variety of body types I saw in the classroom space and in images on its products, and its emphasis on wellness, rather than dance technique, as the sign of a successful dancer. It also hosted the Bellydancers³⁸ of Color Association, the brainchild of the studio's founder, Dr. Sunyatta Amen. Meanwhile, the natural hair care blogosphere, and its attendant focus on self-care, wellness, and the body, rose to prominence. MotownGirl.com, Carol's Daughter, the Long Hair Care Forum, and BlackGirlLongHair began circulating images of black women loving their bodies and their blackness – through yoga, natural hair care products, meditation, and crafts. This mingling of spirituality, handicrafts, and political resistance reflected the long history black wellness practices in the United States, where “acts of healing became arts of resistance, inscribing the vital link between personal health and collective freedom.”³⁹

³⁸ In general, this dissertation uses “belly dance” (two words) to refer to Oriental and North African dance, because that is the dictionary defined stylistically preferred form. However, when I am specifically talking about the Bellydancers of Color Association, I switch to bellydance because that's the spelling most used by BOCA members and in the materials associated with the organization.

³⁹ Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press) 2002.



Figure 3: Screenshot of a 2003 LHCF forum post on seeing nutritionists

The conversations I was having online in my leisure time – about femininity, wellness, and self-love – began to blur with my classroom experiences of belly dance. One of Sunyatta Amen’s foundational arguments is that black women are coming from a state of unwellness – not because of obesity (though that is part of it), and not because of self-hate (though that is part of it too). Instead, she suggests that black women have been psychically and psychologically injured – by larger society, by themselves, by other black people – specifically because they are black and female. They are discursive members of two loathed social categories whose abdominal, hip, and torso movements must be controlled, particularly when these movements reflect a certain uncontrollable largesse.⁴⁰ Surprisingly, this echoed feminist conversations I’d had in Boston on belly dance as a political act of resistance against a patriarchal society that encouraged women to internalize the aesthetics of the corset through an

⁴⁰ Andrea Elizabeth Shaw, *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women’s Unruly Political Bodies* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).

aerobic fixation on abs, belly bulges, and stomach rolls.⁴¹ However, Amen and these black holistic health websites suggested that this resistance was especially critical to *black women's* survival – loving ourselves, healing ourselves, and healing our bodies *through luxuriating in explicitly gendered and racialized femininity* – had become a matter of life and death. The very breath we breathed was in danger because of our literal weight⁴² and our shared metaphysical⁴³ burden of racist histories and cultural erasure.

I approach this project from a phenomenological perspective, drawing on corporeal feminist analyses of dance, aerobic and yoga classrooms.⁴⁴ This approach centers participant observation, auto ethnography, and journaling in order to “trace”⁴⁵ the movement of images, songs, and texts associated with belly dance, yoga, and other mind/body wellness practices. In my investigation of visual and digital rhetorics, I use the phrase “boundary objects”⁴⁶ to emphasize these images’ role as complex concepts whose connotations shift based on audience and use. A boundary

⁴¹ Virginia Keft-Kennedy, “‘How does she do that?’: Belly Dancing and the Horror of a Flexible Woman,” *Women’s Studies* 34, no. 3 (2005),

⁴² Restrictive lung disease is one of the physical effects of obesity, and is a condition where your weight constricts the expansion of your lungs.

⁴³ The social significance of breathing, its legislation, and its connection to living within institutions of power has been demonstrated most poignantly in the activism following the murder of Eric Garner by a police officer in December 2014, who gasped, “I can’t breathe,” as he was choked to death. This powerful phrase helped to inspire the hashtags #icantbreathe, #blacklivesmatter, and #wecantbreathe on Twitter, as well as protest chants, posters, and t-shirts. In response, the New York Police Department and their supporters wore “I CAN Breathe” hoodies at a pro-police rally. This response that may itself reflect the institutional role breathing, fitness, and bodily worth take military cultures as described by Brian Lande in “Breathing Like a Soldier” (*The Sociological Review* 55 (2007): 95-108).

⁴⁴ I am particularly indebted to Barbara Browning’s *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ Maria Velazquez, “The Occasional Ethnicities of Lavender Brown: Race as a Boundary Object in Harry Potter,” in *Critical Insights: Contemporary Speculative Fiction*, ed. Keith M. Booker (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2013), 100.

⁴⁶ Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39,” *Social Studies of Science* 19 (1989).

object is a concept, object, or idea with a stable, consistent meaning whose significance changes as that object moves through audiences and venues. This dissertation draws on the concept of boundary objects to emphasize the shifting meaning digital objects accrue as they move about online. In particular, I used the digital movement of particular images (as well as their absence) to trace the rhetorical movement of conversations about belly dance, yoga, and wellness. Initially, I did so by using TinEye.com and Archive.org's Wayback Machine to find the earliest instances of the image possible. As this project progressed, I augmented this by researching the metadata and tags associated with the image.

Bernard McGrane's unTV experiment questions whether the individual researcher's experiences of technology can be connected to a macro-analysis of larger social and political trends. McGrane's unTV experiment incorporates tracking technical events (moments when the images on the screen have been manipulated in any way, including camera angle or zooming in); watching TV with the sound off; and watching TV with the TV off. Because I am also paying particular attention to the conceit of community membership as an ideological performance, a concept I am drawing from Chela Sandoval's work in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, I used my journaling practice as an opportunity to pay attention to what I was paying attention to,⁴⁷ and the ways in which that act of attention becomes complicit in erasing and/or recognizing signs of agency in studio and set design, music choice, site design, and

⁴⁷ This issue of attention is also important because the Internet and its evolution is "embedded" in academia as a site of labor, imagination, and analysis. In Steve Jones' "Studying the Net" (1998) he highlights that the analysis of community online can become complicit in the "economic engine" of the Internet because community is part of its marketing. Part of what I used journaling to pay attention to are the "technical events" of affect incorporated into site design, unpaid content production, and technological fluency.

the visual rhetoric of online belly dance communities. Incorporating Sandoval's focus on agency shifts the initial emphasis of the unTV experiment from "audience vs. TV" to "audience *and* medium" by highlighting the work of consumers actively engaged with media and its manipulation. But how do you track attention? Is it the computer itself, the screen, or the body that must become central? This question is particularly important when researching the Internet and online community. After all, "we have all, scholar and citizen alike, become savvy media consumers."⁴⁸

In order to address this concern, I incorporated Bernard McGrane's unTV journaling practice post-dance class, self-led session, and DVD session. McGrane describes this activity as "a small attempt" to analyze television viewing as a kind of consumption. It is a way of "stopping the world" in order to resist the "social construction of reality" associated with consuming media."⁴⁹ This is particularly important for analyzing the role of militarization in popular culture. McGrane writes, "As a society we view television as real. We watch our wars on the same TV sets as our football games. W.I. Thomas taught us long ago, if humans define situations as real, they become real."

As we begin to incorporate more and more abstract levels of reality into our daily life through the use of cyberspace, blogging, and other representations of reality where the materiality of the signifier grows less and less relevant, taking seriously the "thingness" of the signifier, its accessories physical and conceptual, becomes more and more crucial. Ahmed challenges researchers to think of the spatiality of the

⁴⁸ Steve Jones, "Studying the Net: Intricacies and Issues," in *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net*, ed. Steve Jones, 1-27. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998.

⁴⁹ Bernard McGrane, "Zen Sociology: The Un-TV Experiment," *Teaching Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1993), 85

cyberspace, by encouraging an attention to the ways in which bodies become orientated toward particular spaces. But how can one consciously pay attention to what you're paying attention to in a space designed feel seamless and intuitive? How does one navigate an investigation into cyberspace and dance when one's own familiarity with these sites of encounter becomes part of the problem, when one is embedded technologically, racially, and nationally within the web of discourse framing the investigation itself?

In order to address this concern, I designed a worksheet on self-reflexivity and also treated my journaling as an opportunity to track the movement of digital objects through space and time. This worksheet and an example of one of my journal entries focused on a particular class session's track list are available as an appendix to this dissertation. Ultimately, I chose to focus on images that appeared multiple times in the belly dance tag on Tumblr whose attribution and tags reflected a longer movement history within and without that indexing. Also, because of the prominence of the Bellydance Superstars in the United States, I used the names and oeuvre of two of their dancers of color to analyze politics of representation surrounding belly dancers of color working outside of the Bellydancers of Color Association. This was particularly useful. The *lack* of images of dancers like Amar Gamal and the conversations surrounding these images' absence often prompted forum participants to engage in profound conversations on racism and privilege in belly dance. These conversations often included references to digital ephemera, such as clips of Gamal performing, where the comments had to be closed because of their racist content.

Rethinking War and Community Online

In their 2012 *Battle for the Internet* series, *The Guardian* describes the fearsome threat of Chinese “cyber jedis” whose culture “we don’t understand.”⁵⁰ In “Cyberpunks in Cyberspace,” Edwards writes, “The experiential quality of cyberspace includes anxiety about boundaries and borders...and the real-life on-line experience of disembodiment and abstraction from geographical space and real time.”⁵¹ Cyberspace becomes one site where the fear of a distant and dangerous Other is negotiated. This use of fear as an organizing strategy reflects the ongoing militarization of American society. This militarization shapes American citizens’ understanding of space and conflict, and creates an “*economy of desire*, often oriented around consumer products.”⁵² Basically, this means the places, stuff, and sounds of Otherness become things, experiences, or sensations you can buy.

Predictably, belly dancers also collect *stuff*: scarves, make up (cheap and designer), bra, tops, skirted pants, harem pants, aluminum canes, wooden canes, bindis....The grab-bag nature of belly dance as a style is reflected in the trunks and closets of its lovers. Putting together a costume – searching out the perfect bangle – requires a magpie-like ability to filter and search, a willingness to dig through clutter to discover a hidden treasure trove of costume jewelry in the back of one’s closet. These lovely toys are part of the economy of desire fueled by America’s fascinated horror with the plight of oppressed Arab women, lips pursed behind their veils,

⁵⁰ Nick Hopkins, “Battle for the Internet: Militarisation of Cyberspace: How the Global Power Struggle Moved Online,” *The Guardian*, 16 April 2012, 1.

⁵¹ Paul N. Edwards, “Cyberpunks in Cyberspace: the Politics of Subjectivity in the Computer Age,” in *The Cultures of Computing*, ed. Susan Leigh Star, (Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/cyberpunks.htm>. Np.

⁵² M. Power, “Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post-9/11 Cyber-Deterrence,” *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007), 276, emphasis in original.

kneeling. The eroticism of the smooth metal surrounding the stones in a dancer's anklet is both deeply sensual and thoroughly enmeshed with larger histories of power, oppression, and conquest. This mingling of material culture, "crude myth,"⁵³ and imperialist fantasy reflects belly dance's Orientalist origins as well as the political climate framing its recent resurgence.

"In the Internet Age, Dance Evolves"⁵⁴

As I began linking imperialism to wellness movements in the U.S., I struggled with the apparent antipathy towards technology present in feminist analyses of fitness and technology. Some even offer up dancing as a tonic for gym culture's fixation on cardio, dismissing machine-assisted cardio as relying on a mechanical "dutiful 'spinning of wheels', from which we'll distract ourselves by any means possible (magazines, headsets, anything to trick us into thinking we're not actually using our bodies)."⁵⁵ While some may dismiss these moments of body/mind/technology synergy as "emphatically non-transformative,"⁵⁶ I challenge this assertion by outlining in this dissertation a series of encounters where technology, movement, and the mind collide to make a discursive claim to a radical politic. I engage work on embodiment, wellness, and the digital in order to investigate community literacy and embodiment as components of critical pedagogical strategies employed by antiracist bloggers discussing wellness and self-care. In this project, community literacy is defined as a series of embodied social practices embedded in everyday life reliant on

⁵³ W. Joseph Campbell, *1995: The Year the Future Began* (Oakland, CA: University of California, 2015), 160.

⁵⁴ Jon Chu, "The LXD: In the Internet Age, Dance Evolves" *TEDTalks* (2010), http://www.ted.com/talks/the_lxd_in_the_internet_age_dance_evolve.

⁵⁵ Christina Pugh, "An Elegy for Dancing," in *My Life at the Gym: Feminist Perspectives on Community Through the Body*, ed. Jo Malin (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 27.

⁵⁶ Pugh, "An Elegy for Dancing," 27.

fluency with community norms.⁵⁷ I use the concept of community literacy and fluency to drive home the point that, as more and more wellness spaces overlap with the virtual,⁵⁸ the language, social practices, and rules for participation depend on fluid and unstated definitions of the body and self.

This project uses two different locations to underscore the role of the body in community building. The first is the Go Mamasita! dance studio in Washington, DC, where the Bellydancers of Color Association is hosted. Dr. Sunyatta Amen, BOCA's founder, envisioned her studio space as a site where women of color, particularly black women, would re-connect with a dance ancestry stretching back to North Africa.

The second type of space I investigate is more strictly virtual: the blogosphere of color, in particular bloggers who participate in the antiracist blogosphere. I use *antiracist* because the term's direct oppositionality to prejudice emphasizes that the traumas of racism are "gut"⁵⁹ issues – that is, physically palpable sensations. The oppositionality of anti-racism as a discursive framework is key to its ability to confront color-blind ideologies.⁶⁰ Anti-racist work is necessarily reactive, proactive, and intimately tied to the affective body.

Each of the places this dissertation examines considers itself a type of community. In many ways, they are self-selected communities, meaning that its members choose to join. However, these are also examples of communities in

⁵⁷ David Barton and Mary Hamilton, *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁵⁸ Sarah Hentges, *Women and Fitness in American Culture*, (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland, 2014), 59.

⁵⁹ Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Gut issues in Babylon: Racism & Anti-Racism in the Arts," in *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984-1992* (Stratford, Ont., Canada: Mercury Press: Distributed in the U.S. by Inland Book Co. and Bookslinger, 1992), 211.

⁶⁰ Dei (2000).

tension. The Bellydancers of Color Association, an international organization, relies on recirculating Orientalist tropes as part of its marketing. Blogger burnout, call-outs, and flaming are all part of the realities of antiracist blogging. For each of these communities, the body, and its ability to be read, are both a building block of community and a marker of community tensions; and is of paramount concern. By talking about these different sites in one project I am able to analyze the theoretical connections between each; emphasize their theoretical utility in discussion of embodied pedagogy, embodiment, and community; and reiterate the centrality of the body as a site of critical analysis online.

The sites I am investigating – a black belly dance studio and the anti-racist blogosphere – involve populations who live, write, and work passionately, palpably, engaging in projects whose after-effects linger in their bodies, minds, and hearts. Because of the sites this dissertation explores, one of its primary goals is to remain accessible to a variety of audiences. This dissertation's intended audiences include administrators in the non-profit sector; artist-practitioners in the fields of yoga, dance, and creative writing; researchers in the fields of critical race theory and the digital humanities; and academic and non-academic public intellectuals writing, working, and publishing online. Because of its roots in my own work with the nonprofit sector, curriculum and community liaison advisors in the nonprofit sector may find portions of this project a useful addition to the literature on embodied pedagogy and establishing community partnerships. Artist-practitioners in the fields of yoga, dance, and creative writing will find this study useful because of its engagement with the virtual as a means of establishing creative communities online. Theorists working

within the fields of critical race theory and/or the digital humanities will find this project useful because of its discussion of race, the body, and community in the 21st century.

The questions framing my project focus on the critical utility of the digital humanities in addressing issues of race, gender, and ethnicity. My dissertation interrogates the role of love as activist praxis linked to knowledge production, particularly online. When does blogging about wellness become writing about politics? Are belly dance and yoga invoked as an antidote to the psychological tolls of a racist and sexist society, and if so, how? To what extent can we see affect as undergirding social justice activism and digital praxis? What does this offer me (and others) as a scholar, blogger, and hobbyist dancer looking for ways to think critically about the role wellness and self-care takes in these projects?

Placing these sites in conversation with one another highlights the ways in which the body – as material construct, affective nexus, and discursive conceit – becomes implicated in this fantasy of erotic conquest. I examine the sites under investigation as multi-nodal, as straddling both the physical as well as virtual. Thinking of these sites as occupying multiple spaces means that it is possible for this project to engage with each as a “global/local” site, that is, sites immersed in local and global technological flaws that thrive in the in-between world of “both/and.”⁶¹ Because I use these concepts as part of my larger framework, I am able to suggest that part of the belly dance and wellness experience online is tied to its fetishization of a technological framework operating within and without the organic.

⁶¹ Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, “Tracking the Global/Local,” in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. Rey Chow, Harry Harootunian, Masao Miyoshi, Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 1996), 8.

By making central the everyday spaces of wellness and care online and off, this dissertation offers one approach for investigating the blurred lines created by American imperialism. Throughout each phase of this project, I focus on the ways embodiment is performed, mediated, and disciplined. I also am deeply invested in the interconnections between the civilian home front and the imagined battlefield.⁶² For example, the Go Mamasita! studio draws on extant conversations about emancipatory blackness as part of the fantasy of community membership as well as conversations about belly dance as a women's art form. These conversations occur in *both* virtual communities, such as Tribe.net and LiveJournal, *and* are centered on specifically American sites of production, particularly Washington DC, Boston, and San Francisco. Likewise, the anti-racist blogosphere draws on extant conversations about writing, genre fiction, and race as a means of engaging in solidarity in online contexts. These conversations occur in *both* virtual communities, such as Dreamwidth, Tumblr, and LiveJournal, *and* are centered on specific "meat-space" events,⁶³ such as WisCon, DiversiCon, and Arisia, three anti-racist, anti-sexist science fiction/fantasy conventions in the U.S. *Both* make central conversations on wellness and self-care, particularly in regard to cultural and communal survival.

I am also paying particular attention to agency and hope. This is in part because of Liz Philipose's argument that a "decolonizing political subjectivity" has the potential to heal, that its birth is heralded by "emergent paradigm of global

⁶² I am indebted to M. Jacqui Alexander's provocative question, "What do lives of privilege look like in the midst of war?" in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred, Perverse Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, 7) as a compass for this project.

⁶³ Jaymee Goh, an active blogger and member of the Carl Brandon Society, used the term "meat space" to differentiate between her virtual and "real world" activism in an informal conversation with me in 2010 at WisCon 34.

relations based on compassion, love and justice.”⁶⁴ Colonial and imperial pain draw their strength from the ongoing ruptures associated with the colonial project, including the forced separation of bodies that should fit together as members of a humane, human whole.

In the following chapters, I offer a brief history of the 1990s, the evolution of wellness rhetoric, and I argue that the growing popularity of yoga and belly dance is linked to the U.S. military projects in the Middle East (Chapter 2: “Do You Know What They Say About Guilty Feet?”). I then begin to analyze dance as a kind of communal and technological performance (Chapter 3: “Mediating Dance, Mediated Communities”). In these chapters, I connect the media projects associated with belly dance with the militarization of civilian leisure time and video games. By exploring the work of Dolphina, Hemalayaa, and the dance troupe Bellyqueen, I illustrate the ways in which belly dance, love, and wellness become increasingly political projects post-9/11. In Chapter 4: “Bringing a Respectful Booty,” I focus primarily on the Go Mamasita! studio and the online conversations spurred on by the Bellydancers of Color Association. In my discussion of GoMamasita! I discuss the role of music, the circulation of mp3s, and the role of online discussion in framing the social significance of the Bellydancers of Color Association. I also pay particular attention to music because of the opportunities it affords dance instructors to frame the content and atmosphere of their classes,⁶⁵ as well as its role in trademarking a particular dance class experience.⁶⁶ In Chapter 5, I conclude by describing wellness blogging

⁶⁴ Liz Philipose, “Healing the Wounds of Imperialism,” *Works and Days* 29 (2011), 67.

⁶⁵ Sarah Hentges, *Women and Fitness in American Culture* (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland, 2014).

⁶⁶ For example, Zumba as a corporation is notoriously protective of its branding through music and choreography. Its CEO, Alberto Perlman, lauds its ability to create a captive audience, describing

and embodiment as examples of antiracist projects online in order to begin describing knowledge production and the circulation of self-care strategies as an evolving digital praxis of love (“Toward a Digital Praxis of Love”). This chapter explores the curatorial and productive roles black feminist bloggers take in producing content on wellness and self-care.

My goal is not to suggest that love is a tonic. Instead, I argue that thinking strategically and critically about love and its role in online knowledge production can illustrate the ways in which an interdisciplinary conversation about praxis in the context of the digital humanities should include such work as blogging about dance, yoga, and black women’s natural hair.

Zumba’s certified fitness instructors as “DJs....They play the music, and 12 million people not only have to listen to a song, but have to do the choreography for the song. The song is in their body. It’s not like a radio station, where you can change the dial” (Leila Cobo, “Body Rock: Is Zumba the Next Music Platform?” *BillboardBiz*, 2012. <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1093057/body-rock-is-zumba-the-next-music-platform>, 2012).

CHAPTER TWO: DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT GUILTY FEET?: BELLY DANCE DVDS AND IMPERIAL FEELINGS

A month after September 11th, 2001, I signed up for dance classes. This was a coincidence – I was a nineteen-year old college sophomore with a bit of excess cash from my first internship in the big city who thought belly dancing would be more fun than yoga. Plus, I was a big Princess Jasmine fan.¹ After all, I had been part of the age range and demographic Disney had had in mind when they released *Aladdin*² in the early 1990's – that tricky black teen/tween range just old enough to fall out of love with the blondness of the nascent Princess Collection³ but too young to quite be over dolls. Like many American women, I spent the first years of Operation Enduring Freedom shimmying.

It was a great time for dancing. Shakira had just made her English-language debut, introducing New England to various shades of *la mezcla*. Truth Hurts' "Addictive," an R'n'B song featuring *bhangra*, Punjabi MC's "Mundian to Bach,"

¹ Princess Jasmine is the love interest in Disney's *Aladdin*, an animated feature film released in 1992. She is a main character in the *Aladdin* series and one of Disney's meta-characters, meaning that she appears in Disney projects that connect its various worlds, such as the video game franchise *Kingdom Hearts*. She is particularly interesting as a character because she is the first Disney princess to willingly kiss a film's villain.

² *Aladdin* is a critically acclaimed animated musical that came out in 1992. While it won the Academy Awards for Best Original Score and Best Original Song, in 1993 Disney bowed to pressure from the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and removed some of *Aladdin*'s racist lyrics (Wingfield, Marvin, and Bushra Karaman. "Arab Stereotypes and American Educators." *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 7, no. 4 (1995): 7-10).

³ The Disney Princess Collection is a special line of dolls, merchandise, and films featuring specific Disney princesses. Princess Jasmine is one of the six original members of the collection, along with Princess Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty*, Cinderella from *Cinderella*, Pocahontas from *Pocahontas*, Tinker Bell from *Peter Pan*, and Mulan from *Mulan*.

and Natacha Atlas's "I Put a Spell on You" were all spicing the air. It was a great time to buy – the best of the 1990s belly dance DVDs were readily available (perhaps a legacy of the Middle East dance craze following Desert Storm – wait, wasn't that when *Aladdin* was released?⁴) and hip scarves and *bedlehs* were freely available at nearly every thrift store. I undulated in studios and gyrated in my dorm room. My body became part of the grammar of U.S. imperialism, and these leisure sites became locations where this discourse was performed. By 2002, I had performed in a student show, bought my own copies of the introductory DVDs in the *Neena and Veena* series, and was obsessed with Dolphina. Belly dancing had become something convoluted: symbolic of the nations and peoples the United States was committed to destroying, yet deeply tied to the sensuality of the ideal femme. For me, though, it was a sort of "just add water" experience of community, something I turned to because I was lonely, because I was in pain.

In this chapter, I compare the media products of two well-known belly dance instructors in order to describe the types of knowledge production re: the Orient, the "now," and wellness with which they engage. I argue that these are examples of the ways in which Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom become mediated and are entrants into the public sphere in their own right. I am doing this in order to explicitly connect the upsurge in wellness and movement-oriented knowledge production *in these times* to larger political and social conversations – not just the world of leisure to which they are so often consigned. I argue that lives of

⁴ In Dianne Sachko Macleod's "The Politics of Vision" (*The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, New York: Peter Lang, 2003), she argues *Aladdin* gave new life to the colonial images and stereotypes used to justify American military action in the Middle East for a new generation of Americans.

privilege during times of war include moments of material and epistemic conquest, that dance is never innocent, and that Orientalist workout DVDs illustrate a particularly neoliberal form of body praxis.⁵ The bodies implicated in these performances include the dancer-consumer (me, or someone like me, circa 2002) and the performer-producer (the DVD instructors). Each has a stake in manipulating the story of the Orient into a usable product. Belly dance becomes a series of performative acts embedded in everyday life, illustrating the connections between power, privilege, and the ability to engage in a type of individualized capitalist and imperialist consumption.

I begin by using Dolphina's *GoddessWorkout* series to identify the ghosts of a haunted, emptied Orient, calling on a series of tropes drawn from popular culture as a means of reifying their (Westernized) authority in that space. Dolphina is an especially useful performer to look at, since she is sometimes credited with originating the belly dance/workout craze during the 1990s. She has been featured on *Sex in the City* and in *U.S. Magazine*,⁶ and is a very prominent producer of this particular genre of workout paraphernalia. After using Dolphina's work to introduce a brief history of belly dance as historical phenomenon and Orientalist phantasy, I then discuss Hemalayaa's *Bollywood Booty* series. Unlike Dolphina, Hemalayaa consciously markets herself as having a type of nativized authority due to and dependent upon the visibility of her ethnic backgrounds. I conclude by discussing the group Bellyqueen, the brainchild of Amar Gamal and Kaeshi Chai, in order to discuss

⁵ Here, I am indebted to Nancy Scheper-Hughes' discussion of embodiment in *Death Without Weeping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), where she describes the body as the product of a series of cultural performances.

⁶ Dolphina, "GoddessLife," *GoddessLife and Namaste Interactive*, <http://www.goddesslife.com>.

the political solvency of a multiracial belly dancing troupe. Throughout these discussions, I am specifically focusing on the consumption of a mediated dancer of color, an image drawing its discursive strength from both its implied reality and the technologies associated with its appearance in the domestic sphere.

My goal is to not only draw out the threads associated with the social utility of that cyborg body, but to also tease out its significance in the context of neoliberal discourse and the rise of imperialism. Each of these media products is part of the same genre; each is a dance-based exercise DVD, marketed to the solitary home-user. More importantly, they are a specific sub-set of that genre that draws on Orientalist imagery as a key component of their marketing campaign. I argue that both Hemalayaa and Bellyqueen resist that imagery by undermining colonial authority; by drawing their inspiration from contemporary dance stylings associated with the South Asian Diaspora; and by explicitly linking their work as dancers to their work as social justice activists.

I am interested in this project because Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" concludes with a call to solidarity. This call to solidarity is something frequently dropped in cyborg studies, a field sometimes more wed to the fetishization of technology than to the socialist feminist agenda Haraway enjoined her reader to discover. So, in this chapter, I would like to explore the vagaries of discourse, the multiple meanings of belly dance, and the utility of the cyborg as a concept reconciling contradictory stories. In doing so, I highlight the roles political and commercial Orientalism plays in the social utility of these cultural products.

Why does this tradition of representation matter? Why discuss Orientalism in

a 21st century American context? Edward Said defines discussions such as this as “studies of the present.”⁷ Attacks on social constructions using *past* depictions of the Middle East are truly critiquing the *present* world of the West. These critiques are especially crucial due to the continued existence of stereotypical representations of Muslims and Arabs in the media, especially post-September 11. After September 11, Shakira shook her belly dancing hips, Truth Hurts sampled a Hindi song for her hit single “Addicted,” and doomsday scenarios resulting from the “problem”⁸ of Islam surged to the forefront of popular culture. Traditionally, Middle Eastern studies have focused on issues of policy, as opposed to issues of appropriation and representation.⁹ Here I focus on dance, play-spaces, and the virtual, building on Malek Alloula’s argument that “the Orient is no longer the dreamland. Since the middle of the 19th century, it has inched closer.”¹⁰ The Orient as sexy fantasy and dangerous war zone bleeds into the home front, the domesticated space of the living room, into and out of the screen.

This conceit of bled-over, blurred lines between the home front and the battlefield, echoes many of the concerns embodied in “cyberspace” as a conceptual framework. Cyberspace finds its earliest conceptual origins in William Gibson’s short stories and novels. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson describes cyberspace as a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions...in the non-space of the mind, clusters

⁷ Edward Said, “Orientalism Revisited,” *Middle East Report* 18 (1988), 32.

⁸ See, for example, Brian Aldiss, *Finches of Mars* (London: Friday Project, 2012) and Dan Simmons’ “Message from a Time Traveler,” (DanSimmons.com, 2006), both of which describe a future Earth destroyed by Muslim fanatics, as well as the blockbuster movie *Iron Man*, (Paramount, 2008), where terrorists kidnap wealthy businessman Tony Starks in an insidious plot to destroy freedom and limit the free market.

⁹ Said, “Orientalism Revisited,” 33.

¹⁰ Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3..

and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.”¹¹ In a blog post for *Scientific American*, Camille Francois links this conversation on *cyberspace* as a state of mind to an ongoing discussion of cyberwar, illustrating the ways in which cyberspace and its boundaries become embedded in militaristic projects. She writes, “The cyberwar rhetoric turns the abstraction of *cyberspace* into a new zone of combat – and aligns it with land, sea, air, and space....It depicts the cyberspace as a proper *place* in which power has to be deployed and conquered.”¹² I link this to belly dance and other mediated Oriental movement practices disseminated online and through DVDs to illustrate the ways in which these movement practices participate in an economy of desire. In order to explore this idea of playtime, I draw on Johan Huizinga’s definition of *homo ludens*, or man as player.¹³

The instructors of these DVDs engage in a complicated manipulation of these narratives, reflective of their approach to the Orient as an ongoing political imaginary. These exercise programs ostensibly encourage a playful embodied re-making of the physical self. The format of this remaking is a component of a particular type of privilege bound up in imperial feelings.¹⁴ This re-making is dependent on a continuous reinstatement of particular narratives associated with the Orient, narratives related to the sensuality and spirituality of the Oriental woman. Unlike play between individuals, play between states reverberates. Like play, war creates an alternate time,

¹¹ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), 51, 52.

¹² Camille Francois to Guest Blog: Commentary Invited by Editors of *Scientific American*, electronically published November 26, 2013, <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2013/11/26/what-is-war-in-cyberspace-a-reality-check-on-the-meaning-of-cyber/>.

¹³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

¹⁴ Sunaina Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 317-345.

is bound by ritualized rules of engagement, and that it takes place in an alternate space from the everyday. It impacts the playtime of its citizens, and influences what imagined spaces they conquer during their leisure time. Playtime becomes more and more militarized, micro-reflections of macro-social issues. In the next section, I build on Foucault's initial arguments on the significance of political rhetoric and conflict to the process of creating productive citizens. I also connect extant literature on affect and state control to a history of digital activism emergent from communities of color. I do this in order to illustrate how the politics of self-care intersect with national and international conflict.

An Empire State of Mind

Foucault argued in "Of Other Spaces" that the major conflicts of the twentieth century would be over the shifting of maps and space. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault argues that metaphors of war and racial conflict undergird political conversations in a neoliberal and neocolonial context.¹⁵ For Foucault, the discourses of war and race shape, inform, and create each other. Moreover, the militarization of civilian and domestic space depends on the constant (re)introduction of an Othered subject into both the public and private sphere as a looming threat.

The state's move toward using racism and the specter of unwellness as systems of bodily control and bodily regulation reflect the machinations of this

¹⁵ *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picado, 2003) was published in French in 1976, and is best read as a text bridging the intellectual projects laid forth in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976). As a collection of lectures, *Society Must Be Defended* is especially useful in revealing the foundations of Foucault's analyses, including the basic building blocks associated with disciplinary power, the historical specificity of biopower, and the genealogies of the discourses associated with governmentality. Foucault accomplishes these tasks by using the concept of war as an analytical lens, suggesting that surveillance and the implicit potential for state violence are always linked. His analysis of the connections between war, bodies, and state control are particularly useful for this dissertation because they highlight the affective and physical impact of political rhetoric.

(re)introduction. National anxiety over contamination by Othered bodies frames civilian political discourse, especially during times of increased militarization. Because of this, Foucault marked the “urgent problem”¹⁶ of war, race, and discursive struggle as “the nucleus of [his] theoretical desires.”¹⁷ This particular analysis of power has recently become crucial to understanding the shift in social dynamics in post-9/11 American popular culture.¹⁸ This chapter incorporates Foucault’s definition of power, politics, and trauma in its discussion of bodies, embodiment, and wellness. I expand on Foucault’s argument by incorporating an engagement with feelings, wellness, and technology in its exploration of the citizen-subject’s agency. The connections between the feelings of life under capitalism and its lived effects constitute a “psychosomatic economy”¹⁹ – a feedback loop of the social, the emotional, and the biological. This feedback loop is itself a disciplining process, one where particular neurological pathways become engrained in the gray matter of one’s brain. Once they’ve been established, the somatic manifestations of the troubles plaguing the psyche become engrained, “kindled”²⁰ for particular psychosomatic ailments. The physical symptoms of depression (including weight gain, weight loss,

¹⁶ Alessandro Fontana and Mauro Bertani, “Situating the Lectures,” in *Society Must Be Defended*, ed. François Macey David Ewald (New York: Picador), 288.

¹⁷ Foucault, quoted by Fontana and Bertani, 287.

¹⁸ For example, see Marita Sturken’s 2004 work on Ground Zero in New York (“The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero,” *American Ethnologist* 3, no. 3 (2004):311-325), and her 1991 work on the screen as a memorial conceit for the Vietnam War (“The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial” *Representations* (1991): 118-142), where she describes a screen as an object upon which narratives are projected and behind which histories hide. Sturken argues in both pieces that national attempts to rehabilitate these militarized histories are as much about shoring up capitalism, U.S. vitality, and American narratives of a righteous war as they are about memorializing a piece of national history. For Sturken, the mechanics of mourning are components of citizenship and citizenry narratives, in which participation and consumption become part of an affective civic duty.

¹⁹ Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

and changes in appetite) are as much about a material loss of connection with the outside world as the *feelings* of loneliness, disconnection, and apathy typically associated with the clinical diagnosis of depression. It is not as simple as a feeling, then sensation. Instead, the mind/body bleedover is simultaneous; “the psyche is always already of the body.”²¹

Kindling creates an indelible link between the feeling of depression and its physical symptoms. Like allergy attacks, whose severity can increase over time with continued exposure to the triggering element, the kindled mind/body/affect link gradually becomes stronger, until the triggering event itself may be relatively minor or even a background response to a low-level constant. Through this kindling process, depression in its clinical state can become part of the affective and physical backdrop of one’s everyday life. In fact, Cvetkovich argues that depression and its inducement of paralyzing political “despair” is another form of violence perpetuated by the state.²² In order to situate the political and social climate framing the recent popularity of belly dance and its connections to *kindling* imperial feelings in Americans’ daily lives, I offer the following history of America’s politics of fear beginning in the 1990s, its connection Information Age rhetoric, and the shifting definitions of fitness and wellness.

A Beledi Progression Begins With the Drums

The 1990s laid the groundwork for America’s invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan; America’s political destiny was rhetorically linked to both its technological innovation and its international supremacy. Prominent neoconservatives

²¹ Ibid., 1.

²² Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 13.

such as Paul Wolfowitz and William Kristol used their positions as writers, public intellectuals, and policy makers to foster a political and social climate justifying the American invasion and occupation of another nation for the actions of a few.²³ Wolfowitz viewed the continued development of information technologies as key to America's imperial goals.²⁴ In essays such as "Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," William Kristol and Robert Kagan, another prominent neoconservative, describe an international landscape where even Milosevic is forced to realize that it is better to be a U.S. "satellite"²⁵ than not.

Milosevic was probably using old Cold War terminology to refer to states forced to economically, politically, and socially orbit a more powerful ally. However, in the context in which Kristol and Kagan are writing, *satellites* also call to mind America's shocked realization that the Soviets' focus on "less frivolous things"²⁶ than designing television sets led to the 1957 launch of the *Sputnik* satellite. In History.com's "The Invention of the Internet," American panic over Soviet technological supremacy led to the development of ARPAnet, one of the earliest incarnations of the present-day Internet. After *Sputnik*'s launch, U.S. military and private researchers marshaled themselves to defend military communications in order to protect an innocent populace against nuclear war.²⁷ As Kristol and Kagan's essay

²³ John B. Judis, "Imperial Amnesia," *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2004.

²⁴ Andrew J. Bacevich, "A Letter to Paul Wolfowitz: Occasioned by the Tenth Anniversary of the Iraq War," Miscellany, *Harper's Magazine* (2013), <http://harpers.org/archive/2013/03/a-letter-to-paul-wolfowitz/>.

²⁵ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996, 21.

²⁶ History.com Staff, "The Invention of the Internet - Inventions - History.Com," A+E Networks (2010), accessed June 7 2014, <http://www.history.com/topics/inventions/invention-of-the-internet>.

²⁷ Robert Hobbes Zakon, "Nerds 2.0.1 - Internet Timeline," OPB Learning Media, <http://www.pbs.org/opb/nerds2.0.1/timeline/>.

progresses, it becomes clear that they are explicitly linking national security, technological innovation, and the safety of individual citizens. The ghosts summoned by subtly referring to the technological bogeyman of Soviet scientific prowess appear to be deliberate.

In a tone of pseudo-rational panic, Kristol and Kagan denounce national concern over military spending, arguing that it is the U.S.' "high-technology weapons" and innovative military research that brought Milosevic to heel and that defends America from Chinese and Iranian aggression.²⁸ The road to American imperialism on a global scale requires not just a bigger research budget for the military-industrial complex; it also requires an emotional change on a national level. In keenly precise language, Wilson and Kagan argue for fostering a "conservatism of the heart," a "remoralization" of both American civilians and American foreign policy.²⁹ This remoralization emphasizes civic engagement, a commitment to American sovereignty, and "a sense of the heroic."³⁰ This last is particularly important: Kristol and Kagan argue that the ideal civilian *must* experience a heart-felt commitment to U.S. foreign policies, must grieve for and appreciate the sacrifices of military personnel, and must accept America's role as global peace-keeper.³¹

Wilson and Kagan's 1996 essay dismisses the "ubiquitous" foreign policy

²⁸ Kristol and Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," 24.

²⁹ Ibid., 35.

³⁰ Ibid., 32.

³¹ America's role as an international, sometimes violent peacekeeper as linked to its technological supremacy is an ongoing theme in American popular culture. For example, *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* includes a storyline set during the Cold War as well as one set during a future Cold War. In both stories, a Latino terrorist and drug lord plots against the United States. Cyber-attacks, unmanned aerial vehicles, and treacherous Mujahedeen abound. Its creative team consulted with Oliver North, a Department of Defense consultant and former service member, in order to design into the game a realistic sense of geopolitics (Mike Snider, "'Call of Duty: Black Ops II' Melds Gaming, Geopolitics." *USA Today*, 2012. Accessed 18 Aug 2014. <http://www.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/story/2012-05-02/call-of-duty-black-ops-2/54667692/1>).

question, “where is the threat?”³² to instead argue that America’s “weakness”³³ is its own enemy. A “benevolent global hegemony”³⁴ is its only defense. Centering the unpredictable evolution of the global stage, the essay moves from “where is the threat?” to “who can tell?”³⁵ even as its authors insist that *neither* question can be answered logically.

To borrow Elizabeth Wilson’s language to describe the progression of an affective disorder, the political climate created by this fear-based warmongering *kindles* a constant sense of low-level anxiety, particularly as the language associated with that fear becomes more and more pervasive. In 2003, William Kristol describes a global moment where Bush’s description of the “axis of evil” implies a moral imperative, a sea change in American foreign policy.³⁶ By 2014, as editor for *The Weekly Standard*, Kristol pushed for an affective engagement by every American citizen in these imperial projects. He wrote that the “idol of war-weariness can be challenged,” explicitly linking the “rallying” of American patriotism, “our responsibilities” internationally, and the Republican Party’s goals for the 2016 presidential campaign.³⁷

The neoconservative investment in “the politics of fear”³⁸ frames the production of Americans’ affective lives, even as that production is itself framed by

³² Kristol and Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” 23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁶ Michael Kirk, “Interviews - William Kristol | the War Behind Closed Doors | Frontline | PBS,” *The War Behind Closed Doors* (Boston, MA: WGBH Educational Foundation, 2003).

³⁷ William Kristol, “War-Weariness as an Excuse,” *The Weekly Standard*, 2014.

³⁸ Faize Shakir, “Kristol: ‘I Recommend the Politics of Fear,’” *ThinkProgress*, published electronically February 24 2008, accessed August 29 2014, <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2008/02/24/19775/kristol-politics-of-fear/>.

institutional oppression and the lived experience of state surveillance. To borrow Louis Althusser's metaphor for state surveillance: when the policeman hails you, you answer; you are "always-already"³⁹ marked as subject of state surveillance, a potential subject for state violence, anxious and afraid. This hailing is an affective production of citizenship, selfhood, and state. The "always-already" post-9/11 American citizen began experiencing symptoms of trauma immediately after the event,⁴⁰ symptoms that can be re-kindled on the subclinical level through the recirculation of images associated with graphic images associated with terrorist attacks.⁴¹ Part of the project of citizenship during the War on Terror included a nationally induced PTSD. Wellness, both mental and physical, becomes folded into this same anxiety.

Feelings are not optional; they are an integral part of the decision-making process for every human being, and are crucial hints to the state of one's overall wellness. More importantly, the experience of "background feelings" – the sort of low-level bodily and affective reactions undergirding the conscious experience of emotion and wellness – are necessary to maintain a continuous sense of self.⁴² The anxieties associated with institutionalized oppression would be an example of a background feeling: a malaise so pervasive it is not consciously noticed. They are the accelerated heart rate, the elevated cortisol levels, and the shortness of breath that

³⁹ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁴⁰ Mark A. Schuster et al., "A National Survey of Stress Reactions after the September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks," *New England Journal of Medicine* 345, no. 20 (2001).

⁴¹ Roxane Cohen Silver et al., "Mental- and Physical-Health Effects of Acute Exposure to Media Images of the September 11, 2001, Attacks and the Iraq War," *Psychological Science* 24, no. 9 (2013).

⁴² Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994), 150.

become the unwell individual's new normal. These "corporeal significations"⁴³ hide the affective effects of dominant culture; the nature of these significations and the narratives surrounding them suggests they are natural, innate to particular raced and gendered bodies. These narratives frame not only our interpretation of our background feelings but also the imagery used to name these feelings' relationship to our sense of wellness. These "neurobiologically-ingrained potentials of the nervous system...triggered, moulded and refined"⁴⁴ in everyday life reflect the "messy"⁴⁵ connections between the biological and the social. It is through this physical and emotional experience of power that "we may discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions."⁴⁶ Even when rejecting a national policy of increased militarization, pacifist and progressive citizens still imbibe the same sick nectar of terror.

The panicky fear of foreign invasion pervaded public discourse in the 1990s, including the language and imagery surrounding health, fitness, and wellness. The 1990s imagery of "the body at war" included the fear that our bodies faced "masses of cells bent on our destruction," foreign invaders and internal traitors intent on attacking a valiant but beleaguered state.⁴⁷ This imagery echoed national rhetoric on the War on AIDS as well as arguments surrounding immigration policy. At the same time, the 1990s imagery of the body included a growing tendency to envision the

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 41.

⁴⁴ Jaak Panksepp, "On the Embodied Neural Nature of Core Emotional Affects," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12, no. 8-10 (2005), 158.

⁴⁵ Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, 110.

⁴⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford [Eng.]: Oxford University Press, 1977), 130.

⁴⁷ Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 52, 53.

body as a networked and responsive *system*, modeled after the communications technology that had so rapidly reconfigured the American workplace. This fascination with the body as a system revealed America's new love affair with *flexibility* as workplace ideal. After all, as employment grew more precarious, workers needed to gain new skills, accommodate new demands on their time, and excel within their redefined professional roles. Unfortunately, because you can only control *some* aspects of your body and your job, envisioning the body as a system

produce[s] simultaneous feelings of empowerment and powerlessness....

Once we start to see the healthy body as if it were a complex system teetering along on the path of life pretty well most of the time but always on the verge of falling over the edge into catastrophe, a pervasive sense of anxiety that is difficult to assuage seems inevitable.⁴⁸

Despite this sense of anxiety, one of the images used to capture the hopefulness and potential of the body as a complex system is that of dance.

Recall the ads for Nike shoes, the tango of the designer-architect-builder, the dance of the stretching flexible body.... Recall the "intricate dance" of the cells of the immune system, Bubbles the B cell "dancing about," and the image of immune cells as Fred Astaire dancing with Ginger Rogers. The qualities associated with dance – flexibility, grace, balance, mutual interaction, delicate adjustment – make it an image that can capture the qualities now required of good workers (as well as healthy bodies).⁴⁹

Post 9/11, the image of the dancer continues to hold a peculiar fascination for

⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 218.

American citizens. For example, Sunaina Maira uses belly dance to explore American women's affective and political responses to gendered images of violence and oppression during the initial stages of the War on Terror, when veiled women in danger were used to justify military action. In order to analyze the social and affective ambiance of low-grade anxieties framing American civilians' experience of the War on Terror, Sunaina Maira uses the concept of "imperial feelings," such as anger, hatred, fear, and "ambivalence about empire," to explore the use of belly dance by white women and women of color to "constitute and perform their American-ness and femininity through a liberal, multicultural vision of the nation."⁵⁰ Maira describes a world where war, fear, and power are incarnated into the flesh and then exorcised out of the body through costuming and dance. The body becomes the space where conquest is continuously reinforced and reinscribed.

Are these imperial feelings part and parcel of the background feelings necessary for true citizenship? Perhaps – but if so, feelings and their connections to "multiple ways of knowing" are "negotiated, created and practiced" within a mind/body/self with agency and the ability to manipulate and mold its own affective tendencies.⁵¹

Charting a Course Using Feelings and Space

Belly dance exercise DVDs function as a roadmap across a particular geography of desire, mapping out "the conflation of the erotic and the exotic."⁵² This mapping of fantasies lays out a series of fetishized gestures and performances,

⁵⁰ Maira, "Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," 319.

⁵¹ Francesca E. Godinez, "Youth Bodies and Emerging Subjectivities," in *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, ed. Dolores Delgado Bernal, et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 12.

⁵² Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 6.

inserting these fetishized body commodities into the sanctity of the domestic space. Further, this genre of exercise DVDs reiterates the image of the “dancing Oriental girl,”⁵³ a trope that hides the material significance of Orientalist discourse as well as the work of the laboring dancing body. She writes, “The Oriental dancing girl is a fantastical, exotic image that has played in the minds of North American audiences since the early nineteenth century.”⁵⁴

The fact that it is an *image* and not a *body* is significant. Srinivasan describes how the actuality of dark-skinned Asian bodies performing foreign dances in the home-space of New York City was a little too much for the citizenry of that city in 1881. Their performance was lambasted; the women featured were specifically criticized for the foreignness of the rhythms associated with Indian dance, their brown skin, and their unrevealing costuming. They were too foreign, and not sexy enough. Their use of specific ethnic dance stylings and modest costuming was perceived as a refusal to function as eroticized and desirable objects. They were seen as ugly, unpleasant, and uncouth. Their unruly, overly flexible brown bodies were unpleasant reminders of tricky, non-white Others.⁵⁵ However, the white women who performed in the same show were considered creative successes. These white women performed in brown-face. They did so literally by browning their skin and bodies. They did so discursively by baring their arms, cleavages, abdomens, and feet, and performing the popular conception of feminized Oriental dance, illustrating that when Oriental dance is performed by white female bodies it becomes acceptable, and is sometimes seen as

⁵³Priya Srinivasan, “The Nautch Women Dancers of the 1880s: Corporeality, U.S. Orientalism, and Anti-Asian Immigration Laws,” *Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 19 (2009) 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Virginia Keft-Kennedy, “‘How Does She Do That?’: Belly Dancing and the Horror of a Flexible Woman,” *Women’s Studies* 34, no. 3 (2005), 279.

radical.⁵⁶

The Orient acts as a kind of costume-shop, an exotic, erotic imaginary used to make foreign the familiar. Western bodies consuming the aesthetics of the Orient base these aesthetics on collective fantasies that lack historical specificity and corporeality. Introducing actual brown bodies associated with the Orient into the public eye disrupted these collective fantasies and proved a wildly unsuccessful venture.

Part of the criticism for dance performances featuring Indian women at the turn of the twentieth century lay in the lack of eroticism associated with their public performance. The combination of dark brown skin, sweat, and unfamiliar dance language irritated audiences.⁵⁷ This ambivalence toward the *fantasy* of the Oriental dancing girl versus her brown reality also arose during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, where Little Egypt, a belly dancer performing at the Fair, was criticized for her repulsive, twitchy gyrations.⁵⁸

The physicality of the non-white dancing body disrupted the Oriental fantasies associated with the feminized aesthetics of the performative aspects of Oriental dance.⁵⁹ It may also have disrupted the classed nature of these fantasies. The 1881 Indian dancers were originally imagined to be delicate and lady-like. However, after they arrived in New York and actually performed, the press turned on them, accusing them of having more in common with Mexican laborers than with fantastical harem

⁵⁶ Srinivasan, "The Nautch Women Dancers," 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸ Keft-Kennedy, "'How does she do that?': Belly Dancing and the Horror of a Flexible Woman," 289.

⁵⁹ Srinivasan, "The Nautch Women Dancers," 10.

princesses.⁶⁰ Harem princesses, after all, don't sweat, aren't brown, and don't slap their feet quite so...loudly.

As belly dance in the United States evolved, this classed element remained. As white women started performing belly dance and began rejecting the corset, the perceived link between abdominal mobility, flexible hips, and sexual independence became stronger.⁶¹ However, the feminist Western dancer draws on popular imagery associated with the Orient, where the Oriental female is caged in the lush prison of the harem. Drawing on a stable, unchanging ancient past becomes a way for white women engaged in Oriental dance productions to argue for the universality of an ancient, powerful feminine identity,⁶² even as the living bodies associated with that past were rejected from the national body through either military action or legislation related to immigration. It also becomes a way of naturalizing the classed and raced nature of this performance of femininity. The rejection of the Oriental body from the national self didn't include a rejection of the imagery associated with the Oriental dancing girl. Instead, that brown dancing girl discovered that someone had stolen her costume from backstage.

American belly dancers' reliance on the aesthetics of the Orient becomes a key component in their tool-kit of resistance to Western male dominance. What the West had originally dismissed as backward and repressive, second wave feminism rehabilitated as "testaments to corporeality, the persistence of ancient wisdom in the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Keft-Kennedy, "How does she do that?," 293.

⁶² Donnalee Dox, "Dancing Around Orientalism," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 4 (2006).

modern world.”⁶³ This fantasy of ancient wisdom argues for an imagined matriarchal past that is the birthright of Western womanhood. It has been denied to this populace because of the machinations and sexism of a domineering, patriarchal Western history, one that rejects women’s sexuality and women’s natural bodies.⁶⁴ At the same time, this repressive Western culture is the real, vital present; the Orient is always ancient and always in the past. The latter is one of the major foundations of the aesthetics of Orientalism.⁶⁵

The parallels between a remediated *commercialized* Orientalism can be vividly contrasted with a remediated *politicized* Orientalism, where social policies enacted to defend the nation-state against the waiting, treacherous Other are materially represented.⁶⁶ Because of the rise of politicized Orientalism and its mate, commercialized Orientalism, American audiences gradually began to prefer to view white bodies performing an over-determined Oriental dance-form⁶⁷ – one drawing on the entirety of the imagined Orient for its movement repertoire. Dolphina’s *Goddess Workout* DVD series serves a prime example of these two drives.

Dolphina’s *Goddess Workout* series draws on the aesthetics associated with the trope of the Oriental dancing girl. Dolphina does this by simultaneously unmooring the Orient from a specific historical context by mixing up different

⁶³ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ This may seem like an artificial split, since politics and consumption are intimately linked when discussing the discursive creation of Othered bodies. I draw this split here to highlight the ways in which feminized signifiers of the Orient (like styles of dance and costuming) become tools of sensuous identity play, and the ways in which masculinized signifiers of identity (like turbans and guns) become tools of militarized national play. While these processes can be similar, the valences of the political and social narratives surrounding them are very different.

⁶⁷ Srinivasan, “The Nautch Women Dancers,” 12.

histories and by creating a hodge-podge, essentialist Oriental spirituality arguing for a universal femininity. She begins *Intro to Bellydance* with an extended video montage of goddess figures, some actually from the Middle East and some not. All are, however, associated with the Other, and act as signifiers of an imagined matriarchal, spiritually rich past. At the same time, Dolphina draws on still-extant spiritual traditions such as Hinduism, Sufism, and Buddhism. Doing this turns these contemporary faith traditions into signifiers of a long-ago past; they are made equivalent to the ancient goddess figures Dolphina uses to establish the ancient roots of belly dance. After all, the reality of the Arab world and its history is generally of far less interest to Western artists than the mythologies these artists create for themselves.⁶⁸

The feminized performance space in which Dolphina moves, replete with arches, rugs, ruined walls, flowers, pillows, and soft lighting, acts in marked contrast to the masculinized space associated with popular imaginings of the male, Oriental terrorist. This spiritual, ahistorical Orient has no occupants besides Dolphina herself. Further, this imagined Orient is in decay.

Like videogame depictions of the Middle East, Dolphina's stage set presents an emptied and ruined Orient.⁶⁹ The constant interchange between the aesthetics of

⁶⁸ Ian Wojcik-Andrews and Jerry Phillips, "Telling Tales to Children: The Pedagogy of Empire in MGM's "Kim" and Disney's Aladdin," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 20 (1996).

⁶⁹ Here, I am specifically referring to video games such as *Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammer*, where the cityscape of the imaginary city of Zekistan is emptied of nearly all but military personnel. In "Electronic Empire," Johan Höglund writes, "For the most part the only interaction possible between the soldier of the gamer and the computer generated people of the Middle East is that of military violence. The gamer has the option of either shooting the approaching enemy or ceasing to play. For this necessary conflict to be realized within the game, and in order to avoid the moral issues tied to urban warfare, the Middle Eastern city must be transformed from a teeming habitat into a childless and (often) womanless territory occupied primarily by terrorist guerrillas. Having thus skirted one of the crucial questions of modern warfare-collateral damage-the gamer need not hold his fire, but can

the feminized Other and the dangers of the masculinized Other highlight what Sunaina Maira describes as liberal “ambivalence about empire.”⁷⁰ The two bodies discursively associated with this imagined Orient are the body of the terrorist and the body of the luscious concubine. One is male, and an enemy; one is female, and ready for the taking. Both are ripe for conquest.

Dolphina’s use of an unmoored history makes inevitable the defeat of this dangerous, yet sensual, Other by suggesting that the Orient is a fantastical space in decline. It is not a space in which civilians live; it is not a space in which *anyone* lives. Dolphina is the only body occupying this space, and, as she emphasizes during the cool-down section of *Intro to Bellydance*, it is not the space of the everyday. The emphasis during this final section shifts from the ancient and ritualized to the scientific and normalized, as Dolphina describes the correct posture and mood to adopt as one finishes one’s sojourn into this Orientalized space. The consumer-dancer is prompted to slow down her hip gyrations, showing reverence for the body, to bring her arms down from temple pose, and to relax, shoulders back, chest open and out, arms and knees at rest. As one’s breath returns to normal, she counsels that retaining the memory of this space creates the potentiality for “magical things to happen,”⁷¹ but she does not suggest that this is a state in which one can live. She counsels the viewer to *remember* this imagined past, but not to continue *living* it. Games of pretend cannot last – but they can create a heterotopic play space reconciling and subverting a variety

engage in never-ending warfare” (Johan Höglund, “Electronic Empire: Orientalism Revisited in the Military Shooter,” *Game Studies* 8, no. 1 (2008). Available: <http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/hoeglund>).

⁷⁰ Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” *American Quarterly* (60) 2, 318.

⁷¹ Dolphina, *The Goddess Workout with Dolphina: Introduction to Bellydance* (Sea Sirens Productions, 1998).

of hegemonic narratives. Such a space is created when the performer/consumer invites this particular cyborg body, this “condensed image of both imagination and material reality,”⁷² into her living room.

Scenes from the East are very deliberately defined as Other; in that way, the West is able to determine its own identity, by saying what it is not.⁷³ As the consumer dances out Dolphina’s instructions – summoning a snake at the base of the spine, bending into delicate temple arms, recalling a gentle goddess in her smile and poise – she incarnates both the technologies of Orientalism (the veils, the mysticism, the eroticism) as well as its meat (the sensual luxury of soft stomach undulations, the precision of hip circles, snaky arms). Further, she also dances her way *out* of ahistorical, a temporal dance space one in which she *cannot* remain. The inability to stay within the world of the dance, and this type of closing ritual, is a crucial component of what makes this style of Oriental dance pedagogy Orientalist.

This performance takes place in both a domestic space and a domesticated space. The living room⁷⁴ functions as a domestic space because the performer/consumer is engaged in the consumption of a packaged, mediated style of dance whose marketing is based on its signification of a discursive Other; this consumption is always tied into nationalist discourse, since the gaze consuming the product is construed as Western.⁷⁵ The living room functions as a *domesticated*

⁷² Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 151.

⁷³ Ronald Stockton, “Ethnic Archetypes and the Arab Image,” in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. Ernest McCarus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 130.

⁷⁴ Here, I am using “living room” to designate a space marked out by the performer-consumer as “home.”

⁷⁵ The imagined gaze consuming the embodied performer/consumer is always male. Dolphina constantly refers to the desiring male gaze as a framing mechanism for particular moves. Interestingly, this mirrors the rhetoric associated with Carmen Electra’s *Fit To Strip* series, *The Art of Exotic*

feminized space because of the changing significance of Oriental dance as both a feminized signifier of the Orient and a signifier of women's sexual empowerment. The latter is itself dependent on the sensuality and sexuality associated with Oriental dance. Finally, the performer/consumer's body is encouraged to function as an embodiment of the Orient. First, incarnating this Othered body is explicitly linked to performing Othered spiritual histories. Second, incarnating the sensuality of the Orient becomes a uniquely femme entry into the economy of desire within which Orientalism operates. Both of these embodiments are offered up to the dancer-consumer as a means of recovering her own lost sensuality and sense of self.

The momentarily Othered space of the civilian living room is created through play-as-performance. This spatial overlay has social utility; it is a way to address the emotional toll neoliberalism takes upon its citizenry. The momentary recovery of an emotional, embodied self is a tonic to a subject alienated from both her emotions and her body. The utility of this performance depends on an experience with the "imperial feelings"⁷⁶ associated with the U.S. neo-Orientalism – a complex latticework of Orientalist imagery, alienated emotions, and privilege framing how the individual U.S. citizen approaches the aesthetics of the Orient. Because the Oriental Other is an object, it can be used as a tool to bolster this faltering system.

Temporarily incarnating this particular cyborg body through dance is a more elaborate version of dress-up, a version that both numbs the pain of the alienated body of the neoliberal citizen and that physically revitalizes that body in such a way

Dancing for Everyday Women (Laurie Conrad and Philadelphia Films, Thousand Oaks, CA: Goldhill Media, 2002.), and *The Stripper's' Guide to Looking Great Naked* (Jennifer Phillips Leigh Axen, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005).

⁷⁶ Maira, "Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," 318.

that it can continue to be involved in a series of reproductive and affective labors that benefit the state. How does this shift when the instructor on the DVD is a person of color, when the body performing is a concrete example of the brown skinned dancers so roughly pushed out of the national body? Instructors like Hemalayaa and the dancers of Bellyqueen frame their performances in a way that incorporates both the aesthetics of the Orient and the specifics of historically vital, contemporary cultures. Dolphina might be presenting an Orientalized cyborg body, but Hemalayaa and Bellyqueen are presenting an Orientalized cyborg body of color, a body whose discursive formation draws on both the popular imaginary of the Orient and the lived experiences of marginalized subjects. As such, the body they perform both reinforces particular narratives about the Orient, such as its sensuality and its ancientness, and rejects others, such as ones reducing Oriental dance to its sensuality and spirituality. Further, both Bellyqueen and Hemalayaa's control over their images and self-narratives is another example of the sites of this resistance. Hemalayaa in particular draws on her perceived status as a native informant, a conscious act that highlights the existence of the Orient into the present-day, and resists narratives that would reduce the Orient into a hodge-podge of ancient, dead cultures.

Authority Means Not Always Answering Your Questions

Hemalayaa Behl claims Indian ancestry, and instates herself as a native informant and performer. On her website, Hemalayaa specifically names the schools of yoga and Indian movement traditions from which she draws inspiration – these include asana, Indian classical dance, and Indian MTV.⁷⁷ She specifically challenges

⁷⁷ Hemaalayaa Behl, "Hemalayaa Behl." Last Modified 14 April 2009. Accessed 22 May 2009. <http://www.hemalayaa.com>. Because these sites update fairly regularly, I mention the date of access

Western narratives of yoga, arguing that “Most people in the West identify yoga with physical postures...[this] doesn’t embody the complete practice.”⁷⁸ She goes on to suggest that the physical gestures must be combined with an attitude of spiritual humility and love in order for yoga to reveal its more potent effects. While she emphasizes that engaging in Oriental dance leads to the incorporation of an “Eastern spirituality” into one’s life, her naming of specific styles in the context of their choreographic evolution highlights her familiarity with the continuing evolution of popular cultures associated with the South Asian diaspora.⁷⁹

Hemalayaa’s familiarity with the evolution of both *bhangra* and Bollywood implies that she is an active participant in popular culture associated with the South Asian diaspora, an implication that both confirms her authority as a native informant and highlights the specificity of the Oriental dance culture in which she is engaged. Further, her site’s ongoing evolution and her engagement with multiple technological platforms (including streaming media, several iPhone apps, and an active Twitter account including yoga, dance, and nutrition advice) reflect her commitment to branding Oriental dance as an incessantly contemporary phenomenon.

Hemalayaa’s insistence that this Oriental movement traditions and dance have a history, and her presentation of that history online, challenges the larger ideologies framing cyberspace. Through her website, Twitter presence, and recirculation of online moving images such as gifs, YouTube clips, and online ephemera, Hemalayaa insists that the viewer see her as an expert on both dance and in technology.

here to specifically highlight the fact that I’m talking about an image that has since been removed.

⁷⁸ “Yoga, Dance, Cardio, and Travel,” *Hemalayaa* (2014), <http://www.hemalayaa.com/about/yoga-dance-cardio-and-travel/>.

⁷⁹ “Hemalayaa Behl,” www.hemalayaa.com, 2009.

When Hemalayaa goes on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* and giddily describes *bhangra* as the “twisty light bulb”⁸⁰ dance, her body acts as both the proof of cultural and ethnic diversity, and proof of her ability to translate the mechanics of a non-Western dance-form. She challenges Ellen to play – not for pretend but for sheer joyful silliness, as both women pretend to be vivacious elks, do side-lunges and the “I don’t know”⁸¹ shoulder shrug of *bhangra*. This works in contrast to the serious world of the spiritual erotic that Dolphina relies on to establish her authority.

Hemalayaa challenges the viewer to play with the dance vernacular of the Orient. She also highlights the continued cultural vitality of the dance styles she in which she is engaged. However, she refuses to translate. Her website includes the requisite images of hennaed hands and a close-up of her *bindi’d* face. Other images include a full-body shot of Hemalayaa sitting cross-legged, wearing prayer beads, and with marigolds heaped in her lap.⁸² She alludes to, but does not explicitly comment on the spiritual significance of marigolds,⁸³ and their connection to her larger discussion of the role of joy and safety in recovering the divine in the everyday.⁸⁴ She does, however, include a bonus dance, “Odissi,” specifically invoking the spirituality associated with the Orient in *Bollywood Booty* but also reinforcing that spirituality as

⁸⁰ AcaciaFitness, “Ellen’s Opening Monologue with Hemalayaa,” in *Acacia Fitness*, ed. RLJ Entertainment (YouTube, 2008).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Behl, “Hemalayaa Behl, 2009.

⁸³ In Hinduism, marigolds are associated with plasticity and endurance as well as with protection and joy. Because their scent keeps insects away, and because one marigold is considered the equivalent of ten other flowers, they are especially popular flowers to offer on alters, for celebrations, and for deaths. See “Marigolds of Mullickghat,” *Carrots Love Tomatoes*, and Mazumder and Mazumder’s “Religion, Immigration, and Home Making in Diaspora” for more information on the marigolds’ botanical significance, particularly in the context of the South Asian diaspora.

⁸⁴ Stephanie Syman’ argues in *The Subtle Body* these types of “elisions” are part of the yoga tradition in the United States, as some teachers are concerned that Americans could “abuse” some of the more spiritual aspects of the yogic tradition with which the teacher is associated (Stephanie Syman, *The Subtle Body*, Macmillan: New York, 2010, 8.)

existing outside the context of the workout routine.⁸⁵

While her set contains the same set of Oriental accouterments seen in Dolphina's emptied Orient, Hemalayaa herself functions as the other signifiers of the spiritual, sensual Oriental. She translates her performative acts into both a series of accomplishable gestures and into a foreign and cohesive representation of Indian spirituality. She, too, is calling on a cultural association with "goddesses" and "meditation." In contrast to Dolphina's reliance on perceived authenticity, Hemalayaa refers to herself, her family heritage, and her training as the primary source of her knowledge. She also challenges the stability of this kind of nativized knowing. She jokes on her website that when she began learning classical Indian dance as a young adult, she said to her teacher, "We should be able to learn pretty fast, since we're Indian..." She then describes the months of grueling practice as she began to learn classical Indian dance.⁸⁶ Her gentle teasing of her younger self and its assumptions of access to essentialized skill-sets shines through. She also emphasizes her work with Shiva Rea,⁸⁷ a prominent yoga teacher and a UCLA faculty member, as having been deeply influential.

While the set of *Bollywood Booty* includes Persian rugs, curved archways, and a scattering of various statues associated with the spiritual practices of the Oriental Other, Hemalayaa's irreverent nicknames for various moves (such as the "Bollywood vogue" for a series of sudden, sharp arm swoops), her use of more formal dance terminology (such as "plies"), and the constant specificities of the

⁸⁵ Paul Eckstein et al., *Bollywood Booty* (Silver Spring, MD: Distributed by Acorn Media, 2008).

⁸⁶ Hemalayaa Behl, "Hemalayaa," <http://www.hemalayaa.com>, 2009.

⁸⁷ Shiva Rea is one of the most prominent yoginis from the United States. She has also been featured in articles on yoga as "big business." Susan Moran's 2006 article, "Meditate on This," offers a snapshot of the \$3 billion industries surrounding yoga as a consumption-based lifestyle.

Eastern spirituality to which she refers, all suggest that Hemalayaa is working both within and against strands of Orientalist discourse that value the labor of a dancing brown body but reject its materiality and concrete histories. Further, Hemalayaa is listed as both instructor and creator of Acacia's *Bollywood* series.

Hemalayaa chips away at the assumptions of subservience associated with Orientalized femininity through her assertion of a nativized authority. Even though her students appear enthusiastic, even though she invites the audience to "be the Bollywood star [they] already know [they] are," Hemalayaa is the centerpiece of the production as a whole.⁸⁸ Her students, and their lack of full fluency in the performative language of Indian dance, become the bodies with which the performer-consumer empathizes. Where Dolphina invites the viewer to read themselves into *her* body and her cultural fluency, Hemalayaa invites the viewer to read themselves onto *her students'* bodies as cultural allies groping toward an understanding of an unfamiliar dance vocabulary.

Belly Dance for Social Justice

Bellyqueen also engages in a complex conversation with the class and racial identities associated with this trope. The performers of Bellyqueen, Amar Gamal and Kaeshi Chai, describe belly dance as a fun, social activity, one appropriate for an extremely hip club. They are both women of color, and founded Bellyqueen, one of the most active belly dance troupes in the world. *Bellydance Jam* does not emphasize

⁸⁸ This is especially interesting when one puts Hemalayaa's *Bollywood Booty* series in conversation with the *Yoga Booty Ballet* series featuring Gillian Marloth and Teigh McDonough. In that series, the students emerge as silent, but distinct, personalities, and provide a way for multiple types of audience members to find a way in. A few of the students are always slightly overweight, and one is always slightly offbeat but clearly enjoying herself. Generally, at least one student is male, and at least one is identifiably non-white. The presence of this variety of students and skill levels may reflect Marloth and McDonough's reliance on their professional histories as fitness instructors as a means of establishing their authority.

sexiness performed for others. Instead, the emphasis is on “strutting” and dance as an implicitly heterosexual rite of platonic feminine friendship.⁸⁹ Gamal and Chai flirt, play, and dance *with* each other as friends and equals. This stands in sharp contrast to Hemalayaa’s series, where she is the instructor and the other dancers her students, and Dolphina’s empty ruins.

Bellyqueen’s discussion of their choreographic creations emphasizes both their individuality and their friendship as a key component in their ability to create involved dance routines.⁹⁰ They focus on the social function belly dance can play between friends dancing together at the club. They include a section on improvising group dance when out with friends, and share authority in the performance by alternating as both the narrator and bodily focus of particular movement sections. They also include a bonus disc of electronica and Arabic trance music.⁹¹

Gamal and Chai joined the Bellydance Superstars in 2003, after having worked together for five years. Like Hemalayaa, both Chai and Gamal point to their extensive professional involvement in the global belly dance community, and to their certification as fitness instructors. They also explicitly challenge the viewer to participate in a larger virtual community of dancers working and performing across the world, connected through their website, social media activity, particularly

⁸⁹ Their refusal to acknowledge their movements as sexualized (if not for the dancers themselves then for those watching) echoes a common strand in belly dancing communities where they distance themselves from belly dance as an erotic form of play. See, for example, Rachel Kraus’ “We Are Not Strippers,” *Symbolic Interaction* 33(3): 2010.

⁹⁰ Amar Gamal et al., *Bellydance Jam* (Sherman Oaks, CA: Firststars, Inc., 2004).

⁹¹ Interestingly, even though the disc has not been formally re-released, the two copies I own have different bonus CDs – the earlier copy, purchased in 2006, has the club music used in the routines. My more recent copy, purchased in 2009, has a copy of Galactic Caravan’s *Intergalactic Bellydance*, which combines traditionally Middle Eastern music with a synthesizer and techno. This CD is also available through the Bellydance Superstars’ website. Both the Bellydance Superstars and Steven Last, Galactic Caravan’s composer, are managed by Miles Copeland.

Kickstarter, and circulation of dance-related ephemera online. Indeed, their New York studio has hosted classes on belly dance and activism, where topics included grassroots organizing and developing relationships with sponsors.⁹² Chai also co-founded PURE (Public Urban Ritual Experiment), an international organization devoted to affecting geopolitics through dance.⁹³ PURE emerged from a mourning and healing ritual performed at the World Trade Center in 2001.⁹⁴ This ritual was initially organized online through belly dance forums and through word of mouth.⁹⁵ Volunteer efforts, crowd-sourced funding, and a celebration of women's community continue to act as the basis of PURE's work, an approach based on American tribal style dance philosophies and made actionable through the same technologies on which ATS relies for its visual and aural inspirations and remediation.

The members of PURE have committed themselves to engaging in divine play in the context of public spaces, asking the audience what they can do to better the world. To facilitate this, PURE offers links to donate to *The Field*, the artists' financial collective of which both PURE and Bellyqueen are members, and the "DO GOOD" page of Belly Dance NY.⁹⁶ Gamal also highlights the fact that belly dance

⁹² Kaeshi Chai, "PURE Bellydance Conference," *Bellyqueen: Home: Events* (2013), <http://bellyqueen.com/events/2013-07-05/>.

⁹³ Chai, Keshi, Darshan, and Sera Solstice. "PURE Public Urban Ritual Experience." PURE Dance, 2009. Accessed: 14 May 2009. www.puredance.org. Again, I note my access dates for these websites because they shift as a response to their owners' professional lives. For example, puredance.org is no longer used by PURE as its main website. In June of 2009, much of its content was moved to purenyc.org and pureglobe.org. The site itself remains active, but only shows the updated URLs for PURE's more recent projects.

⁹⁴ Erin Kenny, "Bellydance in the Town Square: Leaking Peace through a Tribal Style Identity," *Western Folklore* 66, no. 3/4 (2007).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Chai, Kaeshi, Darshan, and Sera Solstice. "PURE Public Urban Ritual Experience." 2009. Accessed: 14 May 2009. www.puredance.org.

helped her transition to young adulthood with her self esteem intact.⁹⁷ Bellyqueen situates self-realization as dependent on community development, describing performance, love, friendship, and hope as necessary risks.⁹⁸ The playful performance Bellyqueen advocates is one based on homosocial relationships and self-realization as a community benefit, two factors often rejected in other Oriental dance contexts.⁹⁹

Like Dolphina, *Bellydance Jam* markets Oriental dance as an antidote to a world where women's bodies are ugly, at-risk, and shameful. More importantly, Bellyqueen's emphasis on crowd-based funding via Kickstarter, their "guerilla belly dance" rituals organized online, and their willingness to engage in an online community of dancers, reflect their dual commitment to belly dance as an art form and spiritual tonic.¹⁰⁰ They also locate Oriental dance as immensely vital – their emphasis on improvisation, homosocial interaction, and clubbing all locate Oriental dance as a playful, fun cultural product. The dancer-as-activist is invited to incarnate a body not so different, temporally, from her own. However, their work continues to be entangled in the very discursive processes they attempt to resist.

Bellyqueen's incorporation into the Bellydance Superstars undermines their social justice mission. Even though *Bellydance Jam* features Bellyqueen, the newer version of the DVD prominently promotes Bellydance Superstars' products. Miles Copeland, who is the promoter behind The Police and Sting, has taken on the Bellydance Superstars as his latest project, and works to maintain the branding

⁹⁷ Gamal et al., *Bellydance Jam*.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Maira, "Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," 330.

¹⁰⁰ Chai, Kaeshi, Darshan, and Sera Solstice. "PURE Public Urban Ritual Experience," 2009. Accessed: 14 May 2009. www.puredance.org.

associated both with the Bellydance Superstars and with belly dance as a whole.¹⁰¹ He began by organizing a “reality-television style” competition to form the Bellydance Superstars as a troupe.¹⁰² His artistic vision for this troupe included strict weight and age restrictions that he viewed as key to maintaining the integrity of the brand. He also strongly objects to the incorporation of active, overt sexuality into the choreography, writing that “a dancer who resorts to this sort of approach...lacks the talent to get attention in any other way.”¹⁰³

The pushback online regarding Copeland’s branding tactics was immediate.¹⁰⁴ Copeland has been accused of reducing his dancers to passive sex objects in the promotional materials associated with the troupe, using “tits and ass” to sell the troupe.¹⁰⁵ One Superstar comments on the contradictions between her expectations of a Bellydance Superstar tour and Copeland’s vision, saying, “We are adult women who are expected to look perfect, rested, and gorgeous at our shows. We are women who are supposed to be able to ride a tiny bus for 8 hours and jump off able to dance a two hour gala show.”¹⁰⁶ She goes on to discuss the ways in which appearance is legislated – the dancers’ makeup must all match, and the majority of the dancers are all a size 4 or smaller. She notes that Copeland makes her want to lose weight – she is a size 8 and is one of the larger women in the troupe. Another blogging belly dancer suggests that Copeland’s Bellydance Superstars approach belly dance as a

¹⁰¹ Miles Copeland, “Divorcing Bellydance From Burlesque,” *The Gilded Serpent* (2008), <http://www.gildedserpent.com/art43/milesdivorce.htm>.

¹⁰² Kenny, “Bellydance in the Town Square: Leaking Peace through a Tribal Style Identity.”

¹⁰³ Copeland, “Divorcing Bellydance From Burlesque.”

¹⁰⁴ Kenny, “Bellydance in the Town Square: Leaking Peace through a Tribal Style Identity.”

¹⁰⁵ Katrina Layla, “Auditioning for the Belly Dance Super Stars: Two Personal Experiences – The Cattle Call,” *The Gilded Serpent* (2005), <http://www.gildedserpent.com/art31/leylaLAaudition.htm>

¹⁰⁶ Dondi Simone Dahlin, “The Tour Diary Pt. 1,” *Bellyqueen* (2008), <http://www.bellyqueen.com/ark2/USPart1.html>.

“commodity” while other troupes approach it as a “field of study.”¹⁰⁷ In either case, the dancing Oriental acts as an object – it is either commodified for sale or an object of study.¹⁰⁸

In their portion of the *Bellydance Jam* DVD, Chai and Gamal resist the matriarchal spirituality associated with Oriental dance. Because of this, Bellyqueen’s creation of an alternative narrative surrounding the utility and context of belly dance is curtailed by its absorption into the Bellydance Superstars. While the labor and working conditions of these brown bodies is hidden because of the technology associated with its presentation, they still impact Gamal and Chai’s ability to subvert Orientalist narratives.

Bellyqueen uses social media and online forums to highlight their participation in an imagined dance community. Indeed, its online presence has been a surprising constant, given that its membership has changed over the years; its studio has grown, shrank, grown again, and then moved; and its founding members have often gone abroad to pursue other projects. However, its website has been used to participate an imagined community of international dancers. Bellyqueen emphasizes its participation in a transnational dance community throughout its website, discussing their feature on Univision (a Spanish-language TV network) and its

¹⁰⁷ Sausan, “The BDSS Experience and Miles Copeland: Doing What He Does Best,” *The BDSS Experience*, published electronically March 3 2005, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.gildedserpent.com/art30/sausantalkmiles.htm>.

¹⁰⁸ Part of this has included treating troupe members as employees, not artists. Copeland insists in “Taking Good Care of Our Stars” that this benefits dancers, since they are guaranteed weekly pay, health insurance, and training with other prominent dancers, all as components of a “long-term view of the business.” While he has been criticized for creating a cookie-cutter troupe of Barbie doll dancers, these are arguably better working conditions than those facing many Oriental dancers in the United States.

multiethnic classes.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Dolphina and Hemalayaa, Bellyqueen advocates a creative spirituality that blurs the boundaries between the self and the world.¹¹⁰ Much of its activism takes place online – through belly dance forums, online crowdfunding, and social media.¹¹¹

As two of the few professional belly dancers of color visible on a national level, Chai and Gamal act as boundary objects for online discussions of racism in belly dance. Gamal in particular acts as a locus for under-discussed issues of race and ethnicity within belly dance. On Tribe.net, one of more popular sites featuring forums, one user asks why the other founding BDSS dancers have risen to such prominence while Gamal remains far less known. In response, one poster writes, “I think we know the answer to that without asking it.”¹¹² Another responds,

They also say that there are no black dancers on the [BDSS] tour either and there are two that I have seen including Amar. I love her dancing, her shimmies are CRAZY FAST. And not the jurky [sic] fast that most people do, they are nice and smooth. I just have my particular favorite...if you can't tell by my picture :)¹¹³

As the conversation progresses, its focus shifts from Amar Gamal and the difficulty associated with being a fan of hers to the role racism plays in designating

¹⁰⁹ Bellyqueen, Amar Gamal, and Kaeshi Chai, “About Bellyqueen,” *Bellyqueen* (2006), <http://www.bellyqueen.com/about.html>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Jason Farman, in *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*, writes, “We are often more embodied in a virtual space...than we are in a material space. Thus, significant practices of embodied space can and do take place in spaces that have no foundational connection to any shared material space” (Farman, Jason. *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*. New York: Routledge, 2012. 23.)

¹¹² “amar gamal,” *tribes » cultures & community » black belly dancers » topics* 2014 (2005), <http://blackbellydancers.tribe.net/thread/c62ebb5f-d933-460e-8540-794409059367>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

particular dancers as professionals. One user writes,

In this forum, you will find names that keep popping up, while other names you won't see. I am not speaking with malice or anger, because I have some dear dancer friends that are not of color who think the same way. The only dancer that is as dark as I am is Amaya of New Mexico.

You will see her on IAMED and MECDA events:

The reasons for why we are coming out and building our own dancing empires is because of the very things we were speaking of this past weekend at BOCA. The beautiful dancer Amar will not get the recognition as the others because of her color. Her recognition will come from a black forum of dancers.¹¹⁴

As the conversation concludes, Gamal's absence becomes a rallying cry to create more venues for dancers of color, and to share this "ancestor knowledge" with a new generation of black women so that they may "move more comfortably in [their] skin."¹¹⁵

I began this project by centering Alexander's question in *Pedagogies of*

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Both IAMED (International Association of Middle Eastern Dancers) and MECDA (Middle Eastern Culture and Dance Association) are professional associations for belly dancers. MECDA originally formed in 1977 as a union for professional dancers working out of nightclubs, but grew to offer workshops, performances, classes, conferences and social networking for dancers, teachers, musicians, vendors, and students. Because of internal issues, MECDA closed on a national level in 2014, though its local chapters remain active. IAMED was founded in 1996 by Suzy Evans, a member of MECDA who specifically wanted to offer better audiovisual media services and products for performances, classes, and music. Like MECDA, IAMED grew to offer classes, workshops, and performances. In her blogpost "MECDA 1977 – 2014 The End of an Era," Evans reflects on the MECDA and IAMED's shared history (*Belly Dance Blog*. March 31, 2014. Los Angeles, The International Academy of Middle Eastern Dance. Accessed: June 28 2015. Available: <http://bellydancedvds.blogspot.com/2014/03/mecda-1977-2014-end-of-era.html>).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

*Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*¹¹⁶ This particular confluence of privilege, play, and Orientalism may point to one answer to this question. In highlighting the discursive formations framing the production of Oriental dance DVDs and their use in the domestic and domesticated living room, I argue that Western fantasies locate the Orient as a site of play, conquest, endangered matriarchies, and sinuous eroticism. At the same time, these same place-making narratives of conquest provide an opportunity to dancers for adhering to visionary politics by making use of the trappings remaining in that fantastical Oriental play-chest. Hemalayaa and Bellyqueen invite the viewer to momentarily incarnate a space of dreams and aspirations that simultaneously acknowledges social flaws and power struggles and insists that the viewer is capable of disrupting those processes. However, these dancers continue to be entangled in the very discursive narratives they attempt to resist, related to conquest and imperialism. These processes mark the difference between what is for play and what is not.

¹¹⁶ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 7.

CHAPTER THREE: “MEDIATING DANCE, MEDIATED COMMUNITIES”

This chapter offers an in-depth description of two belly dance DVDs and highlight the ways in which the performer/choreographers engage their audiences using supplementary material online. I situate these DVDs, their production, and their significance in corporeal feminisms. I conclude by connecting these histories and sociopolitical conversation to the circulation of gifs, YouTube clips, and the larger discussions surrounding wellness, race, and holistic embodiment in the United States. This chapter also marks this dissertation’s shift in focus from the private sphere of the living room to the semi-public world of the blogosphere.

Oriental choreographies, play, and times of war

In this chapter, I use belly dance workout DVDs to examine the ways in which the instructors use mediated dance spaces to access a particular archive of feelings derived from guided bodily performances. I also investigate the ways in which a movement-based community is constituted through a mediated, imagined experience. Finally, I investigate the role of psychic trauma as a necessary component to reading that community. In particular I examine the post-9/11 moment, when the trauma overtly described involves Western angst over the denigration of the female body, and the covert trauma derives from liberal ambivalence about the Oriental Other. I am not arguing that belly dance DVDs are a new post-9/11 product – instead, I am arguing that their valence, and therefore the significance of their use, has

evolved as a result of continued geopolitical conflict and their genre association with a larger military-entertainment complex. This is particularly relevant because of the growing national emphasis on health and fitness as a citizenship project.

Linking the affective and the militaristic is particularly important to this analysis. Engaging with this “sensational story”¹ of feelings, wellness, and the institutional blurs the difference between “inside your body” and the “out there.”² In *Depression*, Cvetkovich argues that “depression stories” are often as much about the neurological as they are the “insidious effects”³ of daily life under capitalism and institutional oppression. Further, these little pains act as “barrier and buffer”⁴ against the citizen-subject’s (rightful?) anxieties about “other (more real) wars”⁵ because they shift the individual’s attention to the symptom rather than the systemic or infrastructural frustrations causing the stress itself. At the same time, inducing anxiety and fear is a potent political tool, a way to induce social and political paralysis in addressing institutional issues. The rhetorical invocation of belly dancing and its imagined history becomes one strategy of resisting this politically induced anxiety.

My engagement with dance and community online reflects a growing trend in analyzing geopolitics. Unfortunately, popular geopolitics “still [focuses] on the elite visions of media moguls, movie directors, and lower-level yet still relatively empowered media functionaries such as writers and reporters.”⁶ This focus on media

¹ Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 158.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁶ Jason Dittmer and Nicholas Gray, “Popular Geopolitics 2.0: Towards New Methodologies of the Everyday,” *Geography Compass* 4, no. 11 (2010), 1664.

elite reflects the field's fascination with agency and autonomy as the defining characteristics of the state and subject as actor. In contrast, a "Geopolitics 2.0" incorporates concepts and methodologies from audience reception, feminist work on embodiment, and feminist geopolitics.⁷

I believe that engaging embodiment and audience enriches the analysis of this particular geopolitical moment. My focus on belly dance in particular – and through this dance form, a larger engagement with a feminist and postcolonial approach to women's fitness – reflects my commitment to analyzing the ways in which Orientalist narrative strands move through the West's concept of playtime and leisure. In order to explore this idea of playtime, I draw on Johan Huizinga's definition of *homo ludens*, or man as player.⁸

Huizinga uses the idea of *homo ludens* to describe the ways that the *logic* of playtime bolsters the *illogic* of the everyday. The ludic logic of playtime lies not in its delineation of the playful but instead adheres to the notion of consent. We consent to play. We consent to abide by the rules of playtime. We consent both to those rules spoken and unspoken, particularly those rules so ingrained into everyday culture that they no longer need to be stated. Huizinga is particularly interesting to me because he explicitly connects play and warfare, describing war as play between nations, and play as a conciliatory space and time where the violent acts implicit in everyday life are naturalized. As a writer, I appreciate the conceit. As a researcher, I find the possibilities opened by Huizinga's approach to play as consensual evocative, particularly in a neoliberal moment where particular bodies and places are reduced to imagined playgrounds.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play-element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

A Brief History – the “GoddessWorkout” Series

Belly dancing has fascinated American audiences since the Chicago World Fair in 1893.⁹ Most recently, belly dancing in the United States has virtually exploded. Since the 1970s, American belly dancers have developed many regionally specific styles, including American tribal style (a conglomerate of many “tribal” people’s dance movement vocabularies), gothic belly dance (sometimes called “East Coast tribal”),¹⁰ and folkloric (most often seen at Renaissance Faires).¹¹ While these styles appear to be very different, at their core they feature several common moves (including hip shimmies, hip circles, and rib isolations) as well as a common history that typically emphasizes blurred historical origins.¹² This blurred history provides a space for American belly dancers to inscribe an ancient, exotic fantasy world, where worshipped women recline luxuriantly on richly decorated chaise lounges. Unlike earlier Orientalist fantasies, the reclining woman claims a particular sense of agency within the femininity typically associated with the Orient. The “dancer places herself within the Orientalist painting as a seductress, but makes herself the speaking, feeling, and dancing subject, rather than the object of an anonymous male gaze.”¹³

This move toward women’s agency reflects the period when American belly dance gained prominence as a facet of women’s empowerment. The 1970s were a time when white heterosexual women wanted a broader control over their sexuality

⁹ Dolphina, *GoddessLife: Bellydance, GoddessLife* (New York: DK Publishing, 2005).

¹⁰ East Coast Tribal as pioneered by Sera Solstice is primarily defined through its emphasis on popping and locking, muscle isolations, and emphasis on the eerie and atmospheric in musical selection.

¹¹ Kajira Djoumahna, “Not Your Mother’s Bellydance,” *Kajira Djoumahna and Black Sheep Bellydance* (2003), <http://blacksheepbellydance.com/writings/not-your-mothers-belly-dance/>.

¹² Ariellah Aflalo, *Contemporary Bellydance and Yoga Conditioning with Ariellah*, (New York: WorldDance, 2007).

¹³ DonnaLee Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 4 (2006). 55.

rather than just over their reproductive health.¹⁴ Performing the American versions of this transnational dance became a “feminist act of liberation.”¹⁵ One dancer, Daniella Gioseffi, linked belly dancing to an imagined, historic community of women. She performed for the National Organization of Women, using her work as a dancer to engage politically in a larger conversation about citizenship and women’s rights.¹⁶

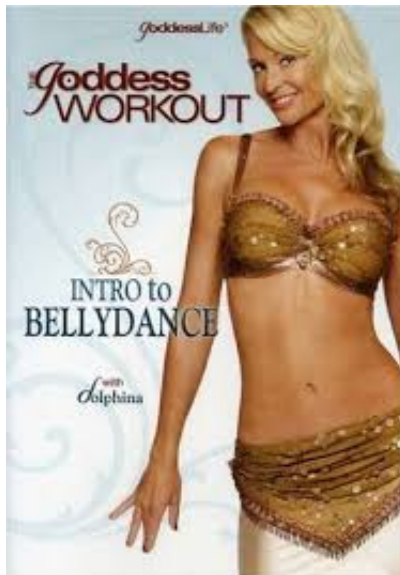


Figure 4: Cover of *Goddess Workout: Intro to Bellydance*



Figure 5: Back cover of *Goddess Workout: Intro to Bellydance*

This conversation about citizenship has been a continuous theme in the mediated belly dance products produced since that time. In *Introduction to Bellydance*, one of Dolphina’s first GoddessLife DVDs, Dolphina proudly announces that this dance-form is “more than just a workout routine.”¹⁷ With its text mirroring

¹⁴ Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, “Introduction,” in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 14.

¹⁵ Najwa Adra, “Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre,” in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 45.

¹⁶ Sunaina Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008), 320.

¹⁷ Dolphina, *The Goddess Workout with Dolphina: Introduction to Bellydance* (Sea Sirens Productions, 1998).

the graceful, slender curves of Dolphina's arched back, the back cover describes the ways in which the *GoddessWorkout* educates its users into essentialized gender roles by "engag[ing] the body, mind, and spirit, enabling every woman to celebrate the eternal feminine being within herself."¹⁸ This is the first step toward becoming a "modern-day goddess!"¹⁹ As the novice dancer begins "gyrating [her] abdominals, buns, and thighs (parts of the body associated with femininity),"²⁰ Dolphina argues that they will acquire a new appreciation for their "feminine curves" and learn to relish the fact that they have a body they are able to shake.²¹ Figures 4 and 5 are the front and back covers of this DVD, and are included to help illustrate the amorphous and ahistorical femininity Dolphina describes.

A Brief History – Alterna-chic Feminisms

When I first encountered Dolphina's particular brand of cheery dance work, I was still reeling from my first experience with gothic belly dance. At one point while I was clubbing, Pigface's "Lips/Tits/Hips/Power" came on. As smoke filled the dance floor, a woman adorned in thickly heeled combat boots, a fiercely defiant latex corset, and a thick leather collar designed for a man began to slowly sway, undulating along to the song's first, growled chorus: "I don't want to go to China. I don't want to fall in love. Let me give you broken pieces."

I remember a space around her clearing, as though she was suddenly the star of the floor, lanced by flashing strobe lights, but that probably did not happen. She

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dolphina, *GoddessLife: Bellydance*, (New York: DK Publishing), 2005.

²¹ *Goddess Workout: Cardio Bellydance with Dolphina*, *Goddess Workout* (GoddessLife Productions, 2007).

moved like a sea anemone, trunk and torso swaying with arms outstretched, as the guttural strains of industrial rock surrounded her, luxuriating at the center of the dance floor like a lazy maenad. The slow ferocity of her arms, shoulders, and hands stood in sharp contrast to Dolphina's perky invocation of a generic goddess-head. Dolphina, with her emphasis on the prettiness of cabaret, encourages women to "nurture the goddess within themselves."²²

Both the newer style of gothic belly dance and Dolphina's glittery cabaret style push for the dance student's embodied realization of an essentialized "universal" feminine identity.²³ While the teachers associated with gothic belly dance often don't make that explicit, their emphasis on the "darkly-exotic" and the dangerous feminine highlights their focus on a different sort of essentialized feminine ideal, a sort of dark mirror image to the woman-as-sensuous-mother more commonly seen in the world of belly dance.²⁴ Dolphina emphasizes "the time of the Goddess" when belly dance emerged, its role in "ritual dance," and its holistic benefits.²⁵ Gothic belly dancers like Tempest and Ariellah instead emphasize its usefulness in club-setting and its evolution into an edgier sort of sexy, marked by leather, jewel tones, and the "strange presence" of a hungry, vulpine smile.²⁶ Both paradigms emphasize the timelessness of this Othered cultural product, but fetishize it in different ways. In gothic belly dance, the Orient becomes a dangerous, magical world of death-magic, gargoyles,

²² *The Goddess Workout with Dolphina: Introduction to Bellydance.*

²³ Dox, "Dancing Around Orientalism," 55.

²⁴ Tempest, *Bellydance for Beautiful Freaks* (New York: WorldDance, 2005).

²⁵ Dolphina, *The Goddess Workout with Dolphina: Introduction to Bellydance.*

²⁶ Tempest, *Bellydance for Beautiful Freaks.*

and razor edged weaponry.²⁷ Both paradigms exhort the dancer to feel her body and *relish* its uniquely feminine strength.

This rhetorical investment in femininity-as-power intersects with the type of futurity so endemic to conversations about the Information Age and neoliberalism. It depends on placing the subject's own embodiment in an about-to-happen future moment while at the same time forcing fantasies of embodied nostalgia onto spatially, temporally, and nationally Othered objects. Donnalee Dox describes this phenomenon in "Dancing Around Orientalism" when she talks about the utility of an amorphous Orient to a relentlessly contemporary Western feminist dancing subject. The Orient becomes a toy box filled with ancient props, but no people, and is put at the disposal of a modern, Western self.

This initial emptiness is echoed in Dolphina's project in the *Goddess* belly dance series. Dolphina performs in empty space – she is alone, but for her voice, her body, and the music. She is the only sentient being in that void – except, that is, for the viewer behind the camera. Dolphina flirts with the camera, her eyes and breasts the stars of an instructional DVD meant to center on her hips and thighs. The ways in which she performs the state of desirability argue for the universality of this body, these gestures, and the desires she both generates and describes. The camera – and the audience – become the presumably male supplicant, granted temporary access to the emptied harem in which Dolphina performs.²⁸ This scopic gaze emphasizes the accessible, portable, knowable, and penetrate-able Orient that Dolphina inhabits. It also further complicates the ways in which belly dance is able to intercede in Western

²⁷ *Gothic Bellydance*, (New York: World Dance New York, 2006).

²⁸ Dox, "Dancing Around Orientalism," 59.

constructions of gender. The visual emphasis on Dolphina's face, and not on her choreography, suggests that viewers are learning more than a style of dance; they are learning a series of specific emotional responses to the mysticism and accessibility of the East.²⁹

For Dolphina, an imagined history of belly dance creates an unmoored Orient, a heterotopic site where she can extol the unique benefits of belly dance for the individual. This imagined location has no specific time, exists in no place, and, apparently has no permanent citizens. Dolphina is able to describe the spiritual aspects of belly dance, including its impact on chakras and aural energies, and the ways in which arm work encourages the development of "angel wings" in a world that is itself a mish-mash of Oriental icons. She explicitly links the movement vocabulary she employs to Sufism, a still-extant genre of mystic Islam. She also draws on ideas from kundalini yoga, describing the heat source associated with that meditative practice a serpent "curled up" as the base of the spine.³⁰ "Magic" things happen upon its awakening. This blurring of various types of spiritualities is a constant theme throughout her introductory DVD.

Dolphina tellingly includes no bodies but her own in this imagined Orient. The feminized Orient in which she performs emerges as an eroticized and emptied stage-set, in the same way the masculine Orient emerges as a militarized and empty screen when translated through the popular imaginary.³¹ Both visions of the Orient

²⁹ Antonia Losana and Brenda Risch, "Resisting Venus: Negotiating Corpulence in Exercise Videos," in *Bodies Out of Bounds*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 119.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See, for example, the opening sequence of Disney's *Aladdin*, whose soaring and swooping introductory visuals are based on stills from *Top Gun* and echo the fighter pilot footage of the bombing

erase the specificities of the everyday public of civilian life in their emphasis on the erotically charged private world of the harem and the terrifyingly unseen world of the terrorist. Belly dancing becomes a way to work through this imaginative tension. This performative embodiment of the dangerous (yet sensuous) Other becomes a space to perform a liberal “ambivalence about empire.”³²

While Dolphina makes an argument for the spiritual utility of the Orientalist constructs with which she is engaged, her presentation suggests that these products are fun to play with but not to keep. They are heterotopic for a reason. Her sets are all Mediterranean ruins, verdant, but absent of all life but her own. This bodily absence reflects the gaps in the “transnational public sphere”³³ seen in belly dance; the discursive erasure of Othered bodies hides the discursive and material acts of violence inflicted on those bodies resulting from U.S. imperialism and the conquest of Iraq.³⁴ The imagined space featured in Dolphina’s DVD is in ruins, a foreshadowing and reminder of the decline and fall of a doomed civilization. The destruction of this space, continuously rendered as both in the far past and inevitable via its momentary re-habitation by a white body, is consigned to nostalgic reminiscences.

Even as she grieves over the psychic injuries caused by a Western culture that refuses to give women the space to find their inner deities and renders invisible the loss of a matriarchal goddess-centered society, Dolphina reconstitutes particular

of Iraq during Desert Storm. In “Telling Tales to Children,” Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews write, “The audience comfortably settling down to watch *Aladdin* on the big screen at the movie theater (just as they had settled comfortably down in 1991 to watch the Gulf War on the small screen at home) is metaphorically placed inside the “cockpit” (behind the camera) as it hones its sights on human beings” (81).

³² Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” 318.

³³ Liz Philipose, “The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9 (2007), 61.

³⁴ Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” 338.

aspects of that imagined society in such a way that its imagined benefits are accessible to her audience. These imagined benefits constitute the “archive of feelings”³⁵ Dolphina is trying to excavate. This archive includes the movement vernacular of belly dance and the bits and pieces of material culture associated with it as a specific type of Orientalist fantasy. This archive also includes the affective states associated with belly dance as women’s movement practice based around community and self-care. Because this affective state has as much to do with the production, circulation, and connotation of belly dance as both Orientalist fantasy and a type of self-care, Dolphina combines all of these factors in her marketing of both the dance form and its promised sense of wellness. To do so, she frames herself as the direct descendent of an imaginary matriarchy, whose Orientalist roots have been lost to the mists of time. The dance space she offers the viewer is space-less and time-less moment; the care she promises is not bound to any sustained critique of Western culture as a whole. The comfort Dolphina offers is only for the individual and can only be temporary, a uniquely neoliberal approach to the injured heart:

In neoliberal imperialism, our emotional selves are segmented from politics and public life, medicated and pacified in ways that delimit their expression....We mourn their passing in an altogether anachronistic lament for things that never came true for most people.³⁶

This excavation is unsuccessful because Dolphina is advocating for her readers to dig in the wrong spot. By treating her DVD series, and the DVD series of

³⁵ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.

³⁶ Philipose, “The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire,” 61.

other belly dance instructors, as components of an “archive of feelings,”³⁷ Dolphina restores the temporal and spatial specificities of these resistances. She does this by describing the political climate in which these texts are produced. Restoring that specificity is the first step toward unearthing the psychic trauma – and hidden resistances – to which Dolphina is so deeply tied.

Another belly dance instructor argues that “for many women who have grown up in American society...the belly dance class may be the first time they are encouraged to think about their own body awareness.”³⁸ She implies that part of the American context of belly dance is the systematic erasure of women’s bodies and sexualities from the public sphere during the transition from girlhood into womanhood. This discursive context constructs American belly dance as a performative site that is constantly working through, with, and against a tense understanding of femininity and adulthood dependent on the existence of the Oriental Other.³⁹ In order to understand what it means to exist in a Western female body, discursively constructed as unsensual, asexual, alienated, and repressed, the dancer has to articulate what it means to female in the imagined Orient, discursively constructed as a community member, mystical, sexual, and sensual.⁴⁰ Acknowledging this discursive relationship not only unearths the archive of feelings associated with gender identity in the West, but also pulls out the feelings associated with conquest and imperial domination. Dolphina scrupulously avoids naming these “imperial

³⁷ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 7.

³⁸ Rania Androniki Bossonis, *Bellydancing for Fitness: The Sexy Art that Tones Your Abs, Butt, and Thighs* (Gloucester: Fair Winds, 2004), 21.

³⁹ Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” 338.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 331.

feelings,”⁴¹ even as she names the feelings of self-consciousness and gender anxiety she associates with being a Westernized woman living in the present moment.

Dolphina says she began the GoddessLife series because she wanted to share “the empowering feelings that belly dancing arouse in [her].”⁴² She fervently describes her continuous re-discovery of the “Goddess within,” the moment when “layers of self-doubt fall away to reveal a confident woman.”⁴³ She ends by describing the ways in which belly dance has changed her life spiritually, emotionally, and physically. As she enjoins her readers and viewers to pretend to be a “mischievous genie,”⁴⁴ and she constantly draws on images of the ancient Orient, and the ways in which bodily control can be true “empowerment.”⁴⁵ The introduction to her DVD *Introduction to Bellydance* features a flow of images of ancient goddesses, including Isis and Sekhmet. Her emphasis on the ancient history of the Near East reflects Donnalee Dox’s observation that

Western dancers are much more likely to identify belly dance with ancient Mesopotamia or Persia than with modern-day Iraq, Iran, or Saudi Arabia, and to link belly dance to ancient rituals as a way of situating women’s sexuality outside of Islam and Christianity, as well as social, economic, and political conditions.⁴⁶

Dolphina presents herself as an expert on healing and wellness, able to intervene against the mental and emotional violence that produces alienated female

⁴¹ Ibid., 318.

⁴² Dolphina, *GoddessLife: Bellydance*, 11.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁵ *Goddess Workout: Cardio Bellydance with Dolphina*.

⁴⁶ Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism,” 57.

subject-citizens. One of the constancies in her DVDs is her insistence that the release of tension, fear, and pain feels good and is empowering, reflecting that “[a] crucial part of describing the self, thereby bringing the self into the political sphere, includes the experience of emotions engendered by social, political, and structural relationships.”⁴⁷ Dolphina gently insists that someone out there has divorced her viewer from the rightful power associated with the spiritual feminine, with the erotically female. This, she argues, is wrong. Women need to be restored to the power that is theirs by virtue of their femininity.⁴⁸ They can do so through belly dance and the mythos of the harem:

Western belly dancers frequently use Orientalist frameworks to argue for alternatives to Western patriarchy, materialism, and logo centrism. If European colonial gazes saw in the harem and the veil repression, cultural backwardness, and frustrating secrecy, contemporary belly dancing transforms these same images into testaments to corporeality, the persistence of ancient wisdom in the modern world.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the intervention attempted by Dolphina and others like her has no teeth – it depends on the absence of particular bodies, their psychic erasure, and their eternal disappearance from the imagined Orient in which she performs. Moreover, it depends on reifying the main tenets of the aesthetic Orient; its critique of the West valorizes the Orient while at the same time consigning the Orient to an

⁴⁷ Philipose, “The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire,” 64.

⁴⁸ *Goddess Workout: Cardio Bellydance with Dolphina*.

⁴⁹ Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism,” 53, emphasis in original.

undefined, unchanging past.⁵⁰ This unchanging past becomes a way for Dolphina to argue for a spiritually “universal feminine.”⁵¹ This emphasis on spirituality appears throughout conversations about belly dance,⁵² with dancers describing their desire to “celebrate the body God gave them.”⁵³

Mediating Dance // Dance as Medium

Given the hyper-embodied nature of many dance classes, it may seem counter-intuitive to situate these conversations in the context of online social practices and community. This may seem particularly startling, given that this chapter’s earlier sections have focused on the ways in which Oriental exercise DVDs and belly dance classes become opportunities to think critically about embodiment and the role of Oriental dance in creating and redefining domestic and civilian spaces – particularly in the context of the *individual’s* experience and the *individual’s* body. In some ways, this focus reflects the tendency in dance writing to center the observer and the performing body.⁵⁴ The split between the mind/body experience of the writer-as-dancer and the dancer-as-writer is innate, something that makes writing and dance “incommensurable.”⁵⁵

Tumblr and the wellness blogosphere present a challenge to this argument. Those amateur dancers who blog, create videos, publicly debate belly dance and politics, and use their online activities to augment their dance-work may contribute

⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Penny Stewart, “Ask the Gypsy,” PinkGypsy.com, accessed October 25, 2008. <http://www.pinkygypsy.com/questions4.html>.

⁵⁴ Christina Pugh, “An Elegy for Dancing,” in *My Life at the Gym: Feminist Perspectives on Community Through the Body*, ed. Jo Malin (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 24.

only a small part to an ongoing societal discussion centered around the embodied critique of neoliberal ideas, the palliative Orient, and embodiment. However, as Annemarie O'Brien notes in her discussion of "thinspiration" and online community, those community participants who re-blog, create gifs, publicly reflect, and archive images of these moving bodies "are not merely passive consumers of this ideology, but are actively involved in shaping both the discourse and materiality of the body."⁵⁶ She argues that paying attention to the online communities and to the user-created images and text circulating within "thinspiration" communities becomes a way to unveil the political, social, and philosophical conversations about the body in which these community members are engaged. I build on O'Brien's argument, highlighting the ways in which these conversations about body, dance, and a historicity become ways of locating agency, challenging discursive authority, and (to borrow Foucault's phrasing) talking through war using another name.

The following analysis will specifically focus on belly dance forums and microblogging sites like Tumblr because of the format's association with the easy circulation and re-circulation of images. The shifting⁵⁷ nature of this online space – pages are removed, pictures edited, URLs lost or forgotten – echoes the ahistoric, timeless, and fuzzy language associated with Oriental images, large-scale media productions, and phantasms.

⁵⁶ Annemarie L. O'Brien, "Mind over Matter: Expressions of Mind/Body Dualism in Thinspiration" (Bowling Green State University, 2013), 10.

⁵⁷ In *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), Lev Manovich offers an analysis of the "variable" nature of new media and the attendant moral, temporal, and intellectual anxieties this type of ephemeral cultural product incites.



Figure 6: Header for *Pink Gypsy Bellydance*

Online conversations about belly dance and its usefulness to the West take many forms. Penny Stewart, of the website *Pink Gypsy Bellydance*, whose header is included in Figure 6, fields questions from Christian belly dancers attempting to negotiate the contradictions they feel between their spiritual beliefs and their bodily work as dancers. One of the respondents on her websites writes,

I reconciled myself to the notion of dancing when I thought about the women in Jesus' time, who probably drummed out beats while they were washing clothes, and other women would dance. I love the imagery of it. Praise God and dance on!!!! Do ALL to the glory of God!!⁵⁸

Here, the poster is describing the ways in which an imagined history of belly dancing becomes tied into her own understanding of her spiritual life. Other dancers weigh in, describing possible Biblical references to finger cymbals and the role of dancing in their church. These conversations center on the presumed absence of Othered bodies, with one poster asking in confusion if belly dancers are Jewish or "Arabian."⁵⁹ Other dancers describe belly dance as a way of gaining access to the world of the spiritual

⁵⁸ Stewart, "Ask the Gypsy."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

without having to partake of “unknowingly” patriarchal organized religions.⁶⁰ Each dancer treats belly dance as an ahistorical void, surrounded by signifiers of the Orient, but itself ready to be filled by another: a dancing, active, historically specific (Western) body endowed with agency. It is in the moment where the dancer *imagines* a just-so story for social context of belly dance that its social function becomes critically useful for her as a Christian woman.

In “The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire,” Liz Philipose argues that it is necessary to acknowledge the fullness and reality of Othered bodies in order to acknowledge their relevance as human, political actors.⁶¹ Wolff’s enjoinder that “dance can only be subversive when it questions and exposes the construction of the body in culture” is a pointed reminder that, ideally, the subversive potential of belly dance should not depend on colonialist frameworks.⁶² However, in many American belly dance media projects, only one body is being complicated. Non-Western women, cultures, and histories continue to be erased.

This erased body and emptied void does not mean that belly dance has become post-racial or post-colonial. Certain dance forms remain conceptually linked to particular cultural identities, even when they have been removed from the special spatial context from which they emerged.⁶³ This argument is particularly relevant to belly dance since belly dance is often read as a cultural product of the Middle Eastern. However, this dance form has been stripped of a specific spatial context as well as a

⁶⁰ Keith I. Marszalek, “Belly Dancing Movement Accentuates Spiritual,” *NOLA.com* (2007), http://blog.nola.com/entertainment/2007/12/belly_dancing_movement_accentu.html.

⁶¹ Philipose, “The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire.”

⁶² Janet Wolff, “Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics,” in *Meaning in Motion*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham: Duke University, 1997), 96.

⁶³ Sheenagh Pietrobruno, *Salsa and Its Transnational Moves* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 2.

specific history. Pietrobruno further argues that the context of the students' dance training further shifts the meaning and performance of the dance to a commodity being consumed in its own performance.⁶⁴

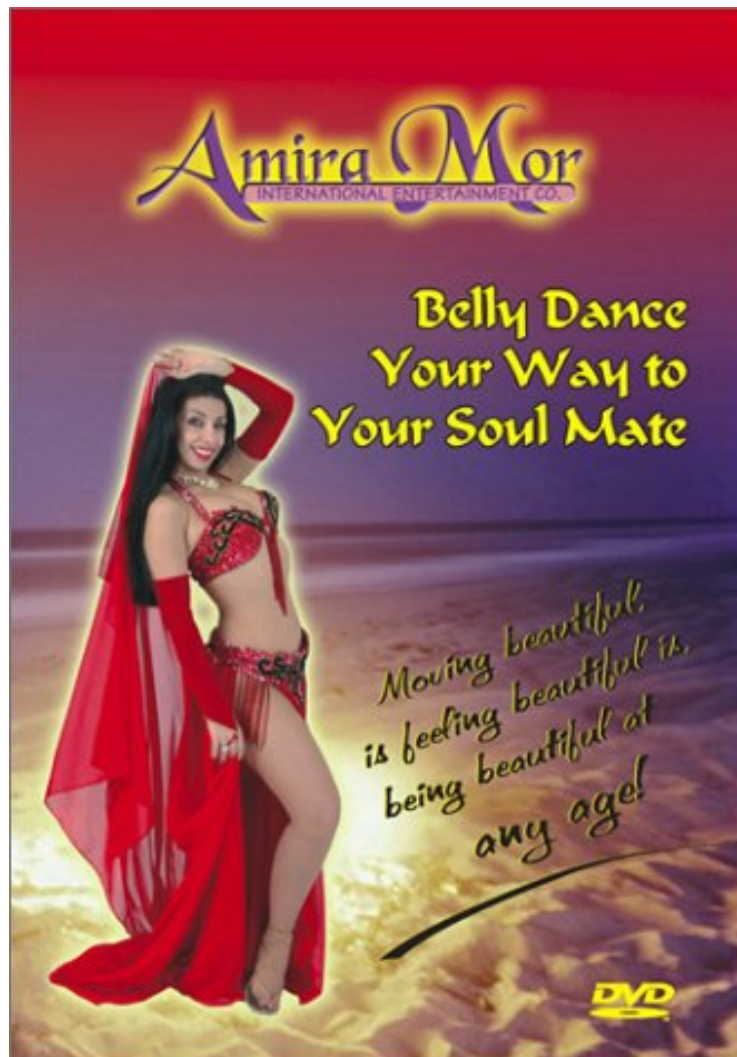


Figure 7: Cover, 2003 Collector's Edition, *Belly Dance Your Way to a Soul Mate* (Amira Mor).

As American belly dance has evolved, dance instructors have begun treating belly dance as a single component of a lifestyle overhaul. It is the very baggage of its enmeshment in Orientalist myths and images that allows for this transition. While

⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.

offered sincerely, and with great faith, the suggestions proffered fit into a paradigm that emphasizes the presumed spirituality and sensuality of the Oriental female. As Amira Mor of *Bellydancing Cardio* pushes her students to also incorporate *Bellydance Your Way to Your Soul Mate* into their self-improvement routines, she argues that in the “world” of belly dance “cardio fitness” acts best when treated as a larger component of a “world of sensuality, sexuality, [and] health.”⁶⁵ In fact, the cover of *Bellydance Your Way to Your Soul Mate*, shown in figure 7, includes Mor’s slogan: “Moving beautiful is feeling beautiful is being beautiful at any age.” Throughout her belly dance series, Mor pushes for her viewers to “improvise, listen, feel, and move” while at the same time arguing that there are specific ways to exist as a sensual, sexual female body. Her emphasis on the use of belly dance as *homosocial* practice for *heteronormative* life is especially highlighted when situated in the context of her larger oeuvre, and its emphasis on finding love, the appropriately spiritual self, and maintaining an appropriate and desirable weight.

Donnalee Dox describes this complicated relationship to women’s empowerment as a recurring trend in belly dance workout regimens, arguing that belly dancing becomes a site where women’s experiences gain primacy, but only in a specific “cultural alterity.”⁶⁶ Further, the manifestation of this particular dance form in this specific cultural milieu (which, again, is an imagined Orient) is often used to designate what types of sensuality, sexuality, and health are intrinsic to being female.⁶⁷ Dolphina suggests that particular moves are both “natural” to being a

⁶⁵ Amira Mor, *Bellydancing Cardio with Amira*, (Fogware, 1997).

⁶⁶ Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism,” 55.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

woman and “pleasurable to perform,”⁶⁸ even as she describes the ways in which learning a new movement vocabulary can be difficult for even the most experienced dancers.⁶⁹

Fantasizing about what it means to be female in the Oriental heterotopia can translate into a heightened femininity in the real world. Dance students describe the ways in which their engagement with belly dance becomes a way to engage in individualized self-work, with the cultural connotations of the dance style itself reduced to a variety of consumable commodities.⁷⁰ Novice dancers frequently described a renewed “appreciation”⁷¹ of their body as they entered a community of dancers, an individual manifestation of free-market agency voiced in the context of a communal identity. The tensions between this individual yet communally constructed project manifest themselves in a variety of minute ways. Dolphina, for example, cheerfully wobbles between the first-person-plural and the second-person-imperative when addressing her viewers and readers. Further, she dedicates her *Bellydance* book to “all women”⁷², a move that suggests that she views belly dance as a gendered human birthright. This self-work is often treated as race-less, class-less, and nation-less. The only aspect coded as Other is the bodily work providing the platform for this affective laboring on the self.

American women writing online about belly dance and the body echo this complicated mirrored divide of renewed self-love and remembered self-loathing. One

⁶⁸ Dolphina, *GoddessLife: Bellydance*, 82.

⁶⁹ *The Goddess Workout with Dolphina: Introduction to Bellydance*.

⁷⁰ Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism.”

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷² Dolphina, *GoddessLife: Bellydance*, 4.

blogger highlights the alienation she feels when viewing images of herself in practice gear, writing:

I don't really want to post this. In this picture I see a big belly – which actually doesn't worry me as much in this case – but I see my chin, and the weirdness, and it doesn't feel like me. I feel short, stocky, un-sexy, and uncomfortable.⁷³

At the website SoulBlossomDance, Rita Lazar writes,

The reason dance is helping me with weight loss is not because it's exercise, or rather, not ONLY because it's exercise. It helps with weight loss because a lot of overweight people tend to feel a lot of shame in regards to their bodies – shame either that happened as a result of weight gain or shame that caused the weight gain, and dance helps us release this shame, because when we do it we see how capable and beautiful and UNshameful our bodies truly are.⁷⁴

Rita Lazar of Soul Blossom Dance is a belly dancer, intuitive healer, and dance instructor. Her online writings emphasize the shedding of traumatized affective and material self with the gradual revelation of a healed, whole belly dancer. Her motivational Facebook page includes reflections on women, spirituality, and holistic selfhood. She writes, “We need these stories in our lives. And you will see, as I have long ago, that these stories are our story. And in an almost eerie way they have the ability to see right through to our situation, and to guide us on which step to take

⁷³ Lisa Jill, “Vulnerability, Body Image, Shame,” *Distant, Early Morning* (2013), <http://lisajill.net/vulnerability-body-image-shame-belly-dancing>.

⁷⁴ Rita Lazar, “Why Everyone Everywhere Should Dance All the Time,” *soulblossamdance* 2014 (2014), <http://soulblossomdance.com/2014/02/18/why-everyone-everywhere-should-dance-all-the-time/>.

next.”⁷⁵ Several of the stories about the goddesses featured on this page combine femininity with strength and reconciliation, and are drawn from Eastern spiritual sources, such as Hinduism or Chinese mythology.

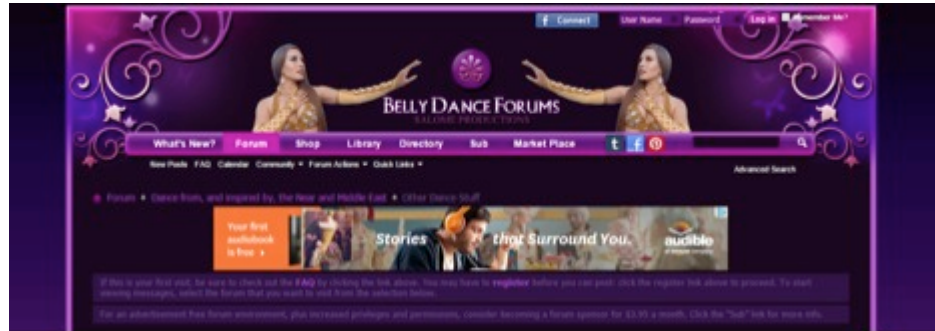


Figure 8: Bellydance Forums Screenshot

American belly dancers use belly dance (and the consumption of accessories and communal identities associated with belly dance and the Orient as a whole) as an opportunity to rehabilitate their own gendered identities into something more empowering.⁷⁶ The lack of a specific perceived history provides a space for dancers to determine their own understandings of belly dance’s utility to the specific performer. One poster to the Bellydance Forums argues:

It doesn’t matter what “history” says about belly dance and spirituality; if a person believes this dance to be spiritual then for that person, it IS! If someone believes it to be sexy or erotic or just exercise, then that’s what it is to that person. No one else has to agree.⁷⁷

In the ensuing conversation, the posters describe the ways in which belly

⁷⁵ “New Facebook Page!!! The Divine Motivatress,” *soulblossamdance* (2014), <http://soulblossomdance.com/2014/02/10/new-facebook-page-the-divine-motivatress/>.

⁷⁶ Barbara Sellers-Young, “Body, Image, Identity: American Tribal Bellydance,” in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*, eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 298.

⁷⁷ “Spirituality and Bellydance,” *Bellydanceforums.net*, www.bellydanceforums.net/other_dance_stuff/1638-spirituality-belly-dance.

dance intersects with Buddhism and yoga, a conversation further developed in Ariellah's *Contemporary Bellydance*, where she describes the ways in which incorporating yoga into belly dance opens the body to multiple choreographic influences. Ariellah, and the posters to that particular thread on the Bellydance Forums, each describe the Orient as a grab bag of gestures and spiritual practices, accessible to the dedicated consumer. This grab bag approach is reflected in the site's design; Figure 8 is a screenshot of the forum, and illustrates the combination of generic scrollwork, Eastern mysticism, static poses, and ahistorical costuming folded into belly dance as both movement vernacular and a way of life.

This reduction of the movement vocabulary associated with belly dance to separate moves and gestures constructs them as a *series of* commodities, through their transformation into easily consumable dance-moves able to be dispersed through a variety of formats.⁷⁸ Ariellah, Tempest, Dolphina, and Amira are able to break apart the body into separate zones, prescribing the best yogic, belly dance-based, or Indian-dance based movement vocabulary to achieve particular results. Dox argues that this reduction to a "taxonomy" of moves grants belly dance "credibility" as a teachable dance style.⁷⁹ This taxonomic commodification also provides a way for the dance instructor in question to offer a venue to establish membership into a consumption-based community oriented toward specific bodily anxieties, as each zone of the body comes with an accompanying DVD marketing campaign. In this facet of the dance community, community membership comes through disciplining each part of the body to perform in particular ways. It also comes through the ability to make the

⁷⁸ Pietrobruno, *Salsa and Its Transnational Moves*, 4.

⁷⁹ Dox, "Dancing Around Orientalism," 53.

discursive connections between the worlds in which belly dancing bodies move. Much in the same way that Dolphina's Orient presents an empty playspace occupied by Western bodies, many Gothic belly dancers incorporate the angry strains of rock, EDM, and metal into their choreographies, a dissonant soundtrack similar to that present in many pro-war games produced post-9/11.⁸⁰ This angry "virtual revenge for 21st century angst"⁸¹ becomes folded into the experience of belly dance as a cathartic release and tonic for American women using this dance style as a means of regaining agency, navigating trauma, and articulating a sublimated anger.⁸²

Group membership is provided through the consumption of specific accessories. WorldDance New York, the production company behind *Bellydance for Beautiful Freaks*, *Contemporary Bellydance and Yoga Conditioning with Ariellah*, and *Gothic Bellydance*, includes a section on each DVD detailing the complete discographies of the musicians associated with the soundtrack of each section. The *GoddessWorkout* DVD series includes a section discussing issues of costuming or other belly dance accessories, which often ends with Dolphina suggesting that viewers check out her website. Unlike both Ariellah and Tempest, Dolphina uses pseudo-authentic musical stylings and makes sure to describe the different types of belly dance styles with which she is familiar, and about which there is more information on her website.

These consumption-based cross-listings expand the boundaries of the

⁸⁰ M. Power, "Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post-9/11 Cyber-Deterrence," *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007).

⁸¹ Ibid., 284.

⁸² For further work on subversive femininities in goth subcultures, please see Amy C. Wilkins, "So Full of Myself as a Chick": Goth Women, Sexual Independence, and Gender Egalitarianism," *Gender & Society* 18, no. 3 (2004).

individualized and one-way conversation between the viewer and the mediated dancer. By engaging in a pedagogy based around dance as an intangible-but-consumable object, the dance teacher in question not only trains the student's body into appropriate femininity, but guides her into what avenues to use to gain access to a symbolic membership into a larger dance-defined public sphere. This sphere exists in many locations and in many forms, particularly as a result of belly dance's remediation as discrete audiovisual product and exercise regimen.

The distribution of dance through the "dance lesson" most notably transform dance into a cultural commodity. Nonetheless, since the dancer must corporeally reproduce the "object" that he or she is either buying or selling through commercial dance instruction, the human body is not separate from the object being consumed or produced.⁸³

Belly dance's appeal lies in its promise of community. Shira (of Shira.net) describes the existence of an online belly dance/spirituality community, mentioning the existence of this community in the midst of a discussion of Sufism and hadras, spiritual practices consigned to Othered discourse.⁸⁴ "The overtly Orientalist theme of tapping into Eastern spirituality and an alternative way of life is coupled with the notion of becoming part of a collectivity,"⁸⁵ even as it emerges as both a site of individual practice and mediated community.

In "Fitness is a Feminist Issue," Tara Barbazon writes, "[P]art of the problem

⁸³ Pietrobruno, *Salsa and Its Transnational Moves*, 7.

⁸⁴ Shira, "The Spiritual Connection," in *The Belly Dance Book*, ed. Tazz Richards (Concord, CA: Back Beat Press, 2000), 69.

⁸⁵ Maira, "Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," 329.

is that women's physical exertion is too often labeled as fitness or leisure,"⁸⁶ going on to argue that "[h]ow women are incorporated into physical culture is an indicator of their place and role in the contemporary workplace and citizenship."⁸⁷ To analyze these online conversations centered around belly dance, I incorporate a sustained engagement with the psychic damage associated with life under capitalism. Using these same conversations, I offer up examples of moments of surprising agency as dance instructors use their online and physical dance spaces to reflect on women's bodies and wellness. My engagement with Orientalism, agency, wellness, and digital rhetorics represents a departure from extant literature on the circulation of fitness-related images, gifs, and culture online. Current research focuses on thinspiration and pro-anorexia/bulimia online communities. Unfortunately, this approach to digital and feminist corporeal studies pathologizes young women's public engagement with technologies of the self by focusing on the conflation of thin bodies, mental unwellness, and the specter of eating disorders.

Thinspiration Tumblrs and blogs place a discursive emphasis on the use of exercise and diet to *control* an unruly body.⁸⁸ In contrast, belly dance blogs, Tumblrs, and forums place a discursive emphasis on the use of dance to control an unruly *self*—one plagued by low self-esteem, bodily shame, and spiritual ennui. It is this last in particular that links the blogging and online discursive practices associated with belly dance, yoga, and Oriental dance practices as a movement-based contribution to the larger community of wellness bloggers. This approach uses dance to illustrate power,

⁸⁶ Tara Brabazon, "Fitness is a Feminist Issue," *Australian Feminist Studies* 21, no. 49 (2006), 65.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁸ O'Brien, "Mind over Matter: Expressions of Mind/Body Dualism in Thinspiration," 25.

politics, and conflict; and centers a choreographic, embodied analysis of theory emergent and evolving with specific dance histories.

The larger public sphere created via Othered dance forms is “increasingly textual,”⁸⁹ marking a shift between a “dance tradition that thrive[d] in lived circumstances” and is now both becoming standardized and more specific due to its new, textual life. That is, dances that evolve and are not codified don’t necessarily develop into hybrid styles in the same way standardized dances do, when definitions and rules are made very specific. This marks one of the factors impacting the massive outpouring of U.S. styles of belly dance – there are now rules for a dance previously marked out as amorphous and expansive, which means there is suddenly a space for innovative stylistic variation that can then be encoded as intrinsically different from the particular style from which it emerged. Further, this marking out of more “modern” dance terrains as a significant departure from what is construed as “traditional” dance sets up a problematic paradigm where the originating culture is always, always timeless and irrelevant to the continued performance of belly dance.

This textualization of an embodied practice lends itself to the analysis of belly dance as a space in which to gain access to particular emotions. Belly dance’s promise to heal one’s self esteem through self-care, class-time, and accessories is a particularly neo-liberal approach emotional and physical unwellness.

In neo-liberalism, then, emotions are displaced from the realm of the social and the human, this time by processes of commodification. There is a market for the trade in emotions if they are packaged and contained correctly, in a

⁸⁹ Petrobruno, *Salsa and Its Transnational Moves*, 203.

form suitable for neat and easy exchange....There is a market solution when emotions threaten to disrupt normal activities.⁹⁰

Philipose is specifically describing the ways in which neoliberalism intersects with the world of psychotherapy. She suggests that the neoliberal public sphere cordons off emotions in order to maintain its own integrity. These buried emotions create the harem as the space in which it is appropriate for white American women to safely transgress the roles to which they have been consigned because of the specifics of their race, class, and gender identities. While belly dance is useful in creating a space to deconstruct these identities, this framework is unable to act as a component of the “earnest democracy”⁹¹ necessary to resist continued U.S. imperialism.

The ability to perform as an Other becomes a way of resisting an unsatisfactory system. The ability to perform as the forbidden Other, to dance in the “state of being in Islamic dress” becomes a place to perform idealized understandings of beauty and sexuality in the public sphere in relative safety.⁹² Such resistant performances cannot be read as simple racial masquerade, as is often the dominant reading when women use their bodies to resist hegemonic constructions of femininity. They are bound up in complex feelings surrounding U.S. imperialisms, as well as a simple desire for basic human rights.

In “Feminisms in the Aftermath of September 11,” Zillah Eisenstein argues that this democracy can only emerge as “*polyversal* if written with women’s bodies in

⁹⁰ Philipose, “The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire,” 68.

⁹¹ Zillah Eisenstein, “Feminisms in the Aftermath of September 11,” *Social Text* 72 (2002), 82.

⁹² Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism,” 62.

their different cultural contexts.”⁹³ She contrasts the mysterious, hidden body of the burkha’d Afghani woman with the naked porn model in order to discuss the ways in which depictions of women’s bodies become ways of representing the modernity of the neoliberal market.

In Tehran, Iran, although the law now requires women to cover their hair and conceal their bodies in loose clothing, women still have their individual acts of rebellion. Those wealthy enough have nose jobs and wear their postsurgical bandages as badges of honor. Others work out aerobically in their women-only gyms and wear long nail implants. Others wear their long coats and scarves over their black mini skirts imported from Italy. These acts should not be seen as simply “Western.”⁹⁴

Instead, Eisenstein argues that they should be read as attempts to publicly resist a domineering, devouring public sphere. However, using the body of the forbidden Other becomes exceptionally complicated when one conceives of this present time as existing in a post-9/11 moment, when the issue of racial masquerade becomes particularly dangerous.

After September 11, prominent choreographers defended belly dance as an art form, emphasizing its lack of real history, and suggesting that American fusion styles subvert its connections to the suddenly dangerous world of the Orient.⁹⁵ They argued that this modern version of belly dance was essentially rootless *and* global, folding into itself African, Spanish, Romani, and medieval influences. Interpreting this bodily

⁹³ Eisenstein, “Feminisms in the Aftermath of September 11,” 82, emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁹⁵ Dox, “Dancing Around Orientalism,” 63.

work becomes a way of accessing the vagaries of power and hierarchy bound up in the political moment surrounding the performance,⁹⁶ particularly since belly dancing emerged as a type of “hyper visible performance”⁹⁷ after the rise of anti-Arab sentiment in the United States. Because of the routes images about belly dance take as they circulate, the women-only space of the belly dance classroom does not always translate to a women-only space online. These images and conversations are embedded in larger cultural and imperial contexts, and circulate to and from these insular online communities.

One example of this circulation would be the movement of one particular image between the body acceptance zones of Tumblr, the fitness and dance zones, and erotica. Tumblr user BellyThoughts features an image of a dark-haired woman doing snake arms while standing in the middle of a stream.⁹⁸ This image reaches BellyThoughts after a torturous journey, reblogged from user VeryHairyWomanLover and SunsideNudistCamp.

The image itself is of Ariel, a model from HippieGoddess.com, a website “created...[to celebrate] the inner goddess and all of her magick [sic]....Mixing the passion, wild energy and sexuality of the fire element with the depth, clarity and emotional range of the water element thereby creating steam.”⁹⁹ Described as a “virtual time warp,”¹⁰⁰ the site features women “frolicking spritelike and blissfully

⁹⁶ Sally Ann Ness, *Body, Movement, and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 13.

⁹⁷ Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” 328.

⁹⁸ BellyThoughts, “HippieGoddess.com,” *BellyThoughts* (2014), <http://bellythoughts.tumblr.com/post/77107799440>.

⁹⁹ David Levine and Emma Soji, “Hairy women Hippiegoddess - Hairy girls,” (2001), <http://www.hippiegoddess.com//index.php?section=20>.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Speer, “The Fuzz That Was: Beaver or Brazilian? The latest Bush War has Portlanders

*ignudo*¹⁰¹ along forest trails and waterfall-fed streams”¹⁰² in order to capture what the site’s founders describe as the erotics of “the sweat, the patchouli, the pot, all intermingling”¹⁰³ as they watched a woman dance at a Grateful Dead concert. Figure 9 is a screenshot of BellyThoughts’ post, and includes both the image of Ariel and a sample of the reblogs that brought an erotic image into the blogosphere associated with women’s wellness and belly dance.

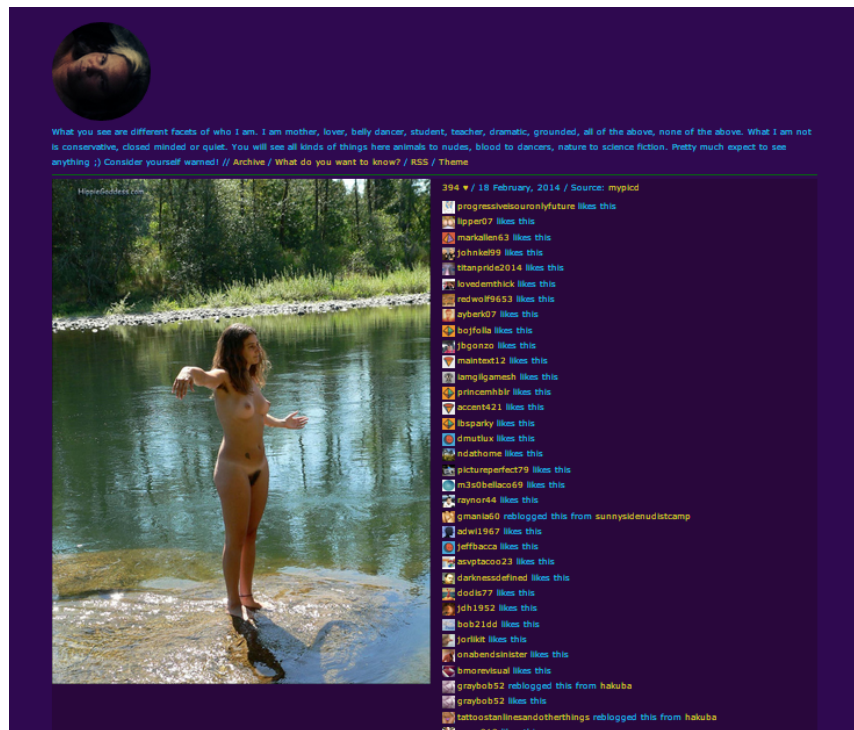


Figure 9: Screenshot of BellyThoughts’ post¹⁰⁴

As the image of Ariel from HippieGoddess traveled, it accrued new and

tearing their hair out.,” *Willamette Week*, published electronically December 14, 2005, accessed August 18, 2014. http://www.wweek.com/portland/article-5132-the_fuzz_that_was.html.

¹⁰¹ “Ignudo” is an Italian word used by Michelangelo to describe the decorative nude male figures he incorporated into the Sistine Chapel. These figures were supposed to represent the Classical ideal of male beauty, and act as semi-angelic figures introducing the religious stories adorning the chapel’s ceiling.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ User info reads: “What you see are different facets of who I am. I am mother, lover, belly dancer, student, teacher, dramatic, grounded, all of the above, none of the above.”

evolving tags, including #naturelover, #sexy, #hippieslut, #serenity, and #dancer.

Another image featuring Kimberly Marbles, a BBW porn star, in a cabaret-style belly dance costume includes the tags #fatspo, a tag meant to highlight an image's validating nature and role in encouraging body positivity; #belly dance; and #jiggle.

This image primarily circulated through a series of Tumblrs associated with fat-fetishists and BBW-lovers. However, I ultimately encountered this image via FatShitCray while searching for images of plus-sized belly dancers. The user describes herself simply as “Lisa.25.ny.fat,” warning viewers to “leave your racist, homophobic, body shaming, patriarchal bullshit at the proverbial door. IF YOU RUN A PORN/FETISH BLOG, PLEASE DO NOT REBLOG MY PERSONAL PHOTOS.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Lisa to *FatShitCray*, 16 Jan 2014, 2014, <http://fatshitchray.tumblr.com/post/73525894882/princeofdarkness-kimberly-marvel-omg-imagine>.



Figure 10: ArabQats' Arab cats

The nature of these tags (and their evolution through their changing over the course of the image's reblogged history) help guide the reader in "reading" the image's social and political significance. Is this evidence of reclamation? Objectification? Regardless of the answers to these questions, the hyper-visibility of belly dance includes its embeddedness in raced, classed, and gendered structures of power, desirability, and conquest.

Because of this same hyper-visibility, discussing belly dance and its performance also becomes an opportunity to discuss political dissent and embodiment as a form of resistance. For example, Tumblr user ArabFace uses their Tumblr to engage in conversations on cultural appropriation. Their reblogged posts run the gamut from protest poems documenting the atrocities committed against Palestine to a quote on colonialism that, one user writes, "I will always reblog....It hits my heart,"¹⁰⁶ a sentiment shared by more than 3500 Tumblr users, including users identifying themselves as women-of-color activists, social justice yoginis, and other

¹⁰⁶ ArabFace to *ArabFace*, 7 Oct 2013, 2013, <http://arabface.tumblr.com/post/63407999752/colonialism-is-the-massive-fog-that-has-clouded>.

Tumblr users committed to politicizing the physical and resisting cultural appropriation through dance and yoga. As seen in Figure 10, Tumblr user ArabQats uses the cat macro imagery so pervasive in online memes to provide a pictorial contrast to the PDFs included in their posts, one of which features belly dancing cats and a link to Sunaina Maira's "Bellydancing: Arabface, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire."¹⁰⁷

Examining contemporary American belly dancing within the framework of post-9/11 trauma provides a way to leap through the "window" left open by "sensational experiences."¹⁰⁸ Maira describes the world outside this window as one composed of "imperial feelings,"¹⁰⁹ the "complex of psychological and political belonging to empire...the 'habits of the heart and mind' that infuse and accompany structures of difference and domination."¹¹⁰ Working through these imperial feelings – indeed, finding a way to perform them in the context of an embodied public sphere – becomes a way to reach toward that "earnest democracy" Eisenstein describes. While the DVDs that form the mediated backbone of the American belly dance community engage in neo-liberal understandings of the self, the Other, and the emotional, treating them as components of a post-9/11 archive of feelings, creates a space for reading them as a powerful articulation of the ambiguous emotions experienced by U.S. citizens in light of American imperialism.

Foucault argued that the major conflicts of the twentieth century would be

¹⁰⁷ Queer Arab Crazy Cat Lady to *ArabQats*, 8 May 2014, 2014, <http://arabqats.tumblr.com/post/49941925104/belly-dancing-arab-face-orientalist-feminism>.

¹⁰⁸ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 285.

¹⁰⁹ Maira, "Belly Dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," 318.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

over the shifting of maps and space.¹¹¹ He argued that metaphors of war and racial conflict undergird political conversations in a neoliberal and neocolonial context. For Foucault, the discourses of war and race shape, inform, and create each other, as I argue is demonstrated in Western (re)presentations of belly dance. Moreover, the militarization of civilian and domestic space depends on the constant (re)introduction of an Othered subject into the public sphere as a blank cipher, a mannequin onto which fantasies of escape, healing, and desire are projected. The belly dancer's living room (and laptop) becomes one site where these contradictions, militarizations, and subversions are explored.

¹¹¹ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowicz, "Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27.

CHAPTER FOUR: “BRINGING A RESPECTFUL BOOTY”: DANCING TOWARD UTOPIA

Not long ago, I studied medicine.

It was terrible, what the body told.

I'd look inside another person's mouth,

And see the desolation of the world.

I'd see his genitals and think of sin.

— Rafael Campo, “What the Body Told,” in *What the Body Told*

In this chapter, I critically examine the body as a component of community building. I do so by analyzing the use of the body as a conceit for community building as exemplified by the GoMamaSita! Cultural Center/Studio. This cultural center represents one facet of its creator's grand vision for belly dancing in communities of color. This cultural center, and the Bellydancers of Color Association, represent a nodule of Thirdspace, Edward Soja's radical concept of space as a site of communal and personal resistance.¹ I build on Maira's argument on belly dance as a choreography of citizenship, but I depart from her work by incorporating her discussion of belly dance as one “the guilty pleasures of American imperialism” with an extended engagement of the digital, the dancer as content

¹ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996).

producer, and self-care as a public pedagogy of love.

Dancers as Pedagogues and Place-makers

I came to my dissertation project because I wanted to learn more about the pedagogies associated with counter-publics. I wanted to look at sites where intersubjectivities are produced outside of the classroom, where there is an epistemological nudge toward learning how to be in that space, and where there is a discursive emphasis on community and community building. I also wanted to focus on spaces that position themselves against hegemonic understandings of citizenship, spaces that argue that silenced bodies not only have the right to speak, but in fact have something to say. At the same time, I wanted to focus on sites where the built environment is less important than the emotional structures that group members are called upon to perform. In a dance class, participants cannot necessarily rely on the built environment to create a sense of community because it may not be a stable one – props, students, and teachers all change. As I approached this project, I began to wonder if it is possible to identify those structures required to create an embodied experience of community that can linger after the community is no longer physically present. How can a class remain a class, a community, when it's fundamentally a drop-in experience?

My project draws some of its urgency from its roots in embodied pedagogy studies. Pedagogy is the study of teaching, most specifically the study of the philosophies surrounding teaching and learning. Embodied pedagogy runs counter to established educational norms in two major ways. It does not pre-suppose the child as a blank slate in need of factory refining in order to produce a particular kind of

subjectivity. Instead, it is centered around communicative educational philosophies that rely on relationships of trust within the classroom space as a means of creating an intersubjective space. Because it is rooted in performance studies, phenomenology, and feminist work on embodiment, this particular branch of pedagogy treats the body as a site where history and political allegiance are enacted and performed. This kind of analysis provides an opportunity to think of the body as part of the apparatus of community, the spark that activates those structures based feelings of membership, solidarity, and intimacy between community members, and that is itself reliant on these embodied and affective structures for its existence as a discursive framework.

An “emancipatory praxis” combines knowledge and action.² Ideally, this action links both the actor’s consciousness of *self* and *space*; this concept highlights the ways in which space is a product of individual action and the epistemological framework from which that action emerges. The body is a site where history is enacted and felt. Its usefulness to the hegemony emerges when the body has been redefined from its simple corporeal state to a complex multinodal one, where abstract and artificial concepts take on a didactic force. This disciplining process, where bodies are discursively penalized until they obey and perform their assigned role, has a physical effect as well. Once a series of experiences has sufficiently “disciplined” a particular subject, the physiological response to that conditioning becomes second nature and no longer bound to the experiential. This is one of the ways in which bodies become “docile.” In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes: “[hegemonic forces] invest [the body,] mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to

² Soja (1996), 22.

perform ceremonies, to emit signs...the body becomes a useful force only if is both a productive body and a subjected body.”³ Part of that training involves the physiology of emotion, linking affective social structures to subjective emotional worlds to the physical flux and flow of emotional well-being.

At the time I joined this dance studio, I had already taken a set of classes at the Joy of Motion studios in Dupont Circle, about two years’ worth in Boston, and about two years in Northampton, Massachusetts. I joked, frequently, that I was an expert on introductory belly dance classes along the East Coast, since I made it a point to take at least one in every city where I lived. After all, I was already very familiar with the idea of belly dance classes as a women’s space, and it was an easy way to make friends. Despite this, I had never heard of the Bellydancers of Color Association (BOCA), or of belly dance classes oriented toward women of color.

After I attended a few classes, I became aware of something that seemed to me to be very weird going on. The pedagogical narrative of these classes directly incorporated an Afro-centric understanding of history. Specifically, the instructors and students focused their work as dancers and belly dance aficionados on celebrating the beauty and bodies of women of color. This emphasis on black women’s health and self-esteem is one of the legacies of a 1990s moment where black feminist health movement activism came to fruition. The manifestation of this politics of self-care and wellness also reflects the 1990s’ fascination with “Orientalist discourse affirm[ing] wellness, whole body fitness, and yoga.”⁴

The Bellydancers of Color Association, also known as BOCA, is hosted out of

³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 25.

⁴ Tara Brabazon, “Fitness is a Feminist Issue,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 21, no. 49 (2006), 66.

the Go Mamasita! studios in downtown Washington, DC. Established in 2002 by Dr. Sunyatta Amen, this cultural center represents one facet of its creator's grand vision for belly dancing in communities of color. These multiple narratives play out in several ways in the dance space of the Go Mamasita! studio. During class, each teacher presents links the dance forms to Africa and places where there was a cultural interchange between Africans and other groups, whether to dance forms from Tunis, tribes in West Africa, or the western coast of India. The physical space of the class appears to be a conventional dance studio, but at significant moments, its overarching narrative breaks through. There is a long mirror bearing marks of its recent installation: hardwood floors, whose smoothness is sometimes marred by falling beads or coins, casualties from a hip-scarf undergoing a vigorous shimmy; and a dimly lit barre at the back of the classroom for teachers who will need to stretch throughout the day, close to where the renovations end. A water cooler where students huddle when trying not to be first for solo performances in front of the group is hidden by a wooden room divider with ornate tapestries draped along its front.

During the first belly dance class of the day, the wood floor is not yet dirtied with the passage and pounding of many bare feet. The smell of incense is a constant, left over from the morning yoga classes, and within a few minutes, the entering student will have forgotten the cold or the heat of the outside. The room feels fresh and safe; the richly colored curtains and the scattered pillows invite reclining like an odalisque.

The walls feature local painted artworks exulting in sensuous brown-skinned human bodies. The front of holds chairs for people needing to sit and wait for an

upcoming class, and a small market where students can buy granola, virgin coconut oil, guides to tantric sex, and Mixed Chicks! organic hair care products while they wait. Also on sale are hip scarves, offered at cost when possible, as well as other dancing gear, including mesh leotards and bags emblazoned with the BOCA logo. The room's warmth is just enough that students willingly shed their sweatshirts and jackets.

The studios are concrete locations and act as the focal point for an imagined geography created through a combination of insurgent history, the use of "corporeal intelligence,"⁵ and a virtual presence. I link these two types of spaces – the imagined and the concrete – through the music that both share, a music made possible through the use of technology, as part of the African "digital diaspora."⁶ The narratives surrounding the dance form's presentation frame belly dance as part of an African Diasporic cultural tradition.⁷ Diaspora, here, is a particularly useful concept. In "The Turn to Diaspora," Lily Cho emphasizes that, "diaspora brings together communities which are not quite nation, not quite race, not quite religion, not quite homesickness, yet they still have something to do with nation, race, religion, longings for homes which may not exist."⁸ Cho also emphasizes treating diaspora as a type of subjectivity, as a type of subject formation highlights the connections between

⁵ Barbara Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xi.

⁶ Janice Cheddie, "From Slavery to Motherhood and Beyond: Thoughts on a Digital Diaspora," *Desire by Design: Body, Territories and New Technologies* (London: IB Tauris, 1999), 167.

⁷ Ramón Rivera-Servera's discussion of *latinidad*, dance, and "choreographies of resistance" provides a further critique of the role of dance as a form of cultural preservation and resistance. Rivera-Servera describes these choreographies as "embodied practices through which minoritarian subjects claim their space in the social and cultural realms" (282) Body movement matters; it articulates agency and connects psyche to soma to create a toolkit of resistance. (Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, "Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative," *Modern Drama* 47, no. 2 (2004): 269-289).

⁸ Lily Cho, "The Turn to Diaspora," *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (2007), 12.

colonialism, imperialism, trauma, and the forced dispersal of diasporic populations.⁹

Dr. Sunyatta Amen opened the studio in order to create a “healing, relaxing, other-worldly space, a place from antiquity, a place both exotic and comfortable.”¹⁰ When she went to belly dance conferences as a woman of color, she says she felt diminished, as though her presence was being questioned. “Why do these so-called professionals act surprised when I’m doing my dance? [It’s] like looking white and having a great grandmother that’s black.”¹¹ The simple fact of her presence sharing the same performance venue as white dancers, and her insistence on an Afro-centered genealogy for a dance form typically stripped of its history, disrupted notions of race and racism with regard to belly dancing.

This shift in history breaks the traditional narrative of belly dance normally described as a stereotypically Middle Eastern product. By locating belly dance as a product of the African Diaspora, Sunyatta opens the door to incorporating the music of the African Diaspora into belly dance as a form of cultural reclamation. Sunyatta is creating a space in her classes where insurgent history is performed – through bodies, sound, and love.

Music and Mythmaking in the Dance Classroom

Who owns what is a tense matter in the world of dance fitness? In the context of fitness and dance classes, music represents brand, pedagogical control, and expense. The use of music in fitness and dance classes has become an issue of copyright law and creativity. Record companies have turned to group fitness classes

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Amen, Sunyatta, interview by Maria Velazquez. Go Mamasita! Studio. November 11 2007.

¹¹ Ibid.

as a new market.¹² Zumba, for example, has partnered with Universal Music Group to both distribute and brand the musical selections associated with its classes. In contrast, SoulCycle, an indoor cycling fitness brand with multiple locations, does not allow its instructors to share their playlists because the brand itself seeks its own music distribution deal with a record label.¹³ Also, music marketed specifically to fitness instructors for use in class sometimes will feature suggestions for which section of the workout each song is intended.¹⁴ In contrast, BOCA studios treat music as an avenue of cultural exploration and cultural connectivity.

By locating Africa as the source of the dance practice in question and arguing for a collective and shared African Diasporic history, the studio's philosophy is engaged in the creation of a historical meta-narrative where the dancer is constructing herself as the spiritual descendent of her "African antecedent."¹⁵ This meta-narrative grants the gestural language of belly dance in this space a "double, self-reflexive significance"¹⁶ where descent is both promised and reinforced. This restored genealogy works against dominant notions of race and gender, both of which devalue the black female bodies invited into GoMamaSita's! environs. However, while its students may enter for an ephemeral moment of rejuvenation, when they leave they return to a world where they are valued for their labor and not for their lives.¹⁷ This

¹² Sarah Hentges, *Women and Fitness in American Culture*, (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland, 2014), 71.

¹³ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴ Nicole Thompson, "How Group Exercise Music Selection Affects Your Workout," *San Jose Examiner* (2012), <http://www.examiner.com/article/how-group-exercise-music-selection-affects-your-workout>.

¹⁵ Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷ In *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, Vijay Prashad specifically argues that blackness is a political state where the *quantity* of one's labor is more valuable than the *quality* of one's life.

definition is particularly useful because of its relationship to soundness, fitness, and wellness as terms describing health. In the introduction to this dissertation, “Bootylicious and Jingling,” I described the tensions between soundness, fitness, and wellness as terms for describing individual experiences of health. The antebellum origins of soundness emphasize the ways in which the health of black bodies is explicitly tied to their ability to labor as slaves. In contrast, fitness claims neutrality as metrics-based system offering raw data on strength, flexibility, and endurance. But how neutral can these metrics be when their historical origins are grounded in oppressive structures that privilege certain types of citizens with the time to “work out” as a leisure activity? Unlike both fitness and soundness, wellness centers collective and individual quality of life as its most powerful indicator of mental, physical, emotional, and social health.

I offer the above reflection on wellness as a concept in order to provide a larger context for Sunyatta’s approach to belly dance, history, and love. Sunyatta Amen, one of the studio’s principal organizers, fervently believes that a holistic approach to this insurgent history has the power to change lives. She argues that dominant culture has co-opted North African dance in a way that negates its connections to the larger African continent. For Sunyatta and for the teachers involved in the studio, class time is as much about rectifying this historical libel as it is about creating insurgent black bodies. Dances highlighting radical and resistant black booties reframe the black female’s physical aesthetic as both non-white *and* beautiful, in contrast to mainstream narratives that treat it as a grotesque fetish

object.¹⁸ In particular, “bringing a respectful booty,” as one instructor jokingly described the type of dancing expected at a Congressional Black Caucus event, becomes a coded action revolving around respect for one’s body, respect for the dance, and cultural pride. “Booty dancing therefore destabilizes white racism as much as, if not more than, it reinforces it; blackness does not necessarily inhere in what this



Figure 11: T-shirt and pants display for BOCA Expo 2015. The shirts feature six black dancers drawn as chibis. The dancers are different skin colors and body shapes. Each has a different hair texture as well.

body looks like, but in what it *does*.”¹⁹ At the Go Mamasita! studios, students don’t just dance, they do so in a space whose overarching narrative forges a connection between their movement and a line of imagined ancestors and wise women whose loving gaze admires the movement-based work of their distant descendants.

This larger cultural genealogy is one of the significant aspects marking this space as a belly dance site oriented towards women of color. While DC Tribal events

¹⁸ Melissa Campbell, “Go White Girl!”: Hip Hop Booty Dancing and the White Female Body,” *Continuum* 18, no. 4 (2004).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 503.

might include women of color as participants or dancers, their focus is on the dramatics of performance.²⁰ Some dancers construct a radical narrative surrounding the presentation of non-standard bodies or frank sexuality, but these narratives do not situate belly dancing as a serious cultural product with a specific history. The dancing at Piratz Tavern is a component of their larger theme of pirate-related kitsch.²¹ While the dancers of both groups are extremely talented, and the dancer at Piratz is one of the only women of color I saw performing outside a BOCA context, the rationale behind their presence in the space in question is not the same. The alternative history presented by Sunyatta and her co-teachers is crucial component of what constructs the GoMamaSita! Cultural Center as a site of resistance.

This resistance is exemplified in a message posted by a participant on the message board for the Bellydancers of Color 2005, who said she “cried several times because [she] was SO PROUD and SO HAPPY to be a part of history... There was some powerful stuff that was performed on the birth of this dance and its origins.”²² Another participant firmly grounded her understanding of the association’s mission as part of this larger Afro-Orientalist solidarity movement:

BOCA was wonderful, it was like W.E.B. DuBois’ dream come true, all the dancers of the Diaspora meeting to talk about issues related to the dance, sharing the dance and it was an incredibly child friendly event as well.... This

²⁰ DC Tribal is a collective of DC-based belly dancers who practice tribal belly dance. Tribal style belly dance is a particularly East Coast style of dance that has been criticized as a type of exoticising grab-bag because its movement vocabulary explicitly draws on any and all “tribal” peoples. While Jasmine June of The Gilded Serpent describes the “tribal” connection as referring to the “tribe” of dancers participating in belly dance across the world, the cultural appropriation associated with East Coast tribal in particular remains controversial within the larger belly dance community.

²¹ Piratz is Silver Spring, MD bar, known for both its themed decorations, its pirate-themed performance nights, and its tribal belly dancers.

²² “What People Are Saying,” (2005), http://www.bellydancersofcolor.com/wst_page6.html.

is definitely going to change the tone among dancers in the community and I am glad that the Sistah's [sic] took the lead in building unity.²³

The alternative history presented by Sunyatta and her co-teachers is crucial component of what constructs the GoMamaSita! Cultural Center as a site of resistance. At the beginning of our interview, Sunyatta offered a summary of her project that explicitly defined it as a resistant history:

Belly dance is an African art form – the oldest continuous dance form in existence. Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria – all of these places are located in Africa. It's amazing to me that people want to take ownership of these “exotic” things – we can't let people co-opt our geography. I love that people think it's beautiful, but we need to credit our ancestors.²⁴

In *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, Vijay Prashad notes that the creation of “origin” stories is a major component of resistance for politically and socially disenfranchised groups. “Minority groups may mobilize around the notion of an origin to make resource claims, to show that despite the denigration of the power elite, the group can lay claim to an aspect of civilization and the cultural currency attached to it.”²⁵ However, Prashad also notes that alternative histories are ineffective and create a sort of cultural essentialism unless they are presented within a narrative of solidarity and resistance.²⁶ The mobilization of this cultural genealogy to forge a political connection to modern-day Africa moves the cultural center from a site of resistance on a personal/spiritual level to one of active political work. Sunyatta

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Amen, interview by Maria Velazquez.

²⁵ Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting*, 147.

²⁶ Ibid., 148.

describes this transition as follows in her discussion of female genital mutilation:

FGM is one of our pet projects – when that’s taking place suddenly it’s African, but when it’s beautiful [women dancing], it’s Middle Eastern. I see FGM as being relevant to belly dance, because the places where women are beautiful and alluring are the places where they’re hurt for that....This is the oldest dance form... but we need to allow the beauty [of these women] to be something they can reach safely.²⁷

Sunyatta made this comment during my interview with her after describing the many women who have approached her after class in order to talk about their issues with sex and desire. Initially, I assumed she was speaking of sexual pleasure. After all, the Go Mamasita! studio in Takoma Park has a small store where yoni eggs are available for purchase.²⁸ In addition, Sunyatta specializes in sexual Tai Chi, an approach to Tai Chi that focuses on the flow of sexual energy.

When I tried to lightly joke about New Year’s resolutions and spicing up the bedroom, she casually brushed me off. “No,” she said. “I’m talking about women who only remember their rape when they’ve been given permission to move their hips, who have no one else to tell, who didn’t remember themselves until they started to dance.” I don’t know if she heard me, but I gasped; like a punch to the gut I remembered that I started dancing, so long ago at Smith, the fall semester after I was raped during my first internship in DC. I skipped the next few classes, struggling to decide if I could bear such an explicit link to my academic work and my own history

²⁷ Amen, interview, November 11, 2007.

²⁸ Yoni eggs are egg-shaped rocks that have been smoothed and shined. They are normally really pretty, weighted to be pleasurable to hold, and are made out of quartz or amethyst or another spiritually significant stone. The user inserts them into the vagina to augment their kegel muscle flexing routine in order to help strengthen their pelvic floor.

of unwellness to something that was supposed to be fun.

Sunyatta's frankness challenged me. I felt ungracious for avoiding something that gave me such pleasure, particularly when that pleasure was so explicitly linked to the gifts of survival offered to me by other black, dancing women. To reject healing felt like the rejection of a larger, loving black community. By centering her call for political action on an alternative history and a holistic approach to the body, Sunyatta engages the political power of the erotic as a means of realizing social change, and as a means of incorporating a narrative of bodily pride into one focused on sexuality, empowerment, and Afro-centrism. The body, its movement through space, and its potential revolution are three constant foci within class-time; the space itself defines its boundaries and its members based on their willingness to dance out a particular history for a particular purpose. "The body as it is revealed through performance stands as a source of political activity."²⁹

The body's status as a "chora"³⁰ site is based upon the use of ritual welcoming both the students and the teachers into that space. Each class begins with a series of warm-ups, which include yoga-based stretches, a gentle rejoinder to treat dance as lovemaking with the universe, and other tender silences centering on the sensual. During these poses, one of the co-teachers goes around, bending people into more perfect approximations of the pose in question. These poses are meant to both warm-up the body for dancing, and to create an ideal mind-set. The ending ritual is similar, involving more child's poses (a beginner's yoga stretch that encourages circulation),

²⁹ Randy Martin, *Performance as Political Act: The Embodied Self* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1990), 2.

³⁰ Jeremy Louis Korr, "Washington's Main Street: Consensus and Conflict on the Capital Beltway, 1953-2001" (University of Maryland, College Park, 2002), 489.

more cool-downs, and an emphasis on maintaining the dance space within the body during the upcoming week through incorporating its survivals, holistic methodologies, and aesthetic philosophy regarding black beauty.

Sunyatta purchased the studio and did extensive renovations in order to firmly situate it as a “*women’s space*.”³¹ Its windows are thickly curtained with a vibrantly colored tapestry through which the light shines like a gem. Its storefront is unmarked and understated in comparison to the barbershop and liquor store with which it shares a corner. Sunyatta fiercely protects entrance to this space and has made it clear that if one has not come to dance, one has not come to stay.

The songs used during class are performed or written by artists of the Diaspora, including those Egyptian, Tunisian, and Moroccan artists Amen is reclaiming. Artists included range from the Jackson 5 to James Brown to Soulja Boy to Kelly Rowland. The class emphasizes the continuity between black American music, music of the Diaspora, and traditional belly dance songs. The works performed by black artists are considered as authentic as those produced by Arab and Turkish artists. Further, because of their commonplace and familial nature, this soundtrack represents a sharp departure from the violent metal music used in video games set in the Middle East, as well as the pseudo-authentic music used by Dolphina. The undercover work of trauma recovery can slide into the classroom space, veiled by the structured nature of “I do, we do, you do” as a teaching strategy and the familiarity of the music played. The role of music here is particularly important; dance and music work together to reprogram the brain as part of social

³¹ Amen, Interview, November 11, 2007.

bonding.³² I include a set-list for one of the introductory classes in aA.

The music to which one dances forms the foundation for the soundscape featured within the class time. The ambient street noises are blocked because of the curtained window and the closed door. One cannot even hear the trains coming, even though Takoma Park station itself is less than two blocks away. The music and the sound of the teachers' voices become the aural focal point of the environment. The music and sound that manipulates the individual's physical and affective response to the other is part what makes the Middle East of *Call of Duty* feel so scary, the imagined harem feel so foreign, and the dance world of BOCA feel so friendly. The deliberate inclusion of multiple skin tones, hair types, and body types in the studio's products (such as the line of shirts shown in Figure 11) reiterates BOCA's vision of many shades of brown dancing in loving harmony.

Claiming that the music of the African Diaspora shares a family relationship to belly dance is a story of aural authenticity possible only in an era of digital reproductions. The technologies associated with creating and circulating mp3s, mashups, and remixes make it possible to blur the boundaries of soundscapes in such a way that the similarities between such traditionally divided and socially valenced³³ forms of music can be revealed and reinterpreted. The ability to sample from a variety of sources furthers this potential fusion. In the context of these dance performances, the work of sampling and the technologies of the digital diaspora are reflected both in the music (a mingling of digitized wholes) and in the gestural languages of the dance

³² Walter J. Freeman III, "A Neurobiological Role of Music in Social Bonding," in *The Origins of Music*, edited by N Wallin, B. Merkur and S. Brown, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) 411-24.

³³ I use "valenced" here to highlight that in this space the affective narrative surrounding the experience of the digital object becomes embedded in the object's meaning to the listener.

(a mingling of hip hop, tribal belly dance, and African dance). This is where that notion of a digital diaspora really comes into play.

Digital reproductions of music make it possible to blur the boundaries of soundscapes in such a way that the similarities between such traditionally divided and socially valenced forms of music can be revealed and reinterpreted. The ability to sample from a variety of sources furthers this potential fusion. This narrative of authenticity is particularly important because culturally-specific dance classes have become an increasingly visible intervention in the health needs of a population of women who are more likely to be sedentary, diagnosed with type II diabetes, and suffer the ill effects of high blood pressure.³⁴ Dance classes are particularly useful because they can also act as support networks, which both encourages continued commitment to wellness strategies and an attitude of hopefulness in the face of a diagnosis of a chronic condition like diabetes.³⁵

Remediating African American musical traditions as part of a larger African diaspora, of which belly dancing is another part, has positive implications for health outcomes for African American women. However, this remediation is not always an exchange between equals, and is not without its Orientalist tendencies. In 2002, DJ Quik received a great deal of criticism for sampling “Thoda Resham Lagta Hai” (“It Takes A Little Silk”), a Hindi song sampled by Truth Hurts in her first single.³⁶ DJ

³⁴ Carolyn J Murrock and Faye A Gary, “A Culturally-specific Dance Intervention to Increase Functional Capacity in African American women,” *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 15, no. 4 (2008): 168–173.

³⁵ Carolyn J. Murrock, Patricia A. Higgins, and Cheryl Killion, “Dance and Peer Support to Improve Diabetes Outcomes in African American Women,” *The Diabetes Educator* 35, no. 6 (2009): 995–1003.

³⁶ Joe D’Angelo, “Dr. Dre, Interscope Stung With \$500 Million Lawsuit over ‘Addictive,’” *MTV News: Top Stories* (2002), <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1457672/dr-dre-sued-over-addictive.jhtml>.

Quik describes his discovery of the original song as almost accidental.

I woke up one morning... I turned on the TV and landed on this Hindi channel and just turned it up real loud... There was a commercial on, and I just got up and went into the bathroom and started brushing my teeth. I'm brushing, and before I knew it, I was grooving... [The beat on the TV] was just in my body. I went back in there and looked at the TV — there was a girl on there belly dancing, just like real fly. So I pushed record on the VCR.³⁷

This criticism culminated in a lawsuit, leading to a court injunction halting sales of the CD in question. Despite this, the trend has continued, with more and more artists like Kelly Rowland, Shakira, and Amerie blurring the lines between *bhangra*, Arabic music, and American R&B. The lawsuits have also continued, with Timbaland, a prominent producer, facing one or another unauthorized sampling of an Egyptian song in 2005.³⁸ While it may seem strange that I would mention these suits involving Bollywood and Egyptian music in a chapter about American-style belly dancing, I suggest that part of the American cultural narrative surrounding these samplings rests on recent emergence of a new strand of Orientalist discourse. The composer of “Thoda Resham Lagta Hai” describes co-opting of their original work as a form of cultural imperialism.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interestingly, the controversy over Timbaland's use of “Khosara, Khosara” from the film *Fata Alamo* in “Big Pimpin'” continues; both Jay Z and Timbaland refuse to be deposed in this case, though they continue to collect royalties for the song itself (Amber Ryland, “Jay Z Refusing Deposition In ‘Big Pimpin’ Sampling Lawsuit.” *Radar Online*. Published electronically 14 July 2014. Accessed: 14 July 2014. <http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2014/07/jay-z-refusing-deposition-big-pimpin-sampling/>). Ultimately, the suit brought against Timbaland for his sampling of “Bighorn Mein Bihar Hai” for “Put You in the Game” was dismissed because the vagaries of Indian copyright law meant that the plaintiffs bringing the suit were no longer the considered the original copyright holders (Eriq Gardner, “Timbaland Escapes Bollywood Sampling Lawsuit Thanks To Odd Indian Copyright Laws,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, published electronically 29 March 2011, accessed: 29 March 2011. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/timbaland-escapes-bollywood-sampling-lawsuit-172250>).

³⁹ Kevin Miller, “Bolly'hood Remix,” *Institute for Studies In American Music Newsletter* 33, no. 2 (2004).

The emergence of these musical hybrids is especially interesting in a post-9/11 musical scene. While Indo-chic has appeared in Beatles music and in other older songs, the sheer proliferation of this phenomenon “can be partly explained by a curiosity about a region of the world stirred up by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.”⁴⁰ This “sonic Orientalism” emerges at a time when the Orientalist Other is a catchall concept incorporating South Asian beats, “Arabic chicks,” and henna.⁴¹ This circulation also goes both ways: various remixes of “Thoda Resham” (both with and without Truth Hurts’ vocals) became popular in the United States, the Indian subcontinent, and across the world.⁴² “[T]he circulation of tunes and samples is as much about creative agents in global cities, situated in particular networks of meaning, media, and commerce, as it is about modes of industrial music production or legal regimes within and between nation-states.”⁴³

While the narrative behind the GoMamaSita! studios argues for a historical connection between parts of India, Africa, and the Middle East, the idea of cultural imperialism is not so widely discussed. This dialogue might not be obviously necessary because of the reframing of belly dance as a product of the African Diaspora, but the deeper conversation surrounding national identity and Western privilege must be ongoing. In part, Sunyatta’s work on female genital mutilation, as well as other black belly dance groups’ offer of free dance classes, reflects an approach to belly dance as physical and spiritual activism based on wellness as a community ideal.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Wayne Marshall and Jayson Beaster-Jones, “It Takes a Little Lawsuit: The Flowering Garden of Bollywood Exoticism in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” *South Asian Popular Culture* 10, no. 3 (2012): 249-60.

⁴³ Ibid., 250.

The incorporation of an Orientalist strand in black resistant *histories* is not new. In *Afro-Orientalism*, Mullen argues for the constant existence of an “Afro-Orientalism” whose advocates include W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Richard Wright. Mullen’s argument primarily locates this concept as the province of black male intellectuals especially, because this restorative genealogy often featured appreciate Arab princesses suitably awed by their black Western husbands. This “Afro-Orientalism”⁴⁴ is a dynamic counter-discourse, but its power rests on whether its adherents construct a world-view where race, gender, and culture are treated as non-essentialized concepts.⁴⁵

The incorporation of black identity with other Othered groups may be interpreted as a sign of political solidarity, “a commitment to the ideal of freedom.”⁴⁶ Also, because the studio is centered on a communal identity involving a larger African Diasporic community, and its dancers are constructed as partaking of a smaller but more relevant *women’s* community, the same issues of colonialism are not necessarily at play. The women dancing are allies and advocates for these other imagined dancers. Part of the significance for their presence in this space is a connection to this larger community of women, and, for some, a connection to this Afro-Orientalist philosophy as a sign of solidarity.

In “From Slave Ships to Motherships,” Janice Cheddie argues that it’s through the use of remix technologies that black arts practitioners can come together across time and place. I am extending her argument here to highlight the fact that that it’s

⁴⁴ Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xxi.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, 24.

through remixing – the remixing of gestural languages, musical genres, and spatial histories – that allows particular African American artists to re-write themselves into a shared history of diaspora. The constant mediation – through the dance itself, the studio’s sonic Orientalism and a soundscape composed of hip-hop, and a virtual community involving message boards and a yearly conference – suggests that the virtual here is a tool helping to realize that vision of the African Diasporic female body as the inheritrix of a history, a passion, and a community. This sense of inheritance is, perhaps, encouraged through Sunyatta’s teaching style; the growing trend in African American women’s political projects that blend the spiritual, creative, embodied and political as envisioned by Akasha Hull in *Soul Talk*; and the studio’s centering of black bodies and histories as its reason for existence.

All of the belly dance classes I have taken emphasized the authenticity of the music used during class, whether that authenticity is demonstrated through the teacher’s insistence on using tracks from Natacha Atlas, Amr Diab, Arabic club remixes of Shakira singles, or carefully orchestrated Arab tunes from the *Bellydance Superstars* CD series. In performances where the authenticity of the music is not considered a factor in judging a dancer’s quality, musical sources ranged from hardcore industrial to Spanish-influenced Celtic lullabies to Japanese techno. The Belly Horror Show organized by DC Tribal did not include any songs performed in Arabic or Farsi. In fact, the majority of its performers drew on classical Indian dance, the aesthetics of Japanese horror cinema, or anime. This disconnect between the source of the music used and the source of the gestural languages overlaying belly dance’s core dance moves mark the transition of belly dancing as a cultural product

with a particular history to belly dancing as a style of dance and performance.

This shifted historical perspective necessitates a lifestyle change as a component of both this and its chora-status. In fact, Sunyatta describes her work with BOCA as a spiritual mission.

It's a mission. I feel called to it. The ancestors wake me up at night to talk to me about it. I wouldn't get a moment's rest at night until I did it....I demand my students take it seriously, I yell at people, and I want them to know I do it out of love. It's really out of love. It's out of love for the art form....I moved here because of a boyfriend, who was the main one who didn't believe in what I was doing. Black women belly dancing? And the health thing? Black women don't do that, they don't wanna do that, they don't want to be holistic, they don't want to go vegetarian...That's how I got here. After teaching at Dr. Barack's, I realized we needed our own space. A women's space....We're moving, reinstating ancestral ways, the idea of the sexuality of healing.⁴⁷

Amen's reframing of the body as a site of resistant history, with wellness and the erotic acting as a component of that, creates a *holistic* insurgent history. The emphasis on dance as healing and nutrition as a component of spirituality suggests an interpretation of the body as a tool to in the spiritual resistance to cultural assault.

Because of the nature of this class, the studio's borders are extremely permeable, even as acceptance into its environs is based around admittance to a restricted community. The space appears to spiral, instating its narrative on the body of the dancers as they act within the space, the physical dynamic of the space itself,

⁴⁷ Amen, Interview, November 11, 2007.

and the bodies in question as they transition back to their normal lives. This transition and its implied psychological reproduction of the dance space is a component of Sunyatta's pedagogy.

The emphasis on community and the holistic self is carried through in the philosophies surrounding Sunyatta's treatment of the teachers she trains. First, they bring their children into the studio with them. The children (ages 2, 4, and 10 years old) participate in class, offer to help students learn moves, or reprimand students not displaying proper dance decorum, including appropriate use of the seating area. The classes themselves incorporate multiple teaching styles, but constantly highlight narrative (why are you doing this? and for whom?) and spirituality (the body is the language of the universe, and the act of dancing is a prayer to that universe). These last two are often constructed within a heterosexist framework essentializing gender identities. The watcher generally has a male/sexualized gaze, and the prayer is often framed as a female yin dancing against a male yang. While men sometimes participate in the class, these overarching narratives of the dance as either feminized and connected to women's communities, or feminized and performed for a male gaze remain constants.

During class, the teachers talk about belly dancing as a way of creating mental, physical, and emotional well being, with a particular emphasis on Africana traditions as a way of fostering that wellness. This spiritual component is a major aspect of the space, a subsidiary of the larger historical narrative. Spirituality, as it is treated in the confines of the studio, is a communal activity, and the result of an unlearning, a decolonization of the mind. Sunyatta's goal is to not only treat belly

dancing as a form of African dance, but also to treat it as a component of holistic wellness, a revelatory dance, and a fount of feminine fertility in a world set against the organic and holistic. Sunyatta enjoins her students to remember that dancing is both a pragmatic and beautiful act. The same stomach undulations that feel like such an accomplishment and look so snaky are the same stomach undulations that do a great deal to alleviate menstrual cramps. The cultural center acts like a heterotopic place of “return,” a “homeplace”⁴⁸ whose balm can be felt for days at a time. That this balm conflates holistic wellbeing with sore muscles noticed during the return to the working world is a minor reiteration of one of the larger ironies of this holistic project: how can a place of healing be one of restricted access?

When Sunyatta established the studios in Takoma Park and DC, she specifically wanted to create a space where belly dancing was articulated as a black, African-Diasporic dance. “If we’re going to do this dance,” she said, “then we’re going to talk about our very great, very black grandmother. It’s not meant to be an exclusionary event. It’s just a proper telling of the story.”⁴⁹ This political component does not elide the issue of sexuality. Sunyatta describes the studio as “*women’s space*. We’re moving, reinstating ancestral ways, the idea of the sexuality of healing. Even though people of color are thought of as being really sexual, as having a hyper sexual persona, [we’re] very conservative on the outside. There’s a lot going on, there’s a lot of pain, there’s a lot we’ve put behind closed doors. We want to reinstate the old ways of a safe space for women...[like] a big womb, a big yoni, something taboo like the magic of menstrual blood, something for-special. Making women feel

⁴⁸ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990). 43.

⁴⁹ Amen, Interview, November 11, 2007.

comfortable in their own skin.”

The GoMamaSita! Cultural Center is a site where radical history is performed. Its positioning as such is based on its founder’s reframing of belly dancing as a product of the African Diaspora. This reframing deeply informs its teachers’ pedagogical methods, in particular its treatment of teaching as a communal activity and the presence of their children in the communal space. This idea of community permeates the space and its radical historical narrative, reframing the dancers and their bodies as in conversation with an imagined African Diasporic community, and an imagined community of women with whom they are in political solidarity. By investigating this space using Korr’s methodology, I found myself focusing more on the political abstracts framing the space (such as the politics surrounding its soundscape) and the politics of the cost of participation. I also found myself contemplating the paradox of performing analytical work while being a participant observer.

Circulating Bodies, Circulating Selves

It appears that the explicitness of BOCA’s mission, as well as the constant pedagogical reiteration of that mission in studio design, soundscape, and virtual presence, is vital components of its success as a community-building space. The dancing body, here, becomes a vital component in the participatory grammar of this space, with the aches and pains of sore muscles acting as constant reminders of new histories and communities and a reminder of the physical spatiality of the digital African diaspora. The body and its presentation become the constancies of the studio’s radical pedagogical commitment to dancers of color, the movement

undergirding in its philosophical commitment to black women's holistic well-being.

But what about sites that are more explicitly virtual? In 1999, Neil Gross writes "In the next century, planet earth will don an electronic skin. It will use the Internet as a scaffold to support and transmit its sensations. This skin is already being



Figure 12: Visible Earth

stitched together.”⁵⁰ The map in Figure 12 below is from NASA, and reflects the locations of permanent lights on the Earth. This map was created using information from the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program.

I include this map for two reasons. First, my project is about rejecting the utopic Information Age-rhetoric describing our shared technological futures as equitable. Without a divestment in colonial projects, not everyone will share in that electronic skin. Second, I wanted to introduce my discussion of the virtual with an image whose immediate genealogy reflects the ways in which the state, place, and flows of capital are intimately connected. Much in the same way creative copyright does not fairly protect Third World subjects, even as it is rhetorically deployed to

⁵⁰ Neil Gross, "The earth will don an electronic skin," *Business Week* (1999), http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99_35/b3644024.htm.

defend the exploitation of these subjects' ancestral resources, an “electronic skin” whose origin is dependent on the commingling of the militaristic and technological *cannot* monitor all its citizen-neurons equitably.

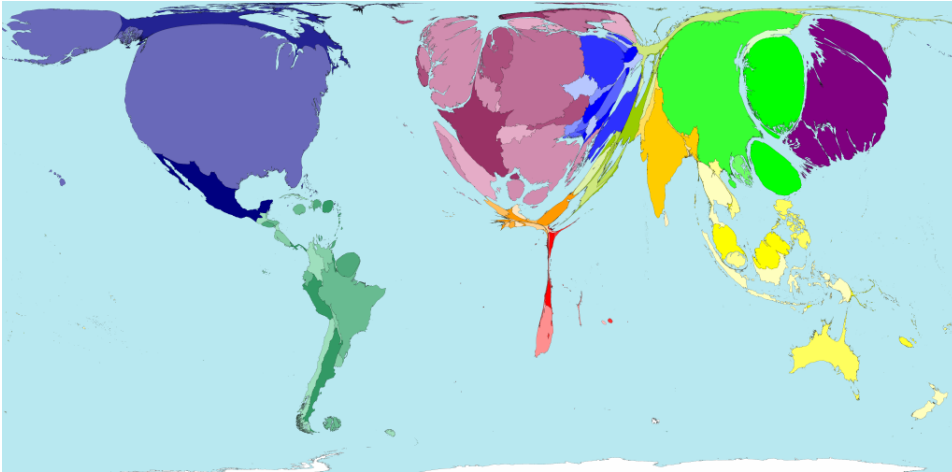


Figure13: Worldmapper Internet users by country

The second map, Figure 13, was generated by WorldMapper, a team of cartographers and researchers who use maps to visually represent statistical data about populations. This map in particular shows the population of citizens across the world using the Internet relative to the country from which they're logging on.⁵¹ As you can see, the brightest lit countries on the *Visible Earth* map have more Internet users than other countries.

The *Visible Earth* image from NASA highlights the fact that talking about the presence of technology as a “skin” isn't necessarily the best or most useful language. This language of the body naturalizes modes of production and differential labor dynamics. Plus, large chunks of the earth are not just naked -- they are literally dark continents haunting the globe. Introducing the Internet users map from

⁵¹ Dorling, Danny, Mark Newman, Graham Allsopp, Anna Barford, Ben Wheele, John Pritchard, and Benjamin D. Hennig. “Internet Users 2002.” *Worldmapper* (2006). Accessed: 7 July 2015. http://www.worldmapper.org/posters/worldmapper_map336_ver5.pdf.

WorldMappers also highlights the role imagined citizenship plays in this conversation – this electronic frontier is imaginatively populated with white, Western bodies even as it's materially populated with users with access to particular types of permanent infrastructure. The bodies discursively associated with these skinny areas, typically bodies of color, drop out of the conversation, even if those bodies are active participants in the technological conversation. By marking these bodies as pathological and as objects of study, they are rendered incapable of participating in the multiple conversations going on around them. Further, marking these bodies as unable to speak then necessitates a constant stream of conversation surrounding these bodies, one that reinforces their inability to speak and presumes their inability to understand, while at the same time rationalizing its own existence. This dialogue between privileged speakers becomes one of the core aspects of academic discourse.

As I mentioned earlier while describing the Bellydancers of Color Association, modular technology (that is, technology based around joining pre-made parts together, like icon-making websites, photocopying, or remixing as seen in hip hop) has helped to create an African Diasporic identity drawing on imagined geographies and imaginative lineage. The technologies of race and new media shape and inform each other. Something similar to these two examples occurs in the blogosphere in the context of antiracist projects. Cheddie highlights the fact that cyberspace and the experience of diaspora involve non-linear understandings of time and space, interconnectivity (meaning they're performative and participatory), and ability to overlap multiple times, identities, or zones, helping it to become a place where discussions of identity, solidarity, and community can be articulated through a

“web of connections.”⁵²

One particularly useful example of this web of connections would be the archival work associated with a fandom event known as Racefail ‘09, an incident in the feminist science fiction and fantasy fandoms where author Elizabeth Bear suggested using friends and fans as research tools when writing characters of color. This seemingly benign statement exploded as members of the anti-racist blogosphere pushed Bear to think critically about privilege, tokenization, and the politics of being the white female author defining how to write black characters. The blogger Rydra Wong collected every post associated with RaceFail 2009, creating a backdated archive of more than 200 links.⁵³ As you sort through the links, you’ll see that each blogger engages in cross-linking and that the issues raised are linked by theme and ethnicity. You will also see that the bloggers’ *imagined* bodies (that of an activist and that of a racialized citizen) become potent conceits as sites of rallying.⁵⁴ Who’s linking to whom and why reflects allegiances (political and social) and also the political cohorts in which these authors are locating themselves, again acting as the strut work of a web of connection. Cross-posting, linking, and guest posting is a way of establishing the lay of a virtual land. A next stage of this project will begin a cartography of the anti-racist, anti-sexist blogosphere, situating the bloggers included

⁵² Richelieu, Dianne. “Rooted Networks, Relational Webs and Powers Of Connection: Rethinking Human and Political Ecologies,” *Geoforum* 38, no. 3 (2007): 433-37.

⁵³ Rydra Wong, “RaceFail ‘09,” <http://rydra-wong.livejournal.com/146697.html>.

⁵⁴ These imagined bodies are hotly contested and protected. In 2014, the #yourslipisshowing hashtag campaign documented the efforts of antiblack 4chan users attempting to embarrass feminists of color, particularly black and Asian feminists. According to *Vice*, at least one of these fake accounts had several thousand followers. Ultimately, blogger and author Shafiqah Hudson (@sassycrass on Twitter and StrandedMermaidInc on Tumblr) exposed the campaign and began archiving the fake accounts (Fruszina Eordogh, “What the Internet’s Most Infamous Trolls Tell Us About Online Feminism,” *Vice: Motherboard*. June 20 2014. Vice Media LLC. Available: <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/trolls-4chan-online-feminism-women-of-color>).

here as part of an anti-oppression global citizen's movement.

As belly dance moves through cyberspace as a style of dance, it accrues a series of political, social, and cultural implications whose meanings shift as the dance form itself cycles through new knowledge worlds. In *Body Language*, Kimberly Lau argues that organizations like Sisters in Shape and other black women's wellness groups make a specific kind of claim to identity politics.⁵⁵ This claim complicates both race and gender, using a "health and exercise project for black women [to act as] a community, a culture, and a movement."⁵⁶ In particular, when connecting black women's emotional and physical wellness to a sense of black community, shared cultural mythos, such as the stereotype of the strong black women are reshaped into an engagement with "the black woman's strong body."⁵⁷ This re-imagining of black women's strength as an investment in self-care, wellness, and health "represent[s] a mode of cultural activism and open[s] up new ways of imagining the strong black woman."⁵⁸ Here, I build on Tara Brabazon's article, "Fitness is a Feminist Issue," in which she highlights the fact that "[t]o move fitness beyond the self-help discourse, *self making* must transform into *sense making*."⁵⁹ This is in part the mission of blogs like *The Black Girl's Guide to Weight Loss*, where Erika Kendall writes,

Why do I write this for you? Because I, along with every other Black woman who has even a passing interest in fitness, can relate. It's what we go through every day, and I think it's only fair that I address you and your concerns in a

⁵⁵ *Body Language: Sisters In Shape, Black Women's Fitness, and Feminist Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011). caps

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁹ Brabazon, "Fitness is a Feminist Issue," 77 (emphasis in original).

way we wish ours were addressed...The reason my blog carries the title it does is not because it is a guide to weight loss for Black girls; it is a guide to weight loss by a Black girl.⁶⁰

Kendall's explicit engagement with race and racism is reflected in her posts on eating disorders, black women's experiences of sexual harassment, her reflections on the controversy regarding Michelle Obama's rear, and her analysis of the editing of Shirley Sherrod's NAACP speech on black farmers. Kendall's blog has been largely embraced in the black blogosphere, garnering praise from *Afrobella*, *Madame Noire*, and *Black Girls Run*. Tracing the movement of this blog and its associated images provides an opportunity to reflect critically on the web of connections in which antiracist antisexist discourse 'moves' online.

Based upon who is linking to whom, and what they are saying about these links, I think it's possible to argue that these authors, including Rydra Wong and Erika Kendall of *Black Girl's Guide to Fitness*, and the "web of connections"⁶¹ in which they are participating, are active participants in a conversation going beyond ethnically specific blogospheres and into a larger one, where membership is defined through solidarity, anti-racist work, and hope. Further, I think identifying these bloggers as workers participating in the same projects – that is, disrupting the imageries associated with people of color, documenting and resisting discursive injustice, etc. – lays the groundwork for resistance to a kind of imperial blogging –

⁶⁰ Erika Nicole Kendall, "Blogging While Black: On Having An Accidentally Controversial Blog Title," *Black Girl's Guide to Weight Loss: The Op-Eds* (2012), <http://blackgirlsguidetoweightloss.com/the-op-eds/blogging-while-black-on-having-an-accidentally-controversial-blog-title/>.

⁶¹ Dianne Rocheleau and Robin Roth, "Rooted Networks, Relational Webs, and Powers of Connection: Rethinking Human and Political Ecologies," *Geoforum* 38, no. 3 (2007).

where a new discursive “frontier” is re-colonized into a world where black and brown bodies are invisible laborers.

The blogosphere and a dance studio may seem like different worlds. However, threaded through each is a concern for the body, and its rhetorical potential as a site of citizenship. By talking about these different sites in one project I can talk about the theoretical connections between each, as well as highlight their theoretical utility in discussion of embodied pedagogy. Standard academic discourse constructs theory as a “bodiless entity,”⁶² as a force that only exists on the mind’s side of the mind/body divide. When theory is challenged by the “messy text”⁶³ of a body bearing multiple labels, it reveals the fact that academic concepts like hegemony have real world consequences. As Cindy Cruz writes: “The most profound and liberating politics come from interrogations of our own social locations, a narrative that works outward from our specific corporealities.”⁶⁴ Further, the body is the source of the self in flux, a passionate inquisitor, demanding answers to questions traditional narratives of history ignore: how did we survive? And for whom? These questions, emerging from a body constructed by dominant culture as an “object of knowledge”⁶⁵ instead of a *subject* able to *share* knowledge, form the core of an embodied pedagogy. Treating the body as a source of affective and sensory knowledge connects the personal to the political

⁶² Cindy Cruz, “Towards an Epistemology of a Brown Body,” in *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, edited by Dolores Delgado Bernal, C. Alejandra Elenes, Francisca E. Godinez and Sofia Villenas, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 62.

⁶³ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 28.

and empowers multiple speakers.⁶⁶

The knowledge accessed through the politically resistant body is knowledge based around the lived experiences, and argues for the self as soma, constantly evolving in response to movement, sensation, and the limits imposed on both. Understanding that the body is framed by the social processes created and enforced by capitalism resists the idea that human psyches are unmarked by their social circumstances. This understanding can be oddly freeing. “I seek self-liberation when I write from my particular stance...Our culture, our identity, is not entirely of our own making. We participate in and act out what we are handed by history.”⁶⁷

Treating history as a series of processes, and not as the great progressive and linear tide of Western expansion, creates moments of surprising synergy. The women behind Bellydancers of the Color Association and the fitness bloggers in the anti-racist blogosphere are both arguing for alternative narratives of selfhood and citizenship for communities of color. While the members of the antiracist blogosphere rely on a common language to create a sense of community, Amen founded a performance-based organization, a cultural center, and studio devoted to disseminating her alternative narrative of the history of belly dancing. Her reframing of the body as a site of history, healing, and resistance creates a holistic insurgent history, one with social interpretations of the body as its starting point. Amen’s emphasis on dance as healing and nutrition as a component of spirituality suggests an interpretation of the body grounded in a resistance to cultural assault, and a conscious

⁶⁶ Cornelia Hoogland, “Bodies of Knowledge: Making Sense and Sense-Making,” *Taboo* 4, no. 1 (2000).

⁶⁷ Mari J. Matsuda, *Where is Your Body: and Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 17.

understanding of this insurgent history as a subaltern narrative under constant attack from the policies of coercion that serve the larger structures of hegemony. The body she calls on is one able to fight back against these histories: a valiant imaginary warrior.

I prefaced my analysis with an excerpt from *What the Body Told* (Campo, 1997), the companion text to Rafael Campo's (1996) *The Poetry of Healing*. In these works, Campo examines the place of the body in medical scholarship, chronicles his growing alienation from standard medical discourse, and uses poetry to redress the injuries done to an injured psyche when the body is treated as an inert object, as opposed to an embodied series of political processes. In *What the Body Told*, Campo (1997) shares with the reader "Ten Patients and Another," a poetic cycle examining the circumstances bringing a set of patients to a hospital emergency department. Each poem acts as a mini-restoration of humanity to subjects reduced by medical discourse to objects in need of analysis.

While Campo's mission primarily focuses on the unification of medicine and poetry, I focus instead on his argument regarding pedagogy. He argues that treating the body should be like treating the whole self. In order to incorporate this philosophy into his pedagogy, he introduces intersectional analysis into his students' discussion of case histories, and includes poetry for both students and patients in his ward rounds.⁶⁸ Campo writes that the incorporation of poetry allows him to welcome the body into a discussion of the patient's medical history. He also indicts a health system structured to reinforce Foucault's concept of the unsupervised but monitored body in

⁶⁸ Zoe Ingalls, "A Professor of Medicine Discovers the Healing Power of Poetry," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 Feb 1997.

Discipline and Punish: a system that presents the disciplined body as unable to speak for itself. By reframing the body as both a site of dominant narratives and a site of resistance, Campo uses embodiment to fight against historical inevitability and suggest paths of resistance to social dominance.

I would like to conclude this brief analysis of the body as a component of radical pedagogy with the final stanza of Campo's poem, "What the Body Told." While bodily knowledge may begin in a place of pain, it has the potential to end in a place of glory and liberation.

I've studied medicine until I cried

All night. Through certain books, a truth unfolds.

Anatomy and physiology,

The tiny sensing organs of the tongue –

Each nameless cell contributing its needs.

It was fabulous, what the body told.

— Rafael Campo, "What the Body Told," in *What the Body Told*

CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARD A DIGITAL PRAXIS OF LOVE

As cultural critics, we must become movement literate.

– Jane Desmond¹

The thing about the belly is that it is simultaneously the most real and the most abstract body part. It is a region rather than a spot on the map.

– Jane Smiley²

In her 1993 article “Embodying Difference,” Jane Desmond argues that cultural studies should begin taking dance seriously as text and metaphor. She writes, “We can trace historical and geographic changes in complex kinesthetic systems, and can study comparatively symbolic systems based on language, visual representation, and movement.”³ In participating in the online communities associated belly dance, yoga, and black wellness, I began to see an opportunity to investigate an electronic skein. This skein, knotted together from histories, technologies, fictions, and fantasies, constitutes a powerful backdrop onto which multiple users, dancers, and instructors projected the dramatic tales of healing goddesses, hidden wars, and forgotten ancestries.

This wasn’t the project I imagined I’d write. It was not until years after my rape, my student activism post-9/11, and my immersion into belly dance that I began

¹ Jane C. Desmond, “Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 26 (1993): 33-63.

² Jane Smiley, “Belly, Dancing, Belly, Aching, Belly, Beasts,” in *Body*, ed. by Sharon Sloan Fiffer and Steve Fiffer (New York: Bard, 1999), 128.

³ Desmond, “Embodying Difference,” 34.

situating this hobby into a larger history of personal and national trauma. Even then, I thought I would be writing about individual wellness, not cultural wellness; individual survival, not cultural survival; and individual movement, not social movements. Five years and several thousand words later, it still seems outrageously bold to claim online communities surrounding dance and wellness as a site of interest to the digital humanities and academia as a whole. *However* (and my best work has always come out of *however*), the online communities and conversations surrounding belly dance has offered me as a researcher and activist an opportunity to think through the role of copyright and intellectual property in wellness; the role of gif-making in creating a taxonomic catalog of wellness practices; and the critical use of digital ephemera in capturing the sass and salience in digital activist praxis.

In this dissertation, I used belly dance and the conversations it spurs through its choreographies, imagery, and fantasies to illustrate the ways in which conversations about dance and wellness become conversations about race, imperialism, and geopolitics. I highlighted the coevolution of the black women's wellness movement during the 1990s, Information Age rhetoric emergent from that same time period, and the discursive connections between this rhetoric and cyberspace as a cultural metaphor for an increasingly militarized civil society. Using the 1990s as a backdrop, I described the role the circulation of mp3s play in the Afrocentric ideologies of the Bellydancers of Color Association; discussed belly dancing forums and blogs as public reflections on Western women's embodiment in post-9/11 America; and used the work of three particular belly dance and yoga instructors and the circulation of their mythos to further analyze the significance of

race and ethnicity in online wellness communities. I did this in order to knit together an electronic skein that incorporated strands from feminist corporeal studies, black women's wellness-based activism, and the creation and circulation of digital rhetoric as activist praxis. I will now conclude by introducing the idea of a digital praxis of love as a useful concept for analyzing the creative work of antiracist bloggers, particularly those bloggers specifically aligning themselves with wellness politics, self-care, and health outcomes for communities of color.

The questions framing my work on technology focus on the critical utility of the digital humanities in addressing issues of race, gender, and ethnicity. In this dissertation, I hope that I have illustrated the complexities associated with writing about wellness online. I also hope that I have illustrated some of the creative ways that antiracist antisexist activists have made use of the digital commons. Finally, I hope that this discussion of community and the body has illustrated future avenues of research for a digital humanities landscape where praxis is too often defined by the ability to code. In the following section, I describe the connections between my work on belly dance and online community, and point toward a need for further research on the role of love in digital projects.

“Sensitive Black Boys/ Don’t Exist”

As I write this, it is March 6th, 2015, and #blackout is trending on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook. It's a day to celebrate blackness, to post selfies tagged #blackout, to celebrate black digital communities, and black love. There has been a flurry of beautiful brown and black faces on my Facebook timeline, in the secret POC and Fashion group I subscribe to, on my Tumblr dashboard. These images range from

the tongue in cheek (Figure 14 is a movie clip repurposed to celebrate the black Tumblr community)⁴ and the poignant (Figure 15 is screenshot of a text post reminding #blackout participants that they are loved).⁵

I focused on love, dance, and technology because I love dancing. However, I could have written this dissertation on #blacklivesmatter, on #blackbeauty, on #kemeticyoga, and in each of these digital archives, the same elements would have appeared: an insistence that black bodies deserve love, deserve care, and that this care must emerge from an engagement with both infrastructural oppression and the chronicling of individual experiences with trauma. This realization is why this dissertation is not the story of one woman's empowerment through belly dance, one trauma survivor's healing through movement, or one researcher's quest to test a few ethnographic strategies.

⁴ Olivia--Nope. "#blackout." *Olivia Nope*. March 6, 2015. Tumblr. Accessed: March 6, 2015. Available: <http://olivia--nope.tumblr.com/post/112949258202/phuckindope-squaddddd>.

⁵ inaudible-reign. "Reminder:." Maristoviante. March 6, 2015. Tumblr. Accessed: March 6, 2015. Available: <http://mariareadsalot.tumblr.com/post/112849130199/reminder>. The original post by inaudible-reign has been deleted; however, it was reblogged over sixteen thousand times, including to my own tumblr.



Figure 14: Still from a .gif created for #blackout

I see a liberatory potential in the circulation of images of bodies in motion. The anti-racist blogosphere draws on extant conversations about writing, popular culture, genre fiction, and race as a means of performing “coalitional consciousness” in online contexts. Online communities surrounding dance and wellness often center around the online personae of amateur and professional dancers, fostered through forums, blogs, Twitter, and other sites of interactive virtual play, *and* are centered on specific dance studios, local dance cultures, and dance performances. In both contexts, the work associated with maintaining these literal and figurative sites (including the affective labor associated with making these sites a safer space) is often performed for free.

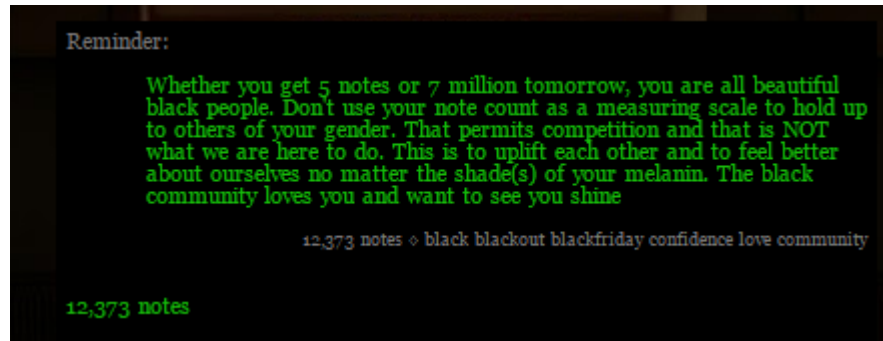


Figure 15: Text post from #blackout

These virtual and material labors of love – blogging projects, metasites collecting historical research, and Tumblrs blurring the line between the personal and the political – often participate in larger social justice movements centered on body positivity, wellness, and wellbeing. Because of this, I’ve begun to see calls for selfies like #blackout as explicit examples of a digital praxis of love, where love is defined as both a politic of self-care and heralding to communal care. My use of love as a kind of political and social activist work draws on Chela Sandoval’s arguments in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, where she describes love as a “set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects toward a differential mode of consciousness.”⁶ “Love,” for Sandoval, “is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global coalitions of citizen activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation.”⁷

The digital acts as the vehicle for creative interchange, a structuring mechanism for these conversations, with various sites acting as places and spaces. Powerfully, these discussions often explicitly link the personal and the political, translate academic terms for race and racism into everyday language, and illustrate

⁶ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), 139.

⁷ Ibid., 183.

the role of the body in antiracist antisexist theorizing as object, site of labor, identification, and site of theorization. Thinking critically about the role of the body (material and discursive) in fostering this sense of community builds on Donna Haraway's argument that *cyborg* bodies blur the line between the biological and the technological. This last is particularly important when analyzing gifs and their movement online;

The gif, in other words, is more a matter of creation than recycling. At the heart of this creative intervention lies a recognition of cinematic movement as a force of differentiation and metamorphosis.⁸

⁸ Hampus Hagman, "The Digital Gesture: Rediscovering Cinematic Movement Through Gifs," *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* 21 (2012), <http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2012/12/29/hagman/>.

Black Yogis

Photo May 01, 2015 41 notes



Peace be still.
#SoulPower #Healer #Baltimore #FreddieGray

Photo May 01, 2015 38 notes

Figure 16: 5/1/2015 post on BlackYogis. The image features a black woman dressed all in white like a santera doing a sage smudge in front of a row of police in riot gear.

My engagement with this type of visual rhetoric builds on the “horror” of the flexible body Virginia Keft Kennedy describes as key in making belly dance and yoga so transgressive upon their initial introduction to the United States. Instead of a contorting torso, bending where no woman should bend, gifs and black selfies capture a body whose mortality has become national myth, whose unwellness has become the dark face of obesity in America, and whose creator is supposed to be technologically ignorant. In these conversations, the initial “color blind” rhetoric associated with Information Age rhetoric is flipped on its head; instead of race and identity no longer mattering, they are of paramount importance. Because of this, I argue that a digital praxis of love mingles the creative and the political, the technological and the embodied, and the affective and analytical. It is about keeping conversations moving,

and insisting on the right to speak honestly and vulnerably about pain and survival. I came to this definition because for me it holds a kind of explanatory power; it provides a larger context for the work of bloggers such as BlackGirlinMaine and the Tumblr user BlackYogis. These bloggers use their online work to discuss the commingled effects of racism and sexism on black women's bodies. Figure 16 represents benediction and purification in the wake of the Baltimore protests following the murder of Freddie Gray.⁹

BlackGirlinMaine,¹⁰ known offline as Shay Stewart-Bouley, uses her blog to reflect on parenthood and experience of being black in Maine. In her blog, she talks about aging, parenthood, and living in an overtly racist and sexist society. She is deliberately and consciously honest about feeling alone, isolated, and angry as a result of being a black woman. She writes,

I am a woman living in a body that some deem to be inferior and in a world where I must always be on guard. It's tiring.... Why I didn't have a large panic attack before is a testament to the strength of yoga in my life.¹¹

In this blogpost, Stewart-Bouley describes liveblogging her ER visit as a result of a panic attack, her feelings of isolation, and her anger at well-meaning acquaintances who comment on her supposed stress. She highlights that she's not

⁹ Rollan, Robin. "Peace Be Still." *Black Yogis*. May 1, 2015. Tumblr. Accessed: June 29, 2015. Available: <http://blackyogis.tumblr.com/post/117861447857/peace-be-still-soulpower-healer-baltimore>.

¹⁰ Shay Stewart-Bouley, "About Me," *Black Girl in Maine* (2008), <http://blackgirlinmaine.com/about/>.

¹¹ Shay Stewart-Bouley, "Laying My Burden Down or the Struggle of a Black woman," *Black Girl in Maine* (2014), published electronically April 15 2014, accessed August 25 2014. <http://blackgirlinmaine.com/racial-and-cultural/laying-my-burden-down-or-the-struggle-of-a-black-woman/>.

stressed; she's angry. She writes, "What I feel most days when I am sitting with myself is rage, rage at a world that seeks to invalidate my very existence...rage that I must wear a mask for my own safety and protection. My struggle is the struggle of many Black women in a country that doesn't honor or respect Black bodies."¹²

In contrast to the searing honesty of *BGIM*, BlackYogis on Tumblr seems like a simpler project. This user is simply reblogging images of black people doing yoga, acting as a "curator"¹³ to pre-existing content found online. However, BlackYogis' tagging practices, their emphasis on black yoga-practitioners as yoginis and instructors, and her focus on yoga as a community activity adds a complexity to the ostensibly simple mission of image recirculation. In this case, image, text, and indexing become part of a larger conversation on black bodies, wellness, and black community online and off.

In an interview with *The Atlantic*, Robin Rollan, the blogger behind BlackYogis, emphasizes that African Americans "don't have a great track record when it comes to preventative health. Wellness is not really valued."¹⁴ In an email interview with *Chelsea Loves Yoga*, a blog centered on making wellness practices accessible to black Americans, Rollan explicitly links her commitment to circulating images of black yogis as part of a larger social justice mission. She writes,

I quickly noticed that there were barely any images online or in magazines of yogis of color and in particular *Black* yogis. This is by no means a unique

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lee Rainie, Joanna Brenner, and Kristen Purcell, "Photos and Videos as Social Currency Online," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, September 2012, accessed October 8, 2012. <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Online-Pictures/Main-Findings>.

¹⁴ Rosalie Murphy, "Why Your Yoga Class Is So White," *The Atlantic* (2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/07/why-your-yoga-class-is-so-white/374002/>.

situation but just a symptom of a larger issue of how images of people of color are handled in the main stream. Aside from Russell Simmons and the amazing Faith Hunter, there was virtually a “black-out.” For the most part, “blackouts” are the norm in the media except when it comes to the ills of society, in which case images of black people are ridiculously over represented.¹⁵



Figure 17: Screen capture from Pharrell's Grammy Performance

Is Rollan a creator or a curator of online content? Is her emphasis on the recirculation of gifs and still images a critical making project? The easy answer is *no* – after all, she neither created nor contributed to Tumblr's design. While her use of tagging and captions shifts the meaning of the embedded images, her use reflects an engagement with the modular aspects of these technologies, as opposed to its innovation. I don't like that answer. It's too narrow, and dismisses the affective and intellectual significance of the work antiracist bloggers contribute to online conversations about race, ethnicity, and wellness. It also ignores the impact these conversations have on their source media. For example, Pharrell's "Happy" began as part of the soundtrack to *Despicable Me II*, a children's animated film. It's become

¹⁵ Robin Rollan, "Yogi in the Community: Robin Rollan (Black Yogis Tumblr)," *ChelseaLovesYoga: Activism & Yoga* (2013), <http://www.chelsealovesyoga.com/yogi-in-the-community/>.

one of the first repurposed protest songs of the 21st century.¹⁶ In YouTube videos such as “We Are Tunis” and “Happy in Tehran,” the song’s narrative about joy and play becomes linked to a resistance to political repression. In fact, “Happy in Tehran’s” dancers and director were arrested for “hurt[ing] public chastity.”¹⁷ Most recently, Pharrell’s 2015 Grammy performance featured black church dance vernacular, capoeira, break dance, and the “Hands Up Don’t Shoot” pose popularized by Ferguson protestors after the murder of Michael Brown, as seen in Figure 17. Pharrell himself performed as a “swagged out Pullman Porter,”¹⁸ perhaps in reference to those courageous Pullman Porters who brought Emmett Till’s mutilated body home to Chicago after his police-endorsed murder by white supremacists. It is both the literal and metaphorical movement of “Happy” that interests me: the movement vernaculars associated with it, its movement through communities, and its move to incorporate the shifting valences of its multiple meanings into one performance.

Gif-making in the context of fan-based communities provides another vivid example of the incorporation of moving images’ movement into an antiracist critique of the American police state. The set of gifs featured in Figure 18,¹⁹ for example, is particularly interesting. It incorporates a quote from a popular Tumblr blogger howtobeterrell, who writes on black queerness and black masculinity,²⁰ into a *Teen*

¹⁶ Shan Wang, “How This Became the Surprising Protest Song of Our Generation,” *Policy Mic* (2014), <http://mic.com/articles/85423/how-this-became-the-surprising-protest-song-of-our-generation>.

¹⁷ Ali Hamedani, “Iranian Pharrell Fans Arrested for Happy Tribute Video,” *BBC Persian* (2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-27499642>.

¹⁸ Mordecai Cargill, “Mordecai Cargill on Twitter,” Twitter, <https://twitter.com/mcargill28/status/564614080947044352>.

¹⁹ TeenWolfTags, “Tags about the show Teen Wolf,” in *#boyd*, ed. winterinhetardis, celestialcow, and flamesofatimelord (Tumblr, 2013). Accessed August 29 1024, <http://teenwolftags.tumblr.com/post/59648939263/wolvesofcolor-exploring-fandoms-x-in>.

²⁰ howtobeterrell, “Sensitive Black Boys Fall Through the Cracks,” *howtobeterrell: Malcolm X in*

Wolf fandom discussion on the material and discursive erasure of black boys in *Teen Wolf*, using the character of Vernon Boyd. Howtobeterrell's quote, "Sensitive black boys don't exist because we turn them into monsters and then ask why they're in pain," is mingled with 3-5 second clips from *Teen Wolf*. These clips include a profile shot of Boyd in the classroom, a pan over his "missing" poster, his silhouette from the night he changed into a werewolf, and an image of him dying with an arrow in his shoulder.



Figure 18: "Sensitive Boys" from Wolves of Color

Using the telos of visual rhetorics, this gifset asks, "If werewolf stories are normally stories about puberty, then what does this suggest for *living* sensitive black boys, so often murdered by hunters in the guise of institutions, state violence, and

a Dress (2013), <http://howtobeterrell.tumblr.com/post/53169511181/sensitive-black-boys-fall-through-the-cracks>.

political erasure?” Boyd’s introduction to lycanthropy and his death at the hands of those sworn to hunt werewolves are mingled with the rare moments of characterization he received; his lonely gaze in the classroom, his status as “missing,” and his sudden monstrous shadow.²¹

Rarely do bloggers like howtobeterrell or BlackYogis make it big. Instead, they are summoning up an ephemeral community, a space that is not safe, not funded, and not permanent, but instead balanced on the precipice of all three. These projects branch the curatorial and creative work associated with the circulation of images online, situating these images as texts in a longer history of global antiracist work.

My goal is *still* not to use love as a tonic, or even a way of escaping an engagement with the militarization of cyberspace or these conversations’ contribution to the further corporatization of cyberspace. Instead, I am suggesting that drawing on a discussion of affect undergirding social justice activism and praxis offers a way to reconsider the significance of body, gesture, and wellness in the context of digital humanist projects emphasizing social justice. Perhaps thinking strategically and critically about love and its relationship to wellness in online and community activism might illustrate the ways in an interdisciplinary conversation about praxis can include such work as the creation and curation of yoga and belly dance fan sites and the role the political commitments of these bloggers takes in framing the kind of work they do online.

²¹ I am specifically using the *Teen Wolf* fandom here because of its fans’ tendencies to erase characters of color, including Scott McCall, the eponymous teen wolf around whom the show centers. In response to this erasure, fans of color have used .gif creation and other fanworks to capture the hidden stories of secondary characters of color.

EPILOGUE: LEISURELY CRITIQUE — AN INTRODUCTION TO THE APPENDICES

American Studies begins in the everyday, in the analysis of the common, the ephemeral, and the plain. Its researchers couch their projects in imperatives and utility, illustrating the “so what?” alongside the theory, the framework, and the site of inquiry. Throughout the evolution of American Studies, this guiding question has coalesced around citizenship and agency. More recently, this “so what?” has argued for the impact of race and other identities of difference in framing these two major issues. More recently still, the field has begun grappling with globalization, using this concept to trouble borders, bodies, space, and place. This dissertation engages this ongoing conversation by exploring sites where definitions of leisure and play are explored, sites with amorphous boundaries, and sites where understandings of the body vacillate between the material and the virtual. Further, this dissertation challenges the larger field of American studies to incorporate embodiment, wellness studies, and the digital humanities into this analysis.

This dissertation also connects work on embodiment and pedagogy with a discussion of the technological as a world-changing tool. I do so in order to highlight the ways in which embodied play can become a kind of world-changing and truth-making strategy. Discussing these issues extends ongoing conversations in the field of cyberculture studies. I am taking concerns threaded throughout these fields – embodiment, literacy, community, and technology as a means of facilitating social justice projects – and investigated them using sites framed by 1990’s rhetoric

surrounding war and the body, a fetishization of technology, and an overt concern with wellness as a citizenship project. However, the very banality of these same concerns sometimes made it difficult to notice when and how they appeared. I needed to pay attention to paying attention.

But how?

The answer emerged from my teaching. Appendix A is one of my sample journal entries, initially formatted to model for my students what a research journal entry could look like when doing a cultural landscape study. Normally I recommend ordering these journal entries by date; typically, this is most useful because it highlights the landscape's evolution over time. However, since this was an actual journal entry from a current project of mine, I decided to use this as an opportunity to reflect on what types of patterns emerge when instead of focusing on the *landscape*, one focuses on the *soundscape*. What emerged from this formatting shift provided an opportunity to think of these musical selections not as *sounds* but as *objects*, whose provenance could be traced back and forth through time and space.

Appendices B and C began as worksheets for another class. Initially, I used Appendix B as an in-class writing prompt when teaching about “technology” as a theoretical concept. Basically, we used this worksheet to analyze the technologies framing the undergraduate experience of wellness at UMCP. I used this worksheet to explore the multiple spaces where belly dance appears, and to highlight the moments where technology supplements, but does not replace, a particular kind of dance experience. For example, watching and rehearsing dance routines as instructed by DVDs is a multimodal experience working in conversation with the experience of

performing in a studio. Both involve the self-objectification necessary for analyzing one's attainment of a taxonomy of movement *as well as* a kind of storytelling *to* the self *about* the self in terms of the dance's history and significance. This worksheet challenged me as a researcher to remember that these technologies do not supplant each other. Instead, they reverberate, warping each other and themselves as they move through space and time.

Appendix C began as a guide for undergraduate students doing an autoethnographic assignment while playing a children's video game. After several years of using this reading guide, I began incorporating a critical engagement with the role of movement in structuring digital experiences in the questions and journaling prompts. This reflected my own growing engagement with movement as a multimodal concept. I ultimately returned to this worksheet to assist me in paying attention to paying attention; the questions and prompts act as mental stop signs, a necessary tool when researching movement and technology. After all, the best pieces of tech and the best dancers make their movement and use appear fluidly inevitable.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES

<p>Sample Journal Entry/notes on music – Jan 2009, updated Sept 2009</p> <p>– Playlists & Diasporas? –</p> <p>**set list from 1/17/2009, intro and hip-hop fusion class**</p> <p>**16 from Belly Horror show by DC Tribal**</p> <p>Creating an “origin”¹ story can lead to a particular sort of cultural essentialism, where cultural products are defined by their point of origin versus their particular creator.</p> <p>Gopinath’s work on “communities of sound”² → context where music is performed impacts the narrative framing that music; argues for a digital, auditory diaspora, where songs are differently valenced depending the specificities of the space in which they are played. Ex: Kelly Rowland’s “Like This” has a different social meaning depending on whether it is played as a warm-up song for a predominantly African American belly dance class or as one of the requests for the slow rock out at Fireplace on a Friday night ~ inc. into Dr. McCune freewrite & make sample playlist?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. “Hizzi Dalli Hizzi” (“Move and Continue to Move”) Instrumental – Traditional Bellydance Music and 12. “Chaiyya Chaiyya” (Shadows/Shades)– <i>Dil Se</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is a song by Lebanese artist Emad Sayyeh, included here because it is one of the more popular songs used by belly dance teachers invested in an “authentic” version of belly dance. “Chaiyya Chaiyya” and other Bollywood songs are also often incorporated as well. Weird, because <i>Dil Se</i> is a really sad movie about rape, depression, and state violence... I think the main char decides to kill herself during it??
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2. “Girl, Put Your Records On” – Corrine Bailey Rae 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BOCA <i>only</i> -- Black British artist, used once or twice as a component of the ending ritual. Its inclusion is as much about the comparatively slower beat as well as its hopeful message surrounding the comfort of relaxation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3. “Umbrella” – Rihanna, 4. “Like This” – Kelly Rowland, and 5.”Crazy” – Gnarls Barkley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All three have been used as either practice songs during the basic beginner class or as choreography pieces for the Hip Hop Bellydance class.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6. “Jimmy” – MIA, 7. “Hussel” – MIA feat. Afrikan Boy, 9. “Don’t Phunk With My Heart” – Black Eyed Peas, 10. “One Thing” – Amerie, 13. “I Put a Spell on You” – Natacha Atlas, and 15. “Galang” – MIA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These songs have all been incorporated in both beginner and hip-hop classes. I include them here in order to highlight the differences between the two types of sampling present in these East/West collaborations. MIA uses samples from Bollywood musicals, and describes them as a component of her identity as a transplanted Sri Lankan artist. “Jimmy” is weird tho, b/c it’s a Bollywood interpretation of a disco beat that’s then got looped and re-synched. ○ “Don’t Phunk With My Heart” also samples 2 Bollywood musicals (<i>Apradh</i> (1972) and <i>don</i> (1978) – credited in discography? Doesn’t look like. Also has Lisa Lisa and Gucci Crew. ○ Amerie describes her use of dhalek drums as a component of her mixed race identity. This identification is a bit troubling, considering she is black American

¹ Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 147.

² Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2005), 29.

and Thai, and dhalek drums are generally used in Indian music??
○ Natacha Atlas considers her music a form of cultural fusion –jazz and French?
• 11. Al Green – “Let’s Stay Together”
○ Generally used as either a practice song or a warm-up song.
• 12. “Rock the Party” – Bombay Rockers and 14. “Tarkan” – Simarik
○ Included as examples of popular music folded in as one big Oriental phantasy – also I think the Bombay Rockers are Dutch/Indian – so it’s interesting to see them using Urdu and English as a song for the Indian diaspora
• 16. VNV Nation – “Forsaken”
○ One of the songs performed by DC Tribal at the Halloween show – great choreo combining Japanese mask dancing/anime imagery w. East Coast Tribal!! ~ potential connection to geek feminism? SF Feminisms?
• 17. “La Tortura” (Arabhangra Remix) – Shakira and 18. “Shakira Is a Dancer” (Shakira’s “Ojos Asi” vs. Madonna’s “Music”) – Jirob Remix
○ Examples of cultural interchange headed the other way. I first heard these two remixes while in Tunisia -- 2006. These, “Rock the Party,” and “Tarkan” → aspects of a counter-discourse framing belly dance as both a historic cultural product and a still extant cultural practice?

APPENDIX B: AFFECTIVE/EFFECTIVE WORKSHEET¹

This is a notes worksheet for tracking affect and effect in journaling on embodiment.

Technologies of Production (production and manipulation of objects, bodies, and concepts)	Technologies of signs (semiotics and signification)
Technologies of Power (where subjects become objects, and where the “I” is disciplined)	Technologies of the Self (where one’s own body is manipulated or transformed by oneself in order to approach a particular idealized state)

¹ Created by Maria I. Velazquez; last revised 5/31/2015

APPENDIX C: “WHAT IS CRITICAL SELF REFLEXIVITY?”¹

What Is Critical Self Reflexivity? – *Maria’s Journaling Guide*

Critical self-reflexivity is a way of positioning yourself and your experiences in the larger world. It’s a lens of analysis, not a series of facts...so the answers you come to might be similar to someone else’s but are not going to be exactly the same.

Begin in the everyday // Pay attention to paying attention.

To get started:

1. Write down/draw your immediate reaction to the dance class or performance. Feel free to disregard the lines on the page – draw circles, make stars, use arrows.
2. Look it over.

Then ask yourself the following questions:

1. What knowledge worlds are overlapping in the context of your response?
2. What types of bodies does the performer or instructor recognize in his/her work? Are there multiple types of bodies imagined into this space?
3. Which bodies are recognized as active or passive in this work? Might the active/passive nature of the body be connected to more than one intersectional category? (i.e. race and gender, gender and disability, race, sexuality, and disability)
4. How might your own body impact the assumptions you make about the bodies at play in this work?
5. What/whose histories are all tangled in your response? Why these histories and not others? What histories are excluded from your response? Why these histories and not others?
6. What is your investment in the reading and your response?
7. What do you have to “unlearn” to make sense of the story of the class? This reading? This assignment? What do you have to “learn?”
8. What is at stake in agreeing (or disagreeing!) with the reading? What about your experiences might be driving your agreement/disagreement?
9. What is the *movement* of this piece? What is your immediate *affective* response to this performance?
10. What work is that response doing? Are you responding to the dance itself or to its implications?
11. What *ideologies* are at work in your affective response? How are they *signified*?

¹ Created by Maria I. Velazquez; last revised 5/31/2015.

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