

The University of Reading

Dis-Orient Express: Belly Dancing, Hybrid Identities and Female Oriental 'Other'

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to the Department of Film, Theatre & Television

June 2016

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged

Edina Husanović

In memory of my Majka Šida, for all her nurture, love and laughter

Acknowledgements

This thesis was developed over a number of conversations with different people that started with being about belly dancing and perceptions of 'Oriental' women in Britain and Europe, to include many other related topics. Many of those conversations took place over coffee in exotic places, but the most important ones were in the offices of my supervisors Teresa Murjas and Lib Taylor at the University of Reading. To them I owe my special gratitude for their forbearance, encouragement and humour throughout the unexpected turns, bumps and delays of this doctoral journey. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Arts and Humanities Research Council in funding this research. Other important conversations have been with all the field research interviewees, and my special gratitude goes to Hilde Canoodt, Donna Mejia, Nana Majstorovic Kozul and Bahar Sarah. I am indebted to all those who made the research journey possible through their valuable contacts and support with finding interviewees and accommodation across Europe and in Istanbul, especially Alma Husanovic, Gerhard Gross, Luise Grinschgl, Aoife O'Brien Rosenmeyer, Anne Weshinskey and Gonca Gümüşayak. I owe my special gratitude to the University of Reading staff and students who helped with making the research performance, especially Lisa Clark, Pamela Wiggin and Chris Bacon. I would like to thank my friends Helena Walsh, Tom Richards, Mark Mallabone, Emily Neale and Johnmichael Rossi for their generous support in enacting the roles of *Dis-Orient Express* attendants. My gratitude also goes to my family and friends for their support throughout this project, especially Jasmina Husanovic, Izeta Husanovic, Melina Sadikovic, Gemma Harding, Hester Berry and Lejla Delalic. In the end, my greatest appreciation goes to Ben Rattenbury for his shared enthusiasm and incredible support in all his roles as a trusted 'Passepartout' in our joint journeys.

Dis-Orient Express: Belly Dancing, Hybrid Identities and Female Oriental 'Other'

Abstract

Positioning the female Oriental 'Other' as the speaker and the agent of the discourse on belly dancing, rather than solely the object of a Western male gaze, this thesis investigates the politics of cultural difference through the prism of belly dancing. My practice as research approach combines the voices of other belly dancers interviewed along the route of Orient Express, the analysis of my creative strategies in the research performance *Dis-Orient Express* as well as the perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory. My thesis combines the analysis of my performance strategies, the findings from the field research, and relevant critical perspectives, to investigate the potential of a creative counter-narrative to subvert the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse.

Chapter One maps out the context of my multi-disciplinary methodology encompassing performance art practice, auto-ethnography, empirical research and critical reflection drawn from the post-colonial and feminist theory. Chapter Two develops the analysis of artistic counter-narratives by engaging in three case studies from Europe and Istanbul, drawn from the field research of belly dancers along the route of the Orient Express in 2012. Chapter Three analyses this performance by tracing the creative attempt at collaborative remapping of the concepts of 'Orient', 'Europe' and feminine Oriental Other, and my use of the myth of Persephone to convey issues of exile and violence that lie at the margins of belly dancing politics. Chapter Four develops the analysis of creative counter-narrative enacted from the position of hybrid identity. Conclusion highlights the question of how the fantasies and fears of the Other are currently re-played in the climate of increasing polarisation of the debate on European/British identity and the 'immigrant' Oriental Other, acknowledging the importance of a deeper analysis of these processes for a future study.

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Dis-Orient Express: Belly Dancing and Female Oriental 'Other'

FOREWORD

In 2012, four years after my first tentative belly dancing class, I was described as a 'political belly dancer' in the publicity material for my performance in the Brighton Fringe festival. How did this come about?

I started attending belly dancing classes at my local leisure centre in West London, motivated by the desire to discover and investigate my family history. I was born in Bosnia where we don't have much of a belly dancing tradition, and I never saw a belly dancer until I came to London and went to an Arabic restaurant. Nevertheless, throughout my childhood, I had heard many stories about my paternal great grandmother, who allegedly arrived from Turkey in the 19th century leading 'donkeys laden with gold'. These stories ignited my imagination with images of my exotic female ancestor. My complexion is darker than that of most Bosnians, and my mythical great grandmother from the Middle East was credited with a similar one, along with the mysterious ability - according to my paternal aunt - to belly dance. My aunt also told me that in her youth she herself used to give informal instruction in belly dancing to her female work colleagues. Allegedly, she was unaware of how she had come to possess this gift, yet she did, and so she shared it with others. In the beginning, my interest in belly dancing was manifested in a desire to learn more about my maternal history and our family myths. Henceforth, the shadow of my great grandmother has stayed in the background of my research in belly dancing.

After my first class, I not only discovered that I too could 'naturally' belly dance but also, as time went on, that attending the dancing classes was giving me a new body confidence. A very warm, beautiful and elegant Azerbaijani woman led the classes and I instantly liked her. Within four months I was performing belly dance at 'haflas', Arabic parties that featured many belly dance performances. As a newcomer to this fascinating London subculture, I didn't have much to offer in the way of belly dance technique but I did, I was told, have a 'unique Bosnian flavour' and a performer's confidence to be in the limelight. Within just over a year I had secured a regular slot performing in a Covent

Garden Arabic restaurant, and had joined a group of belly dance performers with a prospect of working in the entertainment industry. This new world of belly dancing unfolded swiftly before my eyes and I was certainly enjoying the heady ride, when something happened during one of our group training sessions.

By this stage, we were receiving frequent invitations to perform at parties and on TV shows. After this particular training session had finished, one of the women in the group made an announcement. An opportunity had arisen, with excellent pay. We had been invited to perform for 'heroes'. Following a moment's silence, we ascertained that this invitation involved performing for British soldiers who were returning home from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. I was shocked that this well educated young woman was not aware of the problems implicated in this proposition. We had a discussion about this and some other dancers also expressed their doubts, but I was left with a curious feeling that if I hadn't voiced my concerns, this show would have gone on.

From that moment on the course was set for this PhD research project. My particular traumatic experience of the Bosnian war in the 1990s, and various socio-political injustices that continued there in the post-war period, made it impossible for me to relate to this invitation to perform outside the broader context of international politics. How was it that my fellow dancer was not troubled by the idea of performing for 'heroes'? Who were the 'heroes'? Were there other similar performances staged for these audiences? As I experienced new freedom, body confidence and many new solidarities with fascinating women in the belly-dancing world, I came to witness first hand a stark contrast between how this dance is often perceived - as an erotic and risqué display designed for a male gaze - and how numerous practitioners experience it as empowering and even feminist practice. I came to be haunted by questions concerning the ethical implications of reclaiming one's sensuality and freedom through the medium of belly dance. This incident had revealed a network of underlying tensions associated with my own position in relation to British political and military involvement in the Middle East, and had suddenly manifested my belly dancing body as a contested site, forcing me to perceive it anew. The resulting riddles and contradictions that emerged came to be formulated not just into the academic research project but also in my performance art practice. I no longer performed belly dancing in restaurants or at parties.

The initial shock that I experienced following the 'dancing for heroes' proposition gave rise to numerous questions, and these in turn led me to create, in 2012, my one-woman performance, which was entitled *From Kabul with Love*. The performance was shown in two Brighton theatres, each time to an audience of around thirty to fifty people. Both venues provided intimate settings that allowed me, as a performer, to achieve close proximity to an audience. Significantly, during its premiere at Brighton Fringe festival, one venue decided to publicise this performance as starring 'a political belly dancer'. In *From Kabul with Love* it certainly was my intention to respond to what I had experienced as a belly dancer from Bosnia working in the UK. Through reflexively engaging with those contexts and ideologies associated with belly dance, and through my use of autobiographical material and satire as tools in deconstructing and challenging stereotypes, I sought to performatively re-frame those experiences. For example, the performance opened with a narrated re-staging of the belly dancing class at which the problematic and distasteful proposition of 'dancing for heroes' was made. My belly-dancing conclusion to the performance was enacted wearing a paper mask of David Cameron's face – the type of mask that can be purchased in many UK souvenir shops at tourist hot-spots, with cut-out eye-holes. A review read: "Orientalists will be disoriented and Disorientalists reoriented. Her mystical eyes are full of irony so beware!"

Building on this experience, a year later I performed *Dr Belly Dance* – a tongue-in-cheek, one-woman piece that revisited, from an autobiographical perspective, the racial and class tensions explored in Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Re-engaging with the tone of satire I had deployed in *From Kabul*, I sought to explore the idea of two female personalities locked in tension within me, the outcome of my experience of living between many different cultures and identities. Therefore, as 'Dr Belly Dance' I aimed to performatively expose and critique both a westernised, 'sophisticated', and suppressed academic, and a passionate, exoticised 'Gypsy belly dancer'. This piece was performed at academic conferences as well as a belly dancing festival, and was later incorporated into my doctoral performance, which will be analysed in this thesis.

Looking back, these two experiments were more or less successful, but what can be certain is that I had definitely burned my bridges. Now, I was a 'political belly dancer', a 'Dr Belly Dance' even, striking out on my own, and no belly dance performance of mine would ever be politically unquestioning again. Beginning with the enticing legend of my

talented Turkish grandmother and moving into the painfully liberated, playfully conflicted 'Dr Belly Dance' experience, I had, through performance, charted my belly-dancing journey from 'mytho-centrism' to political satire. Now, with my 2013 doctoral performance of *Dis-Orient Express*, my aim was to engage critically and durationally with these concepts, positions and personas within one performance space. This PhD thesis is the critical story of the development of my practice-based research into belly dancing from a personal-political angle.

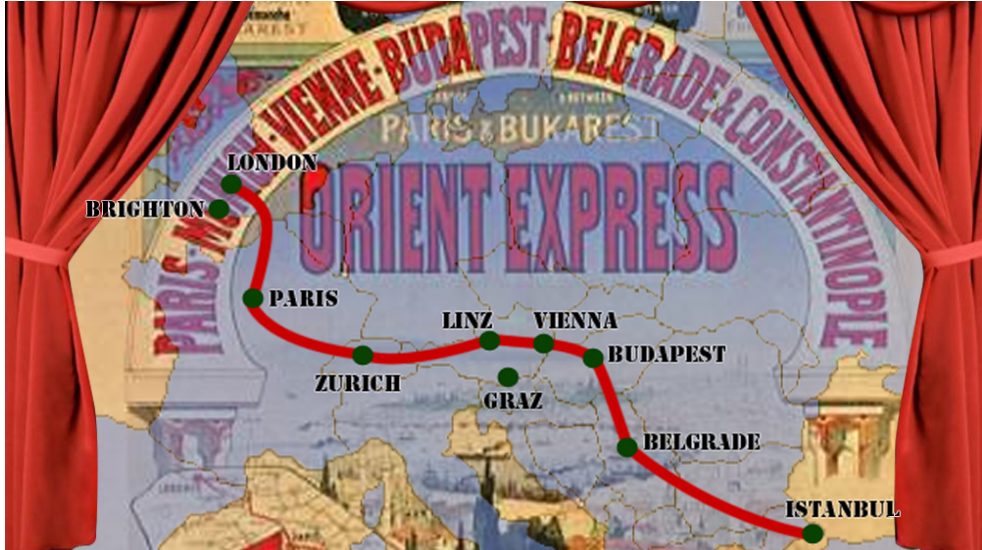


Figure 1 Map of *Dis-Orient Express* research journey

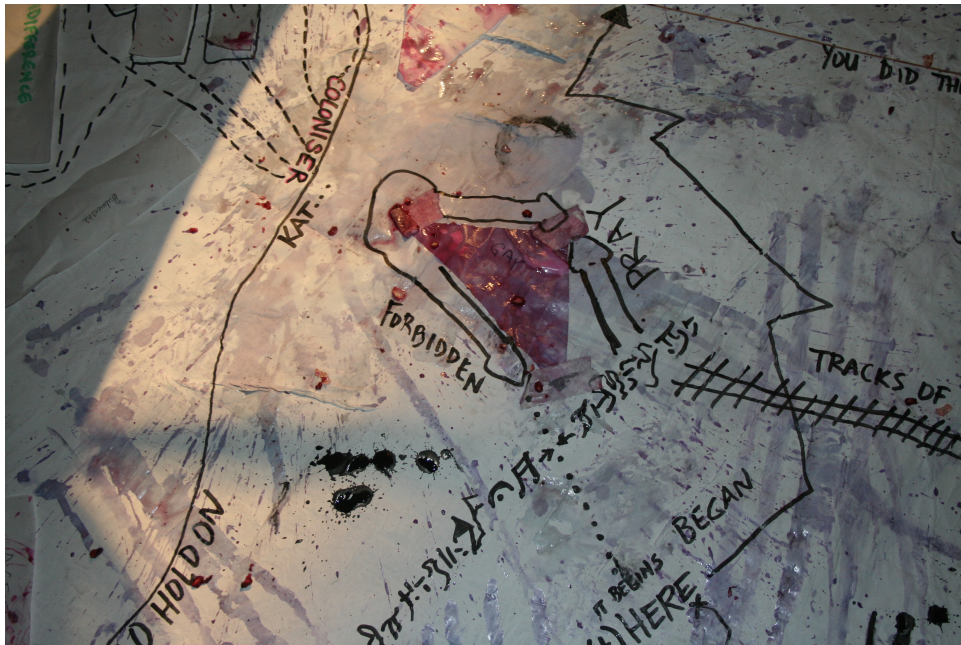


Figure 2 Map in *Dis-Orient Express* performance

INTRODUCTION

In this research project I set out to investigate the possibility of a dialogical, collaborative and self-reflexive re-mapping of the relationships between the concepts of Orient, Europe and female Oriental 'Other', looking through the prism of belly dancing. Through a mixture of field research, my performance art practice and critical reflection on perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory, I aim to explore the capacity of a counter-narrative created by a heterogeneous, hybrid identity in the context of the cultural practice of belly dancing, to uncover the instability of the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse and to subvert the feminine 'Oriental Other'.

This thesis is situated on the intersecting critical frames of feminist and post-colonial studies. Belly dancing is a cultural practice that, as I will argue throughout this study, needs to be read in both contexts in order to critically examine the orientalist stereotype of the 'female Oriental Other'. The eroticised mystique of the Orient is nowhere embodied more appropriately than in the figure of a belly dancer. However, as Edward Said (1985), Sunaina Maira (2008) and Amira Jamarkani (2008) have argued, the exotic mystique of the female Oriental Other has often served a deliberate political agenda, and this cultural mythologizing has accompanied Western imperialist interventions in the Middle East. On the other hand, feminist and post-colonial perspectives continue to question and resist the hegemonic structures that continue to dominate the cultural representation of the Oriental Other. The importance of this critical resistance is highlighted most recently by the return to the cultural stereotyping of the Oriental 'Other' as a threat to European and British security, following the renewed anxieties brought about by the mass immigration of people from the Middle East.

Belly dancing has traditionally been seen as eroticised and orientalised practice while at the same time presenting a tool for personal empowerment for many women who practice this dance. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, And Harem Fantasy* (2005) reveal the history of the development of the orientalist discourse on belly dancing. The cultural stereotype of a belly dancer as a mystical, veiled 'Oriental woman', dancing in a harem-like setting in order to seduce a man, has been entrenched through the history of representation of

this form and is still present in many belly dancing performances. My research reveals that many dancers feel that their profession has suffered from the narrow and stigmatising representations that continue to associate belly dancing with striptease or lap dancing. As conveyed in my interviews with belly dancers, they employ various embodied and impassioned artistic strategies to resist and subvert these representations and change the popular perceptions of belly dancing.

My thesis draws on post-colonial and feminist studies, and in particular the theory of hybridity, to enable the space for the counter-hegemonic agency that reveals the belly dancing 'Other', as the speaker and not just the object of the orientalising gaze. As the theory of hybridity in this practice-as-research conceptualises the space for resistance, my performance practice occupies that space. This thesis foregrounds both my own personal-political approach to the politics of belly dancing and to the idea of hybrid identities, as well as the original accounts of belly dancers, to explore the possibility of subverting the orientalist stereotype. At times employing an autobiographical perspective and self-reflexive approach, this practice-as-research uses the myth of Persephone to investigate particular manifestations of loss and trauma integral to my experience of hybrid identity. Persephone's mythical descent into the underworld enabled an expression of darker issues of gender violence and racial intolerance that lie at the extreme margins of the politics of belly dancing, as well as enabling personal and collective expressions of re-mapping of that politics. This particular approach to belly dancing, informed by the critical framework of hybridity as well as by my art practice that deals with the experience of war and exile, will attempt to develop a more intricate insight into the political positioning of feminine hybrid selves in the globalised world. Before explaining the methodological interplay of theory and performance practice in this thesis, I will introduce the research context, including my positioning in relation to the research, and then outline its key questions and methods.

Research Context

In *Orientalism Reconsidered* Edward Said wrote that 'the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbol the sensual woman' (1985:103). As 'the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said 1978: 1-2), the image of the belly dancer has come to shape the 'female Oriental Other' in the recurrent structures of the imperial narrative

and imaginary. Orientalist travelogues disclose a mixture of distaste and desire for the exotic feminine 'Other' (Shay and Sellers-Young 2008; Karayanni 2004). However, the dynamic changes that have affected Europe and the West since belly dancing was first presented to its Victorian audiences, have brought many sobering and creative encounters with 'the Other'. In the series of cultural appropriations and counter-appropriations that have affected the history of belly dancing, one of the most significant has been the alliance with the 70s feminist movement, which has re-constructed belly dancing as a counter-narrative to the male imperial gaze. Feminist discourses continue to shape present practices of belly dance. Virginia Keft-Kennedy reports that a survey of the websites on belly dance 'reveals the extent to which it is constructed around discourses of female empowerment, the politics of women's embodiment, and issues about autonomy and independence' and reveals 'an agreement amongst practitioners that the dance is generally understood to be a feminist activity' (2005:8).

The field of scholarly writing on belly dancing is still very limited, and none if it employs dance or performance practice as a research method. The anthology *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, And Harem Fantasy* (2005), edited by Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, gives a comprehensive history and definition of belly dancing, pointing out differences in its development and perception in the Middle East and the United States, as well as processes of translation and development that it underwent as it travelled between these spaces. Amira Jamarkani in *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, harems and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (2008) and Sunaina Maira in 'Belly dancing: Arab face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire' (2008) are sharply critical of belly dancing. Framed by the context of the U.S. imperialistic interventions in the Middle East, Jamarkani analyses how the orientalist exotic myths of Arab women in the U.S. popular culture serve the imperialistic narratives, while Maira criticises belly dancing as an imperialistic spectacle whose 'Arab-face' obscures real bodies and experiences of Arab women. Jane Bacon in *Unveiling the Dance: Arabic Dancing in an Urban English Landscape* (2003) undertook an ethnographic study of Arabic dancing in Northampton area, using a reflexive and embodied approach drawing from sociology, anthropology, dance ethnography and performance studies to analyse issues of femininity, spirituality and dance communities in those belly dancing practices. Virginia Keft-Kennedy in *Representing the belly dancing body: Feminism, Orientalism and the Grotesque* (2005) analyses the representation of belly dancing in popular culture, fiction and travel writing, charting the contradictions

and ambiguities created by the intersections of orientalism and feminism. Keft-Kennedy traces the genealogy of ideological constructions of belly dance in relation to the major waves of feminism from the late 19th century to the present, by focusing on key representations of belly dance in the West.

Shifting the focus from representation, Brigid Kelly in *Belly dancing in New Zealand; Identity, Hybridity and Transculture* (2008) highlights the experiences of belly dancers in New Zealand and explores the processes of construction of self and other in the globalised world. She claims that the literature on belly dancing has too often focussed on belly dancing as it is developed and practiced in the U.S, which has too often been represented as 'Western' and opposed to 'more authentic' Middle Eastern belly dance. In addition, she argues that the debates on belly dancing have often been polarised between the Western/Eastern, coloniser/colonised, appropriative/authentic points of view, and have suffered from the mutual-exclusiveness of these frames of analysis. Her writing on 'globalised belly dance' and hybrid identities opens up space for more layered and precise ways in which we can talk about performers' identities, positioning and strategies of resistance. Following in the footsteps of Kelly's approach of using the critical framework of hybridity, mine is the first study that is practice-based and also the first that approaches the problem of hybrid identities in belly dancing from the complex and embodied position of an ex war refugee.

Keft-Kennedy (2005) rightly acknowledges that feminist scholarship on belly dance has so far been limited, reflecting the relative silence on this topic within cultural studies and dance scholarship. My work in this area joins those attempts to bridge this gap, by focusing not just on significant texts but also on specific embodied experiences of individual women, including my own. In this sense, my thesis follows Kelly's (2008) analysis of formations of hybrid selves via belly dance, through practice-as-research that includes multiple methods, such as interviews, participant observation, performance and performance analysis. The original contribution to the knowledge on belly dancing, hybrid identities and orientalism that I hope to develop in this thesis is closely linked to the fact that this project comes from an embodied and autobiographical approach to the problems of hybrid and migrant identity. This study of belly dancing is partly influenced by my own embodied experience of living between Bosnia and Britain, in the liminal space between two very different cultures, languages and identities. The 'hybrid counter-energy' (Said 1994: 406) which comes from this experience, drove my PhD

performance *Dis-Orient Express* in 2013. The performance was partly driven by the feeling of identity fragmentation due to displacement and the deeply visceral experiences of the Bosnian war, patriarchal violence, and separation from home, which connects to the use of the Persephone myth, the theme that I will explore throughout the thesis. Informed by the field research in 2012 in which I interviewed belly dance practitioners across Europe, *Dis-Orient Express* was an attempt at a collective and emancipatory remapping of the relationships between the concepts of Orient, Europe and the exploration of issues such as female objectification and female empowerment. At times I will be using auto-ethnographic methodological approach to reference in a personal way my experiences of the research journey. My research performance enriched my methodology in the way that it emphasised the emotional, corporeal and political aspects of re-inscribing identity and thus created productive intersections with, and illuminations of, the related theoretical and conceptual material.

In order to articulate a range of subject positions and women's perspectives that are more complex than those expressed through binary models of belly dancing discourse, I use both the theory of hybridity and the concept of third space, as developed by Homi Bhabha. Hybridity, as one of the central ideas in postcolonial studies, is a theory of cultural difference by which the dominance of colonial authority is subverted through an encounter with 'the Other'. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha writes of hybridity as a strategy by which the workings of the colonial power are interrupted and subverted when the gaze of the dominated is reversed back upon the colonist. The moment of interruption and resistance is located in 'a hybrid displacing space' or 'third space'. As Fredrik Fahlander writes:

In a sense, the third space is the space of hybridity itself. The colonial discourse is split in enunciation between various positioned agents who (mis)appropriate the dominant ideology in order to intercede against and resist it. (Fahlander 2007:23)

The emergence of hybrid spaces is valuable in that they provide a possibility for emancipatory change and transformation of how the feminine Oriental 'Other' is seen and represented. This PhD project will focus on the specific moments in belly dancing performances, as well as in my own performance practice, when the orientalist discourse is interrupted and transformed. The concepts of hybrid spaces and hybrid

identities will be used to critically frame the analysis of the case studies and my performance of *Dis-Orient Express*.

This study uses the framework of hybridity to open up space for analysing practices of belly dancing from the angle of cultural heterogeneity and pluralism, with an emphasis on the perspective of those who may be recognised as 'the Other'. It sets the stage for the subject of the female Oriental 'Other' as the speaker, and not only the pleasurable object of the gaze. My performance, *Dis-Orient Express*, reveals multiple stories that are spoken by those who are both seen, and may also identify as, the exotic 'Other'. Following auto-ethnographic methodological approach, it conveys my own embodied experiences and memories, as well as the original accounts of belly dancers from across Europe. Some of these are deeply situated and embodied stories of violence and trauma caused by displacement and the separation from home, and some are more playful and ironic takes on the fantasy of an 'Oriental feminine mystique'.

The debate on feminine Oriental Other, which is at the centre of this thesis, is changing with the pressing issue of the migration crisis that has affected Europe in 2015 and 2016, and the political context of the UK referendum on leaving the EU membership in 2016. The political debate on immigration has polarised the popular discourse on British/European identity versus the 'Other', changing it significantly since the beginning of the research in 2011. The idea of Britishness in public discourse is being increasingly drawn in contrast to the 'threatening, dark-skinned, Eastern, immigrant' Other (Stewart and Mason, 2016). I will try to refer to this shift in context throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapters Two, Four and in the Conclusion. While acknowledging the significance of the changing context of the European migration crisis and the British referendum for the research, at present it is not possible to analyse its full implications. An in-depth analysis of this changing context on the debate on Oriental and European identity is a matter for future research.

The thesis will also reveal that the stories of those hybrid selves that are involved in the globalised practice of belly dancing are often characterised by ambivalent responses towards processes of migration, and that such stories may encompass moves to embrace both innovation and the creative fusion of different cultural forms, as well as to summon nostalgia for the past and grieve the loss of connection with cultural traditions. Investigating the emancipatory potential of 'hybrid counter-energies' (Said

1994: 406) in those performances that set out to challenge orientalist and patriarchal stereotypes, will lead to the exposition of a range of performers' strategies and political positions that are not easily classified.

Research Questions

The central argument of this thesis is that by investigating a counter-narrative created by a heterogeneous, hybrid identity in the context of the cultural practice of belly dancing one uncovers the instability of the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse and subverts the 'Oriental Feminine Other'. This allows for an attempt at dialogic and emancipatory re-mapping of the relationships between the signifiers of Orient, Europe and 'Oriental woman', as part of the orientalist discourse of belly dancing. My performance *Dis-Orient Express* deconstructed and satirised the apparently stable categories of Oriental feminine 'Other' and the associated binaries of coloniser/colonised, man/woman, Orient/Europe, to rewrite the narrow identity scripts placed on the subject of belly dancing. Both my embodied experience of living between different places and cultures, and my embodied memories of the tragic consequences of fixed identity politics in the Bosnian war fuelled *Dis-Orient Express*, and framed this practice-as-research. Throughout this thesis I use aspects of hybridity theory to position and analyse both my practice and the case studies from the field research. This study sets out to explore strategies employed for the purpose of 'dis-orienting' the orientalist framework of belly dancing while being led by the following research questions:

- 1) How do women artists and belly dancers negotiate the politically charged and contentious arena of belly dancing that has traditionally been seen as eroticised and orientalist practice? In their negotiations, do they accept or resist the forces that are attempting to structure the female Oriental 'Other'?
- 2) How does my research performance *Dis-Orient Express*, that engages with themes of home, identity and power relations and that employs belly dancing as one of its performance strategies, destabilise fixed stereotyping representations of feminine Oriental 'Other'? In expressing my autobiographical experience of loss and separation from home through the Persephone myth, how did *Dis-Orient Express*

investigate the complexities of the relationship between a subjective, hybrid identity and wider social and political powers?

- 3) How do the perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory concerning hybridity, migration, displacement and exile relate to the practice of globalised belly dance and to the dancers' hybrid identities?

Related to the research questions are the changing contexts of the European refugee crisis and the British referendum on EU membership, and consequently the investigation of how these changes are impacting on perceptions and performances of the Oriental 'Other'. I will try to address these issues in the thesis, while recognising that their full analysis is not possible in the current, dramatically developing situation.

Research Methodology

The methodology that I employ to address the research questions combines practice with critical reflection. The practice element of this practice as research is composed of the field research in 2012 and the research performance in 2013. As the theory of hybridity provides conceptual spaces of resistance to orientalist discourses and identity designations in this study, so my practice steps in to embody and creatively test those spaces of resistance. The relationship between theory and practice in my practice as research is dynamic and cyclical: at times led by practice which is critically reflected on, and at other times led by theoretical writing which is tested in practice. Importantly, it is impelled by the urgent social aim of interrogating the politics of constructing and representing the female Oriental Other in the current UK and EU political landscape of increasing anxieties and prejudice toward the immigrant Oriental Other, to investigate the possibility of an emancipatory and collaborative counter-narrative to this discourse. My methodology that serves the aim of deconstructing the orientalist discourse of belly dancing is multi-disciplinary, combining post-colonial and feminist perspectives, with an auto-ethnographic approach and aesthetic/conceptual choices that come from my performance art background.

The first part of the practice in this PhD is the field research that followed the trail of the original Orient Express. During two months in 2012 I travelled from London to

Brighton, Paris, Zurich, Linz, Graz, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade and Istanbul, where I conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty three people; orientalist scholars, dancers, artists, curators, and the general public. I collated video and photographic material in those ten cities, recorded audio conversations/interviews, held a belly dancing class in a contemporary dance school in Linz, and carried out a public intervention/photo shoot in the centre of Vienna. There were many subjects that were the topic of these conversations and interventions, but the main research question that was explored on this journey centred on the strategies that these female belly dancers employ to negotiate the politically charged and contentious arena of belly dancing.

The visual and audio material gathered during the 2012 field research trip following the path of the original Orient-Express train, was used to construct the performance *Dis-Orient Express* in 2013. Firstly, the field trip enabled the space where research participants, mostly women in various European locations and Istanbul, could voice their unique feelings and opinions on belly dancing and its socio-political meanings. Secondly, these recorded voices were joined by my performative expressions of experience of living in-between different cultures, at times playful and at other times melancholy, in a real-time performance. Thirdly, the performance opened the stage for a dialogue with audiences who became participants in re-imagining the belly dancing form by adding their views on gender and the colonial politics of belly dancing. The function of my embodied methodological practice where 'the living body/ subjective self is recognized as a salient part of the research process' (Spry 2001: 711) was to enable a dialogical performance 'to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another' (Conquergood 1985: 9).

In this way the performance *Dis-Orient Express* used belly dancing and the original accounts of belly dancers to explore and expose power relations that continue to frame our view of the Orient. The aim of my participatory practice-as-research has been to 'dis-orient' belly dancing and critique the related orientalist framework. The audiences were invited into the real-time performance conversation on the politics of belly dancing, which was the continuation of the recorded conversation between the belly dancers and myself. The aim of the performance was to enable an interactive space for an informed and critical examination and a transformative dialogue about belly dancing. The intention of the practice as research was to create a critical dialogue that

would make visible the limits of orientalist discourse and - by pointing out subjective experiences of exile, displacement, gender, and dance politics - to dis-orient or dis-orientalise the discourse around this dance practice.

Adopting an auto-ethnographic approach in my exploration of what is offered to the practitioner by the story of Persephone as the archetypal traveller 'between worlds', the study will analyse particular manifestations of loss that pertain to my experiences of war and of living between different cultures, languages and identities. The thesis will investigate how the archetype of Persephone and her mythical descent into the underworld allowed me to explore more melancholy aspects of my experience of hybrid identity. It will attempt to show the emancipatory potential in foregrounding a subjective, embodied approach to connecting my own experience with the experiences of others, as a new way of resisting those discursive powers that act to ascribe feminine identities.

Representing others' opinions is a matter of ethical approach. All interviewees were informed of the ethical procedures of the research, giving their consent for the use of information that they provided. Apart from being led by academic as well as my own ethical standards in conducting primary research, my attitude to representing others' voices has at all stages of this project relied on a dialogical method which is contextualised within the field of auto-ethnography and performance ethnography. My dialogical approach will be analysed in more detail in the section entitled 'Methodology' in Chapter One. Instead of posing as an 'invisible objective researcher', I put myself and my personal story forward in relation to the stories of others. In this thesis, I will strive to minimize subjective interpretation and conflation of others' voices, to articulate ambivalences and differences of opinion, and always to place them in their context.

The analysis of the field research and the performance will be located in relation to the critical framework of hybridity theory, the critique of the orientalist discourse and selected examples of art and dance practice that feature resistance to the hegemonic structures of representation of the female Oriental 'Other'. All these different elements of empirical research, performance and their related contextual analysis, form the methodology of this research project. The original contribution to the knowledge on belly dancing, hybrid identities and orientalism that I hope to develop in this thesis is

closely linked to the fact that this project comes from an embodied and autobiographical approach to the problems of hybrid and migrant identity.

As is the case with many practice-as-research projects, its creative aspect relies on a mixture of intuition, research and memory that frequently characterises personal-political, experiential and embodied modes of research. This process is interwoven with a distinctly contrasting mode of critical analysis. As auto-ethnography often utilises first person, reflexive accounts of the relationship between the self and culture (Short, Turner and Grant, 2013:2) I will at times adopt a more poetic and autobiographical style of writing. In indication of these different but complementary modes of critical engagement, the majority of the thesis follows the conventions of academic writing, but it deliberately employs an alternative register when describing the performances and interview situations from the field research, as well as my own performance. This style of writing is employed to bring back these stages from the research in a more direct and effective manner. This poetic style will be made clear by double indentation. I do this with an awareness of the distinction between 'the confessional', diary style of writing and of 'self-reflection'. In line with the way of thinking presented by Richard Johnson (2004), I employ reflexivity to explore 'how relations of power and inequality are negotiated, represented and changed in the living' (Johnson 2004:53). Importantly, I inform the readers of the subjectivity of my research methodology, so that they can make their own adjustments.

Thesis Structure

To understand the particular angle of this investigation of belly dancing and identity, it is important to contextualise the subject of belly dancing as a site of complex intersections of orientalism, feminism and hybridity. It is equally necessary to contextualise the practice-as-research methods that come from my particular positioning as an artist and a person of multiple belongings. My artistic strategies of subverting and resisting the social and political structures that act to ascribe narrow identifications come from the attempt to understand my experience of the Bosnian war and my subsequent exile in Britain. For these purposes, Chapter One will situate my methodological approach within a broader performance as research field, linking it to

auto-ethnography and performance ethnography. Then it will analyse two examples of my previous performance practice, and position my practice within a wider professional artistic field. This will be followed by sections that focus on the historical development of the orientalist discourse of belly dancing, the problems of identity politics in popular debates on belly dancing, and the perspectives of hybridity theory in relation to multiple identities in globalised belly dancing. This complex research context will enable an insight into the rationale for the methodology that will delineate a preference for a dialogical method and travel, contextualised within the emerging field of performance ethnography and auto-ethnography. While some scholars have criticised the theory of hybridity on the grounds that it was conceptualised in a vacuum, outside wider material and economical conditions (Parry 1996, Mitchell 1997), my analysis will place this theory in direct relation to specific performative and socio-political contexts.

Chapter Two will focus on three performative contexts, developing the concept of hybrid spaces in the analysis of belly dancing practices. Case studies from Brighton, Vienna and Istanbul derive from the field research journey that followed the route of the Orient Express in 2012. The aim of the journey was to instigate a series of conversations on what it means to be a belly dancer in Europe. By focussing on three case studies from the journey, this chapter will engage with questions of how these female belly dancers negotiate the politically charged and contentious arena of belly dancing. The analysis will emphasise these dancers' multiple identities, and their various positioning in relation to the cultural politics of belly dancing in specific performative contexts. The investigation of dancers' strategies will be framed in relation to the wider contexts of the orientalist spectacle of the Middle Eastern restaurant, the enduring Goddess meta-narrative in belly dancing practices and the cultural phenomenon of neo-Ottomania, to point out the hybrid potentials and challenges of cross-cultural encounters. The analysis will provide inspiring, specifically located, performative strategies of resistance to the cultural stereotypes of belly dancing, featuring mimicry, play, irony and humour. This investigation of performative strategies of resistance will be carried over into the next chapter, in the analysis of my own performance.

Chapter Three will describe and analyse my doctoral research performance that took place in 2013. In unfolding the *Dis-Orient Express* performance layer-by-layer, Chapter Three will highlight the expressions of both melancholic separation and playfulness that come from the embodied experiences of hybrid identity. It will chart my

attempt to deconstruct colonialist stereotypes and to create a critical and transformative dialogue on belly dancing with the audience. The performance employed some of the research outcomes of the 2012 field research journey. This chapter will show how the multifaceted relations between the West and the Orient, the coloniser and the colonised, the gaze and female body, are investigated through this highly interactive and multi-layered performance. In particular focus will be the analysis of those audio-visual and performative strategies that placed the researcher at the centre of her research, in line with the emerging tradition of auto-ethnographic methodologies.

Chapter Four will offer further investigation into the problem of hybrid identities and belly dancing by drawing on selected case studies from the field research and examples from the research performance. It will deepen the analysis of the doctoral performance by relating it to the conceptual context of hybrid identity. It will develop the theoretical framework of hybridity in the context of current media-based and popular debates on migration, in order to enable the formulation of an argument that investigates both the problematic notion of authenticity and the tension between fixity and multiplicity of identity in relation to belly dance practices and identities. Chapter Four will also chart the possibilities that belly dancing practices provide in terms of the glamorous nomadic identifications of many belly dancing practitioners, and juxtapose these with the more troubled experiences of a fragmented hybrid identity that have arisen from the experience of displacement and war, and that were expressed in both the interviews I conducted and in my own research performance. In particular, it will analyse how the symbolism of the Persephone myth acted in expressing the experience of separation and yearning for home in my research performance.

To conclude the thesis, I will revisit the wider context of migration and the current security crisis in Europe in order to indicate how the political landscape that shapes attitudes to the Oriental 'Other' has changed significantly during the period of undertaking this doctoral research. I will point out the challenges posed by the polarised debates that are taking place in the public discourse, in order to propose a way forward for future practices that embrace multi-cultural perspectives.

As a globalised dance practice (Kelly 2008), belly dancing contains many contradictions in its cultural history, and the debates on ownership, authenticity and cultural identity in today's dance practices indicate many generative and destructive

processes in the wider patterns of mass globalisation. The trans-locations and cultural appropriations that happen as belly dance form travels between different geographical places and performance settings reveal the tension between experimenting with the form and staying true to its traditions. This tension is reflective of the on-going ideological conflict between fixity and multiplicity of identity in the debate on identity politics in belly dancing. Migrations and journeys that belly dancing as a globalised cultural practice traverses in the processes of globalisation reveal the ambivalence between the yearning for home (tradition, mother, past) and the embrace of the new.

The argument is driven by an investigation of the tension between the idea of, on the one hand, the multiplicity of hybrid selves and, on the other, the orientalist and essentialist categorisations of the female Oriental 'Other'. This tension is indicative of wider social processes that hinge on the conflict between the idea of multiculturalism and the idea of a 'pure' nation or society, based on fixity of identity. Mapping the definition and development of hybridity theory in *Colonial Desire: Theory, Culture and Race* (1995), Robert C. Young explores the cultural politics of hybridity, referring to Britain of the 1990s as a place that exemplified the cultural heterogeneity and diversity of a modern society. He writes:

Mobile and multiple identities may be a marker not only of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but of a new stability, self-assurance and quietism. Fixity of identity is only sought in the situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change. (...) Fixity implies disparateness: multiplicity must be set against at least a notional singularity to have any meaning. In each case identity is self-consciously articulated through setting one term against the other; what has happened is that the hierarchy has now been reversed. Or has it? (Young 1995: 4)

Even though this was written twenty years ago, the values of tolerance and respect between British citizens of different religions, ethnicities and races, and the idea of celebration of this multiculturalism, have been promoted in British society until very recently. At the 2012 London Olympics, in the opening ceremony the organisers celebrated the idea of diversity as one of the main assets of British society (Dunt 2012). Only four years later in 2016, the public debate around the British Referendum on the EU membership drew the issues of immigration and diversity as one of Britain's key threats (Ferguson 2016). Young's question is very pertinent today in the wider context

of British society and European community, which is marked by growing anxieties over immigration, terrorism, anti-immigrant rhetoric and threats to the legacies of multiculturalism and open society. The question of the tension between fixity and multiplicity of identity will be addressed throughout the thesis, and revisited again with reference to the changing European landscape due to the migration and security crisis.

CHAPTER ONE

Methodology and Context

This chapter will outline the research context and methodology of this study, by developing the material presented in the Introduction. The first part of the chapter will provide the rationale for my methodology. The methodological approaches will be contextualised within an emergent field of performance ethnography and auto-ethnography, in order to situate my methodology within the wider context of practice as research. Then, I will provide the rationale for the deployment of deconstruction and mimicry in my performance and their potential for resistance according to the theory of hybridity. In doing so, the chapter will refer to the third research question of the thesis which investigates how perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory relate to the practical and academic research of belly dance practice.

After analysing the rationale and theoretical background of my methodological approach, I will focus on the context of this research, which will provide practical insight into my methodological choices. The research context will be mapped out in relation to the examination of my past performance methods, other relevant art practices, the development of the orientalist discourse, the problems of identity politics and the key concepts of 'hybrid spaces' and 'hybrid identities'.

In order to explain the emphasis on the importance of a counter-narrative to the orientalist discourse of belly dancing, I need to explain something of my own personal and professional background in performance, linking it to the established methodological framework of auto-ethnography. Therefore I will map out the rationale and the artistic methods employed in resisting the prescribed identity scripts and representations of feminine identity, through the analysis of my two previous performances *Holy Jolie* and *From Kabul with Love*. Importantly, this section will outline my concerns with who is telling the story and who forms the meta-narrative, and it will evaluate my artistic attempts to subvert the meta-narrative. The analysis of my past performances will address the second research question of the thesis which relates to performance strategies in de-stabilising orientalist systems of representation, investigating the multifaceted relations between the West and the East, the coloniser

and the colonised, and staging an embodied and subjective counter-narrative. A brief account of the situation in post-war Bosnia will give an insight into one of the grim consequences of the war, which resulted in its citizens being constrained by ethno-political identifications that are entrenched in the intolerance of the ethnic Other. This will lead into an analysis of my previous performances that will show the development of a multi-disciplinary methodology that combines embodied experience, testimony and academic research, and that resists hegemonic representations and identity designations. The analysis will address the question of why there is such a political angle to this study of belly dancing. A section on other art practices will follow, which will situate my performance practice within a wider artistic field.

Before analysing strategies that resist orientalist stereotypes in *Dis-Orient Express* doctoral performance and in the performances of others, it is necessary to chart the development of the orientalist discourse of belly dancing. The third part of this chapter will briefly map out the significant junctures in the fascinating history of this dance in the West, from the turn of the century to the present. This analysis will manifest the links between belly dance and the enduring orientalist fantasies of the female Oriental Other evident in popular culture, painting, travelogues and advertising. It will also show how women during the second wave of feminism popularised belly dance by merging it with the myth of the divine feminine. The analysis will develop an insight into dancers' negotiations of the orientalist framework, which is the focus of the first research question. The globalisation of the dance has generated the thorny issue of cultural appropriation of this form that dominates contemporary popular debates on belly dancing. This part of the chapter will highlight the opposing voices in this debate and criticise the limitations and one-sidedness of identity politics, to newly position my argument. Reaching for a more emancipatory theoretical model of identity, I will develop the framework of hybridity theory that was presented in the Introduction. In doing so, I will re-address the third research question, and investigate how perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory refer to artists' hybrid identities. The concepts of hybrid spaces and hybrid identity, as I will argue, offer a more productive way to model counter-narrative strategies against the orientalist myths, as well as a more appropriate way to write about contemporary belly dance practitioners who often inhabit multiple identities.

Methodology

As described in the Introduction, a combination of empirical research, performance and corresponding critical analysis forms the methodology of this project. The practical methods such as interviews, participant observation, performance and performance analysis, are posited in relation to the conceptual framework of hybridity, to address a range of research questions throughout this thesis. The ideas of hybrid spaces and hybrid identity conceptualise a space for resistance to the orientalist discourse of belly dancing. My performance practice utilises that space of resistance and together with the empirical methods, it aims to test its possibilities and limitations.

In this practice as research project the practice element is formed both of the field research in 2012 and the research performance in 2013. It is accompanied by critical reflections that come from the fields of post-colonial theories of hybridity, auto-ethnography and feminist perspectives. Both practical and theoretical forms of research aim to test the possibilities of resisting the orientalist discourse of belly dancing. The dynamic of the relationship between theory and practice in this practice as research project has been cyclic – at times it has been led by practice, such as interviews and my exploratory performances as ‘the Oriental Other’ along the research journey (see Chapter Three) in 2012. The outcomes of practice would demand critical reflection, which would then re-position the research in new ways. At times, it has been led by theoretical concepts that were then explored in the *Dis-Orient Express* performance in 2013, which would then need further critical reflection. Even though the dynamics of the interplay between theory and practice has been cyclical, the aim has always been focussed on the deconstruction of the orientalist discourse of belly dancing and the female Oriental ‘Other’ through a creative, critical and reflexive counter-narrative. This aim has been impelled by the critical importance of interrogating our relationship with cultural difference, made urgent by the increasing anxieties over immigrant ‘Other’ in the European and the British political landscape of 2015 and 2016.

In the Introduction I presented my field research that followed the trail of the original Orient Express, and the resulting performance *Dis-Orient Express*. *Dis-Orient Express* took place at the University of Reading in 2013. It addressed the second research question of this PhD project, which is how my practice-as-research focuses on belly dancing to destabilise fixed stereotyping representations of the feminine Oriental

'Other', and the associated binaries of coloniser/colonised, man/woman, Orient/Europe. In doing so, it aimed to rewrite the narrow identity narratives of belly dancing. Chapters Three and Four are offering the analysis of *Dis-Orient Express* as a dialogical performance which provided space for many voices, as well as the expression of my own experience of the politics of belly dancing, gender and war.

The video documentation of the performance is presented in the appendix V, and Chapters Three and Four include references to this video material. While it is possible to gain a limited insight into the performance via this video document, the reader will gain much deeper insight into the practice by reading the analyses of *Dis-Orient Express* and its collaborative and reflexive re-mapping of politics of belly dancing in Chapters Three and Four. While Chapter Three may appear overly descriptive, it offers a much fuller insight into the performance than it is possible through the limited means of the video document. Apart from describing the performance, Chapter Three also offers an important analysis of my performative strategies aimed at destabilising the fixed stereotype of the Female Oriental Other and de-constructing the politics of belly dancing.

The cross-disciplinary methodology of my practice as research embraces elements of auto-ethnography, theory of cultural deconstruction and hybridity informed principally by the writing of Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, and, in relation to the research performance, the aesthetical and conceptual considerations that come from my background in performance art. In this practice as research project, the intention of the performance was to 'dis-orient' the discourses around belly dancing, by occupying, embodying and creatively testing the spaces of resistance of those orientalist discourses, the spaces demarcated by the theories of hybrid spaces and hybrid identities. In order to address this urgent aim, I used a combination of methods of resistance to discourses that frame the orientalist representations of the female Oriental Other. In an attempt to de-colonise the power matrix and cultural context that surrounds belly dance practice, I put myself at the centre of the research, in a self-reflexive and critical way. As will become clearer in the unfolding of the thesis, I frequently position myself as both 'the Other' and the researcher. This is in line with auto-ethnographic methodological approach, which informs this practice as research.

In this part of the chapter I will clarify my methodology by situating it within the wider context of practice as research and the wider academic field of auto-ethnography and performance ethnography. I will outline the importance of dialogical approach in my practice as research. In the next section I will start to analyse my methods of resistance, such as the deconstruction of meaning, in relation to the writing of Stuart Hall, and the methods of mimicry and irony, in relation to the perspectives of hybridity and feminist theory. This will provide a deeper insight into the rationale for my methodological approaches, such as the preference for a dialogical method and travel.

The methods of resistance to the orientalist framework and the cultural politics of difference will become clearer in the third section where I discuss my previous performance work. I will evaluate the methodological approaches of my past performances, which have aimed to subvert and resist hegemonic processes of representation and identity designation. My aesthetic, conceptual and political approaches to this practice as research project are strongly shaped by my performance art background. Therefore, my practice as research will be further contextualised in relation to other installation, durational performance and video art works. Next, I will develop the research context of this study by outlining the development of orientalist discourse in the practice belly dancing, the problems of identity politics in the current debates on this globalised form and the key perspectives of hybridity theory.

Therefore, cutting across my practice as research methodology is a preference for a dialogue and reflexive aesthetic practice that positions myself, the researcher, within the research. The awareness of the gender and colonial politics implicated in the subject matter of belly dancing requires a self-reflexive positioning in relation to the research. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in *Decolonising Methodologies*:

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. (1999: 13)

In the next section I will position my self-reflexive and dialogical methodological approach within the fields of auto-ethnography and performance ethnography, and will indicate strengths and pitfalls of such an approach.

Auto-ethnography, Performance Ethnography and Dialogical Stance

My performance work derives from my background in performance and conceptual art. My knowledge of belly dancing comes from my training in this dance form. However, my practice as research methodology crosses disciplines as it also embraces the developments in the fields of anthropology and ethnology, especially in its radical post-colonial turn in researching and representing 'the Other'. The ethical and political considerations in how we think, write and interact with 'the Other' in the field of anthropology and ethnography have also shaped my research methodology which is aimed at reframing the thinking about the Orient and female 'Other'. The 'practice turn' in research methodologies has produced 'hybrid enquiries combining creative doing with reflexive being' (Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, 2011:63-64). My practice-as-research methodology has been inspired by this multiple, hybrid approach, combining the aesthetics of performance/installation, methods of cultural deconstruction, as well as elements of auto-ethnography.

The methodology of practice as research has emerged as one of the de-colonialising approaches in the post-colonial turn from a quantitative model of objectivity to a more interpersonal, embodied and intercultural approach to studying 'the Other'. Auto-ethnography has been described as 'a self-narrative that critiques situatedness of self with others in social context' (Spry 2001: 710) and as Janelle Reinelt states:

A radical democratic politics – a politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change (Reinelt, 1998:286)

The definition of auto-ethnography in relation to both self and socio-political context, is supported by Carolyn Ellis (2004) who describes it as:

research, writing, and method that connects the auto-biographical and personal to the cultural and social. The form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection [...] [and] claims the conventions of literary writing. (Ellis, 2004:19)

My research methodology embraces the emergent auto-ethnographic tradition which criticises 'value-neutral, rationally-based categorical thinking and abstracted theory' (Short, Turner and Grant, 2013:4) to reveal the orientalist framework of belly dancing and the cultural politics of identity and difference. It foregrounds subjective position as well as 'emotionality, political standpoint position and social activism' (Short, Turner and Grant, 2013:4) that comes from my experience as well as from the research interviewees' experiences of political and ideological forces that have acted to ascribe their and mine hybrid identities.

Therefore, in the research performance *Dis-Orient Express* I employ both autobiographical material and ethnographical accounts of other belly dancers, to reveal our subjective experiences and strategies of resistance to the orientalist framework. Striking a balance between expressing the autobiographical material and reflecting on my representations of 'the Other' is one of the key ethical challenges in my practice as research. Many who work in the emergent fields of auto-ethnography and performance ethnography share this concern.

Performance ethnography has been defined as a research method where the collaborative power of performance and ethnography utilises an embodied aesthetic practice, coupled with the descriptive knowledge of lives and conditions of living, to stir up feeling and provoke audiences to a critical social realization and possible response. (Bryant Keith Alexander, 2005: 411). Jony L. Jones (2002) charts different forms of performance ethnography, which oscillate between audience-centred performances to those performances that contain more autobiographical material. She gives, as an example of the first type, *Searching for Osun*, her performance/installation, which presented her research from Nigeria on the Yoruba deity Osun in such a way as to invite participants to ponder on the ethical dilemmas of fieldwork and representation (Jones 2002:7). As an example of a more auto-ethnographic performance she gives the performance by Myron Beasley where 'performers presented auto-ethnographic installations about their experience with Yoruba culture as African American gay men' (Jones 2002:7). While Jones is careful not to slip into prescribing what performance ethnography is, stating that the form of performance ethnography depends on the specifics of the cross-cultural encounter, she highlights the importance of accountability and integrity on the part of ethnographer/performer when working with 'the Other'. She states that the work of performance ethnography:

can move toward commitment rather than detachment, respect rather than selfishness, dialogue rather than exhibitionism, mutuality rather than infatuation. (Jones 2002:11)

While my methodological approach has been inspired by the political and ethical consciousness of critical ethnology and its 'radical democratic politics' (Reinelt, 1998:286), I am aware of the criticism within this field regarding the hierarchy between writing/performing about oneself and about 'the Other'. In *The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography* (2003), D. Soyini Madison raises an important question regarding the auto-ethnographical approach, asking whether the urgency and importance of complex ethnographic work has 'been upstaged by the poetics of the self' (2006:320). She states: 'When the gaze is on one's own navel one cannot see the ground upon which one stands or significant others standing nearby.' (2006:321). I share this concern, particularly since my performance work is following in the tradition of fine art performance which has frequently focussed on the idea of the author and the autobiographical material (see section 'Other Art Practices' pages 56-62).

As Jane Bacon notes on writing about performance: 'This is and always will be a dialectical relationship between self and other, subject and object' (2013:2). Striking a balance between writing/performing about others and one-self is a challenge faced by many who work in the fields of performance and ethnography. After researching the developments in critical ethnography, what I hope to achieve in my practice-as-research methodology is a higher degree of critical reflexivity over my subjective positioning in relation to representing and questioning the representations of 'the Female Oriental Other'. One of the avenues for avoiding either/or approach between the self and the Other is found in the concepts of 'dialogical stance' (Conquergood 1985:10) or 'dialogical performative' (Madison 2006:321).

Against what she terms 'a sea of auto-ethnography mania' (Madison 2006:320), Soyini Madison offers the theory of the dialogical performative, in order to 'clear more space for Others to enter and ride' (2006: 321). She writes that the dialogical performative is invested in paying attention to others, opening spaces for courageous conversations between researchers and the researched, demanding that we are conscious of collaborations that emerge from those situations, as well as potential conflicts. She writes:

What I have come to realize during my fieldwork in Ghana is that by being in the presence of Others, the fully embodied struggle to pay attention is a methodological and ethical necessity, and a service for freedoms that implicate us all. (Madison 2006: 323)

This ethical imperative in exploring cultural difference through a dialogical approach is what has spurred my own practice as research attempt at re-mapping the relationships between the concepts of Orient, Europe and Female Oriental Other. The insistence on a dialogical and embodied relationship between the researcher and the Other in the fields of auto-ethnography and performance ethnography gives an important context to my hybrid methodological approach.

Dwight Conquergood's writing on the dialogical stance in ethnographic work has been very influential in the field of critical ethnography (Conquergood 1985). He starts by charting different performative stances that an ethnographer may adopt in working with the Other. He writes how distances between the performative ethnographer and the Other may result in the ethical minefields of appropriation, infatuation, exhibitionism and plagiarism, and instead offers a dialogical performance, a 'path to genuine understanding of others' (1985:9). As he states:

The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate and challenge each other. [...] Like good conversation, the event is a co-operative enterprise between two voices, neither of which succumbs to monologue. (1985: 9-10)

This thesis will chart my dialogical approach in pointing out subjective voices and experiences of exile, displacement and gender and dance politics in an attempt to create a critical dialogue aimed at de-colonising or dis-orienting the discourse around belly dancing. Chapter Two will analyse my conversations with belly dancers in different European locations, and Chapter Three will show how I combined those conversations with my autobiographical material to extend the process of the critical dialogue to the live audiences in the performance.

Therefore, at the centre of my methodological approach is a dialogical process that connects my perspective with those of other artists and dancers, as well as the critical reflection of those perspectives in relation to the existing academic research. As

it will be analysed in the section on my previous performance practice, my sensitivity to the political forces that have attempted to label my identity during the war and exile, is extending into an acute investigation of how those forces that are attempting to structure 'the female Oriental Other' are being resisted and negotiated by women artists and dancers. These two processes of reflecting on self (my experiences of war and exile, my creative art strategies) and Other (the voices of other dancers and interviewees), are in dialogue with each other throughout this thesis.

This section has outlined emancipatory and de-colonising potential of auto-ethnographic approach which favours 'emotionality, political standpoint position and social activism' (Short, Turner and Grant, 2013:4) but also some potential minefields of working with the Other through auto-ethnographic approach, such as pre-occupation with the self. Another potential pitfall is cultural appropriation, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Aware of this, I have attempted to steer this practice as research project towards the collaborative cultural deconstruction of belly dancing politics, informed by a reflexive methodology that is centred in a dialogical stance. The next section will develop the analysis of my methodological approach in more detail, emphasising the importance of deconstruction, dialogue and travel.

Hybrid Methods of Resistance: Deconstruction, Dialogue and Travel

During this research project, I have repeatedly been reminded of the power of cultural stereotyping that seems to follow belly dance practice, and of the need to deconstruct the politics that continues to frame this dance practice both for those who interpret it and those who practice it. The aim of this PhD is to expose orientalist stereotypes and to explore power structures that continue to frame our relationship with belly dancing. Much of the inspiration for this kind of approach is found in the writings of Stuart Hall. Hall, as one of the founders of the academic field of Cultural Studies, saw culture as far more than something to study, but as a critical site where people can act to produce new meanings and unsettle existing power structures. This was particularly important when it came to foregrounding my own frame of reference for the reading of the subject of belly dancing, including my own war-influenced approach to the subject. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) Hall approached identity and therefore the racialised 'Other' as an on-going product of history and culture, rather than a fixed given. Even though he did not

write about belly dancing practice, his writing has informed a dynamic approach that I take to the study of belly dancing and the politics of Oriental feminine identity.

Hall's stance that 'the meaning can never be finally fixed' (1997: 270) is applied in this project's aim of revealing the meanings that are signified by the 'mystical', belly dancing, 'Oriental Other' and de-stabilising and 'dis-orienting' the complex matrix of power relations and cultural stereotypes which dominate the meanings of the feminine Oriental 'Other'.

The specific performance strategies of resistance are analysed in detail throughout this thesis, and can be summed up as deconstruction, irony and play. As well as deconstruction, the performances also employed satire and irony to de-centre the dominant codes of representation. By creating a gap between representation and intended meaning, I aimed to use irony to provoke the audience to think harder. The performance strategy of irony used to subvert the surface meaning can be situated in the concept of mimicry, which has been explored in the recent scholarship on hybridity. Developing Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry as an active subversive strategy, Fredrik Fahlander writes:

Mimicry always borders on pastiche or irony, which means that mimicking behaviour, iconography and habits of the other is a safe subversive strategy. While the subaltern seems to adjust and assimilate to a dominant discourse (e.g., behaving and looking European) it gives a false impression that the colonised is pacified and harmless, while actually opening a space for hidden agendas. (Fahlander, 2007:27)

Similarly, Luce Irigaray's concept of mimicry, based on variability, challenge to dualistic structures and intention "to make visible [...] what was supposed to remain invisible" is achieved through the playful repetition of the feminine role (Irigaray, 1985: 76). In deliberate repeating and re-manipulating the prescribed gender paradigm, one finds a way around them. Chapters Two and Three will investigate the instances of irony, play and mimicry in the case studies and in my performance *Dis-Orient Express*.

This preference for a dialogic and pluralistic approach informed the choice of research methods and the general tone of the whole project. Throughout the whole

research process, there has been a *dialogue* between different methodologies. One characteristic in common to many elements of this practice-based PhD is conversation – the real conversations between people and conceptual conversation between methods. The first part of the practice, the field research was marked by semi-structured interviews that were in fact two-way conversations that took place over cups of coffee (Figure 1). There is a distinct preference in this research project for the dialogic method where there are various texts and registers that are allowed to co-exist and influence each other. The preference for a dialogic method can be traced back to the concept of hybridity and more specifically to Mikhael Bakhtin’s idea of an ‘intentional hybrid’. Christina Voicu explains that:

the intentional hybrid is not only an individualized mixing of two socio-linguistic consciousnesses, but “the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms” (Bakhtin 360). Intentional hybrids are thus ‘inevitably dialogical’ (Bakhtin 360). (Voicu 2011:182)

The subject position of ‘intentional hybrid’, which I can relate to, has prompted my questioning of normative representations of belly dancing, highlighting *conversation* between multiple points of view.

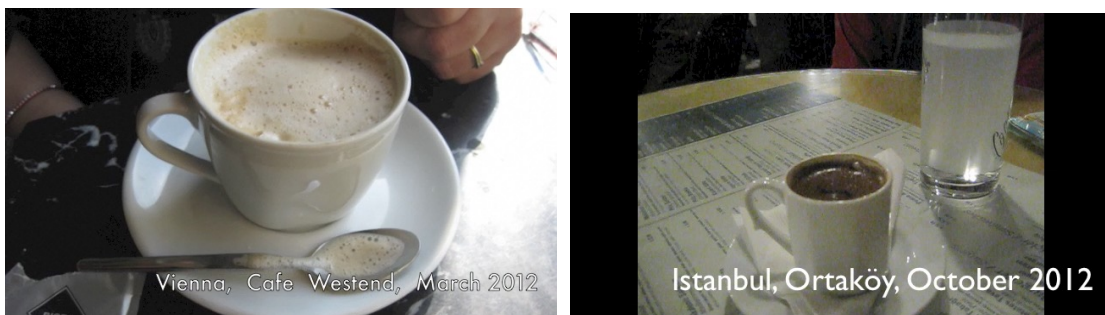


Figure 1 Image stills from *Dis-Orient Express*

The performance *Dis-Orient Express* was deliberately envisaged in such a way as to allow an audience member to make their own connections between the various layers, or ‘texts’ of the performance. This is in distinction to the dialectical approach of Plato (Jowett 1911), as there is no unifying synthesis at the end of this thesis between its different texts, arguments and methodologies, and not one unifying answer to its research questions. The intention is that the answers will remain in conversation with other academic and dramatic texts, giving rise to new questions and possibilities for new conversations.

Another important characteristic of this practice-based PhD is the notion of travel. The position of a traveller is significant in many ways. First of all, as a field researcher down the route of the Orient Express and secondly as a frequent traveller between the Balkans and Britain navigating the space between 'old Europe' and 'new Europe', I was interested in creating links between the physical travel, academic research as a form of journey in itself, and the imaginative, mythical voyage. This position of multiple intersections connects to a form of nomadism that Rosi Braidotti has theorised as a position of potentiality for a more politically engaged existence in a globalised age.

We have to start from the fact that the world will never be culturally and ethnically homogenous again: that world is over. Then, we have to think about the multiple forms of belonging of subjects and map out different configurations of nomadism, different ways in which a subject can have multiple belongings. (Braidotti 2012)

Therefore, my own position as a cultural hybrid, a nomad, or as Braidotti writes, a 'subject of multiple belongings' inspired the choice of methodology for this project. The legendary Orient Express trajectory used to start in Britain and pass through the Balkans, two places I call home, ending up in Turkey, which since my childhood I have envisioned as a mythic home of my maternal great grandmother (see Foreword p9-11). Multiple perspectives and contexts that inform and frame this study reflect and come from my frequent travels between these places. My performance and multidisciplinary art practice in the last seventeen years has dealt with the ideas of home, exile and memory. My research MA thesis was also based on a research field journey through Former Yugoslavia. The backbone of the research was a journey through the Balkans during which I interviewed around thirty artists and cultural workers in the region.¹ Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that this PhD study of hybrid formations of belly dance and identity employs a hybrid, multi-disciplinary, practice-as-research methodology, which at its centre has a field research trip.

¹ For my MA in Cultural Policy and Management at the University of Sheffield, I submitted a thesis titled 'Cultural Networks in South-Eastern Europe'. The field research also resulted in the production of '10 o'clock' film which has since been widely presented together with the thesis.

One of the aims of performance ethnography is 'to encourage audiences to define themselves as active participants in the artworks' (Alexander, 2005: 411). The aim of the performance *Dis-Orient Express* was to enable a platform where *spectators* would take part as *participants* in the critical dialogue about belly dancing, with the hope that this would help to re-imagine the belly dance form out of its dominant hegemonic discourses. Here the audiences were the active participants in the analysis, deconstruction and exposing of the ever-changing flow of the meanings attached to concepts associated with belly dancing. The process was not vertical and linear, but multiple and organic. It resisted a conclusion or synthesis, and instead generated a wide range of associations and inspirations. This will be described and analysed in detail in Chapter Three and Four.

My Previous Practice

Introducing the Context

The constraints and the violence of the identity politics that I experienced as a teenager in Bosnia, and then as a refugee in Britain, have resulted in a particular approach to my art practice. My performance practice is an area where I can expand the boundaries of how a particular identity is perceived, presented and defined in society. By highlighting the examples of my performances *Holy Jolie* and *From Kabul with Love*, I will begin to chart the rationale for my choice of performative methods when aiming to subvert the power structures that act on ascribing identities in the processes of domination. This section will address the contexts of how my performance and research practice, which deals with home, identity and power relations, can destabilise fixed stereotyping representations of the feminine Oriental 'Other'. Chapter Three will go on to address this research question in more detail.

First I will briefly explain the problems of the post-war period in Bosnia as an introduction to my art practice that, as it will be made clear, in many ways derives from my experiences of the war and exile. I will then focus on my art performance *Holy Jolie* that dealt with the controversies of Angelina Jolie's cinematic representation of the Bosnian war trauma, and my performance *From Kabul with Love* that posits belly

dancing practice in the context of the US and UK military interventions in the Middle East. *From Kabul with Love* was a belly dancing performance whereas *Holy Jolie* was not. However, both of these examples will show the development of the methodological approach in my practice-as-research in revealing and subverting the patterns of dominance in cultural representation. This analysis will be contextualised in relation to academic scholarship on trauma and the writing of Stuart Hall regarding the cultural representations of the racialised 'Other'.

About half of the Bosnian population, around two million people, left Bosnia during the 1992 – 1995 war, including myself. I came to Britain in 1995 as an 18-year old refugee. The war finished the same year with the Dayton Agreement, but the post-war period has been characterized by further destruction, both symbolical and physical. After the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina was left in a liminal state, ethnically divided. The problems are related to the implementation of the Dayton Agreement that has in practice served to entrench the ethnic divisions and intolerance, rather than to overcome them. Soon after signing the Dayton Agreement, Noel Malcolm, one of the most prominent historians writing on the breakdown and conflict in Yugoslavia, expressed the view that Dayton had created a dysfunctional country - hewn into two parts by the Agreement, and 'pickled' like Damien Hirst's post-modern cow in formaldehyde:

Hirst takes a cow, saws it from tip to tail into two symmetrical halves and pickles each half in formaldehyde. A question then arises: it may be an ingenious work of art, but is it still a cow? Similarly with the new Bosnia. It may have the cleverest of constitutions, but is it still a country? (Malcolm 1996)

The Bosnian state, forged in the bloodiest conflict Europe had seen since the Second World War, is today riddled by inconsistencies and paradoxes that surround the post-war effort to create an artificial confederation of fixed singular ethnic identities. Bosnia and Herzegovina had, previous to the war, been the most culturally and ethnically mixed republic of the Former Yugoslavia. Since the war, Bosnians have been suffering the daily paradox of having to fit into one of three narrow and prescribed ethnic identities - Serbian, Muslim or Croat - and been confined within the ethno-political discourse which posits those three identities as in conflict with each other. Bosnian-Herzegovinian philosopher Asim Mujkić claims that: 'the political practice in Bosnia can be rightly

described as the democracy of ethnic oligarchies, not as democracy of citizens,' where 'the ethnically - centred Dayton Agreement has become *the* main obstacle to the establishment of civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina' (Mujkic 2008: 18). Many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina feel that they have to absorb a daily dose of lies, having been forced into living in a country that has been divided and exploited by the local politicians, Western neoliberal forces and international mafia. A few years before the war, in the late 1980s, we had been simply Yugoslavs, living in Yugoslavia. Feeling the pressure to conform to a narrow ethno-political identification meant that I felt my new identity as a Muslim woman was an imposed straitjacket. Having to conform to this identity, and to live through the horrific violence inflicted on Muslims in Bosnia during the war has been deeply significant in shaping my view of the world. The experience of living in the UK has allowed me to occupy a position of multiple identities, as most people in Europe and the UK do, and to see this as an enriching and positive experience. Given this personal history, and considering the wider political debates on the subject of immigration and identity that will be visited throughout this study, the idea of multiple identity holds a particular significance in my investigation of belly dancing.



Figure 2 Bones of Srebrenica victims awaiting DNA identification in my hometown of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Holy Jolie

Holy Jolie was a twenty-minute long, solo performance that was first performed in April 2011 in *Vogue Fabrics*, a nightclub in the East End of London. It was shown as part of *I'm with You* events and Fringe! Queer Film and Arts Festival. *Holy Jolie* dealt explicitly with the trauma experienced by Bosnian women during and following the mass rape perpetrated by Serbian paramilitary forces during the 1990s war, and the problems of cinematic representation of that trauma by Angelina Jolie as a celebrity with enormous power and influence to shape the story and reach mass audiences. First I will first explain the political context and the power dynamic that prompted my artistic response. Then I will describe the performance and outline the differences in audience reception. In conclusion, I will address the on-going question of how my past performances helped to shape the methodological approach of this research project.

My performance was incited by the disputes around the making of the film *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (Jolie, 2011), a directorial debut by Angelina Jolie premiered in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2011. My performance was performed in April, eight months before Jolie's film was shown. *Holy Jolie* set out to examine the international controversy that was sparked in November 2010 during the making of the film, when the subject of the film script was revealed and it was disclosed that the main character, a Muslim woman, was in love with a Serbian rapist. The survivors of the mass rape in the Bosnian war, represented by the Association of Women Victims of War, strongly objected to the scenario, saying that 'a love story couldn't have existed in a rape camp', calling for Jolie to be divested of her title of UN Ambassador of Goodwill (Child 2010). There were many rape camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s war, and the Bosnian Association of the Women Victims of War objected to the film on the grounds that this controversial screenplay harmed the victims. *Holy Jolie* was also inspired by another news story which came out at the same time: a temple in Cambodia, where *Lara Croft* was shot, was renamed the 'Angelina Jolie temple' by its leading monks in an attempt to save it from ruin (Shoard 2010). The combined stories struck a chord for me as an artist born in Bosnia and sensitive to the absurd power dynamics that shape the celebrity-obsessed realities we live in. I was puzzled by a satirical potential in combining the bizarre story of 'Angelina Jolie divinity' in Cambodia with Jolie's dangerous powers of representation of the traumatic experiences of Bosnian women. But what really drove the piece was my awareness of the distinct possibility that a Hollywood love-story narrative might, in this context, be super-imposed over the subject

of mass rape, a subject that encompasses deeply upsetting and painful accounts of inhumanity which in their pain and grotesqueness lie at the limits of representable human experience.

The process of creating this work was a mixture of intuition, memory and research: as I lived through the 1990s war in Bosnia I have memories of the oral testimonies of rape victims retold by my sister Jasmina, who worked with women refugees from Eastern Bosnia. I also researched the academic sources on trauma and filmic representations of war and mass rape in Bosnia. The material I dealt with was highly distressing so I formed a closed support group where my sisters and I could share information and support. I also had a couple of conversations with a therapist to help me with the victims' accounts I was reading. Whilst I had an immense sense of solidarity with the rape victims, I was aware of the criticism in Bosnia relating to a perceived monopoly on storytelling that was directed at the Association of Women Victims of War. Certain sections of Bosnian society were critical of the Association's apparent exclusive right to speak for the victims. I was also cautious of the culture of victimhood in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, and of a potential cyclical structure of victimisation. However, after examining the power dynamics at hand, most of *Holy Jolie* critical arrows were aimed at Angelina Jolie's intervention. The fact that the film was based on an implausible premise of a love story between a Bosnian woman who was one of the prisoners of rape camps and a Serbian soldier who was one of the commanders of the camp, was utterly misleading about the power dynamics and the sexual politics of the war. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia declared that systematic rape and sexual enslavement were crimes against humanity second only to genocide, and that they were part of military strategy rather than just a product of the conflict (Hyndman 2009: 202-211). To superimpose a love story on this scenario meant to assume a sense of reciprocity and choice on the part of victim, which was not just profoundly offensive to the victims, but also potentially misrepresentative to mass audiences. Therefore, my criticism was mainly pointed at the culture of celebrity in postmodern society - Jolie's celebrity brand endowed her with the enormous power and influence to shape war rape narrative and that was highly questionable. Where in all this were women themselves who are hugely marginalized and stigmatized in our communities?



Figure 3 Image still from *Holy Jolie* film projection

The performance was devised in two parts – the first part was a ten-minute film projection and the second part was a live performance that lasted another ten minutes. In the performance I impersonated a rape victim and interacted with the audience and the film projection. It was shown in a small but crowded East London performance space to the audience of around fifty people, most of who also attended the Fringe! Queer Film and Arts Festival. The film combined the fictional images of Angelina Jolie's film alter egos such as *Lara Croft* and the water demon in *Beowulf* with stark UN reports and figures relating to Bosnian war rape camps. The combination of *Lara Croft*, celebrity and divinity (Figure 3) had a satirical tone that the audiences responded to with laughter. The film projection also contained visual and textual codes indicating the theme of victimhood, accompanied by sombre music. The text in the projection introduced an 'Ideal Victim' in these terms:

We have been watching Merima for a while. We have observed different stages of her post-traumatic stress disorder. 1. Shame: Deep embarrassment, often characterised as humiliation or mortification...9.Second injury or second wound: re-victimisation through participation in the criminal justice, health, mental health and other systems...Merima, can you tell us how are you feeling?

As this text was projected in the back of the space, I was standing in front of the projection, impersonating *Merima*, a fictional rape-victim. When asked by the anonymous voice in the film projection to 'tell us how she is feeling' *Merima* was stuck with an open mouth, unable to produce a sound. She was repeatedly approaching



Figure 4 Merima in *Holy Jolie*, kneeling in front of the video projector

the audience with an open mouth, with the throat convulsing, but unable to produce a sound. When the sound finally came out of her mouth, it was in the form of a pain-ridden, brutally raw version of a Bosnian folk song (Figure 4). The song 'Why are you not here?' addressed all those missing, murdered and exiled due to the war. In the end, I created a disturbing temple raised to Angelina Jolie, 'the modern UN goddess' (Figure 5). On the altar of this archetypal mother figure I verbally offered many Bosnian children, 'more than she ever wanted', as I said in the performance. Some in the audience chuckled at the irony of this statement, as Jolie is well known for adopting several children from different parts of the world. After the war there were many unwanted children as a result of forced pregnancies in rape camps, recognised by international courts as a crucial part of a systematic policy of ethnic cleansing during the war.

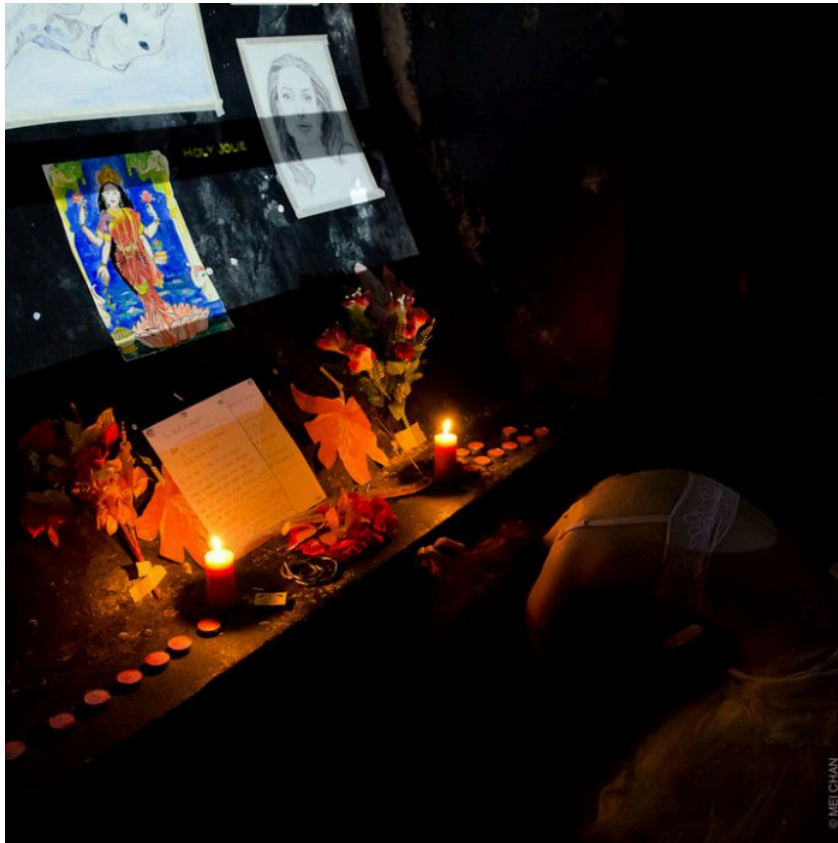


Figure 5 The *Holy Jolie* altar consisted of my original drawings of Jolie. In the lower right-hand corner is *Merima* prostrating herself in front of 'the U.N. Goddess'

I wanted to make the point that the trauma of mass rape is almost impossible to convey through an ordinary language. For Bosnian rape survivors, the blockage is double. First, they cannot talk about their experiences as their trauma lies at the limit of representable human experience. Second, even when they do try to tell their story, no one, in Bosnia's patriarchal and post-war fragmented society, will listen. As Michael Gold writes:

Traditional narrative forms are cultural silencers to the embodied memory of physical violence. Because of the inability to transform a physical recollection of physical pain and trauma into the language required by traditional narrative patterns, these experiences and memories become marginalized by the accepted metanarrative. (Gold 2010)

My artistic intentions for *Holy Jolie* were to explore the intervention of Angelina Jolie as an international celebrity invested with a vast power to shape the representation of mass rapes in Bosnia, and to contrast this with a subjective, personal-

political approach to this national trauma and the problem of victimhood in my native country. The piece was shown in three countries, the UK, Bosnia and Serbia, and the reception of the piece was very different due to the differences and particularities of each given political and cultural context. A full analysis of these differences and particularities in audience response is not the scope of this thesis, so I will summarise them in simple terms. The following analysis is based on my impressions, critics' reviews and discussions with the audiences after the performances. The audiences in East London engaged enthusiastically with the subversion of the cult of celebrity and although they did not understand the language of the Bosnian folk song, they grasped the emotionally harrowing quality of the singing. The audiences in Bosnia and Herzegovina responded very emotionally to the piece. The song 'Why are you not here?' is a love song, but in this performance it addressed hundreds of thousands of those who have been killed, wounded, displaced and those who are still leaving due to the abysmal post-war conditions in the country. The song touched the raw nerve of loss that most Bosnian people are grappling with. In Serbia, the topic of mass war rape of Bosnian women by Serbian soldiers is still a taboo subject. The piece was shown in the Centre for Decontamination of Culture, an independent institution in Belgrade, which was set up in resistance to the culture of ethnic intolerance and hatred. In the discussion after the performance there was a sense of guilt in the reactions of the audience. At the end of the discussion, the Centre's founder thanked me for 'giving voice to the victims'.

In all three contexts, juxtaposing images and controversies of the celebrity with a direct and visceral performance made an impact. It further opened up this taboo topic to debate and exposed the power imbalance and the problems in representation of this subject. However, the subtler message such as my criticism of the cyclical nature of victimhood was not communicated to the audience. Looking back, there were too many intentions layered in this complex piece, and this message was lost, as it was not sufficiently considered. This was a low-budget, short performance and not all the messages and intentions could be integrated within its format at that time.

Even though *Holy Jolie* did not deal with the subject of belly dancing, it dealt with questions that are raised in this PhD project. In particular, it dealt with the multifaceted relations between the West and the East, the coloniser and the colonised, which refer to the second research question of this project. The key aim of my practice as research is to foreground subjective experience over the accepted meta-narrative, which, in the case of belly dancing, is the orientalist stereotype narrative. That aim has continued to drive my

work since the *Holy Jolie* exhibit. My central concerns with who is telling the story and who forms the meta-narrative, and with the potential of the art performance to subvert the meta-narrative, are echoed in the methodological approach of this PhD project. The combination of the research methods that I used in *Holy Jolie* – from drawing to performing and from researching to talking to people - are reflected in the multidisciplinary methodology of the practice-as-research for this study.

Most significantly, some aspects of the war trauma that were dealt with in *Holy Jolie* were also there in the background of the *Dis-Orient Express* performance. I develop this discussion in Chapter Three, in the section titled 'Breaking the Pomegranates'. Next I will describe my subsequent piece *Kabul with Love* which featured belly dancing and analyse how the two performances drove my subsequent practice-as-research into belly dancing.

From Kabul with Love

As mentioned in the Foreword, there was a particular event in my early involvement with belly dancing that changed my attitude to belly dancing as entertainment. This occurred during a dance class when one of my classmates brought up a proposition for us to perform for 'heroes', or the UK soldiers who were coming back from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I found this suggestion more than a little problematic. Firstly, in a strand of public discourse at that time, the term 'heroes' was ascribed to soldiers who were employed by the British Army during the highly criticised military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2012 when I performed *From Kabul with Love*, British public opinion of both wars was predominantly very critical of the government's support of US military policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, as verified by the analysis of data from the British Attitudes Survey by London School of Economics in 2011 (Gribble et al. 2015). The findings from the analysis point out evidence of public cynicism about the U.S. and the UK governments' military aims in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the findings, the reason for this cynicism was due to the fact that British public mostly declared that the aims for the wars were to do with ensuring Western oil supplies, which 'did not match any of the official aims (preventing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, democratisation and preventing terrorism)' (Gribble et al. 2015). However, despite the fact that wars were criticised on the grounds of morality and legality,

representatives of the mass media and politicians still frequently used the term 'heroes' in their descriptions of UK soldiers.

In *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, Graham Dawson argues that 'the soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the ancient Greeks' (1994:1). In analysing how feminist theory has placed gender at the centre of investigation of the construction of hero as a form of idealised masculinity, Claire Duncanson outlines colonial and neo-liberal narratives which place 'masculine, heroic, civilised, advanced, white protectors' in contrast to the peoples in conflict zones as 'weak, child-like victims, or as barbaric, excessively violent hordes' (2007:7). These critical perspectives unmask the category of 'white, Western, ultra-masculine, soldier, hero' against its binary opposite of the 'feminised, non-Western, weak, barbaric Other', as the central part of the ideology that is in the function of practices of militarism and war. While I did not doubt that there were many brave young men who were fighting in the British Army, the term 'heroes' seemed to be regularly mobilised for political ends. I was critical of what I regarded as the falsity and sinister purpose of this ideological and indoctrinating use of terminology, but not of the people who were bestowed with the identity of 'heroes'. I was confident that this terminology ascribed a superior value to the category of soldier in order to conceal the morally corrupt foreign policy for propagandist purposes. It seemed dogmatic and rarely challenged in public debate. Then, when one of the fellow belly dancers proposed that we should dance for 'heroes', it raised a whole set of uncomfortable questions regarding my fellow belly dancers' and my own positioning in terms of this power dynamic, which I outlined in Foreword, p9-11. Were we really going to stage a performance of female Oriental 'Other' for the 'heroes'? Juxtaposing this distasteful proposition with my war experiences led me to create a solo performance *From Kabul with Love* for the Brighton Fringe Festival in 2012, which subverted the idea of a belly dancer performing for the pleasure of 'white, Western, soldier Heroes'.

FROM KABUL WITH LOVE

BY EDINA & FRIENDS

KOMEDIA, BRIGHTON, 5TH MAY, 5 PM, £5

TICKETS AVAILABLE THROUGH BRIGHTON FRINGE OFFICE

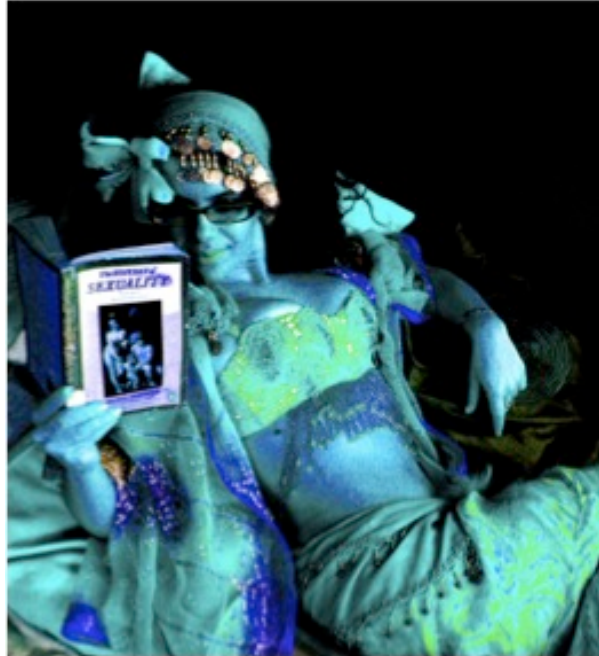


Figure 7 Performance poster

The performance was premiered in a small, intimate theatre setting for an audience of around fifty people. It lasted around thirty minutes and included a mixture of stylised movement, story-telling, dancing and video projection. I was narrating several stories in a cabaret-style, in close proximity to the spectators. The performance started with a re-enactment of the belly dance class and the absurd proposition of belly dancing for heroes. From that initial scene, a series of variations on the theme of the wars and their relationship to belly dancing unfolded, which were mainly rooted in my personal experience. For example, the performance was partly based on Facebook correspondence with those of my Bosnian friends who went to work with the American military in Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the many absurd situations relating to post-war Bosnia was that there were many educated young people, my peers, who were employed as, for example, translators and engineers on U.S. military bases in Bosnia. When the U.S. decided to move its military operations from the Balkans to Iraq and Afghanistan, many of their Bosnian employees decided to continue their employment in the U.S. military in the Middle East. We all knew very well what life under everyday shelling meant, as we had lived and survived four years of life under Serbian bombs and snipers in the Bosnian war. Yet, many of my compatriots decided to join the American

military forces that were carrying out the same violent and traumatising military actions over the civilian populations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Moving from the proposition of dancing for 'heroes', to the re-telling of the absurdities of a post-war Bosnia, *From Kabul with Love* had a satirical tone. It included a fictional Ali-baba-like character, the original accounts of my Bosnian friends who were employed by the American military and orientalist imagery. My performance contained a range of performative registers that corresponded to several different scenes. In some scenes I would directly address the audience, talking as myself and giving an autobiographical testimony of the war in Bosnia, whilst in others I would adopt an Ali-Baba-like character, or persona, in order to emphasise the seductive, orientalist fantasy that underpins the subject of belly dancing. These different scenes carried different tones - some were explicitly satirical and playful, whereas others had a more solemn mood. Added to the complexity of registers, the performance also contained a video projection showing images of 19th century orientalist paintings and newspaper articles about the recent war in Afghanistan. The intention of juxtaposing this visual material was to expose the instability and deceptiveness of these representations of the Middle East. At the start of the performance I wore a shirt, a long skirt, and a veil. The veil functioned to hide and expose the mediated 'truth' about the military operations in Afghanistan (projected on the veil in the form of newspaper articles) as well as to hide and expose the dancing, orientalist body.

By the end of the performance I revealed a belly dancing costume in the preparation for the final dance. In the introduction to the final dance scene, I explicitly presented 'the main elements of belly dancing costume': 'Hip Scarf', 'Mystical Eyes', 'Snake Iconology' and 'Transparent Veil'. This was the result of a semiotic analysis of the cultural signifiers of the Eastern Other from the initial phases of my PhD research. This semiotic approach was informed by the writing of Stuart Hall on fantasies of the racial 'Other' in media and popular culture in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997). Drawing on the work of Edward Said and Michael Foucault, he argued that the orientalist discourse, through practices of representation, such as theatre, art, media or literature, produces a form of 'racialised knowledge of the Other' which appears fixed, but is in fact rooted in the 'operations of power (imperialism)' (Hall 1997:227). His analysis of the structuring of meaning, including semiotic encoding, was progressive because it posited them in relation to the politics of representation. His

conceptualisation of the social positioning of a reader in relation to the dominant code revealed a crucially important point: that the meaning behind cultural signifiers is never fixed and that the structures of representation are open to a 'struggle over meaning' (Hall 1997:277). It emphasised the power of counter-strategies that work to 'trans-code' dominant meanings in the regimes of representation. These strategies can work to subvert cultural stereotyping of the Other.

Following Hall's deconstructive method of analysis, the symbols of 'Hip Scarf', 'Mystical Eyes', 'Snake Iconology' and 'Transparent Veil' could be termed cultural signifiers in the construction and perpetuation of not just belly dance as a signifying practice, but also the mythology that underlies these signs. Hall calls this the second level of signification, linking it to Roland Barthes work on mythology and semiotics in *Mythologies* (1957). This mythology of the 'Eastern Other' is brimming with orientalist images of harem, colonnaded patios, spice-infused souks, transparent veils, languid women, snakes coming out of baskets to the sounds of an oriental flute, and many others, the list goes on. These cultural signifiers remain curiously robust in popular imagination as manifested in numerous videos and performances by the contemporary pop icons Shakira, Beyonce and Katy Perry.

In *From Kabul with Love* I was explicitly unpicking the 'mystique of a belly dancer', by showing the elements of a belly dancing costume, as in a sort of a mini-lecture, to the laughter of the audiences. As well as satirising Oriental feminine mystique, I was also pointedly challenging the idea of military 'heroes'. In line with the second research question of this project, the performance explored strategies that set to destabilise fixed stereotyping representations of feminine Oriental 'Other', and challenge power relations that frame the politics of belly dancing. I played with the possibility of dancing for 'heroes', by calling out to 'the heroes in the audience', in order to reveal the absurdity of this proposition. My manner was active and challenging, in order to subvert the idea of the female Oriental dancer as a passive object of male desire. The idea of heroes was boldly parodied in the final dance number, which concluded with a crescendo of belly dancing for 'heroes', a group of miniature soldier figurines. The majority of audiences who attend the Brighton Fringe Festival are people from Brighton, and are known for their liberal attitudes to gender politics. The audience of *From Kabul with Love* were unlikely supporters of military policies, and they responded to its political edge with wit, enthusiasm and laughter.

Both *Holy Jolie* and *From Kabul with Love* were intended to convey strong political messages through their densely layered multi-media format. This format at times made those messages unclear. Both performances directly addressed their audiences, and yet they remained non-participatory. As a layered performance, *Holy Jolie* delivered a satire on celebrity culture and an instance of its engagement with the trauma of mass war rape, but it failed to communicate a more delicate and nuanced critique of the culture of victimhood in Bosnia. Too many artistic intentions were compressed within a short, low-budget performance. *From Kabul with Love* was a monologue delivered in many different performative registers, and my narration at times revealed my lack of acting experience and training. In addition, one of the intended messages which was to expose the deceptiveness of particular representations of the war and the Orient through juxtaposing visual material with live performance was lost to the audiences, due to the fact that the performance was under-rehearsed and perhaps overly ambitious. Overall, the politically driven intentions of the latter performance were not fully matched by sufficiently strong technical capability, and at times this caused confusion for audience members. However, both these performances managed to strike the intended tone of political satire that was understood by the audiences. The audiences of *Holy Jolie* responded to the dark humour in raising the temple to Angelina Jolie and to the idea of offering this modern 'Mother Goddess' many unwanted children born from Bosnian rapes. The audiences in *From Kabul with Love* responded to the deliberate unmasking of the orientalist symbols signalled in the belly dancer's costume.

What I wished to develop in my subsequent performance *Dis-Orient Express* was a space within which a multiplicity of voices could be engaged. Rather than projecting only my story, I decided to stage a participatory performance that would offer audiences the opportunity - working alongside me as the performer - to assume responsibility. The responsibility for developing a transformative dialogue on the subject of Oriental identity was to be shared between many participants in the performance. I decided that such a complex subject, incorporating many different first-person accounts that had been collected during the field research, would best be explored through the creation of an art installation that would come to life through its dynamic positioning within a participatory performance. Considering the weaknesses in my past performances, I wanted to avoid conflating too many messages and compressing too many intentions

within one format. I decided to develop an installation with distinct spatial and conceptual elements, each enabling a particular angle on a specific aspect of the subject in question. The modern theatre setting of the University of Reading provided an opportunity for this endeavour. Chapter Three will show how I continued to use elements of irony and satire in *Dis-Orient Express* to subvert stereotypes of belly dancing and Oriental mystique. One of the outcomes of *From Kabul with Love* was the development of *Dr Belly Dance*, an ironic, 10-minute performance. *Dr Belly Dance* formed one of the elements of the *Dis-Orient Express* performance and is further analysed in Chapter Four in the context of hybrid identities.

Both *Holy Jolie* and *From Kabul with Love* emphasised subjective experience in a decisive move towards self-representation that flew in the face of restrictive hegemonic representations. As well as developing a dialogical performance by providing space for many voices, I felt strongly that by expressing some of my own experience of the politics of belly dancing, gender and war I would compel the audiences to respond in an equally direct way. I learnt this from the reaction of audiences who were moved by my performance of *Holy Jolie*. The experience of trauma that impacted on *Holy Jolie* was woven into the background of *Dis-Orient Express*. It is analysed in detail in Chapter Three, particularly in the section entitled 'Breaking the Pomegranates'.

Other Art Practices

The work of a number of artists who operate in the fields of performance, installation and multi-media practice has also framed my own thinking and creative practice. In this section I will briefly analyse two key practices that influenced the aesthetical choices made during my research performance *Dis-Orient Express*. I will focus on two artworks, *Measures of Distance* (1988) by Mona Hatoum and *Balkan Baroque* (1997) by Marina Abramovic. Even though Abramovic's work has in more recent times been criticised on the grounds of her celebrity status and even on the grounds of her perceived support of neo-liberal ideology (Avgita 2012), it is her early durational work that has influenced my performance practice. These are artists and artworks that I encountered decades ago, when I was a Fine Art undergraduate student, and their influence has run deeply through all my subsequent practice. They are key artworks that I return to periodically, and they provide anchor points for my creative exploration. Their themes of dislocation from home, war trauma and complex mother-daughter

relationships resonate within my own life experience, and thus have coloured my art practice. I have sought to demonstrate this within this chapter through an analysis of my previous practice.

Using these artworks as examples serves to situate my research performance within a wider professional field of fine art practices that use installation, duration and performance. It is not in the scope of this study to give a history of installation and performance art practices; it is rather my intention to delineate the professional context of my practice by drawing on these two examples. These two artworks were chosen for this analysis both because of their subject matter and their form. In terms of their form I will focus on the features of duration, multiplicity of layers and installation, which were also present as stylistic and structural choices within the *Dis-Orient Express* performance.



Figure 8 Marina Abramovic Balkan Baroque 1997

Balkan Baroque was created in 1997 by Marina Abramovic for the Venice Biennale. The installation consisted of three video projections that conveyed the themes of war and violence. In one of the videos Abramovic enacts a scientist in a white robe narrating a story of rats killing each other, alluding to the wars in the Balkans. In the middle of the room there was a pile of more than a thousand bloodied animal bones. For four days Abramovic sat on the pile of bones, scrubbing away at them. Her white dress became increasingly stained as she cleaned the bones, singing folk songs and crying.

The aspect of duration has been an important element in most of Marina Abramovic's performance work, both in her collaborations with Ulay in the 1970s and in her solo work, notably in the recent and much publicised *The Artist is Present* (2010). The long passage of time is the central concept of durational performances. As Adrian Heathfield writes:

The term "durational" is often used then to indicate an art work that draws attention to its temporal constraint as a constitutive element of its meaning. The meaning of the word duration itself, evolving from the Latin *duratus* [to last], is bound into the notion of persistence, of remaining through time. (Heathfield, 2009: 22)

Adding to the ideas of persistence and determination in durational art, Abramovic states that durational performances help her alter the perception of the viewer as well as of the artist: 'I have found that long durational art is really the key to changing consciousness... not just the performer, but the one looking at it' (Visco 2013). The sense of ritual in the repetitive actions of cleaning the bones in *Balkan Baroque* echoes other works by Abramovic such as *Rhythm 5* (1974) and *Relation in Space* (1976), where the focus is on actions that are meant, over a period of time, to lead to a sense of trance or a change in consciousness.

This intention to test and affect consciousness follows conceptual art of the 1960s in its focus on the intentions of the artist. Conceptual art signified the departure from more traditional forms of painting and sculpture and their preoccupation with representational aspects of art, to focus on the concept, idea and message behind a piece of art. The performance art movement of the 1970s, and Abramovic as one of its pioneers, placed emphasis on the creative process and conceptualisation, rather than on the art object. Abramovic's focus, in her collaborations with Ulay in the 1970s, and in her solo work since the 1970s, on changing consciousness through the determination and intention of the artist, left a deep imprint on me as a young art student in the 1990s, and steered me towards making performance work, much of it durational. In *Dis-Orient Express* I decided to return to my early work in installation and durational performance. The influence that Abramovic and other artists, such as Joseph Beuys (1974), Judy Chicago (1979), Louise Bourgeois (1997), Sophie Calle (1979) have had on my work,

derives primarily from their focus on the intention and concept for their art work, and only secondarily from their choice of durational performance and installation format.

Balkan Baroque was a four-day installation/performance, performed in 1997, a few years after the end of the Bosnian war and before the NATO bombing of Serbia. Marina Abramovic was, like myself, born in Yugoslavia. She was born in Belgrade, the Yugoslavian capital. After Yugoslavia broke apart into various countries, Belgrade became the capital of Serbia. As she told *The Guardian*: 'When people ask me where I am from, I never say Serbia. I always say I come from a country that no longer exists' (O'Hagan 2010). The sense of dislocation, of disintegration and fragmentation marks *Balkan Baroque*. In the performance, Abramovic is repeatedly washing the bones, referencing the violent histories of the Balkan region. The action of cleaning the bones may be interpreted as an attempt at reconciling those histories and the bloodied past, in a wish for renewal and transformation. It can also be interpreted as a lament for the lost country, the 'country that no longer exists', which disintegrated with such tragic and brutal consequences. The experience of the fragmentation and disintegration of Yugoslavia has also marked my experience and my art practice, as outlined previously.

Balkan Baroque has at times been described as an installation (Louisa Avgita: 2012) as it comprises three video projections as well as the durational performance to provide an immersive space for the viewer. Installation art aims to transform an environment – often gallery spaces but also frequently other spaces – into a three dimensional immersive environment. Similarly to performance art, installation art rose to prominence in the 1970s as a reaction against the more traditional medium of sculpture. In contrast to performance art, which has usually emphasised the performer, installation art has placed an unprecedented importance on the viewer and their experience of the art piece. A viewer approaches the installation and its immersive environment with their own set of pre-conceptions and their own subjective perception. The interpretation of the piece depends on the viewer's perception as well as on the artist's intention. As artist and cultural critic Ilya Kabakov writes:

[One] is simultaneously both a 'victim' and a viewer, who on the one hand surveys and evaluates the installation, and on the other, follows those associations, recollections which arise in him[;] he is overcome by the intense atmosphere of the total illusion. (Kabakov, 1995:256)

Adding to this sense of illusion, a viewer often needs to negotiate a multitude of spatial and temporal reference points, particularly when one is immersed in screen-based installations. As Alison Butler has claimed, this condition of multiplicity of spatial and temporal referencing in contemporary screen-based installations 'can also be used in subtle and precise ways to address the complex situation of the contemporary subject in mediatized time and space' (2010: 323).

The fact that installation formats centre on the viewer as a participant in the construction of meaning is what appealed to me and influenced my choice of installation format for the research performance. It suited the dialogical methodology of my research process. Additionally, the installation genre allows for inclusion of a broad range of media to elicit a sensory/narrative experience in the audience, which appealed to me when creating the performance. It gave me liberty to create an immersive environment in which a viewer could play with belly dancing signifiers and assume responsibility in the act of collective re-casting of belly dancing politics. As I stated in the analysis of my previous works, I sought to avoid compressing too many conceptual strands in one format, and the format of installation in the modern University theatre seemed to provide ample space for each conceptual and technical element of the performance. Later in the thesis, in Chapters Three and Four, I will analyse how Louise Bourgeois' installation *Maman* and Yong Soon Min's installation *deCOLONIZATION* relate to my research performance *Dis-Orient Express*.

Measures of Distance is the other key artwork that has influenced my art practice and my aesthetic choices for *Dis-Orient Express*. The work has parallels with *Dis-Orient Express* in dealing with the ideas of dislocation from home, war trauma, mother-daughter relationship and in its aim of critiquing the stereotype of an Arabic woman. It also influenced my research performance in the way that the artist chose to use several layered elements to communicate the ideas of dislocation and displacement.

Measures of Distance is a video work created in 1988. The video shows slides of Hatoum's mother in the shower. The sound comprises the taped conversation between Hatoum and her mother, in Arabic, intercut with the Hatoum's voice reading her mother's letters, in English. In the first layered sound element, her mother talks openly about her sexuality and her husband's objections to Hatoum using images of her naked body in her art. Mona Hatoum was born in Lebanon to Palestinian parents and became an exile in Britain. Reflecting on this work, she said:

Although the main thing that comes across is a very close and emotional relationship between mother and daughter, it also speaks of exile, displacement, disorientation and a tremendous sense of loss as a result of the separation caused by war. In this work I was also trying to go against the fixed identity that is usually implied in the stereotype of Arab woman as passive, mother as non-sexual being ... the work is constructed visually in such a way that every frame speaks of literal closeness and implied distance. (Hatoum, 1997:140)



Figure 9 Mona Hatoum *Measures of Distance* 1988 Video still

The layering of the sound and images works to aid the expression of dislocation and separation. The use of English and Arabic language works to create 'a difficult and alienating situation for a Western audience who have to strain to follow the narrative' (Hatoum 1997:140). The skill with which the artist uses different layers of video and sound to express complex issues as well as an intimate experience of loss and separation from mother, left a deep impression on me as a young artist in the late 1990s. At the time when I was myself an exile in Britain from the Bosnian war, it alerted me to a possibility of using highly personal and painful material in an original and emancipating way. As Elizabeth Manchester writes:

The work evokes a strong sense of intimacy between a mother and daughter and suggests a creative and transformative relationship through the breaking of taboos around the maternal body. It is through the daughter's art-making project that the mother is able to present herself freely, in a form that cements a bond of

identity independent of colonial and patriarchal concerns. (Manchester 2000)

Although my research performance is conceptually and formally very different to Hatoum's video piece, her use of differently layered elements influenced my art practice. In terms of its form, it influenced my use of layering of different conceptual and formal elements to construct a piece of work with a complex message in *Dis-Orient Express*. More profoundly, it affected the character of my art practice, guiding me to use personal and intimate material, such as my relationship with my mother, to attempt to express a story of loss, exile and war. The empowering potential in expressing a highly personal, politically charged story that questions patriarchal and colonial stereotypes of Oriental woman is what also drove this practice-as-research.

Abramovic and Hatoum are artists who inhabit hybrid identities; both were born in countries that were ravaged by conflict and both found acclaim while working in Western contexts. Both artists used multi-layered media to communicate the 'double vision' that comes from a state of displacement. In *Balkan Baroque* Abramovic used video to portray the detached scientist in the white robe narrating a violent tale of murderous rats, juxtaposed with her durational performance of scrubbing the bones and weeping. Referencing this double role in Abramovic's work, Louisa Avgita writes:

Thus, the detached observer is both the voice of the 'neutral' Western – or international – community which analyses and objectively describes Balkan reality, and the voice of the detached Abramović, who, after decades spent living away from the Balkans, can see her native country through the 'objective' eyes of the West. On the other hand, there is the artist who experiences, suffers, enjoys and acts in passion like 'all Balkan people'. (Avgita, 2012:17-18)

In my previous works (*Holy Jolie* and *From Kabul with Love*) I also combined various media to portray different narrating voices that come from the experience of exile and life between two cultures. This method worked with different levels of success, as I analysed in the previous section of this chapter. The analysis of my research performance (Chapters Three and Four) will tackle my use of multiple media (film, sound, movement, associative writing) in a multi-layered installation in order to create an interactive event in which audiences and myself could engage in a deconstruction of belly dancing politics. It will also tackle my playful take on Western versus Oriental persona in *Dr Belly Dance*, which was one element of the research performance.

In this section I have analysed how other practices of installation, performance and video have framed my thinking in terms of my research performance. It is important to highlight that my practice is led by the sense of urgency to analyse and question power structures that work to fix the stereotype of the feminine Oriental 'Other'. *Measures of Distance* and *Balkan Baroque* are artworks that foreground feminine embodied experience of loss and dislocation in the face of power structures that act on feminine identities. In Abramovic's work, the experience of the loss of a country is articulated in a durational performance that embodies a cleansing ritual, whereas Hatoum expresses her unique experience of dislocation through intricate video work that tackles the intimate relationship with her mother. In this context, the way that these art works have foregrounded the importance of feminine experience, body, consciousness, ritual, mother-daughter relationship, in a way that defies stereotypical feminine identifications, influenced my aesthetic choices for my research performance. These choices will be analysed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four.

In the next section I will develop the research context of this study by outlining the development of orientalist discourse in the practice of belly dancing, the problems of identity politics in the current debates on this globalised form and the key perspectives of hybridity theory, which will give a greater insight into the methodology of this practice as research project.

Critical Framework: Towards Hybrid Identities

History and Definition of Belly Dance

Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, And Harem Fantasy* (2005) give the most comprehensive scholarly anthology on belly dance and its position in relation to the West. First of all they provide a definition of belly dancing as 'all solo dance forms from Morocco to Uzbekistan that engage the hips, torso, arms and hands in undulations, shimmies, circles and spirals' (Shay and Sellers-Young, 2005:1), adding that this belly dancing definition also applies to those solo and group dances that are based upon and demonstrate clear kinaesthetic similarities with the above mentioned dance forms, including tribal dance which was created in the US.

The focus of this research project has been solely on the globalised form of the dance, with its underlying politics, as it is practiced in Britain and Europe, specifically those European countries that were visited as part of my field research. The native form of dance, or belly dance as it is practiced in the Middle Eastern countries, together with the politics that frame the interpretation and the practice of this dance, is not the scope of this study. One exception to this is Turkey, as part of my field research trip took place in Istanbul. The evolution of the globalised form of belly dancing in the last century and a half, and its inextricable bonds with orientalism, form the argument on which this research project is based. The proposition is that belly dancing is seen from its beginnings as a dance by an exotic Oriental female 'Other' and is continuing to be seen through an orientalist discourse. This idea connects to my first research question, which centres on the ways in which women who practice belly dance in specific contexts are negotiating this politically charged history. As Shay and Sellers-Young claim, the communities of dancers have unconsciously or consciously resisted or employed the orientalist myths in their performances. The main focus of this practice-as-research project is on those performative strategies that attempt to resist orientalist myths, including my own performance practice. This is in order to unshackle the practitioners from narrow, one-sided identifications.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives two definitions of orientalism. The first one is that orientalism relates to 'style, artefacts, or traits considered characteristic of the peoples and cultures of Asia' (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). The second definition is that orientalism is 'the representation of Asia, especially the Middle East, in a stereotyped way that is regarded as embodying a colonialist attitude' (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). The second definition is the one that is relevant to this thesis, and it derives from Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* in 1978.² Said's work is centred on deconstructing the implicit cultural bias of the whole tradition of Western knowledge about Eastern world and Islamic civilisation, revealing that rather than being an objective academic study it was a psychological exercise in affirming 'European identity' as opposed to Oriental identity. Said's critical analyses are of the colonial literature that conflates a whole host of non-European peoples and places into one exotic land of adventure - a fictional 'Orient'. His research led him to the conclusion that the Orient was represented as

² It is interesting to note Oxford English Dictionary contains both definitions, with the second definition indirectly offering the criticism of the implicit cultural bias of the first definition.

irrational, feminine and weak in relation to the strong and masculine West, in order to satisfy the European psychological need to create essential cultural difference and to justify the inequality of power between East and West. According to Said, orientalist stereotyping continues to exist in order to justify present imperial ambitions in the Middle East:

So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab–Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have, instead, is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world, presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression. (Said 1998)

Belly dancing as a cultural practice that sits within this historical discourse connects to debates that expose orientalist stereotypes implicit in creating the myth of the exotic oriental female dancer. In the introduction to their book, Shay and Sellers-Young describe the history of the Western fascination with the dance, situating their analysis within the on-going discourse of the commodification of orientalism. At the outset they reveal a fact of which many practitioners as well as audiences of belly dancing are unaware, that is, concerning the invented nature of belly dancing in the West. They argue that belly-dancing practices in the West are inextricably linked with orientalism, asserting that:

Orientalism, as a framework for exotifying the other, had by the mid-twentieth century created a set of written and visual images of an exotic oriental female that permeated the public imagination via novels, film, visual art, issues of National Geographic, opera, ballet and modern dance not only in the West but throughout the increasingly globalized world. The communities associated with the dance, either inside or outside its area of origin, were frequently consciously or unconsciously resisting or incorporating this framework into their performances. (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005:11)

Tracing the history of the evolution of orientalist discourse, Shay and Sellers-Young mention the 18th and 19th century travellers' accounts of female performers in Egypt, notably by Lane, Flaubert and Curtis.



Figure 10 The Dance of the Almeh by Jean-Leone Gerome, oil, 1863

They claim that, together with the paintings by Gerome and Delacroix that focused on the sensuality of the dancers but ignored their cultural context, these writings formed an imperialist narrative that started to establish belly dancing in the popular imagination in the West as a harem fantasy. As Shay and Sellers-Young write, the letters and travelogues disclose a mixture of distaste at what was perceived as the obscenity of the dance as well as the desire for the exotic 'Other'. This combination of desire and distaste is the essential characteristic of the imperialist narrative that continues to frame attitudes towards belly dancing up to and including the present. A particular focus on this question is exemplified by the essay 'Dismissal Veiling Desire: Kuchuk Hanem and Imperial Masculinity' by Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, which is included in the Belly Dance anthology (2005).

The fantasy of the exotic feminine 'Other' was further strengthened by the displays of native dancers in the series of exhibitions that followed the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London. During the height of western imperialism at the turn of the century, as part of the growing popular interest in the Orient, the images of alluring and seductive 'oriental' dancers formed the basis of advertising campaigns. Shay and Sellers-Young further analyse the evolution of this Western fantasy of the

Orient by providing the example of dancer Ruth St. Denis. In 1904 Ruth St. Denis was so captivated by the image of the Goddess Isis on a cigarette advert that she created a series of images of herself in two-piece costumes, revealing her midriff, in poses that suggest spiritual ecstasy (see images below). Ruth St. Denis and her husband Ted Shawn created 'oriental' dance productions as well as many images showing St. Denis in different 'oriental' costumes. The images and dance costumes perpetuated and fortified the fantasy of a spiritually mysterious and erotically seductive Oriental female dancer. Their influential Denishawn School of Dancing nurtured many dancing talents, and as Shay and Sellers-Young write, one of them was Jack Cole, the legendary Hollywood choreographer of the 1940s and 1950s. Writing of Cole, Shay and Sellers-Young write:

Like his teachers, he, and other Hollywood choreographers, created a hybrid Orient that was a mixture of the movement vocabularies of different regions – Persia, Egypt, Turkey, Spain-styled within the framework of Broadway shows and films like *Kismet*. From 1910 through to 1960s, films with orientalist story lines and Middle Eastern themes such as the lives of Cleopatra and Salome became vehicles for erotically charged performances. Theda Bara and other “femme fatales” including Rita Hayworth, who also performed her version of Salome’s Dance of the Seven Veils, projected the Western ideal of the magnetic and alluring

oriental woman’.
(Shay and Sellers-Young, 2005:10)

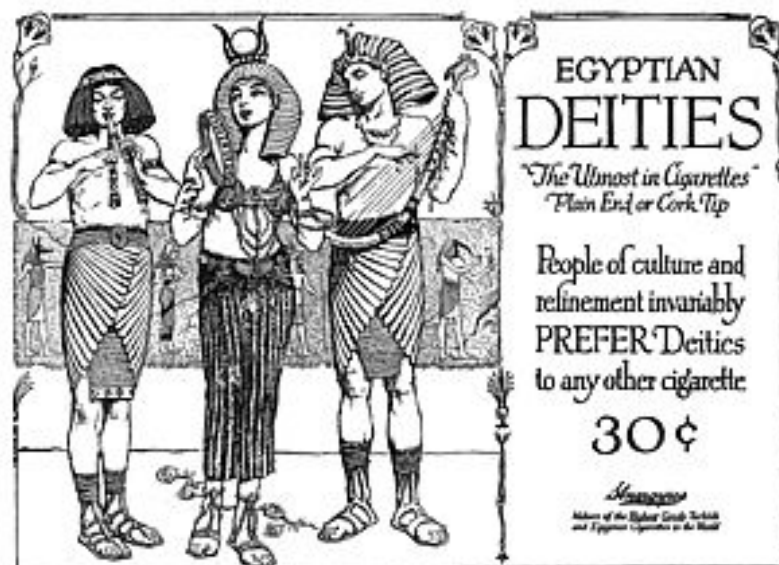


Figure 13 Egyptian Deities cigarette advertising



Figure 14 Ruth St Denis in Egypta production, 1911

These images (Figures 13 and 14) show how Ruth St. Denis used popular orientalist imagery, such as the Egyptian Deities cigarette advertisement that shows the Goddess Isis in the middle (Figure 13), as the visual inspiration for her costuming style. This is how the orientalist myth was perpetuated.

Shifting their focus to the 1960s in the U.S., Shay and Sellers-Young write about the popularity of belly dancing during the 60s feminist movement. During this decade of an increasing resistance to dominant categorisations of class, gender and race, belly dancing took on a unique role for an increasing number of American women. Intensified immigration of people from North Africa and Middle East after the 2nd World War created numerous immigrant communities in U.S. cities and this resulted in the presence of many Middle-Eastern restaurants. These restaurants, write Shay and Sellers-Young, used popular orientalist imagery to attract customers, with belly dancing featuring highly as part of their offering. An increasing number of American women thus became familiar with the dance, and during the 1960s and 1970s, communities of American women evolved who took belly dance classes and performed belly dance in restaurants, community centres and festivals. 'At its peak in the late 1970s, there were one million dancers in urban environments, suburbs and small towns taking belly dancing classes' (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005:16).

During the time of sexual revolution belly dancing played a fascinating role. Shay and Sellers-Young give the example of author Daniella Gioseffi who was one of the first

people who linked belly dancing with the social rights of women. In her book *Earth Dancing* (1980) she asserted that the function of belly dance for women was to turn them into 'active, rather than passive sexual objects' (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005:15). This personal-political agenda, that echoed the concerns of the second wave of feminism, combined with a specific period in U.S. history that made belly dancing familiar to many American women, created a variation of belly dance known as American Tribal dance. 'American Tribal' uses the concept of tribe or group identity to provide psychic space for expressive behaviours that permit men and women to explore movement vocabularies that are outside the standard vocabulary of appropriate male and female gender displays in contemporary America' (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005:16). This style of dance will be analysed further in Chapter Four.

A popular and enduring belief in many belly-dancing communities is that belly dance originates from dances that were part of ancient goddess worship rituals. Shay and Sellers-Young expose this belief as a myth, saying that one of the main authors to be cited amongst this community is Wendy Buanventura, the author of 'Serpent of the Nile' 1989. They question Buanventura's claim that belly dancing 'was once found throughout the world, a dance in which movement of the hips-sometimes vigorous, sometimes soft and sinuous – was the principal expression' and that eventually this dancing was suppressed by those civilisations that suppressed religious worship dance rituals (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005: 17, 18). Shay and Sellers-Young expose this as romantic projection that has no basis in any historical evidence. They claim that Buanventura's and other texts like Curt Sachs's *World History of Dance* (1937), have constructed a history of belly dance that satisfies the Western need for identification with it. Communities of dancers continue to use an essentialist feminist stance of 'timeless, natural, original feminine' in combination with the orientalist myth of 'timeless Orient' in order to validate the dance as the representation of the divine feminine. Shay and Sellers-Young write: 'These and other texts have composed a mytho for the globalisation of the dance that is tied to the dissemination of a western version of essentialist feminism in which female empowerment is associated with erotic agency' (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005: 18). And 'by the end of the twentieth century, American style belly dance, including American Tribal and Goddess forms, had spread to Europe, South America, Australia, Singapore, and Japan where it is performed in combination with the styles of dance learned from Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East' (2005: 18).

The next section of this chapter will address a more recent debate on fixity versus multiplicity of identity in the context of contemporary belly dancing practice, to enable an insight into hybrid identity and its radical potential to challenge dominant systems of representation of difference.

Identity Politics of Belly Dancing

The issues that are inherent in negotiating identity politics are never far from the debates surrounding belly dancing. As belly dancing is practiced all over the world, it is often shadowed by the accusations of liberal orientalism and cultural appropriation. In *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, harems and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (2008), Amira Jarmakani problematizes belly dance as a mythological representation of the Oriental 'Other' shaped by US hegemonic narratives which enable symbolic and real violence. These concerns are echoed in Sunaina Maira's 'Belly dancing: Arab face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire' (2008), which analyses the popular spread of belly dancing among white middle-class American women at the time of U.S. military interventions in the Middle East, criticising 'liberal orientalism' as complicit with U.S. imperialism.

In her article 'Why I Can't Stand White Belly Dancers' Randa Jarrar states that all white belly dancers are performing an act of cultural appropriation. She claims that the orientalist façade of glittery robes, accessories and strong eye make-up has become a culturally accepted form of 'Arab-face' or 'Arab-drag'. She mentions her aversion to white belly dancers in Arabic restaurants:

a white woman came out in Arab drag — because that's what that is, when a person who's not Arab wears genie pants and a bra and heavy eye makeup and Arabic jewellery, or jewellery that is meant to read as "Arabic" because it's metallic and shiny and has squiggles of some kind. (Jarrar 2014)

Further on, she explains how much she dislikes the white belly dancers' habit of adopting Arabic-sounding names for performance and teaching purposes, which in her opinion completes this 'brownface Orientalist façade'. In her article, she juxtaposes the

above example of a white belly dancer in 'Arab drag' with her account of the native dances that she witnessed and engaged in while growing up in Middle East. She writes that the practices of white belly dancing are 'causing harm' and her message to white belly dancers is clear: 'Find another form of self-expression. Make sure you're not appropriating someone else's' (Jarrar 2014).

Furthermore, she rejects the counter-arguments by white female belly dancers that their dancing is not about race and appropriation but about resisting the patriarchy and male gaze, by saying:

Arab women are not vessels for white women to pour themselves and lose themselves in; we are not bangles or eyeliner or tiny bells on hips. We are human beings. This dance form is originally ours, and does not exist so that white women can have a better sense of community; can gain a deeper sense of sisterhood with each other; can reclaim their bodies; can celebrate their sexualities; can perform for the female gaze. Just because a white woman doesn't profit from her performance doesn't mean she's not appropriating a culture. And, ultimately, the question is this: Why does a white woman's sisterhood, her self-reclamation, her celebration, have to happen on Arab women's backs? (Jarrar 2014)

Jarrar's article in *Salon* attracted much criticism and accusations of racism. One of the most interesting responses to Jarrar's article was by presented by Wes Alwan in the article 'On the Identity Politics of Belly Dancing':

Jarrar's hurt feelings can be morally decisive only if white women have a set of moral obligations to Arab women that Arab women do not have toward whites. And this is the obligation to refrain from offense, no matter how authentic one's intentions, and no matter how widespread or limited that offense. How do we explain the asymmetry of this obligation? Only by saying that white women are somehow morally compromised in relation to Arab women. If white women had the same moral status as Arab women, their moral obligations to each other would be entirely symmetrical. (Alwan 2014)

Alwan goes on to expound on logical propositions and arguments that explain the principle of moral compromise or asymmetry of moral obligations between white women and Arab American women.

All of these arguments rest on the notion that moral obligations between various types of human beings can become asymmetrical, implying that one type or another is morally inferior in some way. Identity politics cannot be made to work without the concept of moral inferiority, in this case an inferiority that attaches to a group of people by the virtue of their unfair advantages or historical crimes. (Alwan 2014)

As a Bosnian Muslim woman living in a Western country, I can understand where Jarrar's feelings are coming from. I remember participating in a belly dancing class where the teacher put on a traditional Bosnian song and presented a belly dancing choreography that followed the song. During those few minutes, the whole cultural context and all the meanings that the song had for me and many people who were born in the Balkans, was completely displaced. For me it felt as if this context was erased, and in that moment part of my identity was both evoked and disregarded. On the other hand, I remember that I have many times danced to Arabic music that I did not understand, and that I did not have any reservations about using this music in my performances. Now as I am completing this study, I would think twice before using just any music in a performance. Jarrar's argument is important to highlight so that the questions of cultural context and cultural appropriation are raised among belly dance practitioners, particularly as there are so many unexamined belly-dancing practices.

Even though I can understand her feelings, I absolutely cannot agree with Jarrar's argument that white women should not practice belly dance, or that by engaging in belly dance they are necessarily causing offence to Arab women. Jarrar's argument exemplifies the problem of identity politics, which is also summed up by Michael Rectenwald:

The problem with identity politics, then, is that it is one-sided and undialectical. It treats identities as static entities, and its methods only serve to further reify those categories. It aims to liberate identity groups (or members thereof) *qua* identity groups (or individuals), rather than aiming to liberate them *from* identity

itself. Identity politics fails not because it begins with various subaltern groups and aims at their liberation, but because it *ends* with them and thus cannot deliver their liberation. It makes identities and their equality with other “privileged” groups the basis of political activity, rather than making the overcoming of the alienated identity, for themselves and all identity groups, the goal. The abolition of the one-sidedness of identity – as worker, woman, man, or what have you – represents real human emancipation. (Rectenwald 2013)

So even though I have sympathy with Jarrar’s views, and understand her dislike of orientalist caricaturising representations, the approach of my project is dialectical and therefore critical of any fixed positions, especially those based on racial or ethnic grounds. This includes the argument that cultural forms should remain absolutely pure and authentic, and not shared with individuals of different cultural backgrounds. As Edward Said (1994: 13) wrote poignantly:

Culture is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent ‘returns’ to culture and tradition. These returns accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity. In the formerly colonised world, these returns have produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism.

By giving voice to many practitioners of belly dance in Europe, including women of Arab background, this project gives voice to many different positions. I am influenced by Rossi Braidotti’s alternative approach to identity or subjectivity and the different ways in which a subject can have multiple allegiances (Braidotti 1994). The idea of identity as becoming, rather than identity as a fixed category within which we should be compelled to remain, seems to be more generous in terms of its emancipatory potential. As Michael Rectenweld claims in the above quote, real human emancipation lies in abolishing the one-sidedness of any given identity, whether it is ‘woman’, ‘man’, ‘belly dancer’, ‘British’, ‘Arab’, ‘Turkish’ or ‘Bosnian’.

As Kelly (2008) has pointed out, the debates on belly dancing have suffered from mutually exclusive and polarised frames of analysis such as Western/Eastern, coloniser/colonised, and appropriative/authentic points of view. Hybridity theory will

be revisited in the next section of this chapter in order to open a space in which we can discuss globalised belly dancing and identity in more productive ways. As my field research has revealed, many practitioners of belly dance live outside their country of birth and describe themselves in terms of multiple identities. Hybridity theory poses interesting emancipatory potential in seeing identity as in flux, rather than as a given. As it will be argued in the next section, the idea of hybrid identity contains a radical potential to re-write identity scripts and challenge hegemonic systems of representation.

Hybrid Spaces, Hybrid Identities

Identities are reified social categories from which we should emerge, not within which we should be compelled to remain. (Rectenwald 2013)

In this section I will focus on the relationship between the perspectives of post-colonial and feminist theory, especially on hybridity, and the dancer's nomadic and hybrid identities, which follows the third research question of this thesis. The 1990s wave of postcolonial writing such as Spivak (*In Other Worlds* 1987 and *Post-colonial Critic* 1990), Bhabha (*Nation and Narration* 1990), Bitterli (*Cultures in Conflict* 1989) charted the complexities of globalisation, ethics and generative and destructive processes in the interplay of cultures worldwide.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha develops hybridity as a discourse which challenges and de-stabilises cultural imperialism, altering the workings of colonial power. Hybridity discourse does so by uncovering the ambivalence at the root of the discourses on authority, and thus reverses the structures of domination. Bhabha claims that the interruption of the structures of dominant cultural narratives occurs in the liminal spaces between the subject positions. He describes this liminal space, the location of the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' (Bhabha 1996), as 'the third space'. The liminal, 'hybrid displacing space' deprives the colonial power of the authority over the cultural narratives, and generates, as Robert Young explains, 'unsettling perplexities' that challenge the 'centred, dominant cultural forms' (1995:23).

The third space 'initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of

collaboration and contestation' (Bhabha 1994: 1). That is where the *hybrid identity* is located, in the form of an 'ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion. They have encoded within them a counter-hegemonic agency' (Meredith 1998:3). These conceptions of culture that include liminal hybrid spaces and hybrid identities enable the practitioners of belly dancing to re-write identity scripts and forge their own agenda. Hybridity theory has been criticised on the grounds that it can operate in a political vacuum (Meredith 1998:3). In my study, the concepts of hybrid spaces and hybrid identity are forms of practical strategy for investigating the discursive limitations of belly dancing.

Following the ideas proposed in hybridity theory, Marwan Kreidy developed the theory of critical transculturalism, which has been adopted by Brigid Kelly as a key model in her analysis of New Zealand identities and globalised belly dance in *Belly Dance in New Zealand: Identity, Hybridity and Transculture*. She explains that:

The prefix 'trans' suggests "moving through spaces and across borders" a quality of movement that does not travel one way, or even two ways, but in and out from multiple direction, creating a new synthetic culture in which strands of multiple cultures intertwine and multiple processes operate. (Kelly 2008:18)

Kelly analyses the ways in which the identities of New Zealand women are shaped through their involvement with belly dance practice. She argues that belly dance outside the Middle East has become globalised, with its own complex culture and many intersecting communities and activities. She tells her own story: 'I was a Kiwi; so was my dancing. My Egyptian-style dance was choreographed by an American...Simultaneously, I was a globalised individual, engaging in an activity that women all over the world enjoyed, and also adopted to their local contexts' (Kelly 2008: 2).

Kelly defines globalised belly dance as the dance that has developed outside the cultures where it originated. She claims that in the literature on belly dance there has been too much emphasis on binary oppositions, for example belly dancing as it developed in the U.S, which has too often been represented as 'Western' and opposed to 'more authentic' Middle Eastern belly dance. She avoids the adjective 'Western', as belly dance is practiced also in Japan, Korea, South America, China and other non-Western places, as well as those Western places which have had very different histories to

imperialist histories, such as New Zealand. She considers globalised belly dance as transcultural rather than imperialist, where the prefix 'trans' stands for movement across borders in multiple directions. By questioning the constrictive binary models of Western/Eastern and appropriative/authentic, Kelly expands the space in which we can talk about belly dancing and identity.

As she asserts, hybridity theory considers all cultures as inherently hybrid or mixed, but also recognises the effects of power inequity. While Kelly recognizes that those groups that see belly dance as their local cultural expression have a greater claim for ownership of the dance, she ultimately sees all belly dance as a cultural hybrid. Therefore, she deduces that: 'Belly dance itself is thus always culturally hybrid regardless of where it is, and reflects the idiosyncratic location and viewpoints of the people doing it and watching it, be they Egyptian, Chinese or New Zealanders' (Kelly 2008:15). Kelly situates her analysis within the wider space of globalised belly dancing where transcultural exchange flows in multiple directions. This, she claims, goes to acknowledge 'the ongoing, active participation of Middle Eastern and North African people, rather than restricting their involvement to 'inspiration,' and also allows us to view non-indigenous participants as creative rather than solely imitative or appropriative' (2008:17).

The hybridity model enables a better understanding of belly dancing practices by considering the multiple contexts in which it takes place. The multiple and idiosyncratic contexts of this thesis bring many different angles to the analysis of the politics that surrounds belly dancing and women's identities. The hybridity model may enable a viewing of this dance practice outside such identity politics and its narrow constraints of binary opposites of appropriation and authenticity. Viewing belly dance as a cultural hybrid does not mean that we de-politicise it by ignoring the power inequities that are implicated in the subject matter. Instead, it brings a more complex and nuanced reading of the power relations that frame belly dancing in each particular context.

The women belly dancers interviewed for this project all come from different mixed backgrounds, and are often migrants or ex-migrants. I was a refugee from a conflict in Bosnia, and my experience is of multiple identities and multiple allegiances. Applying hybridity theory to identity leads us to view identities of belly dance performers as hybrid, multiple and in flux. The Deleuzian concept of deterritorialization of identity and of 'becoming-woman' (Deleuze and Guatarri 1972) was adopted and

developed in feminist thinking, notably by Rosi Braidotti. In *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), Braidotti theorised a position for a more politically engaged, ethically responsible existence of a post-identitarian subject in a globalised age. As she says:

We have to start from the fact that the world will never be culturally and ethnically homogenous again: that world is over. Then, we have to think about the multiple forms of belonging of subjects and map out different configurations of nomadism, different ways in which a subject can have multiple belongings, multiple ways in which ethnicity, nationality and citizenship can actually be combined, even within the same nation state. (Braidotti 2014)

It is a utopian ideal that attracts many practitioners. It reflects Edward Said's (2002:186) concept of 'contrapuntal': 'Seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal.' My practice-as-research utilises the concept of contrapuntal awareness, or double vision, to define the methodology of both my practice and theoretical research. Contrapuntal awareness is a term borrowed from music theory, by which each line of music retains its own identity while having a connection to the other. This connection can sometimes be in contrary motion. Chapter Three and Chapter Four will develop this site of ambivalences and complexities, in relation to my performance *Dis-Orient Express*, to give insight into the embodied knowledge of dual and conflicting states of living between cultures, languages and identities that exist both at the same time.

Re-thinking identity outside of the straitjacket of 'fixity' (Bhabha 1990) and in terms of flow provides an interesting framework for analysis of my interviewee's and my own involvement with belly dancing practice. However, it is worth remembering that even the 'nomadic subjects' of contemporary belly dance are still representative of exotic oriental 'Other', whether they like it or not, as the signification between the two is very strong. The fixed positions of identity are going to be countered throughout this project by the positions of multiplicity and pluralism, as well as positions of freedom, dream, fantasy and imagination that belong to performance practices. These contradictions are contextualised by various harsh realities marking the individual

positions of belly dancers in society, as well as difficulties that pertain to the position of exile, including my own.

So far I have outlined methodology and context of this study, and in the process addressed its key research questions. After outlining the rationale behind my practice-as-research methodology in relation to the emerging tradition of auto-ethnography, I contextualised the analysis of those methods in relation to my previous performance work. Thus I started the analysis of the second research question of this thesis, which focuses on my performance strategies of resisting meta-narratives and dominant structures of representation of the feminine Oriental 'Other'. This will be developed in detail in Chapter Three and Four. The analysis of the development of the orientalist framework of belly dancing in the 20th century was followed by an insight into the current debates around orientalism and identity politics in belly dancing. The analysis that follows the first research question regarding the practitioners' negotiations of that orientalist framework will be developed in much more detail in the next chapter. Following the third research question of the thesis, this last section of the chapter gave an insight into the key ideas of 'hybrid identity' and 'hybrid spaces' which will be developed in the next chapter, in relation to the selected case studies from the field research.

CHAPTER TWO

Journey on the Dis-Orient Express

This chapter draws on my doctoral research journey, which I have titled *Dis-Orient Express*. The journey formed the first part of the practice element of this research project, leading to the performance *Dis-Orient Express* which will be analysed in Chapter Three. Here I draw on three case studies, introduced at the start of each of the three sections of the chapter to describe belly dance performances in Brighton, Vienna and Istanbul. This will lead into the analysis of specific strategies that dancers use to resist stereotypes and raise the status of the belly dance form. The first research question of the thesis which focuses on various ways in which dancers negotiate the orientalist frameworks and cultural stereotypes of belly dancing, will be used to frame an empirically-grounded investigation of how, through diverse engagements with the medium of belly dance, women working in different European contexts are able to negotiate, forge and embody a range of female-centred discourses.

Questions of identity feature prominently in these women's art practices, as do strategies of resistance formulated in response to what they regard as prevalent stereotypic representations. The analysis of hybridity theory in Chapter One points out a view of identity as hybrid, multiple and in flux. This chapter will present accounts by dancers who describe themselves as having multiple or hybrid identities, or, in their words: 'a cocktail of French, Berber and Arab' influences (Rami 2012), as in the case of Dalyla Rami; 'a wanderer between the worlds' (Mahmood 2012) and a cultural ambassador for Arabic culture, as in the case of Aminta Mahmood; and Donna Mejia, an American woman who describes herself as a 'multi-heritage citizen' (Mejia 2012). I will continue to investigate how perspectives in hybridity theory, such as the idea of 'the third space' or 'hybrid space', can be critically applied in the analysis of specific strategies of resistance in belly dance practices. My special focus is on the specific liminal spaces which enable subversion of dominant codes of representation of belly dancing. Bhabha's concept of 'interstitial passage' where social subject can move between different subject positions (1994: 2-6) will be applied in the analysis of a performer's strategies in the performance in Istanbul. The analysis will show how dancers can create moments of subversion of the orientalist stereotype to their advantage, in order to reclaim the sites of 'manufactured orientalist spectacle spaces' of

Middle Eastern restaurants. I will also analyse the concept of Goddess discourse in belly dancing practice as a popular narrative that takes central space in many dancers' practices of resistance to the patriarchal gaze. Before tackling the three case studies I will outline my methodological approach.

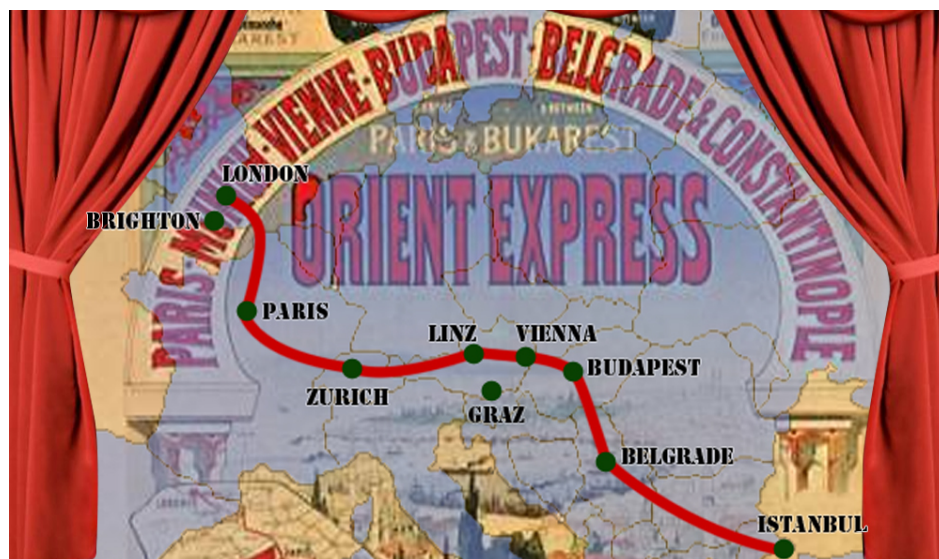


Figure 1 The map of research locations along *Dis-Orient Express*

The *Dis-Orient Express* field research was conducted in March and October 2012 as a journey following the old route of the Orient Express train. The aim of the research was to instigate a series of dialogues about contemporary re-enactments of orientalism and mythologies around oriental dance and eastern femininity, in European cities along the original route. I conducted interviews with twenty three people; orientalist scholars, dancers, artists, curators, and the general public, in London, Brighton, Paris, Zurich, Linz, Graz, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade and Istanbul (see Figure 1). I collated video and photo material in those ten cities, recorded audio conversations/interviews, held a belly dancing class in a contemporary dance school in Linz, and carried out a public intervention/photo shoot in the centre of Vienna. It is important to mention that the intention of the research was not to come out with any conclusive findings or report on the debates in particular European countries along the Orient Express route, but to highlight a variety of individuals' opinions and thoughts on the subjects of oriental dance, its origins, its status, its empowering potentials, and its problems. Therefore, it is important to resist the temptation to deduce any quick or final conclusions from these interviews as representative of national attitudes.

As I explained in Introduction and Chapter One I take a dialogical and pluralist

approach to my examination of belly dance as a trans-national form, integrating multiple viewpoints and contexts. The dialogical stance is the cornerstone of my methodological approach in an attempt at a collective remapping of the conceptual relationships between the Orient, Europe and 'the female Oriental Other', which has been the central aim of this practice-as-research project. Following my reflexive, auto-ethnographical approach, I would not adopt a position of an 'objective observer' or 'an academic expert' in relation to my interviewees. I used my previous professional and personal links with curators, dancers and academics in Britain, Europe and Turkey to find the interviewees, learning in the process how closely knitted belly dance communities are across all research locations. The interviewees varied in age from early twenties to late sixties, but most of them were in their thirties. I would try to position myself in an equal position to an interviewee, as a fellow art professional, often revealing much of my own views, background and positioning in order to encourage an open two-way conversation. This was emphasised by the fact that all the interviews took place over a cup of coffee (see Chapter Three page 134). All interviews were sound-recorded, which brought a degree of formality to the process. All the interviewees were informed of the academic ethical procedures, and all interviews were conducted in line with the requirements of the University Ethics Committee.

The dialogical approach marked the field research, aimed at investigating how those powers that are attempting to structure 'the female Oriental Other' are being resisted and negotiated by women artists and dancers, which is in line with the first research question of this doctoral project. The interviews were semi-structured, starting with question regarding origins of the dancers' involvement with belly dancing, to develop conversations that included questions regarding their positions towards erotic stereotyping of belly dancing, their positions towards public perceptions of this dance forms, as well as the debate on authenticity versus cultural appropriation. Interviews would often include broader issues regarding immigration and perceptions of Muslim women in Europe, frequently touching on the contested subject of veiling. Many interviewees discussed their views on spirituality in belly dancing and the topic of 'Goddess', popular in belly dancing. While there were many connecting conceptual strands that were encouraged by a common set of questions which were introduced at the beginning, the conversations would develop in various directions depending on the geo-political context of the research location and the background and the expertise of the person interviewed. A further insight into the questions and the variety of topics of

discussion is provided by the CD in Appendix VII, which features a selection of audio recordings of the interviews as well as Appendices II and III which give lists of questions, discussion topics and a transcription of an interview in Brighton.

As I was travelling through Europe in 2012 I was increasingly aware that the meaning of 'Oriental' identity versus 'European' identity was changing. The name *Dis-Orient Express* attempts to de-centre the binary opposition between 'European' and 'Oriental'. What it means to be European today has changed substantially from the 1920s, when the Orient Express was in its heyday. As well as allowing for the celebration of differences between its many cultures, Europe today is also characterised by anxieties over immigration from the Middle East, Asia and North Africa, particularly immigration of Muslims, who have usually been seen as 'the Other' to a European identity. More recently in 2015 and 2016, there has been an increase in these anxieties, generated by the right-wing press and the increasingly right-wing European leadership, in the wake of the immigration and security crisis that has affected Europe. Since my field research in 2012, it has become much more acceptable in the public discourse to talk about 'integration' and 'assimilation' of European (or British) Muslims, falsely assuming that this social group is monolithic and homogenous. In 2014, *The Independent* published findings of the research from the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey that showed that British Muslims face worst job discrimination of any minority groups, quoting the researcher as saying that 'If this persists, it could have long-term implications for the cohesion of the UK's multi-ethnic, multicultural society. The exclusion of well-qualified black and Muslim individuals could undermine their willingness to integrate in the wider society' (Dobson 2014). Writing in the Guardian in 2016, Imran Amrani wrote that:

I was encouraged by several friends to use the nickname Immy because it was less identifiably Muslim. I was told that on a professional level it would serve me to be ambiguous about my background, especially in emails, because judgments might be made about me (Amrani 2016).

In the context of the increasing polarisation of debate on immigration, European and British identity, it is even more important to resist the historic and current constructions of 'the Oriental Other' as barbaric, criminal, terrorist and diametrically opposed to a 'civilised' European.

As I realised very early on in my research journey, the 'Orient' can now be encountered at the start of the Orient Express route, in London and Paris, metropolises that include increasing numbers of citizens who descend from geographical spaces associated with 'the Orient'. This is just one of the facts that destabilises attempts to portray European identity and Oriental identity as mutually exclusive dichotomies. Europe is a heterogenous site of multi-directional flows of influence and power, and a site of diverse mappings of subjects' many ways of belonging. However, with the recent immigration crisis caused by the unprecedented number of refugees fleeing the conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Africa, the policy of the free flow of people across Europe has been interrupted by the renewed policies of borders, checkpoints and refugees camps. In Chapter Four and the Conclusion, I will expand my analysis of these political changes in the span of my research, and their impact on how the Oriental Other is perceived and performed. These developments have also changed my attitudes. If I was to undertake a field research across Europe in 2016, my questioning would be much more politically framed, taking into account the recent polarisations of public debates on the 'European-Oriental' identity.

The *Dis-Orient Express* field research approached the subject of European belly dance performances from multiple angles in a wish to stimulate dialogue between many different points of view. This pluralist approach fits an examination of belly dance as a cultural form that has 'travelled' between many geographical points in its modern history, to evolve into the globalised form of today. The *Dis-Orient Express* interviews reveal that the dancers feel that their profession has suffered from stigmatising misrepresentations that are keeping the belly dance form in a marginalised position in relation to the mainstream culture in their respective countries. Some of their opinions on this subject are presented in this chapter, as well as in Appendices II, III and VII. Many interviewed dancers express unease with the stereotyping of belly dancing via association with eroticised sexually suggestive dances such as lap dance and striptease. Some of them consider these associations to be problematic and key contributing factors in keeping belly dance in a position where it is, seen as a lower and relatively unknown dance form compared to established and institutionalised forms such as contemporary dance and ballet. Many of them also regard it as their professional duty to educate audiences and change popular perception through elevating the status of belly dance. For example, Jalya Aslanova said in our interview: 'Us as belly dancers must educate

people and open their eyes...and let them see the truth!' (Aslanova 2012). Considering these concerns and the research questions of this thesis, the main focus of this chapter is on specific dancers' strategies aimed at negotiating the orientalist discourses and patriarchal structures of belly dancing.

This focus follows the first research question which is how dancers negotiate the orientalist and eroticised perceptions of belly dancing, and the orientalist framework of this dance form. This question will be addressed by defining specific cases of the orientalist framework, such as 'the manufactured orientalist spectacle' of the Middle Eastern restaurant, analysed in *Al Fayrooz* and *Nomads* case study. This will allow an analysis of how, in their negotiations with the orientalist frameworks of belly dancing, dancers either accept or resist the forces that are attempting to structure the female Oriental 'Other', which is the first research question of the thesis. The dancers' individual approaches will be analysed in relation to the academic writings on wider themes surrounding belly dance such as the 'Goddess discourse' (Virginia Keft-Kennedy 2005), and neo-liberal gentrification in Istanbul (Oyku Potuoglu-Cook 2006). The analysis of dancers' negotiations of the orientalist milieu and expectations will point out experiences of personal empowerment, as well as professional limitations that are placed upon them.

Each of the three sections of the chapter starts with an introductory scene describing a performance or a dialogue, leading into the analysis interwoven with selected interview material and reference to relevant academic writing. The first case study titled *Supernova* focuses on a Tribal Fusion belly dance show in a UK theatre setting. The location of the belly dance show in the University setting creates 'a hybrid space' which, as I will argue, produces a liberating potential in the re-construction of this genre and of performers' identities. It describes a performance that deals critically with the subject of goddess impersonation and self-idolatry in belly dance practices. This case study provides ideal source material for my investigation of Goddess discourse as one of the dominant themes in this dance form. The second case study *Al Fayrooz* enables an investigation of the complexities surrounding the role of a belly dancer in a restaurant. It focuses on a performance in a Lebanese restaurant in Austria. My analysis here further addresses questions of ownership and appropriation of belly dance practices, subjects that were introduced in Chapter One (p57). The complexities of the role of a belly dancer are further analysed in the third case study titled *Nomads*, an example of

belly dance performance in a nightclub in Istanbul. This case study will address the third research question of the thesis which investigates how perspectives in hybridity theory relate to dancers' identities and practices. This analysis will be framed by the broader context of urban gentrification in Istanbul, as well as by a specific hybridity perspective relating to 'interstitial passage'.

Scene 1: Supernova

Sallis Benney Theatre, Brighton University, March 2012. I am here to see a performance which promises - as we were told in the advertisements - to be a revolutionary show where Middle Eastern Dance is creatively fused with multiple forms of performance, from contemporary dance to flamenco. Organised by the Brighton-based fusion dancer Hilde Canoodt, the show features international performers from the US, Belgium, Netherlands, Croatia and UK.

One of the striking features about the show is the considerable distance between the performers and the audience. The performers on the raised proscenium stage are separated from the audience by the three-metre wide orchestra pit. This creates a distance uncharacteristic of typical performances of belly dance. Belly dance has usually been performed in close proximity to its audiences. Staged performances of belly dance are not uncommon, but it is more often performed in cabaret-style settings, restaurants or celebratory social situations, such as weddings. Here the orchestra pit doubles the distance.³

The show that follows also presents a series of dance pieces that are equally uncharacteristic of belly dance norms⁴, surprising in

³ For more information about belly dance traditions in Arabic cultures see Najwa Adra's 'Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre' in Shay and Sellers-Young (2008:28-49)

⁴ By belly dance norms, I mean a cabaret-style form of belly dance, known also as Egyptian style, mostly seen in Arabic restaurants in the UK, popular tourist entertainment venues in Egypt, or Egyptian and Hollywood films.

their variety of creative dialogues between different musical and dance forms, costuming and moods. Performers dance to recorded music, most of which has been produced specially for them, combining the styles of electronica and world music. The organiser of the show, Hilde Canoodt, bursts onto the stage to the up-beat sounds of 1920s Charleston music, wearing frilly trousers and a colourful overskirt, with a shiny belt, a small bra top exposing her midriff, and with her hair done up in twenties fashion.



Figure 1.a Hilde Canoodt

The song is called 'Happy Feet' and Hilde's smile is contagious. For the next two minutes she performs a series of steps and gestures that are recognisable as Charleston, with many hip and midriff movements that signify belly dancing. At times, she communicates to the audience with her smile and body language that 'this is fun', and they respond with clapping and laughter. A large section of the audience is comprised of Hilde's Brighton-

based dance students, who cheer and ululate in Arabic fashion, producing a nasal high-pitched sound, in a style that has become a sort of etiquette in belly dance subcultures.



Figure 2 Donna Mejia

In the end, we are treated to a performance by Donna Mejia, who performs her piece titled *About that Idolatry Thing*. At first she appears on a raised podium, performing a series of recognisable Tribal Fusion dance movements, hip and arm isolations and midriff undulations, but with her head raised up and in a such a way as if to communicate that she is somehow ‘above it all’. The mixture of choral and electronic music sets a pseudo-reverential mood that accentuates this message. The dancer is communicating an effort to conform to an ideal. Next, the figure falls flat down on this raised platform, clearly conveying a message of boredom. In the last stage of the performance, the dancer steps down from the podium, with a smile, glancing directly at the audience, and signalling with hand gestures that she’s had enough of being on the podium. After an energetic and uplifting dance, she directly addresses the audience, saying: “I really don’t want to go back up there. Can I stay here with you?”

For a spectator not familiar with the term ‘Tribal Fusion belly dance’ *Supernova* definitely disrupts the belly dance stereotype of seedy and titillating promises of striptease. For a start, the space is not a restaurant, nightclub or a cabaret, but a theatre.

We are witnessing a cutting edge fusion of dance styles performed by dancers of differing abilities, but on the pulse of current trends in contemporary culture. The relocation of belly dance performance to a University theatre is one strategy that may serve to reach a wider audience and perhaps gain a higher status. I will briefly outline some of the effects of this relocation, before focusing on the theme of goddess symbolism in belly dance performances.

Belly dancing is a marginalised cultural practice which doesn't get much exposure in mainstream performance venues. When placed within the socio-culturally privileged context of the University theatre, new possibilities emerge, in the form of what Homi Bhabha (1994) terms a 'hybrid displacing space'. The theatre setting enables a new perspective on the act of seeing the cultural form of belly dancing, and new possibilities of its representation. Seen within the wider orientalist discourse of belly dancing, it is an 'interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative' space (Bhabha 1994) which produces new cultural meanings of this cultural practice, blurring the limitations of existing orientalist discourse. By relocating a belly dancing show - usually performed in Arabic restaurants as part of an exotic spectacle - into a theatre setting, and setting it to experimental electronic music, the established categorisations of belly dancing culture and identity are called into question. Something that is usually seen as an amateur form of entertainment bordering on the sex industry, is placed on the University theatre stage and observed and judged as a form of performance art. On the stage in *Supernova* are dance artists who are using a mixture of movement repertoires and music that completely revision the stereotypical view of belly dancers. The women in the show are in charge, using belly dance as an artistic expression. The curious encounter between the belly dancers and the University theatre audiences was brimming with ambivalence and new possibilities of re-imagining this form.

This specific encounter manifested a discord between an ethnic custom and its audience reception. Tribal Fusion, in line with musical fusion trends, employs a pick-and-mix attitude when it comes to choosing its stylistic and visual influences (for details see Chapter Four p 174-6). This cultural borrowing is present not just in the performance, but also in the ways dance is received in its trans-national dance communities. The *Supernova* case study shows how a certain element from the indigenous culture persisted in this new setting, in the example of the Arabic custom of ululating to express admiration. The effect of this audience response seemed to jar in

this highly formal theatre setting, due to the distance of the large orchestra pit and the distance from the cultural origin of this response. The intention here is not to suggest that audiences should be homogenous and unified in their responses, but to illustrate how this budding form often has a diverse reception and interpretation in its trans-national journey. Hybrid spaces that belly dancing create in the processes of translation between its many contexts are sites of ambivalence as well as potential resistance.

Donna Mejia's performance in the introductory scene tackles another important feature of contemporary belly dance and that is the popular and enduring Goddess discourse. I will now briefly analyse this discourse in reference to other scholarly studies of belly dance and my field research interviews, to open up the analysis of using Goddess symbolism as a strategy of resistance to patriarchal gaze.

A popular story circulates among belly dance practitioners, in classes and on teachers' websites, which centres on the sacred origins of belly dance. This is a story of belly dance as an ancient form of dance, practiced in matrilineal societies, by women for women, and by temple dancers, as a form of religious ritual in adoration of a Goddess figure. Since the first modern dancers' performances, such as Ruth St Dennis's reportedly impassioned performances in honour of Hindu female deities (Desmond 1991:28-49) - through to modern day belly dancers who celebrate Isis, Ishtar, Tara and other female deities in their performances, the 'goddess motif' remains influential in contemporary practice. Goddess discourse is manifested in the written and online publications on belly dance, as well as in belly dance classes. For example, a search on www.google.com brings out 692,000 results for search 'Goddess belly dancing' (accessed March 2016). A quick look on these websites reveals topics of revealing the 'inner Goddess' through dance, impersonating a Goddess, or indicates leading names in belly dance, such as 'Goddesses of belly dance'. Ishtar, a 'belly dance artist, writer and musician' based in Liverpool, says that by connecting with a 'divine feminine archetype' women can connect with universal, spiritual power through dance (Ishtar 2016). On her website she addresses those who wish to connect to the powerful feminine Ishtar archetype like this: 'Call on her to make your dance command the attention of the audience and when you want to be treated like a queen'(Ishtar 2016).

The Goddess discourse in the context of belly dancing posits the belly dancer as an idealised figure outside normative influences of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Based on the belief in an ancient matriarchal culture, it aims to counteract the dance's connotations of objectification, and form a meta-narrative of belly dance as 'essentially a woman's' and 'spiritual' activity. The development of Goddess discourse in belly dancing can be traced to the development of the Goddess movement and the women's liberation movement in the 1970s. In 1978 Carol Christ published the essay *Why Women Need the Goddess*, and presented it as the keynote address at the 'Great Goddess Re-emerging' conference at the University of Santa Cruz in the Spring of 1978. In it she said that: 'The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power'(Christ 2006: 45). Christ argues for the need for women to establish a system of symbols and theory congruent with their experience, in clear opposition to patriarchy and patriarchal religions. She emphasises that 'the Goddess is a symbol of the affirmation of the legitimacy and beauty of female power' (2006:46), and writes:

The affirmation of female power contained in the Goddess symbol has both psychological and political consequences. Psychologically, it means the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women's power is inferior and dangerous. This new "mood" of affirmation of female power also leads to new "motivations" it supports and undergirds women's trust in their own power and the power of other women in family and society. (Christ 2006: 46)

Emerging from the grass-roots women's movement in the 70s, the Goddess discourse is associated with spiritual feminism and is evident in many neo-pagan religions today as a form of polytheistic Goddess worship across many cultures in the Eastern world. Donnalee Dox in *Spirit from the Body: Belly Dance as a Spiritual Practice* (2005) draws a parallel between the emergent feminist Goddess discourse in the 1970s and the rising popularity of belly dancing in the U.S. in the same period. In her analysis of how different belly dancers engage with the Goddess symbolism in their practices she writes:

The symbol system constructed from images of the ancient Middle East to give belly dancing a spiritual component does offer a frame of reference through which western first-world women can critique their culture. That the critique is corporeal rather than linguistic, experiential rather than intellectual, and privileges a dancer's intent in performance over the signification of her body in

a matrix of cultural codes perhaps constitutes the strength, rather than a weakness, of its hermeneutic project. (Dox 2005:323)

Virginia Keft-Kennedy (2005) investigates the construction of a belly dance 'herstory' in belly dance scholarship. She cites the most well known and often criticised work on the 'sacred origins' of belly dance is Wendy Buonaventura's *Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World* (1989), as well as more recently Tina Hobin's *Belly Dance: the Dance of Mother Earth* (2003) and Iris Stewart's *Sacred Woman, Sacred Dance* (2000). These texts create a meta-narrative that is criticised as orientalist and essentialist for its tendency to posit 'women' and 'Orient' as fixed, and timeless in their 'fundamental nature', without a sufficiently critical perspective. Keft-Kennedy comes to a similar conclusion as many belly dance scholars; that 'herstory' of belly dancing is as much a construction as the patriarchal history of belly dance that it is trying to replace. She claims that there is little historical evidence to support the theory of the sacred origins of belly dance.

In my field research, I interviewed Hilde Canoodt, the Brighton-based and Belgian-born Tribal Fusion dancer. To questions about the idea of 'female power' in belly dance she answered:

I think any dance has power. I think any dance has feminine power...if it's a woman on stage dancing her heart out, it's going to have feminine power. I think belly dance has been marketed to have sensuality and sexuality and all these things, and then, after that, belly dance is now marketed to have this feminine power, you know that 'Earth Goddess' thing, earth ritual thing, as a reaction to those sensual, titillating, dancing-for-men thing, but it's still a marketing tool, in my opinion. (Canoodt 2012)

It was interesting to observe how Hilde's opinion seemed to echo the view that the 'Earth Goddess' symbolism serves as a strategy to resist the stereotype of belly dance as an activity devised solely for a male gaze. However, Hilde opts not to engage with divine archetypes in her performances, preferring to forge her own dance language, influenced strongly by Tribal Fusion.

In my interview with Donna Mejia to questions about the meaning of her piece *About that Idolatry Thing*, she responded that her motivation for doing the piece stems from her dissatisfaction with the superficial attitudes many women in her familiar dance communities have towards the 'goddess thing' in belly dance (Mejia 2012). Most of the time, she said, they just put on this beautiful apparel, feathers, flowers and other 'Goddess attributes', give themselves Goddess names and it all remains on the level of narcissistic self-adoration. Donna said she wanted to challenge the ubiquitous tendency to portray 'feminine mystique' in belly dancing communities:

I wanted to show that by creating hyper-feminised mystique, we are not helping ourselves. It's a lonely place to be. It doesn't allow us to be human, it doesn't allow us to be fully present, it emphasised superficially what is feminine about us, which is body parts, like hips or breasts (...) It also relegates us to pin-up dolls. So, like in Tribal Fusion, if you are not young or hot, with a model body, how are you supposed to be feminine in your dancing? How about other definitions of what womanhood means? What about humour, what about intelligence, what about other things that make us who we are, apart from being alluring, or pretty? (Mejia 2012)

Importantly, Donna emphasised her respect for the Goddess culture, and said she had problems with its trivialisation and its casual treatment in contemporary belly dance performances. This trivialisation leads to the loss of the original feminist intention of Goddess philosophy, which was to re-imagine belly dancing form as a woman-centred activity, in a desire to offer a typical feminine representation that fulfils patriarchal expectations. It was refreshing to witness Donna's attempt to challenge these uncritical representations in dance practices.

This example shows how a common practice of using Goddess symbolism in belly dancing has in some cases lost its original intention of resisting the dominant patriarchal cultural code. A strategy of resistance, that emerged from the 1970s women's liberation movement, has, according to Donna Mejia, in a large number of cases become another way of displaying a young sexy female body. Her theatrical performance, imbued with irony, was an important attempt at directing the belly dancing community to the

importance of this issue. I interpret her performance as a healthy dose of criticism that was a sign that the growing belly dancing subculture is thriving.

While the theory of the sacred origins of belly dance has been largely discredited for its lack of historical evidence, as well as for its essentialist and orientalist tendencies, the Goddess symbolism still has a remarkable appeal in belly dance subculture. Belly dance, as a creative and evolving art, relies considerably on fantasy and imagination, as much as on the technical dance elements. The Goddess fantasy feeds an idea that is central to many belly dance practices, and that is that women are free to enjoy and display their bodies through artistic self-expression, and as a result to empower themselves. As Christ asserts, the symbol of Goddess 'aids the process of naming and reclaiming the female body and its cycles and processes' (Christ 2006:49). This reclaiming of the body works against the limiting and oppressive social forces that are aimed at owning, controlling and stiling female bodies as well as female experiences of their bodies. Even though many belly dancers do not declare any spiritual intentions in their dance, many report the transformation and liberation that the dance has brought to their lives. This has been stated by many of the interviewees in this research, and is supported by the study by Pettigrow and Wort (2003). The goddess symbolism can work to aid these emancipatory processes, or, as Donna Mejia states, it can also simply indicate the desire to be beautiful and admired.

Later in the thesis I will examine my use of the myth of Persephone and Demeter in my *Dis-Orient Express* performance, in order to emphasise the importance of matrilineal and feminine bonds in counter-acting oppressive structures that act to ascribe identity. I will further expand the analysis of the use of Goddess myths in relation to my attempt to express the nostalgic aspect of hybrid identity through performance - a nostalgia that manifests itself as a yearning for the mother and for home. The complex relationship between this imaginative and nostalgic use of the Goddess myth, and my critical approach to the deployment of Goddess mythology in belly dancing is analysed in Chapter Four.

In the next two sections of this chapter I will continue to explore the concept of hybrid spaces by analysing two examples of restaurant performance. The *Al Fayrooz* performance, set in Vienna, will showcase a typical restaurant experience of belly dancing. It will be contrasted with an example from Istanbul, which, as I will argue,

contained a moment of subversive resistance to the cultural stereotype of a belly dance performance that restaurant audiences have come to expect, which arose from a belly dancing artist's creation of a hybrid space in a restaurant setting.

Scene 2: Al Fayrooz

Restaurant *Al Fayrooz*, central Vienna, March 2012. A group of us arrive at this Lebanese restaurant at the recommendation of Dalyla Rami, a belly-dancing teacher I had interviewed earlier that day. She gave me reason to expect a night of first-class entertainment, with the best musicians and good belly dancers, as well as some delicious Lebanese food. Dalyla also joins us. She has a reputation as one of the pioneers of the oriental dance and music scene in Austria in the 1970s and 1980s. She knows the restaurant owner and the musicians personally. All this promises an 'authentic' experience of Arabic culture, rather than just another tourist spectacle. Two rows of tables frame a narrow stage with a raised podium for the musicians. Most of the audience are members of Middle Eastern immigrant communities. There are also some western tourists presumably anticipating, like us, the 'exotic' experience.

Soon the musicians start playing, and after the singer finishes his first song, a beautiful, young dancer appears in a classic two-piece glittery outfit, and a veil, dancing on the narrow stage. She is, as I find out, of Eastern European background, and she performs impressive hip lifts, shimmies, belly rolls, intricate footwork and graceful arm movements, characteristic of the show version of Egyptian belly dance. Soon after, she starts dancing between the diners' tables. She gestures to me with her hand, and as I decline, I realise that this is her way of inviting diners to join her in the dance. Soon the stage is full of dancers, women and men, dancing and singing to popular

tunes, which they sing in Arabic. The dancers and spectators move fluidly between the dance space and the seated audience.



Figure 3 Al Fayrooz dancer, with Dalyla Rami on the right

Dalyla Rami sings along to all the Arabic songs which she knows off by heart, from time to time asking me whether I know this or that classic song, and appearing a little disappointed when I answer that I don't. At first she declines the dancer's repeated invitations to join the dance, which seems a socially acceptable mode of behaviour. Finally, she relents, ties a scarf around her hips, and then joins the other dancers. At last, we are treated to a performance by Rami, a legendary name in belly dance. Her movements are very small, and concentrated on the midsection of the body. After the dancer has gone, I ask Dalyla what she thinks about the performance. She says the dancer was good and professional, but there was 'no heart, no soul'.

A Middle-Eastern restaurant setting is probably the most common setting for belly dance performances in the West. A similar pattern to the one described above is exhibited in restaurants in UK. As a belly dancer I have performed in similar settings in London. A restaurant owner will hire a belly dancer on a weekly basis to dance for the diners. The glittery dancer is often veiled and the space dimly lit. Along with the enticing food, these elements work together to form a carefully constructed 'orientalist spectacle' aimed at pleasing the customer. The restaurant audiences vary, ranging from

metropolitan, transnational audiences to, as in the example above, ones that are more or less dominated by members of the Middle-Eastern diaspora. This fact affects greatly the level of interaction between the dancer and the spectators, and the overall experience of the event. The scene in *Al Fayrooz* portrays a situation that sits between a professional performance and a communal celebration.⁵

Anne Rasmussen in *An Evening in the Orient: the Middle Eastern Nightclub in America* (2005) analyses the development of 'the Nightclub Era' of American Middle Eastern culture in the 1960s and 1970s. She writes that the Middle Eastern nightclub reconstructed 'the spirit of the Oriental harem' (2005: 172) following the orientalist aesthetic developed by the 19th century orientalist painters, travel writers, and 20th century Russian ballet and Hollywood films. Arab American musicians cleverly reconstructed and adapted the symbols and signs of Oriental fantasy to create new musical styles. The audiences were a mixture of immigrant communities from the variety of countries in the Middle East, as well as adventurous American city-dwellers. As Rasmussen writes:

Although the trademarks of Orientalism helped these musicians to achieve success, the racist bias of this European belief system served to enhance the foreignness of these Arab and other Middle Eastern immigrants and their families, placing them in an imaginary world that was exotic – even to themselves' (2005:172).

Belly dancers were a crucial part of this orientalist display. As Shay and Sellers-Young (2005:13) write: 'In an act of self-exoticism, Middle Eastern restaurant owners used orientalism's construction of the sensuous mysterious woman to advertise the provocative belly dance as the evening's entertainment.' While some conservative immigrant and local communities might have seen the 'exotic' dancers as distasteful or 'immodest', Shay and Sellers Young write how the Middle Eastern restaurant served as the platform through which American women in the 1960s and 1970s, during the women's liberation movement, came into contact with this foreign dance genre and came to re-imagine it in many new and creative ways (2005:11-19). However, the

⁵ Even though I haven't been to any Middle-Eastern weddings, the social dances that are done in Bosnia during informal social celebrations resemble the situation described above.

orientalist spectacle designed to draw guests to Middle-Eastern restaurants continues to the present. As I witnessed in my field research and through my belly dancing practice, a restaurant remains the major context of belly dance performances in the U.K. and Europe. How dancers manage to respond to this orientalist framework within their performance depends on a specific context and, importantly, on the dancer's intentions and motivation.

As a prime example of the strategic deployment of orientalist stereotypes, *Al Fayrooz* capitalises on exotic signs for its advertising strategy. The restaurant's online advertising is brimming with orientalist mythology:

Al Fayrooz - This turquoise semiprecious stone was already adorned by the emperors of ancient Egypt, and stands for beauty and wealth. Egyptian goddess Hathor was the goddess of love, peace, beauty, dance, art and music. She was also known for wearing this divine turquoise gemstone. Dinner & dance: Let yourself be spoiled by oriental Mazza, our specialities from charcoal grill, our various delicacies and by the famous Shisha ... afterwards expect an experience from the Orient world with Oriental Belly Dance Show and live music with famous singers. The Al Fayrooz team wishes you an oriental experience with a difference! (Alfayrooz 2016)

The text in this piece of online advertising evokes a set of meanings that we have come to expect from 'the Orient'. 'Love, peace, beauty, dance, art and music', all attributes of goddess Hathor, evoke the essentialist, divine, female Oriental 'Other', along with the associated orientalist subtext of sensuality and pleasure. It is interesting to note how the text draws a link between the Oriental feminine divine, the restaurant's 'delicacies' and a belly dancing show. Next, the advert addresses 'the Orient' directly, highlighting the connection between 'the Orient world' and a 'belly dance show', which together with other sensual delights of food and music promise the typical 'Oriental experience'. This piece of writing confirms the strength of the fixity of the connection between 'the orientalist spectacle' of the Middle Eastern restaurant and belly dance, accompanied by the orientalist suggestion of pleasure.

In the following analysis I will continue to explore dancers' strategies for negotiating such orientalist discourses by focussing on the position of the dancer within the orientalist spectacle of the restaurant. The *Al Fayrooz* case study will foreground the

perspective of two Arabic belly dancers in Austria. The analysis of their accounts will develop the debate on identity politics and belly dancing that was presented in Chapter One, by focussing on the experience of loss of tradition in belly dancing as a site of complex cultural appropriations and ethical concerns that follow the processes of globalisation. I will firstly highlight the perspective of my interviewee Dalyla Rami, the belly dancing teacher who was born in Morocco. As Figure 3 shows, Dalyla Rami was sitting to my right in *Al Fayrooz* restaurant, and was positioned as an informal 'guide' to this inter-cultural experience. I did not interview the Eastern European belly dancer in *Al Fayrooz*, and I cannot offer her perspective on her position as a performer, which would have been valuable in this analysis. While I cannot offer or replace her unique perspective, in exploring how belly dancers negotiate restaurant environments I draw on my experience of performing in a very similar context in the UK. Dalyla is reputed to be one of the pioneers of belly dance in Austria, and the implication was that she could offer me an 'insider's view' into Arabic culture, music and social customs, along with her specialist knowledge of belly dancing. This perspective was very important at this stage of my research.

Najwa Adra in her writing on the North African traditions of belly dance, describes a situation where Amira, a young girl, is hesitant about joining the dance: 'It was not until her grandmother wrapped a dance scarf around her hips that she stood up, realizing that on this occasion it was permissible for her to dance' (Adra 2005: 28). This resonates with the situation described in the introductory scene, where 'my guide' Dalyla Rami demurs before wrapping a scarf around her hips and joining the dance. In our interview Dalyla described the way in which she learnt to dance in her native Morocco. She was born in an upper-class family in Rabat, and her grandfather regularly organised poetry, music and dance evenings in their enclosed courtyard. The famous Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, and the renowned Egyptian belly dancing star Samia Gamal were both guests at these parties. Young Dalyla had many opportunities to soak up this artistic atmosphere. This is just one of many accounts that give an insight into the way that belly dance knowledge is acquired in Arabic cultures, through communal celebrations, as an integral part of learning music and acquiring the social customs that underpin this form.

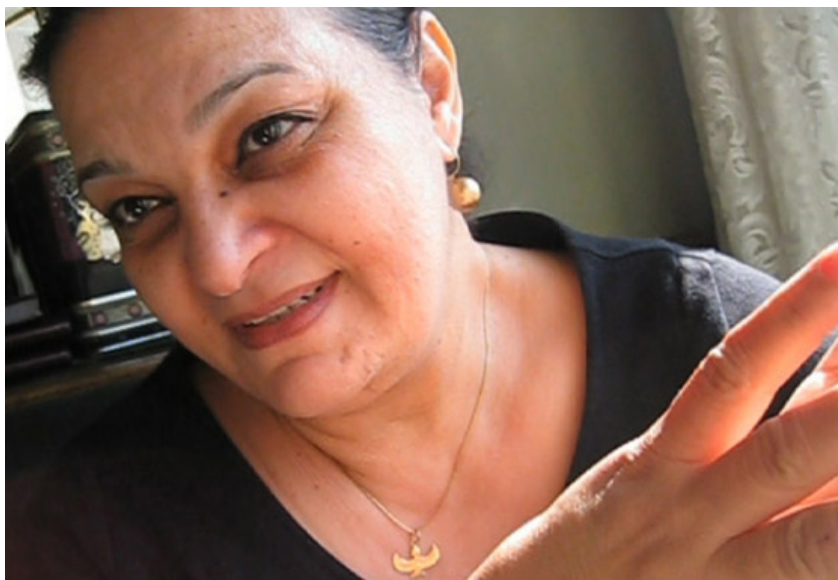


Figure 4 Dalyla Rami during our interview

In the interview with Dalyla, I wanted to explore her attitudes to belly dance. To my question regarding stereotyping of belly dancing via association with eroticised, sexually suggestive dances, she said that:

Oriental dance has two paths. One is when women are very happy to be together and to dance, it's very powerful and it's great. And another path is where women dance for men, it's very erotic, and that is a completely different energy. The world doesn't know this, not every woman knows this. Sometimes in the Orient, if you say Oriental dancer, they only think this, because they don't know the other thing. But you have to decide it, to be there or there. (Rami 2012)

Her statement is important not just for its emphasis on distinguishing between the two different belly dance forms or 'paths' as Dalyla puts it, but also for its insistence on distinguishing between different intentions of belly dance practitioners. The intention of a belly dancer can be in conflict with the restaurant environment. Whereas most belly dancers on their websites construct their practice around the discourses of body empowerment, autonomy and independence, the fact is that majority of paid performance opportunities for belly dancers are still in the domain of the Middle Eastern restaurants and nightclubs, which are mostly run and managed by men. The restaurant expectation, as I previously highlighted, is on belly dance professionals to

fulfill the promise of the orientalist spectacle. This may well clash with the emancipatory intentions of women-only environments of belly dance classes.

The night in *Al Fayrooz* opens up the question of an intention and positioning of a belly dancer in such a setting. Firstly, she needs to set clear boundaries of accepted behaviour from the customers, whilst initiating dancing and ensuring that people have a good time. The dancer completes the orientalist spectacle aimed at pleasing the customer, and so she has to balance many other things in order to assure her status in that economy. The proprietor may lay down certain conditions with regards to her costume, appearance, props and choice of music, and it depends on the dancer's experience and social expertise how much of her artistic self-expression and autonomy she can secure in this relationship.⁶ The harsh social realities behind the glittery dance floor, such as the dancer's need for money, can lead her to conform to the idealised and sexualised 'belly dance look'. Donnalee Dox argues:

female dancers operate *de facto* in patriarchal societies, and women's bodies and behaviour are automatically defined by male expectations for how women look and what that appearance represents for and to men. Social forces (namely, poverty) often drive women's complicity in using that internalised self-image in the sex industry, as well as most other representations of women's bodies in American popular culture (Dox 2005).

Even though Dox is writing in American context, similar patriarchal expectations of women's visual appearance operate in Europe. Drawing from my experience of belly dancing in an Algerian restaurant in London's Covent Garden, I can recall that the restaurant manager had particular demands relating to dancers' physical appearance, such as asking dancers to remove arm body hair.

Most belly dance professionals approach their work in restaurants as a stage profession, in a business-like manner. This was the case in the context of *Al Fayrooz*. The dancer was a professional who was good at her job of delivering the product; she possessed a good technical skill, and physical attractiveness according to social norms, as well as being

⁶ As I discussed with belly dancer Bahar Sarah in Istanbul, much depends on having a good relationship with the owner, who may give more freedom and autonomy to trusted dancers.

good at balancing different social pressures onstage. In my opinion she negotiated this situation well, and even managed to get many people of various age, ethnicity and gender to dance onstage and 'perform' for each other.

Yet, in the opinion of our 'guide' Dalyla Rami, the dancer's performance lacked 'heart'. This comment may lead one to question whether Dalyla was indicating the dancer's non-Arabic background as the cause of this, or whether this perceived effect occurred because the dancer treated performance 'like a job', rather than an activity that she would invest with 'heart and soul'. Many dancers treat restaurant jobs as ways of having regular income, and reserve their creative expression for settings such as studios and festivals.⁷

Dalyla's comment about 'no heart' in belly dancer's performance can be interpreted in the context of globalisation of belly dance form. There are strong opinions that lament the loss of tradition in belly dance performances by dancers of non-Middle-Eastern upbringing. A group of dance practitioners in the 'San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival Symposium on Belly Dance' in 2003 voiced a valid concern that those belly dance forms that are based on the fantasised Orient have now come to represent ethnic dances from the Middle East (Gilded Serpent 2016). One of the symposium questions was to what extent being non-native to the Middle East is relevant to one's belly dance practice, and whether dancers' representation of the Middle Eastern dance amounts to cultural assimilation of the minority culture within a larger American culture. One of the conclusions of the symposium was that the American hybrid forms of belly dancing are not culturally accurate nor representative of various Middle Eastern ethnic dances (Gilded Serpent 2016). While making sure not to slip into essentialist ethno-centric positions outlined in Chapter One (p60-61), it is important to ask what is being lost when the cultural practice of belly dancing is not performed within its indigenous culture. It is within the context of this question that I examine Dalyla's statement.

The shifts that happen as belly dance travels between its many cultural contexts are towards sites of liberatory hybrid potential, as I have analysed in *Supernova*, but can also be towards sites of loss. A partially codified movement vocabulary arguably endures the geographical shifts of a dance form. However, certain facets that might, locally, be expressed as integral to that form - facets determined by culturally-specific

⁷ As Bahar Sarah told me in the interview in October 2012, Istanbul.

interpretative practices and attitudes - could be regarded as not easily transferable. These might perhaps be described as subtler and especially nuanced: a specific response to music; familiar modes of improvisation; recognisable evocations of mood or humour. As a performer, I can support the claim of the loss of feeling in transfer of belly dancing music from its indigenous context. For example, Balkan folk music has many oriental influences, and is popular in some belly dance subcultures, and I have used it in belly dance performances. Its use is completely different to the use the generic 'belly dancing music'. The music with which I have grown up, I know through its language, its story, its emotional charge, its context, its connotations and my personal history. Whenever I would hear a familiar song in belly dance classes, I would experience a sense of melancholic displacement. Exiled from its indigenous context (for example, a group of family and friends singing the song during a family celebration) into a belly dance class, the song would lose most of its meaning. The dance class would approach it technically, by the beat and musical structure, rather than from the position of understanding and regard of the song's emotional meaning. This is as close as I can come to comprehending the meaning of Dalyla's comment on 'the absence of heart' in the belly dancer's performance.

In our interview, Dalyla said that she was one of the first to insist on the use of the term 'oriental dance' in Austria, in order to distance it from the associations of belly dancing with the Western forms of exotic dance and stripping. This use of terminology is a widespread strategy that belly dancers use in their efforts to counteract negative stereotypes and improve the status of this form. A prominent feature of the belly dance scene in Austria is that many practitioners use the term 'oriental dance' or *Orientalischer Tanz*, rather than 'belly dance' or *Bauchtanz*. The term comes from the Arabic name for this dance, *Raqs Sharqui*, meaning 'eastern dance' or 'oriental dance'. All three terms indicate the same dance form, recognised widely as Egyptian cabaret style. I asked Aminta Mahmoud, another dancer who I interviewed in Austria, whether she used the term 'oriental dance' in order to distinguish it from belly dance's sexualised connotations. She agreed, saying that:

I wanted always to put Oriental dance art on a high level. I don't like this belly dance and kitsch that goes with it. This is very old dance, it's a woman's dance, it's a proud dance, it's a strong

dance, and it's a very big present if you dance for somebody.

(Mahmood 2012)

Similarly to Dalyla, Aminta Mahmoud regards herself not just as dancer and a teacher, but also as a cultural ambassador. With her Austrian-Palestinian background, she considers it her responsibility to preserve and circulate knowledge about Arabic culture and customs, as well as the meanings of dance. In our interview, she said:

As I am Arabic I also have a strong feeling who really feels Arabic culture, and who is just imitating it. I'm sure as a Greek, or a Bosnian, I'm sure you can feel it. In these German-speaking countries, it's a very different culture. Many women who are teaching oriental dance are not at all interested in Arabic culture. They don't distinguish, they don't know anything about it.

(Mahmood 2012)

These comments can be interpreted in many ways. Coming from an Austrian-Palestinian belly dancer, they can be read as a form of resistance to the dominant Austrian, European, 'German-speaking' culture. As she claims, 'oriental dance' is higher in status to the 'kitsch' of 'belly dance', so her comments can also be interpreted as a resistance to the misconceptions associated with 'belly dance'. Her comments can be regarded as resonating strongly with an essentialist feminist discourse, in which oriental dance is positioned as an ancient dance of women that has been re-appropriated by the Western entertainment and nightclub industry as an erotic show dance. Aminta's observations also connect to the previously discussed 'absence of feeling' in belly dancing practices by those who do not come from the Arabic culture.

Even though I can understand Aminta's point of view, I find her statements problematic. Her observations seem to be propagating an ethno-centric view, which suggests that belonging to a specific national or cultural group gives exclusive access to the 'soul' of the dance. This is a very slippery area, not just because of the exclusivist and essentialist nature of this idea, but also because terms such as 'essence', 'feeling', or 'heart' in oriental dance and music are very difficult to define. This ethno-centrism (Omohundro 2008) also ignores the fact that what is being referred to is a globalised dance, practiced all over the world by many people, who continue to imbue it with

meanings that are culturally relevant to them. I have criticised the fixity of identity politics in Chapter One, and pointed out that combative forms of identity politics have a tendency towards to closing off, rather than opening of the debate on belly dancing. In addition, I do not endorse the argument that people born in regions outside the Middle East would never be able to understand the nuanced meanings of the Middle Eastern music and dance folk traditions, and come to appreciate and preserve belly dance in its original meaning. On the contrary, there are numerous examples of belly dancers who travel to the countries in the Middle East, to study their dances, music, language and customs, and this has a direct bearing to those dancers' understanding and interpretation of dance's subtleties. The San Francisco Ethnic Dance Symposium on Belly Dance, mentioned previously, showed many examples of that practice (Gilded Serpent 2016). It is important to keep in mind that there are multiple forms of belly dance practice, some of which are more focussed on preserving tradition and others which cultivate innovation. A pluralist approach to belly dance form calls for continuous informed dialogues between different belly dance practices, which have to be fostered in belly dance communities.

Coming back to the performance of the belly dancer in *Al Fayrooz*, it can be concluded that she fulfilled the professional expectations of the restaurant to deliver 'an oriental experience' promised in the online advertising. This was not an act of resistance to established norms, but a conventional belly dance show that one has come to expect in an Arabic restaurant. While there are many examples of practices that continue to supply the demand for the exotic and desirable belly dancer as part of the manufactured orientalist spectacle in restaurant settings, there are also other stories. An experienced or inspired dancer may find a way to circumvent and even change expectations, by layering her performance with symbolic or expressive meanings. In the next section I will outline such an example, with a reference to the Istanbul restaurant *Nomads*, which will be analysed in relation to the critical framework of hybridity theory.

Scene 3: Nomads

Istanbul, October 2012. I arrive at *Nomads*, a chic restaurant/nightclub, accompanied by Istanbul-based Swiss-born belly dancer Bahar Sarah. I enter a striking, polished black interior, lit by an impressive array of lamps. This 'contemporary oriental'

concept, as applied to *Nomads*' interior design, expresses the venue's 'European elegance with oriental flair'.⁸ Bahar introduces me to all the waiting staff, the DJs and the manager, as a friend 'who will help to film the show'.

The elegantly clad customers clearly belong to the social class who can afford the high price. These are wealthy, young Istanbulians, many of them heavily made-up young women in towering six-inch heels. Bahar takes me 'backstage' into a small room where other performers are busy preparing for the show. I meet a group of beautiful, young performers, and one of them agrees to talk to me, seemingly because she wants to practise her English. She says that she is doing this show 'only for money', and that her real passion is Latin dance. Another dancer in the group agrees that this show is for them just about money.

The *Nomads*' 'stage' is the central space of the restaurant, in front of the bar, illuminated by arabesque-like lighting design. The music is a mixture of Turkish and Arabic 'ambient' music, which changes to a faster beat and higher volume, just before the first set of dancers appear. All six dancers are young and slender, in matching shiny belly dance apparel, with translucent veils covering their faces just below the eyes, all of them carrying metal incense burners which spread smoke and create a 'mystical' atmosphere. With their apparel and the smoke they embody the stereotype of 'mystical' and seductive oriental women.

After the 'mood' has been set in this way, Bahar Sarah enters, wearing a face-mask with a striking red feather and intricate, hand-made costume, a red veil covering her entire body. Her costume is composed of hand-chosen ornaments that reflect an

⁸ As described in *Nomads* website "Nomads is a European concept based on Eastern culture, bringing European style and flair to the interior and the cuisine" (Nomads 2016)

individual style with a punk edge. She starts her act on top of the bar counter, in front of the DJ, turning it for a few moments into a stage. She dances to electronic music in a style that reflects the pluralistic approach of Tribal Fusion belly dance, displaying elements of Indian dance, with characteristic 'pop and lock' and 'undulation' movements.

In the second part of her act, the music changes to Turkish Romany traditional music with a distinct 9/8 beat. She takes off the facemask, and in the guise of a Romany belly dancer with the signature headscarf, Bahar steps down from the bar counter, and interacts with the audience. She performs the role of a mischievous Roma, picking up and tasting morsels from diners' plates, dancing defiantly and provoking amusement and laughter from the audience. In this fashion she moves from table to table, dancing in the Turkish Romany style, with characteristic hip and pelvic movements, hand gestures and a typical audacious attitude. The audience are clearly familiar with this music, and have come prepared – each table has at least one tambourine, on which the beat is faithfully and skilfully accompanied. Soon most of the diners are up and dancing, men and women, tambourines up, joining in a festive exhilarated atmosphere.

Attitudes to belly dancing in Turkey are different to other places I studied for this thesis. The main difference is that, as a country that is frequently described as Middle-Eastern, belly dancing is commonly seen to be a part of Turkish traditional culture. The dominant perception, as I discovered from interviews with Turkish dancers, is that belly dancing is a seductive form of dance (Gümüşayak 2012). Gonca Gümüşayak, a contemporary dancer from Istanbul, told me also that when she says that she is a dancer, most Turkish people ask her whether she is a belly dancer. She added, with reference to belly dancing in her culture, that people "are born to this rhythm, the rhythm of darbuka" (Turkish drum), they learn it from "mothers and mother's mothers" and that this dance is done in many social gatherings (Gümüşayak 2012).

As Turkey's economic power grows, with Istanbul taking centre-stage in the national processes of modernisation, so does the commodification of belly dance for both tourist and local consumption. The *Nomads* scenario can serve to illustrate how the Istanbul elites receive and enjoy a belly dance show. It can also serve to exemplify one of the form's specific functions within wider processes of gentrification and neo-orientalisation in modern Turkey. Firstly, I will outline this wider context, in order to then focus on Bahar Sarah's show as an example of an inspired and layered performance in a restaurant setting.

Turkey, with its pro-American politics, its NATO membership and its unique status as the Middle East's 'noble savage' (Potuoglu-Cook 2006:637), has been developing unique appeal as an international tourist destination that is simultaneously 'modern' and 'exotic'. More recently in 2016, Turkey's tourism industry has experienced decline due to the terrorist threat, but the above statement still applies. Oyku Potuoglu-Cook (2006) explores the revitalisation of the belly dance form in relation to the neo-liberal gentrification of modern Istanbul. She asserts that belly dance, with its formerly low and suspect status, has been 'recycled' and now enters spaces associated with the high social elites. This process of recycling she terms neo-Ottomania, describing this as "classed and gendered self-Orientalism particular to the post-1980s Turkish free-market modernity" (Potuoglu-Cook 2006:634). Neo-Ottomania is evident, according to her, not just within urban re-developments, attempts at historical preservation and mediated popular discourses but also in the realm of public entertainment. Belly dance, which has previously been seen as an inferior dance form, has been adopted by higher social classes, in line with the current western endorsement of belly dance as an art form. Potuoglu-Cook writes that many professional Turkish women are taking dance lessons, despite the fact that they learn belly dance at home and through social gatherings. The gradual transformation of belly dance from a folk form with a morally suspect practice, into a codified dance performance genre, has attracted people from higher classes who want to be associated with new westernised cosmopolitanism.



Figure 6 Nomads, Istanbul

The setting of *Nomads* certainly fits the description of a neo-Ottomanian project; it is a modern Turkish establishment, with its finger on the pulse of European popular trends in music, design and entertainment, yet promising ‘a world of fairy tales behind its doors’ (Nomads 2016). As briefly described in the introductory description, *Nomads* presented an orientalist fantasy: six young women gave a stereotypical portrayal of Eastern dancers wearing translucent face-veils, complete with ‘mystical smoke’. This manufactured exotic extravaganza was followed by a starkly different performance by Bahar Sarah. Her performance featured elements of Tribal Fusion style, as well as very free use of space. In our interview I asked Bahar about this unusual amount of freedom for expression in a restaurant setting. The key to this, she told me, was that she had a good relationship with the restaurant, and that they trusted her (Sarah 2012). *Nomads*, she said, was keen to present different forms of musical and dance entertainment referencing wider nomadic cultures, and Tribal Fusion style fits well within this approach.



Figure 7 Bahar Sarah in the performance in Nomads

In our interview, Bahar told me that she was born in Switzerland, to Turkish parents, and had learnt to dance from her mother, as well as from Swiss, Russian, and Egyptian teachers. I questioned her about her views regarding people of different nationalities taking on belly dance - whether Swiss, South American or Russian - and whether they might perhaps be 'taking something away' from the oriental dance. She said:

No, the European people gave something back to the dance, something that Turkish, oriental people lost. They gave back the value to the oriental dance, the appreciation that this is art. If something belongs to you, you often don't appreciate it. Someone needs to take it from you, and give it to you back, show it to you and then you see its value. I am very glad that so many European and American women are taking on belly dance. But, another important point is, sometimes I see performances by American and European people that are technically perfect, but they are missing the feeling. But this is a spiritual dance, the most important thing is that it needs to go through the heart first, not through the muscle (Sarah 2012).

Bahar's is just one of many voices strongly appreciative of the fact that the globalisation of belly dance has acted to revitalise the scene within cultures which claim belly dance as their own cultural form. Her second point about the lack of feeling in westerners' performances echoes opinions outlined in *Al Fayrooz*, in the previous section of this chapter. Her views support the discourses of belly dance as 'essentially a woman's' and a 'spiritual' activity, with ancient and sacred roots. She said: 'It's really important to tell people the roots of oriental dance. It is a praying dance, ritual dance. In my practice, I feel that connection of Oriental dance with nature, cosmos, Goddess, earth, praying for earth. That was the original concept. And it changed completely, it became a show dance' (Sarah 2012). Bahar's views echoed the 'sacred roots' narrative shared by many other dancers in the Dis-Orient Express field research. Even though the Goddess discourse has been criticised on the grounds of its essentialist feminist position which borders on orientalism (see Keft-Kennedy 2005), many dancers use this narrative as a way of elevating the status of belly dance, for themselves, their audiences and their students.

The first *Nomads* performance by six dancers with face veils, glittery costumes and incense, which spread 'mystical' smoke, fits the category of a show dance. It seemed almost fetishist in that it copied a surface signifying iconography of belly dance, without regard for its deeper cultural and emotive contexts. Bahar's performance in *Nomads* was starkly different to the group dance that preceded it, as well as to the standard professional performance in *Al Fayrooz*. Her innovative use of space, mask, costume, and her provocative interaction with the audience, resulted in an original, theatrical and witty performance. She directed the show, never relinquishing control of her own presentation to the spectators, or losing the warmth, spontaneity and fun in the audience interaction. Her impersonation of the Romani dancer thrilled the diners, to the point where cool and elegant Istanbul urbanites were on their feet, belly dancing and playing their tambourines. The witty and vivacious 'Romani dancer' and the familiar, exhilarating music seemed to give them licence to join in a communal celebration, renewing collective embodied memories of Turkish folklore.

Bahar told me that she refuses to teach belly dance as an oriental show dance. Her approach is both esoteric and earthy, it comes 'from inside'. She uses symbols of nature to inspire students 'to feel the connection between their bodies and the universe', as she said in our interview. It was interesting to hear how she negotiates her mission to

educate people about the roots of belly dance with her work in the settings where people expect familiar entertainment. She said: 'I have to also find a middle way. I have to be a bridge between that what people know – show dance – that's fine, I also have to go to restaurants, it's important to be connected, you cannot just say 'everything is wrong, that's not the right way to do it' (Sarah 2012).

I witnessed that Bahar's performance managed to create a liminal space in which the performer, together with the audience, shifted the structures of representation of belly dance as an exotic entertainment of a male gaze. With one show she achieved three things: produce a classic show dance, a theatrical show and a communal celebration in an ultra-modern nightclub setting. In explaining how she achieves this I will borrow Homi Bhabha's concept of 'interstitial passage'. Fredrik Fahlander (2007) explains 'interstitial passage' like this:

A house may consist of several floors that are accessible by a staircase. In order to move from the first to the second floor or vice versa, one needs to use the stairs. The staircase is thus metaphorically speaking transcending 'certain binary oppositions' such as high and low by offering a liminal space and a pathway between the extremes. The liminal space of the stairwell is, according to Bhabha, an 'interstitial passage' in a similar sense that allows a social subject to move in and out of, for instance, different racial subject positions.' (2007:24)

Bahar Sarah in her performance managed to inhabit several positions. As described in the introductory scene, she entered the stage in a feathery mask (Figure 7). This masquerade articulated her hyper-femininity as exaggerated and subversive. Her dance movements were set to electronic music which signalled her theatrical performance as different to the belly dance norms. Then, as she descended from the platform, she adopted a character of a Turkish Romani dancer, a figure on the margins of Turkish society. Turkish Romani people are discriminated against in many ways (see Chapter Four p178), yet they are respected for their music and dance, which are often performed informally on the street or as part of communal celebrations. They occupy an ambivalent role in Turkish society – while they face social discrimination in all aspects of their daily life, they embody the fantasy of fun-loving, free, transgressive outsiders and are one of the enduring influences in belly dance practices across the globe.

With her background in acting, Bahar seemed to utilise theatrical characterisation techniques to adopt different stage personas. By using different costume, mask, movements and music she constructed characters that allowed her to express a range of moods which elicited different audience responses. The extravagant masked performer, standing on the bar counter, projected a self-assured woman, in charge, commanding the audience to pay attention to her. Her reappearance as a Romani dancer projected a completely different mood; her face expressed pride, even arrogance, while at the next moment adopting a humorous expression and switching into a playful teasing and mimicking of the audience, much to their delight. She created the mood of joyful celebration, which moved the sophisticated urban audiences to join in a communal dance. The Romani dancer was a playful trickster who overturned the social rules by eating from the plates of the customers, to their laughter and bemusement, but also re-established the convention of an exhilarated communal celebration.

Her transformation indicated a liminal space, or 'interstitial passage', where she moved from different positions, between a theatrical belly dance performer to a Turkish Romany dancer, bringing the audience along with her in this transformation. Her performance portrayed a multiplicity and variability that reveals a playful, hybrid nature of this contemporary belly dance practice. This indicates a view of cultural difference without an assumed hierarchy, which destabilises the fixed categorisations of belly dance identity.

This was a very different positioning to the dancer in *Al Fayrooz*. In *Nomads* the dancer was in control, not the restaurant, and her performance came from her intent to educate people about belly dance, and not just to strictly provide entertainment for money. As Bahar said, her intent was to provide a bridge between what people know about the dance and her understanding of the dance. The idea of a dancer as a cultural bridge is where the potential of hybridity as a subversive strategy is located. Bahar in *Nomads* managed to create a dance performance where she actively and subversively impersonified 'the Other' in such a way as to playfully overturn the hierarchical structures of the orientalist gaze. Her intention to act as a cultural bridge, or 'interstitial passage', enabled her to make a skillfull connection, or 'a staircase', between the expectations of the audiences of the orientalist spectacle and her political intentions of educating audiences about the emancipatory power of belly dancing. This intention was matched by her creative flair as well as a dose of humour and playfulness. These

skills of characterisation, subversive humour and playfulness inspired some elements of my performance *Dis-Orient Express* which is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

The *Dis-Orient Express* interviews consider how women engage - through belly dance - with the imperialist and patriarchal power relations that have dominated the discourses of this form. This line of inquiry relates to the first research question of this doctoral project, which can be summed up as investigating dancers' strategies of negotiating, resisting or accepting the orientalist framework of belly dancing and powers that structure the female Oriental 'Other'. The interviews gave opportunity to women belly dancers who happen to inhabit multiple, hybrid identities, across different European contexts, to give their perspective on the strategies that they use to counteract dominant orientalist discourses in their practice. In the multiplicity of their voices, positions, and locations, the common thread is their claim that the public perception of belly dancing as a sexually suggestive dance designed to engage a male gaze is at odds with their experiences of the emancipatory aspect of belly dancing. As Jane Bacon found in her empirical study of women who practice Arabic dance in Northampton: 'The dancing belongs to them in that they perform it and this action provides, for them, an embodied resistance to stereotypical conceptions of woman' (Bacon 2003:227). All the women interviewed in my case studies considered it part of their professional role to educate audiences and change the enduring and fixed stereotypes of belly dancing.

My analysis reveals how belly dance performers can choose to challenge the status quo: in the ways they approach their audiences and their students; in their choice of performance settings; in the way they present themselves; in the content of their performances; in the way they talk about their practice. These cases point out the important aspect of intentionality of artistic practice, which will be in Chapter Four. Some of the case studies proposed strategies for subverting the dominant discourse of the Oriental 'Other'. Donna Mejia, for example, de-constructed the 'feminine mystique' in her performance in Brighton, and Bahar Sarah's theatrical approach in her performance in *Nomads* managed to transform the dominant norms of the restaurant's orientalist spectacle. Aminta Mahmood and Dalyla Rami in Austria insisted on the use of the term 'oriental dance' in order to distinguish it from the sexually suggestive 'belly dance'. Hilde

Canoodt located her belly dancing show *Supernova* in a University theatre setting in order to celebrate the multiplicity and artistry of the creative expression of the contemporary belly dance, as well as to gain new audiences and change perception of this dance practice.

In analysing the three examples of belly dancing profession in different European and performative contexts, the analysis has included broader issues addressed by this research project such as ambivalences and conflicts of cross-cultural encounters as part of globalisation and post-colonial processes. This will be analysed in more detail in Chapter Four. Addressing the third research question of how perspectives in hybridity theory relate to dancers' practices, I have used the concepts of 'hybrid space' and 'interstitial passage' to frame the interrogation of dancer's positions and strategies. In the Brighton *Supernova* case study, I focused on the emancipatory potential of relocating a belly dance show to a theatre setting, and ambivalences of such a cross-cultural encounter. Transferring a belly dance performance from a restaurant to a more formal theatre setting might be regarded as a strategy for changing public perceptions, and thus 'elevating' the status of the form, but can also result in codes and conventions of audience behaviour being carried over and accruing new significance. In *Supernova* this was evident in the example of 'ululating' in a Brighton theatre context, which changed the performative experience. Another example is the tambourines played by the audience in *Nomads* in Istanbul, bringing elements of folk celebration to a gentrified urban setting.

In the transferences that happen as belly dancing as a globalised form crosses many different geographical, political and performative contexts, it is perhaps inevitable that something of the meaning that pertains to its indigenous settings gets lost. While some belly dance practitioners take great pains to preserve the traditions of the ethnic Middle Eastern dances, and transfer that understanding to their audiences, it can be generally stated that belly dance as a globalised form does not accurately represent dances of the Middle East. Belly dancing is a cultural hybrid, and as pointed out in Chapter One, it is a fascinating amalgamation of cultural influences from the Middle East and US, but also dances from India, Spain, Russia, Balkans, Latin America, New Zealand. It is a constantly evolving form, influenced increasingly by its transnational online communities. However, this is not how belly dancing is generally perceived by its wider audiences, which still consider it as representative of 'a Middle Eastern culture', as if this

was a homogeneous concept. There are belly dancing communities which focus on preservation of the Middle Eastern dances, but there are also communities for which belly dancing is a hybrid, innovative form that is combined with many other musical and dance styles, to create new, creative and expressive meanings. As my research has revealed, there is a need for better framed conversations between different belly dance communities that avoid the essentialist, fixed positions of mutually-exclusive identity binaries, as well as the continuing need for educating audiences about different belly dance styles.

The interviews in Austria with Aminta Mahmood and Dalyla Rami, the dancers of Arabic background, emphasised the experiences of the loss of 'feeling' in translocation of belly dance from its indigenous context. Bahar Sarah in our interview in Istanbul echoed their opinions. Despite many accounts and attempts to relate this experience of loss, the idea of 'feeling' and 'loss of feeling' in belly dance performances is hard to define. In the analysis of their comments, I added my own testimony of melancholic displacement when hearing Bosnian music played in belly dancing classes. Apart from the difficulty in theorising this emotive phenomenon, another problem with the debate on loss of traditional meaning in belly dancing practices, is that it easily slides into essentialist and exclusive positions, which may suggest that only people of certain background can own this cultural form. The problems with this ethno-centric positioning have been outlined in Chapter One. The idea of authenticity in belly dancing practices will be further developed in Chapter Four. However, it is important to voice these concerns, firstly as they are raised by those who consider belly dancing to be part of their indigenous culture, and secondly as they are not often heard voices of minority groups of Arabic women whose position is frequently mystified and overlooked in the context of the dominant European culture. Finally, it is also important to raise their concerns as they could contribute to a better informed interpretation of this form, and a richer and more progressive practice.

The interviews have revealed another popular dancers' strategy in counteracting the dominant orientalist discourse and negotiating the fixed eroticised stereotype of belly dancers, which is rooted in their belief in the theory of 'sacred origins' of belly dancing and related Goddess discourse. This chapter manifests that although the Goddess culture theories of the 'sacred origins' of belly dance have been dismissed as 'myths' in recent academic writings (Keft- Kennedy 2006: 46-51), they still form a

particularly powerful narrative in re-imagining of this form. This narrative plays a significant role in empowering many women to enjoy moving their bodies in belly dance without any associated stigma. Many of the dancers interviewed for this study report a feeling of having re-claimed their bodies in the process of studying and practicing belly dance. Many interviewed dancers felt that they had a responsibility to educate their audiences and their students about the 'sacred roots' and 'real nature' of belly dance. This is supported by the research of Pettigrow and Wort (2003), which shows that most women interviewees experienced their dancing as a female-orientated activity that fulfils their own needs of femininity and sensuality, rather than appealing primarily to the male gaze. However, the example of Donna Mejia's performance in *Supernova* showed the dancer questioning the role of the 'feminine mystique' as a dominant theme in belly dance performances. She claimed that the 'Goddess symbolism' has in some belly dance practices become a surface cliché which satisfies the need for beauty and superficial femininity, and has lost its power of resistance to the patriarchal structures of belly dancing. Her comments divulged a healthy dose of criticism and indicate a need for more reflection on belly dance politics in belly dancing subcultures. Also, Mejia's criticism of 'the Goddess trend', when juxtaposed with Bahar Sarah's explicitly stated connection of 'Oriental dance with nature, cosmos, Goddess, earth' (this chapter p33) point out an ambivalence in responses to the phenomenon of Goddess mythology in belly dancing. These ambivalences in attitudes to Goddess mythology will be analysed in Chapter Four (p35 -36) in reference to my own artistic practice and the use of the myth of Persephone.

In exploration of the first research question which centres on how dancers negotiate the orientalist, patriarchal discourse of belly dancing, the analysis has pointed out a clash between the dancers' emancipatory ambitions and the orientalist spectacle of the Middle Eastern restaurant environment. My research has revealed that belly dancers in restaurant settings often feel pressure to conform to an ideal body image and a particular representation of the Oriental 'Other' in order to fit the orientalist spectacle engineered by a restaurant. The regulation of female bodies that persists in the wider patriarchal culture and frames all three contexts to a differing degree, is echoed in these situations. *Nomads* and *Al Fayrooz* case studies pointed out contrasting ways in which dancers come to negotiate the expectations of such an environment. This contrast addressed the part of the research question that relates to whether dancers accept or resist forces that are structuring the female Oriental Other. While *Al Fayrooz* presented

a standard belly dance show, the *Nomads* case study provides an example of a dancer finding an inspiring way to navigate the different expectations of the audience and the restaurant, to deliver a theatrical, subversive and entertaining performance.

Seeing performance as a potentially hybrid space in which a subject can move in-between designations of identity, as demonstrated in *Supernova* and *Nomads*, will be carried in the next chapter where I will write about my performance *Dis-Orient Express*. The next chapters will also develop the ambivalent experience of hybrid identity, by investigating the feeling of loss and yearning for home and tradition, which were raised in the comments of the interviewed dancers. These elements of belly dance experience are difficult to theorise, but are intensely embodied aspects of hyphenated identities. They are possible to investigate through the analysis of my doctoral performance, which was based on my embodied experience as well as the theoretical context. The writing on *Dis-Orient Express* performance will show how the findings from the fieldwork were used to critique the orientalist framework and elicit participation from the audiences. The playfulness, irony and humour in some of the performances described in this chapter were echoed in the *Dis-Orient Express* performance. My doctoral performance utilised the knowledge gained through this field research, as well as through my previous performances (see Chapter One), to illuminate the radical potential of recasting cultural politics of difference through dialogic artistic practice. The preference for a dialogue between the multiplicity of opinions, present in this chapter, comes from the deliberate aim at subverting the fixed categories of the Oriental Other. This dialogic approach will be a focus of the next chapter, in the investigation of my performative strategies which aimed to enable the space for the counter-hegemonic agency and to position 'the Feminine Oriental Other' as the speaker and not simply an object of the orientalising gaze. I will show how my performance *Dis-Orient Express* connected the dancers' opinions voiced in these interviews with my embodied autobiographical approach, and then invited the audiences into that process, in an attempt to extend the critical dialogue on the personal-political aspects of belly dancing.

CHAPTER THREE

Dis-Orient Express Performance: Extending the Dialogue

This chapter will describe and analyse the performance *Dis-Orient Express*, which was the second part of the practice element. Chapters Three and Four are both concerned with analysing this research performance, but each have a different focus. While this chapter will introduce and analyse the main elements of *Dis-Orient Express*, Chapter Four will develop particular strands of the analysis in the context of hybrid identities.

The analysis in this chapter will reveal my artistic, creative and embodied strategies aimed directly at unravelling and questioning the politics of belly dancing. In the previous chapters I have outlined the conceptual and practical aspects of my auto-ethnographic approach evident in my previous performances. Following the first research question, I investigated how belly dancers in Europe and Istanbul negotiate the orientalist framework of their practice, revealing ambivalences and difficulties of these encounters. The analysis of *Dis-Orient Express* in this chapter will continue to highlight the ambivalent experiences of hybrid identity. Its focus is going to be on the central aim of the research, which is to investigate the potential of a counter-narrative, created by a heterogeneous, hybrid identity so as to destabilise the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse. It will explore the potential of recasting the narrow identity scripts placed on the subject of belly dancing, emphasising both the personal-political and collective aspects of my performance. In those sections that will foreground my subjective experience, the study will investigate how the use of the Persephone myth enabled particular manifestations of loss and trauma integral to my experience of hybrid identity.

Addressing the second research question in the thesis, the analysis will show how *Dis-Orient Express* deconstructed and satirised the apparently stable categories of Oriental feminine 'Other' and the associated binaries of coloniser/colonised, man/woman, Orient/Europe. The re-mapping of belly dancing politics and identity was a collaborative process, done in a form of dialogue with audiences, developing the

dialogical approach of the research journey. In line with the third research question, I will use aspects of hybridity theory to position and analyse my practice.

Dis-Orient Express was a multi-layered, mosaic-like installation featuring multi-media and live performance. It was carried out in June and October 2013 in Bob Kayley Theatre, in the Film, Theatre & Television Department of the University of Reading. Each performance lasted around six hours, during which the audience were able to come in and out to watch film screenings, listen to audio recordings, watch the live performance, and engage in collaborative writing. The audience was invited to take manifold journeys around the performance space, with the primary reference being to the records of my research trip down the route of the Orient Express.

This interactive performance used the audio-visual outcomes of the research journey to construct a charged theatrical event where the orientalist discourses of belly dancing were illuminated and opened to an active examination by the audience and the performer. This chapter will outline how in setting out the theatre space and during the performance I attempted to provide a platform for the audience and myself as the performer, to engage in an informed, critical and transformative dialogue about belly dancing. For the purposes of clarity, I will first outline the physical elements of the performance, and then focus on the analysis of the performative strategies aimed at re-casting the discourse around belly dancing. Following that principle, I will at specific points refer to 'the installation' of *Dis-Orient Express* to distinguish its physical elements – the four tents, the film, the dress, the props, the sounds – which aimed to establish a vibrant, conceptually stimulating and dramatically evocative environment for the performance. I mostly refer to *Dis-Orient Express* as a whole performance event, encompassing the actions of the performer and the audiences in interaction with the installation.

The chapter is structured in two main parts. The first part 'The Dis-Orient Express Tents' will outline the main elements of the performance, and then analyse the performance strategies related to the three tents in the performance. The fourth tent will be analysed in the fourth chapter (p183). The second part of this chapter 'Performance Actions, the Dress, the Map and their Meanings' will deal with the performance actions and strategies connected with the central elements of the installation, which led to the culmination of the performance.

The first part of the chapter will start with illustrating the physical and the audio-visual elements of the performance, in an attempt to lead the reader through an imaginary journey of an audience member. The next section 'Dis-Orienting the Orient Express' will re-introduce the context of the discourse on Europe, the Orient and identity. Following the line of reasoning with regard to this topic established in the Introduction and Chapter One, I will outline my particular positioning as a performer/researcher/traveller that aimed to disturb the assumed hierarchy between the colonial gaze and 'the Other'. The concepts of 'contrapuntal awareness' and 'nomadic consciousness' will be used to contextualise my attempts to subvert the subject/object relationship between the traveller on the Orient Express and the Oriental 'Other'. Firstly, my analysis will focus on the visual devices and subjective performance gestures presented in the film in the first tent, and then on the interactive element of the second tent which invited audiences to dress up as 'an Oriental Prince or Princess', contextualised in relation to the post-colonial and feminist writing on play and mimicry. The first part of the chapter will conclude with the analysis of the third tent, which presented selected audio material from the research interviews. In presenting interviewees' subjective positions regarding belly dancing and related social and political issues, it will recapitulate some of the dancer's strategies presented in Chapter Two.

The second part of the chapter will address the topics of racial intolerance and gender violence, which lie at the extreme edges of the politics that surrounds the cultural practice of belly dancing. It will analyse the acts that carried personal-political significance, focussing on the action of breaking pomegranates. In analysing the central section of the installation (the dress, the map and related actions), I will show how the myth of Persephone and Demeter functioned to express my experience of separation from home, and identity fragmentation due to exile. This mythical narrative enabled an expression of the aspects of this painful experience in a poetic way, referencing autobiographical material. The analysis will manifest my use of the myth in the performance as a vehicle to express and to reconcile complicated experiences of exile and the related experiences of schism and separation. This theme belongs to the wider thread of an investigation into experiences of loss and separation as part of a hybrid identity, which builds on the discussion from Chapter One, and will be developed in more detail in Chapter Four (see section 'Persephone in Exile' p187).

The initial descriptions of performance will facilitate the analysis of how this performance attempted to create a space of exchange, critical investigation and the transformative dialogue on the politics of belly dancing. This will be particularly in focus of the section titled 'Collaborative Re-Mapping'. The analysis will highlight the performance strategies of a collaborative deconstruction of the multifaceted relations between the West and the Orient, the coloniser and the colonised, the gaze and female body. The analysis will be contextualised in relation to theoretical writing on performance ethnography and auto-ethnography. In the final section, I will analyse the last stage of the performance where the dress is lowered to the floor and I enter the dress.

1. The Dis-Orient Express Tents

Performance Narrative

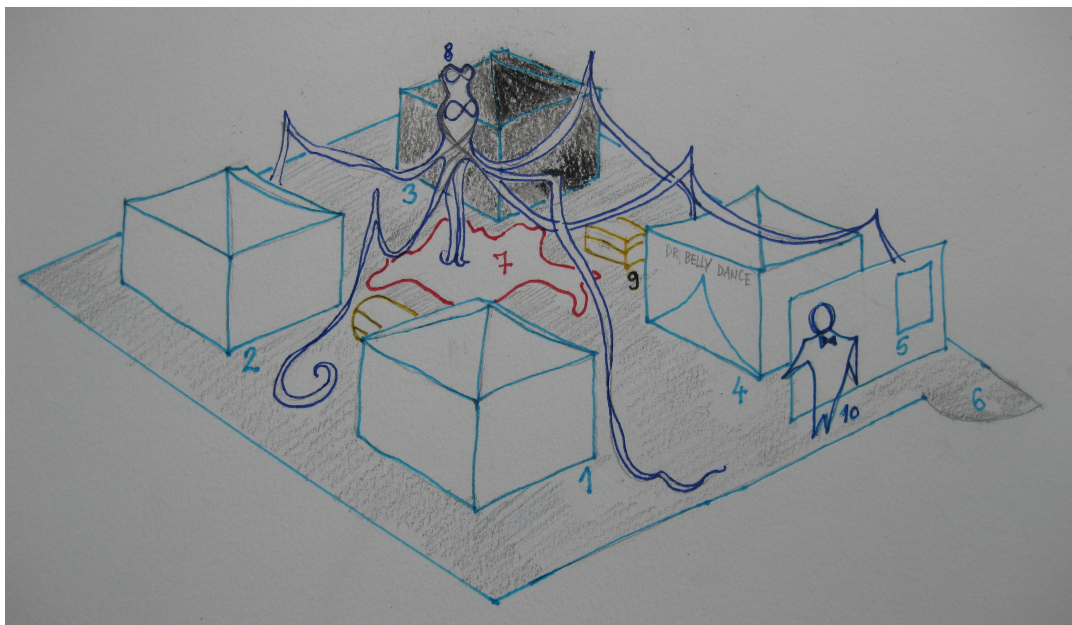


Figure 1 Dis-Orient Express performance installation plan. Tents 1, 2, 3, and 4 are marked numerically. Number 5 shows location of the poster, and number 6 the entrance to the theatre space. Number 7 marks the map and number 8 indicates

the dress suspended over the four tents. Number 9 shows the position of the suitcases and number 10 indicates the attendant.

The performance was set in a black box theatre. This modern theatre space was dominated by a white dress suspended in the middle of the space with long, tentacle-like fringes of white fabric that extended into all areas of the theatre. In four corners of the space were four large tents, approximately two meters wide and two meters high. Three of the tents were white, with translucent material half-revealing what was laid inside. The fourth tent was made of black opaque material, merging with the dark background of the theatre space. Underneath the dress was a large piece of paper that was laid on the floor with a shape that suggested a map of Europe. Many large pomegranates surrounded the map, as well as four old-fashioned suitcases. The lighting highlighted the dress. A floral fragrance emanated from the central area underneath the suspended dress, from a bowl that was full of essential oils.



Figure 2 Dis-Orient Express performance. On the left hand side of the image are the first and second tent. The first tent contains the film projection. The second tent is 'the orientalist masquerade' tent. To the far right is the third, 'audio tent' and in the foreground on the right is the 'Dr Belly Dance' tent. The performer is walking with a green rucksack on her back. An audience member is writing on the map.



Figure 3 A view from above the Dis-Orient Express installation showing the dress, the map, the performer and the tents 1, 2 and 4. The third tent is behind the dress and has merged with the dark background.

At the entrance of the performance space, the audience were presented with a poster displaying the following text:

Welcome aboard Dis-Orient Express, a performance and installation piece by Edina Husanovic, a PhD student at the University of Reading. The piece was inspired by a field research journey along the Orient Express route, during which the artist interviewed belly dancers, orientalist scholars about belly dance and mythologies surrounding the oriental feminine 'Other' in Europe.

The belly dancers whom she interviewed in these different locations are 'nomadic subjects', whose identities are multiple, imagined and performed, featuring elements of orientalist fantasy and often containing references to ancient goddess worship ceremonies.

Dis-Orient Express also references Persephone's journey between the worlds, revealing the artist's own psychological attempt to weave meaning between her traumatic past of the Bosnian war and a subjective and a shared experience of living between different cultures, languages and identities.

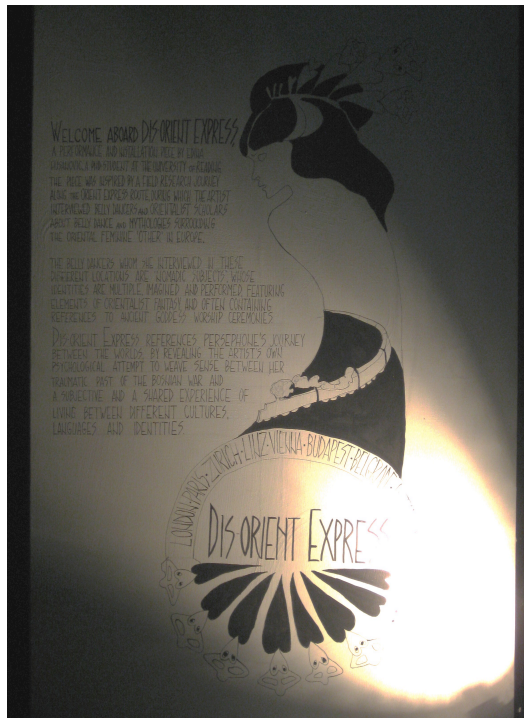


Figure 4 Performance poster located at the entrance of the theatre space

After reading the text, the audience was ushered into the performance space by performance attendants. Their appearance and manner referred to the waiters on the Orient Express train. They gave minimal instruction and at times offered coffee. Their task was to point the audience to different tents, guiding their attention to the map that was laid out in the central area. The attendants suggested that the audiences follow the route from the first tent to the fourth, but the audience could ultimately decide the order of their journey through the space. Their direction frequently depended on whether a particular tent was fully occupied. The attendants invited the audience to contribute to the map by writing on it at the end of their journey through the performance space.

In the first tent an audience member could watch a ten-minute film showing my journey down the Orient Express route, through ten European cities, from London and ending in Istanbul. There will be more discussion of the film in the next section 'Dis-Orienting the Orient Express'. A copy of the film is available in a DVD in the appendix, and the reader may choose to watch it before reading the next section of the chapter.



Figure 5 Tent 1: Image still from the beginning of the film

After seeing the film, the audience member was guided by an attendant to enter the second tent. Here they were presented with the following text: *Please feel free to put on clothes and jewellery, to dress up as an oriental prince or princess. Take a photo of yourself when you are finished.*



Figure 6 Tent 2: An audience member dressing up 'as an Oriental'

In the third tent, the only one that was made from black opaque material, audience members could separate themselves from the rest of the performance activity

and occupy a more private space. There were two sets of headphones next to the sign that was laid on a table. The sign read:

Here you can hear a selection of audio recordings made of interviews that took place along the Dis-orient Express route. The selection lasts 44 min, and you may choose to listen for however long you wish'. Conversations were conducted with twenty-three people, belly dancers, orientalist scholars, and the general public, about belly dance, perceptions of oriental people in Europe, Goddess motif in belly dance, as well as sexuality, femininity and ethics in performance. Interviews were conducted in Brighton, London, Paris, Zurich, Graz, Linz, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade and Istanbul in March and October 2012.

A copy of the audio material is available on the CD in the Appendix VII.

Above the fourth tent there was a sign 'Dr Belly Dance'. Here people were free to look at the documents from my PhD relating to academic literature on belly dancing, orientalism and post-colonialism. The audiences were invited to sign up to a one-to-one 'Dr Belly Dance' performance. The performance will be analysed in Chapter Four, in the section titled 'Dr Belly Dance' (p183).



Figure 7 Tent 4: 'Dr Belly Dance' with an attendant in the foreground

My movement as the performer in the space followed a route between the four tents, around the four suitcases, underneath the dress and over and around the map. It was based on a circular, repetitive sequence. In the first few hours of the performance, this sequence consisted of walking very slowly following a circular route in the central area of the installation, interacting with various objects in the space. At times I carried a green rucksack on my back, denoting a migratory journey. At regular intervals I interacted with the tentacles of the dress, I carried out the actions of cleaning, I broke the pomegranates, gathered their numerous seeds, and at times picking up the sheets of paper that were laid on the suitcases and read poetry. The movement also incorporated some elements of belly dancing.

The theme of journey was suggested throughout the many layers of the performance. Apart from the references to the field research and the Orient Express in the film, I also invited the audience to a physical real-time journey around the performance space. After an initial briefing by the attendants, who suggested to the audience that they go to tent one, the audience could ultimately decide which direction to take, whether to watch the film, dress up or listen to the interviews, and in which order. They could observe the movement of the performer that followed a trajectory over the duration of the six hours, with its own meanings. They could leave and return to the space. Finally, the downward vertical movement of the dress, which slowly descended to the floor of the performance space during the duration of six hours, referenced the mythological journey of Persephone as an ancient traveller between the world of the living and the underworld. The reference to Persephone is rich with symbolism relating to the themes of home and homelessness and the relationship between mother and daughter that are analysed at various stages of this thesis. Depending on the direction they took in the performance space, and which element they participated in the most, individual audience members could interpret and engage in the layers of meaning in ways that were entirely unique to them.

The multiple possible circuits that were actively embedded within the performance were also connected to distinct layers of time and place that occurred within it. One key temporal layer to be expressed was the field research trip. This was recalled through numerous visual and audio references to this journey that were made throughout the performance, most particularly through the possibility presented to the

audience for listening to the recorded interviews that I had conducted in different cities. Closely related to this were the visual references from the 1920s and the heyday of the Orient Express. Contemporary European urban locations, the city streets, cafes and modern train environments in the film contrasted with such nostalgic references to the 1920s. Furthermore, there were present a number of signifiers of the ancient Greek period, mainly evident in a combination of overt and veiled allusions to the Persephone myth, such as the pomegranates and the text in the performance poster. However, at the same time as taking the audiences on different spatial and temporal journeys, the performance kept pulling them back into the immediate time and space of the performance, in which both they and the performer engaged in the actions of walking, watching, reading, listening, dancing, and writing.



Figure 8 An audience member in the foreground is writing on the map, while another is entering the first tent to watch the screening. The performer on the right is interacting with the dress.

The central system in this multiple time journey was the sound emphasising that one of the main characteristics of the performance was its dream-like soundscape intended to transport the audience to different places and times. The central sound that could be heard across the entire performance space comprised a mixture of music - Romany Gypsy, belly dancing and Bosnian folk - and evocative sounds of trains, collected from the field journey. Layered over this haunting, omnipresent sound, in particular



Figure 10 Collaborative Re-mapping



Figure 11 Collaborative Re-mapping

As they were leaving the performance space, the audience members were asked to give written feedback on the performance. They were given reflection sheets that read: *We would love to have some feedback from you about the performance. What did you most enjoy, or found puzzling?* Samples of the feedback are available in Appendix VIII.

Dis-Orienting the Orient Express

The intention of the performance was to 'dis-orient' the discourses surrounding belly dancing, by illuminating and subverting the powers that construct stereotypical representations of the Orient and the mythology of 'Oriental woman'. In the section 'History of Belly Dancing' in Chapter One, I outlined how imperialist narratives and the orientalist discourse came to construct this practice, its representations and interpretation. The *Dis-Orient Express* performance attempted to explore strategies for subverting the dominant orientalist framework of this cultural practice. For the purpose of de-stabilising stereotypical representations of belly dancing, the strategies of movement, deconstruction and repetition were used in the many different layers of the performance. Some layers were strictly visual, such as the film, while others were performative, for instance the dressing-up tent and the Dr Belly Dance tent. Other elements of the performance were more conceptual and word-based, such as the audio tent and the map. In this section, I will first outline the conceptual context for my artistic counter-narrative that resists the power relations that act to produce the dominant narratives of the European, Orient and feminine Oriental Other. I will locate my positioning in relation to the concepts of 'contrapuntal awareness' (Said 2002) and 'nomadic consciousness' (Braidotti 1994), before analysing my creative 'dis-orienting' strategies, evident in the tents one and two.

The idea of the Orient Express indulges a glamorous European orientalist fantasy of revealing the Orient. It is a fantasy rich with romantic images that Westerners had, and arguably many still have, of the Middle East and 'the Orient', a fantasy deeply shaped by the colonial legacy. Together with the orientalist paintings of harems by Gerome, Ingres and Delacroix, it contributes to what Edward Said (1978) calls 'an orientalist aesthetic', where the male colonial gaze construct, orders and make sense of the Other. Post-colonial theory has grappled with the subject of the colonial gaze. As Peter Beardsell argues in *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze* the colonial gaze 'as the function of establishing the subject/object relationship' (2000:8). The Western male gaze is the master subject. Extending the idea of gaze to my research journey, one can notice the same colonial pattern evident in modern day travel. The industries of travel and advertising have been constructed on male-dominated ideologies, which privilege a Western heterosexual male as the subject of travel experiences. As John Urry in his book

The Tourist Gaze (2002) explains, the tourist gaze is made on the basis of difference, it is constructed in its relationship to the Other. A traveller on the Orient Express is presumed to be usually a male subject who exerts his gaze over the Oriental Other. However, the way I located myself as the researcher, performer and author of the film *Dis-Orient Express* was in a critically different position to this. This arose from the intention of interrupting the subject/object relationship and blurring the relation of power between the colonizer and the colonized. This position reflects my mixed background and can be theorized in terms of Braidotti's 'nomadic consciousness' and Said's 'contrapuntal awareness', as I will explain in the following paragraphs.

Notions of 'journey' are one way of 'making sense' in the heterogeneous world, especially for the subjects of hyphenated identities. The idea of 'journey' has been centrally important to this research project, as a metaphor and an inspiration, as well as the mode of practice. As mentioned in the Foreword, my initial interest in belly dancing was driven by the family myth of a Turkish great grandmother. She allegedly travelled from Turkey to Bosnia in the 19th century, and was credited, according to some members of my family, with our 'mysterious' ability to belly dance. The *Dis-Orient Express* research journey re-visited the route I travelled many times between Britain and Bosnia, both of which I call home. I use journey as a central metaphor for highlighting movement, multiplicity and resistance to closure and fixity in my practice and research. In *Dis-Orient Express* I employ my 'nomadic consciousness' to question hegemonic, fixed structures that frame an 'Oriental other' in Europe. As Rosi Braidotti explains in her nomadic theory:

The nomadic consciousness combines coherence with mobility [...]What is political is precisely this awareness of the fractured, intrinsically power-based constitution of the subject and the active quest for possibilities of resistance to hegemonic formations (1994: 65).

I locate my authorial position in the idea of 'contrapuntal awareness'. According to Said, contrapuntal awareness is 'awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts' (Said 1994: 51). In practice, 'contrapuntal awareness' meant, for me, to engage in the *Dis-Orient Express* research journey both as a subject of the research *and* as its object. The role of academic researcher has historically been framed within the

Western Euro-centric patriarchal model. This epistemological position has been criticised in newer post-colonial perspectives. As Ramón Grosfoguel (2008) says:

In western philosophy and sciences the subject that speaks is always hidden, concealed, erased from the analysis. The "ego-politics of knowledge" of western philosophy has always privileged the myth of a non-situated "ego". Ethnic/racial/gender/sexual epistemic location and the subject that speaks are always decoupled. By delinking ethnic/racial/gender/sexual epistemic location from the subject that speaks, western philosophy and sciences are able to produce a myth about a truthful universal knowledge that covers up, that is, conceals both the speaker as well as the geo-political and body-political epistemic location of the structures of colonial power/knowledge from which the subject speaks. (Grosfoguel 2008)

I myself, as 'the speaker' (Grosfoguel) within my practice-as-research, am made visible and am reflexively situated throughout this project. Whereas my interviews with orientalist scholars and belly dancers were closely focused on the subject of mythologies circulating around Oriental woman, in contrast I used the opportunity of travelling down the route of the Orient Express to give various interventional mini performances as an 'Oriental woman', on the trains and streets of European cities. Situated in the contrapuntal awareness of my hyphenated, fractured and 'power-based' identity and in the orientalist histories of the Orient Express, the intention of my performative actions was to interrupt and subvert hegemonic formations of the Oriental feminine 'Other'. The next section will show an example of this performative action captured in the film.

Dis-Orient Express Film: Coffee Cups and Performance Actions



Figure 12 Tent 1: Film still projected on the translucent wall of the tent, showing a video of a belly dancer filmed during the Dis-Orient Express research in Istanbul

This section will briefly analyse how the film *Dis-Orient Express* used visual devices alongside my performative actions, which in themselves were presented as film stills, in order to challenge the dominant ways of representing the ‘Oriental feminine Other’ in Europe. The film was shown as a projection on the translucent walls of the tent (Figure 12). The film as it was shown to the audiences is available for the reader in Appendix VI. It started with the following titles:

Dis-Orient Express. The Dis-Orient Express research was conducted in March and October 2012 as a journey following the old route of the Orient Express train. London Brighton Paris Zurich Linz Graz Vienna Budapest Belgrade Istanbul. I interviewed twenty-three people about oriental dance and mythologies surrounding the Oriental feminine ‘Other’ in Europe. Our conversations took place over cups of coffee.

The image that accompanied these words (Figure 13) was an image of the

interior of a train carriage, featuring a train window and two empty seats. In effect, this image served as an invitation to the spectator to occupy the seat by the window, and gaze at the research material unfolding as if ‘through the train window’. The image repeated half way through the performance, re-affirming this visual relationship.



Figure 13 Image still from the Dis-Orient Express film

The image that followed was a map of Europe, projected over an old poster of the Orient Express train route from 1889 (Figure 14). This visual layering served to highlight the places where the interviews had occurred, as well as displaying the nostalgic image of

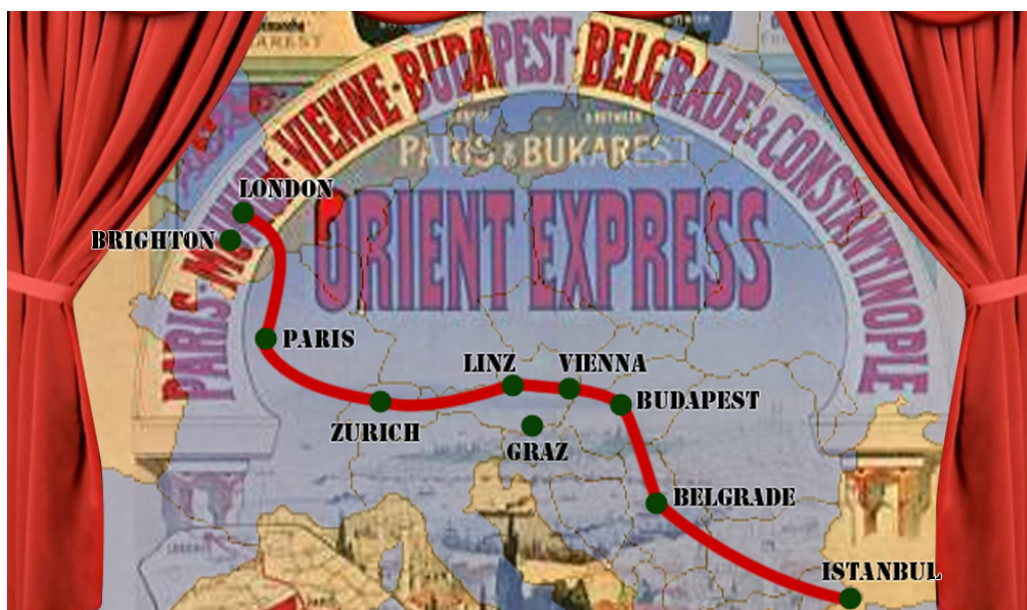


Figure 14 Image still from the Dis-Orient Express film

the legendary train route. The film shows selected fragments of the video and photo

documentation of the research journey. First, I will analyse the function of the coffee cup stills in the film, which are displayed at regular intervals throughout. I will then focus on an example of a performative action staged in Vienna, which in the film is represented by a 'typical' tourist snap of myself as a traveller and is edited in juxtaposition with many other images of myself wearing a belly dancing costume and headscarf, dancing or posing against a backdrop of ordered and pristine European city architecture.



Figure 14 Film still that indicated a research interview in Belgrade

As mentioned in the film titles, the interviews played out in the form of conversations 'that took place over cups of coffee'. This form was responsive to the aim of the field research, which was to instigate, in the aforementioned European cities, multiple dialogues about contemporary re-enactments of orientalism and the mythologies around oriental dance and eastern femininity. The dialogic nature of the research was its essential characteristic. The interviews with Orientalist scholars, dancers, artists, curators, and the general public from the UK and Western Europe, via the Former Yugoslavian countries through to Istanbul, were all conversations that were held over cups of coffee. Thus, the coffee cups functioned as hypertextual marks in the linear narrative of the journey presented on the screen. My filmic expression of my journey along the route of the Orient Express, a route that was redolent with those familiar glamorous connotations and conventions associated with its formal inception in the 1920s, was 'pierced' by the points along that route where I, as a researcher, had brought the coffee cups into use within their formal dialogic context. However, these coffee cups, each different in style, did more than just denote the different cities along the route and the conversations that took place there. They also acted as key semiotic

devices enabling me to instigate and reveal my strategy of ‘disorienting the Orient Express’, of re-evaluating and deconstructing the history of concepts that surround the subjects of belly dancing, the Orient and Europe. They were the visual gates to the dialogues about those mythologies that surround the subject matter of the research, that were to be revealed to the audience members in the later stages of the performance. Significantly, in order to further extend and animate this visual convention, the attendants in the performance offered coffee to the audience, signalling that the audience were also invited to contribute at some stage to this on-going dialogue.

Coffee cups recall romantic connotations of European cafés as creative hubs frequented by writers, poets, and artists, bustling with arguments and conversations. Turkish coffee in particular adds connotations of glamour and exoticism. The film is characterised by a tension between the seductiveness of the old, presented in images that allude to the romantic fantasy of the Orient Express and *fin-de siècle* Europe, and the inquisitiveness of the current, suggested to us by the coffee cups that evoked my research interviews and signalled an on-going analytical approach. The topics of the interviews are outlined in Appendices II and III, and an audio selection of the interviews is available in Appendix VII.

As the film unfolds, revealing the visual records from the field research in Vienna, it shows several images of myself performing in Vienna, dressed in a glittery belly dancing costume, contrasted by the straight-lined urban architecture of Viennese public spaces. A film still of this performance is presented in the images below (Figures 15 and 17). The image depicts me referencing the art poster shown behind my back, by posing as Gustav Klimt’s figure in front of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Figure 16 shows the image of Klimt’s mural representing Isis, an ancient Egyptian Goddess of fertility and the underworld. Klimt was a key figure in the Austrian Art Nouveau movement at the turn of the century, during the heyday of the Orient Express. His work absorbed the influences of 19th century orientalism. During my research in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum was displaying an exhibition of Klimt’s works to mark the 150th birthday of this well-known Viennese artist. By performing the ‘Oriental feminine Other’ against this backdrop, as well as conducting the research, I intended to subvert the presumption of an ‘objective researcher’s gaze’, and to offer a subjective embodied interruption in this visual power relationship. The intention was to present the researcher as a performing, dancing body, as well as the eye who gazes and structures ‘the Other’ – both acting as

subjects to affect the fabric of the orientalist aesthetic. The intention of this performative action was based in the ‘contrapuntal awareness’ of the perspectives of the coloniser (male, Western, researcher) and the colonised (feminine, Oriental, Other), conscious both: ‘of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts’ (Said 1993: 51). My multiple positioning revealed by these images aimed to interrupt the binaries of coloniser/colonised, male author/female muse, Europe/ Orient, embodying ‘the Other’ as the active subject in the discourse, and subverting the assumed hierarchy between the colonial gaze and ‘the Female Oriental Other’.



Figure 15 Film still of the performance in Vienna, ‘quoting’ Klimt’s work

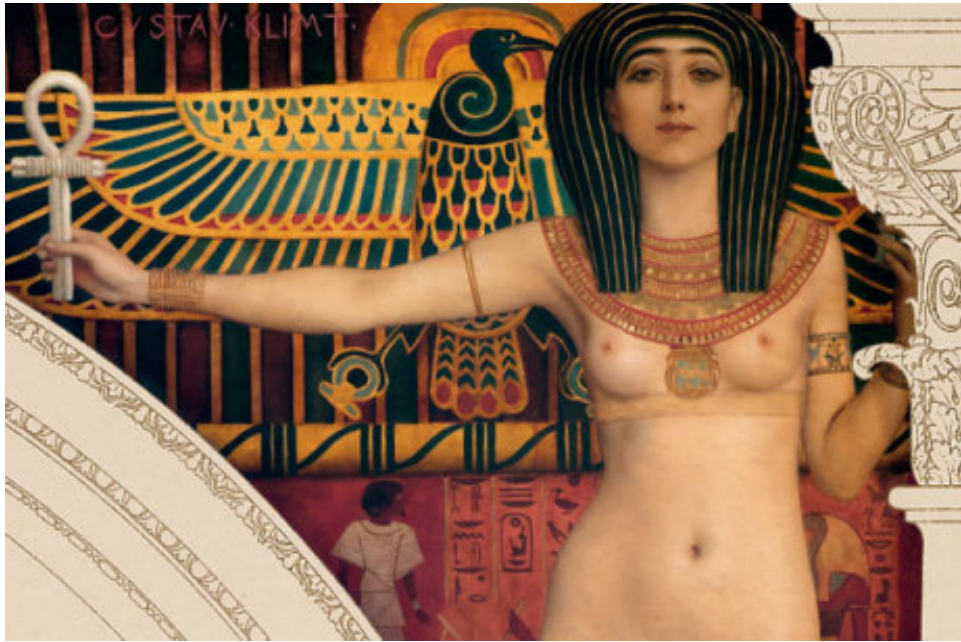


Figure 16 Isis, by Gustav Klimt, 1891

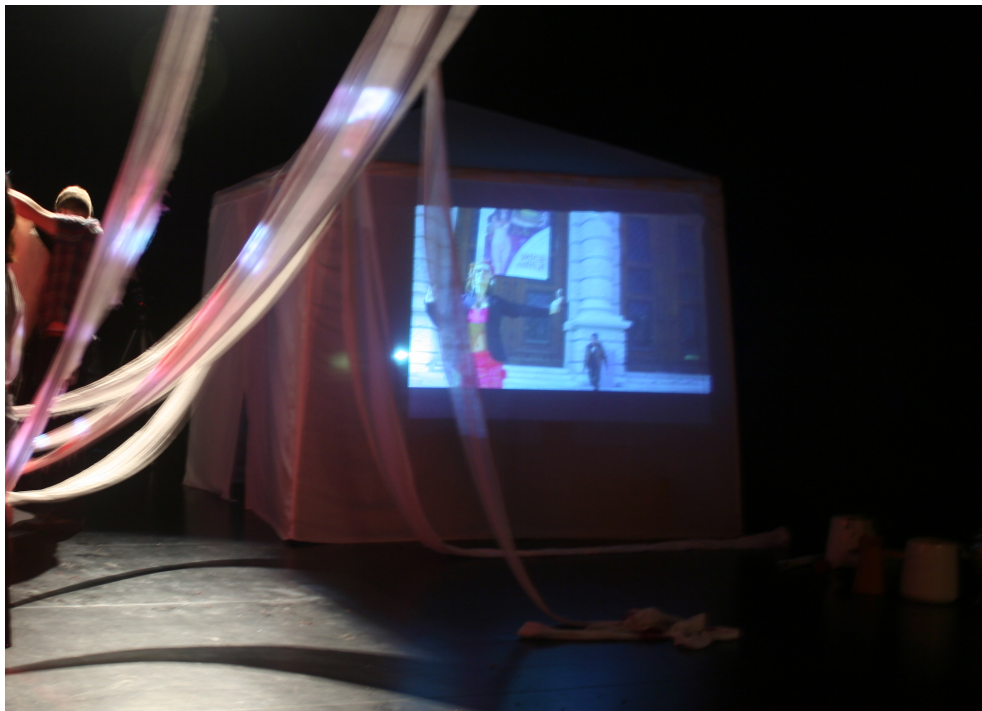


Figure 17 Tent 1 in Dis-Orient Express performance, showing the film still of the performative action in Vienna

This image was also shown during the *Dis-Orient Express* performance, indeed Figure 17 shows this image projected on the walls of the first tent in the performance. The walls of the tents were translucent which resulted in the distorted, reverse images of the film being constantly on show in the main space. My multiple positionings in these images underlined the experience of this performance as inhabiting a hybrid space in which a

subject moved in-between designations of identity to position 'the feminine Oriental Other' as the speaker and not simply as an object of the orientalising gaze. The movement in-between the identity of a Western researcher and an Oriental dancer was also the subject of *Dr Belly Dance*, which was presented as the one-to-one performance in the fourth tent, and which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Orientalist Masquerade

Led by the second research question of the thesis, this section will develop the analysis of how *Dis-Orient Express* attempted to destabilise fixed stereotyping representations of feminine Oriental 'Other' will outline how the strategies of mimicry and play evident in the second tent were intended to parody and question stereotypical representations of 'Oriental' women. The second tent in *Dis-Orient Express* offered a playful invitation to the audience to 'dress up' as 'an Oriental' and take photographs of themselves. Costuming is a significant aspect of belly dance and is characterised by jingling hip scarves, bright make up and glittery, bright and flowing fabrics. There was an abundance of these materials present in the tent together with a vanity cupboard, and many spectators responded to the invitation to put on these materials, with a thrill and laughter that could be heard from inside the tent (Figures 18 and 19). The translucency of the tent meant that others outside could see glimpses of a silhouetted orientalist masquerade. Touching and handling the materials enabled spectators to embody this experience rather than to solely look at the images, or read the texts. In placing themselves under a real-time or camera gaze, the spectators needed to make a series of decisions about how to position themselves in relation to the subject of Oriental 'Other'. In this sense, they were given a more active and pleasurable role in terms of being able to expose the process of construction of the Oriental Other, strongly recalling the example of my performative action in Vienna.

The 'dressing up as an Oriental Princess' experience was intended to construct a parody of the orientalist stereotype. In the analysis of my previous performance *From Kabul with Love* (Chapter One), I wrote about the significance of Stuart Hall's writing on cultural stereotyping of the Oriental Other and the emancipatory potential of re-coding the intended meaning in the politics of representation (Hall 1997). The de-constructive approach that comes from his writing informed the playful approach of *From Kabul with Love* and building on this, it also formed part of the methodological background for *Dis-*

Orient Express. In the second tent of *Dis-Orient Express*, the silky, transparent veils, belly dancing hip scarves, sequined, spangly bras, 'harem pants' that function as codes that underlie the social practices of belly dance and stereotypical representations of the sensual 'Orient', were made explicit and opened up to play. This play of signifiers was a method for destabilising the fixed stereotype of belly dancers; when a surface code is acknowledged as a surface rather than as the fixed meaning, one may question what lies underneath. Elaborating on the Derridean concept of deconstruction, this is how Rawdon Wilson writes on play and deconstruction:

...free play is limitless, unlimited by any irreducible signified or transcendental concept that cannot be further decomposed...Play, considered as free play, lies beyond stable, centered structures, makes them untenable, decentres them, and deprivileges them. (1990:16)

The dressing up allowed the audience to engage in a performance of the construction of the Other within a confined space that was governed by conventions and filled with objects that discernably guided them towards play. The assumption was that the audiences were theatre and media students and lecturers who would be keen to participate in this way. This play had a liberating potential in revealing the unstable and the constructed nature of the orientalist discourse.

Judging from many photographs that resulted from this action, many male members of the audience in particular took this opportunity as an invitation to dress up and behave in a deliberately camp and feminized way that signaled a playful acting-out of gender transformation. As Judith Butler says 'the repeated stylization of the body,' gender and sex both form the subject and allow for 'parodic proliferation and subversive play' (Butler 1999: 32-33). The dressing up in the tent was intended as an ironic take on the construction of the stereotype through an orientalist masquerade, rather than simply the perpetuation of the stereotype, even though it is possible that some audiences may have interpreted it like this.



Figure 18 Tent 2: Audience member in 'the orientalist masquerade'

The strategy of 'mimesis' is argued by Luce Irigaray to be a tool in the playful repetition of the feminine role in order to 'make visible... what was supposed to remain invisible' (Irigaray 1985: 76). Irigaray has argued that for women the resistance to socially prescribed gender roles is possible through deliberate acting out of the constructed femininity, or mimicry, in order to expose its hidden mechanisms. While Irigaray meant this in the context of the feminine in language, the same concept of performativity of gender can be applied to the concept of the 'Oriental feminine Other'. As Hilde Haynen writes⁹:

Mimesis offers a valuable tactic, because it enables women to subvert – by the double gesture of assimilation and displacement – the identification imposed upon them. (1999:178)

This strategy of mimicking resonates with the intention behind both my performative action captured in the film still and the interactive 'dressing up'. The intention in both cases was to mimic and subvert the orientalist hegemonic structures that act upon the representation of Oriental women. The next section of the chapter will outline the performance aspects presented in the third and the fourth tent. The following analysis will also consider aspects of time of the performance that had less playful and more

⁹ Mimes, Dwelling and Architecture: Adorno's Relevance for a Feminist Theory of Architecture in Adorno, Culture and Feminism: SAGE Publications 1999, ed by Maggie O'Neill

solemn tone, led by the second research question which is to investigate complexities of the relationship between a subjective, hybrid identity and wider social and political powers.



Figure 19 Tent 2: Female audience member in 'the orientalist masquerade'

Audio Conversations

Having written about the first two tents in the previous sections of this chapter, I now will briefly explain the contents of the third tent in the performance. My conversations with belly dancers and Orientalist scholars during the research trip touched on many different topics and contexts and exposed many different views, often highly personal and opposing to each other. Chapter Two of this thesis gave an insight into the topics of my conversations with belly dancers and orientalist scholars from the field research, which focussed on how through diverse engagements with the medium of belly dance, women working in different European contexts, as well as Istanbul, are able to negotiate, forge and embody a range of female-centred and feminist discourses. The hours and hours of audio documentation of these conversations were edited into a one hour 'documentary', and played in the third tent. This black tent was the most private area of the installation offering an opportunity to listen into these conversations through headphones. The sound of recorded conversations was punctuated by the sound of the train recorded during the trip. The reader is able to listen to this audio material in the CD attached with this thesis in Appendix VII.

Audience members listened to conversations about the issues of body representation, female sexuality and eroticism in belly dancing that were raised by the voices in the 'documentary'. Linked to the questions of sexuality there was an issue of the status of belly dancing as opposed to ballet or contemporary dance. A current topic that was touched on was the perceptions of Muslims in Europe and the visual significance of Muslim women on the streets of Europe. A recurrent topic in the conversations was the focus on tensions of identity politics – whether it was to do with being an Arabic woman or even Belgian or Serbian woman and a belly dancer in Europe. Women also talked about the therapeutic potential of belly dancing and its positive impact on body confidence and personal empowerment, partly stemming from the inclusiveness of different body shapes in belly dancing. Another popular topic was belly dancing as self-expression with empowering potential or as entertainment for money. There were also comments on orientalist stereotypes in Turkish belly dance. There were references to Goddess culture and connection with the Earth Mother. In connection to this, one woman talked about spirituality and 'heart connection' in belly dancing, connecting dance to prayer and linking it to Sufism in the Turkish context. Another spoke about the trivialisation of Goddess culture in Tribal Belly dance, and how women could learn a lot about their essentialist tendencies by watching male belly dancers.

Thereby, this third layer of the performance gave voice to belly dance performers themselves. In a deliberate move away from representing belly dancer images and problems that go with stereotypical perceptions of these images, a window was opened into a myriad of highly personal/political issues. Following the first research question of this study which is concerned with dancers' negotiations of the orientalist framework of their practice, the intention was to give an opportunity to belly dancers to speak for themselves about troubling questions of female objectification, as well as deeply felt experiences of body confidence and empowerment. The problem of editing and choosing the material for the performance was a matter of not just aesthetic but also ethical choice, as written in the Introduction. One way of dealing with the ethics of representing the others' opinions is found in what Dwight Conquergood (1985:10) frames as 'dialogical stance':

Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversations with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them.

Subverting the problematic convention of 'invisible objective researcher' (see section two of this chapter), I situated my personal story and myself in relation to the stories featured in the third tent. This was in line with my methodology of reflexive and critical practice based research, in preference to the quantitative model of objectivity. The relationship that was intended was the one of a dialogue between the performer, the audience and the ethnographic audio text. The performance was intended as the platform for this dialogical, dynamic relationship that positioned the performer, the audience and the interviewed belly dancers as subjects of re-defining the power structures behind the practice of belly dancing. My embodied aesthetic practice was coupled with the subjective voices of belly dancers on their practice, beliefs and their everyday negotiations of the powers that frame their professional lives, to stir up audiences to a critical response. This is in accordance with the aims of performance ethnography, which is to create 'performance as a critical reflective and refractive lens to view the human condition and a form of reflexive agency that initiates action'. (Alexander 2005:411)

In the following sections I will develop this argument by highlighting how the performance intertwined other voices with my own in the action of collaborative re-mapping, in an attempt at subverting the dominant colonising narrative of the feminine Oriental 'Other'. In order to arrive at that analysis, I will first outline the physical elements of this performative 'ritual of deconstruction' that took place in the centre of the performance space. I will describe the dress, the map and my actions as the performer in the space, focussing on the action of breaking of pomegranates. The analysis will foreground autobiographical material that relates to my experience of loss and separation due to the war, which was poetically referenced in the ancient Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter.

So far, I have analysed the contents of three tents. As regards to the fourth tent, its related performative strategies and meanings belong to the analysis of hybrid identity that will be developed in the Chapter Four. As mentioned before, the fourth tent featured the sign 'Dr Belly Dance' and offered a one-to-one performance for the

audiences who wanted to participate in it. Resonating with the previously analysed performance strategies, *Dr Belly Dance* performance explored the movement in-between the identities and personas of 'a Western researcher' and 'an Oriental dancer', satirising the established categories, and exploring the relationship towards and from the position of the threatening and desired Oriental 'Other' (see 'Dr Belly Dance', Chapter Four, page 196).

Having outlined the tents and the related performance intentions, meanings and strategies, I will now turn the focus of the analysis to the performance in the centre of the installation, and the actions in relation to the dress and the map. The activities around the map and the dress were the culmination of the performance. Following the second research question, I will continue to analyse *Dis-Orient Express* in order to set up an analysis of collaborative actions that led to the re-mapping of belly dance politics. I will also foreground my autobiographical perspective which was intertwined with other subjective positions, in order to explore the central question of investigating complex relationship between subjective, hybrid identities and wider social and political powers.

2. Performance Actions, the Dress, the Map and their Meanings

Walking around the installation of *Dis-Orient Express*, listening to the haunting sounds of trains and Romani music being interrupted by the sound of exploding pomegranates which I periodically smashed on the ground, was a 'dreamy, yet on the edge' experience, as an audience member commented (see Appendix VIII). This part of the chapter will focus on the performance actions that aimed to reveal aspects of neo-colonial, xenophobic and patriarchal violence that lie behind the cultural stereotype of the Oriental 'Other'. I will start by describing performance actions that related to the dress hanging from the ceiling, followed by the analysis of their intended meaning. The dress as the central element of the installation will be contextualised in relation to the work of other visual artists, and to the myth of Persephone and Demeter. The analysis will then focus on the action of breaking pomegranates, as a specific performance strategy that highlighted the problem of violence of identity politics and of male violence against women. It will trace an autobiographical, embodied narrative of migration, identity fragmentation and longing for home, which will be analysed in more detail in

Chapter Four, in the section entitled 'Persephone in Exile', page 200. The final sections of this chapter will analyse the collaborative re-mapping and the final dance. My aim is not to investigate all the intended meanings of all performance actions and numerous installation elements, but to analyse the key performance strategies that attempted to expose and re-map the politics of belly dancing, in line with the second research question.

Performer's Actions and the Dress

My journey as the performer in *Dis-Orient Express* traversed the four corners of the space, the four tents, the area around the map, and under the strands of the dress. It was done in cycles that repeated with variations every half hour, during six hours of the performance. It criss-crossed the individual journeys of the audience members at various points. Depending on when they entered the performance space, the audience could see me moving slowly with a green rucksack on my back, reciting words, dancing, or smashing pomegranates and collecting pomegranate seeds (Figure 20 and 21). It was as if these gestures were 'in conversation' with the dress. Almost at all times I interacted with a dozen eight-meter long white strands that were reaching all areas of the space. These actions also included washing the pomegranate stains off the dress, and wrapping and unwrapping parts of my body in the strands of the dress.



Figure 20 Interacting with the dress



Figure 21 Gathering pomegranate seeds

The dress dominated the space in the *Dis-Orient Express* performance. Made out of white muslin it hung like a chandelier in the central area of the performance space. It appeared as if it was floating in the space. A dozen strands of white muslin stretched out

into all corners of the space, each strand reaching around eight meters. White, red and blue theatre lighting was focussed on the dress, augmenting its form, and its many tassels (Figures 22 and 23). With suspended tentacles swaying in the air, I saw it as akin to a white sea-creature. The dress was embellished with two symbols of ∞ , representing two figures of eight, in black material, on the chest and on the hip area. These symbols had specific personal meaning that will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. While I am aware of many possible interpretations of a white dress that vary across cultures, there was a very practical reasoning for the choice of the white muslin material. The white was intended to serve as a blank canvas for the markings that were to be inscribed on it during the performance through the action of breaking pomegranates, as will become clear later in this section. The connotations of innocence that accompany this colour will be explored in relation to the contrasting connotations of violence and of loss of innocence. During the six hours of the performance, the dress that was hanging above the centre of the performance space was gradually being lowered, making a slow vertical descent from the ceiling to the floor of the theatre space.



Figure 22 The dress, the audience and the performer in the beginning of the performance



Figure 23 The dress and the audience at the later stages of the performance, as the dress has descended

The Temple of the Dress, in Context

In 2000 at the opening of Tate Modern, I saw *Maman* by Louise Bourgeois from 1997 (Figure 24). Its long spider legs, enveloping the spectators who moved in and out of the installation, were at the back of my mind when creating the *Dis-Orient Express* dress. That may seem surprising, as its muslin strands were soft and inviting, not



Figure 24 Maman by Louise Bourgeois

menacing and spiky as with Bourgeois' metallic spider legs. However, the positioning of the dress was similar to the spider – it was enfolding the spectators within its muslin tentacles. I aimed for this sensation of being enveloped within feminine strings. This reference to the maternal theme of *Dis-Orient Express* strongly echoed *Maman*. As with many other works by Louise Bourgeois, it is often interpreted in an autobiographical way, referencing her childhood feelings of betrayal and abandonment by her father, and the loss of her mother who died while the artist was young. This sculpture has been interpreted in many ways, but this is what the artist herself indicates:

The friend (the spider – why the spider?) because my best friend was my mother and she was deliberate, clever, patient, soothing, reasonable, dainty, subtle, indispensable, neat, and as useful as a spider. She could also defend herself, and me, by refusing to answer 'stupid', inquisitive, embarrassing, personal questions.

I shall never tire of representing her.

I want to: eat, sleep, argue, hurt, destroy ...

Why do you?
My reasons belong exclusively to me.
The treatment of Fear.

(Louise Bourgeois, 'Maman', 1999)

This intimate memory of mother served as the artistic impulse behind Bourgeois' work. In *Dis-Orient Express* I also referenced this emotional subject in the poem about my mother, which I recited at particular stages in the performance, while sitting on the suitcase under the dress. The poem '*She walks between her tasks of taking care of other people*' spoke of the loss and separation not just from my mother, but also from my home and from Bosnia. In Chapter Four, the section 'Persephone in Exile' will reference this poem and the personal political subject of loss, relating it to the concept of 'reflective nostalgia', in the wider analysis of hybrid identity and belly dancing.

After reading out the poem, I would continue my journey around the space in a deliberately slow manner. In this circular passage the movement would at times become a kind of a protracted dance, my hips moving in a figure of eight. During these periods of dancing, I would sometimes attach myself to the dress, wrapping an arm, or leg, sometimes even my neck in the tassel of the dress (Figure 25). This ambivalence in my interaction with the dress, indicating that one can wrap and shelter but also lose and strangle oneself in the strands of the dress, may echo the psycho-analytical view of the mother archetype as a nurturing and devouring principle. While this is interesting theoretical ground from which many have interpreted the work of Louise Bourgeois (Nixon 2005), psycho-analytical theory is not part of the critical methodology of this thesis. However, the analysis will indicate how some psycho-analytical approaches have influenced my performance choices, particularly in reference to the concept of 'reflective nostalgia' (see Chapter Four page 204). I will revisit the ambivalence in my interaction with the dress in the final section of this thesis, relating it to the wider tensions in the politics of belly dancing.



Figure 25 Interacting with the dress

My performance actions were based in the will to understand the relationship with my mother, home and exile. For this purpose, I employed the myth of Persephone and Demeter in *Dis-Orient Express*. By using this myth as an archetype of a mother-daughter relationship, the performance opened the space to reflect on the myth in such a way as to engender a personal-political story. As analysed in the previous stages of the thesis, stories of yearning and loss are common to many women's experiences of belly dancing, as this cultural form travels across its many geographical, cultural and political contexts. The myth of Persephone and Demeter enabled a personally charged expression of darker issues that lie at the extreme margins of the politics of belly dancing, such as violence against women and xenophobia. Persephone's mythical journey into the underworld enabled a poetic metaphor for my investigation of these dark and taboo subjects. In order to arrive at the analysis of these creative expressions that were embodied in my action of breaking of the pomegranates, I will first analyse how the installation employed the iconology of a temple, relating it to the Persephone myth.

The centre of the *Dis-Orient Express* installation encompassed the dress and the area underneath it, including the map, the suitcases, and the pomegranates. This part of

the installation employed the iconology of a temple to a female Goddess. There were bowls of water placed under the dress, and a floral smell of essential oils pervaded the room. The dress was suspended high above the performance space, in a superior position to all the other elements. This was reinforced by the air of ceremony associated with the way I interacted with the dress in the performance. Washing the strands of the dress was done with utmost care. The placing of the bowls with water and handling of the pomegranates resembled a ceremony. Even though many strands touched the ground, I never trod on them, treating them with veneration and respect. The Persephone myth was not made overly explicit in the performance, apart from its one mention in the performance poster, from which an audience member could read the following:

Dis-Orient Express also references Persephone's journey between the worlds, revealing the artist's own psychological attempt to weave meaning between her traumatic past of the Bosnian war and a subjective and a shared experience of living between different cultures, languages and identities.

According to the myth (Smith 2016), Persephone was picking flowers when she was abducted by Hades and taken to the underworld. Her mother Demeter warned her not to eat pomegranate seeds while in the underworld, but Persephone forgot this advice and ate three pomegranate seeds. Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, cried for her daughter and all of nature was depleted. There were no flowers, nor fruit; there was no warmth or growth. This resulted in famine, so Zeus allowed Demeter to retrieve her daughter from the underworld. However, as she had eaten the pomegranate seeds, Persephone was bound to return each year for three months to her underworld lover. Her mother grieved each time her daughter left and each time winter returned.

Even though the above story of Persephone and Demeter was not presented to the audiences and the overt references to the myth in the installation were minimal, this powerful mythical story and my embodied traumatic memories informed the movement, dance, the recited poetry, the gestures of smashing the fruit and the cleaning of the dress. The symbolism of these actions was not precise, and their meanings were multiple, but my intention was located in the desire to communicate deeply embedded experiences of loss, yearning, anger over the imposed violence and the enforced

separation, and the strong determination to come to terms with these complicated experiences.

My movement in the space under the strands of the dress was led by my intention of impersonating Persephone and her journey to the underworld. These actions and their meaning are analysed in greater detail in Chapter Four page 200. Even though this was not a theatrical enactment of 'Persephone' for the purposes of telling the mythical story to the audience, the intention of enacting Persephone's mythical journey into the underworld informed my actions of walking, washing the ends of the dress, reading a poem about my mother and dancing while attached to the dress. The intention of going down to 'the underworld' was an attempt to give expression to the past experiences of violence, separation from mother and home, and to find a sort of reconciliation with these experiences. This performative embodiment brought together my experiences of exile and war together with the mythic experience of Persephone, in order to enable a personal political story. The myth served both as a vehicle to express my traumatic experiences, and at the same time to provide a kind of displacement from a too subjective position. The use of the myth was an attempt to find a balance between the will to communicate intense personal-political experiences, and the intention of not getting too locked into emotions that I would not be able to express. Therefore, Persephone's mythical descent into the underworld enabled my attempt to deal with the dark and taboo subjects of violence against women and separation from home, in order to express complicated aspects of hybrid identity. I attempted to link my personal experience of violence with the experience of others in the action of breaking of the pomegranates and collaborative re-mapping. The next section will deepen the analysis of the processes between these performance actions and their intended meanings.

Breaking the Pomegranates

According to the myth, Persephone had eaten pomegranate fruit while residing in the underworld, three pomegranate seeds to be precise, and therefore she is bound to return to Hades for three months of the year. During these three months we have winter, as Demeter is grieving for her absent daughter. This act of eating the forbidden

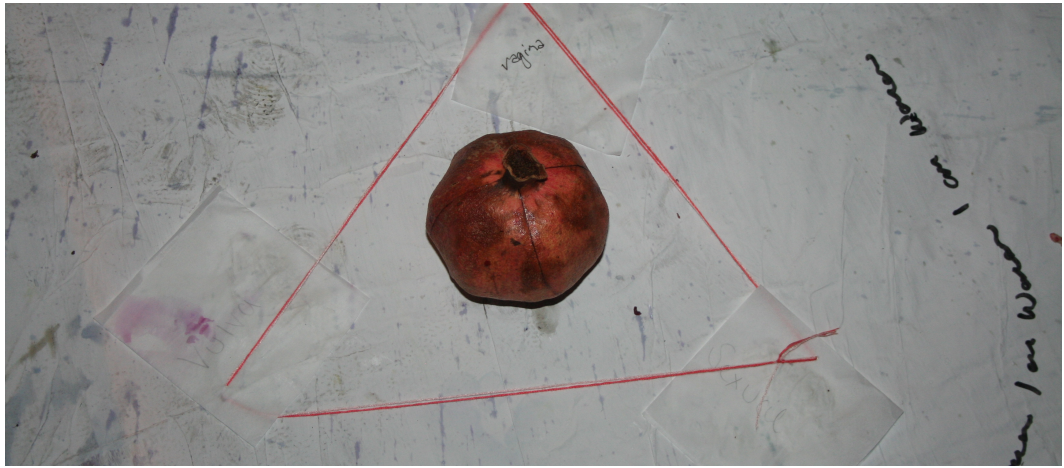


Figure 26

fruit binds Persephone to the underworld. This was an initial inspiration for featuring pomegranates in the performance but the breaking of the pomegranates in the performance had multiple meanings around violation and separation. I will here attempt to unpick some of the meanings behind this action.

Much like the coffee cups in the aforementioned film, the pomegranates served as 'hypertextual marks' in my circular movement around the performance space. These 'hypertexts' pointed to other meanings, often violent, characteristic of the gender and colonial power matrix that frames belly-dancing practice, as will become clearer later in the analysis. In my circular journey around the performance space I would stop, pick up a pomegranate and smash it violently on the evolving map on the floor. The seeds would crash and explode leaving a red liquid mark on the map, surrounded by many scattered pomegranate seeds. Breaking the enchanted sound-scape of the space, I would proclaim in a loud voice: 'There are already too many Turks in Austria!' This was a direct quote from one of the accounts featured in the third tent of the performance, as a comment on a rising xenophobia amongst the youth in Austria (Appendix VII). The audiences would experience this violent interruption into the dream-like fabric of the performance, and if they stayed in the space for more than half an hour, they would come to expect the 'explosion'. An audience member commented on 'on the edge atmosphere' (Appendix VIII). The pomegranates exploded on the evolving conceptual map on the floor containing words that indicated stirring connotations of colonisation, barriers to movement, and manifold forms of violence such as 'coloniser, forbidden, pray' (Figure 27) and 're-possessed, transgressed, stolen, exploited, shipped, used, freedom, rights, humanity, disregard, violate' (Figure 32). The red stains left by the pomegranate juice would criss-cross and highlight these words, adding a whole set of new associations.

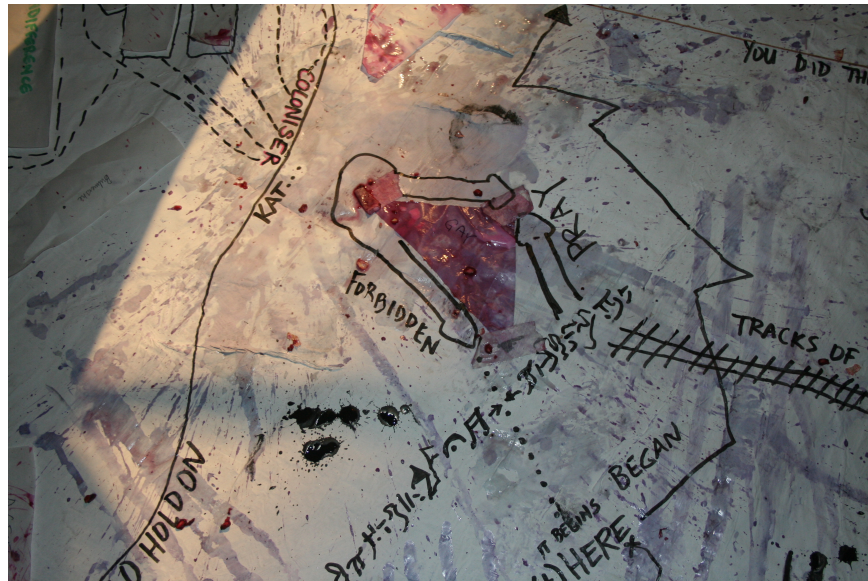


Figure 27

The meaning of the gesture of throwing pomegranates for me was firstly autobiographical. The explosion of pomegranates with their seeds scattered on the floor for me connoted memories of the war and human casualties from the war grenades. The four years of constant shelling and the images of human bodies exploded and scattered on the streets of my hometown are deeply lodged in my psyche. The broken seeds resonated with both my subjective and shared experience of separation and identity fragmentation. My poem that references this experiences was presented to the audiences in the third tent:

*I broke up
And splintered into thousand little pieces
I never noticed when I cracked
One of the pieces remembers other fragments
But doesn't remember the crash
The Big Bang*

*Now it corresponds to other pieces
Over Facebook
Hey do you remember....*

*Most of the time I walked and pretended I am a whole person
But at times I realise I'm not*

*I am an apparition of a whole
My parts have dispersed
Over Facebook
I have forgotten who I am¹⁰*

As Peggy Phelan (1997:95) writes:

Trauma tears the fabric of knowledge itself: it is a wound in the system through which the subject knows the world, knows him or herself.

The red liquid of pomegranate juice and marking of the white muslin dress with red stains has connotations of blood and the loss of innocence. The red stains on the conceptual collaborative map added further possible associations of violence and female sexuality, especially when read next to the words such as ‘colonizer’, ‘dominance’, ‘vagina’ and so on. Persephone in the myth is abducted and raped by Hades. At heart of the myth is an act of violation that causes immeasurable sadness and grief. The male god Hades commits crimes of rape and abduction and the male god Zeus exerts the ultimate control over the situation. The female goddesses and the main actors in the story, Demeter and Persephone are separated and grieving. From this separation and their eventual reunion comes the story of the origin of the seasons of winter and summer, as the key element of the fertility myth. It is important to mention that the myth of Persephone’s abduction and rape has a particular resonance in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. My previous work *Holy Jolie* (Chapter One) dealt with the disturbing subject of mass rape of Bosnian women in the 1990s war. As Lene Hensen (2001: 56) writes:

The large-scale raping of Bosnian women – commonly suggested to be as many as 20,000 – and the perceived inability of the Bosnian men to provide protection were part of Serbian attempts to constitute the entire Bosnian nation as humiliated, inferior, weak and feminine.

Holy Jolie criticised the way the media and celebrity culture continue to deal with this private and collective trauma. In *Dis-Orient Express* the subject of rape is not overtly dealt with, but it certainly provides an important context for this work, as discussed in Chapter One. The background material on rape and violence against women gave a

¹⁰ My untitled poem, 2013

particular charge to the mood of the performance. Nancy Bennet (2016) uses a psycho-analytical perspective in her writing on the Persephone and Demeter myth. She sees this story as an opportunity for a woman to delve into her trauma, to renounce her innocence and delve into the shadow world of Hades. In her own words, Persephone's task is to:

Unite dark and light sides of the Goddess within herself, by increasingly embracing the long-suffering victim/martyr into her consciousness awareness. Addressing her issue regarding power. (Bennet 2016)

This can engender a transformative experience of:

Willingness to look into the face of this suffering and understanding her relation to it – not from a place of blame, but from a place of power. (Bennet 2016)

These words resonate with the efforts by many Bosnian women who have struggled to understand their difficult experiences and to move away from them. They also echo my creative attempts to understand and reconcile my experience of exile and relationship with home. The immeasurable acts of breaching basic human rights and of violence against women during the war and the post war period have called for many artistic attempts to represent, express, understand and move away from the war. My approach has been to learn from other women's attempts to deal with these difficult subjects in the faith that female solidarity may forge a way forward.



Figure 28 DeCOLONISATION by Yong Soon Min

Instances of female solidarity can be trans-national, crossing the borders of specific cultural and political contexts. For example, an artwork by an artist from Korea played an important part in inspiring the *Dis-Orient Express* installation. Yong Soon Min's mixed media piece *deCOLONIZATION* examined the impact of colonisation on a Korean woman's identity (Stahr 2011). In the central space it featured a white traditional Korean dress that contained handwritten words from Won Ko's poem *Home*. The dress was suspended over the words COLONISE. The installation also contained a letter from mother to daughter that explained the beginnings of a military action that changed their lives. Thus, personal history was traced and interwoven with particular events that mark international power struggles. This artwork informed the early stages of this research project, and served as an outline from which I developed some elements of the *Dis-Orient Express* installation. More significantly, I was encouraged by Min's articulate interweaving of complex political circumstances with the autobiographical and intimate correspondence between mother and daughter, in her attempt to intertwine the personal story with the political dynamic. Stating that questions of identity are prominent for many artists of immigrant or colonial backgrounds may risk conflating our different positions and particular conditions. While I acknowledge that

there is a difference in contexts, techniques and intentions between Min's and my work, the similarity lies in our common focus on the female agency in counteracting the dominant systems of cultural representation. The solidarity is drawn from the point of this political agency, as well as from the empathy or the willingness to put oneself in the same situation. In Chapter Four I will continue to develop links between my performative strategies and the work of other female artists, by focussing on the work of an Iranian photographer who directly challenges the prescribed identity of the 'female Oriental Other'.

Returning to the point made by Nancy Bennet (2016) regarding the possibility of transformation and reconciliation of the past trauma, I will further reflect on this emancipatory possibility in *Dis-Orient Express*. In the performance, 'Persephone' delved into the underworld, sacrificing her lily-white innocence for the knowledge of the hidden and the painful, in the desire for transformation and reconciliation. The journeys that were made by the audiences and the performer around the space, as well as the references to the journey down the Orient Express, resonated with this attempt to learn the hidden meanings behind the subject of belly dancing and the feminine Oriental 'Other'. The pomegranates were significant in providing a hiatus from the cyclical movements and the dreamy soundscape, and bringing the audiences and the performer back to the present time. Breaking of the pomegranates ruptured the fabric of the performance in a deliberate way. Accompanied with the words of 'too many Turks in Austria', the exploding pomegranates were envisaged as symbolic acts of resistance to the dominant power matrix associated with the discourse on the Oriental versus European identity. These ruby-red 'grenades' exploded on the map in the central performance area, prompting further collaborative deconstruction of the concepts associated with that power matrix. They served the performance intentions well.

Reflecting back to my previous work *Holy Jolie* where I tried to explore the traumatic experiences of mass rape through a solo performance, *Dis-Orient Express* sought reconciliation through a collaborative effort. The most emancipatory aspect of the performance was the collaborative action of re-mapping, which was the culmination of the performance for many of those who did not see its end. This will be discussed in the next section of the chapter. If there was any reconciliation of the difficult experiences and issues expressed by the performance, it was in the moments of collaborative actions. The meaning of those actions ties in with the previous analysis of

the idea of solidarity with other artists, such as Yong Soon Min, who resist dominant powers of cultural representation, and the related ideas of political agency and empathy.

At the temple of *Dis-Orient Express* I made a symbolic offering of broken pomegranates, broken identities and red-stained words on the collective map. This was not a solitary action, but a collective re-mapping of power relations that frame 'the Oriental Other' engendered by the critical and contextualized subjective perspectives. The collaborative action, linked with the idea of solidarity, attempted to extend the dialogical approach of this practice-as-in order to enable conversation between many different points of view, and across different media. In the next two final sections of this chapter I will focus on collaborative remapping as well as the final part of the performance which started as the dress had finished its descent to the theatre floor.

Collaborative Re-Mapping

Performance ethnography is a form of 'cultural exchange' (Jones, 2002), a performative cross-cultural communication (Chesebro, 1998), an embodied 'critical performative ideology' (Giroux 2001; Pineau 1998, 2002; Worley, 1998), and a theater form that establishes emancipatory potential.

Bryant Keith Alexander (2005:411)

The aim of both the field research and *Dis-Orient Express* performance has been to enable a platform for an active dialogical investigation of cultural and political powers that frame belly dancing. The aim of the performance was to extend the interview-based conversation about belly dancing to audiences, to stir them and invite them to a critical response. The autobiographical material from the previous section was combined with other ethnographic accounts of belly dancers and Orientalist scholars collected during the fieldwork that was made available in the third, audio tent. Highlighting both my auto-ethnographic account of migration and hybridity, and the dancers' perspectives on the politics of belly dancing, this section will show how collaborative re-mapping attempted to enable a reflexive, critical, and dialogical examination of the post colonial and gender politics of belly dancing.

The investigation of the concepts underpinning belly dancing was one of an active and lively dialogue. Around one hundred people came to see this durational performance, and about half of them engaged in the act of collaborative writing on the map. After seeing the performance and listening to the interviews, the audience was invited to respond to the binary opposites of Man/Woman, Coloniser/Colonised, Orient/West (Figure 29.1) by writing their associations and thoughts relating to these concepts on the map that was placed in the central area, under the dress. This section of the chapter will explain and analyse this process by focussing on the collaborative map that grew during the time of the performance. It will also outline the range of socio-political issues in the audio records presented in the third, black tent, and how they related to the map. The intentions of these actions will be contextualised in relation to literature on performance ethnography, dialogical performance and auto-ethnography.



Figure 29.1 Collaborative Re-mapping

The map, positioned in the central area of the installation underneath the dress, was cut to approximately resemble a map of Europe. The performance was a chance for the audiences to get involved in the action of subjective, feminist and collective remapping of the relationship between the concepts such as 'Europe' and 'Orient' and issues such as female objectification and female empowerment. The participants were invited to question the power hierarchies of West/Orient, Man/Woman,

Coloniser/Colonised that on the surface appear as monoliths. They were given a symbolic opportunity to *play* with them, and in the play, to subvert the semiotic and social order of these hierarchies. Before they were invited to write on the map, the audience was able to watch the film mapping the journey on *Dis-Orient Express* in the first tent, to take part in the playful orientalist masquerade in the second tent, and to listen to the subjective accounts of the belly dancers themselves in the third tent.



Figure 29.2 Audience is writing on the map in the final stage of performance. The third, black audio tent is in the back of the performance space, on the right

As discussed previously, the intention behind my action of breaking pomegranates was to expose layers of violence that are implicated in the gender and identity power matrix that frames belly dancing. The sentence that I repeated when a pomegranate was smashed was ‘There are already too many Turks in Austria’. This charged and troubling sentence that signaled xenophobia at the heart of Europe was the link between the tent, my gestures as a performer and the map. I would utter this sentence every time I would break the pomegranate. As mentioned before, this was a quote from the interview with an Austrian Orientalist scholar who was referring to a recent headline in an Austrian newspaper while commenting on the xenophobia of the Austrian youth. The audience was able to hear the audio extract from this interview in the black tent and the reader is able to hear this sentence in Appendix VII. The latent violence in these words matched the violence of the explosion of the seeds on the floor.

The intention was 'to explode' the political concepts that underpin the subject of belly dancing in Europe and to capture them in the map. Displacing the routine assumptions of 'a femme fatale, exotic, belly dancer', brought into focus those that have multiple and contradictory identities, those 'Re-possessed Transgressed Stolen Exploited Shipped Used.', as written on the map (Figure 30 to 33). Deeply troubling contemplations such as 'Sleeping with the enemy. Control. Creation. Male. Barbed wire' were brought to the surface of the map by the audience themselves. Over the six hours of the performance, more and more words were layered on top of others, sometimes linking to others to form phrases. These are some of the word streams:

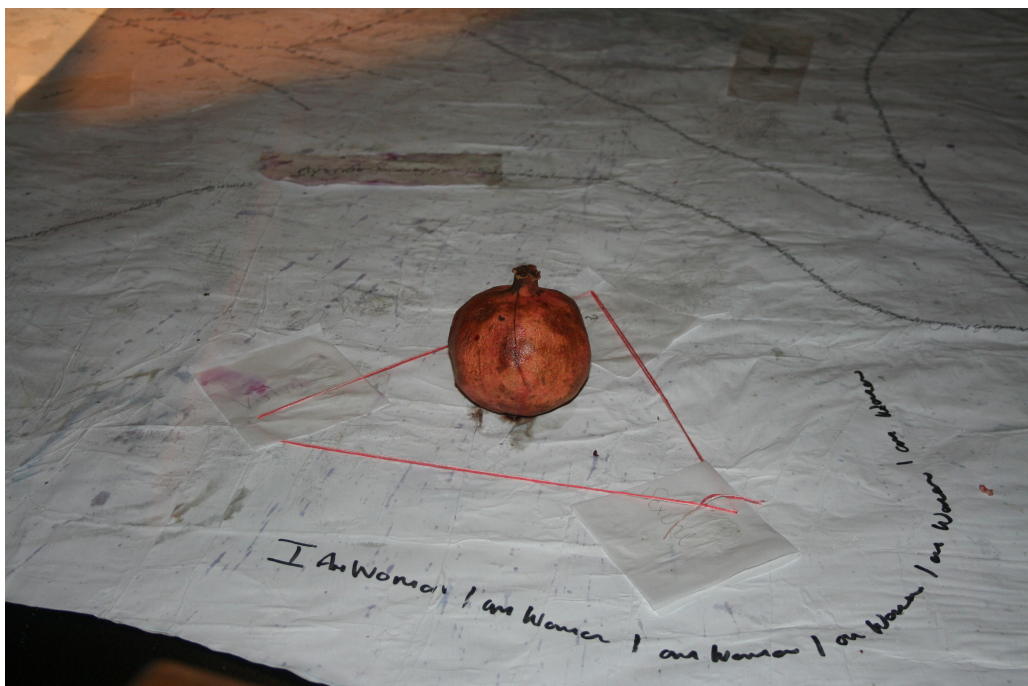


Figure 30 Performance image

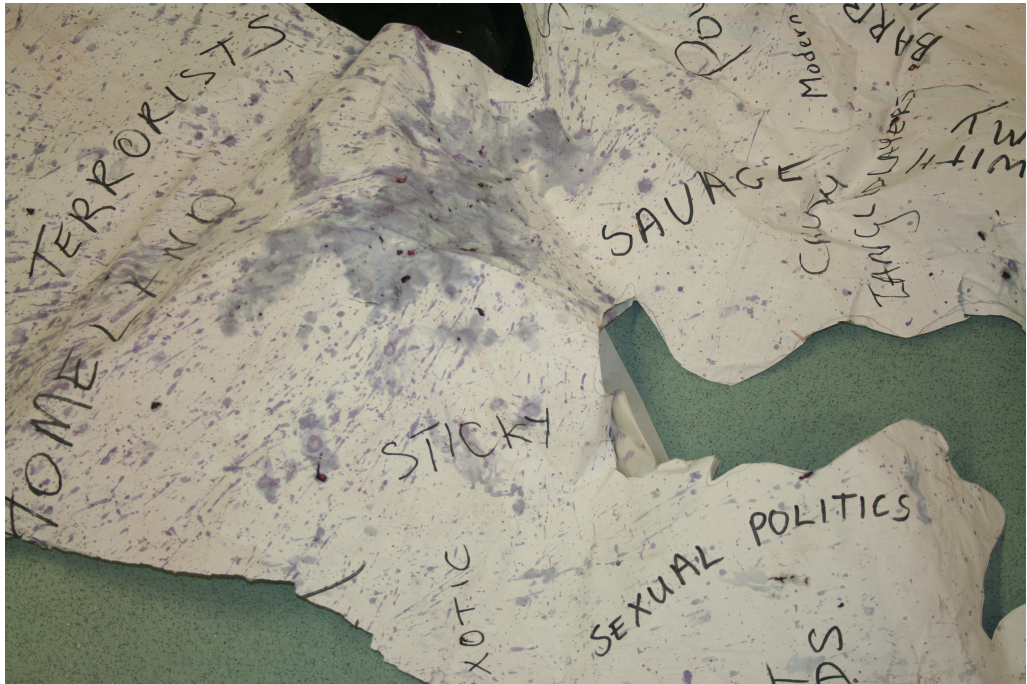


Figure 31 Performance image



Figure 32 Performance image

'I am woman I am woman I am woman I am woman I am woman.'

'Terrorist. Homeland. Sticky. Savage. Sexual Politics.'

'Humanity. Freedom. Rights. Violate. Violated. Co-opted. Dispossessed –Anguish.'

'Fight for what you believe in.'

'Re-possessed Transgressed Stolen Exploited Shipped Used.'

'Exotic. Subaltern. Stereotypes'

'Sleeping with the enemy. Control. Creation. Male. Barbed wire.'

The aim of the action of remapping was to stimulate audience's thoughts and responses, without coming to any definite conclusions in an attempt to keep the flow of the dialogue. So I will not attempt here to give any further conclusions to this action. As Conquergood (1985:9) says of dialogical performance:

It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text (performer and cultural members) open and ongoing.

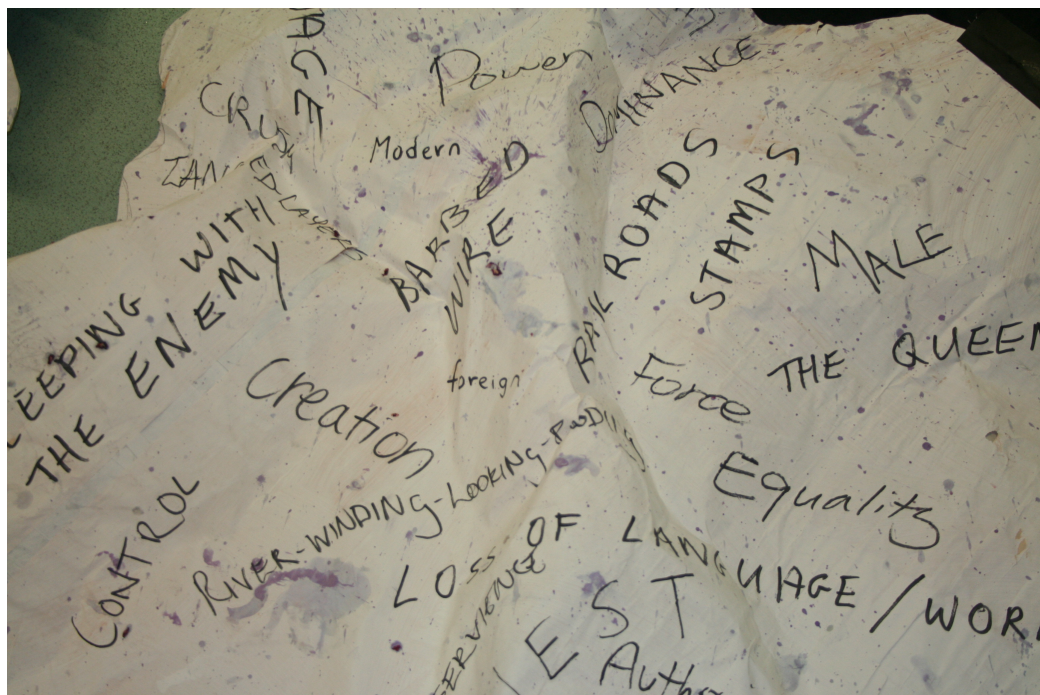


Figure 33

Final Dance

There were periods of dancing throughout the duration of the *Dis-Orient Express* performance. As mentioned previously in the section entitled 'The Temple of the Dress, in Context' at certain times during the slow passage around the performance space my movement would turn into a dance. My hips were moving in a figure of eight while I was attached to the strands of the dress. I mentioned that there was ambivalence in this interaction with the dress, as its tentacles could be constrictive, as well as beautiful and inviting. In this section I will analyse the dance in the last stage of the performance and explain the intentions and ambivalent meanings of that action.

After six hours of this durational performance, the dress was finally lowered to the floor. The audience was asked to move away to one end of the theatre space, and the attendants lifted the heavy paper map to form a screen between the performer and the audience. The music gained momentum. Audience members were able to view the collaborative map that contained many red-stained words and sentences. Then one of the attendants took the knife and cut through the map, dividing it in two. (Figure 34)



Figure 34 The map is lifted and cut

The two sides of the map were split to expose the dancer who had put on the dress in the centre of the space. The performer, myself, was belly dancing to high-energy Romany music while wearing the dress with the long strands suspended in all corners of the theatre space. Every movement that I made was transmitted to all areas of the

installation, with many strands of the dress and the interconnected tents shaking with each movement of the hips. The dance at times became so forceful as to pull away one-by-one the strands, which fell on the ground. At times this dance was more enticing, playfully detaching the fibres of the dress. Once free, I wrapped up all the strands, to finally crawl away into the black tent.

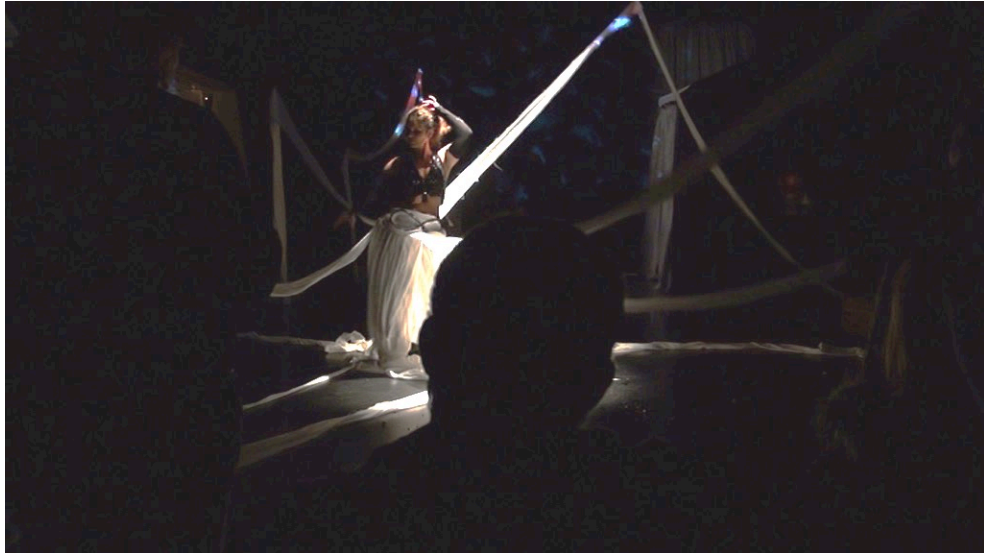


Figure 35

My initial intention with the final stage was to achieve a sort of integrity. This desire was contained in the dance of 'figure of eight', a signature belly dancing movement. The dress itself was also embellished by this symbol in black cloth, both on the bust and the hip area. Visually, this movement resembles a mathematical symbol of ∞ , representing the concept of infinity. In belly dancing, the movement is characterised by hips moving in circles in opposition to each other, to draw an imaginary figure of eight. By moving a rib cage in the same pattern of ∞ , one can perform the same movement. The dance movements in the performance contained both chest and hip figures of eight. The significance of this symbol was mainly visual – drawing a figure of eight visually on the dress and repeating it kinaesthetically in the movement denoted drawing the imaginary line between the four points in the space marked by four tents.

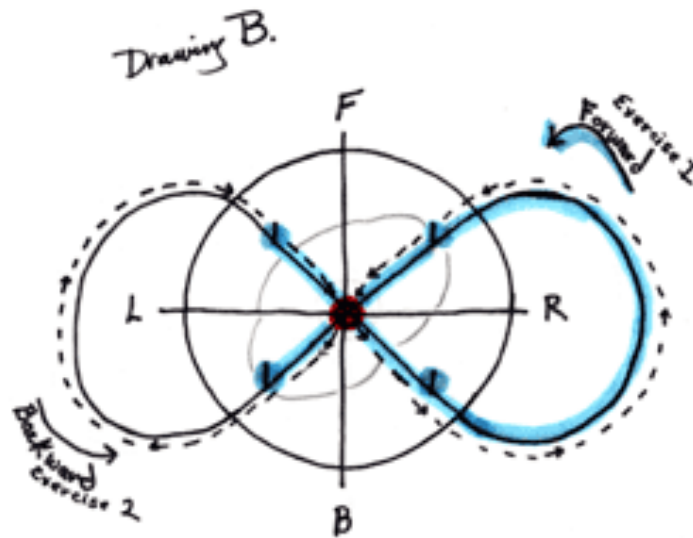


Figure 36 Belly dancing movement 'figure of eight'. L and R indicate the movement of left and right hip

By drawing a figure of eight visually on the dress and repeating it kinaesthetically in belly dancing meant, for me, to draw the imaginary line between the four points in the space marked by four tents and thus striving for a sort of integrity between the many layers of the performance.

Before interpreting this scene it is important to remember that none of the objects or gestures in the installation had a singular meaning. It was also obvious that there was the process of embodiment – the dress was brought to life in the dance. There was transformation from a collaborative installation into a more traditional spectating performance with a greater, focussed energy. So if there was embodiment, what was exactly embodied? The danger lies in concluding that there was an embodiment of the higher feminine archetype or ancient female divinity. Another problematic reading would be that the dance represented the reunion of 'Persephone' and 'Demeter' where the mother and the daughter are together. These singular interpretations would stray into the area of essentialising and mythologizing that this research project strove to criticise and deconstruct in the first place. The carefully balanced tension between the method of deconstruction and the inspiration derived from myth that characterised this whole practice as research would too easily be lost for the sake of a linear and narrow reading.

There is also a risk in interpreting this performance in terms of a cathartic resolution between its many-layered meanings. On the technical level, the moment of

entering the dress was intended to be an energetic peak of the performance. The cutting of the paper map harboured the departure from the previously described layers of meaning, from the language into the final dance. The romantic connotations of the Orient Express, the ancient myth of Persephone and the symbolism of mother-daughter relationship, the myriad of political aspects surrounding belly dancing, all these were moved aside to reveal a dancing body that was performing in the present moment. The layers of time, from the ancient, and 1920s, to the field research time were all peeled away to expose one live moment of the final dance. It lasted no more than five minutes. It was a conscious, premeditated departure from the deconstruction of text (visual, audio, written) to the live action of belly dancing. It signalled a deliberate movement from language, the concepts and maps to the moment of live performance. As Peggy Phelan writes in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. (1993: 146)

However, in this reflection on the final stage of *Dis-Orient Express* performance, it is important to state that while it signified a departure from text into a kinaesthetic experience, the final dance did not result in a cathartic liberation from many-layered and contested meanings, which might have been expected. Instead it delivered an effect of ambivalence. There was a contradiction between the high-energy Romany music and the slow and deliberate dance. Some audience members later commented that my glance was pointing downwards, signalling a vague sense of discomfort. My memory is that I felt entrapped by all the tentacles that I was attached to.

The final dance was not rehearsed, as the structure of the dress was constructed in such a way that dancing in the dress would mean that the whole installation would crumble before the performance even begun. Also, my intentions were partly located in the sense of irresolution and openness to multiple interpretations between different layers of meaning in the performance. These intentions build on the nature of my previous performance work that engaged multiple media in exploration of a diversity of political issues (Chapter One). I wanted to build on this multiplicity, by allowing audiences to make their own conceptual connections. I could not completely predict what was going to happen once I entered the dress. I was suddenly in a strange, liminal

space, dancing to the Romani music, feeling at the same time in control and unpleasantly entangled by the tentacles, the gazes and the expectations of the audience.

Even though the dance offered a dramatic crescendo of the performance, it did not offer a cathartic resolution. The effect of ambivalence that it gave is characteristic of other points of tension and ambivalence in the politics of belly dancing. The tension between the gaze and the intention of the performer echoes the conflict between the wider powers that construct the subject of belly dancing. I will deepen the analysis of the ambivalent experiences of hybrid identity and the cultural politics of belly dancing in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

This chapter expanded the analysis of the potential of an artistic counter-narrative to resist the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse, by focussing on my doctoral performance. In examining several different elements of *Dis-Orient Express*, it investigated the second research question of the thesis, which focuses on my strategies of destabilising fixed stereotyping representations of the Oriental Other. In addressing this question it extended the analysis, started in Chapter Two, of the use of irony, mimicry and play as performance strategies for subverting the 'Oriental Feminine Other'. The chapter first analysed how a 'play' with the signifiers of the Oriental Other can lead to dis-orienting the established representations of the legendary Orient Express and subverting the assumed relationship between the Western gaze and the 'Oriental belly dancer'. That analysis was contextualised within theoretical perspectives that emphasise the emancipatory potential of a hybrid identity, addressing the third research question of the thesis. This introductory examination enabled an insight into performance strategies that aimed to reveal aspects of neo-colonial, xenophobic and patriarchal violence that lie behind the cultural stereotype of the Oriental Other. In addressing the second research question of how the use of Persephone myth functions in the analysis of the complex relationship between a hybrid identity and wider social powers, the study investigated particular manifestations of loss and trauma integral to my experience of hybrid identity. Articulation of these experiences exposes political

agency and a possibility of solidarity between attempts to re-shape dominant representations of the Other. By joining autobiographical perspective with collaborative performance actions, this chapter extended the analysis of the dialogical approach to an investigation and re-casting of the politics of belly dancing.

Reflecting on the development of this performance in the light of my earlier work outlined in Chapter One, in *Dis-Orient Express* I tried to convey a complexity of issues but in a more structured and less compressed way. This aim was largely achieved, as though there were many technical and conceptual elements, they were clearly defined and choreographed to work together. I went back to the roots of my performance practice which is not reliant on acting and speech, but on process, actions and the installation environment. The performance was highly interactive and focussed on audience, who shaped the map in very unique ways. This intimate encounter between the audience and myself exposed the moments of vulnerability and ambiguity that were highly embodied and specific. In my future performance work I would like to build on these moments in clearer, courageous and more powerful ways, in order to expose corporeal and political nature of ascribing and reclaiming identity.

The audiences had multiple interpretations of the embodied, visual, material and conceptual strands of the performance, as well as their own intended meanings that they conveyed in the text in the collaborative map. Their interpretations and meanings may or may have not overlapped with the intended meanings behind my actions. Even though those intentions came from an intense personal experience, I did not want to 'explain' them to the audiences by making too many references to Persephone or my background. In this chapter I tried to give a balanced interpretation of my actions, intentions and performance processes, as well as a faithful representation of others' perspectives, while bearing in mind that there are other interpretations and perspectives that could not be included in this particular analysis, or given a conclusion and synthesis.

In the next chapter I will return to some elements of this performance to develop the conception of hybrid identity in relation to the performer's actions of longing and separation from home, represented through the myth of Persephone. The next chapter will also describe and analyse the performance *Dr Belly Dance* presented in the fourth tent. I will use the elements of performance described in this chapter to develop the debate on how the perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory concerning

hybridity, migration, displacement and exile relate to the practice of globalised belly dance and to the dancers' nomadic and diasporan identities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Miss Hybrid: Moving Places, Fluid Identities



Figure 1 *Miss Hybrid* by Shirin Allabadi

The above photograph by Iranian artist Shirin Allabadi (Figure 1) is titled *Miss Hybrid*. The woman in the photograph blows gum defiantly into a viewer's face. This is an example of an act of creative resistance to the gaze and orientalist representation. Moreover, it is a rejection of a way that the hegemonic forces of Iranian society would like to represent women in their society. We are used to stereotypical representations of Eastern women, whether they are images of women in burkas or Gerome's harem odalisques, and here we have something different. Allabadi takes the issue of representation of 'Oriental woman' into her own hands. She presents a sum of cultural

signifiers that question a traditional and 'authentic' representation of Iranian women - nose patch that alludes to recent surgery, denim jacket, blonde wig, 'Western' symbol of chewing gum, blue contact lenses. Allabadi brings us a young Iranian woman from the streets of Teheran, with a hybrid mixture of cultural signifiers that subvert the stereotypical dualistic representations of Easterner versus Westerner. *Miss Hybrid* 'blows' those pre-conceptions back into the viewer's face.

Allabadi's message echoes the approach and the central aim of this practice-as-research project, which is to investigate the potential of a counter-narrative to the orientalist, patriarchal and imperial structures of the representation of female Oriental 'Other', through the medium of belly dancing. The counter-narrative is enacted from the position of hybrid identity. So far in the thesis I have outlined multiple stories and performances that are spoken and performed by those who are seen and who may identify as the exotic 'Other'. Both in the analysis of my doctoral performance and the work of other performers in the case studies, I have tried to position and investigate 'the Other' as an agent of the recasting of the cultural politics of belly dancing, and not just the object of the colonial patriarchal gaze. Following the central focus of this thesis in exploring the female Oriental 'Other' as the re-maker of politics that surrounds belly-dancing practices, I have outlined various particularities of its hybrid positioning, as well as its pitfalls and opportunities. Some are stories of grief and tragedy, some of play and some of romance of travel. In this chapter I will deepen the analysis of emancipatory opportunities and power inequalities that are implicated in particular performances and individual positions, including my own. This chapter will explore further emancipatory aspects of the artistic counter-narratives of the orientalist discourse, as well as imbalances in power within specific hybrid identity positions. The analysis will remain anchored in examples from my performance *Dis-Orient Express*, the case studies from the field research and the relevant academic perspectives.

While Chapter Three analysed the main elements of *Dis-Orient Express*, this chapter focuses quite specifically on issues of hybridity by pulling out particularly significant moments from the practice and connecting them together with the key perspectives in hybridity theory, and in relation to the shifting context of European migration crisis. Developing the performance analysis from Chapter Three, this chapter continues to tackle the second research question, which is concerned with those performance strategies that can destabilise the fixed stereotyping representations of the

Oriental 'Other'. This chapter focuses on conceptualisations and experiences of heterogeneous, hybrid identities. In the pursuit of the central research aim, which is to explore the creative potential of subverting dominant representations of the 'Other', the chapter focuses on the act of subversion enacted from the subjective position of inhabiting a hybrid identity. Accordingly, this chapter follows the third research question that examines the ways in which hybridity theory perspectives relate to subjective identities.

It will start by positioning the analysis of Oriental identity in relation to the current European migration crisis to point out multi-directionality of processes that are in struggle over ascribing the meanings of the 'Oriental' and 'European' identity. Then it will focus on the cases of inequalities and opportunities brought about by the specific cases of cross-cultural encounters in a globalised world. The analysis of *Dr Belly Dance* will deepen the analysis of a creative strategy of subverting the dominant representations of Oriental 'Other' through evoking the idea of 'monstrous hybridity' (Kipling 1901: 341). In the end, the chapter will re-visit the myth of Persephone to develop the analysis of melancholic experiences of hybrid identity, as well as of cases of creative resistance to patriarchal and imperialist violence that continues to shape the politics of difference.

The previous chapter investigated how *Dis-Orient Express*, especially the action of collaborative re-mapping, explored and re-imagined the complex conceptual and political landscape of Europe in relation to the Orient, the landscape which structures the discourse of belly dancing and feminine identity. The relationship between Europe and the Orient is further complicated by the current European refugee crisis, marked by an unprecedented number of people fleeing the political unrest in the Middle East and seeking refuge in European countries. The first section of this chapter will map out these movements in relation to the topic of my research, to develop the debate on the negotiations and struggles in shaping representations of Oriental identity. EU policies regarding the free movement of people and goods empower Europeans to travel freely through Europe, but the recent huge influx of Oriental and racial 'Others' has resulted in European governments re-installing border controls across Europe. This situation is destabilised even more the recent British vote to leave the EU. During the last year alone thousands of migrant have died on illegal inflatable boats and in the backs of lorries, which has led to an enormous crisis of human rights in Europe. The situation has

dramatically intensified since the beginning of this research project, and has further polarised political debate that shapes the discourse of belly dancing and identity. This section of the chapter will address the polarisation of the debate to introduce theoretical perspectives that have questioned Euro-centric theorisations of modernity, arguing that Europe is a site of multi-directional influences and power that is productively shaped by those who are seen as 'Others of Europe'. As an ex-refugee from the Bosnian conflict in the nineties who now holds a British passport, I can attest to a fluidity of identity, which can be a site of productive, hybrid agency. This agency may result in seeing those who may be identified as 'European Other' as making a valuable cultural contribution, and not just as representing a threat. Adopting this perspective, I will argue that migrants, refugees, ex-refugees, 'hybrids', 'the Others' act in creative ways to re-imagine our shared European spaces.

'Miss Hybrid' by Shirin Allabadi exhibits singularity of intent in counter-acting the stereotype of a Middle Eastern woman. This intentionality manifests the artist's agency in re-shaping cultural representation of an Oriental woman, pulling it away from the dominant structures of representation such as media, governments, advertising and popular culture. In negotiations and struggles over the meaning of their cultural practice, artists exhibit different levels of intentionality. This is also true of belly dancing. In Chapter Two I have given example of Tribal Fusion belly dancers, analysing how they negotiate the politically charged and contentious arena of belly dancing. The second section of this chapter titled 'Vagabond Princess' will further explore the Tribal Fusion belly dance practice. 'Vagabond Princess' is a performance name adopted by one of the current leading names of the UK tribal belly dance scene, reflecting the romantic fascination with travel and 'gypsy culture' in the tribal fusion subculture. This glamorous globetrotting identification will be contrasted by a case study of a Turkish Romani dancer from the field research, exemplifying that there are power inequalities that pertain to positions of Western dancers who choose to travel to research indigenous dances, as the case study of the Istanbul Romani dancers will highlight. This section will also delineate an alternative concept of authenticity that comes from the intention to be true to one's creative vision, rather than to an ethnically fixed approach. Chapter One highlighted the danger of essentialist tendencies of fixed identity politics in the debate on ownership of belly dancing. This idea of authenticity to one's creative practice, rather than to one's own ethnic origin, will develop the argument on authenticity that was established in Chapter One and Two.

In writing about the *Dis-Orient Express* journey I wrote about the hybrid potential of moving through Europe and inhabiting and performing a fluid identity, enacting both the oriental Other (exhibited playfully in my belly dance performances in Viennese urban spaces) and the speaker, the author, the Orient Express traveller (Chapter Three). I will further explore the potential of my performance of this fluid, dual identity in the third section of the chapter titled 'Dr Belly Dance'. This part of the chapter will outline how my performance *Dr Belly Dance*, which was situated in the fourth tent of *Dis-Orient Express* performance, parodied 'the monstrous hybridity' (Kipling 1901: 341) of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, playing out the 'the double consciousness' (Gilroy 1993), stemming from my exilic background.

The fourth section 'Persephone in Exile' will continue to reference my performance practice to highlight another, more painful aspect of hybrid identity. This is a feeling of loss and grief due to separation from home, which troubles many exiles. As Haci Akman writes:

A romantic glow veils the word exile, reinforcing the myth that a life between two cultures affects intellectual activity creatively (Eastmond 1997 [1989]). Such a view, of course, omits such key dimensions of the status such as grief, homelessness and lack of belonging. (Akman 2014:15)

In a turn to a more poetical and mythical ground, 'Persephone in Exile' will re-visit the element of the *Dis-Orient Express* performance that deals with my relationship with home and mother, symbolised through Persephone's archetypal journey and separation from Demeter. A poetical dance expression of exile in my work will be contrasted with the on-going xenophobic European tensions uncovered in my research interviews. They expose harsh realities that people of hybrid identities, especially those of Muslim backgrounds, face in Europe. The exploration of hybrid identities in this chapter will therefore be anchored to four interlinking thematic points: my relationship with home; the myth of Persephone and Demeter; belly dance practices; and my art practice. By emphasising the paradoxes of the Bosnian state, the discussion of fixity and multiplicity of identity will gain another specific social context that is deeply grounded in my experience and a recurrent subject of my performance practice.

The Migration Crisis and Hybrid Identity

Belly dancing is a globalised practice, and a cultural hybrid in itself. Chapter One briefly outlined the history of belly dancing from the turn of the 20th century to the present, exploring its links with orientalism, advertising, early modern dance and the processes of cross-cultural borrowing from the Middle East to the U.S. (see Chapter One). I will first briefly re-visit this history in order to outline the power structures that have framed this cultural form, and then focus on inequalities of power that are implied in its globalisation, brought into the focus by the current migration crisis.

Belly dance began its journey as a product of colonial encounters, which de-rooted this cultural form from an indigenous position, to emerge, through a series of appropriations and counter-appropriations, in its current form. As analysed in Chapter One, even though it derives from the traditional dances of Middle East, belly dance is as much a product of the colonialist fantasy of the exotic 'Other'. Since it first entered the Western arena in the series of World Exhibitions at the end of the 1880s, belly dance has been subject to fetishising colonialist representations of 'the Other'. There is not a single history of belly dance, as it is a product of hybridisation from multiple sources, but we can map the key moments in belly dance history since the turn of the century. These include interpretations by early modern dancers such as Maud Allan and Ruth St Denis in the age of Salome-mania; appropriations by Hollywood cinema and Russian ballet; 1970's proliferation of how-to-belly dance books; the rise of Goddess feminism and development of American Tribal belly dance; 1990's commodification of belly dance as a health and fitness activity (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005, Kefft-Kennedy 2005). Indigenous belly dance (or Raqs Sharqi in Arabic language) is in itself a fusion of the Egyptian folkloric dance with Hollywood inspired jazz choreographies, movie characterizations and fantasy, to create star solo performers in the Golden age of Egyptian cinema in the 1950s. Today we can talk of belly dance as a globalised hybrid cultural form, and a product of various post-colonial and modernist forces of the 20th century.

Since the beginning of 21st century the digital revolution has greatly accelerated the transmission of the dance and its hybridisation across many different geo-cultural contexts, from Russia to Brazil. As a popular, post-modern and globalised form, belly dancing reflects both the generative and destructive processes inherent in the

mechanisms of globalisation. Marwan Kraïdy in *Hybridity: or the cultural logic of globalisation* (2005) asserts that there are power inequalities within a hybrid model of globalisation, the claim that Brigid Kelly in *Belly Dancing In New Zealand: Identity, Hybridity and Transculture* (2008) follows by emphasising that in considering belly dance as a globalised cultural practice there is an ethical imperative to acknowledge power inequalities between different cultural groups. I have followed this rationale, by foregrounding individual accounts of dancers as well as my own background and artistic positioning, to outline cultural contexts relative to the analysed performances, and focus on the struggles and inequalities of power in each particular context.

The theoretical framework of hybridity and hybrid identities has historically been linked with the cultural politics of 'migration', especially in the writing of Homi Bhabba (1991). Migration has profoundly shaped the development of belly dancing, both as a mythical narrative and as a harsh reality. The fantasy of the gypsy trail that has influenced the mythology of belly dancing continues to affect the aesthetics and identity of contemporary belly dancers, as will be explored further in this chapter. However, actual migratory processes reveal the stark power inequalities of globalisation. There is the pressing context of growing economic inequality and wars in Middle East that have resulted in the increasing migration of people to the EU and the West. As mentioned in Introduction, in 2015 Europe was affected by its biggest refugee crisis since the 2nd World War (DePillis 2016). The map (Figure 2) shows the direction of the migrant route into Europe. If compared to the map (Figure 3) of my *Dis-Orient Express* journey, it shows a similar migratory route, but in the opposite direction.

Migrant route to Germany



Figure 2 The map provided by the BBC to illustrate migration of predominantly Syrian refugees in 2015

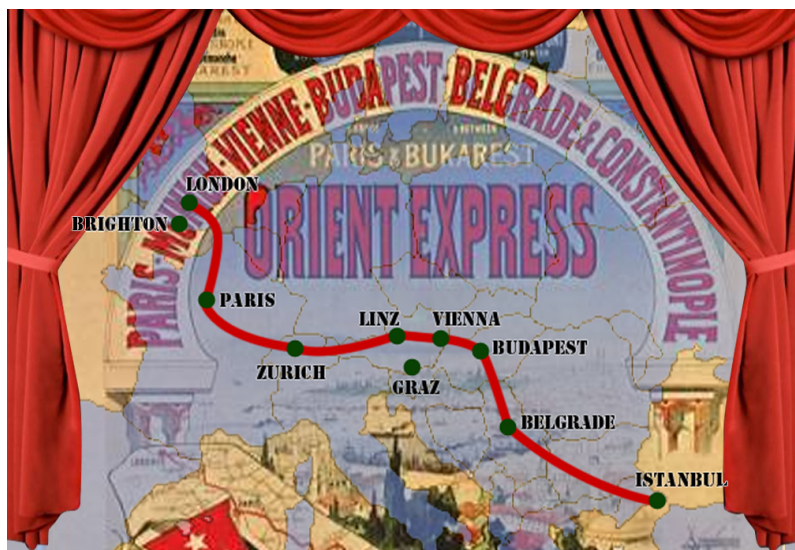


Figure 3 The map showing the research journey from London to Istanbul in 2012

The crisis is unfolding as the thesis is being written and a deeper analysis of the consequences of these migratory and cultural processes will undoubtedly be subject for many future studies. In the context of my point about the opposing directions between the research journey and the flow of migration, the maps above reflect on the stark inequalities between many others and myself who like me can travel freely through Europe and those who are struggling to make the journey to Europe in pursuit of basic human rights. However, it is perhaps worth pointing out that I made a similarly perilous journey from the occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, just before the fall of Srebrenica in

July 1995, to arrive in Britain. My journey followed the same migration route that is currently being followed by the refugees from the Middle Eastern conflicts. I do not want to conflate these experiences, but I venture as far as to state that this radical change in personal circumstances supports my argument on fluidity of identity as opposed to fixity of identity, reinforcing the postmodern view of identity as fluid and open to change. In 1995 I was a refugee fleeing to Western Europe, and nearly twenty years later I was a PhD researcher tracing the opposite direction. This view of identity as open to change may appear abstract and complacent to those who are displaced and in pursuit of basic human rights, but it is emancipatory and full of hope. In my artistic practice I have investigated the play of the multiplicity and liminality of identity, in order to understand my experience of displacement and wider powers that are implicated in structuring group identities. In the section of this chapter entitled 'Dr Belly Dance' I will analyse this in more detail.

The maps fittingly illustrate the multi-directional migratory processes that have come to define what it means to be European today. The picture is very different to a hundred years ago when the Orient Express was in its prime. Europe today is characterised by growing anxieties over immigration of people from the Middle East, Asia and Africa, particularly immigration of Muslims, who have historically been seen as 'the Other' to a European Christian white identity. In 2007 Sneja Gunew in her lecture entitled *Who Counts as European? From Orientalism to Occidentalism* asked the following question:

Who, after all, would have predicted that the familiar binaries would resurface with such a vengeance and that they would seek their origins in those constitutive old myths of East and West, Islam and Christianity? Once again we have the claims made on behalf of the modern Self in terms of having a privileged access to modernity, which includes the moral high ground of being more civilized and more ethical, although no histories support this, as we know.
(Gunew 2016)

In the conclusion to this thesis I will focus on the polarisation of political debate in Britain in response to the perceived threat of immigration, and the collision between the differing points of view on the world brought about by the migration. Looking more broadly, the current refugee crisis of 2015/2016 is another outbreak of a long-term

condition of global crisis, or in the words of Naomi Klein of 'crisis globalisation' (2007). When viewed through the prism of this urgent context of global inequality, the concept of migration uncovers the need to make a distinction between those who chose to travel and those who have to. As Carol Becker says in *The Romance of Nomadism*:

Unfortunately, the world now seems divided between what Jacques Attali calls the rich and poor nomads: the nomadic elite who travel at will, expanding their world, and the disenfranchised poor who travel because they are desperate to improve their conditions. However indigent artists may sometimes be, we in the art world are very distinct from those migratory laborers who cross borders illegally, return again and again, live on the margins, negotiate cultures because there is no other way to earn a living. These people move at constant risk to their lives without the romance of travel or the delirium of adventure (2009: 27).

Those who manage to break through the ever-growing fences of the 'Fortress Europe' often face stereotyping and reductive labelling along the lines of their political status. The language of crisis that has shaped the representation of the recent refugee situation by the mass media and government politics does not acknowledge the counter-narratives of the 'migrants' and 'refugees' themselves. While some sections of the media give diverse opinions, mass media works to categorise the immigrants (especially if they happen to be Muslim) as the number one threat to British security, stability, economy and system of values. However, the post-colonial turn in studying how cultures interact points out a two-way process, which blurs the divisions between 'the Other' and 'the Westerner' and as such, migrants are the agents, rather than victims in this cross-cultural exchange. As Rocio G Davies (et al) claim:

Migrants often strategically use mass media, such as film and television, and the visual and performance arts to claim cultural space, social visibility, or a political voice. (2010)

More recent post-colonial perspectives on histories of modernity (Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer) have questioned the euro-centric normative view of history as a discourse by which 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan' and so on' (Dipesh Chakrabarty 2010: 1). The new trans-culturalist perspectives have highlighted how aesthetic and political practices

of migrant artists show multidirectional appropriation and cross-cultural borrowing. *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, edited by Kobena Mercer (2008), takes a global, non-eurocentric perspective to show the numerous ways in which artists of hybrid identities have re-shaped our collective imaginary. In *The Migrant Image* by T.J. Demos (2013) we are shown critical and creative ways that artists have intervened in the cultural politics of globalization. These re-orientations and de-colonisations in thinking have pointed out a much more complex landscape by which 'Others of Europe' have come to shape Europe as a site of multi-directional influences and powers.

Artworks such as Allabadi's 'Miss Hybrid' point out the value of artistic agency in re-shaping the dominant stereotypes that serve particular political purposes. The value of such artistic practices is even more emphasised in the times of a diminishing tolerance of difference, as we are witnessing at present. The artists that inhabit hybrid identity, especially those who have decided to tackle the complexities of that identity as part of their art practice, have an opportunity to intervene productively in the current political landscape. The next section will continue to highlight inequalities that are implicated in belly dancing as a globalised practice, by focussing on the practices of Tribal Fusion belly dancers, as well as the inequalities and creative opportunities in their encounters with 'the Other'.

Vagabond Princess

Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Berlin... All in one month! ...Next up I am heading to Toronto with Audra Simmons as part of the Dark Harvest Festival, teaching alongside Heather Stants and Mira Betz, then I head straight to Australia for the first time for workshops and performances at the Tribal and Trance Fest in Sydney. November sees me headed to Copenhagen for SOLD OUT workshops hosted by Tribaldance Denmark... Wheeeeew! (Emmanuel 2016)

This is how one tribal dancer proclaims a busy schedule of performances and workshops on her website 'Vagabond Princess' (Emmanuel 2016). Samantha Emmanuel, alias Vagabond Princess, is one of the leading names in Tribal Fusion belly dance scene in United Kingdom. Her website reflects the visual style of Tribal Fusion belly dance and its romanticization of the 'gypsy culture'. It reveals a belly dance subculture penchant

for international travel, workshops and belly dancing festivals all over the world. Figure 4 shows the image of Emmanuel, together with two other dancers of international status, adorned in 'Gothic Tribal' costumes that were fashioned by themselves, arms touching, and adopting carefully framed body positions for the photograph. The nostalgic quality of the sepia photograph is indicative of the wider trend of this dance style to evoke the 1920s and 1930s aesthetic.



Figure 4 Tribal Fusion dancers pictured in the 'Vagabond Princess' website. Emmanuel is on the far right of the photograph

In this section I will first outline the history and characteristics of Tribal Fusion belly dance and its relationship with travel, before problematizing the questions of identity and power in belly dancing practices. Tribal Fusion belly dance (or just Tribal Fusion) is difficult to define, since it is a form that is thriving and constantly evolving. This is due both to its open-ness to creative experimentation and eclecticism, as well as to the trans-national nature of global media, mainly YouTube, which allows for a swift transfer and development of this practice globally. Tribal Fusion was largely popularised by Rachel Brice and groups such as Indigo, Ultra Gypsy, Belly Dance Superstars and

others. It features solo performers, and is distinguished by an urban manner, often accompanied by electronic, synthesised music. There are a large variety of styles that fall under the umbrella of Tribal Fusion. Tribal Fusion dancers tend to fuse multiple dance forms together with belly dance movements, most commonly street dance, contemporary dance, Flamenco, but also Indian classical dance, and other folkloric or classical forms, leading to such forms as 'Belly Salsa' and 'Vaudeville Belly Dance'.

One way of defining Tribal Fusion is to refer to its recent history from the 1980s to the present day. It has many lineages from belly dance teachers, but it is generally accepted that it was created in the U.S. and that it is very popular today all over the globe.¹¹ Tribal Fusion is a stylistic descendant of American Tribal Style, known also as ATS, which was created by Carolena Nericcio in the 1980s in San Francisco. Starting with the Oriental/Egyptian style. It was transformed into a series of cues, movements and steps that would allow dancers to dance together in an improvisational style. The word 'American' was used to distinguish it from indigenous forms of belly dance, and the 'Tribal' denoted that ATS was always to be danced in a group. Nericcio named her group 'Fat Chance Belly Dance', as a response to those who thought that they could command a performance for their personal pleasure, declaiming: 'fat chance you can have a personal show' (Nericcio 2016). This was particularly aimed at those who, following the orientalist stereotype of belly dancing as a harem activity, presumed that belly dance was designed to appeal to arouse male sexual interest. Therefore, from the beginning ATS had a strong feminist stance, with an emphasis on self-expression and 'sisterhood' - a supportive community of women dancers. As one dancer explains:

Some of us define 'tribe' in a post-modernist urban sense. We are folks who come together for a common goal. We socialise together and help each other when times are tough. Post-modern tribalism as I have lived it is not based on co-opting indigenous tribal cultures – rather it is based on creating community and support for our artistic and social lives. (Sellers in Shay and Sellers-Young 2005: 292)

The appeal of this dance lies in the sense of community that romantic notions of 'post-modern tribalism' provides for women who live in post-industrial urban societies, which

¹¹ The sources for the information on Tribal Fusion come from Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (2005), Rachel Brice (2016) and Gilded Serpent, *Introduction to Tribal Fusion Belly Dance* (2016)

fail to deliver a sense of social cohesion to many citizens. The photograph shown above echoes the feeling of connectedness, community and sisterhood, which is one of the major attractions of this dance.

There is a strong motif of travel and nomadism in the Tribal Fusion style. A discourse that has significantly shaped the mythology around belly dance is the narrative of a Gypsy trail. This popular discourse situates belly dance as a travelling form that has evolved in migrations of Romani peoples, from India, via Middle East and Spain. Although research has brought little evidence of this myth, it remains a very strong motif in the popular imagination and the stories surrounding this form. In one of the first accounts of history of belly dance, Wendy Buenaventura (1983) identifies Romani and other nomadic tribes as ones that have managed to preserve the dance in its original form, free from mainstream cultures. This theory intersects with factual information about Ghawazee dancers who were street performers in 19th century Egypt, and are claimed to be ethnically Romany people. Historical research of dancers in the Middle East in the 19th century indicates that most of the professional dancers at that time belonged to the lowest classes of society, as only the most desperate would publicly carry out such a disreputable profession (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005: 62).

Romantic connotations with 'all things Gypsy', nomadism and travel are abundant in contemporary belly dancing troupes, identities and imaginations, and evident in names such as the belly dancing troupe *Ultra Gypsy*, *Urban Gypsy*, *Gypsy Dreams* company, *Gypsy de Rose* belly dancer and many others. Gypsy fantasy evokes powerful and alluring associations of transgressive outsiders, mystery, exoticism, freedom and abandon. The romantic associations of travel, wild nature and creativity appeal to contemporary dancers in globalised, industrialised, urban and post-modern societies. In addition, the romantic ideal of a 'wandering Gypsy' seems to appeal to people who have migrant backgrounds themselves, and may seek to find a positive identity for that potentially insecure experience, as indicated in the writing of Brigid Kelly:

The under-explored gypsy trail model offers non-Maori/Pasifika New Zealand dancers in particular an appealing view of belly dance as already hybrid (yet ancient and authentic), created and disseminated by travelling outsiders. This acknowledges their own recent immigrant roots and the culturally-endorsed New Zealand affinity for international travel. (Kelly 2008: 62)

This nomadic theme is particularly visible in the costuming of ATS and Tribal Fusion styles. The visual styles are influenced by the dress of the regions of Spain (Flamenco), North Africa, Middle East, India, particularly Rajasthan – the performers are often sporting a Flamenco skirt or Rajasthan ankle bracelets. They are marked by the heavy make-up accentuating eyes, frequent body piercings, a combination of hippy and gothic visual styles, flowers, feathers and jewellery in hair, sometimes head scarves, plenty of jewellery all over the body, including body appliqué jewellery, a coin bra-top, frequently a coin hip scarf, multi-layered colourful, frequently patterned skirts, or ‘harem pants’, or often both. Dancers frequently perform barefoot and sometimes use finger cymbals. The emphasis in Tribal Fusion dance is to collect and fashion one’s own individual jewellery and dress, adding adornments oneself, in a wish to hand-make one’s own costume, rather than buying a ready-made one off the shelf.¹² This opens up opportunities for self-expression not just in terms of movement but also in visual style, with many dancers creating their own unique styles to reflect their fashioned identities. These colourful and alluring identities are consciously created, with much joy and gusto, often profiled on Internet, to join international communities of belly dancers. Sometimes, the dancers will create similar costumes jointly, when performing as part of a group (Figure 4). Glamour is very important in tribal fusion style, and performers often have a nostalgic take on 1920s, 30s and 40s beauty ideals, as evident in Figures 4 and 5.

¹²As I was told by my previous American Tribal dance teacher Maho Beaumont, based in London, during one of her workshops in North London in April 2010.



Figure 5 Tribal Fusion dancer

My research of belly dance has found that the majority of belly dance practitioners are people who can be described as having ‘multiple backgrounds’, either as exiles from their homeland, immigrants or self-declared ‘world citizens’. In her study of New Zealand belly dancers, Kelly (2008) suggests that by engaging in a transcultural performance, in enacting the ‘Oriental Other’, a dancer’s sense of identity may be altered:

These participants identified “the belly dancer” as one of multiple personae with which they identified and on which they could draw; the belly dancer was figured as a performed identity, which subsequently became part of a more complex and confident ‘self’ (Kelly 2008: 29).

I can also support this statement by adding that through my involvement with belly dance I have experienced a renewed body confidence, improved body image and more creative approach to the idea of self.

However, in their creative attempts to forge new, empowered identities, dancers may wander into areas of political complexities. The playful masquerade of 'Other' is replayed over some painful realities. 'Gypsy' is not just a site of fantasy; it is also pejorative term that denotes very real communities of ethnic Romany people. In my *Dis-orient Express* field research I travelled to Istanbul to investigate how people engage with Oriental dance, from a non-Eurocentric point of view. In the Istanbul quarter of Gaziosmanpasa, I met Reyhan Tuszuz, a Turkish Romani woman. Far from a 'Vagabond Princess', Reyhan is a woman who doesn't have an elaborate performance persona. She has recently lived through a painful and controversial uprooting by the Istanbul authorities that moved thousands of people of Romany origin from an area, which they have inhabited for centuries in a process of urban gentrification driven by the commercial sector. Turkey, with its pro-American politics, its NATO membership and its unique status as Middle East's 'noble savage', as Potuoglu-Cook puts it (2006: 637), has been developing unique appeal as an international tourist destination that is simultaneously 'modern' and 'exotic'. There is the revitalisation of the belly dance form following the neo-liberal gentrification of modern Istanbul. At the same time the Istanbul authorities are demolishing areas where thousands of Istanbulu Romanies have lived for centuries, with their dance, their music and their way of life, in order to make way for new private commercial buildings.



Figure 6 Reyhan and myself after the class, Istanbul 2012

Reyhan gave me a class on Turkish Romany dance, which has had a major influence on

the Turkish style of belly dance. She told me she learnt the dance of her people in local celebrations, at weddings and circumcision parties. She never had a 'dance class' herself, having learnt the dance when she was a child. Yet after she was 'discovered' by a well-known American Tribal Fusion dancer Elizabeth Strong, Reyhan became sought after by many Western dancers looking to learn 'authentic' dance.

In 'The Turn of the Primitive: Modernism, the Stranger and the Indigenous Artist', Ruth Phillips (2008) explores similar encounters between 'native' and foreign artists. She asserts that there is a 'triangulated pattern' to these encounters 'which brings into dynamic association the de-territorialised western artist, the colonised and dispossessed native artist, and the modernist European ideology of artistic primitivism' (Phillips 2008:48). Both Elizabeth Strong, as an American dancer travelling through Turkey exploring the local dance traditions, and Reyhan as a Romani Istanbulu, are displaced, but in different ways. One is displaced by choice, another one was forced to move due to urban gentrification processes. The Eurocentric modernist approach to interpreting the encounter between Elizabeth Strong and Reyhan would posit Strong as a 'modern' artist who has 'discovered' her 'primitive'. Reyhan's name would rarely be mentioned.

Even-though Western 'Vagabond Princesses' and Turkish Romany dancers such as Reyhan are worlds apart; the stories of globalisation are not just stories of cultural theft or misappropriation. With her connection to Elizabeth Strong, Reyhan managed to forge international links and exposure, while Elizabeth went on to teach Turkish Romany dance in her international workshops crediting Reyhan as her teacher. There are many dynamic and empowering stories of solidarity between dancers of different economic, ethnic and social backgrounds that often get lost in the debates around authenticity. In presenting my field research I am particularly conscious of not displaying the stereotypical narrative of Reyhan as 'authentic', 'native', 'Oriental Other', who was 'discovered' in my travels, as I stated explicitly¹³. Imposing this value system in representing our creative exchange seems inconsistent with the dialogic method of this research. I have also tried to avoid adopting a paternalistic approach to my interviewees, as so often attempts 'to protect' the Eastern 'Other' from cultural

¹³ At the conference *Becoming Nomad: Hybrid Spaces, Liquid Architectures and Online Domains*, TaPRA Performance and New Technologies inter-conference event 2013

appropriation ignore the fact that non-Westerners have long ago sought to assimilate cultural products of modernity. *Miss Hybrid* by Shirin Allabadi is one such example of blurring of the boundaries between a Westerner and an Oriental 'Other'.

In *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), Braidotti theorised a position for a more politically engaged, ethically responsible existence of a post-identitarian subject in a globalised age. However, the post-modern theory of deterritorialisation of identity implies associations of emancipation from identity that is perhaps available only to certain sections of society. Does the emancipation from identity through the idea of deterritorialisation of identity apply to the migrants and refugees in the current migration crisis? I argue that it does not, as their experiences of deterritorialisation are enforced and full of pain. Further dialogue is required around this issue. The ambivalences of migratory experiences will be tackled throughout this chapter.

As outlined in the examples above, Tribal Fusion dancers exhibit dedication to the autonomy of their creative practice, which also results in their alternative approach to authenticity. First, I will briefly recall the argument so far regarding authenticity in belly dancing practices (see Chapter One and Two), and then focus on this alternative approach. The dancers whom I interviewed all have different positions on belly dance, which are often influenced by their own background. In Chapter Two I have given an example of a Palestinian born, Austrian-based dancer, who has a very different position to a Western dancer who freely chooses Middle-Eastern influences in her fusion form of belly dance. The discussion about authenticity in the performance of belly dance often centres on whether the dance style is true to its Middle-eastern origins. The arguments commonly propagate an essentialist view of belly dance, suggesting that only people of certain cultural backgrounds can really feel the music and express Arabic culture. This gives 'ownership rights' to belly dancers of Middle Eastern origin and propagates a view synchronous with something that Stuart Hall calls 'cultural nationalism' (Rutherford 1990: 222-39). Although I understand where this view comes from, I see the exclusivity of ownership of belly dancing as problematic, as identity politics has a dangerous tendency to slip into essentialist and fixed thinking, even nationalism. As Said writes:

In our wish to make ourselves heard, we tend to forget that the world is a crowded place, and that if everyone were to insist on radical purity or priority of one's own voice, all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and

a bloody political mess. (Said 1994: 23)

In contrast, Donna Mejia, an 'American dancer of multiple allegiances and bloodlines' (as mentioned in Chapter Two) and whose interview selection was available to audiences in the installation (Appendix VII, min 33), has a different view. She sees belly dance as an opportunity to explore some of her African roots, but also as an open form through which dancers are free to mix influences and styles. Importantly, she added that as a fusion dancer she also has a responsibility 'to be deeply informed about all the source material that I am pulling on' (Appendix VII, min 33). Her opinion propagates another view of authenticity different to the concept of 'ethnic' authenticity. Many dancers see authenticity to oneself and one's creative vision as an ethical guideline in their performances of belly dance. As Kalae Kaina says:

Tribal Fusion and world fusion dance form are trying to bring in other dance forms. I feel like it gives the person more freedom to express and be authentic with their own vision and their own ideas (Kaina 2015).

Many Tribal Fusion dancers resist the temptation to judge all forms of globalised dance as somehow 'inauthentic' and they share appreciation for innovation, as long as proper respect is given to the dance form that precedes it. Respect is the significant word here. As the dancer Hilde Canoodt said in our interview:

First of all what is 'authenticity'? I try to stay out of it. I don't want to get into an argument with someone who has very different opinion to me. But I do talk to people that know about orientalism, and know the difference between what is authentic and what is fantasy. I studied all these other forms, and I made my decision to go this way using all that background, as opposed to just doing whatever (Canoodt 2012)

Joni Jones (2002) theorises a new position of authenticity which is located in the ethnographic performance itself:

Performance offers a new authenticity, based on body knowledge, on what audiences and performers share together, on what they mutually construct. As a form of cultural exchange, performance ethnography encourages everyone present to feel themselves as both familiar and strange, to see the truths and the

gaps in their cross cultural embodiments. In this exchange, we find an authenticity that is intuitive, body-centered, and richly ambivalent (2002:14).

Tribal Fusion dance as a form is constantly evolving, and any critical view of this globalised, hybrid and thriving cultural practice, and the debates of cultural appropriation, need to be situated in a specific contexts. Most of the Tribal Fusion dancers I met seem to be very aware of their political and cultural positioning, and that they are participating in an international community, or a 'tribe in a post-modernist urban' sense, with self-designed rituals and dance movements, and costuming inspired by nomadic or tribal visual motifs. As evident in the above, the interviewees in my field research gave varying and interesting views on their responsibility as performers in such a complex and often-misunderstood form. This thesis clearly shows that there are empowering potentials in the engagement with 'the Other' in mindful and considered performance practices.

It is important to underline that there is a subtle, but crucial difference in the Tribal Fusion post-modernist and eclectic approaches to belly dance, and the approach to belly dance by those who see it as part of their indigenous culture. The post-modern, hybrid context of Tribal Fusion belly dance does not regard the history and traditions of its folkloric music as important; its aims are to transform, fuse and innovate. It is also worth noting that some dancers pay more attention to preserving original form of belly dance, even when they 'fuse' it with other forms. However, the idea of fusion of different cultural forms inevitably implies a type of loss. The problem was identified before in this thesis in the analysis of the loss of cultural context when belly dancing is displaced and divorced from its indigenous language, lyrics, music and customs. In many of the accounts by individuals who consider belly dance to be part of their heritage, they claim to be happy that the dance has spread globally. However, notably, some of them report that something is missing in 'foreigners' performances of belly dance. I have given examples previously about this (p96). Balkan music is very popular in Tribal Fusion performances, and whenever I heard it in classes, I would experience a sense of melancholic displacement. Exiled from its context into a Western belly dancing class, into a language and culture that is not sensitive to its history and its lyrics, the music would a lot of its meaning. Listening and moving to this music without the cluster of emotions that are associated with its indigenous context, the experience of songs would seem superficial.

In my performance *Dis-Orient Express*, as in all my performances, the context and state of exile from home was very important. In the next sections of this chapter I will reflect on certain aspects of the *Dis-Orient Express* performance in order to further problematize the hybridity of identity in belly dancing practices. I will first focus on *Dr Belly Dance* in order to develop the debate on multiplicity of identity and on establishing counter-narratives to those orientalist stereotypes that frame belly dancing. In the final section *Persephone in Exile*, the analysis will centre on the myth of Persephone to explore the experience of loss and grief as part of the experience of displacement.

Dr Belly Dance

In contextualising the analysis of artistic practices in the above ways, the argument has been increasingly focussing on the counter-narrative to the orientalist, patriarchal stereotype of Oriental Other as staged from the position of an 'intentional hybrid'. As argued in Chapter One, Mikhael Bakhtin's conceptual distinction of intentional hybrid versus unconscious hybrid, presupposes that there is a collision between different points of view that pertains to this state of hybridity, which makes it 'inevitably dialogical' (Bakhtin 1981:360). Conflicts, tensions and ambivalences that pertain to experiences of hybrid identity can be expressed fruitfully in art practices. For those artists who choose to investigate the conditions that have come to influence the 'contrapuntal awareness' (Edward Said 2002:186) of their hybrid positioning, there are opportunities to re-imagine those conflicting, shared symbolic spaces that frame the Oriental Other. *Miss Hybrid* by Shirin Allabadi is one example of such a practice. My performance *Dr Belly Dance* came from a similar position: I wanted to present an unsettling hybrid identity and directly challenge the spectator's gaze. It was an attempt to explore the contradictions and collisions of a hybrid identity, with a tongue in cheek exploration of the ideas of 'Western/civilised' and 'Eastern/barbaric' sides of identity. It was presented in the fourth tent of *Dis-Orient Express* but before describing and analysing this performance, I will briefly present the idea of the 'monstrousness' of the Other.

Hybridity in the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century was closely associated with miscegenation and mongrelisation, and even degeneration. Robert L. Stevenson wrote *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1886, during the height of the British Empire. The novel reflects the Victorian preoccupation with morality and the concept of good and evil existing in every person. This dualistic notion of good and evil is transferred in Victorian literature onto the dualism between the civilised and the uncivilised, the animalistic, the horrific, the Other, which is both threatening and desired. Writing of hybridity and desire a century later, Robert C. Young mentions Stevenson's writing in the following context:

The novels and travel writings of Burton, Haggard, Stevenson, Kipling, Allen or Buchan are all concerned with forms of cross-cultural contact, interaction, an active desire, frequently sexual, for the other, or with the state of being what Hanif Kureishi calls 'an inbetween', or Kipling 'the monstrous hybridity of East and West' (Young 1995: 3).

Even though hybridity has since then been appropriated for other, more productive purposes that reflect the multi-cultural awareness, in the writings of Bhabha (1994), Hall (1997), Spivak (1987) and Gilroy (1993), the ghosts of the threatening associations with 'impurity' or 'monstrousness' of the Other still haunt many present debates on identity. In *Dr Belly Dance*, which was part of *Dis-Orient Express* research performance, I intended to explore the suppression of the 'uncivilised Other', and the conflict between two different sides of my performance persona, between 'Dr Husanovic' and 'Miss Lily Lazuli'. The audience had to book an individual ten-minute 'surgery session' with 'Dr Belly Dance'. This is the description:

Dr Belly Dance is in the fourth and last tent in the performance. She is waiting for 'a client'. An audience member is ushered into the space and she is seated in the chair across from Dr Belly Dance. A coffee cup is placed in front of her, and an usher asks her whether she would like some coffee. Dr Belly Dance, with her golden-tinted reading glasses and a laptop, sits across from the client and starts asking a series of rather awkward questions, such as:

Have you ever engaged in any orientalist practices?

At one point, the sound of belly dancing music begins. Dr Belly Dance seems not to be able to resist this music, she lets go of the laptop, puts down her glasses, unbuttons her jacket to the growing sound of percussion music, revealing a spangled bra and a belly dancing outfit. The movement starts in a jugged, angular, awkward way, but it progresses into a set of flowing movements. She cannot be contained, she is free, she is 'Lily Lazuli' and she is belly dancing. She speaks with her dancing body to the sitting audience member.

As the music wanes, her movements become more rigid and more angular. She grabs her jacket, 'straightens herself out', and puts on her glasses. She is Dr Belly Dance again. She apologises profusely and conducts the audience member, clumsily, out of the tent.



Figure 7 Image from *Dis-Orient Express* presenting *Dr Belly Dance* in one-to-one interaction with the audience member

As described in the previous passage, the audience members were ushered in by an attendant and sat in front of the 'Doctor', who proceeded to ask them a number of unsettling questions, such as: Do you consider yourself an Orientalist? Coloniser? Colonised? Westerner? European? This questioning reversed the power dynamic that has become expected of a belly dancing performance. 'Dr Belly Dance' questioning overturned the expectation that a belly dancer is there to dance for the viewer's erotic pleasure, heightened by the fact that this was a one-to-one performance in an enclosed, semi-private space. The audiences of *Dis-Orient Express* were not the audiences of a

restaurant or a nightclub belly dancing performance, and most had already been made aware of the deconstruction of the politics of belly dancing. This heightened the irony of the performance. Most of the audiences were aware that there was an expectation of them *as participants* to interrogate the orientalist clichés, rather than to indulge in them as passive *spectators*. They were able to listen to my audio interviews with belly dancers in Europe and to consider the dancers' subjective positions and negotiations in the politically charged arena of belly dancing. There was the collaborative map where they were asked to write their conceptual associations to the binary opposites such as Coloniser/Colonised, Orient/Europe and Man/Woman. In this way the spectators were directly invited to position themselves in relation to the orientalising and restrictive conceptual frameworks that were proposed in Doctor's questionnaire. Many responded with wit and enthusiasm.

Revisiting the well-known Gothic horror story of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert L. Stevenson (1886), *Dr. Belly Dance* explored personalities of a westernised and 'sophisticated' academic ('Dr. Husanovic') and a passionate and exoticised 'Gypsy belly dancer' ('Miss Lily Lazuli'). Dr. Husanovic and Miss Lazuli playfully presented the oscillation between 'western Edina' and 'eastern Edina'. The process of transformation from one identity to another was intended to portray a sense of discomfort and conflict in my dance, and to satirise Victorian values of 'properness' versus 'dis-order'. Belly dancing movements of hips and chest defy the idea of corseting and restricting the movement of the female body. I used this kinaesthetic contrast to emphasise the contrast between 'the academic' and 'the Gypsy'.

During the moment of the 'monstrous' transformation from 'the academic' into 'the Gypsy' in the one-to-one dance performance there was invariably a mixture of feelings of embarrassment, pleasure and awkwardness between the viewer and myself. The incongruence of the conflicting dance movements, in the liminal space between the angularity of 'the academic' and the fluidity of 'the Gypsy', echoed the awkwardness of the close proximity between the viewer and myself. 'Have you ever engaged in any orientalist fantasies?' – this 'Dr Belly Dance' question linked with the preceding elements of the installation, such as the costume tent where audiences were encouraged to adorn themselves with silky robes and belly dance costumes. The performance sought to establish a critical relationship to 'the threatening and desired' Oriental 'Other', scrutinising both the audience and myself. That is the reason that 'Dr Belly Dance was

both a highlight and slightly discomfoting', as one audience member reflected (Appendix VIII).

The identities of 'a refugee', 'a woman', 'a Bosnian', 'a Muslim', 'a belly dancer', 'Lily Lazuli', 'Dr Belly Dance', 'an academic', 'Miss Hybrid', 'Vagabond Princess', 'Persephone' are all conceptual materials that I have used in the performance *Dis-Orient Express* in order to open up what is largely autobiographical subject matter to a dialogue with the research participants and the performance audiences. Building on the investigation that was started in Chapter Three, this section addressed the second research question of how my practice destabilises the fixed stereotyping representations of the Oriental 'Other'. Concentrating on the third research question of this thesis that interrogates the ways in which hybridity theory perspectives relate to subjective identities, this section showed how performance subverted the idea of 'monstrous hybridity' in order to question the power dynamic that structures the representation of female Oriental 'Other'.

Dr Belly Dance allowed for a playful exploration of identity. This contrasted with other elements of the doctoral performance that featured a series of different, more nostalgic and mournful reflections on identity. The next section of the chapter will look in particular at the more painful aspects of loss and alienation that are all part of a perilous journey of a nomadic subject.

Persephone In Exile

I broke up

And splintered into thousand little pieces

I never noticed when I cracked

One of the pieces remembers other fragments

But doesn't remember the crash

Previous sections of this chapter outlined a glamorous identification with a nomadic fantasy self in the examples of Tribal Fusion belly dancers. This section will re-visit the darker side of a migrant, hybrid identity. It will continue the analysis of *Dis-Orient Express* performance strategies that highlight my experience of exile in order to analyse darker issues that lie at the edges of the politics of belly dancing, such as patriarchal and colonial violence and xenophobia. I will reflect on the material that I introduced in Chapter Three which analysed my performance interactions with the white dress and the gestures of breaking pomegranates, linking them with the ancient myth of Persephone and Demeter. In the following analysis I will focus more deeply on the issues of patriarchal violence, separation and yearning for home, relating it to the concept of 'reflective nostalgia'. In doing so I will attempt to develop the analysis of the complex relationship between a subjective, hybrid identity and wider social and political powers, which is the focus of the second research question in this thesis. I will also clarify the tension between the use of this myth and other elements of *Dis-Orient Express* that attempted to demystify belly dancing. The Persephone myth promotes the idea of female solidarity in resistance to male violence. The sense of separation from homeland, family, mother, is in contrast with a sense of sisterhood and community that the belly dance scene creates. The analysis will consider both my subjective performance actions and the primary research material that relate to the shared, darker experiences of migration and hybrid identity. It will show how, by highlighting the patriarchal and colonial violence that lies behind the stereotype of the female Oriental 'Other' in *Dis-Orient Express*, the space was opened up for collaborative questioning of the power relations that continue to frame the representation of belly dancers.

The performance *Dis-Orient Express* incorporated a variety of travel references and expressions of migrant experiences. The film represented the journey down the Orient Express. The soundscape of the whole performance was imbued with the melancholy sounds of Romani music and recorded sounds of trains that evoked travel. The audio accounts of belly dancers, which audiences could access in one of the tents, also told stories of their migrant backgrounds. But the most significant reference to travel was my performance in the central area, where I was moving slowly and deliberately around four large suitcases, while carrying a green rucksack on my back

¹⁴ My untitled poem, 2013, featured in *Dis-Orient Express*

(Figure 8 and Figure 9). The following description may recall the experience of the performance:

She is walking among suitcases, the tentacle-like ends of the dress and a paper map occupying the performance centre. At times she is talking about her mother. At times she sits down and reads from the piece of text:

'I'm here to tell you a story of my mother who has lived through the war

A forty-year war of a marriage

I'm here to tell you a story of my mother with her green tired eyes

Who limps between her tasks of taking care of other people

Who is as quiet as the lake in the highest Bosnian peak

And as deep and unknowable, and as maddening, beautiful

As she walks between her tasks of taking care of other people¹⁵'

'Persephone' is displaced. She is in a dark place. She is walking slowly, her movement changing from heavy to light. At times her feet are grabbing the floor as if the land has shifted and she is walking upwards. Her backpack seems heavy. At times, she is spinning around as if she is about to fly off. A recorded song playing through the performance space is Djelem Djelem, a classic Romani song transmitting the sound of mournful wind instruments and an uplifting young woman's singing:

'I've travelled many long roads, I've met happy Roma, I've travelled many long roads. Oh, Roma, oh, my people
Oh, Roma, oh, my people'

¹⁵ My poem '*She walks between her tasks of taking care of other people*' February 2013.

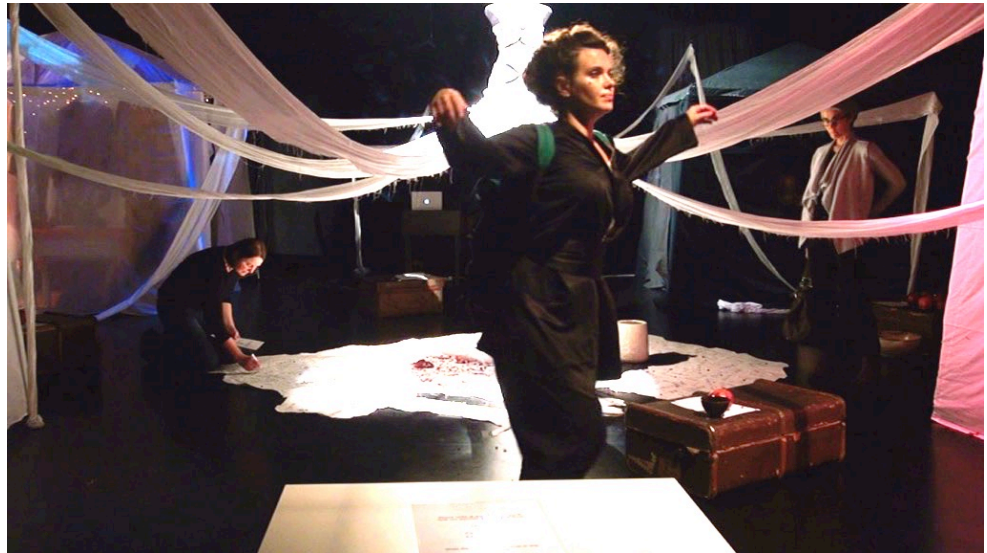


Figure 8



Figure 9

At times Persephone is smashing a pomegranate on the floor, to a loud sound of hundreds of pomegranate seeds scattering across the map. At times Persephone is washing the ends of the dress, slowly, trying to wash out the stains of the pomegranate left on the dress. At times she is dancing while attached to the dress, slowly moving her hips following the figure of eight movement. But she mainly continues her circuit around the space, the suitcases, the dress tentacles, the map, at intervals stopping to shout: 'We already have too many Turks in Austria!'

The actions of attaching myself to the strands of the dress and the reading of the poetry connoted a yearning for the mother and for home. It was a nostalgic expression of loss. This is a subjective feeling, but a feeling shared by many of those who are forced to flee home. In psycho-analytical theory, the feeling of nostalgia is inherent to the

human condition as it reflects the original feeling of separation from mother at birth. As James Phillip (1985:70) explains:

The transitional object – concrete, unarticulated, preverbal – and embodying for the infants the lost state of oneness with the mother – may be thought of as the earliest precursor of nostalgia.

The word nostalgia has two Greek roots, 'algos' meaning loss and 'nostos' meaning 'return home' (Dictionary 2016). It is a yearning for an idealised home that does not exist or has never existed. Svetlana Boym (2001) in *Nostalgia* distinguishes 'reflective nostalgia' from 'restorative nostalgia'. While restorative nostalgia is at the heart of a problematic nationalistic impulse to return or recreate an idealised homeland, reflective nostalgia dwells in 'the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately.' (Boym 2016). As she writes:

Restorative nostalgia takes itself dead seriously. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, can be ironic and humorous. It reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, just as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment, or critical reflection (Boym 2016).

Therefore, the actions within the performance that represented loss and yearning for home are conceptually situated in 'reflective nostalgia'. The embodied actions in my performance were attesting to a personal and shared truth that was aiming to move the audience to act as witnesses of this subjective and collective experience. As Patrick Duggan (2012) writes:

It has been argued that the very nature of bodies witnessing bodies creates a visceral human connection enabling the audience to be physically and emotionally moved by what they are presented with. (2012: 87)

In the actions of 'reflective nostalgia', of loss and yearning that featured the myth of Persephone, I was hoping to generate the energy for exposing the levels of violence that exist in the wider net of gender and post-colonial politics that frames belly dance. This was most potently expressed through the act of breaking of the pomegranates.

There is, perhaps inevitably, a tension between employing the myth in my

performance and the intent of this research project to demystify belly-dancing practice. I have come to view this as ambivalence but not necessarily as a contradiction. The view of the Orient as the cradle of Western civilisation and the view of belly dancing as an ancient form of woman's dance have been criticised as essentialist, as I analysed in Introduction, Chapter One and Two. At the same time, ancient as well as familial mythologies played an important part in capturing my imagination and were a strong impetus for me to become interested in belly dancing, embark on this research project and travel to the Middle East. The Persephone myth was a way of expressing a particular, highly charged subjective story, and by the incorporation of this myth the performance aimed to convey a genuine, situated perspective on the issues of separation, exile and female solidarity. The aim was not to mystify, but to create a charged space with a common political significance that would move audiences to respond as *participants* in an equally genuine way. The audiences, on the whole, responded in such a way, with audience members commenting that there was a feeling being on the edge, of 'not knowing what was going to happen next' and that the collaborative map was 'eye-opening' and 'thought provoking' (see Appendix VII). The collaborative map that encouraged active (re)-inscribing of power relations behind the myth of Oriental feminine 'Other', encouraged a collaborative and critical perspective on the ancient, contemporary, gender, colonial and imperialist myths that surround this subject. In this way, the use of the myth had critical and imaginative angles that were mutually complementary.

The Persephone myth offers an archetypal female narrative of loss, separation of daughter from mother, and mother from daughter, of fertility and sexuality. It also talks about the female, mother's fight and the male yielding to her demands. It is marked by the trauma of duality, female solidarity and an eventual victory of a feminine principle over a male principle. 'The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy', as Adrienne Rich states (1976:196). Patriarchy and male domination that are the cause of the conflict, often depicted in classical paintings as 'the rape of Persephone' by Hades, are the cause of the separation between the mother and the daughter. Moreover, Zeus in some stories is said to have conspired with his brother Hades in the abduction of his own daughter, Persephone.

This has been described as a symbolic representation of marriage 'to a stranger, arranged by her father against her mother's wishes, and envisaged as a kind of rape', a reality for women in ancient Greece (Blundell 1995: 42). For a bride

whose husband lived far away, the separation from her mother was effectively permanent, a kind of bereavement (Hurst 2012: 2).

This, as I said, echoes my own separation from my mother and my home country, Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is also significant to mention the recorded male violence against women in the Balkans. Nationalistic leadership is intensely patriarchal. The subject of mass rapes in Bosnia by Serbian forces in the nineties has been a subject of much feminist scholarship (Hensen 2001) as well as the subject of my performance *Holy Jolie*, analysed in Chapter One. However, the subject of mass rape in the 90s overshadows many everyday instances of patriarchal dominance over Bosnian women, many of them hidden and sanctioned by family circles, as Danijela Majstorovic writes (2011). One of the consequences of this patriarchal dominance is my own disconnection from not just Bosnia but also from my mother. This feeling was expressed in the *Dis-Orient Express* performance through my reciting of the poem 'She walks between her tasks of taking care of other people',¹⁶ which was the most intensely autobiographical element of *Dis-Orient Express* performance. The poem about my mother 'who has lived through the war, a forty-year war of a marriage' speaks about my experiences which imbued the performance and provided visceral impulse that was combined with a more conceptual and pre-meditated approach. The feelings of separation, isolation, displacement, anger, grief, loss and depression are at the core of this experience, and these feelings are shared not just by my own generation from Bosnia, but also many other people of hybrid identities.

As somebody who has been assigned the categorisation of a 'European Muslim woman', I have a particular position towards the controversial debate around the increasing presence of Muslims and Asians in Europe. This debate entered many of my interviews during the *Dis-Orient Express* research journey. In Austria, I met with Dr Hannes Galter, orientalist scholar and lecturer at Graz University. I asked him:

What are the perceptions of Oriental people in Austria?

He answered:

Very difficult. There has been a study done which shows that in Austria, young people under 30 years old, are the most xenophobic youth in Europe. *We have*

¹⁶ My poem my poem 'As she Walks between her Tasks of Taking Care of Other People', June 2013

already too many Turks in Austria' was the recent headlines in our Austrian paper. This is something to do with our Habsburg past. Because Austria has for centuries posited itself as a defender of Europe against the Muslim East. Tomorrow I will have a lecture here on the second siege of Vienna. And right wing groups use the slogan 'the third siege of Vienna' to whip up the anxieties around Turkish immigrants. Even Greeks, now with the economic crisis, have started to be perceived negatively. Now, this is very problematic, there is a strong anti-Muslim feeling in Austria, and that makes me very thoughtful. (Galter 2012)

This debate was echoed in my interview with Helene Dikaios, a psychologist in Paris hospitals and prisons, who gave an account of the attitudes of youth offenders and mentally ill patients, predominantly second generation North Africans. Helene, herself of mixed Greek/French heritage, emphasised that is an identity problem of this group of young people who face the problem of whether to identify with their parents or whether to adopt more 'French identity':

Maybe if you'd grown up without so many problems in your family, you'd be freer to say that your double culture is something that makes you richer, not poorer. So that they are not so jealous, and so they can share, and do something with it. But sometimes they leave it at that there is something wrong with them because people see them differently. And they can't see that it's good for them to have a different culture. And when you have parents coming from two different countries, for some of them is difficult to see this as something good. (Dikaios 2012)

The problems of people of 'hybrid identities' and particularly those of Muslim, North African, Turkish or Asian backgrounds, were foreshadowed in the *Dis-Orient Express* performance by my usage of the quote from the interview with Hannes Galter: 'We already have too many Turks in Austria'. This provocative statement was followed by an aggressive performative action of breaking up a pomegranate with its red juice splattering on the collaborative map (see Chapter Three, section 'Breaking the Pomegranates'). The red juice splattered on the handwritten words on the map emphasized many levels of violence implicated in this complex subject, whether it is of male violence against women, foreign policy violence in post-colonial countries, or state violence towards their own immigrant populations. Therefore, the myth of Persephone

and its symbolic codes of red pomegranates, careful gathering of pomegranate seeds, dancing, and washing of the red-stained dress all gained multiple meanings in relation to these written and spoken words. The actions of walking, washing the dress ends and smashing of the pomegranates, combined with the spoken words of my poem *'She walks between her tasks of taking care of other people'* and the words *'We already have too many Turks in Austria'* led into collaborative map-making where audiences were invited to re-chart the power relationships between the given dichotomies of man/woman, coloniser/colonised, East/West. This was one of the most uplifting and transformative aspects of the performance that conveyed the feelings of solidarity and connectedness.

Another emancipatory element was the dance in the performance. Belly dancing has the power to invigorate, shake up and instigate movement, energy and heat that are counteractive to depression and isolation. My own experience of this dance testifies to this, as well as the numerous accounts of belly dancers that I met in the last seven years since I first went to a belly-dancing lesson. Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992), a Jungian psychoanalyst and a poet offers her version of the Persephone and Demeter myth, which illustrates this point. Writing about Demeter, who after months of searching for her daughter, fell into grief and depression, she says:

Demeter herself no longer bathed, her robes were mud drenched, her hair hung in dreadlocks. Even though the pain in her heart was staggering, she would not surrender. After many askings, pleadings, and episodes, all leading to nothing, she finally slumped down at the side of a well in a village where she was unknown. And as she leaned her aching body against the cool stone of the well, along came a woman, or rather a sort of woman. And this woman danced up to Demeter wiggling her hips in a way suggesting sexual intercourse, and shaking her breasts in her little dance. And when Demeter saw her, she could not help but smile just a little. The dancing female was very magical indeed, for she had no head whatsoever, and her nipples were her eyes and her vulva was her mouth. It was through this lovely mouth that she began to regale Demeter with some nice juicy jokes. Demeter began to smile, and then chuckled, and then gave a full belly laugh. And together the two women laughed, the little belly Goddess Baubo and the powerful Mother Earth Goddess, Demeter. And it was just this laughing that drew Demeter out of her depression and gave her the energy to continue her search for her daughter, which, with the help of Baubo, and the crone Hecate, and

the sun Helios, was ultimately successful. Persephone was restored to her mother. The world, the land, and the bellies of women thrived again.' (Clarissa Pinkola Estés 1992: 338)

The embodied confidence that comes from practising belly dance is something that is testified by many belly dance practitioners. This, combined with the sense of belonging to a female community that many belly dance classes and subcultures engender, make it so appealing to many women practising belly dance all around the world.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

This chapter introduced the context of the current migration crisis in Europe to emphasise the inequality between its citizens in shaping the current debate on cultural difference and the Oriental 'Other'. The analysis focussed on belly dancing as one of the main signifiers of the feminine Oriental 'Other', and on the inequalities brought about by the processes of appropriations and counter-appropriations of this globalised cultural practice. The subject of belly dancing offered the prism for an investigation of specific cases of ambivalences and conflicts that pertain to the processes of globalisation, which are anchored in the tension between the nostalgia for the old and the embrace of the new. The focus of the analysis was on the social inequalities of cultural encounters between the dancers and the 'Oriental Other'. The chapter emphasised how multi-directional processes of migration and of cultural interweaving that pertain both to the movement of people and of cultural practices (such as belly dancing) can be traced to more concrete examples of hybrid identities, and specific conflicts and collisions that pertain to these states. I traced the multi-directionality of migratory processes, written about by Marwan Kreidy as processes of trans-culturation (2005), back to the example of my background and my art practice. Noting that as a refugee I followed the same migratory route that migrants and refugees are following during the current crisis, I contrasted this with the direction that I followed as a researcher in the field research of this project, indicating a vastly privileged position. Following the second research question, in the analysis of my art practice I try to express the complex contradictions and 'clashes of worlds' that pertain to the experience of hybrid identity. The analysis of these contradictions could point ways towards navigating more a responsible political existence in the modern world. My investigation in this chapter has highlighted that living one life in one culture and then being transposed to another can result in an

ambivalent position of seeing this both as a possibility of emancipatory change and of personal loss. These dual and conflicting states can exist both at the same time, as my artistic practice illustrates.

The example of *Miss Hybrid* by Shirin Allabadi highlighted the potential in resisting and reshaping the discourse of the Oriental Other. This and other example of artistic practices outlined in the chapter, point out the importance of choice and intention in cultural practices of those who set out to investigate the ambivalences of hybrid identity. They point out radical potentials of recasting the cultural politics of difference and of resistance to cultural stereotypes of the Oriental Other that often serve particular political goals. In addressing the third research question concerned with how perspectives in hybridity theory relate to the subjective experiences of nomadic identities, I tried to conceptualise a space of resistance to dominant representations of the 'Other'. The analysis has pointed out that the resistance is posed from the position of 'intentional hybrid' identity (Bakhtin 1981:360). The analysed examples show not only the opportunities and pitfalls of inhabiting the 'double-consciousness' of hybrid identity (Gilroy 1993) but also the responsibilities of artists who deal with this subject in the current political climate. The latter will be further explored in the conclusion to this thesis.

The examples of Tribal Fusion belly dancers delineated an alternative view of authenticity as relating to one's creative performance in contrast with the view of authenticity of one's cultural origin, re-emphasising the values of artistic agency and autonomy. 'Vagabond Princess' investigated the trend of the post-modern performances of Tribal Fusion belly dancers to engage with an appealing and romanticised fantasy of 'Other' contrasted with the example of a Romany dancer in Istanbul, indicating the limitations and pitfalls in the cultural encounter with the Other. The liminality and counter-energy of hybrid positioning was explored in my performance *Dr Belly Dance* that, together with other elements of *Dis-Orient Express* doctoral performance, set out to destabilise fixed stereotyping representations of the feminine Oriental 'Other'. The analysis showed how the performance recast the Oriental feminine 'Other' as an agent of the power dynamic between the viewer and the performer, rather than its passive object. It also re-emphasised the positioning of hybrid identity as *becoming* rather than *being* (Braidotti 1994), as fluid rather than fixed, and pointed out the potential of creative play with the liminality of that positioning. The last section of the chapter

'Persephone in Exile' explored the expressions of embodied stories of violence and trauma caused by displacement in my performance *Dis-Orient Express*, deepening the analysis of resistance to patriarchal and colonial violence that continue to shape the cultural politics of difference. It re-affirmed the potential of resistance to these powers through collaborative performance practice.

In conclusion to this thesis I will return to the context of the current crisis of multiculturalism in Europe and Britain, to finally locate the recurring question of whether the hierarchy between fixity and multiplicity of identity has been reversed, and delineate the potentials of artists' positions in relation to the changing political climate.

THESIS CONCLUSION

This thesis started with the account of my early involvement with belly dancing when I was made aware of the sharp contrast between the orientalist framework of the practice and the experiences of empowerment of body and identity of the women who practice it. Despite the trans-cultural transformations that this practice has undergone due to feminist attempts to reclaim belly dancing as a site of more confident and complex performative selves, many dancers still struggle with the stigmatised and out-dated orientalist stereotype of a belly dancer. My approach was to enter the field and listen to what belly dancers had to say about this, which was then developed into a dialogical research method across the thesis. Following an auto-ethnographic research method, I considered how my experience of a heterogeneous identity, shaped through living across different cultures and languages, has developed my sensitivity and resistance to the power inequities and hierarchies that act to prescribe identity. Drawing from scholarly work and my own performance practice, I developed the critical framework of hybridity in my approach to the problem of a fixed identity of Oriental feminine 'Other' in belly dancing. My intention was to explore the potential of a counter-narrative created by a heterogeneous, hybrid identity to uncover the instability of the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse and of the 'Oriental Feminine Other'. The dialogical approach to the investigation of this resistance potential was based in interlinking the voices of other belly dancers with my performance practice and relevant critical perspectives.

Therefore, the central argument of the thesis has been on how by investigating a counter-narrative created by a heterogeneous, hybrid identity in the context of the cultural practice of belly dancing, the fixed categories of the orientalist discourse are destabilised, thereby subverting the 'Oriental Feminine Other'. I decided to explore this argument by following three main research questions. The first question focussed on other dancers' negotiations of the politically charged and contentious arena of belly dancing, that has traditionally been seen as eroticised and orientalised practice, to uncover potential areas of resistance to its orientalist framework. The second research question focussed on my research performance *Dis-Orient Express* and it aimed to investigate its strategies of destabilising fixed stereotyping, representations of feminine Oriental 'Other' and the use of the myth of Perspehone to investigate complexities of the relationship between a subjective, hybrid identity and the wider

social and political powers. The third research question explored how perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory relate to the globalised belly dance and hybrid identities. I will now reflect on how these questions were addressed in the thesis to emphasise the key findings and indicate the original contributions to knowledge, as well as to point out the importance of future research into artistic counter-narratives in the context of the current political landscape marked by an increasing fear of cultural difference.

Chapter One developed the context of the argument and positioned my multi-disciplinary research methodology. First, I contextualised my practice as research approach within the field of auto-ethnography, emphasising subjectivity, reflexivity and the dialogical approach of the research process. I explained my dialogical approach of linking practice and research, the voices of other dancers and my own performance practice with post-colonial and feminist perspectives on hybridity, deconstruction, mimicry and resistance to neo-colonial meta-narratives. Then, I contextualised my practice as research methodology within an evaluative reflection of my past performance work and the practice of others who work in the field of installation and performance art. In addition, I developed the context of my argument by charting the development of the orientalist discourse in belly dancing, by providing an insight into current debates on cultural appropriation of this form, and by developing the framework of hybridity theory.

The analysis of the first research question focused on dancers' strategies of negotiating, resisting or accepting the orientalist framework of belly dancing and powers that structure the female Oriental 'Other' (Chapter Two and Chapter Four). It provided examples of how women engage – through belly dance – with the imperialist and patriarchal powers that have structured this form. The analysis in Chapter Two included three case studies from the field research that depicted different performance and geographical environments: Supernova (Brighton), Al Fayrooz (Vienna) and Nomads (Istanbul). The dancers' individual approaches were analysed in relation to the academic writings on wider themes around belly dance such as the 'Goddess discourse' (Virginia Keft-Kennedy 2005), and neo-liberal gentrification in Istanbul (Oyku Potuoglu-Cook 2006). Al Fayrooz and Nomads case study analysed dancers' positioning in relation to the orientalist discourse embedded in 'the manufactured orientalist spectacle' of the Middle Eastern restaurant (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005). The case studies highlight the

common claim by the interviewees that the public perception of belly dancing as a sexually suggestive dance solely designed to engage a male gaze is at odds with their experiences of the emancipatory aspect of belly dancing. They also point out many ways that women choose to resist the stereotype of this dance form, in the way they talk about their practice; in the ways they approach their audiences and their students; in their choice of performance settings; in the way they present themselves; in the content of their performances. One of the crucial findings of the analysis of the first research question was to show in practice how the emancipatory intentions of many belly dancers, evident through their online discourses around body empowerment and autonomy, are often in conflict with the cultural economy of the Middle Eastern restaurants and nightclubs, which are mostly run and managed by men. The concept of 'hybrid spaces' was applied to my analysis of their performances, to show how some dancers can move between subject positions in a liminal space, and in the process, subvert the fixed stereotype of belly dancer as a passive object of the male gaze. The findings show how a dancer can choose either to acquiesce to the cultural economy of the orientalist spectacle of a Middle Eastern restaurant, or to subtly subvert it through an imaginative and enlivening approach. In addition, the findings point out the pitfalls of using Goddess symbolism, a common practice in many belly dance performances that emerged as a strategy of resistance to the dominant patriarchal cultural code that sprung out of the 1970s women's liberation movement. Using Goddess symbolism has in many belly-dancing practices become another way of displaying a young sexy female body, but Supernova case study shows how a belly dance practitioner challenged this trend by de-constructing 'feminine mystique' in belly dancing, which points out some healthy criticism within this thriving dance subculture.

The analysis of the second research question focussed on my creative strategies of destabilising fixed stereotyping representations of the feminine Oriental Other, and my creative investigation of the relationship between a subjective, hybrid identity and wider social and political powers through the use of the myth of Persephone. The analysis of this question took place in Chapters Three and Four, focussing on my performance *Dis-Orient Express*. The performance combined the perspectives of belly dancers with my own embodied performance, and then invited the audience to join a collective unpacking and remapping of binary concepts of man/woman, West/Orient, coloniser/colonised that frame the bio-politics of belly dancing. It extended the dialogical approach of the field study to the collective

performance where the participants took responsibility for conceptual re-mapping of belly dancing and its gender and post-colonial politics. In Chapter Three, led by the second research question of the thesis concerned with the ways of subverting orientalist stereotypes, I analysed how the performance utilised decolonising strategies, conceptualised in hybridity theory, of irony, mimicry and play to de-centre the fixed givens of Oriental feminine 'Other'. In Chapter Four, I deepened the analysis of the second research question to investigate my use of the Persephone myth to convey and reconcile complicated intimate experiences of exile, hybrid identity and politics of gender and military violence.

In creatively investigating the central argument, and the possibility of a counter-narrative to the orientalist discourse of the Oriental Feminine Other, my practice as research findings show how a performance with cultural signifiers of the 'Oriental Other' together with creative strategies of mimicry and irony situated in tents one, two and four, can lead to dis-orienting the assumed relationship between the Western gaze and 'the Oriental belly dancer' (pages 131-143). One of the most important emancipatory moments in the performance was the action of collaborative re-mapping which included both performer and the audiences as subject in re-defining the power structures behind the practice of belly dancing. The collaborative re-mapping process revealed aspects of neo-colonial, xenophobic and patriarchal violence that lie behind the cultural stereotype of the Feminine Oriental Other (pages 162 -167). I analysed my use of the myth of Persephone and how my particular articulation of loss and trauma expose political agency and solidarity with other artists' attempts to re-shape dominant representations of the Other (Chapters Three and Four).

The third research question dealt with how the perspectives in post-colonial and feminist theory concerning hybridity, migration, displacement and exile related to the practice of globalised belly dance and to the dancers' hybrid identities. This question has been addressed throughout the thesis; in the analysis of dancers' negotiations of the orientalist framework (Chapter Two) I employed the idea of hybrid spaces and hybrid identities to investigate their strategies of resistance to cultural stereotypes of belly dancing; in the analysis of my performance (Chapter Three and Four) I investigated the potential of re-coding the intended meaning in cultural stereotyping of the Oriental Other (Hall 1997) and employing mimesis (Irigaray 1985 and Haynen 1999) in my creative practice. Following the findings from the analysis of dancers positions in

Chapter Two, I used the potential of hybridity as a subversive strategy located in the idea of a dancer as a cultural bridge, in my performance. In particular, *Dr Belly Dance* (Chapter Four) used the potential of subversion contained in the 'contrapuntal awareness' of my hybrid positioning, to playfully subvert the binaries of Western/Oriental, Academic/Romani Dancer and re-cast the Oriental Feminine Other as an agent of the power dynamic between the viewer and the performer, rather than its passive object. Chapter Four developed the context of migration, globalisation and cross-cultural encounters, to develop the debate on negotiations and struggles in shaping representations of Oriental identity.

By looking through the prism of belly dancing as a cultural form, I attempted to convey an original contribution to the knowledge on political positioning and agency of feminine hybrid selves in globalised world. The analysis of the first research question pointed out power inequalities that arise in belly dancing as a form of cross-cultural encounter between the dancers and perceptions and fantasies of the Oriental 'Other'. In Chapter Four, the case of Istanbul Romani dancer highlighted inequalities that pertain to cultural encounters between Western and indigenous dancers, but also pointed the instance of dynamic inter-change and solidarity. In addition, Chapter Four delineated a concept of authenticity, alternative to an ethnically fixed notion, which comes from the integrity of one's creative vision, contributing to the writing on belly dancing and cultural appropriation (Jamarkani 2008, Maira 2008, Keft-Kennedy 2005). The findings from my empirically grounded study contribute to the scholarship around belly dancing and female agency (Bacon 2002, Kelly 2008, Shay and Sellers-Young 2005) by pointing out individual, subjective and specifically situated expressions of feminine resistance to the orientalist discourse of belly dancing in different European contexts. Whereas theory of hybridity has been criticised on the grounds that it operates in a political vacuum, the analysis of my *Dis-Orient Express* research performance contributes on the knowledge on practices which test the potential of hybrid identity, 'double consciousness' and 'contrapuntal awareness' to intervene productively to reshape our relationship with cultural difference (Phillips 2008, Mercer 2008).

It is precisely in the urgency of the question of agency of the feminine hybrid selves in the changing political landscape of fear and suspicion of the Oriental Other, that I identify the important new area of research for this study. The next and the final section of the thesis will return to the current crisis of multiculturalism and the

recurring question of multiplicity versus fixity of identity, to emphasise the importance of research into responsibilities and opportunities of artistic counter-narratives in the climate of the increasing anxiety around cultural difference.

Multiplicity of Identity in the Changing Context

In 2011, when I started this PhD project, the political landscapes of Britain and Europe were radically different. Since then, Europe has been plagued by political insecurities. These were brought on initially by the E.U. financial crisis, then by the inflow of an unprecedented number of people fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, and seeking protection in Europe. Finally, there is the security crisis resulting from the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels that were committed by the French and Belgian cells of the ISIS terrorist network. Tens of thousands of those seeking protection and basic human rights, fleeing the wars in the Middle East, at the doors of some of the world's most powerful countries, are held in debased inhuman conditions and labelled 'illegal migrants' by European policy-makers who seem to be stuck in a false hope that by building wire fences migration can be stopped and that the desperate people will 'disappear'. In the face of the huge humanitarian crisis that has befallen Europe, the response of European national governments has been mixed, from the German Chancellor's 'open door' approach to the Hungarian Prime Minister's openly xenophobic, anti-refugee and anti-Islamic rhetoric. People who were born and who grew up in Europe committed the recent acts of terrorism in Paris and Brussels. Yet, rather than looking at the root cause of their radicalisation, the European governments' security response has been to launch another military assault in the Middle East, in an ineffectual masquerade of potency. The effect of this profound European crisis is the increase in the language of fear and racial intolerance in public discourse, and the resurfacing of the old binaries of civilised West/barbaric East, Christianity/Islam, Westerner/terrorist as primordial, mutually exclusive and fixed categories, rather than discursive signifiers which change radically according to a specific context.

In Britain one can observe a similar polarising trend in popular discourse, which is eroding its hard won values of multiculturalism and open society. At the start of this research project, British mainstream society celebrated multiculturalism and diversity, as manifested in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics in London, whereas today, it can be argued, it is increasingly in denial of those values. After six

years of Conservative led government and growing anxieties over immigration, terrorism, membership of the European Union, the rise of far right politics and anti-immigrant rhetoric, Britain today is very different place. Returning to the words of Robert C. Young, quoted in the introduction to this thesis:

Mobile and multiple identities may be a marker not only of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but of a new stability, self-assurance and quietism. Fixity of identity is only sought in the situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change...what has happened is that the hierarchy has now been reversed. Or has it? (Young, 1995: 4)

In 1995, when Young was writing this statement, Britain could boast 'stability' and 'self-assurance' in the success of its multicultural project, which demonstrated a view that cultural heterogeneity and diversity had 'become identity' within a modern society. Today we can say that the hierarchy of multiplicity and fixity of identity in modern Britain has not been reversed, with the strengthening of Conservative, white elite power structures that shape conceptions of British identity as rich, affluent and white. Commenting on this change in British society, Amit Chaudhuri wrote:

...can one deny Britain, like India, is a culturally hybrid nation? The reason for this in both cases is simple: history. Can you suddenly extricate yourself from your history, and start from scratch? Britain, around 1990, seemed to have adjusted to its multicultural past and present; today, it is in denial.

Why does the political significance of the non-white minority in Britain seem so negligible today, in a way that they can be repeatedly ignored, by May and other politicians who make pronouncements on immigration, Britishness, and race, as if it did not matter how minorities perceived the issue? How is it in a country that prides itself on its party political debate having a powerful bureaucratic component – that is, a fulsome reliance on facts, figures, and policies – that politicians get away with providing very little real data about immigration and its effects? (Chadhuri, 2016)

Stuart Hall, whose work was cited at the beginning of this thesis as one of the main influences of my deconstructive and de-colonising approach, was also branded as the

'godfather of multiculturalism' in a British context (Jeffries 2014). Referencing the UK's imperial past and exploitation of colonised territories, Hall famously stated that 'Euro-scepticism and Little Englander nationalism could hardly survive if people understood whose sugar flowed through English blood and rotted English teeth' (Jeffries 2014). His legacy in opening debate on identity politics, immigration and multicultural society in Britain was celebrated after his death in 2014. This legacy is even more significant in the current context of the return to identity politics, and attempts to portray Britishness as white and opposed to the dangerous, dark, potentially terrorist, 'Migrant' (Stewart and Mason, 2016), drawn in ever more alarming ways immediately after the British Referendum on the EU membership, in June 2016.

The wider political landscape that has shifted during this PhD project is inevitably changing the context in which the Oriental 'Other' is performed and perceived. The practitioners of belly dancing are facing challenges of anti-Muslim backlash and xenophobia due to the increasing polarisation of the political and cultural environment. A deeper analysis of how the fantasies and fears of the Other are replayed in this changing context is beyond the scope of this thesis, as the debates on immigration, Europe, British-ness, security and the Other are rapidly changing and shifting. Before briefly addressing how some belly dancers respond to this challenging political landscape, I will first recapitulate some of the main points of my argument in the thesis.

In emphasising an embodied and autobiographical approach to the problems of hybrid and migrant identity, I attempted not only to develop the debate on belly dancing and orientalism in an original and new way, but also convey an original contribution to the knowledge on political positioning and agency of feminine hybrid selves in the globalised world. My thesis analysed instances of social inequalities that arise in the cross-cultural encounters between the dancers and the fantasies and perceptions of the Oriental 'Other'. Through investigating the collisions and conflicts that happen as belly dance practices travel between different geographical places and performance settings, the thesis unveiled the limitations, the potentialities, and also the responsibilities of those artists who work with this globalised cultural practice. In exploring the third research question of the thesis, concerned with how perspectives of post-colonial and feminist theory relate to dancers' identities and practices, I reflected on the current migration crisis, seeking to investigate the limitations of theories of fluid

identity, identity in *becoming*, and the deterritorialisation of identity. Asking whether it is possible to talk of this theory as emancipatory in relation to those who are displaced as a result of current Middle Eastern conflicts and who seek refuge in Europe, I addressed the pressing problematic of multiplicity resisting the fixity of identity. Here, I return to Robert Young's point that it is easier to talk about fluidity and multiplicity of identity when there is stability, rather than in the current atmosphere of a turn towards identity politics. Reversing Young's statement, I argue that we should seek and promote multiplicity of identity in situations of instability.

The people who are now looking to Europe for protection are people who, like me, have a voice and a subjective agency and are not, as blanket media coverage and far right rhetoric would like us to think, just victims or terrorists. Migration is the story of Europe's present and past. Far right groups and terrorist organisations have had the combined effect of inflaming public discourse with the language of fear and threat. There is a huge responsibility on the part of all those who value and endorse multi-cultural perspectives, to continue to voice them in new and imaginative ways, in the move towards a more integrated, kind and peaceful society. As our idea of society expands beyond national boundaries, real and imagined, cross-cultural and international communities are re-linking, renewing and forging solidarities for this particular aim.

For example, cross-cultural groups such as real and online communities of belly dancers are finding ways to respond to the humanitarian refugee crisis. 'Dancing for Calais' (Canoodt 2016) is an initiative started in 2015 by a British-based belly dancer Hilde Canoodt to give her international dance community a platform to discuss how to help the refugees. Since then the volunteers have organised fund-raising dance shows, auctions, crowd-funding and visits to the refugee camp in Calais, in co-ordination with other grass-roots organisations who are working to help the refugees from the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Sudan. Many in this belly dancing community have first-hand knowledge of the Middle East, which was gained through travel or from having been born there. Many of them are international citizens imbued with the 'double vision' who are immune to the anti-immigrant rhetoric. These creative communities are, contrary to the pattern in wider society, almost entirely led by women. Analysis of a particular value and potential of this could form subject matter for another study.

In this study I explored the use of myth to propose new ways of resisting essentialism through performative embodiment which brought together my own experience and the mythic experience of Persephone. Spurred by family mythology concerning my great grandmother to start belly dancing, as I explained in Foreword, I was fascinated by pluralism and the visual richness of Goddess symbolism in many practices of this dance, and by its powerful and alluring narrative of female empowerment and solidarity with other women. My research has discovered belly dance practitioners' criticism of using Goddess iconology for superficial purposes, and the dangers of falling into precisely those essentialist, orientalist frameworks that my argument is trying to challenge. However, the use of the Persephone and Demeter myth in my research performance enabled an expression of my embodied experience of exile, allowing me to point towards collective human experiences that lie at the margins of belly dancing politics, such as male violence against women and institutional violence against immigrants. I used the trope of Persephone's mythical descent into the underworld to invite audiences to participate in a collaborative, politically relevant 'ritual of deconstruction' and an investigation of the darker side of belly dancing politics. By rigorously applying multiple layers of reflexivity to my methodological approach in this thesis, I have attempted to show how the use of the myth enabled both a personal expression of traumatic memories and a collaborative transformation of belly dancing politics. The symbolism of Persephone's journey into the underworld enabled a performative re-mapping of the signifiers of the Orient, Europe, 'coloniser', 'colonised', 'man' and 'woman', as a resistance to powers that structure belly dancing as a performance of the feminine Oriental Other aimed at pleasing an imperialist, Western, male gaze. The symbolic aspects of my performance were complementary to, rather than contradictory of, the critical perspectives within the thesis.

This thesis has been led by an auto-ethnographic methodological approach that has allowed for dialogic, collective and reflexive research into the cultural politics of difference, illuminated through the prism of my belly dancing practice. Such an approach aimed to incorporate some of the ambivalences and contradictions of an embodied, subjective creative process, as well as critical reflection, in order to enable an investigation of the relationship between a subjective self and the wider politics of difference. This multi-disciplinary and multi-layered methodology outlined the process of research and analysis that involved many points of ambivalence and a few reconciliations between its many points of tension. In the kaleidoscope of views,

reflections and perspectives, I attempted to guide the reader through my subjective and critical analysis of the relations between the orientalist discursive powers and the dis-orienting counter-narratives. As the relationships between those discursive powers that act on belly dancing practices and individual belly dancers' subjective positioning continue to shift, the conversations and arguments engendered by this project are in a state of 'becoming', and remain open to future evaluations and positionings.

The following dialogue from my interview with Donna Mejia, a Tribal Fusion dancer, during the Dis-Orient Express research journey provides a final insight into one of the central questions of my thesis: how does the pluralistic approach of certain belly dance practitioners yield opportunities for resisting singular ways of thinking?

Donna: I am a multi-heritage citizen, with five different bloodlines, and I don't feel any particular allegiance. But in terms of artistic exploration, I was very narcissistic. I wanted to understand if those forces could reside harmoniously within me, why couldn't they do so in the world? Why is the world always fighting, when I, long ago, reconciled those issues within myself? So I guess I was hoping, I hope ultimately, that through my art and my teaching, that through my work I could help ease the world towards more pluralism, toward allowing a multitude of referential points, so there isn't one place where everything is true. Truth has multiple references.

Edina: I come from Bosnia, where the opposite way of thinking has caused so much pain and still really makes people suffer; a very nationalistic way of thinking that started in the nineties and is still present. Monolithic culture or gender is what is seen as right. This is strange as the country where I'm from has historically been such a mixture of cultural influences. It's a very unnatural state of affairs. I feel separated from there, because my identity is not that. And that is why I find a real kind of hope in fusion. (Mejia 2012)

This thesis was written from the ashes of the idea of multiculturalism, which was killed in Bosnia in 1995. The effect of the gruesome extremity of Serbian nationalism was to prove that a pure 'ethnically cleansed' nation today can exist only through a massive effort at violently dis-entangling complex historical and cultural bonds that have arisen as products of multiple and unique hybrid cultural encounters. When looking at the conditions of people who are now being kept in refugee camps, held back by barriers, one should recall the not too distant memory of Srebrenica where eight thousand men 'disappeared' despite assurances from the European community that they were in a safe area. This should be a stark historical lesson to prompt us to find more courageous, imaginative and kind ways to revision our relationship with cultural difference, both through global, British and European governance and through creative cross-cultural encounters such as dance.

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Performances and films

Edina Husanovic, *Holy Jolie*, Vogue Fabrics, London 2011

Edina Husanovic, *From Kabul with Love*, Fringe Festival, Brighton 2012

In the Land of Blood and Honey (2011) Directed by Angelina Jolie [Film] Bosnia and Herzegovina: GK Films

Figures

All figures in the thesis come from my own archive, except the following:

Chapter Two

Figure 1.a Hilde Canoodt - Photographed by Lee Corkett, license granted in December 2012

Figure 2 Donna Mejia. Image copied from <<http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/donna-mejia>> (Accessed 21 December 2012)

Figure 6 *Nomads*, Istanbul. Image copied from from *Nomads* website <<http://www.nomads.nl/istanbul/en/about>> (accessed 20th November 2012)

Chapter Three

Figure 24 *Maman* by Louise Bourgeois. Image copied from <<http://www.radford.edu/rbarris/Women%20and%20art/bourgeoispider.jpg>> (accessed 20th March 2015)

Figure 28 *DeCOLONISATION* by Yong Soon Min. Image copied from <http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/07/Yong-Soon-Min_001.jpg> (Accessed November 2011)

Chapter Four

Figure 1 *Miss Hybrid* by Shirin Allabadi. Image copied from <<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-pma14tfPLTc/Te5M5AExCdI/AAAAAAAAAF0A/xjn7W7zPcg/s1600/SHA-2018-300dpi.jpg>> (Accessed June 2016)

Figure 2 BBC map. Image copied from <http://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/624/cpsprodpb/32F6/production/_85164031_migrant_journeys_turkey_to_germany_624.png> (Accessed June 2016)

Figure 4 Tribal Fusion dancers. Image copied from Emmanuel, S. 2016. *Belly Dancer UK - Vagabond Princess*. *Vagabondprincess.com* [online] Available at: <<http://www.vagabondprincess.com/>> [Accessed on 10 December 2015]

Figure 5 Tribal Fusion dancer. Image copied from Cannoodt, H. 2016. [online] Available at: < <http://www.hildedancer.com/> Accessed 21 June 2016]

APPENDICES

- 1. Field Research**
- 2. Interview questions**
- 3. Transcription of an interview in Brighton**
- 4. List of interviewees**
- 5. DVD documentation of the performance**
- 6. DVD film (Tent One)**
- 7. CD audio selecton of interviews (Tent Three)**
- 8. Performance feedback**

Appendix I

Field Research



Interviewee Jalya Aslanova, British Museum, Journey to the Heart of Islam exhibition

Edina: It would be nice to go, wouldn't it.

Jalya: Yes, I would love to, one day.

Edina: Shall we go together?

Jalya: If we ever walked into Hajj, we would probably be stoned.

(March 2012, London)

The *Dis-Orient Express* field research was conducted between March and October 2012 as a journey following the old route of the Orient Express train. The aim of the research was to instigate a series of dialogues about contemporary re-enactments of orientalism and mythologies around oriental dance and eastern femininity, in European cities along the original route. I conducted interviews with twenty three people; orientalist scholars, dancers, artists, curators, and the general public, in London, Brighton, Paris, Zurich, Linz, Graz, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade and Istanbul. I collated video and photo material in those ten cities, recorded audio conversations/interviews, held a belly dancing class in a contemporary dance school in Linz, and carried out a public intervention/photo shoot in the centre of Vienna.

Appendix II

Interview questions

Introductory questions:

- How did you become interested in belly dance?
- What do you think about the idea of 'original belly dance'?
- What do you think of the erotic associations of belly dancing?
- How do you think they impact on the status and perceptions of belly dancing as an art form?
- What are your thoughts about the topic of 'Goddess' and spirituality in belly dancing?
- What are your thoughts on public perceptions of 'Oriental' women and veiling in your country?

These questions led into a variety different topics, which can be summarised as following:

- Body representation, female sexuality and eroticism in belly dancing
- Status of belly dancing as opposed to ballet or contemporary dance
- Authenticity, cultural appropriation, preservation of original dance
- Muslims in Europe and the visual significance of Muslim women in the streets of Europe.
- Tensions of identity politics – whether it was to do with being an Arabic woman or even Belgian or Serbian woman and a belly dancer in Europe.
- Therapeutic potential of belly dancing and its positive impact on body confidence. Personal empowerment, partly stemming from the inclusiveness of different body shapes in belly dancing.
- Belly dancing as self-expression with empowering potential or as entertainment for money.
- Orientalist stereotypes in Turkish show belly dance.
- Goddess culture and connection with the Earth Mother; 'heart connection' in belly dancing, connecting dance to prayer and linking it to Sufism in the Turkish context; trivialisation of Goddess culture in Tribal Belly dance, and how women could learn a lot about their essentialist tendencies by watching male belly dancers

The *Dis-Orient Express* interviews reveal that the dancers feel that their profession has suffered from stigmatising misrepresentations that are keeping the belly dance form in a marginalised position in relation to the mainstream culture in their respective countries. The dancers who expressed particularly strong opinions on this topic were: Hilde Canoodt (Brighton), Donna Mejia (Brighton), Jalya Aslanova (London), Aminta Mahmood (Graz), Dalyla Rumi (Vienna), Luca Hajnoczy (Budapest), Nana Kozul (Belgrade) and Bahar Sarah (Istanbul). These feelings are echoed in my own experience of belly dancing. For a more detailed account, see interview with Hilde Canoodt (Appendix 3).

Appendix III Sample Interview

Interview with Hilde Canoodt, 2nd March 2012, Brighton, Small Batch Café

E: How did you get into belly dance?

H: In 1999, I think it was 1999, I saw one of my friends perform, she was a bartender, next to the bar I worked in, but she was also a belly dancer. I saw a little bit of belly dancing before, and I liked the movements, but what she was doing, she was dancing to Drum'n'Bass and that's the first fusion that I've seen. This was before I really got into, you know, tribal fusion scene that is in America, this was years before that. But I just really loved the movements, the isolations, in combination with more Western feeling. I've always been drawn to that. Well, I am Western. I feel that attraction to that style of dance, but I also want to feel connected to my own roots.

E: Do you mean the roots of contemporary dance?

H: You know, I think its more the music that interests me. Its more Western, like Hip Hop and Drum n Bass, So I really feel connected to that, because I used to be really into my music, well I still am.

E: The music you use in your workshops is funky and uplifting, and that comes across in your character.

H: Yes, thank you, that's where I really differ from more traditional dancers. Because I'm not trying to do whats right according to the books. Because I'm not trying to do what's supposed to be done, I'm just trying to do what I want. And if that appeals to people, that's even better. I'm just trying to find my own language and a new dance.

E: Have you ever been in dispute or argument over 'original belly dance'?

H: Yeah. First of all, what is 'authenticity'? So, I try to stay out of it. I don't want to get into an argument with someone who has very different opinion than I have. I don't see the point. But I do talk to people that know about orientalism, and that know the difference between what is authentic and what is fantasy. So I have a lot of criticism to people that criticise what I do. Because I know what I'm talking about. Its not like Im la la la I'll do a bit of this and a bit of that. No, actually, I studied all these other forms, and I made my decision to go this way using that background, as opposed to just doing whatever. You know, I have a lot of criticism towards people who do that, take one workshop of belly dance and then fuse it with other styles. That's not what fusion is about. Fusion is about understanding the dance style completely and then finding a new language.

E: So, fusion is about finding a new language - taking influences, understanding one form and then transforming it into your style, or one's style?

H: Its like people, when you meet new people, people that influence you in your life, you know, your mum, your grandmother, your best friend, there is always going to be things that you disagree with and things you agree with, but these people influence you, you don't necessarily take everything, but then you also have other people who influence

you in different ways, and make who you are. And for me, it's the same with dance. I don't want to follow one path, because that is not necessarily my path, that's someone else's path, why would I follow that path? That's great that they have that path. That's how traditional belly dance started, that's somebody's path that went that way and then everybody else just copied it. But why would I want to copy someone else? I get influenced by it strongly cause I feel inspired and I get passionate about it, but I might not agree with everything.

E: From my experience of belly dance, I know that it has a lot of power. Some say its feminine power, or sexual, creative power. What do you think about this?

H: I think any dance has power. I think any dance has feminine power...if it's a woman on stage dancing her heart out, its going to have feminine power. I think belly dance has been marketed to have sensuality and sexuality and all these things, and then, after that, belly dance is now marketed to have this feminine power, you know that Earth Goddess thing, earth ritual thing, as a reaction to those sensual, titillating, dancing-for-men thing, but its still a marketing tool, in my opinion.

E: So do you think why this sexual and titillating aspect of belly dance, which is there...Or is it there?

H: Yes, it is there. Well, depends on who is dancing it, but its definitely there.

E: Do you think that aspect of dance is the reason why belly dance has been perceived as a lower form of dance, than contemporary dance?

H: I think its like chicken or the egg thing. I think a lot of people because its been marketed that way, a lot of dancers will play into that, and will perform what's expected which is the flirty, titillating belly dance, because it sells. But I don't think that's the reason why people look down on it. It goes much further than that, it goes much deeper than that. Its about the movement of the pelvis. If you go back to nineteen hundreds, or even before that, when European travellers went to the Middle East, they were used to ballet. In ballet, there is no movement of the torso, maybe just upper body, but none of the hips. Hips are supposed to be completely still. Even if you look at it rationally, they move their leg up, into the split, up in the air, with their crotch to the audience, and that's somehow not seen as sexual. But if you get a fully clothed woman, with a scarf on her hips, doing circular movements with her hips, undulations, its seen as sexual. I find that just so astounding. I can see where its coming from. They've been programmed to see; "that is dance" and "this is sex".

E: Or something that is not well known.

H: Its interesting for example in street dance, maybe because its been seen more in mainstream, the movement of the pelvis are seen as much less sexual, maybe as funky, or something, but not as strongly as belly dance. When we say belly dance, people go "a-ha, belly dance" (*she says this in a suggestive tone, implying a salacious activity*). If you say flamenco, people don't go "a-ha, flamenco".

E: But salsa is also seen as sexual?

H: Very much less so. Belly dance is there with lap dance, with strippers. I've experienced this many times, when I say I am a belly dancer, people say "Aa-ah,

interesting" (*again, bawdy tone*), because they just have this vision of a Middle Eastern Goddess. And we play into this, because we call ourselves names like "Edina", oh sorry, that's your name, but 'Fatima' etc. But we play into that.

E: But that's a Muslim name. So there is this aspect of mythologies around Muslim women, together with veils, harems etc.

H: That's why I perform with my real name. Because I feel I'm not Selima, I'm Hilde. I do Western interpretation of belly dance.

E: Do you find that performers take on names like Isis, Cleopatra etc. So there is definitely this myth of the Mother Goddess.

H: I don't think there is anything wrong with it. I think its that its important that its not only that, that is not stereotypical. Yes, there is that, but there is also this and this and this. For example I have a stage name which is Fatima Fatale, which I use not when I perform as me, but I use it in cabaret. Because cabaret is supposed to be a bit of a fantasy, full of caricatures. And I totally play into that. And I may get criticism for it a little bit, from some of my peers. But that's the character that I play, my alter ego, its not me, and my performance will be very different.

E: You said, when you say you are a belly dancer, people go "aa-ah". How does your own family react to this, are you open to them about what you do? Do you have to go through explanations?

H: Its interesting because my dad, for example, is completely supportive, he is awesome. My brother is supportive as well, maybe he is not, you know, that bothered really (laughs). But I noticed a little bit, you know. I don't see my family that often, because I live in England, but I went to a family gathering the other day, and they made a book about the family, and people went oh my god, because the costuming makes it look as if I'm in my underwear. Even though Im not, Im wearing a heavy beaded bra. And my aunt, and a lot of the people were performing but I wasn't asked to perform, And my aunt was like; sorry I didn't ask you to perform but I didn't think it was that kind of place. And I was like: what kind of place do you think I perform at? So they are really badly informed. They've never seen me dance. But some of my other family have and usually when they see me dance, they loose that image.and they go: wow, that was great, I really enjoyed that, you know.

E: Yes, its something about letting go and expressing yourself that families do only at certain times, like weddings etc, that they can let go and see that you are doing something uplifting and creative, an art.

H: Yes, exactly.

On perceptions of belly dance in the Middle East

E: So, you were saying that each of those countries want to claim belly dance, and they want belly dancers at their wedding, but nobody wants to be with a belly dancer.

H: Yes, there are two personalities going on with everyone. They are all very proud to be the country where belly dance originates from, which is obviously not true, they claim the dance, and they admire people like Dina, but on the other hand belly dancers are not

allowed to give money to the charity (as one of the five obligations of a Muslim), they are not even allowed to accept it from belly dancers. This is what I heard. So they all want to see belly dancers but they don't want to talk to them, because they think its terrible that they do that. So its very strange really, very strange. And I think on a certain level it can be here as well. I think belly dancers here do get perceived in a certain light. And I am very careful what I say to people. I don't really use the word belly dance, as much as I do just dancer, or dance teacher. And especially, and that maybe a little stereotypical of me, especially when I talk to men. So with women I am much more open, and when I say Im a belly dancer they go 'Oh my god that sounds so much fun, I want to try that.' And with guys its 'aa-ah you are a belly dancer', and its much more stereotypical, but there is a stereotype for a reason, you know.

E: Have you had men in your class?

H: I have had maybe in total maybe 3-4 men, in my class. I think, funnily enough, a lot of men would love to learn, but there is a stigma around it, so they don't want to do it. Its more an embarrassment of being in a class full of women, and maybe everybody think they are gay, even though its not like that, at all.

Appendix IV

Dis-Orient Express interviewees:

1. Jalya Aslanova–London
2. Hilde Canoodt – Brighton
3. Helene Dikaios – Paris
4. Sylvie – Paris – St Dennis Museum of Art History
5. Miriam – Paris, University of Rouen
6. Julianna Smith – Zurich
7. Monica -- Zurich – Innsbruck
8. Daniela -- Zurich – Innsbruck
9. Dr Hannes Galter - Graz
10. Prof Gerhard Richter – Graz
11. Aminta, belly dancer - Graz
12. Bruckner University Linz – group interview
13. Alma Husanovic - Linz
14. Dario Dzanic – Vienna
15. Dalyla Rami – Vienna
16. Aniko - Budapest
17. Luca Hajnóczy – Budapest
18. Nana Majstorovic Kozul – Belgrade
19. Donna Mejia – Brighton
20. Bahar Sarah – Istanbul
21. Gonca Gümüşayak – Istanbul
22. Reyhan – Istanbul
23. Sema Yildiz - Istanbul

Appendix V

DVD documentation of *Dis-Orient Express* performance October 2013 at the University of Reading (presented at the back of the thesis) 1hr

Six hours of the durational performance were edited into one hour, which is presented in this DVD.

Appendix VI

**DVD documentation of *Dis-Orient Express* film
Shown in the first tent of *Dis-Orient Express* performance
October 2013 at the University of Reading
(presented at the back of the thesis)
10 min**

Appendix VII

**CD interview selection,
Presented in the third tent of *Dis-Orient Express* performance,
October 2013 at the University of Reading
(presented at the back of the thesis)
44 min**

This is a one hour audio selection of many hours of audio footage from the field research in 2012. It features recorded sounds of the trains and sounds of the interviewed conversations that refer to the discussions outlined in Appendix III.

Appendix VIII

Selection of *Dis-Orient Express* audience reflection sheets (3 samples)

We would love to have some feedback from you about the performance. What did you most enjoy, or found puzzling?

I enjoyed the atmosphere created and the almost 'on edge' feeling of not knowing what was going to happen next.

I liked the visuals and audio clips and feeling part of the orient by dressing up.

The display map in the middle was interesting and thought provoking.



We would love to have some feedback from you about the performance. What did you most enjoy, or found puzzling?

The whole atmosphere was very well created - the smell ~~was~~ was possibly the most noticeable part, it really made the space come together.

I wish I could have stayed longer, the interviews were fascinating and the ~~#~~ map looks like it will develop into something really impressive.

Very nice.



We would love to have some feedback from you about the performance. What did you most enjoy, or found puzzling?

I enjoyed the use of space.

The possibility of a very individual experience.

Dr. Belly Dance was both a highlight and slightly disappointing.

I am unsure of the significance of the pangebrates.

