Shahrazad in the White City: Muslim Women's Agency through Performance at the Columbian Exposition

Alexandra Me'av Anne Ellinwood Jerome

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Shahrazad in the White City: 
Muslim Women’s Agency through Performance at the Columbian Exposition

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Master of Arts

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The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition was host to a myriad of national displays and cultural curiosities. Along its famous Midway Plaisance, exhibits portraying Muslim-majority countries were perhaps amongst the most heavily attended. At the Algerian Village, the Egyptian Theatre, and the Persian Palace, dancers from the Middle East together with American-born dancers performed Muslim womanhood through belly dancing. Through their dancing, Muslim women subverted the imperial gaze by engaging with the colonizer, using Islam and Islamic mysticism to subvert imperial and colonial ambition and to helped to encourage a sexual revolution. Islamic mysticism and female power in Islam possessed a utility that fair organizers were not aware of; however the more fastidious public, including Anthony Comstock, were more than aware that what Muslim women brought to the Columbian Exposition was more than just Islam, exoticism and fetishism, but a means through which Americans could experience desire in a common, public space. The Midway, ghettoized against the White City, undermined celebration of imperialism and the accomplishments of the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races through the performance of desire. Dancers, through their gyrations, also thrust sex into a shared public space through a counter-Protestant narrative of Islam, thereby doubly undermining both the imperial gaze and the Christian Protestant narrative of the White City.
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For Mummy, with love.
Kocham cię, mamusi.
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This is my third and, according to my adviser, “your last,” Master’s Thesis. I wrote and re-wrote these acknowledgments many times over the course of the two years that it took to write, revise and finally defend this thesis. During those two years, I lost my Daddy, lost and gained friends, suffered through illness, and struggled with a myriad of foes, both seen and unseen. A remarkable faculty, extraordinary students, and loving family and friends surround me, their love and faith in me has never wavered. In these few sentences below, my words will surely fall short of the gratitude I wish to extend to them, but I will do my best.

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“...My cup runneth over.” (Psalm 23:5)

Alexandra Méav Anne Ellinwood Jerome
Williamsburg, Virginia
March 2011
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"King Shahrayar governed all day and returned home at night to his quarters and got into bed with Shahrazad. Then Dinarzad said to her sister Shahrazad, ‘Please, sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales to while away the night.’ The king added, ‘Let it be the conclusion of the story of the demon and the merchant, for I would like to hear it.’ Shahrazad replied, ‘With greatest pleasure, dear, happy King.’"

In the medieval tales of The Thousand and One Arabian Nights the character of Shahrazad uses her intellectual and political savvy, as well as her gender to preserve her life and her livelihood. After she takes the bold initiative of arranging her own marriage with Sultan Shahrayar, Shahrazad begins the first of one-thousand-and-one nights of storytelling, in which she, together with the help of her sister, Dinarzad, harnesses the both her intellect and her sexuality, retaining, in part, some of her own female power and subduing the impulses of a murderous sultan. In the tales, Shahrazad’s storytelling is the commodity upon which she trades for her survival. In 1893, nearly five hundred years later, inside of the White City and like their fictional predecessor, female dancers from Muslim North Africa also plied their wares in the form of their bodies, sexuality, and cultural knowledge inside another marble palace. These modern Shahrazad’s also sought to tell tales, but their stories were appropriated by white American women manifested as the Board of Lady Managers, the group of women responsible for the execution of exhibits that celebrated women’s achievements. Together with the men who designed and hosted the Columbian Exposition, white, Protestant bodies conspired against brown, Muslim bodies, crafting a new narrative that exploited the gyrations of Muslim women’s torsos and reinterpreted their fables. However, like Shahrazad, these women simultaneously discovered means of subversion and were also willing participants because their very survival depended upon the men who bought, rented, and imported them to the United States.2 Through their

2 Sol Bloom. The Autobiography of Sol Bloom, New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1948. In his autobiography Bloom writes that he paid $1000 to a French businessman for the rights to import the village from the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889 and exhibit it throughout the United States and South America.
engagement with entrepreneurs, the dancers were inadvertently compensated for bringing desire into the public sphere and enabling the discourse of desire that was beginning to burgeon toward the turn of the century. Muslim women, mystics and pseudo-mystics alike earned their livelihood through dancing and Americans also found utility in the public expression of heterosexual desire through Muslim women’s bodies and the gyrations of Islamic mysticism on the Midway.

The removal of women from their traditional venues of performance on the streets and villages, which also removed them from their local economies, caused women’s success and economic survival to be dependent upon entrepreneurs like Sol Bloom, who imported the Algerian Village, G.B. Putnam, the Harvard-trained anthropologist who took a particular interest in Muslims, and other investors in the Exposition. Women in Muslim-majority countries were never guaranteed income, but relied on goodwill, sometimes manipulating one of the central tenets of Islamic belief, zakat, a tax that takes the form of a charitable donation or philanthropy. In countries with regular tourist trade like Algeria and Egypt, women relied upon peddling exoticism and desire, not a connection to holiness through poverty, thereby developing a micro economy built-around a conscious bastardization of religious ritual, all to ensure their economic survival. Both Bloom and the Algerians possessed enough economic savvy and knowledge of Western culture, through their time abroad and under colonialism at home, to understand that temporary emigration had the potential to be quite lucrative, even if it required self-exploitation, especially for women. The New York Herald Tribune reports that the dancers were paid a sum of

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3 F.W. Putnam. Types of the Midway Plaisance (St. Louis: N.D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1894)
4 Bloom 107. Bloom discusses his entrepreneurial role in the Columbian Exposition, including his importation of the Algerian Village for display on the Midway Plaisance in his autobiography. Bloom is widely credited as being the developer behind the Midway Plaisance, taking over the exhibit from the Department of Anthropology. Under Bloom’s guidance, the Midway Plaisance became a center of entertainment rather than a venue of serious anthropological study.
6 Algeria remained under French colonial rule until 1962, while Egypt remained under British colonial rule until 1922, with the exception of the Suez Canal Zone.
$30 for their services, not an insignificant amount of cash for women. The promise of a larger income and opportunities associated with Western civilization may have galvanized performers, as well as poor urban and rural classes to emigrate first to Paris where they performed at the 1889 Exposition and then to Chicago in 1893.

According to many accounts of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Shaharzad’s identity as an Eastern Muslim woman not only further deprived her of economic agency, but also denied her any bodily or intellectual agency. The White City was erected as an architectural metaphor and showcase for the accomplishments of white men, not brown men or women nor did it elevate white women. The city was erected for the purpose of exhibiting the industrial and commercial achievements of these white men, particularly those of Americans. The failure of peoples to meet the requisite criteria of race or intellectual and cultural achievement marked by their relegation to the Midway Plaisance, a carnivalesque ghetto on the outskirts of the White City. It was here on the Midway where the world’s nations congregated in a variety of exhibits that simultaneously exploited and celebrated their unique cultural commodities: commodities neatly packaged within bodies. It is within this setting, mostly upon the bodies of the “other,” that organizers of the fair, entrepreneurs, and fairgoers themselves translated Islam: stripping Middle Eastern culture of its Muslim signifiers and appropriating Islamic cultural artifacts, gender, and especially mysticism, exploiting a dizzying array of religious and cultural products for entertainment. However, despite these limitations, Muslim women, like Shahrazad in her famous stories, found ways to circumvent the restrictions placed upon them and like the famous storyteller, discovered means of

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8 Aileen Vincent-Barwood, "The Arab Immigrants," *Saudi ARAMCO World Magazine*, September/October, 1986, 15. Early Arab emigrants to the United States did not intend to settle in the United States. The majority of Arabs emigrating from the Ottoman Empire (which included Egypt) intended to remain in the United States for up to two years, generating income through peddling. Income earned was to then provide for the establishment of businesses in their home countries.

manipulating a public represented by a masculinity being challenged by changes brought by modernization to sex and gender, to ensure their survival. Through their dancing, Muslim women subverted both the imperial and colonial gaze and helped to encourage a sexual revolution using Islamic mysticism and gender to disrupt the socially conservative Protestant narrative and bring desire into the public sphere through a counter discourse to Christianity: Islam.

The state, corrupt and colonized, was unable to support its population. Traditionally in Muslim-majority countries, religious endowments (\textit{waqf}) were established with the intention of donating one’s earthly goods, a parcel of land, or cash “in charity of poors or other good objects.”\textsuperscript{10} Within these circumstances, together with colonization, female dancers understood that their survival not simply as performers, but as women, depended on manipulating and negotiating the area between colonizers and colonized, Muslim and non-Muslim, first in Egypt and Algeria, and then in the United States. As colonial citizens, Egyptian and Algerian dancers survived under the authority of the metropole, but in matters pertaining to \textit{cultural} authority, the dancers negotiated a space between the Islamic and the colonial, and in the process created a sophisticated, yet subtle new discourse of power that gave them a particular agency. The dancers imported the \textit{danse du ventre} to the Midway Plaisance with the assistance of white male entrepreneurs who sought to exploit the thriving and well-established tourist trade in North Africa and the Levant in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The dancers’ agency, their willing participation in first the vibrant and often \textit{lucrative} tourist trade and the Columbian Exposition, demonstrate that women had a more sophisticated understanding of the colonial (male) gaze, allowing them to capitalize upon and exert their own hegemony over the colonizer \textit{vis-à-vis} belly dancing.

\textsuperscript{10} Joseph Schacht. \textit{An Introduction to Islamic Law} London: Clarendon Press, 1963. This definition comes from the Hanafi School of Islamic Law. A \textit{waqf} is meant to be used for the betterment of Muslim society and the \textit{umma} as a whole through the creation of a trust that will ensure the development or sustainability of educational and welfare mechanisms within Muslim communities both local and national. It is more than \textit{zakat}, the religious tax for the living, but its ultimate purpose remains to continue to do God’s work on Earth even after death.
Belly dancing originated in Egyptian culture, having evolved from an existing tradition within Egyptian practice of Islam performed by the *Awālim*, a group of female religious scholars who used dance for the purposes of religious devotion and the *Ghawāzī*, a second group of dancers who “performed unveiled in the streets and in front of coffeehouses.”  

In Islam, dance is permitted if it is a means of becoming closer to the divine and is an intrinsic element of Islamic mysticism. The rise of the tourist industry and the process of colonization, forced the dance to shift away from its religious origins. The medieval Islamic jurist al-Ghazali wrote, “A performance is not acceptable if too much time is devoted to it, so that it interferes with higher Islamic goals and distracts believers’ attention from their devotion to God.”  

While the public performances of the *Awālim* coincided with Saints Days or religious holidays, the *Ghawāzī* performed in public for the purposes of entertainment rather than religious vocation. These two groups of dancers would eventually merge as a result of government attempts at religious and moral reform, obscuring some of the original signifiers of Islamic mysticism and female performance. 

In the mid-nineteenth century, under the rule of Muhammad ‘Ali, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, the government instituted a heavy tax on female performers. In 1834, the governor, under the advisement of the Ottoman-Egyptian ‘ulama, who disapproved of public performances given by women, issued an edict that officially banned female dancers and public performers in Cairo, regardless of the intention of the performance. The ban also included the *Awālim* despite their conforming to the recommendations of Muslim jurists. The Ottoman governor’s edict also banned prostitutes from the capital, eliminating yet another source of income for poor women.

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11 vanNieuwker, 26. “The word ‘alma completely lost its original meaning of ‘learned woman.’ At the beginning of the 19th century, its meaning had changed to singer-dancer, and by the 1850s it denoted a dancer-prostitute.” (26, 35) In contrast, linguistically the Arabic word ‘alim, the masculine equivalent, has never lost its meaning.
12 Al-Ghazali (Paris, 1902) 9
13 Ibid 23
14 van Nieuwker 32
The ban would safely, the ‘ulama certainly hoped, restore moral order to the city and the province. The ban can also be read as a response to the growing incursion of European travelers and colonial influence or simply a method through which ‘Ali could gain traction with Al-Azhar to establish the legitimacy of his leadership, both motivations for establishing some kind of control mechanism, performed most effectively through the regulation of morality and desire.\textsuperscript{15}

The taxes and subsequent ban of the dancers inadvertently created a black market and a lascivious tourist culture in Upper Egypt where dancers and prostitutes migrated to ply their trades amongst European and American travelers. In Southern Egypt, where much of the tourist culture was centered around the Valley of the Kings and other Egyptological delights along the Nile, there was minimal police presence and both the provincial governors and the police looked-away in the interest of the economic benefits that the dancers brought through European and American tourism. Interestingly, it seems that both Egypt and the United States shared a common interest in legislating morality and desire, however as Egypt discovered through its tourist trade and Anthony Comstock through his visit to the Columbian Exposition, selling and policing desire was a lucrative commodity.\textsuperscript{16} Comstock’s visit to the fair in 1893 resulted in several of the Midway Dancers being fined, however readers also discovered that dancers were paid upwards of $50 for their performances, a vast sum for women accustomed to being salaried through begging and the whims of religious authorities and endowments.\textsuperscript{17}

Economics at the state level also played a part in the creation of these communities of dancers who began to work exclusively for the tourist industry and not for purposes of devotion or popular religious celebrations. Certainly the dancers were always generating some kind of meager income for their services as a result of charity or zakat. The inclusion of widowed and

\textsuperscript{16} Here I am referring specifically to the “Comstock Laws.” Parallels between the edict issued by Muhammad ‘Ali and the laws galvanized by Anthony Comstock were similar in their attempts to control vice and virtue and ultimately use desire as a mechanism for social control.

\textsuperscript{17} “Midway Dancers Guilty and Fined: Police, Justices McMahon, Koch and Divver Brand the Danse Du Ventre as Sinful.” \textit{New York Herald}. 07 Dec. 1893
other impoverished women in the ranks of dancers toward the mid to latter half of the century in Egypt is also a result of the breakdown and ultimate failure of both the waqf system and the levying of zakat, a mandatory tax paid by Muslims. The revenue from zakat is meant to support the care for the poor and disenfranchised the majority of who are women. The waqf, according to Islamic jurists is an endowment established for charitable purposes especially philanthropic efforts that promote dawah and welfare services for the poor. The concept theoretically functions as a kind of supplementary model of support for all members of the umma. It is also a system through which women were able to inherit from their father’s under the laws set-forth by the Shari’a that governed inheritance. Until the twentieth-century, when significant changes were enacted to reform the waqf system, fathers would “bypass women’s inheritance rights...a father would specify that upon marriage, his daughter would lose her share” of the family’s wealth. Under Ottoman rule, male family members regularly excluded daughters and husbands excluded wives from their wills, leaving women who were orphaned or widowed at the mercy of their families. Women’s subsequent impoverishment, and lack of legal recourse or agency in the family courts, meant that they would have to seek alternative forms of income and join informal social networks that were not based-upon kinship ties. Thus, Egypt in the nineteenth century had a proportionately large population of poor women, a fact that not only galvanized the tourist industry but also calls for social reform from the Egyptian elite at the latter half of the century.

The creation of a diaspora of dancers in Southern Egypt resulted in the conflation of the dance cultures of the Awâlim and the Ghawâzî. The restrictions placed-upon public devotion, especially in the form of female dancers caused the Awâlim to be absorbed into the Ghawâzî.

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19 *Dawah* refers to spreading Islam, mostly done through educational outreach and good works.
20 Schacht 90; *Umma* is the worldwide Muslim community. It is understood by scholars and Muslims to be a nation of Muslims without national borders.
21 John L. Esposito. *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982) 68
22 van Nieuwker 25
These women, together with prostitutes, mostly widowed and impoverished discovered the financial benefits amongst these agent provocateurs along the Nile. The arrival of the European and American elite in Egypt “provided a new opportunity for entertainers, particularly female dancers to earn a living. The travelers invited dancing girls to entertain them on their boats while they were anchored in one of the towns in the Delta or in the South.” As Karen vanNieuwerker notes, “drastic changes took place in 19th century entertainment, changes for which the travelers themselves were crucial agents.” It was on the boats of the Nile that contemporary belly dancing was born and harem fantasies were fulfilled.

Travelers who were invited to parties where the dancers were featured described them as being unveiled, their bodies were tattooed and their nose rings a prominent accessory. Their costume “was like other women’s, except for the girdle,” indicating that the dancers wore their gallabeyas, the traditional, shapeless gown of both Egyptian men and women, cinched at the waist. Interpretations of this appear in images of French postcards and souvenir albumens from the Columbian Exposition. The costumes themselves thus flaunted the dancers’ position in the Egyptian and Islamic subaltern by rejecting the Islamic social standards for modesty. These performers, as members of the entertainment profession, were “outside the community of believers” according to religious authorities because they continued to dance a variation of the Zar and performed it within the parameters of a new public sphere: the tourist “public” populated by infidels and Egyptians themselves, most prominently the dancers themselves made-up of the now officially banned Awālim and the ghawāzi. Although the dance experienced a paradigm shift from the sacred into the profane, it still remained profitable for the performers and arguably more so when it was moved into the tourist’s public and off the streets. The dancers recognized its profitability and despite the official ban continued to perform in private for tourist groups and

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23 Ibid 25
24 Ibid 23
25 Ibid 27
wealthy Egyptians who were keen to modernize Egypt. Although the dance was moved to a new public space and the performances given a secular billing, the dance was still very much a taboo and remains such into the present.\textsuperscript{26} A tug-of-war between protecting the virtues of Muslim women and exploiting Middle Eastern sexuality began between Egyptian authorities and the European and American elite, with the religious authorities turning their attention away from the impropriety of the dance and to the argument that “the profane eyes of the ‘Infidels’ ought not to gaze upon women of the true faith.”\textsuperscript{27} However, with a government unable or unwilling to remedy the circumstances under which the dancers were exploited, Western visitors inevitably won the privilege of indulging in Egyptian women.

Prior to the opening of the Columbian Exposition in 1893, only upper class travelers from Europe and the United States were privy to the performances of female dancers in the Middle East. The image of the belly dancer that travelers writing about their experiences brought back, coupled with existing Orientalist imagery of women, gave validity to the notion that the East was a place of unbridled sensory indulgences. Rarely however, are the dancers described as prostitutes. Although some dancers did exchange sexual favors for cash or goods, the dancers were likened more closely to gypsies, perhaps drawing-upon a more local European experience with the Romany, the ethnic gypsy class of traveling fairs and provocative dancing in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{28} Travelers, as well as artists, were fascinated by the exotic and sensual contrasted against the more demure ideals of womanhood in Europe and the United States. The vast majority of accounts of the dancing are by men who no doubt indulged themselves in not only the visual eroticism of the performance but also in erotic adventures for a fee.\textsuperscript{29} Men engaged in the sexual

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid 27. See “Egyptian belly dance ‘in crisis.’’ BBC News. 30 Mar. 2005 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4393035.stm) and “Belly dancing out, cinema in, says Hamas.” The Guardian. 6 Apr. 2006 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/apr/06/filmnews.israel)
\textsuperscript{27} Warburton (1864) 295 as cited in van Nieuwker
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid 26
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid 25
pursuit of Muslim women where Muslim women, and to a certain degree, Islam itself, was conquered, possessed, and then discarded. The dancers performed a precarious balancing of dancing as a ritual while simultaneously attempting to maintain a viable livelihood, a feat that required them to be both public (in their performance space) and private (sexual favors and as prostitutes). As a result, these public perceptions of Muslim women, imported from travelers from abroad, shaped partly by truth and partly by imagination, shaped her image in the Western imagination. Through the visual culture and still reproductions of the dancers, the Muslim woman’s body became a vehicle for sexual pleasure and a challenge to European and American normative gender ideals of the late nineteenth-century.

The new entertainment that the Midway produced created a provocative, and at times sexually subversive subculture on the Midway, showcasing the danse du ventre or belly dance, a contrived cultural artifact that is now a permanent signifier of Muslim and Middle Eastern culture in the United States. At a trial for three of the Midway dancers, a reporter from The New York Herald aptly described the dance as being “denounced one moment as a wholly degraded exhibition and defended the next as the representation of a state of ecstatic bliss, due to the frenzy of a religious devotee.” In this observation, the reporter was correct as one may argue, after observing the movements of both the Zar and the danse du ventre in contemporary recordings, that the dance did evolve from the Zar. The imported product is thus a piecemeal rendering of movements associated with both ritual performance in Islamic mysticism and the colloquial Egyptian ritual of the Zar. The dance was meant only for the female gaze. The dance associated with the Zar was a means through which women, particularly those women who were part of the poor and disenfranchised classes, could simultaneously establish both an intimacy with God and

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perform a ritual of healing. This intimacy was otherwise a privilege with the exception of within Sufi Islam, reserved only for men. There is a shift in meaning when sacred dance is appropriated for European and American audiences: the dance is no longer sacred, but through its new, nuanced adaptation it becomes profaned through the exaggerated changes in gesture and also as it moves inside the perimeters of a profane space (e.g. The Midway Plaisance).

The Zar is not unlike the practice of Vodou, something that some nineteenth-century Americans were familiar. The Zar was adopted from pre-Islamic tradition and may be related to the Islamic tradition of the jinn, mischievous fire spirits who meddle in the affairs of mortals. Similarities between Vodou and the Zar include animal sacrifice, the use of amulets, and being “ridden” by the spirits who control various elements of one’s life. These spirits are made manifest through trance-like dancing accompanied by the rhythms of tambourine music. Also much like Vodou, the Zar is performed amongst women and requires a lengthy process of training including the development of a holistic knowledge that encompassed local and orthodox religious practice, medicine, history, and social dynamic. The dancing closely resembles that of belly dancers in its sensuality and hypnotic movement. It is possible that Western travelers had the opportunity to witness these ceremonies or those women who performed as Khodias, the leaders of the Zar, joined the ranks of the professional dancers.

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33 In Sufism, dance is an important element of worship. The so-called “Whirling Dervishes” are the most popular example of this mode of worship and their performances have moved from the private to the public sphere as a way of generating income through the tourist trade.
34 The Egyptian author Out El-Kouloub describes the Zar in detail in her novel Zanouba published in 1947 by Éditions Gallimard, Paris. The novel’s protagonist, Zanouba, is brought to a Zar in an effort to eliminate the impediments to her becoming pregnant. El-Kouloub’s novel, which takes place at the turn-of-the-century is one of the only existing published descriptions of the Zar and its utility amongst all classes of Egyptian society.
36 Ibid BizZari. Also see Neil, J.S. “Muscle Dancing: It originated in darkest Africa. Graphic description by one who saw it there.” The Chicago Inter-Ocean 1893.
37 Ibid BizZari. See both El-Kouloub and BizZari for more detailed description and function of Khodia.
The dancers on the Midway, appearing mute and docile in the numerous souvenir volumes documenting the fair, through their performance at the fair, consciously inverted the White City’s discourse of power through their very own manipulation of a colloquial Maghreb-Islamic practice. These women dancers manipulated the dance and the sacred public space that was erected around them to generate a more lucrative income. The dancers rejected, at least publicly, their spiritual purpose, and entered into a partnership with tourists and entrepreneurs to capitalize on art. The results of this partnership was short-term economic agency for the dancers who found profitability in secularization, while its long-term effect generated an image of the Islamic World that is completely secularized and devoid of its original, sacred signifiers. Yet another aspect of this profaning of the sacred, that is unacknowledged by scholars and observers of dance is that by deliberately profaning the dance, women did not simply gain economic agency, but to a certain degree, they attempted to protect the original, authentic dance.\(^3\) The dance du ventre, then can also be understood as a way of protecting women’s sacred spaces by creating a diversion for the imperial gaze.

The literature that contains accounts of the dancing, written mostly by men, gives the dancers an enthusiastic reception and depicts the dancers as an excuse for men to indulge in voyeurism. Some travelers described the dance as “‘voluptuous’; ‘shameful’; ‘stupid’; ‘abject’; or ‘savage’.”\(^3\) A French traveler characterized the dance as “at first voluptuous, but then it became lewd...it was no more than the most outrageous and indecent expression of bestial desires.”\(^4\) The adjectives used by European and American male travelers to describe the dancers denote a sense of Western superiority, not merely in regard to the status of women, but also the status of Egyptians themselves: African, non-Christian, and pre-industrial. Additionally, the

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\(^4\) Ibid 22

\(^5\) V. Denon. Reize in Opper-en Neder Egipte Gedurende den Veldtocht van Bonaparte. (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1803) 175 as cited in vanNieuwerker I.
selection of adjectives for describing the dance not only resonate with a morally conservative audience, but they also belie a kind of shame in the travelers’ having witnessed, and perhaps enjoyed, such lasciviousness. One can certainly argue that such a vehement critique of the dance is less a statement about the dance and more about the audience.

In 1893, writers who visited the Columbian Exposition made similar observations of belly dancing.41 The same adjectives of earlier European and American travelers were used to describe the dance in the Chicago papers when it was imported to the Midway Plaisance. On the Midway in America, the descriptors translated into a way to assign a rigidly Puritanical mask to the licentious indulgences of a generation of Americans with shifting viewpoints on sexual and social paradigms. Compounded with this were contemporary American shifts in theories on race and empire, with the United States beginning to flex its imperial and industrial muscle: nowhere was this more explicitly articulated than on the Midway Plaisance during the summer of 1893.42

Perhaps the more important vestige of the Midway however are the images that exist from the summer of 1893 and the exhibits that were featured there. The Midway was one of the most photographed elements of the fair with the major souvenir albumens written by J.W. Buel, author of The White City and Professor F.W. Putnam’s Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance relying almost exclusively on photography to relay the experience of the fair.43 The textual elements of the books are limited to brief descriptive paragraphs. As such, nineteenth-century audiences would have relied almost exclusively on inference to understand the images depicting the panoply of racial and ethnic populations at the fair. In the albumens, Muslim women comprise the vast majority of women photographed, the pages displaying an array of different “types”

labeled as "Moslem" or "Mohammedan" women. Books published exclusively to commemorate the fair also acknowledge the ethnic exhibits and the racial types that peopled them. These are vast, heavy volumes full of large, glossy pictures but very little in the way of any substantive knowledge or observation about the people who populated the Midway. Further, they do little to substantiate any of the additional materials produced for the Midway, including the Souvenir guide for the "Street in Cairo" which depicts various Cairene scenes, including belly dancers, Bedouins, camel drivers and other iconic images of the Middle East, but with very little in the way of substantive observation or facts.

Extending outward from the White City, the Midway was simultaneously a living museum and a racial and ethnographic foil for the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race celebrated inside the walls of the White City. It was a micro-empire, delicately situated somewhere between what Robert Rydell calls "a sliding scale of humanity" amounting to little more than an ethnographic side show. The map of the Midway offers a blueprint for nineteenth-century anthropology, siting the more "advanced" races in closer proximity to the White City. These groups included the Teutonic races and Northern Europeans, with the exception of the Irish Village was nestled away with the Pygmes. The more "savage" and "primitive" peoples outside of Europe (the Irish excepted) were arranged according to how closely evolved they were in relationship to the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races. A visitor to the Columbian Exposition could

44 Ibid. The terms in both Buel and Putnam are used interchangeably.
45 A Street in Cairo: An Illustrated Souvenir Guide (Chicago, 1893). This guide is particularly well-illustrated with belly dancers, snake charmers and the like, but offers little in substantive observation of the inhabitants of the Street or their cultural significance.
traverse the hierarchy during the course of a leisurely afternoon, beginning with the White City and progressing or rather, regressing, through human evolution all the way to the “Mohammedan and Asian worlds” which were the farthest away from the White City. Grouped into the conglomeration of ethnicities and ethnological wonders were the Moorish Palace, the Algerian Theatre and Village, and a presumably paradigmatic “Street in Cairo.”

The model for the Midway was adopted from the work of Francis Galton, whose racial typing established the formatting for ethnic exhibits at late nineteenth and early twentieth century international expositions. Yet visitors to the Midway were not expected to quietly browse through museum exhibits, as were the presumably middle-class visitors to the White City. As the Chicago Tribune pointed-out, “Public taste on the Midway would not support an instructive display, but enjoyed and patronized a very questionable entertainment.” The issue of the Midway’s “questionable entertainment” came to a head in the summer of 1893 when Anthony Comstock, in the interest of public virtue, launched a campaign with the Board of Lady Manager to stifle the popularity of the “Oriental” dances performed on the Midway. Interestingly, it was the Board who were vociferous in their opposition to the dancing, no doubt a reaction to the temptation of American men toward various indiscretions amongst the various “Oriental” exhibits. The ladies even went so far as to offer an alternative dress code, publishing their

49 Shawn Michelle Smith. American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 60 It is interesting here to note that in the context of the argument, Smith utilizes the term “Muhammadan” which is also the signifier used by writers contemporary to the Columbian Exposition. Indeed, observers did not make distinctions between Turkish, Arab, or Persian but rather identified Muslims as a single racial group.
50 A Street in Cairo: An Illustrated Souvenir Guide (Chicago, 1893)
51 Smith 160 The author notes that: “Galton’s eugenics provided a scientific basis for the arrangement of racialized ‘others’ commonly presented at international expositions.”
52 “Want Midway Dances Stopped.” Chicago Tribune 6 Aug. 1893 (28)
53 ibid. See also: “Midway Dancers Guilty and Fined: Police, Justices McMahon, Koch and Divver Brand the Danse Du Ventre as Sinfu.” New York Herald. 07 Dec. 1893 (7). This article offers a summary of the testimony and evidence presented by Comstock in his campaign against the Midway Dancers.
“Before” and “After” images of moral reform in a local Chicago paper (Figure 1).54 On the Midway, people were to be entertained, shocked, and permitted to indulge in the imagined pleasures of more exotic cultures, enjoying entertainments in a manner similar to those entertainments performed on boats on the Nile in the earlier part of the century.

The Midway Plaisance was the most popular venue at the Columbian Exposition as a result of its blending of Barnum-esque showmanship and what was deemed at the time legitimate scientific inquiry. Unfortunately, it was the Barnum-ized racial discourse and oriental titillation that dominated the Midway’s exhibits and the manner in which the American public consumed and enjoyed it. The organization of the Midway employed a kind of “scientific racism” which lent a certain degree of legitimacy to the otherwise chaotic and purely for-profit Midway.55 Intermingled with the legitimate exhibits displaying artifacts (and people) were performances of race, gender, and sexuality that were carefully choreographed according to popular stereotypes. For the Middle Eastern and Islamic elements of the fair, the organizers relied on a simple reproduction of what had become profitable in Egypt amongst Western tourists.

The Middle Eastern exhibits were situated closest to the White City, so they were placed along a specific continuum of “whiteness” or closeness to Protestant Anglo-Saxons, the racial and social group that drove the organization of the Midway. This group included Protestant Europeans, predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races. One may speculate that the placement of the Middle Eastern races toward the head of the Midway indicated a racial as well as religious valuation. The first group following Protestant Europeans were Arabs, Persians, and Ottoman Turks, considered racially close to Europeans and monotheism. They were near the Irish (Catholics), but still separate from them, indicating that although the Irish were European their Catholic identity subjugated them to a lower ranking on the Midway. The presumption illustrated

by this organizational pattern on the Midway was that all Western Europeans were Protestant, with the exception of the Irish, and all Middle Easterners were Muslim. To illustrate this further, there is no record of any Christian Arabs participating in the exhibits or Protestant Irish. The Midway’s exhibits were thus intrinsically linked to beliefs that conflated race and religion.

Of all the exhibits on the Midway, The Street in Cairo was the most popular. There, for an initial admission fee of twenty-five cents, visitors to the fair could have their name written in Arabic script, ride camels, and see the infamous Hootchy-Kootchy, one of the various labels by which belly dancing was advertised on the Midway.56 At the zenith of the fair’s popularity, 180-400 people were estimated to have made the Street in Cairo their temporary home.57 In his book, Types of the Midway, Harvard University professor and anthropologist, Professor F.W. Putnam describes the Street in Cairo

This brief little byway was the most sought-for resort in the great territory of the Exposition. The good and the wicked—men and women, and children—sought it as delightful relief from other sightseeing. Women in grief, seigniors of divinity, men of melancholy visages, as well as merry people, came to it as a panacea for mental ills. The curative powers of the place were miraculous. The varieties of life were given an Oriental flavor and fascination in this happy imitation of an ancient and despised city.58

Over the duration of the fair, nearly 2.5 million visitors traversed the Street in Cairo, visiting and indulging in the various sights and sounds that were proffered there.59

The Street in Cairo represented a kind of collective identity of the “Mohammedan” peoples of the fair. The organizers conflated national and religious identity into one area of the

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57 The Street in Cairo was originally not a stand-alone exhibit, but intended to complement early plans for a Damascene street which early plans describe as having its own “mosque, praying Mohammedans, cafes bazaars [sic], and native Arabs.”
59 Carlton 39
58 Putnam, no page numbers.
59 Ibid
fair and added the Persian and Moorish Palaces to the array of entertainments adjacent to the Street in Cairo. The Moorish Palace, by all accounts, was "Oriental in name only. It was mainly a museum in the tradition of Woodward's Gardens and P.T. Barnum's." A souvenir booklet from the Moorish Palace describes various exhibits, a kind of hodgepodge of historical artifacts, and wax figures depicting historical personalities like Marie Antoinette. In addition, the Moorish Palace, according to Donna Carlton, "housed galleries of Oriental-style items and furniture and a wax works including figures of harem women posed in bizarre costumes lacking yardage or authenticity." Although the harem scene was real, if not realistic in its licentiousness, illustrations from the booklet tend to refute Carlton's claims, especially when she notes that the costumes lacked "yardage or authenticity." In respect to authenticity, the observer needs to gauge two distinct factors. First, the authenticity of the costumes of the ghawazi, who were the dancers imported by entrepreneurs for the purposes of performing at the Columbian Exposition, and second, the closeness of Midway characters with Middle Eastern Muslim women like the Bedouins who roamed the Street in Cairo. These costumes were authentic in their own right. Yet the women in these costumes were labeled as "The Sultan's Favorites," suggesting a harem, and women in them were situated lounging around a wax depiction of an imaginary sultan and guarded by yet another wax figure, this one depicting an African eunuch. This particular exhibit soundly rejected the images being promoted by the Ottoman government and wholly embraced the images painted by various popular European Orientalist painters of the period like Jean-Leon Gérôme, Giovanni Costa, and Richard Parkes Bonington. Americans embraced the writing and

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60 Carlton 20
62 "Midway Plaisance; Shows and Shops of All Nations at the World's Fair; A Panorama of the Human Race." The Baltimore Sun 23 June 1893, Vol. CXIII, Issue 33, 1
63 For an array of examples of Orientalist art, see: Genevieve Lacambre. The Orient in Western Art (Paris: Konemann, 2001)
images of their European counterparts abroad and eagerly deployed them at the fair by making them living exhibits of both Middle Eastern and Islamic culture.

At the Columbian Exposition the Ghawāzi’s dance was performed in more than one of the exhibits purporting to represent an Islamic country. Americans, in particular savvy entrepreneur Sol Bloom, who is credited with introducing the American public to belly dancing, recognized the potential for profit through exploiting the exoticism of the Eastern and the Islamic. Bloom alludes to this process of creating a false culture as he recalls observing the Algerian Village at the Paris Exposition, writing, “I doubt very much whether anything resembling it (the Algerian Village) was ever seen in Algeria, but I was not at the time concerned with trifles. The Algerians themselves were genuine beyond questions, and what was really important was that they presented a varied entertainment that increased in excitement in proportion to my familiarity with it.”64 The purpose of the Midway was, after all, to bring the world to the average American. In this way the Midway is curiously egalitarian for Americans, if not for the peoples exhibited, because both the elite and working classes were able to travel “abroad” and share the experience of the “Islamic” world. Amongst all classes, the most exciting and popular exhibits were the ones that featured belly dancing. Belly dancing, originally belonging to the Awālim and the Ghawāzī, as part of their practice of Islam was exported and decisively stripped of any remainder of its religious significance, a process that had already started with the tourist trade, but which Americans efficiently completed by incorporating it into mass culture. The Turkish Village, the Street in Cairo, the Algerian Village, and the Persian Palace all had women performing variations on belly dancing.65 The dance itself was reincarnated at each venue, assigned various enticing labels such as: “Houri’s Dance,” “Moorish Dance,” “Nautch Dance,” and in an attempt to lend

64 Bloom 107
65 Carlton 20
some sophistication to the dance, the "Danse du Ventre." The names are taken from European and American literature on the Islamic World from the period. The word "houri" is the word for "virgin" in the Qur'an, while "Moorish" infers that it is a North African construct, and "Nautch" implies that it is not so much an Arabo-Islamic dance, but rather one that originated in the context of Mughal arts. Thus there is, at the most superficial level, an assignment of Muslim womanhood and Islamic identity to the dance that not only exoticizes the performance, but also makes it palatable for a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant audience. The majority of sources that describe the dance, included those published in contemporary periodicals of the time, label it as the "Hootchy Kootchy," borrowing the term from contemporary descriptions of the provocative, jerky movements observed in the dances of African slaves, especially those in Creole communities. Race, performance, and religion overlapped in multiple contexts in the United States and were subsequently exploited for profit.

The dancers performing in various exhibits along the Midway were “described in one fair history as ‘stars in their professions.’” Meanwhile, in the Chicago Inter-Ocean, a reporter describes belly dancing, calling it the danse du ventre because “it might fracture Anglo-Saxon susceptibilities even to name it in English... The dans du ventre is quite a strain on American sensibilities, but many want to see it as one of the Oriental curiosities of the fair.” One newspaper wrote, “it is not dancing. It is walking about the stage to alleged music with peculiar and swaying and jerking of the body, such as tends to excite passion...From association with the negro, American people are apt to conclude that all dark-skinned people are dull.” Indeed,
writers struggled to describe, identify, and categorize the dance and the performers, turning to existing examples of African-American dance styles, as mentioned earlier amongst Southern Creole and Caribbean communities like the performances associated with Vodou and amongst whites, minstrelsy, and then to the racial characteristics of the dancers themselves. One observer concluded that the dancers were not at all Arab but rather native Chicagoans described as “dark and muddy brunettes” that make “good imitation Algeriennes.”

Further observations on the performances of race include testimony from yet another visitor who wrote

Their kinky hair, dirty-butter complexions, bad features, stained teeth, and tendency to enbonpoint are dreadfully disillusioning, and their voices are a timbre that would drive an American cat in disgrace from any well-regulated neighborhood.

The female performers themselves “had to keep obscured their identities as working women and migrants so as to portray the fantasy of an entertaining retreat into a Middle Eastern café or even the clichéd harem.” This obscuring of identity speaks to the performance of race, religion and gender on the Midway.

Visitors to the Midway watched as the performances shifted from scandalous to deliciously provocative, and in some instances became a tantalizing venue for pushing existing social and sexual boundaries, especially for women. Describing this capability of the Midway to affirm Americans’ beliefs about Eastern, non-Christian populations while simultaneously challenging their view of their own moral and sexual landscapes, Robert Rydell writes, “with its half-naked savages and Hootchy-Kootchy dancers...Americans [were provided with] a grand

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74 Carlton 38
75 Susan Nance. How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 173. Nance introduces the first substantive debate about racial code switching amongst Middle Eastern/Muslim women on the Midway, arguing that the performers were not only working women from abroad, but also women from Chicago, a fact articulated in one editorial piece written contemporaneously to the fair in Chicago that observes that the accents of one of the dancers is distinctly Midwestern.
opportunity for a subliminal journey into the recesses of their own repressed desires." Members of both sexes were privy to performances that were intentionally and simultaneously both secret and public display of sexuality, which was manifested through the bodies of Muslim women dancers, and rooted in a specific, gendered, Islamic devotional practice. For women visiting the Midway, the dancing and its overt suggestion of eroticism provided them with a venue for exploring their own sexuality and sexual agency. American women observing the performances may have been appropriately scandalized by the spectacle and we can speculate as to how much, if any, of what the woman visitor to the fair appropriated for exploring her own sexual agency. This appropriation allowed American women to vicariously explore and engage with their sexuality in a very public manner. Until the fair, the use of Muslim women and belly dancing was a means through to satiate the sexual desires and fantasies of men, particularly those of the elite, but on the Midway, women were also participants. Belly dancing encouraged and challenged American women's sexuality and in this way, its introduction to the United States was perhaps more complex for women than for men.

The contrasting experiences of men and women at the fair, and the observations and engagement with the performers, speaks to how the fair resonated with and was constructed and marketed for each sex. As Gail Bederman argues, the White City was the embodiment of their role as "the agents who lifted their race toward the millennial perfection God and evolution intended for them." Specifically, as white men, they were the agents who "lifted their race" toward a racial and social paradigm articulated in part by millennial Protestantism, not Islam. They were therefore engaged in the creation and reinforcement of a hegemonic rule and masculinity both over the feminized Islamic world and over their white female counterparts. The feminization of the Islamic world, or other cultures deemed inferior, was an important facet of the assertion of white millennial Protestant masculinities at the turn of the century. The feminization

76 Rydell 37
77 Bederman 40
of other cultures and nations justified conquest, and was easily reconciled with American imperialism. At the Columbian Exposition, as Bederman explains, “the Midway provided an implicit comparison between the White City’s self-controlled civilized manliness and the inferior manhood of dark skinned primitive men who solicited customers for belly dancers or wore skirts and danced like women.” For men who participated as viewer or voyeurs of belly dancing on the Midway, white, Protestant masculinities were asserted in their enjoyment and “conquest” of the women inside. Indeed the exchange of monies where merchants freely sold access to the bodies and traditions of their nations for profit made all men who could pay actors in sexual imperialism. While many analysts focus on American men’s use of the dancers as a vehicle for exploring and pushing the boundaries of acceptable social behaviors of the day, men’s participation also has a more insidious affect in proletarianizing Americans’ to reaffirm conquest of “savage” lands.

The images of Muslim women that were disseminated at the fair appear in two primary texts published at the fair’s conclusion. The first is by Professor F.W. Putnam, a Harvard-trained anthropologist. His book is a large souvenir albumen entitled Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance. In the text, Putnam embarks on a cursory ethnographic study of the populations of the Midway, highlighting various idiosyncrasies and signifiers of racial and religious identity, making vague notations about “Mohammedanism” and “Moslem” but making no substantive analysis or creating a discourse that would be useful to Americans’ understanding of the sociology of Islam. The second volume is J.W. Buel’s The Magic City, which in scope is more about the architecture of the Columbian Exposition rather than the human exhibits. In Buel’s text, significantly more emphasis is placed upon the Algerian and Egyptian ethnographic areas than the Anglo-Celtic-Teutonic populations. Additionally, Buel’s text is curious in that it is almost entirely couched in Orientalist rhetoric, which lends itself neatly to the inclusion of a vast store of

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78 Ibid 40
79 Putnam, no page numbers
Orientalist images. Together, the two volumes represent a small sample of the ethnographic media to commemorate the fair.

The images produced for the fair are contemporary to the production of other photographic images produced of Muslim women abroad. In Algeria, at the time a French colony, entrepreneurs produced images of Algerian women for consumption by tourists. Muslim women's images were distributed abroad and the lounging odalisque popularized by Orientalist painters became incarnate in the postcard. In his study of Algerian postcards, Malek Alloula makes the observation that these mass-produced images of Muslim women "provides (colonialism) with a custom-made iconography, replete with pious and worthy intentions. It is an illustrated breviary." Alloula writes about images being staged and created in Algeria of Muslim women that were contemporary to those being staged and created at the time of the Columbian Exposition. The photographs produced by the French in Algeria differ from those of the Exposition in that the former stage bare breasted women and women shown behind bars. The explicit subjugation makes the link between colonial and sexual exploitation explicit. As Alloula notes, the Algerian postcards, not unlike the photographs produced for the albumens at the Columbian Exposition, operate along a continuum of so-called "wish fulfillment" which allows a predominantly male audience to consume women and allows the general population an inexpensive mode of both escapism and voyeurism.

Escapism and voyeurism are further illuminated by the fact that the majority of the photographs feature women who are unveiled. In Algeria and in particular, Egypt, veiling was customary. In photographs of the elite, Circassian women for example, their faces are covered in gauzy veils and Bedouin women are always heavily veiled. Egyptians were themselves debating

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81 Ibid 49  
82 Based upon observations done by the author using her own personal collection of French postcards from the Maghreb.
whether women should or must veil themselves, a controversy reaching its zenith through the
1899 publication of Qasim Amin’s essay “The Liberation of Women.”

In the essay, Amin defends the use of the veil but argues that its use in Egyptian society
has “gone to extremes in veiling our women and prohibiting them from appearing unveiled before
men, to such an extent that we turn women into objects or goods we own.” In the Middle East,
the veil was still very much an intrinsic element of maintaining social order; unveiling was a sign
of immodesty and subsequently the degeneration of society into fitna or social disorder.

Seclusion amongst the more established elite was a sign of wealth and veiling in public, with the
exception of the Bedouin class, was indicative of a woman’s social status. Unveiled women were
associated with the Ghawází, prostitutes, and the class of women who performed for tourists.
Their unveiled status left them on the fringes of society and thus easily exploited by tourists and
entrepreneurs. This was true both in Egypt and Algeria. The elite, particularly those with
experience abroad began to push for more relaxed standards of modesty. Although they were not
ready to abolish the veil altogether, there was a general sentiment amongst men in Amin’s class
that the veil’s utility was archaic and inhibited women’s social and intellectual agency. Amin
argues that a woman’s chastity should not be linked to the veil and even goes so far as to write
that, “those familiar with American society believe that, in spite of this open interaction,

83 Qasim Amin. The Liberation of Women and The New Woman Trans. Samiha Sidhom
Peterson. (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2000). The essay was originally
published in Arabic as a book entitled Tahrir al mara’a (“The Liberation of Women”) in 1899,
followed by Al mara’a al jadida (“The New Woman”). Amin was especially critical of religious
authority and believed that Islam was in a state of decadence. He called for the end of purdah
(seclusion) and that European and American models of women’s education and social agency
were compatible with Islamic ideals.
84 Qasim Amin. “The Liberation of Women,” in Contemporary Debates in Islam: An Anthology
of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought Ed. Monsoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof. (New
85 Fitna is translated both as “social disorder” or “social chaos” and as “civil war.” It is believed
that the Prophet’s favorite wife, A’isha bint Abu Bakr, was the instigator of the first fitna, in this
historical context meaning “civil war,” in the early Muslim community. Traditionally this blame
set upon A’isha is used to rationalize why women are excluded from active participation in public
life because of their potential to cause division and strife amongst all Muslims (i.e. within the
umma).
American women, more than any other, guard their honor and have moral standards." He stops short of calling for Muslims to emulate the West, but he deploys the West as an example of the possibility of industrialization and social progress while retaining certain moral standards that do not require keeping women in purdah.

Westerners however, were not particularly interested in these debates: they were interested in the exoticism of Eastern women, whether they were veiled or unveiled. Veiled women represented a world that was only inhabitable by those with the cultural, racial, and religious currency to access it, while unveiled women, depicted in images of harem and scenes of Turkish baths were accessible to the voyeur. Performers and postcard printers alike capitalized on this notion of unveiling as signaling an accessibility and readiness: an unveiled woman meant that a man had access to the woman’s body. By unveiling herself she was giving permission to be seen and enjoyed. In contrast, by being unveiled by an outside force, such as the French colonial photographer or one of the photographers at the Columbian Exposition, permission is given on her behalf and she is both conquered and exploited, her agency is curtailed and she becomes not only a colonial possession but the possession of the voyeur.

Unveiled women on the Midway were living dolls, forced to temporarily relinquish their identities as Muslim women and relegate themselves to the parameters of erotic fetishes and human curiosities. The unveiling of Muslim women permitted the photographer, concessionaires, and the viewing public the ability to assert authority over them and to relegate them firmly in the position of the “other.” The unveiling was particularly important in that it also allowed for no association to be made between iconic Christian figures like the Virgin Mary, the cadre of saints, or nuns. Rather, the unveiled Egyptian women stood in contrast to those clothed in the proper social dress of the contemporary United States where bonnets and Sunday hats were almost as important in marking women’s social status as higher than those without them. Immodesty, heads uncovered, and hands clasped, Muslim women who were photographed and performing on the
Midway were made captive. These were women whose relative agency was explicitly linked to foreign investors, tourists, and to dancing.

Yet one can read Egyptian women's participation in the dancing and exhibitions of the Midway as an art and a means to economic agency. Nance writes of the troubling push-pull of women's agency and captivity that, "the trouble for the historian is sorting out how much of the reported agency and action of actual women performers was truly theirs, how much a product of the reporter seeking to cross these women over to the listener or reader comprehensibly as a wily harem girl."87 As a result, the archive that was produced of these women is limited to the texts put together by casual observers of the fair like Buel and anthropologists like Putnam. What women who participated in the fair thought and negotiated in the trade is far hard to evidence and thus to understand.

In discussing a selection of the photographs of Muslim women taken and marketed at the Columbian Exposition in 1893, I debated whether or not to separate the two volumes from which I unearthed the photographs. It seems reasonable that the strictly souvenir, commemorative volume by Buel should be separate from the anthropologist Putnam's work. The captions in both volumes add further dimensionality to the images themselves making them slightly more (or less) palatable for analyses. In addition, the two volumes were published for vastly different purposes. Although revealed imagery, one was meant to entertain (Buel's) and one was meant to educate (Putnam's). The culmination of staged authenticity and the lack of concern for accuracy in the labeling of the photographs demonstrates that these were not serious anthropological studies, but rather a flimsy accumulation of images compiled to entertain, not to educate. In these circumstances, I believe that the two endeavors are distinct, yet I also believe that the purpose of them, to use racial typographies and in the case of this thesis, the spectacle of Muslim women's bodies, to promote imperial discourse and the supremacy of Anglo-America makes their achievement, if not their intent, quite similar. They are remarkably insidious for such a seemingly

87 Nance 174
benign set of photographs, but when the images are examined and “read,” the images become part of the narrative white, Anglo-Saxon, and imperial narrative of the White City.

In Buel’s text, he includes a photograph of a woman simply identified as “An Algerian Girl (Figure 2).” She is standing akimbo, looking away from the camera, and against a carefully constructed back drop of the pyramids. The background alone allows one to establish that the national origin of the participants in the portfolios was of secondary concern to the photographer and entrepreneurs to such an extent that the only way to vaguely validate Buel’s claims of the girl’s ethnicity is to compare photographs of her to other anonymous Algeriennes from contemporary postcards printed in Algeria (Figure 3). Buel observes that the Algerian girls were much more modestly dressed in comparison to the other dancers, like those from Egypt. This is somewhat confusing as the bulk of the existing images of Algerian women taken by French contemporaries depict Algerian women topless and provocatively postured, while Egyptian postcards rely heavily on Bedouin costume and veiling. This may reflect the artistic, albeit stereotypical, sensibilities of the colonizers, with the French choosing to exploit the female form and explore the nuances of the Algerienne’s body while the British in Egypt preferred a more modest imagining of the East. However, Buel does acknowledge however that “Algerian Girl” is still “bedizened with gewgaws which North Africans and Orientals lavishly affect” which is a true statement of images of Algerian women of the time and may denote a stand-in for what would normally be a more explicit rendering of her identity. She is still categorized by an essentialism that defines the outward appearance of Muslim women. Buel approves of “An Algerian Girl” because of her modesty, but still does not afford her a position amongst the higher-ranked populations of the Midway Plaisance.

The essentialist claim made about North Africa itself and the Middle East by juxtaposing “An Algerian Girl” against the pyramids speaks to the idea that the identity of Middle Eastern-Muslim women was cobbled together without any real concern for accuracy. Why situate her

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88 Buel, no page number. A gewgaw is defined as a “decorative bauble or trinket.”
against the pyramids when she is not identified as Egyptian? Undoubtedly the pyramids served as a kind of marker to identify her general location in the Middle East, even if was one that was clearly not correct, as well as acknowledging the cultural and consumer craze for all things derived from ancient Egypt. It was a fad that was promoted by British archaeologists and anthropologists who were diligently pillaging and exporting from the Valley of the Kings simultaneous to the Columbian Exposition. The work of the British metropole impacted the landscape of the fair by including cultural signifiers, like the pyramids, that resonated with the public and reduced Egyptians from citizens to laborers.

The pyramids and her ethnic and racial identity are merged in this portrait as an indicator of the monolithic notion of the East. Her physical situation is further reduced by Buel’s description where he notes that “Algerian Girl” was taken from the Midway Plaisance’s “side-show.” Even on the hierarchical scale that was the Midway, Muslim women were subjugated further and their identities subsumed to enable empire and imperial ambition to be highlighted in their individual portraiture.

There is a second portrait of a young woman in Buel’s collection. This particular woman, who does not look much older than a teenager, is identified as being “An Odalisque Straight from the Seraglio (Figure 4).” This photograph is of a better quality and the close proximity of the photographer to the subject is indicative that the photographer himself took a deep interest in his subject, perhaps himself believing that she was an authentic, living artifact of the Sultan’s harem as the caption claims. He seems to instinctively know that the staging of this girl as an “Odalisque” will garner both and his subject more attention and more consumability. The “Odalisque” in this photograph is fetishized in her performance of an “Odalisque” according to the artistic whims of the photographer staging the photograph. Presumably influenced by other

90 Ibid, no page number
91 Ibid, no page number
existing imperial visions of Muslim womanhood in Orientalist art, the scene is carefully
constructed and the body of the “Odalisque” is used to affirm the presumptions underlying ethnic,
racial, and religious hegemonies. She is dressed and perhaps even over dressed with trinkets and
baubles and items that would be appropriate for the performance of her art on the Midway or
even on a Nile boat in Upper Egypt, but certainly not characteristic of women who inhabited a
harem. In contrast, Egyptian women’s actual clothing was both practical and, as demonstrated by
portraits of elite women from Egypt and Turkey, also surprisingly Western. Ottoman women in
particular, with their proximity to Europe coupled with the Tanzimat reforms, meant to encourage
the modernization of the empire, embraced and cultivated the popularity of European fashion at
court.92 Gauzy “harem pants” and shoes with curled toes were a fiction of Orientalist artists.

The camera controls her and guides her gaze away from the imperial instrument. The
“Odalisque’s” hands are clasped together and her head is turned to the side, like the other
subjects, she is also not looking directly at the camera. This is perhaps the most distressing aspect
of her pose: the tilt of her head and her vacant expression are more of sadness than seduction. She
is truly an empty vehicle into which the observers may project their own story. Her posture is an
attempt to appear charming, innocent, and most importantly naïve. Her age, in this juxtaposition
of innocence and eroticism lend an entirely new dimension to her objectification, making her
almost the subject of a more pedophilic fantasy than one of an ethnographic or a more
sophisticated erotic undertaking. Her clasped hands also do not give her any indication of
physical agency and add to her vulnerability in front of the lens. She is kidnapped by the
photographer and in his studio, she becomes his prisoner and in that studio a gendered and
racialized iconic image is immortalized in one shutter. The photograph becomes one of the series
of paradigmatic images of Muslim womanhood in American popular culture and is eventually
deployed as a way to articulate conquest and imperial endeavors. The “Odalisque” becomes a
sexual object through which generations of re-imaginings and re-stagings of her religious, ethnic,

racial, and sexual identity remain a part of the American popular consciousness of the Middle East and the Muslim world.

In Buel’s collection there is also a portrait of a dancer on stage in the Egyptian Theatre. This portrait is different from the portraits of the “Algerian Girl” and the “Odalisque.” The photograph is of both men and women, but at center stage is a single dancer (Figure 5). She is standing with her arms down, either preparing to be photographed or to dance. The performers accompanying her are in the background, lying languidly watching and waiting for the scene to unfold in front of them. Their posturing is almost a caricature of the harem and the various poses that populate harem imagery, languid and salacious at the same time. The photograph, in its posturing alone embodies this vision of the harem and the stereotype of the East as a region of languid bodies and idle entertainment. However, the young woman at the center is standing and looking out toward an empty theatre and slouched forward. She looks as if she may be mentally impaired, cast in her starring role because she is marginally exotic, but also because she fulfills the racial typing of an inferior intellect that is necessary for participation in the Midway’s entertainments. She appears dwarfish, perhaps as a result of the scenery against which she is juxtaposed. The real difficulty in this picture is that it really does appear to manifest the qualities that Buel articulates when he describes the Egyptian Theatre as a “side show.” The scene that is set inside the frame of this photograph is one of a Barnum-esque performance, where “artful deception”93 is certainly evident. This particular image illustrates the body and costume of the dancer and enables further speculation about what she will do when allowed to commence her performance. In reality, however, it is really more of a commentary on the breadth and assumptions about Eastern culture and perhaps on the mental acumen of the “Mohammedan race.”

One of the most haunting portraits from Buel’s collection is that of the “Syrian Bedouin (Figure 6).” The photograph is of a woman who is standing, fully cloaked in her “Bedouin” dress

93 Cook 23
by the exposition’s lake. She is standing amongst the fallen leaves of autumn. The juxtaposition of the two geographies that she inhabits is particularly jarring. She is clearly captive in her environment on the shores of the Crystal Lake, shuffling through terrain that is not her own, and superimposed against a backdrop that is not indigenous to her identity. Her expression is one of both confusion and hostility, as though she is not entirely sure what the purpose of her posturing is for or perhaps she was asked to make such an expression to emote the kind of fierceness associated with the Bedouin. She is different from other portraits of Muslim women in both Buel and Putnam’s collection in that she is perhaps the closest to being an accurate representation of Bedouin womanhood. Her single appearance in only one of the texts however lends credence to the idea that her particular costume with its draping cloths, coins, and modest underpinnings did not appeal to connoisseurs of the ethnographically erotic. Still, she is an interesting statement on femininity and the way in which such femininity was staged for consumption at the fair.

In Buel’s collection, amongst the portraits of single women, there is a rather classic Victorian portrait of two young girls and an older man whose appearance seems very much that of early portraits of Santa Claus (Figure 8). The two girls, who look more like they belong in a Pear’s Soap advertisement than in an albumen from the Columbian Exposiion, are staged looking intently over the shoulder of an older man whom Clement C. Moore would no doubt declared a perfect foil for his description of Saint Nicholas. Buel identifies the subjects in the photograph as “Algerian Chief and Girls.” What is seemingly a benign portrait of an aging man and two young, cherubic-faced girls is perhaps not entirely what it seems. At first glance, there is a desire to observe the portrait as charmingly paternal between father and daughters or grandfather and granddaughters. The girls appear to be quite young and obviously doting on the aged “Chief” and they are attending to some detail on his person. However, in the context of the other photographs in this albumen, one could venture to guess that this is more of a statement of the “Chief’s” virility. These girls could be his granddaughters or his wives. There was, in newspaper accounts of the time, a fascination with the concept of polygamy. Perhaps this photograph is meant to
satiate or indulge some of that curiosity, as it painstakingly assembles a scene in which both male fantasy and paternal instinct are both satisfied. However it is couched, it, like the other photographs in the albumen, there are more sinister overtones than are initially appreciated. After all, “to analyze it is to dissolve its charm,”94 as sinister as it may be.

The alternative to Buel’s albumen is Professor F.W. Putnam’s book *Types of the Midway Plaisance*, a compilation of the various races, cultures, and ethnicities that comprised the Midway. His commentary is loosely couched in ethnography. Putnam’s examination of Middle Eastern women also includes Jewish women, which adds a curious dimension to the discussion of which groups were given religious signifiers to accompany their racial identities. I maintain that Jewish women were assigned their identities because their relationship to monotheism was marginally more tolerable than that of Muslims. Additionally, the Jewish dancers are described by Putnam as being much more elegant and graceful in their dancing and movements, elevating them further above the Muslim belly dancers. Eastern Christians are not identified in any of the texts, further confirming the notion that the Eastern “Other” did not include any manifestations of Christianity or Christian women.95

Although Putnam has a large collection of portraits from the Islamic World, he places less emphasis on the performance of race and Muslim womanhood, so his portraits lend less to the collective American perception of Muslim women. However, one portrait in particular is distressing. Amongst the hodgepodge of various belly dancers, Bedouins, and “Odalisques” there is a portrait of a toddler. The toddler is identified as “Colona” and labeled as a “Soudanese Baby Dancer (Figure 9).” According to Putnam the toddler was capable of “dancing” a rather uninspiring little dance and then passing her cap around for a gratuity. In her portrait she does not even appear to be capable of sitting-up, let alone being able to perform on-behalf of her mother.

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95 Putnam, no page number.
She is lying down and looking at the camera with a grimace on her face. Her costume is nothing except an untidy sack with some seashells for ornamentation. In Putnam’s description of Calona, he claims that when asked her name, the child would answer, “Mary Anderson.” This, he claims brought about “the desired shower of small coin.” In this circumstance, it is not the identity of Calona as a Muslim baby girl, but rather her ability to code switch in a country where African-Americans, women, and non-Christians were denied full citizenship rights. The novelty of a Sudanese Muslim toddler assigning (or rather being assigned) a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity is simultaneously comic and tragic. Modern audiences may view it as a sad product of the failure of Putnam’s study, but a successful one if deployed to see how America viewed itself.

Americans, as exhibited by Calona, paid for whiteness and a racial discourse that validated their ideas of supremacy and exceptionalism.

One peculiar instance that not simply illustrates the fluidity of race and the ease of racial code switching occurring on the Midway, but almost entirely to Americans’ seeming disinterest in authenticity occurs in a photograph that appears in both Buel and Putnam’s albumens. There are photographs of the same pair of women, separately featured and identified in Buel’s volume as “Romanian Dancers (Figure 10)” and in Putnam’s as “Moorish Dancers (Figure 11).” The women, who are sisters, are capable of racial code switching and give credence to the observation by some fairgoers that all was not quite what it seemed on the Midway. In Buel’s text, the sisters are seen dancing with tambourines in what could be considered a kind of Eastern dance with their hips pushed to one side and their fingertips elongated upon their instruments. They appear to be performing some kind of ritual of Arab-Muslim womanhood with a certain degree of skill. I would argue that they are in fact Romanian simply based on their costume which differs entirely from any of the other photographs of dancers from the Middle East. The fabric of their costumes is elaborately patterned which denotes a more traditionally ethnic Eastern European costume than

96 Putnam, no page number.
97 Buel, no page number; Putnam, no page number.
one from the North. The sisters undermine the racial and ethnic project of the Midway because in separate texts they are alternatively identified as two different performative entities. If this is true in the major texts documenting the Exposition, then what can be said of the entirety of the Midway Plaisance and the performance of Muslim womanhood there? Later accounts of the fair, published in tandem with a similar exposition in St. Louis, announce that the entire Midway Plaisance was a fraud, the headline trumpeting, “Fair Girls and False: Oriental Beauties of the Midway Plaisance.” There is only one version of the article published. The article claims that the women were not from Muslim lands, writing, “perhaps if the spectators had known that the girls’ with foreign names and Oriental costumes were natives of sunny France and young American brunettes it would have detracted from their pleasure.” The article goes on to assert that according to one source the dance was completely contrived by a shrewd business man, identified as Ben Debs, and that the Midway in its entirety was a “fraud.” As sensational as this account is, and if one inserts the evidence from Buel and Putnam to illustrate the claims, it did not galvanize a revision of the Protestant American gaze upon the Muslim East. Americans, at once confident in their own morality, yet beginning to push the boundaries of decency, were more interested in how others’ immorality might effect their own.

Collectively, Buel’s portraits form the more innocuous versions of Muslim womanhood because they are constructed purely for entertainment purposes. They lack any substantial ethnographic analysis, not to give more credit than is due to Putnam’s volume. Yet Buel’s framework is set against Orientalist descriptors from his introduction invoking Aladdin and the genie of the lamp to his overwhelming favoring of the “Eastern” elements of the fair, both architecturally and performatively. In sum, as Alloula so eloquently described it, “the saturation of the image sought by the photograher has no other aim than to lead the eye astray, to set

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98 “Fair Girls and False. Oriental Beauties of the Midway Plaisance.” *Wheeling Sunday Register* 02 Nov. 1894
99 ibid
glittering traps for it, and to direct it entirely to that which is offered to view." Both albumens “set glittering traps” as well as record those traps set along the Midway through the exploitation of the Islamic world and Muslim women’s sexuality. The White City itself and its Babel ghetto was a “glittering trap” for the Americans who visited, consumed, and enabled the imperial gaze to fix upon Muslim women and upon the Muslim world through the Columbian Exposition.

However, inside the White City, the Ottomans were attempting to counter the more visceral discourse through a vigorous campaign of self-promotion. The Midway Plaisance and its ethnographic bacchanalia dominated the ways in which Americans saw and experienced Muslim womanhood. At the time of the Exposition, the Ottoman Empire was in enacting a series of reforms called the Tanzimat reforms, which sought to modernize the empire and restructure monarchical and social power in the empire. The Ottomans were keen to restructure their image as a modern empire and cultivate their relations with the West. In an effort to promote the empire’s project of Europeanization and modernization, Sultan AbdulHamid II sent a series of albumens to be displayed at the fair. The purpose of the albumens was to show the West, in particular the United States, that the Ottomans, although “Eastern” were also “Western.” The intention of the albumen was to deconstruct inauthentic versions of the empire while simultaneously promoting a newly authentic version of the same empire. AbdulHamid II’s intention was to portray his empire as still industrially and socially competitive with Europe and the United States. Unfortunately, the albumens, which consist largely of Ottoman architectural achievements within what is now modern Turkey and not in the greater empire, fail to surmount

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100 Alloula 52
the enormous volume of work already produced to fetishize and fictionalize the empire.\textsuperscript{104} Any effort that AbdulHamid II put forth toward rendering a more Western image of Ottoman womanhood was quashed by the proliferation of material of his own subjects in Egypt, Algeria, and Syria. The sultan was waging a battle against a rapidly changing social, political, and religious landscape as well as the encroachment of European dynasties on Ottoman-held lands. Thus, his contribution to the Columbian Exposition, despite being an enormously informative one, lacked the cognitive power to bring the empire from its eventual collapse or recognition by the West as a peer culture.

In the Sultan’s albumens, there are a prolific number of photographs taken of young girls at various schools throughout Turkey (Figure 12). Mostly in urban areas, the girls are photographed as classes and their schools are photographed separately. The number of photographs of various girls’ schools in the albumen outnumbers the photographs of the actual students themselves. Whether this is intentional or not, or just a matter of pieces of the archive that are lost to time, is unknown. Despite this, the albumens place an obvious emphasis on female education. However, the question is more than the nature of girls’ education in late nineteenth century Turkey, the question is more specifically that if AbdulHamid II wanted to counter the rhetoric about Islam, women, and any critique of Turkey’s progress toward modernization, then why use schoolgirls? The Sultan, as much as early Turkish feminists like Fatma Aliye Hanım, whose work was part of the library exhibit at the Columbian Exposition, recognized the growth of women’s education in the West and its importance to the West as a means of gauging the civility of a nation.\textsuperscript{105} The photographs are to represent a counter-discourse to the “Odalisque” and offer

\textsuperscript{104} For a complete record of the Sultan AbdulHamid II Albumens from the Columbian Exposition, please see the Library of Congress’s collection of manuscripts. The albumens are searchable through the following link: (http://www.loc.gov/pictures/related/?fi=name&q=Abdullah%20Fr%C3%A9res)

\textsuperscript{105} Çelik. Some of Fatma Aliye Hanım’s early work defending Muslim women from Western presumptions was exhibited at the Columbian Exposition’s library, but it was never translated into English. Translations exist in French, Arabic, and Urdu, but not into English. Also see:
an alternative, modern conception of Muslim womanhood, not unlike the one that Hanım herself 
promoted in her untranslated works on the subject sent to the fair. The girls in these photographs 
were not compensated like their older Algerian and Egyptian peers on the Midway and have no 
agency of their own and are simply pawns in an imperial chess game, their utility to the 
government was priceless.

Practically speaking, schoolgirls were easy to photograph and although their use 
amounted to probably little more than tokenism, they were representative of the contemporary 
debates on women’s education as well as of the future of the empire that was both modern and Muslim, something that modern Turkey continues to struggle with as it straddles both Western and Eastern ideals. The albumens are curiously absent of photographs of grown Turkish women with the exception of one photograph of a tuberculosis hospital in Istanbul. The patients, as amorphous and sexless as the nurses attending them, appear to be female and are identified as such, but they too seem passive and appropriated for the project of presenting the modern Ottomans. Unless we extend female agency to the female nurses trained to attend to them, this is the only glimpse of the “modern” Muslim woman that the AbdulHamid II albumens offer to the Western gaze (Figure 13). Clearly a shift from the stereotypical and beloved languid odalisque will require more than a single grainy photograph of female nurses. Further, the single frame is a novelty because it is the only articulation of a female professional class in Turkey at the time. It is easy to fetishize the portrait of the nurses and patients in the ward because of their apparent agency. However, without any other indicator of Turkish women’s agency, with the exception of a collection of untranslated publications in the Women’s Building, the public is not able to find an accurate, self-constructed Muslim identity for women in the pages of the albumen, the souvenir portfolio, or any of the ethnographic guides. It is this gap in the counter-performance of Muslim women’s identity that led to the popular imagining of Muslim women: covered in silver

coinage, ornately embroidered vests, and curly toed shoes, the Ottoman attempt to refute Western exoticism of the East ultimately failed. The albumens were buried in an exhibition hall and sex and exoticism dominated the discourse on Middle Eastern as well as Muslim identities. The subjects of the Ottoman albumens may too have been too juvenile and flat to make any kind of potent visual counterargument. By picturing schoolgirls and tuberculosis patients, instead of demonstrating a progression toward modernity, the empire inadvertently infantilized itself and demonstrated its lack of industry and progress. Thus, the imperial Western vision of the Muslim woman succeeded over the one the Ottomans wished to convey.

The space in which the American public conflated Muslim and Middle Eastern womanhood for consumption was created during the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. Drawing-upon authentic, gendered performances of Islam, live cultural artifacts in the form of female performers were imported to Chicago in 1893 to sustain the White City’s masculine hegemonies as much as its economy. Their presence also influenced changing ideas about sex and gender. As living embodiments of a counter-narrative to the normative social and sexual behaviors of Protestant America, the women who performed on the Midway Plaisance forever altered the ways in which Americans envisioned the Islamic world and continue to envision and engage with it. Muslim women in their performances not only allowed for the exploration of their sexuality, and others’ sexualities, but established a stage upon which Americans would continue to conflate the Islamic world with images of veiled and unveiled, hypersexual and chaste, easily conquered through their confinement and necessarily subjugated.

The performances by Muslim women at the Columbian Exposition also challenged Americans to reevaluate and reconceptualize their ideas about sex, gender, and especially, desire. In an era of profound social change, the summer of 1893, with its Hootchy-Kootchy and languid odalisques shimmying and lounging along the shores of Lake Michigan gave Americans a certain necessary escapism that was lacking in their own world. In this new narrative of the Islamic World, Shahrazad is excluded: she inhabits a space outside of the white, Protestant world. Despite
her wisdom, beauty, and nobility, she would be relegated to the Midway Plaisance, where she could ply her wares as a colorful storyteller on the “Street in Cairo” or as an Odalisque the “Moorish Palace.” Her ability to conjure stories and use her intellect to charm men would be replaced by her superficial, exotic appeal. Finally, later, she would be immortalized in the souvenir albumens of Buel and Putnam and confined to a harem of imperialism and deployed to control and navigate American political and religious ambition abroad and her role in enabling Americans to experience and feel desire in the pubic sphere was forgotten with only the stories told by her hips remembered.
BEFORE AND AFTER REFORMATION.

Fig. 2. "Before and After Reformation.", ca 1893, Illus. in the Idaho Daily Statesman
Fig. 4. “Scènes et Types – Ouled Nail”, Lehnert and Lockhart. (Algiers, ca late 19th century)
Fig. 9. “Calona, the Soudanese Baby Dancer,” ca 1893, Illus. in F.W. Putnam, Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance (St. Louis, Missouri: N.D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1894).
Fig. 11. “Moorish Dancing Girls,” ca 1893, Illus. in F.W. Putnam, Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance (St. Louis, Missouri: N.D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1894).
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