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Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East  
Prof. Dina Le Gall

**“Sword Dance”**  
**(Sayida’s Lament)**

As the sun was coming up over Cairo and through the windows of the little apartment above the café, which was known as Gezirah, I could hear the calls to prayer, and the smell of coffee and tobacco smoke were plentiful. An anthropologist major studying at Oxford, I now found myself in Egypt working on a thesis concerning the social issues surrounding woman singers and dancers in the Middle East. I had been interviewing several singers and dancers over the last couple of days, and two entertainers in particular named Sayida and her cousin Farouk, conveniently lived in an apartment building near to the room where I was staying. It was located near a section of town close to Muhammad ‘Ali Street, famous for its sub-culture of artists, musicians, singers and dancers.

The sounds in Muhammad ‘Ali Street seemed a bit more noisy than usual that morning, and in the distance, I could hear Umm Kulthum, (a famous and beloved Egyptian singer), playing on Farouk’s old cassette deck. Farouk lived in an apartment right above Sayidas and every Saturday morning you could hear a few different Umm Kulthum songs playing very loudly. Farouk told me that he loved to listen to Umm Kulthum, and that he always told Sayida stories about her and the

unique way she sang. Sayida, like many Egyptian women, was very interested in Umm Kulthum because ever since she was a little girl, she wanted to be a singer just like her.

Farouk worked in the local mosque as a janitor and supplemented his meager income by singing religious songs for weddings and other celebrations in the neighboring villages. Just as Umm Kulthum who accompanied and learned songs from her family, Sayida would sometimes accompany Farouk to these celebrations and would learn some of the old songs mostly of a religious nature, including those that constituted the story of the Prophet's life (*al-Qissa al-Nabwiyya*). I have learned that these songs formed this "story" from a large corpus of recitations and sung poetry in the genres of *tawashih* and *qasida* relating to the life of Mohammad. Men usually sang religious songs. But women also became accomplished religious singers and performed, sometimes veiled, for male and female audiences.<sup>1</sup> Farouk would usually travel with his friend Hassan who would accompany him on violin. Religious singers in Cairo began using instruments such as the violin and the qanun in place of or in addition to vocal accompaniment. Unlike the music and songs played in nightclubs, these religious songs were considered more appropriate for many of the different social and religious occasions: Muslim religious holidays, including the evenings of the holy month of Ramadan, the large public festivals commemorating the birthday of the Prophet or that of another saint, as well as weddings, circumcisions, naming of babies, and celebrations of the inundation of the Nile.

Recitation of the Quran occupied a central place in Egyptian culture in public contexts and less formally, as a source of comfort and as a part of religious expression and instruction everywhere.<sup>2</sup> Sayida's grandfather was such a Quran reader in his local village. The reading of the Quran is a marvelous and beautiful art in the view of the peasants (*fallahin*). They love to hear it. When someone finds a reader with an especially good voice and brings him for some occasion, the village in its entirety rushes to hear him, the men surrounding him and the women sitting on the roofs of the houses or in any other place where they can hear the beautiful voice that reads the Quran. I found a good example of this while interviewing Sayida. When Sayida was about seven years old, her grandfather became curious about his granddaughter's voice. She became a family star. He would take her to public houses such as small cafés and small public concerts in the middle square of the villages where he would have her sing. Of course, the audience did not consider her singing as real singing, rather they heard it as a novelty: a little girl, seven years old, who sings with her high voice the religious songs and hymns to the Prophet that a man with a husky voice would sing, as people now listen to a little boy giving a speech in literary Arabic.<sup>3</sup> Sayida's father would constantly argue with her grandfather about taking Sayida to such "public" events. The audiences were largely if not exclusively male, and the social constraints that normally governed behavior at family gatherings loosened in the context of the public event. In some circumstances, especially in the lower-class festivities out in the street, some alcohol was served and some hashish would be

smoked. Sometimes inebriated audience members would cause disturbances. These occurrences contributed to her father's anxiety at risking his very young daughter's reputation by allowing her to appear before public audiences, a problem he addressed in part by requiring that she dress in a boy's coat and Bedouin head-covering. Sayida's father's misgivings must have been exacerbated by the low esteem with which their compatriots' regarded musicians, male or female.

While most Egyptians patronized some form of public or private entertainment and entertainers lived and worked almost everywhere in Egypt, young people were not encouraged to take up these professions nor to consort with others who did. Aside from the notorious difficulty of earning a living as an entertainer and the frequently hard conditions confronting the beginner, the prevailing attitude seems to have been based on concepts of personal dignity. Displaying oneself publicly as an actor on stage, as a singer of love songs, or, worst of all, as a dancer, was seen as an unworthy use of time not commensurate with dignified behavior.<sup>4</sup> Women, particularly younger women in entertainment, have often been subject to social restrictions in many geographical locations and eras. In the Islamic and Arab context, there are problems with musical performance itself that are compounded when women perform. Music has been held to be dangerous to the faithful for it could unleash passion and sensuality if played skillfully. The pious might forget their prayers, and the not so pious might also imbibe alcohol along with their music and spend their money rewarding performers in fits of enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup>

After a little straightening up and a quick shower, I met Sayida again downstairs in the café for a morning cup of “Turkish” coffee, her favorite which Ibrahim the owner and manager of Gezirah was renowned for. She had been working in Gezirah for about six months and Ibrahim had become a good friend. I noticed that while women are seen walking, shopping, and chatting on the streets in central Cairo, and can be seen working in many schools, institutions of various types, stores, and even in factories, they are very rarely seen as patrons in local cafés or nightclubs. Far more men than women are employed in certain local industries in the area, such as metalworking, shoemaking, commodity bulk trading, and the gold market. The visual image of social and occupational settings is that Egypt is a highly gender-segregated society.<sup>6</sup>

Most of Syida’s unmarried or divorced friends live near and around the little café and apartment district where she lives. Like Farouk, the male musicians usually sit in the coffee shops during the day, while the female entertainers phone the agencies to hear if there is work. Mobility is an important characteristic of the profession. Most entertainers are employed for work in distant villages and towns and regularly leave the community to work somewhere else.

I found Sayida and her friend Karima to be good examples of the younger generation who were born outside of Cairo in the 1970’s and who eventually came to settle in the sub-culture neighborhoods like those surrounding Muhammad Ali Street. Some performers have personal reasons for working away from their place of birth.

Just like Sayida, Karima, a café dancer originally from Alexandria, came to Cairo in order not to compromise her father's good name. In general, most female performers, even if their families do not object, do not work in their natal villages, towns, or neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup> Unlike Farouk who travels often for saint's day celebrations and weddings, Sayida and Karima are strictly nightclub performers and travel much less. Instead, they hurry from nightclubs downtown to those on Pyramid Street and back, often making several short trips at night. This mobility has numerous implications for the status of entertainers. On the part of authorities, especially in the current "Islamic atmosphere", "moving" groups are a nuisance because they are difficult to control. Mobility can also create opportunities to engage in immoral activities. This suspicion is mainly directed at female entertainers. Female singers and dancers are suspected of using the night as a cover for dishonorable meetings.<sup>8</sup>

When asked by customers (who always turned out to be reporters or students like me), why she dances, Karima would always cry "*akl esh*," "it is a livelihood". Even a dancer is a human being who must work in order to earn her daily bread". But when Sayida was offered a dancing job along with her singing position by a friend of Ibrahim, she refused. She explained her reason. "Dancers collect "tips", and this is frowned upon! I do not collect tips from my customers! When you give an entertainer a huge tip, this is usually thought of as advance payment for sexual services after the performance. Not only do they suspect us of sleeping with the generous customers but also with the owners and managers of the clubs for us to be

guaranteed work. They look at us as mere prostitutes!<sup>9</sup> Maybe this is true, but I will not do that! As a single woman, Ibrahim my friend looks after me! Many things that happen in the nightclubs and cafés are considered shameful and (*haram*), taboo and the sheikh's tell us we will burn in hell! The way people think of female entertainers is not fair. They gossip about us because we talk and laugh with customers. But we do it as a part of our profession! They consider it shameful, but if we don't do it, they won't want us. Whatever our feelings may be, we must please our guests! Even if I am sick or something is seriously bothering me, as soon as I go onstage, I have to laugh and make jokes-and precisely for this reason I am condemned"! Her poetic response to my question was a good one..." A performer is like a candle; she sheds light for others but burns herself up!"<sup>10</sup> Karima who was listening to our conversation put down her coffee and pulled up a stool right next to us. Being very defensive, she spoke about her honor, respectability, morals, and good manners. I realized that coming from a very poor family, a low-income area of the country and "on top of everything", divorced, Karima constantly had to defend herself against accusations of shameful behavior and low morality. She pointed out that entertainment in general is a respectable trade! "If I don't dance, then maybe my children one day will have to dance! I am as tough as any man and not to be taken as an easy-going weak woman! How can our profession be shameful? We make people happy! If someone is going to marry, why should this happen in silence? People want to enjoy themselves. God provides everyone with a livelihood; everyone works

for a decent piaster. God created us to make people happy!<sup>11</sup> Praise Be to God!

Sometimes female performers must do things contrary to Islam because entertainment is our only livelihood. It is easy for the Islamic fundamentalists to talk because they have better jobs! May God make things easy for them, but I am one of those who must earn money from dancing. Fundamentalists say that we do things against our religion, but we eat from our work. We raise our children from it...Let them provide us with another job, with enough to pay for the school and all the other expenses for our children and ourselves. We struggle for them!”

Out of the window Sayida saw Farouk walking with a teacher from the mosque, a man named Aziz. “Their going home already... it must be nearly evening”! She opened the door and waved for them to come in to join in the conversation and have something to eat. Farouk was carrying Hassan’s violin, which was said to be worth a lot of money. Evidently Hassan’s grandfather at one time played violin for the famous singer Asmahan. After he died, the violin was given to Hassan, the only son and a musician by his own right. Unlike Farouk, Hassan told me that he didn’t like Umm Kulthum. He felt that Asmahan was the exact opposite of Umm Kulthum. Umm Kulthum projected the image of an unusually determined, self-assured Arab woman who had a purpose in life, and knew what she was doing, while Asmahan made hearts sink with self-doubt and bewilderment. In looking up an article on Asmahan, I discovered that Arab women, forced to dance alone in closed-off courtyards, admired Asmahan for realizing their dreams of hugging a man close in a



Western-style dance, and swaying with him in a tight embrace. Aimless enjoyment, with a man by your side also totally engaged in the same, was the image that Asmahan projected.<sup>12</sup> Hassan told me that he liked this image of Asmahan and dreamed of one day being some lonely woman's heroine.

I must have sparked something in all of them because they were interested in giving me a lot of information. Sayida turned the conversation to Aziz. "Tell us what you think! What do you think about women entertainers like us"? Aziz responded stating that he had recently read a long article written by Leila Ahmed given to him by another teacher at his mosque. Aziz spoke; "Islamic law became more conservative in its approaches to women and gender issues, and after the first century of Islam, seclusion from public places was often demanded of most urban elite women, not only those in royal harems. Although musical performances retained its importance in rites of passage and in Sufi practice, conservative male scholars condemned it as well as female artists, from medieval times to the present. The article also says that the conservative scholar, Ibn al-Hajj's objections, were based on his belief that women's voices are '*awra*, "pudendal," as indeed are their whole bodies. Their bodies must not be seen, and unrelated men should not hear their voices. He recommended a strict segregation of the sexes and that women stay in their homes. Religious musical practice was frowned on as well."<sup>13</sup>

As a teacher, educated in an upper-class neighborhood, I could see that Aziz knew a lot about the discourse at hand. He also found in his readings that in later years,

female performers were suspicious creatures for several reasons. Folk performances by older women were often tolerated; after all, these women were invariably married grandmothers and mothers and beyond the procreative period. However, musical mourners were occasionally harassed because they made a wage, in money or in kind. Certain cities in the Ottoman Empire passed laws against public performances by females. These were intended to allow officials to control the prostitutes in these areas, and to extract taxes from their guilds and those of singers and dancers. Female public performances came to be associated with prostitution, and lower social status. Because of these past stigmas, most modern-day female entertainers such as Asmahan and Umm Kulthum were at the mercy of male writers, male agents, and male critics.<sup>14</sup> Karima jumped in with her defensive tone and asked... “Could these men really understand the life of a woman of their era, or of their mother’s or grandmothers era? And if they understood her, how could they explain her personal experience given their view of what they think is socially normal?” Aziz responded, “Another article about the singer Asmahan points out that to some degree, Asmahan was sexualized by her fans and her foes. She was aware of this process and responded by acknowledging her femininity, instead of denying it.”<sup>15</sup> Aziz continued; “Yet another paper by the writer, Malti-Douglass tells us that a woman’s body is indeed problematic. The medieval Arabic male-generated text assures us of this. The literary narratives deal with this physicality, often permitting the female to participate in the discourse. Yet her speech remains tied to the seductive power of her body.”<sup>16</sup>

Women subvert their efforts, speaking a body language that still utilizes a discourse of gender. She points out that we cannot de-gender the female singer. In the middle of the twentieth century, the female entertainer was never simply an individual, but also, and always, a female body emitting poetic text through song. In the private, segregated setting of elite functions given by and for women, the performers' female sexuality remained an important feature of their appeal, though sexual tension was diminished in the absence of men. But, in any other setting the singer had to struggle with history and cultural interpretations of gender as well as musical technique and poetic interpretation to be heard."<sup>17</sup> Sayida and Karima sat there shaking their heads... "Thanks for that information, Aziz, that's exactly how we feel, poetic bodies and all" we all laughed, then took a break for more coffee and something to eat.

Nighttime fell over the city and the little area where we lived, and it was time for the girls to get ready for work once again down on Pyramid Street. Sayida and Karima were working in a club that evening called The Palm, which featured not only singers but also veil and sword dancing and belly dancers as well. When looking back on our conversation, I noticed that Sayida appeared somewhat insecure. She already knew in her heart what I was beginning to realize, that especially for women, working in a nightclub didn't seem very respectable. Lower class and lower-middle class people who had never entered a nightclub had a negative opinion of them. It appeared to me that their ideas were mainly based on the old image of *fath*, the time that singers and dancers sat and drank with customers. Although *fath* has been

abolished, the image is kept alive by way of old films featuring nightclub scenes and belly dancers, which are regularly broadcast on television. She was told many times by many people, that it was improper to work and be “hiding” in disreputable places. Farouk has also tried many times to convince her not to work in the nightclubs down on Pyramid Street and just sing at weddings and religious gatherings like he does. But the money isn’t as good, and it has been getting harder to get that kind of work.

Since the early 1970’s, the government of Egypt has built a growing number of clubs for sports and festive occasions. It has partly been an attempt by the authorities to restrict the uncontrolled weddings in the streets. Weddings limited to a number of invited guests, without alcohol being served and finished by midnight, have replaced disorderly and unpredictable happenings of the street. For performers to entertain in these clubs, they have to be registered with an agent and obtain several papers. So now, these wedding and festivity jobs are harder to come by and are given to only a “selected few”, usually making the whole process difficult and very political. Now with the loss of esteem and safety in the circuit of weddings and saint’s day celebrations, several woman performers have been trying their luck in nightclubs. Sayida and Karima will tell you that the *mahallat* (shops), which is a nice way of saying “nightclubs”, provide a steady income and a higher one than they could make at weddings or saint’s day celebrations. Moreover, since sitting and drinking with customers is no longer part of the job, many of the performers main objections to this work has now been removed.<sup>18</sup>

Karima and Sayida take a taxi to work. Abu, a taxi driver they have known for a long time usually drives them to Pyramid Street and to the nightclubs. He also regularly drives Saudi tourists to the clubs and sometimes watches the shows with them. When I asked him about what he thinks about Karima and Sayida's work, Abu told me that "the customers show how much money they have and the women show their flesh, that's all. If they lavish money that easily, the money must have come from forbidden practices; otherwise, they would not spend money like water."

It seems that not only the sums of money, which are thrown away, are a thorn in the sides of the less well off, but also the way tips are earned is frowned upon. Nightclub performers are depicted as doing everything to increase their tips; it is a "sheer rip-off" and nothing to do with art in the eyes of most Egyptians, Abu will tell you. The performers are regarded as flatterers and hypocrites. They flatter, compliment, and extensively thank the tip giver to stimulate competition among customers.<sup>19</sup>

With Abu's testimony, I came to realize that many people feel that female entertainers thus make use of what is feared by Muslim scholars: the feminine power to ensnare men and create *fitna* (chaos), since they work with their seductive bodies to earn money. They do not keep the rules as prescribed by the orthodox discourse. They are not invisible, secluded, and devoting all their attention to the needs of the husband, the children, and the home. Although a lot of these singers and dancers, particularly those on the circuit of weddings and saint's day celebrations, are "socially covered," (since they are married), they are not "literally covered". On the

contrary, they uncover themselves, wear revealing clothes, and exhibit their attractiveness as women to gain a living.

In my interviews with religious leaders, some claim that female singers and dancers set a bad example for young girls who attend weddings. One cleric stated, “If a young girl watches a dancer who seduces men and sees that all men eagerly watch her, she will act like her. She will imitate her.”<sup>20</sup> This seems to refer to the idea, on the one hand, that women have a lack of discernment, and on the other, that women strive to hold the attention of men. For that reason, one *sheikh* maintained that women are not allowed to watch a “vulgar dancer.” In an article out of the newspaper *Dar al-katub* which Aziz had showed to me, the reporter stated, “in the nightclubs, the female performers also seem to bewitch their customers. They entice money out of their pockets in order to support them (the dancer or singer), making them lose their minds and causing them to throw their money over their heads ruining them financially forever”. The gravest danger, however, is that of tempting men. The general belief is that even the toughest man, if he sees a scantily dressed woman moving in front of him, must succumb to her. This could result in his giving money and presents to her, so that income is taken from another woman’s household. The temptress could eventually seduce the man and take the husband of another woman. In all of my reading and in interviewing numerous people, I have concluded that in general, most people do not fear the influence of these “bad women.” Except for wedding celebrations, performers are mostly removed from the public’s social life.

Most people took the view that although female singers and dancers are shameful, they themselves do not commit sin when they invite them to their weddings and watch them perform. Abu will tell you that, “if a dancer takes the wrong path, she only harms herself”. Their behavior occasionally causes danger to the morality or wallet of an individual, but female entertainers are not an outstanding symbol of *fitna* and disaster. They may harm occasional individuals, but they do not endanger the entire moral order.<sup>21</sup>

One morning as I was coming down the stairs into the café, I noticed a lot of activity in the kitchen. Everybody was very excited and upset. I asked Sayida what was going on and what all the commotion was about. Evidently, that night before, some of the nightclubs down on Pyramid Street endured yet another attack by either Muslim extremists or the government. Karima was working in one of the clubs at the time, and she was hit by flying glass and she was in the hospital. Ibrahim told me that in 1977, twelve of the fourteen nightclubs on Pyramid Street were burned down. “Corruption and wealth provoke such anger,” he said. “On one hand the extremists think of the clubs as immoral, while the governor would prefer to relocate the nightclubs far off in the desert”! I have read recently that religious influence on the wedding circuit is most strongly felt in the south. Particularly in Minya and Asiyut, the Islamicist strongholds, where fundamentalists succeeded in banning female entertainment and alcohol from weddings. But I haven’t heard of it happening in Cairo! Although I have heard of some Islamic fundamentalists occasionally

disturbing weddings, breaking the musicians' instruments, and chasing the female performers from the stage. I have also heard that sometimes fights break out among the partygoers, who defend the entertainers' and their right to merriment. Religious agitation against public entertainment is not a recent phenomenon in the Middle East, but the effects of growing religious pressure are discernible in all fields of art and entertainment.<sup>22</sup> It is clear to me that although Islamicist pressure is strong, there are forces counterbalancing it. The government tries to moderately implement some of the fundamentalists' proposals but ignores the more fundamental issues. Islamic fundamentalist influence, although strong in the south, should not be overestimated. Most people still enjoy art and entertainment and invite performers to their weddings. If they forego these pleasures, it is mostly because of economic rather than religious reasons.<sup>23</sup> Both Sayida and Karima have told me that they will not perform in Islamicist strongholds such as the Cairene neighborhood 'Ain Shams because they were too afraid. Now I can see why!

Karima unlike Sayida is the "strongman" (*fitiwwat*) of the neighborhood. I find her to be tough, strong, and masculine. Yet she is also very feminine, she cares for her appearance, and is coquettish. It is interesting to me to see her smoke a water pipe occasionally in front of the café. She claims to be this way to protect her reputation. When confronted in a dangerous situation such as drunken men and persistent flirts, she says she might act in a masculine way to defend the integrity of her body. This also removes the suspicion of her being weak and loose. "When I am



among men, it is man to man”, she exclaims. “It is not indecent. I try to be feminine and soft, but I am serious and straight like a man.” Karima once told me that she used to drink beer and smoke hash, but that she was very polite. “We were like men together. It wasn’t like women and men together, it’s like we were all men.” This is interesting; if she is a man, how can she be suspected of having affairs with other men, that is, clients or colleagues? She tries to disclaim the source of her dishonor by redefining herself as a man. The negation of her femininity is thus ultimately related to her efforts to be perceived as a respectable woman. Karima’s expression about men finally means that she considers herself a respectable workingwoman. By defining themselves as masculine in the public sphere, female entertainers like Karima, seem to be trying to neutralize and redefine the femininity of their bodies. Like Karima, they are trying to negotiate the meaning of their body and to reduce its sexual dimension. They view themselves as workers and their bodies as a productive force. It is not sexual and shameful but a means to earn a living. For them, their bodies are neutral productive instruments, like the male body. By presenting themselves as men among men they protect their reputation as respectable women. They thus uphold their respectability as women by using the male gender in public.

Sayida had come into the café from the hospital to let everyone know that Karima was doing fine and that she would be home soon. I was curious to see if she would sit down with me over some coffee. I wanted to finish my research, which seemed to take a “back seat” to the events taking place over the last couple of days. I needed to

get back to England by the end of the week. Sayida agreed to sit and talk with me, so I pulled out my pen and paper and began my final interview. I wanted to know why overall, her trade appeared to be a neutral living for a man, whereas for a woman it seemed to be a dishonorable profession? Why is entertainment provided by males, perceived as productive, while those supplied by females are evaluated only in moral terms? “It goes back to the same old issues,” Sayida cried. “Here in Egypt, our female bodies are enticing, regardless of what we do. A woman who works in the male public space is distrusted, working among men, she is looked upon as an erotic aggressor. Whatever women do, they are first and foremost perceived as sexual bodies. They and their bodies seem to have only one dimension. The male body, although sexual in the presence of a female body, has several dimensions; for instance, it can function in the economic or political field. For that reason, the body of a male performer is perceived as a productive body. According to the *sheikhs*, even if the male body shakes and dances, it is not primarily perceived as enticing. Woman in contrast, even if they do not move or dance, but simply walk or work in the male space, is perceived as sexual beings. Even if I use my body as a productive instrument, I am looked upon as a sexual body. When I am at work, I am looked at as a sexual object.<sup>24</sup> This is all about *fitna*. Let me please explain. When I was growing up, I was told that women should cover their bodies, except for their hands and face. They should use non-transparent material without adornment, and the clothing must be loose in order not to reveal the form of their bodies. My mother always reminded

me that the need for veiling was a way to protect myself against men as well as a method to protect men against me. When I was a little girl, I could never understand this, but now that I am older and a performer, I certainly can understand her thinking and her beliefs. Women should be protected against harassment by men and should not be exposed to male desire, and yet by being a woman, and of course being a performer, I know that I am looked at as seductive and as a temptress.”

I thanked Sayida and Ibrahim by buying them both one last cup of coffee and some imported dates. I also asked Sayida to send my good wishes and many thanks to Karima and Farouk. Afterwards, I returned back to my room to make some final entries into the now thick journal that I have been writing in, and to pack my belongings for the long journey home.

I find it fascinating that many of these interpretations of gender and the body pertain to all Egyptian women. In many ways female entertainers are thus perceived as women like most other women, that is, as sexual beings that can bewitch and seduce. They mainly differ from “decent” women because they use their bodies to make a living instead of hiding them as much as possible. They publicly employ the power of their bodies. Instead of using their feminine powers in the legal context of marriage, they tempt male customers in public. It seems that outside the environment of marriage, this is looked upon as a form of prostitution. They consequently employ the sexuality of their bodies for making a living, which makes them shameless and shameful. They profit on a material level from the cultural structure of gender and

the body but pay for it in terms of status and respect. These entertainers, most of them from the sub-culture of the lower and lower-middle class, like Karima, also try to modify their feminine image of their body and to reduce its sexual dimension. Most of them want their bodies to be perceived as neutral instruments. For them, their bodies are productive just like male bodies. Throughout all my interviews, the notion of the body has proved to be central for all of these female performers. In the Egyptian context especially, the crucial aspect of dishonor of the entertainment trade is the public exhibition of the female body. Whereas the male body is neutral, multidimensional, and productive, the female body is sexual, seductive, shameful, and one-dimensional. Nonetheless, this ideological construction of the female body as sexual is not undisputed. Female entertainers go on challenging it all the time, however unsuccessfully in the eyes of most Middle Eastern societies.

Hidden Dream  
By Furugh Farrukhzad  
(A Modern-Day Iranian Poet)

*O, hey man who has burned  
My lips with the sparkling flames of kisses,  
Have you seen anything in the depth of  
My two silent eyes of the secret of this madness?*

*Do you have any idea that, in my heart, I  
Hid a dream of your love?  
Do you have any idea that of this hidden love  
I had a raging fire on my soul?*

*They have said that that woman is a mad woman  
Who gives kisses freely from her lips;  
Yes, but kisses from your lips  
Bestow life on my dead lips.*

*May the thought of reputation never be in my head.  
This is I who seeks you for satisfaction in this way.  
I crave a solitude and your embrace;  
I crave a solitude and the lips of the cup.*

*An opportunity far from the eyes of others  
To pour you a goblet from the wine of life,  
A bed I want of red roses so that one night  
I might give you intoxication.*

*O, hey, man who has burned my lips  
With flames of kisses,  
This is a book without conclusion,  
And you have read only a brief page from it<sup>25</sup>*

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- <sup>1</sup> Virginia Danielson, "The Voice of Egypt": Umm Kulthum, Arabic song, and Egyptian society in the twentieth century, University of Chicago Press 1997, 23
- <sup>2</sup> Virginia Danielson, "The Voice of Egypt": Umm Kulthum, Arabic song, and Egyptian society in the twentieth century, University of Chicago Press 1997, 24
- <sup>3</sup> Umm Kulthum, quoted in Fau'ad, 90
- <sup>4</sup> Al Faruqi, "Music, Musicians and Muslim Law", *Asian Music* 17 1985, 22
- <sup>5</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song", University of Texas at Austin 2000
- <sup>6</sup> Diane Singerman, "Avenues of participation: family, politics, and networks in urban quarters of Cairo", Princeton University Press 1995, 31-32
- <sup>7</sup> Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other", University of Texas Press 1995, 103-105
- <sup>8</sup> Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other", University of Texas Press 1995, 106
- <sup>9</sup> Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other", University of Texas Press 1995, 128
- <sup>10</sup> Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other", University of Texas Press 1995, 110
- <sup>11</sup> Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other", University of Texas Press 1995, 132-133
- <sup>12</sup> Fatima Mernissi, "Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood", Perseus Books 1994, 104-105
- <sup>13</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song", University of Texas at Austin 2000
- <sup>14</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song", University of Texas at Austin 2000
- <sup>15</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song", University of Texas at Austin 2000
- <sup>16</sup> Fedwa Malti-Dougllass, "Woman's Body, Woman's World: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing", Princeton University Press 1991
- <sup>17</sup> Fedwa Malti-Dougllass, "Woman's Body, Woman's World: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing", Princeton University Press 1991
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