

## **'Now We Get It': Ukrainian Perception of Belly Dance as Colonial Practice**

When it comes to debates on the belly dance colonial legacy, Ukrainian belly dance community used to struggle with acknowledging their practice as the colonialism product. However, the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 and direct experience of land occupation brought the decolonisation discourse to the unprecedented level in Ukraine. For Ukrainian belly dancers, recognizing themselves as current victims of Russian imperialism helped to shift their perception of belly dance as culturally appropriated practice and prompted small acts of solidarity, such as deleting one's own dance videos misrepresenting indigenous cultures or abandoning the label 'tribal' in the style name. At the same time, after the recent Israeli-Palestinian escalation multiple Ukrainian belly dancers, despite being engaged into Arabic culture through their dance practice, preferred to support Israel as a representative of the 'civilised West' against 'barbarians'.

The ambiguous situation in which Ukrainian belly dance community finds itself (longing for solidarity with oppressed cultures but at the same time preferring to be associated with the 'civilised West') can be extrapolated on the whole post-war Ukrainian society. Through the series of interviews with Ukrainian belly dancers and social media ethnography, this research analyses patterns of mental mapping and categories' construction, such as Us/Others, Civilised/Barbarians, West/East, using the example of belly dance in Ukrainian context. Particular focus falls on fusion belly dance as a style variation often detached (or, as one might say, 'sanitized') from its MENACA origins and therefore even more exposed to the East/West speculations.

Keywords: fusion belly dance, othering, decolonisation, East/West, Ukraine