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# Unmasking Hybridity in Popular Performance

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# Unmasking Hybridity in Popular Performance

## **Abstract**

This paper explores cultural hybridization in popular music and the eroticization of the exotic eastern aesthetic. Using musicology and anthropology as tools, the paper examines varying perspectives of the artists, audience and marginalized groups. Although cultural appropriation has been used recently as a blanket buzzword in mainstream dialogue, it does provide a platform to discuss complex issues on gender, race and sexuality that has been muddled by colonial mentalities.

## **Keywords**

orientalism, appropriation, music, Beyonce

## **Disciplines**

East Asian Languages and Societies | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Musicology | Social and Cultural Anthropology

## **Comments**

Written as a senior capstone in Anthropology.

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## Unmasking Hybridity in Popular Performance

### **Introduction**

Beyoncé, Selena Gomez and Madonna are well-known artists in contemporary popular culture who have intentionally appropriated Eastern motifs for various goals in their music careers. Whether through music, fashion or performance, they have utilized cultural elements as a way to set apart their personal brands. At the same time, there is an increased awareness surrounding cultural borrowing and appropriation in mainstream discourse. Concerns surrounding appropriation have created a contested space in which the artist's individual expression of femininity seems to hinge on stereotyping the Eastern "Other". This paper explores the tensions between two approaches to cross-cultural musical borrowing: celebrations of hybridity versus accusations of appropriation. This paper will demonstrate how Western musicians in American popular music have appropriated musical motifs from India and the Middle East in their work. As examples, it will examine the use of cultural appropriation by popular artists Beyoncé and Selena Gomez, and their respective songs "Naughty Girl" as well as "Come & Get It."

Globalization and its technological changes have made the appropriation of sounds easier than ever. Several scholars have explored cultural exchange and the harmful aspects of appropriation through the lens of not only anthropology, but also musicology and anthropology. In his work "Domesticating Otherness: The Snake

Charmer in American Popular Culture” (2012), the ethnomusicologist A.J. Racy explores Orientalist, musical tropes in American culture. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in his book *Modernity at Large* (2000) looks at the disjointed nature of global culture. Similarly, Appadurai’s work alludes to cultural hybridization and the mixing and reconfiguring of elements from different cultural traditions. In her work “So Contagious: Hybridity and Subcultural Exchange in Hip-Hop's Use of Indian Samples” (2015), Sarah Hankins discusses hybridity in the use of Eastern samples in hip-hop music. Finally, Sunaina Maira looks at the expression of whiteness and femininity through familiar orientalist tropes in her work “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire” (2012). All works relate to questions of hybridity in music as well as the acts and processes surrounding it. Using similar contemporary approaches, musicologist Steven Feld, in his work *Music Grooves* (1994), has helped to critically analyze “world music,” a genre that is defined as being separate from the music of Europe and North America. Feld explores the concept of *schizophonia*, which is meant to hone in on the process and implications of removing sounds from their original contexts.

An example of schizophonia can be heard in Beyoncé’s “Naughty Girl,” released in 2003, in which one can hear a distinctive flute melody playing a Middle Eastern scale. Mainly, scalar motion that sounds foreign to Western audiences. Juxtaposed with the vocalist’s breathy tone and sexually explicit lyrics, the music transports one to a fantastical and alluring world. The creative layering of vocals provides us with an almost aural harem, adding to the mystical world in which “Naughty Girl” exists. Showing similar aesthetic choices, Selena Gomez released her single “Come and Get It” in 2013, which features an Indian tabla drum throughout.

Today, the success of the American pop star is one that relies on the highly sexualized performativity of the women in the mass-produced music industry. In our current image-based culture, female artists boost their sex appeal through their music, dance and other visual expressions of femininity. Both Gomez and Beyoncé view their debut works as being fantastical as well as more mature, which they derive from the music itself. For the Western conscience, the sexuality expressed in these songs seem to be inherently tied to the exotic sounds that deviate from the expected Western textures, timbres, and scales. A “snake charmer theme,” or musical motif, ties itself to the image of belly dancers and harems. This unconscious perception has truly become a cultural fact in the Western mind due to a complex history of varying processes. Wooden flute and drum sounds evoke romantic feelings of the past while a scale built with curious augmentations can create a sensual fantasy to the Western listener.

Analysis of musical hybridity and the meanings associated with non-Western sounds is important to anthropological research because aesthetic preferences and meanings are imprinted through enculturation. Although syncretic cultural forms are ubiquitous, globalization and modernity have blurred these paths of exchange and created ambiguous lines of intersection. As a result, analyzing uneven power structures and their effects on collective attitudes has become increasingly relevant. This paper analyzes the musical elements that evoke exoticism and how the performativity of the artists reinforce it. The stance that the artists take on hybridity in their music sheds light on the way a unique, yet contrived, pop-star image is crafted. The audience, too, provides perspectives on the art and its implications. This information is found in video clips of interviews,

performances, and online comments. Finally, blog posts and articles that condemn the appropriative actions provide plentiful data.

Popular music is a fairly new phenomenon that has emerged in modernity. The analysis surrounding it has been set forth by sociologists, cultural theorists and some musicologists. However, a modern ethnomusicological perspective should approach issues surrounding popular music with an interdisciplinary lens that incorporate anthropological perspectives. Delineating different musical elements and how they express different cultures is musicological. Due to the blending of various cultural attitudes and appropriation of the Other, an ethnomusicological approach to popular music can help unpack different influences and intended meanings. After all, music is not an indisputably godly creation. “Musical judgments can never be dismissed as subjective; neither can they ever be celebrated as objective” (Walser 2003: 23). In his approach to the analysis of popular music, Robert Walser argues for a culturally relevant investigation of popular music: “In the end, I am arguing for a more anthropological conception of culture in popular music studies, a stronger sense of history...and a conception of analysis that is self-reflexive about methods and goals, tactical rather than absolute, less interested in describing or legitimating than in understanding how music works and why people care about it” (38). This paper will not attempt to analyze the songs from a strictly musicological perspective, but will show how the more obvious elements support anthropological insights into gendered, Western expression and the attitudes towards the Other. Based on this approach, I argue that investigating the responses to the music by the performer and the audience is an anthropological exercise that gives insight into the different sides implicated in cultural borrowing or hybridization.

Before approaching appropriation in the work of Beyoncé and Selena Gomez, it is necessary to outline how Orientalism has persisted in popular culture and been used to navigate sexuality, femininity, and multicultural anxieties. Exploring this historical context, as Robert Walser suggests, can reveal the complexity of modern issues. I will then explore contemporary theoretical issues on hybridity, culture and the diffusion of modern realities. This will show the extent to which agency and individuality play a role in the process of creating popular music. Finally, I will analyze specific songs by Beyoncé and Selena Gomez to demonstrate the disparate realities of Western and non-Western women. Analyzing the reception of the music will help to explore this idea further and show how certain symbols and images continue to hold meaning, on the one hand for Western audiences, and on the other hand for the marginalized cultures.

### **Orientalism in Music: A Historical Perspective**

All timbres, melodic lines, textures and sounds were developed in a particular cultural milieu that harbor various connotations. At the same time, musical elements have always been exchanged and appropriated cross-culturally. However, colonialism and capitalist narratives have stained these exchanges by stripping certain groups of power. The formality of Western music has cemented a firm hierarchy in which the calculated and symmetrical musical form of the West holds higher status than the indigenous, oral traditions of the non-Western world. Traditions, including music, were appropriated within the colonial context and as a result the sounds were and continue to be marked as being part of the Other. Thus, the appropriated sounds have come to serve as marked ornaments to the dominant, Western form. This is how Western art music through the 17th and 19th centuries created motivic forms that not only depicted the Orient as exotic,

but also evoked certain feelings and therefore meanings associated with the “East” that persist to the present day. American artists producing popular music eagerly incorporated Oriental sounds to convey the exotic, sexualized essence attached to those sounds.

Edward Said’s 1978 work, *Orientalism*, is integral to understanding the “Othering” of Arab and Eastern music. *Orientalism* examined ways in which knowledge of the Arab world was produced by the West and exhibited self-conscious biases. Said’s work was the first of its kind to unveil the seemingly unwavering notions of Western imperialism that stood as enlightened truth. Daniel Martin Varisco, in his work *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation*, (2005: 157) explains how the Other was created and silenced by the West here: "In his influential *Orientalism*" and later "*Covering Islam*," Edward Said argued that a hegemonic discourse of Orientalism pervaded academic and popular discourse to such an extent that Muslims and other Eastern cultures were not allowed permission to “narrate their own stories or determine their own destinies” (157). This shows how Orientalist rhetoric dictates the representation of the Middle East through the perpetuation of stereotypes and essentialized imagery.

This paper hones in on the sexualizing and exoticizing of the perceived Orient in Western understanding. This sexualization stemmed from the imagination of the West in its objectification of Eastern women. Varisco blames the eroticization of the Orient on "the medievally Orientalist dichotomy of an Islamic preoccupation with sex in contrast to a Judeo-Christian/Western concern for religious devotion” (Varisco 2005: 100). The Western perception of the Islamic world as being full of harems and veiled women stood in contrast to Christendom’s sexual asceticism and repression. This dichotomy between



the West and the East was cemented in ideas of morality versus profanity as well as other marginalizing sentiments.

The authority of Europe over the East stemmed from a long history of Western domination that includes the structure of music. In his work “Musical Belongings” (2000), Richard Middleton unpacks this authority of Western music. The Enlightenment marked the eighteenth century with obsessions of rationality and truth. Western music was treated as autonomous and considered to be true representation (60). Musical motifs became small moments of meaning that could express moods, people, and landscapes. The sophisticated system that is Western music developed a complex labyrinth of codes that were constructed through structure, melody, timbre, and rhythm. This created a way in which semiotic difference could be immediately portrayed. It also created an Other in its treatment of folk, foreign or popular music. The seemingly autonomous Western musical form facilitated alienation by creating difference, which then made it possible to depict the Other.

In her work “Race, Orientalism, and Distinction” (2000), Jann Pasler shows how Orientalism in the Romantic era became its own Western musical language through the discovery of the East. When Western ears first experienced Indian music, they found themselves inspired by the unfamiliar scales and textures (88). She describes how these sounds allowed more compositional creativity. This included the use of melismas, drones and divergent textures and orchestrations, often utilizing woodwinds and strings. The modal nature of Indian music was most attractive to Western composers in creating a newfound excitement through musical variance. Indian music also evoked intense feelings for Western musicians through the new ways to create tension. Melismatic

singing, for instance, dwells on one syllable as many notes are sung. This creates a longer period of tension before resolution. This feeling can also be created with an unwavering drone that is much more indicative of a trance-inducing ritual, as opposed to the goal-oriented Western compositional style. Based on the heightened difference between Western and Eastern sonorities, Pasler goes on to say that, “Many French composers looked to India as symbolic of “seduction, intoxication and loss of self” (Pasler 2000: 88). The exotic music no doubt provided feelings of liberation from the self that, to the dualistic mind of Christendom, were equated with feelings of seduction and eroticism.

While there are many Orientalist operas and symphonic works to choose from, *Salome* by Richard Strauss provides a 20<sup>th</sup> century example that encapsulates a matrix of weighted aesthetics. Based on a biblical story full of sexual desire and murder, it was highly controversial in its time. The most infamous scene shows Salome performing the Dance of the Seven Veils for Herod. Embodying dangerous female lust, Salome entraps and entices the male gaze by stripping down her veils on stage as the woodwind section increases this sexual tension by throwing off impulsive chromatic blips alongside lengthier declamations. This sexualization and demonization of Salome in her seductive entrapment is prominent in Western ideas today. Female sexuality is to be feared for its power, yet also harnessed for the male gaze. The imagery of the mysterious belly dance marries the medium of sound and image into one hyperreal package that stands as a modern cliché.

American style belly dancing emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Western audiences became interested in the exotic performance as well as the music associated with it. This phenomenon was presented in the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, which

attracted thousands. The belly dancers' performance shocked the Victorian sensibilities, which was then exaggerated by the West in order to heighten its sexuality and fit into the Western cabaret style of dance (Maira 2008: 332). Later on, belly dancing grew in popularity after the second wave of feminism embraced the idea of "...the body as a site of pleasure and discovery" (323). Even at this time, the highly sexualized, Americanized dance was seen as objectifying by some feminists. The dance, in turn, perpetuated the idea of the hypersexual, Eastern woman. Today, the appropriative act of belly dancing perpetuates the idea of an individualized femininity through its focus on the difference between the veiled, Arab woman and the liberated, Western woman (340).

In the eighteenth century, Eastern music became associated with certain images, such as the snake charmer and the belly dancer, generating meanings that have remained to this day. In his work, "Domesticating Otherness: The Snake Charmer in American Popular Culture," A.J. Racy explores how the Orientalist notions of the Middle East have been packaged and heavily commodified in American popular culture. He first asks how the Western mind can acquire a nostalgic attitude for a locally produced musical model that becomes synonymous with the fantasy of belly dancers and snake charmers (Racy 2016: 198). Racy explains that appropriation occurs when "...the borrowed theme resonates with the appropriator's historical experiences and cultural worldviews" (199). Western attitudes created an Orientalist other that has the magical ability to charm snakes; this idea then circulated through images in media as well as the attached sounds. Traditional Middle Eastern scales and instruments evoke a sense of difference and exoticism that brings about a sense of timelessness associated with the Orient.

Racy goes further to connect Orientalist ideas to Western thought processes. The serpent refers not only to Jungian ideas of “libido and sexuality,” but also complex ideas relating to darkness and the beginning of things (Racy 2016: 200). This obsession with primitive and timeless feelings facilitates the West’s fascination the East. The primordial and sexualized idea of the snake creates a similarly sexualized Orient. “The snake (the temptress, the seductive harem, the sinuous nude figure, the female coming out of a basket, like Venus rising from a shell) may charm the flute (the phallus, the male, the snake charmer). Such directional fluidity contributes to the metaphoric versatility of the snake charming theme” (210). Here Racy explores how the disjointed images of the Orient pervade the West and can act in many ways that serve the dominant party’s imagination and nostalgic desires.

The fluidity of the orientalist metaphor means that simple melodic and musical themes inspired by the Middle East can evoke a myriad of images and feelings. Using stereotypes and conflating the Orient into one mysterious and exotic space helped to continue the Western colonial stronghold over the East. To belittle the subordinate and exotic culture, it was also feminized and sexualized by the West. This feminization of the Other served to create a mystical and sexualized image that exists in Western representations of the generalized East. Simple melodic ideas that represented the Middle East became representative of both South Asia and the Arab world, clumping countries into the vague category of the Orient (Racy 2016: 207). These melodic fragments also stood as a complex mesh of mystery and sex. It is clear that Orientalism persists today; “Toxic” by Britney Spears, “Naughty Girl” by Beyoncé, “Come & Get It” by Selena Gomez and “Buttons” by the Pussycat Dolls all sound similar in their exotic

ornamentations, although exhibit sonorities present in both the Arab world and India. The point is that it does not matter what the country of origin is; the countries belonging to the “East” are collapsed into a single stereotype and therefore the songs themselves support de-localized ideas of dance and sexuality through the inclusion of “exotic” sounds.

In her chapter on Race, Orientalism and Distinction, Pasler examines two French composers, Maurice Delage and Albert Roussel, in their treatment of exotic musical themes extracted from India. The author explains how the composers’ use of Indian sounds was not intended as exercises in colonial domination, but rather attempts to explore the transcendental attraction of the East through its music (Pasler 2000: 108). Using Indian music as inspiration, both nineteenth century French composers utilized the influence as a means to achieve distinction in their first major work. This idea of commodifying exotic appeals for an individualistic purpose is important to the way this paper approaches Selena Gomez and Beyoncé and their works. We see how, similar to popular music today, the colonial structures are evident but are not tied to the desires of personal expression. Beyoncé and Gomez may not have malicious intent by appropriating Orientalist and Indian themes, but are still exploiting the idea of the Eastern other for their own individuality. Romantic composers as well as contemporary, popular artists appropriate the distinctive sounds of the East as a means of defining difference and to garner attention in their first major work.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In current scholarly discourse on world music, a debate has emerged that views musical borrowing in two different ways. The first is a positive, if not celebratory focus on creativity and human agency that allows many new opportunities for growth and

exploration in this global era. This perspective views cultural hybridization as a positive factor in globalization. The second perspective sees hybridity as an empty term, which actively ignores the unequal power dynamics within global exchanges. This has led to the use of a new term, “cultural appropriation,” which highlights the idea that cultural forms are often taken, if not stolen, by Western artists without acknowledging the original culture. Additionally, cultural appropriation often engages in negative stereotyping of the origin culture. Furthermore, in the highly commodified sphere of popular culture, the profits of performance are not shared with the origin culture.

Examining the first view, this pastiche of sounds and appropriation of a remote culture is truly a facet of modernity. However, the intricate trading of ideas and technology was made more complex through colonialism. Arjun Appadurai explores how European colonial powers created a disjunctive modernity. “The intricate and overlapping set of Eurocolonial worlds...set the basis for a permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood, which created the imagined communities (From Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983) of recent nationalisms throughout the world” (Appadurai 1990: 28). While colonial powers constructed the West’s perceptions of the Orient, popular culture perpetuated them through mass media. Appadurai describes the world climate as being “...schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other.” (Appadurai 1990: 29). The rootless nature of modern cultures can be explored through both the Americanization of the globe as well as nativist and indigenous movements that address local peoples’ desires and fears concerning these global flows.

Appadurai explores one of these flows, which is particularly important for the study of hybridity in music. This is the flow that he calls *mediascapes* (Appadurai 1996: 35). This term refers to the landscape of imagery that is produced and distributed through film, newspapers, magazines, and television. Mediascapes are often complex narratives that differ depending on the producers, audience and means of creation. The large repertoire of images, narratives, and music affect the consumer and serve to blur lines between what is fictional and real. This observation is pertinent to my analysis of musical elements because, although mediascapes are heavily image-based, music has been affected similarly by global exchanges; sounds can exist as clichés to evoke tiresome tropes. In *Salome*, Orientalist motifs stressed the eroticization of the woman and the East through the music as well as the visually appreciable dance on the stage.

Building on Appadurai's ideas about cultural flows and mediascapes, some academics view appropriation as a uniquely hybrid act of identity building and creative expression. Sarah Hankins, an ethnomusicologist who focuses on African diasporic music aims for a friendlier perspective on the adoption of Eastern sounds. Her article, "So Contagious: Hybridity and Subcultural Exchange in Hip-Hop's Use of Indian Samples" (2011) explores how South Asian and Middle Eastern sounds have been utilized and sampled within popular music. The American hip-hop scene in the '90s borrowed from India by incorporating Bollywood and Bhangra dance music. Hankins argues that Missy Elliot's song, "Get Ur Freak On," is not so much a neo-orientalist work, as it is an exploration into identity and hybridity of sounds (194). The artist's producer, Timbaland, has been a pioneer in finding new global sounds for the genre and prides himself on adding freshness to hip-hop through sampling (201). Since hip-hop exists as a modern

expression of black pastiche art, it stands as a minority culture in reference to global politics. Hankins argues that white purveyors of dominant culture have the power to appropriate and perpetuate stereotypes while hip-hop stand separate from the unequal power dynamics. “African Americans are a minority group and, in a broad sense, a diasporic one; in this light, their creative production is distinct from that of a hegemonic Western popular culture” (Hankins 2011: 194). Hankins goes on to say that hybridity in hip-hop music embodies a third space that exists in its own right as it attempts to inform and connect black diasporic identity (195).

To add further nuance to the analysis of hybridity, Charles Keil and Steven Feld, in their work, *Music Grooves*, explore the role of modern and popular music and its disjointed representation. Feld puts forth the concept of *schizophonia*, which conveys the split between an original sound and its “electroacoustical transmission or reproduction” (Feld 1994: 258). The author explores this topic through questions of consumption, authenticity and commodification. He focuses on world music and discourse surrounding hybridity and unequal power dynamics. He writes, “Such perspectives, drawing on the more normative conceptualization of a world in creolization, risk confusing the flow of musical contents and musical expansion with the flow of power relations. Even if local musicians take control in remote locales, how progressive can the world of popular music be when the practices of a transnational culture industry steadfastly reproduce the forms and forces of domination that keep outsiders outside, as “influences” and laborers in the production of pop?” (263). Feld offers a complex view of hybridity, advocating for a more critical look at inequities in the exchange of ideas and the power relations behind it. First he demonstrates how syncretic musical forms are inevitable, although not



necessarily synonymous with unequal power dynamics. He then describes the influence of remote musicians as lacking in power to show that they can never truly be equal contributors in a world where they are only used as influencers of the music industry. This helps to shed light on the use of Eastern sounds in popular music and how using the music is problematic in itself, and not just problematic for perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

One such stereotype echoing through our current mediascape, not only bombards our culture with stereotypes of the Orient, but also informs personal politics and identity. Sunaina Maira, in her work, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” explores appropriation through the white adoption of belly dancing. Through focusing on the dance, Maira explores how white identity is formed through the appropriation of the stereotyped other, similar to musical borrowing. Sunaina Mara explores how Oriental attitudes towards the East have become a part of contemporary, Western attitudes towards femininity. In order to understand this process, she interviewed white, American belly dancers and asked how they perceived the act. Maira explores how belly dancing in the U.S. acts as a site for the “mobilization” of whiteness that works to differentiate American femininity from the perceived Arab or Muslim femininities (Maira 2008: 318). She describes the dance as being seductive not only in its visual allure, but because it helps liberal Americans adopt a modern form of Orientalism that can easily ignore the violence of the U.S. in the Middle East (340). In this way, adoption of the Eastern aesthetic works to augment liberal femininity into a worldly exploration of sexual liberation that distances itself and conflates Muslim femininity into one that is veiled and

oppressed. Belly dancing expands the American woman's identity at the cost of Muslim women.

In her interviews with American belly dancers, Maira presents their attraction to the dance as stemming from the spiritual and feminine qualities associated with it, rather than an affinity for multiculturalism (Maira 2008: 327). After 9/11, there was a fear amongst the belly dancing community that they would be seen as "Middle East sympathizers" (328). However, curiosity towards the exotic held more weight than fear, as stars such as Shakira started to incorporate belly dancing into their musical performances. One dancer called this "the Shakira factor," pointing to a sense of hybridity. "There is a lot of Spanish/Arabic fusion in belly dancing; I think the two cultures work very well together. They are both passionate, fiery people" (329). This shows how multiculturalism in the U.S. is informed through exoticism. The stereotype of the spicy Middle East is only desirable as a means to support Western culture and add substance that is perceived to be missing from it. This is further complicated considering the American fears of the Middle East. According to Maira, the American consumption of belly dancing helps to reconcile individuals to the imperial role of the U.S. and its occupation in the Middle East (Maira 2008: 334).

Mainstream, female artists may not be concerned with how belly-dancing music facilitates or hinders political reconciliation, but still appropriate Eastern sounds to enhance their marketable image. With the backdrop of the Orient, they can portray themselves as presenters of a liberal sense of femininity in which the Western woman stands opposed to the veiled and seemingly oppressed Muslim woman. Music is then used as a sort of Arab-face for an exotic aesthetic that perpetuates stereotypes of Middle

Eastern or South Asian women. This complex phenomenon of voyeurism and exhibitionism displays the West's ambivalence towards their own culture. Appropriating symbols and themes from the Other helps to alleviate anxieties towards their own culture as lacking in community and cultural meaning. Consuming and appropriating other cultures allows for a multicultural image of the U.S. that aims to transcend this modern, capitalist culture (Maira 2008: 334).

Virinder S. Kalra and John Hutnyk in their work "Brimful of Agitation, Authenticity and Appropriation: Madonna's 'Asian Kool'" (1998) are also hesitant to praise cultural borrowing of the East, as the culture is often consumed to provide a sense of coolness. The work explores more generally the appropriation of South Asian symbols by looking at the Beatles' use of the sitar as well as Madonna's use of Indian symbols for spiritual and musical growth. The authors state that "...these acts are all too readily classified and categorized in terms of hybridity and 'newness' reflecting a ravenous desire for fantasy version of the other" (341). The authors argue that embracing hybridity in many cases is often a veiled attempt at capitalist exploitation of Western fantasies. For example, Madonna's entrance into motherhood has spurred her interest in Kabbalah and Buddhism, citing Sanskrit passages in her songs and performing in Eastern inspired outfits complete with bindis and appropriative attempts at traditional dance (343). Kalra and Hutnyk conclude that the attention that Madonna can bring towards India does not actually reconfigure political or ideological attitudes or alleviate anxieties towards such a racialized group (345).

Kalra and Hutnyk also look at this process in terms of authenticity and appropriation. By circulating images of India as a land of spirituality, the world can

continue to ignore the country's complex makeup as a modern, technologically excelling country that suffers from elite exploitation and stratification (Hutnyk & Kalra 1998: 346). Although Madonna embodies the colonial symbol of white privilege transcending national boundaries, it is the fault of the music industry for circulating such symbols for profit. The music itself exists as a syncretic creation, but the power dynamics behind the production spur critiques concerning unequal cultural exchange and appropriation.

In Hutnyk's critiques on hybridity, the author stresses the importance of appropriation as a way to soothe Western anxieties concerning colonialism and its modern counterpart, globalization. "It is my argument, however, that syncretism and hybridity are academic conceptual tools providing an alibi for lack of attention to politics, in a project designed to manage the cultural consequences of colonization and globalization" (Hutnyk 2005: 92). While syncretic forms are to be expected in music, the emphasis on selling hybridity shows the preferential treatment of multiculturalism over unequal power dynamics. John Hutnyk uses London as an example of how a cosmopolitan city can relish in multiculturalism while the problems of the working class are ignored. He states: "...hybridity is recruited to remake London as the multicultural capital, dining out on its mixed cuisine (expensive venues, underpaid and undocumented service staff) and its multiracial vibe (hints of danger, licentious scenes)" (95). The elements of the Other are employed to add symbolic value to the city, which strips the appropriated culture the ability to speak for itself. In other words, the East is cannibalized for the sake of Western excitement.

Kristin McGee explores Orientalist tropes in her work, "Orientalism and Erotic Multiculturalism in Popular Culture" (2012). McGee discusses the success of the group,

the Pussycat Dolls, which was due in part to their popularizing of a new raunchy music genre coupled with the allure of the racially ambiguous women in the group (McGee 2012: 211). Through this approach, their image became highly sexualized, almost a female counterpart to the hypermasculine hip-hop scene. This is exemplified in the lyrics and music video for the song “Buttons.” The women dance a burlesque-like show to emphasize the erotic undertones, which are also supported by exotic sounds. McGee showcases the Orientalist nature of the musical phrases in the song, tracing the scales to those popularized by nineteenth century French composers in their Western portrayal of the East (224). McGee also compares the thick string texture to that which was used by the wildly popular Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum (224). The use of these strings shows that the decision to evoke an Arab sound through texture, melody and timbre, is similar to Beyoncé’s song “Naughty Girl” and an intentional use of musical clichés.

These songs are just one example of the original European Orientalism that later became integral to the American fantasy of belly dance. In McGee’s opinion, modern American culture celebrates Orientalism as a form of cultural hybridity as opposed to understanding the complexity of Orientalism’s growth. “Simulated images of belly dancers situated in mass contexts point to Baudrillard’s hyper reality, where the Orient – a product of the Empire’s imagination – is superseded by postmodernism’s beloved hybridity” (234). Thus, the Orient has become a hyperrealistic part of Western imagination that conflates sexualized images such as the belly dancer that can also be evoked through sound. Before “Buttons,” the theme associated with snake charming circulated excessively in media. Nowadays, it still holds similar ideas and metaphors, although seems to be condensed by popular culture into a Shakira style erotic

multiculturalism. Although this melodic cliché can stand on its own as a signifier for the East, the attachment of a female pop star perpetuates a hypersexual, belly dancing reality.

### **Agency & Perspectives in Musicking**

Before proceeding to analyze the work of Beyoncé and Selena Gomez, we must conceptualize their work and acknowledge that, as artists who appropriate Eastern sounds, they follow in the footsteps of other artists. Sarah Hankins's work (2011) examines the work of different artists that sample sounds of the East in their music. She mentions hip-hop artists such as Missy Elliott and Jay-Z and their use of South Asian or Middle Eastern samples. Kristin McGee looks at the appropriation of Middle Eastern tropes in the Pussycat Dolls's song, "Buttons." In addition to these artists, there are many other Western musicians that appropriate sounds from the East for different aesthetic or personal goals. Before delving into my analysis of the work of Beyoncé and Selena Gomez, this section will provide examples of other artists and producers who borrow Eastern musical elements. The artists known as Sarah Brightman and Timbaland both show evidence of questionably Orientalist acts, although they may approach it in creatively different ways.

The English vocalist, Sarah Brightman, holds international fame for being both a "powerhouse soprano" as well as a "backlit pop princess" (Phillips 2003). Similar to Beyoncé, she is a virtuosic singer, albeit mostly classically centered. In 2003, she released her eighth studio album titled *Harem* that is described by the magazine, *Bay Windows*, as being a "Middle Eastern-flavored release guaranteed to only add to her worldwide tally of 15-million albums sold" (Phillips 2003). As a musician with an already large following, Brightman can easily incorporate new flavors or themes to keep

her audience intrigued. Similar to Beyoncé's comments on "Naughty Girl," Brightman describes her album as being a "fantasy record" (Phillips 2003). Brightman even says: "it means forbidden place if you translate it. It's in your imagination, but you don't really go there. You maybe don't want to go there, but it's a mystical place. It's ancient. People have journeyed there and come back changed." Being a white, British woman, this quote feels like a regurgitation of nostalgic colonial narratives. She is also quoted saying, "I don't think in political terms. I don't have anything to say about that. I don't know enough about it. I love art. I love culture. I've always felt very integrated in many different cultures because of how I've been brought up and how I've lived." Sarah Brightman describes her new album in a traditionally Orientalist way that incorporates a modern love for exotic multiculturalism. By banking on racist tropes of the East, Brightman is guilty of being an old school artsy elite. The fact that this album is presented as apolitical relieves it of tensions and allows it to be enticing in its ambient timelessness. This attitude is also clear in the video and music for her single, "Harem."

The song "Harem" begins with an excessively cinematic orchestra, percussive sounds, and light flute noises that push Middle Eastern musical tropes down the aural canal. There is an irregular drumbeat at the forefront of the sound as the strings play modal exoticisms quietly behind the percussion. Irregular drumbeats are evocative of the Orient on their own, as they deviate from what is considered normal in Western rhythmic construction. No one is free from Sarah Brightman's subconscious terrorism that conjures images of Arabian Nights, belly dancers and Aladdin.

The visuals for the music video do not leave much to the imagination. One is immediately bombarded with obscure angles of Sarah Brightman's form moving

mysteriously as she waves her arms fluidly. This pans between shots of camels roaming in the distance and Brightman's highly ornate costume. Coupled with the deliberate exoticism in the music, it leaves the audience with a contemporary version of something from a nineteenth century opera house. Brightman is, after all, a classically trained soprano; she exercises her training in music history and theory all too well.

Brightman obviously had a vision for her album seen in the title and her love for the nostalgic, classical exploration. Brightman's romantic aesthetic seems to differ from that of the American artists that help produce music for Beyoncé or Selena Gomez. Still, they all show similar creations of difference through appropriation.

One popular method of cultural borrowing is sampling. The art of sampling or looping sounds inspired or taken from different locales shows a modern way to create and express personal and artistic goals. For example, a famous producer, Timbaland, has worked with many prestigious artists like Beyoncé and enjoys incorporating worldly sounds. He is well known and considered an important and creative musician in the world of hip-hop production. One article even describes him as a way to save hip-hop, as his efforts contributed greatly to bringing the genre into the mainstream (Greenberg 2012). His 2015 memoir titled *The Emperor of Sound* explores the life of "one of the most innovative music producers working today" (Timbaland & Chambers 2015). While most of the book features the life of the producer and his career in the music industry, it gives insight into how the musician views his music-producing process and how he views his role as an innovator in the industry. "...I wanted to blend sounds together in surprising ways to create music and sets that would be a little familiar to everyone, but also have that element of being brand-new at the very same time" (29). This quote alludes to not



only his creative vision, but also how sampling and the adoption of different sounds are utilized to explore creative boundaries as a way to stand out in the mass-produced music industry. “Trying to chart my influences is like trying to pinpoint the origin of a cell phone signal ...the signal ricochets all over the world from Virginia Beach to Kingston, Jamaica from Kingston to Toronto from Toronto to Tokyo. And it’s still moving. You couldn’t box it up and put a label on it if you wanted to...” Timbaland explains his different, worldly, interests and how it makes his music unique.

Timbaland goes on to stress his individuality and thus importance in such a banalized world of music. "Me, I'm a complete alien...Jay-Z is an alien ... shucks, Lil Wayne's an alien. You don't have a lot of aliens in the world. You've got a lot of half-humans, you've got a lot of humans on the Earth transforming into aliens, you know what I'm saying?" This quote not only demonstrates the importance of unique virtuosity that is desired in hip-hop but how a strong focus on identity is often a major force behind producing. Jay-Z, Lil Wayne, and Timbaland are all unique outsiders, which directly relates to their role as important pioneers in the music industry. This supports Sarah Hankins’ idea that sampling and mixing in hip-hop music is a way to creatively explore identity and individuality in the music world. It also exemplifies how the production of synthetic sounds by producers such as Timbaland is a creative process and not simply a modern art devoid of personality or meaning.

On the other hand, Timbaland’s music rarely speaks for solely himself. As a producer, Timbaland is responsible for crafting the atmosphere and meaning for stars such as Madonna and Beyoncé. In his book, Timbaland discussed writing a song with Madonna in which she was direct in her desires for her new song. “I want some hot shit”

is the first quote provided by the artist (Timbaland & Chambers 2015: 194). Timbaland mentions that he was surprised that Madonna was a hard worker who was so hands-on in her production process. The song “4 Minutes” that Timbaland produced for Madonna was inspired by her recent trip to Africa and how the experience changed her. Timbaland describes how he approached crafting such a “hot” song by trying to show “a sense of urgency.” He goes on to say that he layered the song with “elements of classic funk songs” as well as “some of my favorite entries from my catalog of sounds: bhangra beats, foghorns, ticking clocks and cowbells.” His unique pastiche of percussive and international sounds in the music is a popular contemporary approach. The producer shows transparency here, in that he lists the sonorities he put together for this song as a means to show that he satisfied Madonna, who believed the track to be a defining direction for her artistic vision. Madonna happily received the song for its upbeat urgency and allusion to her spiritual growth stemming from outside worlds. The production of this particular song shows that the creation of popular music is a curious process that changes depending on the artist or producer.

Although the production process is usually unclear compared to the more apparent marketing of the artist, it is not difficult to determine who holds the authority in the production of specific songs. For instance, Beyoncé has proudly proclaimed that she was able to work with the popular Scott Storch on her song “Naughty Girl,” while Selena Gomez cites her Norwegian producers Stargate for helping craft her new sound. Producing music and sampling requires talent in itself, as the mixing of the sounds is seen as virtuosic. “Naughty Girl,” for example, was produced by Scott Storch and is considered to be one of his best beats characterized by a creative blend of reggae,

dancehall and Middle Eastern melodies. As a producer, Storch not only mashes up different sounds, as many would think, but uses MIDI technology to create his own orchestrations of a full-string orchestra, flute, and drumbeat through an electric piano. The Kashmir-esque melodic motion comes from Storch's own conception of creating Arab sounding nostalgia through his own ideas of what sounds Middle Eastern.

On the other hand, Stargate's sampling is much more transparent. This is because the Bollywood song and its original context are clear from the beginning of "Come & Get It." Although Stargate can still be virtuosic in their mixing and sampling of the Bollywood song, it shows how Scott Storch in "Naughty Girl" included a more intentional composition of an exotic melody. Although the techniques vary, both producers appropriate from different cultures' aesthetics. Regardless of the producers' intentions or methods, they are obviously integral to the production of not only Beyoncé and Gomez's sounds, but the creation of their image.

### **Undressing Beyoncé's "Naughty Girl"**

Beyoncé's song "Naughty Girl" reinforces the sexualized nature of Orientalist tropes not only in recording, but also in performance practice. The song begins with a funky guitar loop underneath a high-pitched orchestra hit. The background melody of the strings underneath Beyoncé's vocals provides the listener with the general ambience of the song. The strings intone a melody that will feel mysterious to any Western listener. This is due to the crafting of the scale with steps between notes that are unfamiliar in traditional forms of Western music. The movement between two tones in the scale has space between it, or an augmented second interval, which evokes a sense of the exotic. There is also much movement between chromatic notes, which seems exotic due to the

sense of improvisation and ornamentation. This accompaniment is not only in the string melodies, but also in a short, ornamented theme played by a hollow sounding wind instrument throughout the song. The high, drawn out vocals of Beyoncé add to the exotic aesthetic, as her voice lingers on the words and the sexual tension increases through her high, breathy delivery. All these musical aspects, save for the bass line, show an intended Orientalist sound.

In her 2003 interview on Oprah, Beyoncé discusses her debut album *Dangerously In Love*, focusing in particular on her single “Naughty Girl” (Dayenne 2012). The artist expresses how her first solo album was intended to put forth a different persona and style than that of her group Destiny’s Child. Oprah describes the lyrics as very sexy, quoting a portion where Beyoncé sings, “I’m feeling kinda nasty.” Beyoncé replies by saying she writes about things that women want to hear. “It’s fantasy,” she repeats. Oprah describes Beyoncé’s image in Destiny’s Child as one that was “sweet, kind of sexy,” differentiating it from her debut album, which is much more sexually mature. According to the feminist scholar Meredith Levande in her work “Women, Pop Music, and Pornography,” a female pop artist has not “made it” unless she has transitioned into a mysterious figure that is symbolic of sex. “Naughty Girl” exemplifies a transition into the hypersexual realm of the equally hyper realistic Orient.

Shortly after its production in 2004, Beyoncé performed the song on the MTV show Pepsi Smash (Performances Pop). The performance is mostly defined by Beyoncé’s high and clear vocals along with her expert belly dancing. This is seen in the way that viewers praised the artist for her singing abilities and appearance, commenting on how good she looked, how well she danced, and how amazing the vocals were. One comment

from a year ago reads, “this is how every woman should be when it comes to her body!!  
♥♥” This remark expresses contemporary attitudes towards the female Western body and the liberation of sexuality that dancing, and belly dancing in particular, can provide.

The hypersexual performance can be seen in comments such as: “This song awoke my inner stripper.” It seems obvious to Western viewers that the dance is very sexual. It is also seen as a positive expression of the Western women's feminist awakening. Similar to *Salome*, the dance could not exist without the music.

The audience is aware of the aesthetic difference created by appropriating the Middle Eastern sounds. The following comment expresses Beyoncé's talent and flexibility in performing a song that is in such a high range and a foreign scale. “THE VOCALS BIIIIITCCHH, GIVIN ME CHILLS, You betta sing them Arabian vocal runs and riffs.” Another comment reads: “the sound reminds me a little bit to [of] Shakira, but now they both are fantastic and unique.” These two comments show how the exotic nature of the music is clear to the listeners. Moreover, this musical approach has become synonymous with artists such as Beyoncé and Shakira, as they appropriate Eastern elements of dance or music to create a collage of different Western and Eastern feelings. This collage then stands as a universal expression of hypersexuality and an exotic, multicultural femininity.

In this MTV performance, the string orchestra is replaced by something much more resonant. The timbre of the indigenous-sounding string instrument stands out, as the texture sounds more exotic. The sound is distinct due to the buzz that seems to reverberate; one that is not present in the lute, guitar or violin. It could be a number of Indian, Yemenite, Turkish, Greek or Iranian stringed instruments such as the sitar,

buzook, saz, cumbus or lavta (ATLAS). Although the same sound is also present in the banjo, the melodies associated with banjo performance are more indicative of the West. This shows how the West has shaped aesthetic preferences and solidified an image of what the East should be aurally. This includes foreign intervals and musical textures that align less with perfection and more with a sense of the untamed and spiritually free feelings towards dance and snake charming.

The string orchestra in the song, along with its melody, sounds similar to the string orchestra of the great Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum. Umm Kulthum is considered to be the most famous 20<sup>th</sup> century singer in the Arab world. She is a massively celebrated musician in Egypt and a very public, nationalist symbol. Her funeral in 1975 was considered larger than that of the president Gamal Abdel Nasser (Danielson 1997: 1). It is interesting to see that Beyoncé seems to be aware of the importance of Umm Kulthum and the Egyptian-sounding tune in “Naughty Girl.” During her tour, “On The Run,” the artist opened “Naughty Girl” with a video of Umm Kulthum performing her song, “Enta Omri” (You Are My Life). A quick search for “Beyoncé” and “Orientalism” produces many results from blogs such as Arab America, MuslimGirl, and more. These blogs show the other side of “Naughty Girl” and its reception by those who are well versed in the significance of Umm Kulthum.

Tamara Wong Azaiez, from the news site Arab America, writes about Beyoncé’s use of “Enta Omri” during her On The Run Tour (Azaiez 2013). Although it is not sampled in the song, Beyoncé performs on tour with a clip of Umm Kulthum behind her. By using such an important figure unknown to most Americans, Beyoncé may be expressing her awareness of the song’s aesthetic, but may also be trying to alleviate any

concerns of appropriation. Still, some Muslim blogs found this to be a problematic perpetuation of Western exoticism. Many comments on this blog expressed how Beyoncé trivializes “Enta Omri” and its expression of love and heartbreak while “Naughty Girl” explores a raunchy night of sexual liberation. Although the history of Western exoticism is relevant, the comments on the blog seemed weighted in misogyny more than anything, calling Beyoncé a “tart” or “cheap” for her dancing.

Nour Saudi explores this more in the online publication site, “Muslim Girl” which attempts to explore and support Muslim femininity. Saudi argues against Azaiez’s portrayal of Beyoncé juxtaposing the songs, as it reinforces the misogynistic idea that a traditional love story is more dignified than a woman exploring her sexuality for a night. Saudi questions if Beyoncé’s actions are Orientalist since she is a black woman who is not at fault for creating the Western definition of the East. In her opinion, the sampling of Umm Kulthum did not make her uncomfortable until she saw the clip of the Egyptian singer paired with Beyoncé’s seductive dancing. As a Muslim woman, Saudi and other Muslim women cannot help but feel further marginalized by the image of Umm Kulthum sexualized. She argues that in a time where Muslim women are condemned for their practices and stripped of agency, the “Naughty Girl” performance continues the idea of the Muslim woman as oppressed and lacking the liberation expressed through Beyoncé’s feminist brand. These complexities in interpretation show the large gap between Western and non-Western cultures that has been exacerbated by issues of racism and sexism; all struggling to resolve one another within the post-colonial context. The lingering power pull is present when a Western woman, even one of color, has the power to portray the

Middle Eastern woman as an exhibit of sensuality and mystery that is for the Western gaze.

### **Come & Get It: Selena Gomez's Bhangra Appeal**

Another artist implicating the East in her rise to fame is Selena Gomez. In this exploration of Orientalist tropes in music, Selena Gomez's 2013 song, "Come & Get It" appropriates a Bollywood song. This song noticeably samples the song "Soske Angleder Na Cinavgan Mancar." While "Naughty Girl" loops a vaguely Orientalist orchestra, Gomez's song begins as an almost homage to Bollywood music. It seems a fitting artistic choice to sample Eastern music that is in a similar style of bubble-gum dance music. Bollywood music is Indian popular music that incorporates the same dance beats of the West. The subjects of Bollywood music focus on light-hearted love stories, similar to American pop.

The track opens with Indian bhangra drums as they lay the foundation for the song. Softer male vocals chant before Gomez begins singing. Since the artist is not one to sing in the styles traditional of the East, it can be felt as a clear ornamentation for Gomez's single. When the song came out, Gomez did an interview to advertise not only her new song, but presented the song within the context of her new solo career (On Air With Ryan Seacrest 2013). Before this, she was part of a band that catered to her teen image, one that never delved into exotic sounds. In the interview, she describes how the track is different because she is trying to exude confidence in this time in her life. She goes as far as to say, "It does have a little tribal, Middle Eastern-y feel to it which I love." This demonstrates how the bhangra drum and other "Middle Eastern" sounds provide a strong platform for difference and to promote Gomez's album as something exotic and



therefore more mature. Her misidentification of the song shows not only that the artist is separate from the creation, but also that the musical aesthetic of the general East is most important for her brand's growth.

In one 2013 article looking forward to Selena Gomez's performance of her new single, one of her producers Jason Evigan, commented on her growth as an artist (Vena 2013). "She's not a little girl anymore. She wants to be like that and be respected like the great pop artists out there...And I think she is. I think this album is really gonna blossom her into a new realm of electronic pop dance artist." Evigan's quote shows how closely pop-stars such as Gomez work with an entire production team to craft her music as well as the image. With this, the rhetoric surrounds the maturation of one young woman, which is normalized in American pop stardom. Although this work touches on the artists themselves, it is only with the backing of an entire industry that these women can hold the power to represent the sexualization of the East.

Due to the nature of the track, many viewers on YouTube had no problem detecting the Indian origin of the song, the tabla drumming style, and the Punjabi singing as seen here:

"Amazing!! ♥♥♥..it somehow symbolizes our Indian style!"

"The background music is Indian and I love that cuz I'm an indian"

"salena gomez. I love u I'm from India."

"Bollywood and Hollywood Mixed/Bollywood-Music♥/Hollywood-Voice♥"

"is it, me or does the song sound really indian"

Many of those from India appreciated the strong representation of Indian culture that was shown in this song.

On the other hand, both Indians and non-Indians were thrown by the appropriative nature of the music video's imagery. In it, the artist wears multiple dresses that are sheer, lacy, and flowing. The fabrics are used as props for dancing to shroud the star in the veils for the Salome effect. Many users commented on the incorrect representation of Indian culture. One user wrote: "Lmao idk what kinda indian clothing you've seen, but im indian and this shit is nothing indian. the outfits look tacky as heck and are nothing like traditional indian clothing." Another comment reads: "Am I the only one that's extremely mad that she appropriated desi culture? Latinas have a beautiful culture too, why doesn't she represent her people instead? A culture she actually belongs too." Not only is Gomez seen appropriating Indian culture for her aesthetic purposes, she also does so through incorrect renditions of the culture.

One blog post by Meher Ahmad on the site Jezebel reads: "Why Selena Gomez's Bindi Is Not Okay." In it, the author describes how Gomez's performance of her single "Come and Get It" at the MTV Movie Awards was offensive to Hindu groups. The author describes how the Bollywood sampling is "totally okay" due to the pop-y nature of the beats, lyrics and outfits. What is not acceptable, however, is the use of the bindi, as it is important for Hindu religion and spirituality. The author concludes with the fact that the bindi in Western society has become a symbol of sensuality, which is why the appropriation of it is offensive. She argues that Gomez is simply using it for her "ritual tween star declares womanhood" campaign, which touches aptly on the star's new image. This all seems to show that the music itself is an exercise in fun hybridity, while the symbols involved in performance are problematic. Not only is the clothing wrong, but also the dancing shows a cheap imitation of traditionally functional Hindu dances. This

sexually mature song succeeds in presenting an erotic womanhood based in the exploitation of the Other, appropriating an Indian song for Western purposes.

### **Analysis**

Analyzing differing perspectives on hybridity and appropriation in the context of postcolonial attitudes helps to shed light into the performativity of Beyoncé and Selena Gomez. It also shows the tensions that arise when artists appropriate various themes taken from other cultures. On the one hand, Hankins' view on sampling and hip-hop would help to understand the two songs "Naughty Girl" and "Come & Get It" as being creative means of expression for two women exploring their sexuality. On the other hand, the blatant marketing of the exotic sounds through eroticism supports the hypersexual nature of the exploited female artist. Although producers such as Timbaland have helped craft songs for Beyoncé and the Pussycat Dolls, the images and lyrics conveyed by the artists are not the same as those exhibited in the protest music of rap and hip-hop although both utilize similar sounds. This shows that there still exists an Orientalist and thus hypersexualized attitude towards the sounds of the Other. These musical allusions seem to have become inseparable from metaphors in the Western conscience that objectify and sexualize non-Western women.

Sarah Brightman's view of her new album seems traditionally European in its Orientalism. Her use of the Eastern, harem-inspired aesthetic choices explore the forbidden and timeless locale that is nothing short of exciting. This alluring nostalgia, of course, would not be possible without its separation from political tension. In her statements, Brightman conveys her willful ignorance as well as her musical agency, which shows her complicit participation in colonial attitudes. Beyoncé and Selena

Gomez, however, were not seasoned musicians when they released their songs. Thus, their methods of appropriation seem to be a symptom of the larger industry problem of commodification and sexualization.

Beyonce does not control the representation of the East as exotic. She does, however, represent the tensions between the two cultures. By using clips of Umm Kulthum she changes the original meaning to fit her image and aesthetic. It is a treacherous Western practice to appropriate; even if she herself is not guilty of creating these stereotypes, she is perpetuating them. This is true of her younger self and her emergence into the individualized, sexual being that has broken away from Destiny's Child. Her perpetuation of the exotic, Oriental aesthetic, however, did not change with her emergence into Herculean star status.

Beyoncé is an interesting figure because she has transcended the idea of the typical female pop star. She has held millions of fans for longer than most artists can. She has continued her career and produced more work even after starting her family. Beyoncé has solidified herself as an artist with a great degree of agency. Her albums are also known to be more nuanced and cohesive than what she was producing at the early age of twenty-two. Her albums *Beyoncé* as well as *Lemonade* from 2013 and 2016, respectively, were indicative of her personal growth and transformation into a matured sexual being and complex woman. *Lemonade*, for instance, conveys compelling themes that explore political and personally nuanced ideas about race, femininity, and the American south. Her album *Beyoncé* from 2013 was the first album in which the artist was recognized for her musical autonomy and ability to create a work of art that provided nuance concerning questions of monogamy, feminism, sexuality, and love. The "On The Run" tour and the

“Ms. Carter Show World Tour” both included performances of “Naughty Girl” that hearkened back to her newly solo days that sold her sexy image. The themes of sexuality were changed, however, in the context of her tour and so the song could stand to represent a more creative and complex Beyoncé that is autonomous in her art. This was no doubt a feminist liberation in the context of her embracing her sexuality. This approach, however, does stand opposed to what Umm Kulthum represented as a woman in Egyptian culture and her status in the struggle for Egyptian nationalism.

The performance of “Naughty Girl” in her contemporary tours might then show a perpetuation of harmful appropriation. Appropriating Umm Kulthum, on the one hand, shows Beyoncé’s intent to give credit and public admiration for such an important figure. On the other hand, the use of this singer who is deeply venerated across the Middle East, and placing her in a sexual context supports a sexualization of the Eastern woman. This tension becomes even more treacherous to navigate in the context of the contrasting cultures. Western, liberal feminism is often defined by autonomous sexualization while the Muslim woman is overlooked as being forced into a veiled and oppressive religious practice. This Western feminism, however, defines itself through the consummation of global symbols and creating difference (Maira 2008). Although Beyoncé is a black woman, and not a direct purveyor of colonial action, her performance exists in this dichotomy between the West and the East. Her feminist rhetoric helps to liberate her own sexuality, but consumes the East to do so.

Selena Gomez is also a product of colonialism and so is problematized and implicated as a guilty party in not understanding her samples. However, it is similarly not her fault that the East has been sexualized. Her song seems redeemed in the way that the

Bollywood track appropriated and sampled fits with the lyrical content and dance-pop aesthetic. “Come & Get” It is still an exercise in whiteness and an appropriation of the Other culture as a way to express the star’s individual sexuality and emergence into a mature sexual performer.

Even though her audience on YouTube is aware and appreciative of the hybrid nature of her song, her position as a mainstream American artist in a globalized world is problematic. First, the appropriation of Eastern cultural elements works to support the cosmopolitan nature of the artist’s aesthetic. Gomez emphasizes the song as being a new chapter in her life and uses phrases like “tribal,” “vibe-y” and “Middle Eastern-y” to describe its difference. The multiracial and spiritual undertones that accompany Gomez’s hybrid song, “Come & Get It,” shows not only the appeal of the newness that comes with multiculturalism, but ignores the negative effects of painting India as a place of spirituality and transcendence (Kalra & Hutnyk 1998).

Beyoncé and Selena Gomez are not at fault for the modern capitalist desires to cannibalize ethnicities for profit. They are, however, complicit in using the profitability of racialized worlds to express their sexuality. The fact that their expression of mature sexuality comes at a time when their publicists and producers are working hard to sell their new image shows the incredibly desirable appeal of the exotic. It also exists in a way that allows the image of the star and the music to be separated from the darker aspects of globalization. “The sophisticated artistic or rustic-ified ethnic performance of culture sits comfortably with an upward mobility of middle-class aspiration in the globalized ecumene. Beneficiaries of surplus while their class underlings succumb, the cultural effervescence of hybridity is indulgent insofar as it no longer contests

monoculture but rather facilitates a corporate multiculturalism” (Hutnyk 2005: 97). This quote shows how the ability to choose which appealing aspects of foreign cultures to represent has become an integral part of modern cosmopolitan life. This reality contributes further to the global dichotomy between the working class and the elites.

As part of elite corporate culture, Beyoncé and Gomez are indicative of larger issues in American industry. Contrary to Hankin’s perspective on sampling as an expression of cultural hybridity, the Orientalist tropes employed imply a commodification and therefore perpetuation of the sexist, colonial narrative. The aural belly dancing serves not as a hybrid musical form, but as a way to create a heightened sense of difference between the East and the West; using the alluring aesthetic of the East and its unique melodies to help support and distance Western notions of femininity from the Other.

At the same time, it is difficult to condemn these performers in contemporary Western culture without treading misogynistic grounds. These mega stars are not allowed to maintain much agency without an emphasis on their appearance and sexuality. Again, this is the fault of the larger patriarchal, capitalist narrative that creates and consumes popular performers.

Viewers and audiences feel personally attacked when Beyoncé perpetuates the sexualization of Eastern sounds, while some audiences relish in the belly dancing experience that her beats provide. Selena Gomez is praised for her creative incorporation of Bollywood music but is condemned by many for her bastardization of traditional Indian garb. Overall, we see that tensions arise with appropriation of different cultures.

Modernity stands as a complex expression of post-colonial sentiments, which require increasingly complex perspectives of hybridity and cultural borrowing.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the commodification of the female performance and Western demand for the exotic, discussions of hybridity are not always productive in examining contemporary musical practice. While “cultural appropriation” is a broadly vague and seemingly empty term, it does show the diverse ways in which the West exercises colonial attitudes and the complexity of the social implications. This can be seen not only through iterations of romantic Western Orientalism, but also through sampling, dancing, fashion, and musical metaphors. Regardless of musical tastes, these missteps of Western artists within our postcolonial discourse show a symptom of a more expansive problem. The mass-produced music industry exploits the commodification of the female body as well as the East. The colonial legacy of capitalism is guilty of perpetuating Orientalist tropes by creating a sexual cliché that is easily adoptable and evoked through musical motivic material.

Tension arises when the liberal, Western femininity of the artists dominate the creation of meaning. The sexualized performances and dances are seen as an affront to the varying cultures and religions of globally marginalized women. Incorporating a bindi as a fashion choice or placing Umm Kulthum in a new context may not be inherently malicious, but the appropriative acts obscure the intended meaning. The Americanization of the belly dance has created a space where Western women can negotiate their sexualities by absorbing the identity of the veiled woman. Through these various examples of performance, the Eastern woman is forced into a status of oppression. This



presents a familiar space in which the West dictates the representation and value of the East.

As this paper has shown throughout, the aesthetic choices in both “Naughty Girl” and “Come & Get It” have been muddled by the Western conscience to become a combined indicator of the mystical East. Whether through Orientalist tropes or sampling, both stand as examples of cultural appropriation and its negative effects. Still, the comments on Selena Gomez’s video show a large support from India and pride in her homage to Bollywood music. However, the fact that she is part of an industry selling an apolitical version of India to cater to Western femininity shows a problem in celebrating her work as hybrid expression. To go back to Steven Feld’s stance on world music, how much agency can a group have when they will always exist as an outside influence? While hybridity is to be expected in musical creations, and often be celebrated, the status of the popular artist is one that has its roots in colonial mentalities and exercises it through commodification of the Other.

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