

## ABSTRACT

The main topic of *Femme Fatale as a Cultural Construct: The Fatal Womanhood Phenomenon in a Historical and Transcultural Perspective* is to describe, compare and interpret “femme fatale” in the context of the belly dancer, geisha and salonnière phenomena. The thesis objective, and subsequently its main research question, is to perform a comparative analysis of femme fatale as a unique cultural construct that is projected into various roles of a woman in an original manner. Special attention is paid to make note of concrete cultural and historical attributes related to the profession, knowledge, skills and social roles of belly dancers, geishas and salonnières. Among secondary objectives, the thesis intends to take an interdisciplinary stance in order to elaborate the problems of emancipation and sexuality in historical attitudes toward women, and to identify fatal womanhood motives in fine arts. Last, but not least, the plan is to study cultural and aesthetic contribution of women regarded as femmes fatales.

The thesis consists of four relatively standalone chapters, each of which take different interdisciplinary angles to analyze the fatal womanhood phenomenon. The first chapter, a historical exposé of the thesis, investigates the femme fatale through the eyes of mythology and religion. The second chapter, the context of profession and social role of the belly dancer is applied. The third chapter is dedicated to various cultural and historical aspects of fatal womanhood embodied in the profession of a geisha. The fourth chapter takes on to analyze and interpret the phenomena of salonnières and salons as important focal points of European culture of its time.

The thesis also outlines the social position of women of the above professions, as well as the cultural values, norms and ideas they held to; the mutual cultural impact and historical encounters of the Orient and Occident; and a deeper analysis of particular historical personalities in the world of belly dancers, geishas and salonnières respectively. For these professions were not just distinct cultural phenomena, but frequently became inspiration or topic for further works of art. Therefore, a reflection was included in the thesis on artistic rendition of said professions, and on their potential to inspire. Each of the chapters makes note of the way the professions reflect in the present and of the impact they had.

Theoretical comparative analysis of the belly dancer, geisha and salonnière phenomena as seen through the eyes of philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology,

aesthetics and art history was the main method used in the thesis. Using a wide range of findings from art, social and cultural sciences, the thesis brings an interdisciplinary analysis and holistic interpretation of the femme fatale phenomenon, and hopes to establish a new point of view on the above professions and their social roles in the historical and transcultural perspective. The thesis thus contributes to both feminist anthropology and gender studies, and to the interdisciplinary conception of cultural history.

**Keywords:** femme fatale, woman, salonnière, geisha, belly dancer, mythology, Orient