CONSTRUCTING THE HOME SPACE: RECLAIMING THE ORIENTALIST IMAGE IN

CONTEMPORARY MENA ART

by

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Reclaiming the Image: Orientalism and Contemporary MENA Art

Thesis directed by Professor Kira van Lil

This project will investigate how home and identity is constructed in the works of artists who operate from within and outside of the MENA world in various states of exile. By looking at the tropes established in Orientalist photography, this project seeks to examine a connective thread between nineteenth-century Orientalist photography of the Middle East and North Africa and the works by contemporary photographic and video artists from the MENA world within the past ten years. The master narrative created in these nineteenth-century photographs, implying that the Middle East and North Africa is a homogenous location marked by ruined vacant cities and sexual abundance continues to impact the global perception of this diverse area in mainstream media. By investigating the many ways that contemporary artists turn the tropes established in early photography on their head, this thesis explores how contemporary MENA artists reclaim and rewrite their narratives of home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is dedicated to Sandra and Stanley Zankowski, for all that I have learned from you, with love.

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Reclaiming the Orientalist Image

The aim is to dare to recast, redefine and revise the very notions of "modernity," "mainstream," "margins," "difference," "otherness." We have now reached a new stage in the perennial struggle for freedom and dignity.... We look to the past for strength, not solace; we look at the present and see people perishing, not profits mounting; we look toward the future and vow to make it better and different.

       -- Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, 1990

An omnipresent theme in the contemporary representation of life in the Middle East and North Africa relates very clearly to a feeling of displacement or dislocation. The images that produce this feeling, though they may be traced back further in time, are heavily rooted in the photographic production of the Middle East and North Africa by and for Western audiences in the nineteenth-century. In contemporary terms, the presence dislocation has grown from the various political and religious upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and has created an environment in which many MENA citizens are forced to reside in exile, diaspora, or other facets of immigration. Though exile, diaspora, and immigration are terms that carry with each of them particular nuanced definitions, they share one commonality- the effect of physical displacement. For contemporary artists working within and outside of the MENA world, negotiating the realities of home and identity as that which is not a fixed state, dislocation and existence as an outsider are themes that manifest in a multitude of

ways. Grappling with a life that is often lived between two, if not more, disparate worldviews, MENA artists are faced with the task of creating both national and personal identities in their work- establishing a type of home between homes. The contemporary visual explorations of the effects of these various categories of dislocation are not entirely without historical precedent.

The 1839 introduction of the daguerreotype happened to coincide with the excavation of Giza, the birth of the first wave of the archeological method, and an increasing European thirst for documenting the worlds that existed beyond their borders. In many ways, the global understanding of both contemporary and nineteenth as well as twentieth-century life in the Middle East and North Africa has been shaped by the paintings and writings of the Orientalists, who popularized the distorted view of the Middle East and North Africa as an exotic, backward, and dangerous locale for Western Audiences.[1] Though both the painting and the written word of the Orientalists has accrued significant attention both in terms of praise and criticism, far less attention has been paid to Orientalist photography. Further, even less attention has been given to the everlasting impact of the constructed stereotyping and orchestrating of these early photographs. Through the production, publication, and exhibition of photo-travel journals, the circulation of the idea that the Near East was a land of erotic and exotic escapism, ruinous cityscapes void of human life, and without a trace of the "great civilizations of the past," became a globalized standard.[2] The lifespan of these images, however, far exceeded the livelihood of the Orientalist tradition. These false documents of life in the Middle East and North Africa bore

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[1] Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, eds., *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, Issues & Debates (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013).
[2] Ibid.

a standard through which visual representation and global understandings of these diverse and disparate cultures and histories continue to be indebted to today.

Comparing nineteenth-century Orientalist travel photographs of the Middle East and North Africa to contemporary MENA photo and video works, I will examine the connectivity between these two incongruent, yet linked, visual cultures. Concerning itself with artists who are working in various states of exile, this project aims to explore the construction of a *home space* from a circumstance, which does not allow for a physical relationship to the artist's place of *home.* Focusing on artists working within the past decade, as well as nineteenth-century Orientalist photography, this thesis will serve as an exploration of the most recent examinations of the construction of home and identity in the Middle East and North Africa.

There is a certain slipperiness in regard to the subjectivity of the photographic document that is brought to the fore in the investigation of the Orientalist photograph, a slipperiness which continues into the contemporary photography and video works of MENA artists. The implication that the mechanically produced document represents a reality, an implication ever present in Orientalist photography, is a ubiquitous theme that is dissected in contemporary MENA photo and video works. However, defining what constitutes as reality versus fiction is not the only taxonomical convention that warrants investigation in regard to contemporary photography in the MENA world.

It is important to consider not only the ways that artists are dealing with exile, but also the ways in which exile is used and defined. Typically, the terms exile and diaspora both imply a state in which the displaced person has no control and cannot legally or safely return to their home country. In contrast, there is an implication in the way that the term

immigration is used colloquially that there has been a choice made on the part of the displaced person. Although, in many circumstances, these distinctions are necessary and beneficial; often the line is less black and white. Additionally, it is important to address that this investigation of contemporary MENA reactions to displacement is simply a case study of a global crisis. Historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos writes extensively on this subject in his 2013 publication *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis.* Here, Demos argues that photography, film, and video allow for a creation of images that are both globally circulating and politically effective. Demos posits that much of what makes the work of artists from migrant groups or communities unique is the employment of the blurring of the cinematic and the documentary.[3] Photography, film, and video, each possess this unique ability- one that is not available through the plastic arts- to present themselves as absolute fact.

The salience of contemporary MENA art that is combating the historical documents that have shaped the global perspective of life in the Middle East and North Africa has never been stronger. Writing from the perspective of an American specifically, it is without question how deeply the representation of the MENA world has shaped the Western consciousness, beginning with Orientalism and continuing through contemporary media. The most common stereotypes- the subservient veiled woman, the scarf-clad terrorist, the lazy homeless, the religious zealot, the seductive belly dancer, and the violent male oppressor- continue to reverberate across the representations that are being produced of the Middle East and North Africa in world media. The contentious political, religious, and

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[3] T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013). 2-20. The migrant groups which Demos refers to in this book encompass; refugees, emigrates, individuals in exile as well as individuals born in diaspora.

social atmospheres in the Middle East and North Africa that dominate the headlines have never been more present in the United States as they are today. American relations with the Middle East have just recently reached a high point, through Iran's agreement to a detailed nuclear outline with the United States- a major step in the reparation of the American relationship with Iran that President Barack Obama has held as a primary objective since his presidential election in 2008.[4] It is hopeful, through events such as this, that with repaired political relationships between the 'East' and 'West,' will come a better understanding of the realities of every day life in the both the world media and global social consciousness. With this thesis, I would like to examine what is happening in the art world at this exact moment, using contemporary MENA works as a lens through which social constructs can be viewed, gauged, and reevaluated.

The landscape of MENA art history has changed dramatically in our very recent history. Art Historian Nada Shabout comments on this shift in a recent interview saying that two decades ago, when she contacted universities telling them that she wanted to work on modern Arab art, they would reply, "There is no such thing!" a reaction that Shabout goes on to note, is not so prevalent.[5] The change in this attitude on the academic front mirrors a growing change in taste within the fine art audience. Shabout's reflections on the growth of modern Arab art can be likewise applied to the study and consideration being given to contemporary MENA art production. Art production from the Middle East and North Africa is certainly not new, but for Western audiences over the past decade

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[4] Michael R. Gordon and David E. Sanger, "Iran Agrees to Detailed Nuclear Outline, First Step Toward a Wider Deal," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-talks.html.
[5] Andrew Russeth, "Arab Spring: Modern Middle Eastern Art Finds A New Audience in the West," *Art News*, April 2, 2015.

MENA art is virgin territory. A growing art market and ample government funding have

undoubtedly aided the boom in popularity of contemporary art from the Middle East and

North Africa.[6] However, despite the growing international popularity of art from the MENA

world, like Shabout's commentary on modern Arab art- there is a lot that remains to be

uncovered. This projects hopes to bridge some of the gaps, between past and present, to

better understand the current state of art production.

      After Franz Fanon's 1961 *The Wretched of the Earth,* and Edward Said's seminal

publication *Orientalism,* in 1979, a post-colonial discourse began to open up, and as a result

the works of the Orientalists faced reinvestigation.[7] However, despite the newly found

critical lens, through which the works of the Orientalist painters were being viewed,

Orientalist photography continued, and continues, to be surrounded by a discourse that

considers them as pure documentary. A handful of publications prove to be exceptions,

however over all a critical examination of Orientalist photography is sparse. Most recently,

Behdad, Ali and Luke Gartlan's *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial*

Representation, published in 2013, attempts to cover a wide variety of misconceptions

about Orientalist photography and its documentary like nature.[8] However, prior this

publication the texts that consider Orientalist photography as a whole, rather than focusing

on only individual collections appear in Sarah Graham-Brown's, *Images of Women: The*

Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950, published in 1988, which

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[6] About this expansion: Sylvia Smith BBC News, "Arab Art on View at Venice Biennale," *BBC News*, accessed March 19, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-23664730. And: Russeth, "Arab Spring: Modern Middle Eastern Art Finds A New Audience in the West."

[7] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). As well as: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2007).

[8] Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*.

as the title states only discusses photography of women, as well as Nissan Perez's *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839-1885)*, published in 1998.[9] While each of the afore mentioned publications deal with Orientalist photography on a broad scale, none investigate the implication of these images in relation to their historiographic trajectory.

While photography remains often overlooked within the broader context of the Orientalist movement, it is even further overlooked in its relationship to contemporary MENA art. Primarily, texts that discuss both contemporary MENA art and Orientalism focus on the painted Orientalist representation of women, the symbol of the veil, and the over sexualization of the harem. And while this connection is sometimes made, it is often done superficially and with little digging beyond the surface of visual similarity. While more recent exhibitions of contemporary MENA work, such as, *Light from the Middle East* (from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London)*, Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* (from the Institute of International Visual Art, and Museum of Modern Art London)*,* and *She Who Tells a Story* (from the Museum of Fine Art in Boston), attempt to weave some thread between the disparate time periods of the nineteenth-century and the past decade, a significant amount of work is still to be done regarding the global imprint of Orientalist photography.[10]

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[9] Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). As well as: Nissan Perez, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839-1885)* (New York: Abrams, 1988).

[10] Marta Rachel Weiss and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Light from the Middle East: New Photography* (Göttingen, Germany : London: Steidl ; V&A Publishing, 2012). Institute of International Visual Arts and Museum of Modern Art (Oxford, England), *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (London: Institute of International Visual Arts in association with Modern Art Oxford, 2003). Kristen Gresh and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran Andthe Arab World*, First edition (Boston: MFA publications, Museum Of Fine Arts, 2013).

To best provide a context for the tropes that are combated, contested, and reclaimed in contemporary photo and video works, I will explores the conventions of the nineteenth-century Orientalist photograph in the first chapter. Though the popularity of travel journals in the form of photo albums increased greatly during the advent of the rise of travel to the Middle East and North Africa, a great deal of the thirst for the Orientalist image can be attributed to three major collections that were published and disseminated throughout the European continent, and eventually the Americas and the East itself.[11] The travel documents of Sir Francis Bedford, Maxime Du Camp, and the studio portraits of the Bonfils family collectively represent the major themes that would eventually form to create a global stereotype of the Middle East and North Africa.

Using particular photographs from each of these three collections, I will synthesize the primary tropes of nineteenth-century Orientalist photography, establishing primary visual commonalities. Looking at the major publications of Nisan Perez, long-time curator at the Israel Museum, Cultural Anthropologist Sarah Graham-Brown, and Professor of Comparative Literature Ali Behdad, along with the photographic collections afore mentioned, this selection will offer an analysis of the codified visual systems in place during this early period of photography.[12] Beginning with an exploration of the Orientalist movement as a whole, Chapter One will address the intersections between Orientalist painting and photography. The tendency for the West to look at the Near East as a place of erotic and exotic possibility, as well as a place of ruinous disrepair requiring an immediate

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[11] Nancy Micklewright, *A Victorian Traveler in the Middle East: The Photographyand Travel Writing of Annie Lady Brassey* (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).
[12] For more on these texts see: Graham-Brown, *Images of Women*.Perez, *Focus East*.Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*.

imperialist intervention, dramatically impacted the production of images that were being produced and circulated during this early period on a broader scale.

Within the context of these nineteenth-century photographic tropes, I will investigate the ways in which MENA photography produced exclusively in the twenty- first century addresses similar themes. Looking at the work of Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Hassan and Lalla Essaydi, and Lida Abdul, I will trace the reactions of contemporary MENA photographers to the conventions arranged in nineteenth-century photography of the Middle East and North Africa by the West. Pulling from the clichés of Middle Eastern and North African life, this chapter will examine the ways in which contemporary MENA photographers are reclaiming and recontextualizing what have become global stereotypes. This project, however, does not only wish to create a text through which contemporary and nineteenth-century images of the Middle East and North Africa become analogous, but also it aims to examine the ways in which early photography has impacted the global perception of MENA home and identity. The contemporary photographers selected in this chapter have all produced works that directly speak to the stereotyped image of MENA identity, of displacement and isolation.

Chapter Two, will continue to examine the junction between early photographic representations of the Middle East and North Africa and contemporary works. More specifically, this chapter will serve as an exploration of the efforts made by contemporary MENA artists living within and outside of the MENA world to reclaim the global understanding of their places of home. Looking at the works of Joana Hadjithomas and Kahlil Jorge, Hassan Hajja, Mohammed Kazem, Ghazel, Shirin Neshat, and Dafy Hagai, this

chapter will explore the themes that have been established in the first chapter. Here, I will

investigate not only the reconstruction of home and identity in the photographic, film, and

video works of these artists, but of these particular reconstructions in relationship to the

medium and the experiential quality of the installations for the viewer.

Unlike the photographs and videos discussed in chapter one, these works each focus

on the occupation of a physical space that suggests or reflects the position of identity

within the domestic or national space. For the viewer, entering these installations generally

without a great deal of history or context, the space becomes a literal imagining of the

space of exile. The viewer in this context is always at once removed from, and submerged

within the world that they are viewing- much like the artists themselves. Here, I will

further analyze the overarching themes established in Orientalist photography and then

later combated by contemporary MENA artists, specifically in relation to how these themes

are responsible for the construction and understanding of the MENA home space. The idea

of home space, I argue, is something that includes both the public and private. It is both the

domestic space, and that national space that the artist identifies as their place of origin.

As a collection, the chapters that comprise this thesis will examine contemporary

MENA art by looking back and forth from the advent of photography to our current

moment. The artists selected in each chapter, whether from the Orientalist period or from

the twenty-first century, are essentially creating images through which collective national

identities are constructed. These images are- in both the past and present- an imagining of

identity and home, constructed through the combined forces of what is documentary and

what is fiction. The eroticized women, blurred figures, and ruinous cityscapes of

nineteenth-century Orientalist photography persist in contemporary MENA photography

taken both from the outside and within. The artists selected for this thesis project have

produced works within roughly the last decade that speak not only to their personal

narratives and histories, but also to the ways in which national identities are construed at a

global level- from the outside looking in.

Chapter One

Constructing Identity: Orientalist Photography and the Implications of Documenting the
Middle East and North Africa

*The Orient and Islam have a kind of extrareal, phenomenologically reduced status that puts
them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert. From the beginning of Western
speculation about the Orient, the one thing the orient could not do was to represent itself.
Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed through and been made firm by
the refining fire of the Orientalist's work.*

--Edward Said, *Orientalism,* 1978

*To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by
having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be
symbolically possessed. Just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is
a subliminal murder - a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time.*

-- Susan Sontag, *On photography,* 1977

After Edward Said's seminal 1978 publication of *Orientalism,* an extensive re-

examination of the "firm refining fire," of the Orientalists was called upon. Said addressed

that which had been ignored in the scholarship by and about the Orientalists- an overt

presence of imperialism. Said defined, or perhaps redefined Orientalism as: "a mode for

defining the supposed cultural inferiority of the Islamic Orient…part of the vast control

mechanism of colonialism designed to justify and perpetuate European dominance."[13] By

identifying Orientalism as the act of the Western world seeking to define the "other," but in

actuality defining itself, Said's work prompted a reevaluation of the images produced by the

West, of the East in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discourse that

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[13] Said, *Orientalism.*

followed in the field of art history challenged the authenticity of nineteenth-century

Orientalist painting primarily and, largely excluding photography's presence. Although

since the 1988 Publication of Nissan Perez's *Focus East* there have been a small handful of

essays and texts regarding Orientalist photography, the deconstruction of Orientalism as a

movement has remained largely within the confines of that which is non-mechanical. In

fact, even the most recent large-scale exhibitions of Orientalist work have excluded

photography entirely.[14]

Photography, considered for a large portion of its lifespan as a medium that

captures or documents the *real*, was in large part left out of the Orientalist dialogue

immediately post Said. However, the connective tissue between the works of Orientalist

painters in the first half of the nineteenth century: Delacroix, Ingres, and Hunt, and the

Orientalist photographer/travelers post 1939, is without a doubt profuse. The complex

relationship between Orientalist painting and photography is examined in Ali Behdad and

Luke Gartlan's 2013, *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*- a

compilation of essays critically examining and complicating these forgotten images. In the

essay, 'Photography's Orientalism,' Behdad states about the interplay between these two

mediums: " The relationship between Orientalist painting and photography is not that of a

linear influence but of a circular reciprocity."[15] The fantasy that inspired early Orientalist

painting would eventually create a standard for which Orientalist photography strived to

live up. However the impossibility of finding the erotic harem scenes, romantic street

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[14] Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*. 8. *The Lure of the East,* held at the Tate Britain in 2008 and *L'Orientalisme en Europe: De Delacroix á Matisse,* held at Musées royaux des beaux-arts in 2010 excluded Orientalist photography entirely.
[15] Ibid. 16.

markets, and bathhouses of the Orientalist painters in the actual Near East prompted a

creative Orientalist photography, which would circulate throughout both the East and West

and eventual would serve to inspire the paintings of Orientalists who did not travel to the

Near East themselves.[16]

Nissan Perez speaks to the collaborative effort of painting and photography as well,

saying, "There is an incontestable similarity in forms as well as content of paintings and

photographs, especially from the 1860's on, when mass production of images made by

resident photographers began. To some extent the kind of photographic imagery produced

in the East dictated the subject of painting."[17] This circulation between photography and

painting described by both Perez and Behdad must be considered for a number of reasons.

Firstly, if photographers began orchestrating their images based on paintings that had been

made by the "great Orientalists," such as Ingres who had never traveled outside of Europe,

and in turn those photographs were perceived by the public as pure documentary that

would prompt the production of additional paintings- then in some way the entire

production of images of the Near East in the nineteenth-century was falsified. Then, even

photographers who set out to document the tremendous monuments and sites of historical

and biblical importance would have had a preconceived notion regarding what to expect

upon their arrival. This cyclical effect in some ways proves Said's theories about

Orientalism, specifically that in the act of creating an Other the West generalized non-

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[16] In this chapter I will be using the terms: Near East, The Orient, Middle East and North Africa as well as MENA, interchangeably, however in later chapters regarding contemporary works I will use Middle East and North Africa and MENA primarily.

[17] Perez, *Focus East*. 66.

Western cultures and circulated fictionalized understandings about these cultures

throughout Europe.[18]

This chapter aims to investigate how that fictionalization of the Near East was

generated and circulated through the vehicle of photography. Along with Orientalist

painting, the photography of the Near East became embedded in a particular set of

iconographies that would eventual shape a global understanding, or perhaps better

phrased as a global misunderstanding, of the West's "other." These motifs would over time

not only impact the production of images about the East from the West, but also images

produced from within the East itself. When considering contemporary photographic and

video works from artists originally from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the

chapters that will follow, it will be crucial to understand the historic basis for the visual

tropes that many contemporary artists are aiming to deconstruct. Lastly, as this thesis is

interested in exploring the production of works by artists who are working in-between

worlds, either as a state of exile, diaspora or elective immigration, it is important to

consider first how the role of the outside looking in has impacted the contemporary

understanding of the MENA world. The artists that will be examined in the following

chapters are all, in some way, interested in exploring themes of home, identity, isolation,

and alterity through their works. To understand how these artists are negotiating these

questions, it is first necessary to embark on a brief post-colonial discourse surrounding the

position of imperialism in the early production of images from the Orient. At the close of

Said's groundbreaking 1978 work, he posits that in the future, the Orient will be given the

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[18] Said, *Orientalism*.

chance to define itself as something entirely separate from the European Other.[19] It is my belief that the contemporary works that address, dissect, and attack the construction of the first photographs of the Middle East and North Africa in the chapters that follow have done just that.

Setting the Stage: Sir Francis Bedford, The Bonfils, and the Traveling Image

      The representation of the Middle East and North Africa, previously described as the Orient or the Near East, has in many ways always been dictated by hybridization and the construction of documentary. The invention of the daguerreotype coincided directly with the mid-nineteenth-century excavation of the city of Cairo, an event that birthed an increasingly global interest in the mystery of the Orient. Over the second half of the nineteenth-century, the excavation expanded throughout North Africa, and with it grew the rapidly advancing technology of photography. The photographs that were taken of these excavations were disseminated throughout Europe and eventually the America's, as well as circulating within the Eastern continents. Presenting themselves as pure documentary-these images would come to characterize the East for Western audiences. Consequently, the lure of the East was heightened by these reproducible images, which conversely promoted and expanded tourism of the Middle East and North Africa. In 1862, the Prince of Whales became the first royal traveler to hire a royal photographer to accompany him on a four-month journey from Cairo to Constantinople. In this time, Sir Francis Bedford was among the very first Englishmen to bare witness to, as well as mechanically capture the

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[19] Ibid. 328.

image of a number of Holy sites and newly excavated locations. The collection of roughly

two-hundred photographs was displayed upon the prince's return to England, and was

described as "the most important photographic exhibition that has hitherto been placed

before the public."[20]

Within this collection, to the delight of European audiences, Bedford was able to

document the partial excavation of The Sphinx, as well as the Pyramids at Giza (Figure 1).

This particular documentation's function is two-fold. Bedford captures in these images of

Giza in a state of transience, mid- excavation, and not yet entirely uncovered. It is a moment

of unearthing a history, but it is also a moment of concealing one. Stretched out around the

base of the Sphinx are seven figures, faces obscured in shadow, and bodies blending into

the monument and sandy earth. Though Bedford records the various individuals that were

included in other photographs of this site, here the men scattered throughout the

composition remain completely anonymous (Figure 2).[21] The consideration given to the

identities of each member of the Royal Party here is entirely abandoned in the image of the

unknown and obscured locals in the first photograph. Likely without the intention of the

photographer, images such as these- though valuable in their documentary-like quality-

would set the stage for decades of photographic works. Photographers that were seeking to

provide a truthful representation of the Middle East and North Africa for Western

audiences, more often than not would begin entirely excluding the population of these

places from the narrative.

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[20] Francis Bedford, *Cairo to Constantinople: Francis Bedford's Photographs of the Middle East* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2013).
[21] Ibid.

The public exhibition and circulation of photographs such as these not only increased the desirability of travel to the Near East, they also created the demand for a supply of consumable images of the mysterious and exotic other. These images were offered to the West as a guise of educational documentary material as well as a possibility for escape. The vacant landscapes and veiled women of the Middle East catered to the fantasy of Western imagination. The Near East became a symbol of exotic, as well as erotic, possibility. As the desire for documentary photographs such as those taken by Sir Francis Bedford increased alongside the Orientalist tradition, Western photographers began inventing exaggerated images of their own. Between 1864 and 1929 Felix, Lydie and Adrien Bonfils, a French family, worked as a collective at the photographic firm Maison Bonfils, worked primarily in studios based in Beirut.[22]

Upon a 1980 exhibition at Harvard University titled *Remembrances of the Near East,* the claim was made that the Bonfils' images were, "a reality and sensibility," that, "help to create the Orientalist dream."[23] This statement, seemingly celebratory of the supposed documentary photographs of the Bonfils family, might have thought to emphasize the elements of *creativity* and *dream* that contributed to these images construction. As a whole, the Bonfils collection may be suitably divided into two contrasting categories. The first is comprised of images of the Near East, nearly void of human presence and primarily emphasizing the ruined cityscapes. Like those made by Sir Francis Bedford, these

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[22] Douglas M. Haller, "In the Eyes of Bonfils," University of Pennsylvania, *In Arab Lands: The Bonfils Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum*, ed. Félix Bonfils et al. (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2000). 16.

[23] Félix Bonfils et al., *Remembrances of the Near East: The Photographs of Bonfils, 1867-1907: From the Collections of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House and the Harvard Semitic Museum* (Rochester, N.Y: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1980).

photographs underscore what would have been perceived by European audiences as uncivilized or crumbling societies (Figure 3). Human presence in these photographs appears as secondary to the architectural elements of the image, often camouflaged by shadow or blurred by movement. The figure included in Bonfils' image of Baalbek is barely visible, standing in the shadows beside the monuments slipped keystone. The second half of this collection are images clearly constructed in a studio space using painted backdrops with props and costumes purchased and arranged deliberately by Bonfils (Figure 4). These constructed portraits of ethnically diverse individuals, primarily identified by the textual component accompanying the image, offer an astonishing parallel to the ethnographic photographs that had been produced in print and later in photographs in the Americas.[24] When looking at the collection as a whole it becomes quite apparent that the same female model would be used several times playing the part of various ethnically diverse women.[25] Costumed and addressed as women, and men, of varying ethnic backgrounds, Bonfils crafted an elaborate false-memory of the Near East for Western Audiences.

The photographs from this period, both those taken in the Middle East and North Africa and those arranged in European artists' studios, formed for audiences what was

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[24] Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations Ofthe "Native" and the Making of European Identities* (London ; New York: Leicester University Press, 2000). More on the history of ethnographic photography and its relationship to the construction of European identities here, as well as in Morton, Christopher A., and Elizabeth Edwards, eds. *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame*. Farnham, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.

[25] Perez, *Focus East*. Perez addresses the constructed nature of these studio portraits in his 1988 publication- though upon examining these images it seems fairly apparent that these images are not realistic representations of his subjects, who are always entirely void of names and other specific information- scholarship before and after Perez's book seems eager to ignore this. The Bonfils portraits fall in line with the standard for nineteenth and early twentieth century cultural anthropology portraits. There is a striking comparison to be made of the Bonfils studio portraits and ethnographic photography, however this comparison is rarely made and even the most recent catalogues of the exhibitions of the Bonfils collection do not address these works as operating within the realm of ethnographic images.

believed to be a concrete understanding of the socio-cultural landscapes of what was, in

actuality, a diverse and rich collection of cultures and histories. Aside from homogenizing

the "Near East," these photographs created a set of visual tropes that began to dictate

image production in both the technological and plastic arts. The romanticized image of the

Middle East and North Africa, as established in early nineteenth-century photography

began impacting the production of Orientalist painting and literature and vice-versa.[26]

Eventually the constructed studio atmosphere of photographers such as the Bonfils would

come to borrow traces of what had been seen and circulated in Orientalist painting,

creating a cyclical repetition of tropes and stereotypes embedded in both the photographic

and painted images of the nineteenth-century. These false motifs, which this chapter will

explore and deconstruct, caused an echoing effect that can still be heard in the

contemporary works of artists from the MENA world today.

Exoticising and Eroticizing

Orientalist photography in the nineteenth century relied heavily on two factors: the

exotic and the erotic. Though the evidence of these things can be found in portraits of both

men and women, it is without a doubt that the Orientalist male gaze dictated the plethora

of erotic female images during the nineteenth and early twentieth century- a gaze that has

arguably dictated the production of representations of the Middle East and North Africa

since. Often described as the grandfather of the French classical Orientalist school, Jean-

Auguste-Dominique Ingres' 1862 *Le Bain turc* is exemplary of the European fixation with

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[26] Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*.

the sexualized "Oriental" female body (Figure 5).[27] This now canonical painting shows an

explosion of nude, supposedly Turkish women, lounging throughout an interior space

surrounding a bathing pool visible in only a sliver of the bottom left. In the foreground, two

women recline, lightly fondling each other's breasts, as the primary turban-clad female

nude with her back turned to the viewer looks on at the supposed lovers. All but two

women in this erotic combustion appear to be overtly European- an unavoidable presence

declaring the falsehood of Ingres' imagining of the harem scene.

Ingres' imaginary Orient extends back far beyond his 1862 painting, which arguably

both influenced and was influenced by the emerging Orientalist photography of the same

decade. The equally exaggerated and eroticized *Le Grande Odalisque,* of 1814 ascribes overt

female sexuality to the Orient nearly fifty years prior to the eruptive nudity of the bathers

(Figure 6). This *Odalisque,* or harem woman, again appears to be blatantly caucasian,

adorned with accessories suggestive of a vague Oriental setting. Bathed in a warm glowing

light, this mysterious woman looks over her naked shoulder toward the viewer. Her hair is

wrapped back in an elaborate jeweled and brocade turban, loosely holding a feather duster

at her grasped ankle, she reclines in a nest of jewel-toned silks. At her feet rests a smoking

pipe- apparently recently abandoned. Her accoutrement signifies the exotic and the

pleasurable- ideals, which Ingres and other armchair travelers of Europe associated with

the fantasy of Oriental escapism. These symbols serve as a necessary mask- if the fantasy is

to be believable the viewer must forget what is positioned right before their eyes. Her

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[27] Royal Academy of Arts (Great Britain) and National Gallery of Art (U.S.), *The Orientalists, Delacroix to Matisse: European Painters in North Africa and the Near East*, ed. Mary Anne Stevens (London: Royal Academy of Arts in association with Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984).

accessories not only distract from her whiteness, but from her impossible physicality.[28]
Each element of her fictionalization increases her digestibility- not a woman created to
document what was real, but to be consumed by the European gaze and imagination.

Upon traveling to the Near East, European travelers would have been faced with a
culture of women both visually and physically inaccessible to them. Orientalist painters
may have started the quest to see what the mystery was behind the veiled woman- but
Orientalist photography ended it. With photography, Western audiences were able to
transform Ingres' odalisques into real live flesh and blood women that were
simultaneously veiled and exposed, and entirely works of fantasy. The paintings and
photographs of harem life are perhaps the most wholly constructed of all genres of
Orientalist imagery, as the probability of any European man actually entering a harem
would have been incredibly slim. The fixation with the harem, as addressed by Sarah
Graham-Brown's 1988 in *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the
Middle East 1860-1950,* is entirely linked with the seen and the unseen. This fascination
with the harem, says Brown, is entirely also strongly linked to veiling practices, which
completed clouded the Orientalist's understanding of the social, domestic, and sexual lives
of women in the Middle East.[29] As the structure of the harem controls and contains
women's visibility and sexual power- the harem itself acts as a type of veil. The public
invisibility of women or the variety of veiling practices that Western travelers would have

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[28] Carol Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies: Retracing the Serpentine Line*, Yale Publications in the History of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). 36. An unavoidable piece of the narrative of Ingres' Grande Odalisque has become the exaggerated body of the woman represented. Her elongated body is thought to be physically impossible, only a person with born extra spinal units would possess the length and flexibility of the woman in Ingres' painting.

[29] Graham-Brown, *Images of Women*. 20-33.

come in contact with, however, is far more physically apparent than the harem-separating

the genders very visibly. The combination of the harem and the veil would prompt a

simultaneous repulsion attraction for Western travelers. In short, the more that was

concealed, the more the curiosity grew- and with that curiosity came a call for a creation of

images that satiated the urge to see what could not be seen.

The voyeuristic challenge of the harem and the veil waged for Western audiences

would spiral out of control over the later course of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. As Brown goes on to write in a later chapter of her book, "No single item of

clothing has had more influence on *Western* images of Middle Eastern women than the

veil."[30] Both the veil and the harem would be seen in the West and symbols of gendered

control and power- a symbol that continues to carry a contentious and debatable weight.

Via this symbol, Western photographers would begin to depict Middle Eastern women as

objects for possession, reserved for the male gaze. This voyeurism would soon run

rampantly, resulting in a highly eroticized genre of "portrait" photography that would be

disseminated throughout both Europe and the East. These images took a multiplicity of

forms and were experienced and exhibited in an array of contexts, perhaps one of the most

accessible being that of the postcard. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century

postcard series, *Scenes and Types,* we can find a number of examples of the mass produced

eroticized other. *Arabian Woman with the Yachmak* is perhaps one of the most striking of

these examples (Figure 7). Here a woman is shown wearing a *yachmak*, a traditional veil

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[30] Ibid. 170.

intended to protect the purity of a Muslim woman, leaving only her eyes exposed.[31]

However in this photograph the *yachmak* and the women have completely fallen victim to

the sexualized male gaze, and the image is made into something entirely pornographic. The

veiled woman sits, eyes peering out at the viewer. The black fabric of her veil covers most

of her face and is draped around her shoulders, yet her breasts are entirely exposed. The

presence of her nudity is further accentuated by the black strip of fabric that descends from

the lower facial veil, cutting between her breasts and framing them between the dark

pieces of cloth. Her exposed skin becomes the focal point of the images, and her sexuality

and consumability becomes the purpose.

Interestingly here, as well as in Ingres' paintings of harem scenes and bathhouses,

the title of the image suggests that what is being shown is a reality. By calling this postcard

Arabian Woman with the Yachmak, a false reality is being constructed. The sexualization of

the woman in this image is simply one part of an entire collection of assertions that the

Orientalists had created about the East, and as a result of these assertions came a long

tradition of misunderstandings. The mockery that is made of this Muslim woman's veil

both directly ignores her sexual and religious identity and reality, it perpetuates an entirely

false stereotype.

Rethinking the Harem

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[31] Ilene Susan Fort, "Femme Fatale of Caring Mother? The Orientalists Woman's Struggle for Dignity," Dahesh Museum, *Picturing the Middle East: A Hundred Years of European Orientalism: A Symposium* (New York: Dahesh Museum, 1996). 42.

Cultural intersection and contemporary hybridity has likewise been examined by female photographers in the Middle East and North Africa. Home, or the domestic space, has been historically identified as a gendered sphere. Women's traditional relationships to the domestic realm have been explored in various medium both before and after the advent of the feminist art wave in the nineteen sixties and seventies. Contemporary MENA women artists continue to address the gendered relationships to the home space through a diverse set of mechanisms. MENA female photographers within the past fifteen years, catalyzed by the works of Shirin Neshat and Shadi Ghadirian in the 1990's, are working to reconstruct the global image of the MENA woman.[32] To deconstruct Orientalism, and reconstruct identities means establishing a new visual standard for MENA women that rethinks both the overplayed images of the powerless and dominated woman, and the overly sexualized mystery behind the veil.[33]

Born in Morocco and working currently in New York City, Lalla Essaydi's work explores the complexities of Moroccan identities. Essaydi's photographs not only reclaim what it means to be a contemporary Moroccan woman, but also directly confront the tropes of North African female sexuality set in place in the Orientalist period.[34] Her photographs challenge what have become deeply, historically, entrenched notions of female Moroccan identity, using the visual language of Orientalist painters and photographers- essentially turning these visual stereotypes on their heads. In an interview with Imani M. Cheers in 2012, Essaydi describes her work as both deeply autobiographical, as well as engaged with

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[32] For more on Shadi Ghadirian, and her works surrounding the traditional domestic roles of women see: Rose Issa, ed., *Shadi Ghadirian: Iranian Photographer*, 1st ed (London ; San Francisco: Saqi, 2008). And Gresh and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *She Who Tells a Story*.

[33] Gresh and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *She Who Tells a Story*.

[34] "Q&A: Lalla Essaydi Challenges Muslim, Gender Stereotypes at Museum of African Art," *PBS NewsHour*, accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/revisions/.

the problematic Western view of Arab women.[35] Essaydi's intention is spelled out clearly in her statements- her work is about reclaiming Arab, Muslim, and Moroccan women's identity. Using the themes of the harem, the odalisque, and the veil, Lalla Essaydi's recontextualizes the identity of Moroccan women and their relationship to the interior realm.

In her 2005 series *Converging Territories,* Essaydi attacks the relationship between Muslim women and the domestic sphere head-on. As a whole, this series, shows a group of women and young girls, ranging in age, dressed in clothing that is covered in calligraphic writing, that blends into the same fabric that covers the walls and floors of the space that they are in, as well as the calligraphy henna on their skin, a traditionally female art form (Figure 8).[36] In image *#30* of this series we see a group of four women, lined up by height and presumably age. The tallest figure, to the images left, wears a garment entirely veiling her face. Her body is fully enveloped by the light, calligraphy-laden cloth, and because no trace of her physical person is exposed she becomes entirely subsumed by the fabric of the room. The woman to her right is also veiled, this time showing a sliver of her face and eyes. Next to her a young girl stands, her face, hands and feet exposed- and beside her an even younger girl stands wearing the fabric as an oversized tunic.

Collectively, this group of women can be viewed as the evolution of any single woman, and her changing affiliation with space and identity. As the girl becomes older, at least in the mind of the Western world, her bond with the domestic space becomes stronger. As we see in this image, as the girl ages, she becomes part of the room, and the

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Lalla Essaydi, Artist Statement, n.d., http://lallaessaydi.com/6.html. Here Essaydi discusses the use of henna in her work, and its connotations with traditional Islamic, female art forms.

home and the woman become one. An echo of confinement radiates throughout the picture- and there is a suffocating quality to the amount of fabric and writing that covers every surface. The woman, or women, we see here are not represented as having a clear identity. Rather, they are shown as a singular being, potentially the singular being that the West represented the East to be during the Orientalist period. Unlike the photographs of other contemporary MENA artists, which seem to want to break the mold of representation of Moroccan women, Essaydi plays inside of it. Her women here are not so much breaking the mold as they are operating from within it and proving the mold's absurdity. The women in *#30* appear to be fixed both in their identities and in their physical placement within their home space, the notion of which seems ridiculous in both counts. In her artist statement, Essaydi discusses her motivation for *Converging Territories,* as coming from her position as an individual born into an Islamic culture, and looking back at it after having spent a significant about of time in America. The series, she writes, acts as a means for her to understand her past and present life.[37]

The calligraphy-decorated beige backdrops and clothing continues in Essaydi's work in her 2008 *Les Femmes du Maroc* series, in which she directly recreates the scenes of harem women found in nineteenth-century Orientalist painting. *Grande Odalisque 2,* specifically, Essaydi produces an image that is in direct dialog with Ingres' canonical 1814, *Le Grande Odalisque* (Figure 9).[38] Like Ingres' sexualized fantasy woman, Essaydi's model reclines, back turned to the camera, glancing over her exposed shoulder toward the viewer. Unlike Ingres' *Odalisque,* Essaydi's model is Moroccan and does not have extra vertebrae

[37] Ibid.
[38] For more on Ingres painting see Figure 6. As well as Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies.*

that elongate her spine and allow her to bend in impossible seductive positions. *Grande Odalisque 2,* is a believable and realistic woman. She is shown clothed, and because of this she is inherently less sexualized than the odalisques of the Orientalist period. Like the women in *Converging Territories,* this figure is swathed in the same material that the room that she exists in is made up of- visually tying her to her space. Here, however, the model's relationship to her environment is entirely tied to the Western male gaze, and the idea that the women of the harem were available for consumption upon any whim. Her figure appears to be simply waiting. She is part of the room- fixed- and she will be in such a position until the viewer claims her.[39] Essaydi's image is, however, importantly, not simply a recreation of Ingres' painting. The sexual fantasy seen in Ingres' works has vanished here, and her fictional availability is not being promoted or sold. The distortion of the Orientalist lens is removed, and the Odalisque becomes a representative of the West's fiction.

The visual exploration of women's connectedness to physical space is brought to the fore in Essaydi's 2009, *Harem.* With a strong emphasis on architectural surroundings, color, and pattern, this series expands upon several of the visual themes established in the two collections afore mentioned. *Harem Number 1,* a triptych, shows an almost entirely vacant, highly decorated Islamic interior (Figure 10). The harem that we see in this image is not the Orientalist harem, bubbling over with seas of scantily clad women. Rather, the room is entirely empty, with the exception of the figure of one woman that occupies a niche space directly in the center of the middle frame. She is not accessible either, as the woman Ingres'

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[39] For additional reading on the "waiting" women in Orientalist painting see: Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Artand Society*, 1st ed, Icon Editions (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

painting would be.[40] She is far away from the viewer, at a back of the room that one feels they have only just entered upon seeing it. The position of the viewer here, however, is not vouyeuristic as most Orientalist harem scenes are. Instead, here the viewer is placed in the position of the outsider, speaking perhaps more closely to the reality of the harem, in which the outsider is unable to access the interior domain.

Like in the previously mentioned photographs, the woman blends into the backdrop of the interior space. The blues of her garment and the blues of the tiles that surround her engulf her tiny body. She is completely overwhelmed by the architectural space around her. Flanked by two frames that are dominated by elaborately tiled columns, the figure in the central frame becomes secondary to the space that she occupies. Though the photograph is constructed and arranged by Essaydi- not at all functioning as pure documentary, if any photograph ever does- it combats the mythology of the harem that is constructed in Orientalist works. In a 2013 interview with Africa Is A Country, magazine, Essaydi describes her frustration with the Orientalist take on the harem, as in her personal reality the harem was a home space in which the gaze of strangers would never enter.[41] The women in these photographs, removed from the eroticized context of Orientalism, open up a space for a different, perhaps more accurate, discourse surrounding the relationship between Muslim women and the domestic sphere.

Blurring, Darkening, Erasing

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[40] For reference see Figure 5.
[41] "An Interview with Artist Lalla Essaydi on Looking beyond Beauty," *Africa Is a Country*, accessed April 8, 2015, http://africasacountry.com/an-interview-with-artist-lalla-essaydi-on-looking-beyond-beauty/.

Somewhere between Orientalist portrait photography and picturesque landscapes emerged a type of image that appears in virtually every collection of nineteenth-century images of the Middle East. A collection that perfectly exemplifies this set or type is the photographs of Maxime Du Camp. Here we see what appear to be first and foremost images that are documenting and in a sense preserving monumental and architectural sites. At first, the documentary quality of the images controls the viewer's eye and the monument, that appears to exist in isolation, mesmerizingly takes hold. However, upon closer investigation of this category of images one can trace a startling similarity across each of the still landscapes and crumbling monuments- a figure. Often blurred in obscurity, hidden almost completely in shadow, and concealed to the point of erasure, these figures are suggestive of a haunting present void. Du Camp suggested that these figures were merely meant to exemplify scale in his works, so those armchair travelers in Europe could experience the magnitude of the ancient Near East through his works. But as Julia Ballerini questions in her essay, "Orientalist Photography and its Mistaken Pictures," "Why use a figure for scale and then hide them?"[42]

Du Camp's photographs of the Temple of Isis in Philae, Egypt from 1849-1851 employ the bad ghost figure in nearly every shot. Though the figures in Du Camp's photographs appear to be existing in the environment of the picture plane naturally at times, at others Du Camp's staged arrangement of human life is palpable. An image of the façade of the temple first seems to be entirely void of human life. The shot is entirely consumed by the exterior wall and its intricate relief sculptures depicting three Egyptian

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[42] Julia Ballerini, "Orientalist Photography and Its Mistaken Pictures," Dahesh Museum, *Picturing the Middle East.* 22.

gods (Figure 11). The central figure appears to be Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, and notable

for a falcon head resting upon the shoulders of a human man.[43] At the waist of this figure is

a void, or a window, perhaps an intentional piece of the construction of the temple or the

result of time. In the dark shadows of this concave space sits a single, solitary, and barely

visible figure. According to Du Camp, this figure was meant as a measure of scale, however

as Ballerini addresses- Du Camp's figure is always alone, which is unusual in its

consistency.[44] Aside from the strangeness of the figure's singularity, in this photograph and

several others, he is barely visible. This figure, sitting perched a great distance up the

façade of the temple wall, is subsumed by the grandeur of the temple itself. Further, he is

almost entirely cloaked in shadow- a strange compositional choice for Du Camp if he in fact

inserted these figures in his work as a means of measuring scale.

The blurred and shadow covered figures in Du Camp's collection may be explained

by the technical rigor of photography at this stage. As the figures in these images would

have been required to remain still for long periods of time while the photograph was being

taken, it is possible that some amount of blurring can be accounted for as simple human

error. Any movement by Du Camp's figures could have compromised their clarity in the

image. However, as Ballerini argues, the constant appearance of these single blurred

figures in Du Camp's photographs seems suggestive of something a great deal more

intentional.[45] It is almost as if these figures, symbolic of the contemporaneous population of

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[43] George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 2nd ed, Routledge Dictionaries (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005). The two figures on either side of the god that appears to be Horus may represent Hathor (left) goddess of sky, love, and beauty.

[44] Julia Ballerini, "Orientalist Photography and Its Mistaken Pictures," Dahesh Museum, *Picturing the Middle East*.22.

[45] Ibid. 22-23.

the areas that Du Camp was photographing, are being intentionally written out of the

narrative that he is creating. In a second photograph of an entirely different view of the

Temple of Isis, the camouflaged man appears again (Figure 12). At the base of the third

column, his face is again entirely obscured by shadow, and his body only vaguely traceable

by the contract of light pillar. Like the first photograph, he appears to be seated or

squatting- a position that confuses the argument that he has been included to contribute to

a sense of scale. In this image, his form is nearly impossible to assess. In the blurred

confusion of light and shadow, his body becomes an extension the temple, the void, the

rubble beneath his feet. He becomes here an image of a civilization past.

To destroy the figure or to create a visual association between the figure and the

crumbling temple, is to suggest that the image being seen is an image of a society that has

fallen. One late nineteenth-century travel account describes the presence of figures in

photographs of Egypt such as Du Camp's saying, "The ghost-like figures of the Arabs might

as well have been omitted… And besides the modern Arabs of Egypt are such ephemeral

occupiers of the soil, that they have no right to any place amongst the more ancient

monuments of Egypt."[46] This comment not only explains the common and bigoted idea that

black skin was un-photographable in the nineteenth-century, it points directly toward the

underlying xenophobia present in the act of the West photographing the East. The primary

intention behind the creation of these images may have been to compile a document that

could be brought back to the Western world, exhibited and disseminated to scholars,

armchair travelers, and anyone in-between. However, somewhere between documentary

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[46] Ibid. 22-23. From Charles Piazzi Smythe, a reading for a magic lantern show, *The Great Pyramid: Forty-Eight Slides from Direct Negatives by Professor Piazzi Smythe,* (London, 18970, 2:12.

photography and constructed ethnographic portraiture, a secondary ambition emerged. Blurring or hiding the figures of unnamed individuals within photographs of the Near East's many monumental achievements was a way of visually establishing a divide between the past and present- a motif that is only one step away from removing the citizens of the places that were being photographed by the West all together.

For many artists born in diaspora, working in a state of exile preventing their return to home, and existing between multiple worlds as a result of emigration, reconstructing missing pieces of the past and national histories is a challenge that must be faced in both their daily lives as well as in their work. These missing narratives or personal voids are perhaps evident in some ways in the works of all artists who are facing these circumstances and interested in addressing their pasts. The motifs established in the nineteenth-century photography of the Bonfils family, Sir Francis Bedford's visual travel journal, and Maxime Du Camp's documentation of the Middle East and North Africa have over time seeped into the global understanding of varied and diverse locations. In turn, these photographic collections created national identities and histories that were, in many cases, false. In a number of ways these collections and their tropes- in combination with the works of the Orientalists during this same period- are responsible for the stereotyping and homogenization of MENA religious, social, and political practice. The trickle down effect that these early images created have not only established a confused and muddled view of the MENA world from the outside, but they have created a series of visual signifiers that contemporary artists from the Middle East and North Africa are obliged to contend with when making works for a global audience.

Inside Out: Cannibalizing the Image

The contrast between the gaze of the insider and outsider in early, "global,"
representations of the Middle East and North Africa can be examined retroactively with a
keen eye to its conscientious construction.[47] The obliterating force of the Western male
gaze dictates nearly every element of what is shown and conversely not shown in
Orientalist photography and painting. The outsider, the European photographer or painter,
thus had the power to reveal the world of the insider, all the while completely concealing
their presence. The fantasy world that the Orientalists created, void of human life,
romantically ruinous, and bubbling over with sexually available mysterious women, would
over a century later be an imaginary place continuing to thrive in the art world- this time
being ripped apart from within.

To create a line between personal and public space is inherently messy business and
begins to slip into the territory of questioning where the individual truly ends. In many
ways, this chapter has concerned itself with the connection, rather than the distinction,
between identity and space, or better put, identity and home. Tarek Al-Ghoussein, a
Palestinian Kuwaiti is presently a professor at New York University in Abu Dhabi.[48] Al-
Ghoussein has been creating photographic works for the better part of a decade that
address his personal state of isolation, homogenization, and displacement. Al-Ghoussein is
both and outsider and an insider. Born to Palestinian parents who were exiled in Kuwait,
educated in the United States and Japan, and currently working in Abu Dhabi, his

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[47] For more about these early photographs see the authors cited in chapter 1, such as: University of
Pennsylvania, *In Arab Lands*. Perez, *Focus East*.
[48] "Tarek Al-Ghoussein - Artists - Taymour Grahne," accessed February 21, 2015,
http://www.taymourgrahne.com/artists/tarek-al-ghoussein.

photographs directly tackle the strain of living a life in exile throughout a wide range of locations.[49] As an individual born into the Palestinian diaspora and denied access to the place that he considers his homeland by Israeli authorities, Al-Ghoussein's photographic works borrow from the tropes of the inside/outside binary that nineteenth-century photographers traveling to and documenting the Middle East were operating under.[50] However, Tarek Al-Ghoussein cannibalizes this codified visual system and turns it on his head.

The image of the near-unidentifiable figure that was repeatedly seen throughout the European collections of Orientalist photography re-emerges in the 2013 compilation of photographs *K-Files.* This collection of works was shown for the first time in the United States in 2014 at the Taymour Grahne Gallery in New York.[51] The 2014 show was inspired by an invitation to represent Kuwait's National Pavilion in the 2013 Venice Biennale, after which Al-Ghoussein continued to expand the series. In this series, Al-Ghoussein explores the various personal and national relationships that he has to Kuwait, as a Palestinian individual. In terms of physical access, Kuwait served as a homeland for Al-Ghoussein more than Palestine ever did, and these photographs explore the position of Al-Ghoussein as an outsider in the country that he primarily grew up in. The series consists of works that may be broken apart into two distinct, yet not entirely disconnected, approaches. The first includes Al-Ghoussein himself as the subject. These self-portraits show Al-Ghoussein in

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[49] Seth Thompson, "Palenstinian Identity: The Work Of Tarek Al- Ghoussein," *Afterimage*, April 2007, 27–30. In this essay the author includes and interview with Al-Ghoussein, in which he describes being a Palestinian who is unable to access his home country. None of Al-Ghoussein's works are produced in what is now Palestine.

[50] Tarek Al-Ghoussein et al., *Transfigurations: Tarek Al-Ghousssein* (Black Dog Publishing, 2014).3.

[51] "Tarek Al-Ghoussein: K Files - Exhibitions - Taymour Grahne," accessed February 13, 2015, http://www.taymourgrahne.com/exhibitions/tarek-al-ghoussein-k-files.

various iconic locations in Kuwait that also signal the presence of national and cultural

intersections. The second level of this exhibition was comprised of Al-Ghoussein's personal

archive, using photographs and other documents which were publically accessible and

linked to Al-Ghoussein's past.[52]

Having been born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents, then living in the United States,

and currently the UAE, the themes most prevalent in Al-Ghoussein's work are displacement

and void. The desolate, vacant, photographs that comprise the first half of *K-Files* explore

these themes in a way that is both entirely personal and entirely of the conversation of a

national memory and identity. Photograph *025* of the series exemplifies each of these

feelings seemingly all at once (Figure 13). The image shows a miniscule Al-Ghoussein, back

turned away from the camera and standing in what appears to be the center of a vacant lot.

Surrounding the open space that surrounds him are what look to be either modern

residential or commercial spaces. The emptiness of the lot and the jarring geometric make-

up of the architecture in the image dwarf the tiny figure. He is clothed entirely in black. We

cannot see his face, as he is turned away, yet even the particulars of his body's form are

difficult to parse out. The shape of the almost staircase like structures that stand before

him cast a shadow on the earthen lot in which he stands, not quite dividing the ground into

equal spaces of light and shadow. His figure, however, appears on neither side. He stands

directly at the intersection of light and dark, peering onward toward the buildings ahead. It

is difficult to discern in this image if we see Al-Ghoussein cast in light or shadow.

The same, almost indiscernible figure, (Al-Ghoussein), appears throughout this

series, cast in shadow and dwarfed by the enormity of the structures that surround him.

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[52] Ibid.

Even when the darkness of his figure is in direct opposition to the visual schema of the

photograph, his presence is difficult to detect (Figure 14). Here we see Al-Ghoussein's

miniature-self standing at the base of a massive pillar. The composition is dominated by the

whiteness of the structure in which Al-Ghoussein has placed himself. Though, in theory, the

contrast between the lightness of the structure and the blackness of his clothing should

draw attention to him immediately, it does not. To say that his body blends into the

architectural form would be an oversimplification, and yet there is an element of merger

between the human and artificial forms. Like Maxime Du Camp's photographs of nearly

vacant Egyptian monuments, the figures in Tarek Al-Ghoussein's images are so

tremendously outsized by the architecture that they are almost robbed of identity.[53]

In the foreground of this image, at the top of the pillar on the left, a security camera

extends outward. Also veiled in shadow, the camera appears to be only additional darkened

presence. Like the figure of Al-Ghoussein, the camera is concurrently part of the structure

and completely removed from it. Its presence in the frame appears to be directed at Al-

Ghoussein's tiny figure in the distance. The camera is suggestive of surveillance and calls to

mind the tendency of both the American and Middle Eastern mainstream to monitor the

immigrant presence. His work is described by his New York representative at the Taymour

Grahne suggests that the figure of the artist in Al-Ghoussein's work, silhouetted against

barren urban and desert landscapes of the region is perhaps allegorical of Palestinian's

position in exile, as well as of the West's view of the Middle East.[54] The cohesion of both the

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[53] For more on the photographs of Maxime Du Camp specifically, see: Dahesh Museum, *Picturing the Middle East*. Perez, *Focus East*.Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*.
[54] "Tarek Al-Ghoussein - Artists - Taymour Grahne."

physical and social constraints of a life in exile extend throughout Al-Ghoussein's body of work and particularly in *323.*

In contrast with *K-Files,* Al-Ghoussein's earlier Self Portrait series from 2002-2003, deals with the disorder of home and identity living in exile. Al-Ghoussein's work provides a means of preserving his personal identity while poking holes at the stereotyped national identities of Arab individuals.[55] Throughout this series, we see Al-Ghoussein walking through desolate urban and natural locations wearing a Palestinian headscarf (Figure 15). Like in *K-Files,* he wears all black, contrasting his figure not only with his surroundings but the symbol of the scarf as well. Not only is the scarf functioning as mechanism for covering or veiling, themes that appear in his later works through the placement of his body in shadow, but also, it represents the prejudices that often accompany this Palestinian tradition. In a 2010 review of a retrospective of Al-Ghoussein's work at the Sharjah Art Museum, Sabine Vogel writes:

> "We immediately presume the subject is a terrorist—the very association which Al-Ghoussein himself provokes in some. The artist was born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents, and went to school in the US. With his "Self-Portraits," he is not only answering the prejudices that continue to misrepresent Palestinians as terrorists, but also plying a sense of solitude and wanderlust."[56]

This assessment, though it is a bit general, does begin to address what is central to this image. We see him here, peering out onto the Dead Sea, Palestine far off in the distance.[57] The water separates him from where he stands, and where he longs to be. After taking this image, Al-Ghoussein was brought into questioning by Jordanian police officer who

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[55] For more on the foundations of Arab identity and the stereotyping of Arab immigrates particularly in the United States see: Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Becoming American?: The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2011).

[56] Sabine Vogel, "Tarek Al-Ghoussein," 4.29.2010, *Artforum.com*, accessed January 19, 2015, http://artforum.com/archive/id=25472.

[57] Thompson, "Palenstinian Identity: The Work Of Tarek Al- Ghoussein."

questioned his headscarf and allegiances for twenty-two hours.[58] For the authorities, and

the viewer, this image comes across as a salient statement about the visual connection

between the scarf and terrorism. This photograph Al-Ghoussein's work is not simply

representative of a split life, divided between multiple homes and identities, but also it is an

emblem of identities forced upon him as a result of the Palestinian diaspora. The images

that make up the *Self-Portrait* series, in many ways like *K-Files* and the 2011-2013 series

(In) Beautification, set up an arrangement of oppositions between person and place, and

identity and home. In a 2012 interview Al-Ghoussein describes the process of *(In)*

Beautification, which at the time was still an ongoing project, saying, "The series is an

attempt to negotiate my own relationship to land and place and how the development has

formed and continues to form my understanding of what the concept of identity may

mean."[59] In this series we see Al-Ghoussein again, performing the acts of beautification,

such as whitewashing the desert floor of what is shaping up to be a perfectly manicured

landscape (Figure 16).

The whitening of the landscapes in *(In) Beatification* is in stark contrast to the

darkening of Al-Ghoussein's figure. The figure in each series represents an erasure of

identity that is both representative of the personal and the national. Whether it manifests

in the form of shadow cloaking the body or the all black clothing that he consistently wears,

Al-Ghoussein appears as an anonymous individual. All of the photographs in Al-

Ghoussein's K-Files series are self-portraits. Though there is no trace of individual identity

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[58] Ibid.
[59] "Stereotyping the Stereotypes," 2012, *Ibraaz*, accessed January 1, 2015,
http://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/50. An interview with Tarek Al-Ghoussein by Anthony Downey. Ibraaz is
a platform for essays an interviews dealing with Visual Culture in the Middle East and North Africa.

in the figure in these images, the choice to use himself as a model is a telling reflection of the history of photographing the Middle East. Not only are there photographs arguing for representations of the MENA world from within, they also shed light on the realities of working as an artist in a state of exile. Though perhaps indirectly, the *K-Files* take in the visual standards that have been historically constructed through the production of travel journals such as those by Maxime Du Camp. Regardless of the artist's intention, when these photographs are viewed within the broader context of photographic imaged of the Middle East the connection is undeniable. In both instances, the figure is meant to be largely unnoticed while still bearing a poignant statement. The figure is a symbol of the irrelevance of the contemporary population in the eyes of the dominant culture. The uniformities of the figure imply, via the darkening and the cloaking in shadow, an intentional homogenizing of the culture. However, in the case of Al-Ghoussein's photographs the figure is not only representative of the identity of the nation, in this case, Kuwait, but of his personal identity as well. Though Al-Ghoussein photographs himself in each of his series, he remains anonymous.

Al-Ghoussein's insertion of himself, as an artist working in exile and an artist who has lived, worked, and trained in both the dominant and subaltern strata, is a clear manifestation of his personal perception of self. In *K-Files,* the power structure is reversed. It is not a series of images that imply an orchestration from the gaze of the dominant white male photographer. Rather, these images are stories of displacement that come from within. Al-Ghoussein's visual veiling of his own identity reveals the artist's position as an outsider within his own community while simultaneously concealing any trace of his character. The backdrop of Kuwait is a stark reminder of the dislocation that Al-

Ghoussein's works deal with. Additional cues in each of the photographs that comprise the series likewise imply the turmoil between person and place.

Photograph *109* shows Al-Ghoussein once again cast in shadow before the backdrop of a shabby residential high-rise (Figure 17). Standing under one of the several umbrellas, Al-Ghoussein seems to occupy a space that was once intended for leisure. It is almost possible to imagine the space bathed in sunlight and filled with poolside amusement, but here it is vacant. It is a photograph of ruin. The tiled floor of the patio is damaged, stained with pools of green stagnant water. The umbrellas and benches stand in clumps- vacant except for the presence of Al-Ghoussein. To his right is a sprawling pile of indiscernible rubble. Then, behind him the façade of the building also appears to have been neglected. Patches of blue paint crackle and fade into washed out beige. There is no trace of life or inhabitance of any kind. This image is not entirely unlike the abandonment that Maxime Du Camp hoped to demonstrate for his audiences. But here, the abandonment is entirely Al-Ghoussein's. He occupies a home that is not home- he is an outsider in his own land.

Ruined Cities

Like Du Camp's pictures of "bad ghosts," images that voided the Middle East and North Africa of human presence entirely, placing the emphasis on what appeared to be a landscape that was entirely blemished by ruined architecture became increasingly popular among European audiences. In some ways, these images can be linked to those taken by Sir Francis Bedford upon his 1862 journey. Bedford was concerned with recording the experience and creating a document that the Western world had never seen. It is difficult, however, to argue that all of the ruin photography of the Middle East that followed was

done with the same intent. Looking again at the collection of Maxime Du Camp's original

publication opening plate, a telling decision is revealed. Though within the collection of Du

Camp's *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie,* number of picturesque landscapes and cityscapes,

of the 1852 travel account was consumed by a rundown desolate image of modern Cairo

(Figure 18).[60] As the image that greets the viewer, the first photograph shown upon

opening the book, this view of modern Cairo sets a poignant tone. It tells the viewer that

the image that they are seeing is what Cairo is now and that the images of crumbling

architecture and monuments are only traces of a civilization gone-by. The text that anchors

the opening plate is nearly as telling as the image itself.

 A View of Modern Cairo from the West, the textual component accompanying this

photograph, perhaps explains what it is that we are looking at in a very different way than

the image itself can. Though this publication was meant to be a documentation of

monuments and historical sites of interest, Du Camp is known to have added images of the

modern cities that he was traveling through as a means of giving the book context.[61]

However, the choice placement of this image as the opening plate combined with the

anchorage of the text suggests that there was perhaps an additional motive. If we take just

a moment to consider that the caption distinguishes that this image of a run down city is

modern Cairo and that it is being viewed from the *West*, we may find that there is a certain

imperialist gaze at play here. Existing in the same arena as Piazzi Smythe's observation

about "modern Arabs," the text that accompanies this photograph separates the

contemporary population of Cairo from its ancient past. Placing this image and its text first

[60] Julia Ballerini, "Orientalist photography and Its Mistaken Pictures," Dahesh Museum, *Picturing the Middle East*. 14-16.
[61] Ibid. 16.

in a series of twenty-seven images is a loaded statement- almost as if to say that though the images that follow are of great architectural and technological achievement- look at how they have let the civilization crumble.

Text as a means of excessive anchorage in Orientalist photography emerges in nearly every genre. Thinking back to the studio portraits of the Bonfils family, particularly those that recycle the same model who has been costumed differently, it is clear that the anchorage of the textual component is crucial for the audiences understanding. Without the caption, *Young Jewish Girl in Beirut,* Bonfils' photograph is simply a portrait of a young woman (Figure 4). The text gives validation to the image, even if what is being shown in the image is entirely contrived by the artist's hand. Ali Behdad describes this need for excessive text as, "A profound desire to fix the meaning of the image, to deprive it of any symbolic message of alternative meaning."[62] Considering this, alongside the text and image combination of Du Camp's opening plate, it is clear that this image and others like it are meant to read as documentation of the truth. By showing an entirely depopulated Cairo, and labeling it as a "modern view," the viewer is being told that this is a city that was once great and is now is a state of disrepair. "A view from the West," also implies the imperialist gaze present in this image. This image serves as a direct example of one of Said's focal arguments- that Orientalism is a mechanism through which the West can assert power over the Easy. If the East is a place of abandoned ruin, then it is the job of the West to intervene.

Returning to the Ruin

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[62] Ali Behdad, "The Orientalist Photograph," Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*. 26.

The examination of the self, as well as of the self's relation to national histories is grappled with by video artists who have varying relationships to their home countries. Additionally, the relationship between the physical body, physical space, and identity that is depicted of the Middle East and North Africa by the West in Orientalist photography is explored not only in the photographic works of contemporary MENA artists that have been afore mentioned, but in contemporary MENA video artists as well. Specifically, the implications of the obscured figure in the ruinous architectural landscapes that are depicted in Orientalist works so picturesquely continue to be dissected and reclaimed in contemporary MENA video-based art. Lida Abdul, an Afghan artist, is one of many female video artists interested in exploring a personal relationship to a homeland that has been marked by the ravages of warfare.[63] Abdul was forced to flee Afghanistan in 1979, when she was six years old, after the Soviet invasion of her country. After this time Abdul lived as a refugee in Germany, India, as well as the United States where she received a Masters of Fine Arts at the University of California Irvine, unable to return to Afghanistan until after the expulsion of the Taliban by a coalition of Western forces in 2001.[64] Unlike the work of artists such as Neshat, who are unable to return to their home country to film their work, Abdul's videos are shot on location in Afghanistan.[65] Having begun her career as an artist while still living in a state of exile, Abdul's ability to return to Afghanistan after 2001 undoubtedly changed the landscape of her work. The ability to access the previously

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[63] Alexandra Macgilp, "Lida Abdul," *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 86 (December 2013).

[64] Genoveva Rückert, *Lida Abdul: Works 1999-2008* (Linz: OK Offenes Kulturhaus Oberösterreich, 2008). 15. Additionally: regarding the events of 2001 see:Steven Morris and Ewen MacAskill, "Collapse of the Taliban," *The Guardian*, accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/nov/17/afghanistan.terrorism10.

[65] Macgilp, "Lida Abdul." This essay briefly discusses the varying degrees to which contemporary MENA artists face a life in exile, specifically the availability of access- which in Abdul's case was granted during her career as an artist.

inaccessible is visually evident in present absences in many of Abdul's video works. Despite

her ability to now return to the home which she was exiled from, Abdul's works remain

heavily influenced by her position of displacement.

Abdul's video productions investigate the intersections between national identities

and physical space. Three of Abdul's videos specifically speak to the visual tropes of the

Middle East established in nineteenth-century Orientalist photography. *White House*

(2005), *Once Upon and Awakening* (2006), and, *In Transit* (2008) are short videos that each

explore the human relationship to architectural space and manmade environments.

Additionally, these three works feature the presence of ruin or damage. These videos along

with others by Abdul, described by art critic and curator Victoria Lynn as that which

"disconnects and reassembles the figure within the landscape, transgressing assumptions

about the body and its place in disputed territories," work within a major theme.[66]

Throughout Abdul's videos there is a strong feeling of dislocation which is brought about

by the uncovering of national history.

In her 2005 video, *White House*, Abdul inserts herself as the work's primary

subject.[67] In this 5-minute video, filmed on 16mm and converted to video, we see Abdul

whitewashing architectural ruins and piles of rubble (Figure 19). This space, on the

outskirts of Kabul, Abdul's hometown, is a visual palimpsest of Afghanistan's political

history. Once a functioning military base, constructed in the early 1900's as part of the

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[66] Victoria Lynn,"ARTPULSE MAGAZINE » Reviews » Lida Abdul: Body of Ruins," 2010, accessed March 1, 2015, http://artpulsemagazine.com/lida-abdul-body-of-ruins.

[67] Abdul is known for appearing in her own work, which may be directly related to her early interest in performance based art. See: *Global Feminisms: Lida Abdul*, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4iOuoOPlN0&feature=youtube_gdata_player. This artist's talk was given in conjunction with the show *Global Feminism* at the Brooklyn Museum.

presidential palace, sit here in ruin. As the short video begins we see Abdul wearing the robes of a nomadic Afghan woman, however, her face and hair remain unveiled giving her immediately away as a contemporary and potentially secular woman. Her costume tied her to her country's past and present, as well as her past and present as a woman who spent most of her life as a refugee. The absence of the veil speaks loudly against the presence of her robe, making it clear that she is an outsider in the space that she occupies, even as the place was her original home. As she clambers over the detritus, painting each bit with a broad brush and hefting a utilitarian plastic bucket, she both preserves and purifies her countries past. The act of painting the ruin white does not erase it, or fix it. Rather, this act seems to be done as a cleansing ritual. It is a mechanism for healing. The meaning of the monument, and its physical connectedness to Afghanistan's history of loss and destruction blended with the gendered act of cleansing the trauma offers up a new potential narrative for Afghan identity.

Abdul is not the only figure that appears amid the stark setting of this video. An Afghan man appears, dressed in all black, also standing in the midst of the bombed-out rubble, and as if he were a piece of the fractured architecture itself, Abdul begins to paint him as well (Figure 20). In a review of this video, Paul B. Franklin identifies this moment as a suggestion of trauma, positing that the event of destruction has rendered Abdul unable to differentiate person from place and thus she treats the man and the ruin identically.[68] This assessment, however, does not allow for a further investigation of the traditionally gendered relationships to warfare. In a normative context, men engage in warfare, and women are left to pick up the pieces, to cleanse and make new, as Abdul does in this video.

[68] Paul Franklin, "Paris: Lida Abdul," *Art in America* 102, no. 6 (July 2014): 170–71.

The man thus, is tied to the ruin as he is tied to the event of war, and warrants the same treatment as does the destruction. The memory of the past is then preserved, but also transformed and renewed with the potential for hope- a sentiment that is mirrored at the video's close with a shot of a herd of wild goats, which has been described by Genoveva Rückert, as, "an image of nature and life prevailing again."[69]

Continuing with the exploration of personal roles and national identities, Abdul's *Once Upon Awakening* (2006), and *In Transit* (2008), turn to images of Afghanistan's ruinous landscapes dominated by groups of men. In the first video, a group of men dressed entirely in black futilely pull at ropes connected to the carcass of a ruined space that stands erect in the barren landscape (Figure 21). When installed, the projection size of this video mirrors the monumental scale of the devastated structure.[70] As a result of the enormity of the projection, this video then creates a doubling effect as the monument dominates the men attempting to disassemble it and the video itself dominates the space and the audience. Employing a similar motif, *In Transit* (2008) first shows a series of images long abandoned warplanes. After a roughly 30-seconds of absolute silence, the sounds of a mob of young boys fades into the shots of the planes, and the text "anything is possible when everything is lost," appears on the screen. Immediately after we see the young boys pulling at ropes that are attached to one of these permanently landed aircrafts, commanding it to fly (Figure 22). Like *Once Upon and Awakening,* there is an eerie wobbling quality to both the film and sound. While the young boys pull at the ropes, the hollow drones and electric scratchings fill the air with a palpable troubling tone. Eventually, the young boys begin

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[69] Rückert, *Lida Abdul.* 2.
[70] Ibid.12. Rückert here describes the monumental effect of the video in the actual installation space.

collecting piles of white cotton from the ground and filling the plane's cracks and bullet holes with the fluffy matter- not unlike the gesture performed by Abdul in *White House*. Their childish decoration of the dead machine reads as the application of a bandage or the new life given to the old substance through imagination.

Abdul describes the site of these skeleton planes as also being on the outskirts of Kabul, where she spent the first part of her childhood, saying, "these are uncanny sights because the presence of these metallic giants is a symbol of sorts for the presence of the physical and psychological traumas of war that have defined the history of Afghanistan for almost three decades now."[71] The violence that these planes suggest, and the innocence of the schoolboys who play in their fantasy world around it creates a very strong call for change while retaining an ominous warning of the truth of history. Seeing children play with and around the wreckages of war, reminds the viewer of the everlasting effects of violence. No only has the history of violence created a landscape strewn with reminders of war, but those reminders are part of the upbringing-the fiber- of future generations. While the past is not being denied, destroyed, or hidden in this video, there is certainly an overtone of desire for particular parts of Afghanistan's history to be put to rest. Abdul's repetition of imagery from the area surrounding her birthplace of Kabul serves as a stage for a poignant commentary on both her personal position as an exiled Afghan person, and the disjointed identity of a nation that has spent decades negotiating disjointed and turbulent histories.

[71] Ibid. 11.

The sexualizing, blurring, and ruining of the cities and individuals in most nineteenth-century travel photos of the Near East speaks directly to the Orientalist vision as described by Said. This vision -primarily fueled by fantasy, desire, and imagination- would eventually culminate in a fixed set of visual signifiers used to represent the Middle East and North Africa from both the outside and from within. These three broad themes are certainly not present in all nineteenth-century photographs of the Near East. In addition, it is important to note that not all photographs taken of the Near East during this period were created by European photographers.[72] With that being said the large and early photographic collections such as the Bonfils', Sir Francis Bedford, and Maxime Du Camp's work set a standard for future production of Orientalist photography, painting, and literary works. Even outside of the realm of Orientalist art production, these typified images would eventually create a global misunderstanding of the MENA world- and understanding that is now being confronted by artists from the Middle East and North Africa who are negotiating a hybrid liminal space that exists somewhere between the "East" and "West."

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[72] Perez, *Focus East*. Perez attempts to catalogue and provide biography for all traceable photographers in the MENA world in the nineteenth-century.

Chapter Two

Interior Landscapes: Memories and Photographic Reconstructions of Identity and Home

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.

-- Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile,* 2000.

The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own

-- Susan Sontag, *Melancholy Objects,* 1977.

The acknowledgement of how individuals makes choices of what to believe, which entail political and social and personal affiliations with individuals and with collection cultures, is clearly a crucial dimension to any model of trying to understand how we identify and make meaning of visual images, not to mention of other people and ourselves, in the world today.

-- Amelia Jones, *Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and "Post-Identity,"* 2012.

To presuppose that contemporary photography and video-based art by MENA artists who are working in various strata of exile can be broken down into discrete taxonomies would be to view these artists works quite narrowly. This being said, to compare these photographic and video works to the Orientalist photography of the Middle East and North Africa would also fall short of doing justice to the complexities of any photographic and video work of the twenty-first century. In a world in which images are abundant, it is critical to engage in a widely varied series of discourses. This chapter

neither aims to pinpoint a singular connection between artists living, working in exile nor does it seek to formulate a definite conclusion regarding a universal MENA meaning. Rather, in this chapter I will look at the ways in which the primary and reoccurring themes that are present in the early photography of the Middle East and North Africa are being reworked by contemporary artists. To borrow a term from Gerardo Mosquera's postcolonial discourse on Latin America, in many ways the contemporary works by MENA artists have *cannibalized* the standard that had been established, disseminated, and repeated with nineteenth-century Orientalist image making.[73] Here, I will engage with the photographic images and videos that have been made by artists who range in location, gender, and cause for displacement, and assessing the number of nuances and themes that these artists negotiate in order to create an image that exists somewhere between fiction and documentary. I will argue that contemporary MENA artists in exile both directly and indirectly confront the visual motifs of nineteenth-century Orientalist photography as a means of addressing the relationships between national and personal identity and the conception of home.

The photographers in this chapter each confront and complicate the tendency for the photographic image to be seen in a global context as an absolute representation. In his now often cited "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," published first in 1959 as part of a collection of essays that came to be known as *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, André Bazin

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[73] Gerardo Mosquera, "J'est un autre" : notes on cannibalism and contemporary art,"
Hans Belting et al., eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Karlsruhe, Germany : Cambridge, MA ; London, England: ZKM/Center for Art and Media ; The MIT Press, 2013). Gerardo Mosquera uses the term "cannibalization," to describe the post-colonial state of artistic production in Latin America as possessing the ability to look backward upon the historical representations of Latin America from the Euroscentric perspective, and to "cannibalize," or claim a new owner ship of those representations- often times using the stereotypes that have been historical repeated in their works.

writes, "All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an

advantage from his absence."[74] Here Bazin is describing the state in which early

photography in some ways was able to mechanically produce what the plastic artists had

been attempting for decades- total realism. Bazin goes on later to say that this ability, the

ability to capture the real, has in some ways freed the plastic arts.[75] Photography then, and

eventually cinema, would become the primary and perhaps even most trustworthy means

of documentation. This description by Bazin is in many ways a reflection of the early

twentieth-century's beliefs about photography, cinema, and documentation. However, I

would argue that what Bazin is getting at is at the heart of a belief that continues to persist

today- that the photograph possesses the power to capture and reveal the truth.[76] The

same ideas can be applied to the medium of video. Often, the recorded document can

appear as documentary, regardless of the role of the artists in the construction of the

footage.

　　　In addition to the notion that the photographic image, or in this case the video, holds

the power of objective truth, Bazin seems to be suggesting in this passage that the hand of

the maker is of no consequence in the overall construction of the image. To assume that the

photograph is an entirely objective view is also to assume that the *photographer* played no

real part in the construction of the image. As we have seen in the first chapter, even in the

earliest moments of photographic experimentation the hand of the artist can be revealed

with only a slight amount of effort. The images that make up the collections of the Bonfils,

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[74] André Bazin and American Council of Learned Societies, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). 13.
[75] Ibid.
[76] For additional early photo theory see: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1st American ed (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

Du Camp, and Sir Francis Bedford, serve to show that there is both a revealing and

concealing quality in early photography. What is seen and what remains unseen in an

image, particularly in regard to these Orientalist images, was entirely orchestrated by the

images maker. To consider this, is to consider the dual effort of man and machine. Unlike

Orientalist painting, which would have been created in a studio manifesting from the

fantasy of the artist and maybe only loosely based on reality and operating entirely within

the realm of fiction, Orientalist photography would have lived in a space far more liminal.

Like contemporary photographic and video-based works, these nineteenth-century

photographs would have occupied a space somewhere between reality and fiction.

The confusion and conflation of these two categories (the real and the fictive) are

largely responsible for the disparate accounts of their history. The discourse surrounding

these images typically takes the form of one of the two opposing positions. The first being

the Orientalist view, which supports that these images are pure documentary. The second

position being the postcolonial view, asserting that these images were highly constructed

and manipulated by those behind the camera either physically or financially, as an imperial

tool. In actuality, these images may be best described as a combination of both views. In

many instances, the photographs found in nineteenth-century Orientalist collections had

been heavily constructed by the photographer in question.

Frequently, the contemporary critical examination of MENA representation is

explored through the use of manipulating the archive.[77] Rather than reconstructing the

tropes established in Orientalist photography or painting as a means of deconstructing the

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[77] For examples of the manipulation of the archive, referring to the photographs described I chapter one, see: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's *Wonder Beirut,* Shadi Ghadirian's *Qajar,* and Lalla Essaydi's *Harem,* series.

past, a number of MENA artist focus their attentions on the more recent histories of their

homes. By seeking a means of addressing a void that has been created through any political,

cultural, or religious displacement, contemporary MENA artists can confront and construct

both national and personal identities.[78] The relationship between identity and home is, in

each of the case studies in this chapter, complicated and intertwined. Each of the seven

artists that will be examined in this chapter, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Hassan

Hajjaj, Mohammed Kazem, Ghazel, Shirin Nehsat, and Dafy Hagai, create photographic and

video work that explore the way that a domestic space is cognitively constructed. Each of

these artists, working in various states of migration, are interested in exploring and

reworking the dominant perception of what it means to be a MENA person. By looking at

the ways in which these artists reclaim Orientalist representations, negotiate a space and

identity between disparate cultures, and critically examine contemporary stereotypes, this

chapter will begin a dialogue regarding the bond between home and identity.

Manipulating the Archive

Between 1968 and 1969 photographer Abdallah Farah was assigned the task of

taking picturesque documentary photographs of Lebanon by the Lebanese state. These

photos, consisting of both scenic rural views and Beirut's impressive cityscape were made

with the intention of eventually being transformed into postcards and other visual

advertisements. In 1975 the adversarial relationships within Beirut that had emerged out

of the onset of the Lebanese Civil War left the city's architecture as photographed by Farah

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[78] Demos, *The Migrant Image.* 169- 201. Demos describes in this book, particularly in the third chapter which case studies *Wonder Beirut,* the politics of fiction, arguing that particularly in states of conflict, artists are able to make use of blurring the lines between documentary and fiction to form a sociopolitical commentary.

anywhere from scarred to completely obliterated. Seeing civilization crumbling around

him, Abdallah Farah began altering his 1968 negatives. Farah burned each negative,

altering the image to reflect the actual change in the city's appearance (Figure 23). The

ontology of the photographic image in this case was then entirely altered by human hand.[79]

This narrative of the burned photographs is how these works were presented to the

public when they were shown first by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige; the true artists

behind these images. These postcards, though they are authentic reproductions of prints

that are not unlike those which would have circulated during the time period and question

and continue to appear in Lebanese tourism outlets today were never burned in the 1970's

to reflect the time destruction of war. Further, there was no Abdallah Farah behind these

images or this story. Rather, the entire story was retroactively constructed and

deconstructed.[80] Between 1997 and 2007 Hadjithomas and Joreige burned found

photographs of Beirut, creating fiction out of a reality.[81] This project consisted of three

parts: the historic process, the plastic process, and the latent images. The first two are

comprised of the burned photographs, and the third consisted of written accounts and

testimonials from Farrah about photographs that he took that were never developed, and

things that he had seen in the war.[82] About this photographic collection Hadjithomas and

Joreige have said, "There was a relation to image, to photography, to memory, to the

impossibility of writing our contemporary history. Our problem was not lack of images,

since our wars were all over the media, but we did not recognize ourselves in those

[79] Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, "The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer.," *Cabinet*, no. 16 (Winter /2005 2004): 37–41.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Marta Weiss "Light from the Middle East: Recording, Resisiting," Weiss and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Light from the Middle East*. 24.
[82] Ibid. 8.

representations, their viewpoint and their relation to the narrative."[83] This statement speaks directly to what I am interested in exploring in this chapter- the means through which contemporary artists from the Middle East and North Africa are constructing the images of their home as an effort to contrast the images that world media has placed upon them. This plethora of stereotyped images, which Hadjithomas and Joreige say they do not recognize themselves in, are in many ways what the artists in this chapter are reacting to on a broader scale. These artists, like those in the first chapter, are producing works that in various ways speak to the construction of the image of the Middle East and North Africa of the Orientalist period. However, additionally, these artists are interested in reclaiming the image of their various places of origin via works that speak to both national and personal realities or narratives that have been excluded in the mainstream representations of the places that they call home.

The connection between memory, the mechanical image, identity, and the construction of the home space is entirely what this chapter aims to explore. The artists selected here are in no way representative of the entirety of contemporary MENA work that critically engages with these themes, they serve instead as case studies for a larger picture. As globalization increases, the volume of artists working between worlds and between identities will only continue to grow. Notions of home, and personal as well as national identity becomes exponentially more complex within the context of exile, diaspora, and migration. These works, all produced within roughly the past ten years, examine these themes as well as their position within the broader historical context of photography and video art in the MENA world.

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[83] Ibid. 148.

Between Two Worlds

Negotiating a space that functions somewhere between two disparate worlds is a reality facing all artists living and working in a state of diaspora, exile, or immigration. The occupation of this liminal space is often visually manifested in artists' works via overt juxtapositions of cultural extremes that symbolize the essential differences between which the artist is living. In some ways, this mess of contradictions and negotiations may be argued as something that appears in any contemporary artists' works regardless of their personal connection to any variation of a migrant lifestyle. In the present state of contemporary globalization, we may argue that it is more common than not for an artist in the twenty-first century to work under a condition in which neither identity nor home is fixed. This fluidity is perhaps best considered as something that is neither global nor limited to those individuals experiencing the effects of mobility. However, for the purpose of this exploration the artists that we will look at are exploring the visual hybridity that comes from existing in between worlds.[84]

Born in Morocco but working primarily in London, Hassan Hajjaj has established a name for himself in the world of contemporary photography with his vibrant portraits with a twist. The press release for Hajjaj's first New York exhibition at the Taymour Grahne Gallery, *Kesh Angels*- a name that puts a spin on the femininity of the entirely female cast portrayed in the images- described his work as playing with stereotypes, branding, and the

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[84] Belting et al., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds.*

familiarity of everyday objects.[85] This particular exhibition of *Kesh Angels,* consisted of a

series of photographs along with an installation and video dominated by vibrant portraits

of cheerful, veiled, Arab women posing with motorcycles in Marrakesh streets and ally

ways. The name of the series alludes to the intentional complication of the orthodox

representation of North African women, calling to mind Hells Angels and Charlie's Angels.

The publications dealing with *Kesh Angels* hint at the nuances and complexities of the

cultural and artistic intersections in Hajjaj's work, however, the sheer volume of these

intersections and fusions deserves a further analysis.

In recent reviews, Hajjaj's style has been described as "anti-ethnographic," or

directly fighting directly against the constructed ethnographic portraits taken by

photographers such as the Bonfils.[86] However, the taking on of the negation to the word

ethnographic refuses to investigate the intricacies of the tradition that Hajjaj is at once

constructing and deconstructing in his photographs. The portraits included in *Kesh Angels,*

as well as in the 2012 three-channel video installation *My Rockstars,* consumes and digests

the very construction of ethnographic portrait photography, regurgitating it as an entirely

new genre. Unlike the staged and constructed studio portraits of MENA peoples made

popular in the nineteenth-century by artists such as the Bonfils family, masquerading as

documentary photographs, Hajjaj's work embraces elements of theatricality as well as

documentary.[87] *M.,* of Hajjaj's *Kesh Angels* series, plays with not only the structure of the

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[85] "Hassan Hajjaj: 'Kesh Angels - Exhibitions - Taymour Grahne," accessed February 21, 2015, http://www.taymourgrahne.com/exhibitions/hassan-hajjaj-and39kesh-angels.

[86] Tara Stevens, "Marrakech's New Arts Scene in the Funky Old Medina," *The Guardian*, accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2013/nov/15/marrakech-new-art-scene-galleries-medina.

[87] For more on the studio portrait photography of the Bonfils family see: Bonfils et al., *Remembrances of the Near East*.University of Pennsylvania, *In Arab Lands.*

ethnographic photograph, but also fashion photography, and traditional African portraits,

pop art, and design (Figure 24). The woman in this image and the other photographs of the

series is clothed in what structurally appears to be a traditional Moroccan robe, or

djellabah, and casually perched atop a motorcycle. The garment that she wears here

gestures toward the new world and the old, tradition and Westernization. The *djellabah,*

likely sown by Hajjaj himself, appears to be printed with some type of commercial brand,

and the repetition of pattern of the sleeves and torso cloak her entire body with whatever

message the product carries. Her face is veiled, and her eyes shine over the rims of yellow

heart-shaped sunglasses. She is at once a reflection of the Western expectation of her

image, and the reality of her contemporary life style. The audience anticipates the veiled

woman to appear reserved and timid, hence her costuming and gaze is somewhat shocking.

She confronts the camera through her heart-shaped lenses, flirting with the audience that is

inevitably making silent judgments about the reality of her identity. Her costuming leaves

very little exposed, but unlike Tarek Al-Ghoussein's figures, the covering of her body does

not strip her of her personhood. She is utterly in control. However, her position within the

frame and the frame itself have clearly been constructed by Hajjaj, removing the woman

from a natural context and borrowing from the Orientalist tradition of studio portraits.[88]

Having worked in the 1990's primarily as a fashion photographer, Hajjaj became

familiarized with the standard conventions of the genre, particularly as they existed in his

place of origin in Marrakech. In an interview with National Public Radio in 2014, Hajjaj

describes the experience of being on a shoot in Morocco and realizing that every element

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[88] Graham-Brown, *Images of Women*. This source deals with the constructed history of photography of women in the Middle east and North Africa, as described in the first chapter.

involved was from another country. The clothes, the models, and the photographer were all

foreign elements.[89] In *M.,* he is not only undermining the conventions of Orientalist

portraits, but also the conventions of contemporary fashion photography.[90] The woman in

this image sits on a motorcycle, but within an entirely staged space. The backdrop that

surrounds her is draped in teal and purple woven textiles. Additionally, Hajjaj constructs a

frame around this image, as well as the other photographs in *Kesh Angels,* using recycled

Arabic products, which lightly suggest the motifs of 1960's American pop-art.[91]

The overwhelming presence of non-Moroccan products and peoples in Moroccan

fashion photography and advertising without a doubt sparked Hajjaj's inspiration in

creating *Kesh Angels.* In what is now perhaps the most widely reproduced image from this

series we are shown elements of the constructed fashion-photography style images such as

M., but this time shown in what appears to be an authentic setting (Figure 25). Rather than

being arranged in front of a highly stylized backdrop like the woman in M., five women

stand in a group on a concrete lot. Three of them are straddled over motorcycles while two

flank the central figure. These women, like those in the other photographs, wear

traditional facial veils and lively *djellabahs* along with kitschy sunglasses. The central

figure, resting upon the largest bike, casually rests her arm on the bikes frame. The two

women on the left stand intertwined around a vintage road bike. The same bike appears on

the right, with a woman standing over it turning its wheel giving it the appearance of nearly

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[89] Meredith Rizzo Leah Scarpelli, "In Photos: Moroccan Motorcycle Mashup," *NPR.org*, accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2014/02/12/273168958/in-photos-moroccan-motorcycle-mash-up.

[90] Marta Weiss, "Light From the Middle East: Recording, Reframing and Resisting," Weiss and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Light from the Middle East*. 20. This essay discusses the conectedness and the critique of Hajjaj's photographs to Orientalist photography and painting.

[91] The repetition of consumer products in this particular image and frame is undoubtedly visually tied to American pop-art, specifically the screen-prints of Andy Warhol.

being in a state of action. Next to her a woman stands defiantly, hand on hip, and starring

out directly toward the camera and the audience. Together, the five women form a

collective of robust and sharp individuals exhibiting both individual and collective

identities. They are confrontational, yet they are playful.

The women in this image directly challenge the standard historical production of

images of veiled women. In a review of *Kesh Angels* in the New York Times, Roberta Smith

wrote, "These ensembles are insouciant mixes of old and new, East and West, Global and

Local, foreign and familiar."[92] Smith's succinct description of the complexities of Hajjaj's

work is perhaps best exemplified in one of the few non-biker-girl portraits that could be

found in the *Kesh Angel* exhibition. These women represent the lively and present

population of Moroccan youth. In an interview with William Lee Adams of CNN in 2014,

Hajjaj addresses the audiences reaction to these images saying: "When Westerners see a

woman with a veil a lot of them think, 'Do they really ride a bike?' If these women were in

Italy, they would look past that."[93] These women, as Hajjaj addresses here, are both

representative of a Moroccan reality and an opposition to the expected. Because the

Western audience seeing these images assumes that they are a fiction, the viewer is forced

to examine their expectations of North Africa after learning that these women *actually*

exist. This is not to say that Hajjaj is treating the *Kesh Angels* series as documentary

photography, as he does costume and arrange his models- giving a wink to the fashion

industry that gave him his start, an industry that dominated Morocco with images of

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[92] Roberta Smith, "Hassan Hajjaj: 'Kesh Angels,'" *The New York Times*, February 27, 2014,
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/arts/design/hassan-hajjaj-kesh-angels.html.
[93] "Fashionistas at the Wheel: Meet the Female Motorcyclists of Marrakech - CNN.com," *CNN*, accessed April 5,
2015, http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/27/world/gallery/fashionistas-at-the-wheel-meet-the-female-biker-
gangs-of-marrakech/index.html.

Western women selling Western products.[94] After finding this information, this series acts as a means of reclaiming Moroccan representation.

LV Posse, a black and white photograph that was included in the installation section of *Kesh Angels,* hung above a richly textures and textile-laden seating area, shows five veiled women standing close to one another in a huddled embrace (Figure 26). The five women again wear *djellabahs*, this time in a uniform white of white fabric. The boisterous patterns and colors that adorn their figures in the color images that comprise *Kesh Angels* are largely absent here. In its place a poignant mark of a Western presence resides- five bandana's worn as facial veils imprinted with the multi-billion dollar French fashion house Louis Vuitton's monogram "LV." The frame surrounding the image is printed with the same monogram, surrounding the women in its colorful repetition. The brand, highly popularized by mainstream popular culture, signifies Hajjaj's interest in cross-cultural encounters as an artist working in both Europe and North Africa. The overt branding also directly correlates to Hajjaj's experience working within the fashion world in Marrakesh and realizing that the fashion industry in Morocco was entirely overrun by foreign elements.

In each of these images, Hajjaj incorporates elements of both his Marrakesh and London identities. Though Hajjaj is not an artist in exile in the traditional sense of the world- he is able to return to Morocco and work there- his works do grapple with the means by which identity and home is constructed from a place of removal. When asked how the politics of his country of origin affects his work, Hajjaj claimed, "My work is about

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[94] Jessie Wender, "'Kesh Angels," *The New Yorker*, January 24, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/kesh-angels. This article addresses Hajjaj's staging of his models- using costumes and sets which he designs personally.

what is around me. It is more about culture and living between two cities myself. I'm

always trying to stay free as an artist, to be able to experiment with different media and

subjects."[95] For Hajjaj, and many other artists from the Middle East and North Africa

working elsewhere, what is around him is often the evidence of two lives, two homes, and

two identities. This is not to say that these worlds do not coexist harmoniously. Rather,

Hajjaj's photographs work to reconcile the divide between- bluntly put- the East and West.

Examining Home Through Video

Video installation as well as film, though essentially incongruent mediums, possess

an ability to produce a narrative in ways that a still photograph simply cannot. With an

increasing availability of technology since video's birth in the 1970's, video, along with film,

has in many ways expanded their fine art and popular culture audiences.[96] The utilization

of these mediums, within the past decade more so than others, has boomed in the Middle

East and North Africa. Contemporary MENA Artists concerned with rewriting imperialist

historical narratives and combating contemporary stereotypes are turning to the moving

image as a new potential for story telling. The video works in this chapter, like those from

the first chapter, deal with the construction of personal and national identity. Additionally,

these works tell stories. That is not to say that each of the videos of films selected here

follow a linear or clear narrative path. Rather, they open up a discourse of multiple

possibilities.

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[95] Weiss and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Light from the Middle East*. 149.

[96] For more on the history of video based art see: Michael Rush, *Video Art*, Rev. ed (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007). Additionally: Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008). For early work on the democratization of the film based medium.

The videos and film produced by contemporary MENA artists, highlight an exploration of the human relationship to space through the moving image. The video-based works in this chapter examine what it means to be an individual that is both an outsider in both their home countries and within a broader global context. These artists also investigate the traditional division of gender in relationship to space, specifically the normative expectation of women in both. Public and private space plays an integral role in each of the works selected in this chapter, both addressing and blurring the lines between what is acceptable female and male space. The videos of these artists expose national histories and truths while also exposing personal truths. For each of them, operating in a nomadic state either as a result of having emigrated, having lived as a refugee, or operating in a fluctuating state of exile, the moving image is a reflection of their position in the world. As art historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos describes, the moving picture is an ideal medium for the representation of a migrant life- both artist and artwork are in a constant state of flux.[97] These videos and films are likewise in a constant state of flux, or negotiation. They not only represent a change in attitude toward one's own personal space, but a fluctuating global attitude toward the MENA world.

Video installation, a medium that requires the occupation of physical space, requires that the audience becomes an active agent in the space themselves. The videos and film in this chapter are in many ways the manifestations of the artist's longing for a place that is inaccessible. The creation of the space, in the installation, thus provides a space in which one can belong. The viewer must be intimate with the installation, and to a certain extent be within it, part of it. Through the moving image, the participant is afforded a sense of

[97] Demos, *The Migrant Image.*

being there, even from within the clean, controlled walls of a gallery or museum.

Mohammed Kazem, the only artist who represented the United Arab Emirates in the 2013

Venice Biennale, uses the absorptive qualities of video installation to create an

otherworldly experience.[98] *Directions 2005/2013- Walking on Water,* a 360-degree

enclosure, propels the viewer into the direct center of the Arabian sea- though for the

viewer the exact location is unimportant (Figure 27).[99] After entering the chamber, the

viewer stands at the center of the space on at a railed dock. Wrapped around them, a blue

turbulent ocean rocks around, running on a two-minute loop, and creating the illusion of

being suddenly removed from land and stranded at sea. At the viewers feet a rotating set of

coordinates flash, along with the current date and time, suggesting that the viewer is part

of a multitude of locations. Though the coordinates are not specified with their locations

names, their presence reminds the viewer that even if they are positioned in the center of a

vast expanse, there is a memory or past that ties them to a physical location. Because the

viewer is not made explicitly aware of the places that these coordinates suggest, it is

possible then for the audience to project their own histories on to these numbers,

recollecting their own homes and own memories.

   When describing this installation, Kazem cites a childhood memory in which he

nearly drowned after falling off of a boat in the middle of the sea, left alone in uncertainty

for almost an hour.[100] This installation was specially commissioned for the 55th Venice

Biennale, and was addressed by the UAE Nation Pavilion as an installation that allows the

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[98] "Emirati Artist Mohammed Kazem at Venice Biennale | The National," accessed April 4, 2015, http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/emirati-artist-mohammed-kazem-at-venice-biennale.
[99] "Mohammed Kazem on the Cover of Harper's Bazaar - News - Taymour Grahne," accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.taymourgrahne.com/news/mohammed-kazem-on-the-cover-of-harperand39s-bazaar.
[100] "Emirati Artist Mohammed Kazem at Venice Biennale | The National."

viewer to explore the sea without fear, acting as a symbol for borderlessness and universality.[101] While this may be the intention of the work, for the viewer it is less a political statement about freedom from the constraints of borders, and more so about the possibility of being immersed in a consuming microcosm while maintaining a position within the walls of the exhibition space. This potential, for the viewer to become part of a world, and for the artists to invent or investigate reality through fiction, is a key element of video and film-based art. The works in this chapter, like Kazem's installation, address the themes of home, dislocation, national and personal identity, and misunderstood histories to create new worlds, and potential for new narratives. The home space, then is not what the video physically represents, it is what the viewer carries within themselves. The home, in the globalized condition, exists within the individual rather than within a physical environment.

Examining the Self in the Home Space

In an effort to relocate misunderstood national identities and histories, many contemporary MENA photo and video-based artists turn inward to themselves as a subject. Unlike Kazem's video installation, which forces the viewer to become the subject through its total emersion, the artists in this section have positioned themselves as the subject. While these works speak to personal narratives of lives lived divided between place and ideology, they also speak to a broader national narrative. Further, these works explicitly address the national and gendered expectations of the occupation of the home space.

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[101] "Mohammed Kazem and 20 Year 'permanent' Pavilion in the Arsenale | E-Flux," accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/mohammed-kazem-and-20-year-%E2%80%98permanent%E2%80%99-pavilion-in-the-arsenale/.

Rather than viewing home broadly, as a borderless expanse such as Kazem does, these works directly confront the traditional image of the domestic sphere.

Shirin Neshat left her home in Iran in 1974 to study art in the United States, unaware that her ability to access her country would soon be about to change permanently. In 1979, the onset of the Iranian Revolution would leave her stranded in the US while her homeland completely transformed from a secular society under the rule of a Western educated Shah into a fundamentalist Islamic society.[102] After completing undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of California at Berkeley, Neshat moved to New York in 1990, the same year visiting Iran again for the first time in over twelve years.[103] About this re-entry into the country that she had for so long been closed off from, Neshat has spoken to the shocking change in national identity saying even, "Everyone had gone through a major identity crisis."[104] Here, Neshat is speaking directly to the major cultural upheavals that occurred during the Iranian Revolution, completely transforming the place that she had known- specifically in regard to the post-revolution expectations for now strict Muslim Iranian women. As Lama Abu Odeh, Professor of Law at Georgetown University, addresses in her 1993 essay "Postcolonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference," the Arab revolutions of the 1970's were waging war on the battleground of the female body. There is, says Odeh, a physical conflict in this period between the "modern," and "traditional," Arab woman- who are often one in the same.[105] For Neshat having been

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[102] For additional information regarding Iran's twentieth century political environment, see:

[103] John B. Ravenal, *Outer & Inner Space: Pipilotti Rist, Shirin Neshat, Jane& Louise Wilson, and the History of Video Art* (Richmond, VA : [Seattle]: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts ; Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2002). 52.

[104] Deborah Solomon, "Prudence of the Chador," *The New York Times*, March 25, 2001. 42.

[105] Lama Abu Odeh, "Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference," *Feminist Review* 43, Spring 1993.

raised in a secular Iran and then educated in the United States, this conflict was something

that began to immediately impact her body of work. A focus on the physical appearance of

contemporary Iranian women, and how that appearance is directly linked to not only a

shift in personal but national identity, became a prevalent aspect of Neshat's photographs

and eventually her videos as well.

In the early 1990's Neshat began producing photographic series that dealt directly

with the role of contemporary women in Islamic culture. Neshat's series, *Unveiling* (1993)

and *Women of Allah* (1994-1997), focus on images of Neshat herself, fully veiled with Farsi

text written on her eyes and hands- the only allowed exposures in public under Islamic law.

A number of the images in these series focus on the significant military presence in Iran

during and after the revolution through the inclusion of weaponry, such as loose bullets

and firearms (Figure 28). In *Rebellious Silence,* (1994), the viewer is confronted with

Neshat's piercing gaze. Her face is halved by a rifle that extends upward from the bottom of

the image and dividing her figure in two. The guns presence, without any other context,

identifies her as a female soldier, removing her from her expected gender role and playing

with the standard notions of male and female relationships to violence. This violence, in

Nehsat's series, is perhaps not only tied to the physical violence of warfare, but the cultural

and global violence's enacted upon Muslim women. She is potent yet she is serene. She is

dressed in a traditional black *chador,* but is without the *niqāb,* which urban Iranian women

wear in the public domain to veil their faces.[106] Rather, where the *niqāb* would typically be

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[106]Hamid Dabashi, "The Gun and the Gaze: Shirin Neshat's Photography," Shirin Neshat, Paris audiovisuel (Firm), and Maison européenne de la photographie (Paris, France), *Women of Allah: Photographies, Films, Vidéos* (Paris: Paris Audiovisuel/Maison Européenne de la Photographie, 1998). 6. In this essay Dabashi discusses the geografic implications of Arab veiling practices, noting that it is a predominantly Urban practice

worn, Neshat has covered her skin on the photograph with the ink of the Iranian poetry.[107]

This gesture not only simultaneously reveals and conceals her, but also connects Iran's

Persian history to its post-revolutionary present.

The overarching theme of the series deals with the Islamic body, specifically the

female body. Later in the series, Neshat begins enveloping herself entirely in a black cloth

that cloaks her in black from head to toe (Figure 29). In this image, *Untitled,* (1997), Neshat

appears fully cloaked with only a bare arm reaching out from the folds of black fabric to

grip the hand of her entirely nude son. This time, it is his figure that is covered in the Farsi

script, even further accentuating the connection between past and present. His childish

innocence, representative of a contemporary moment, is coded with the markings of his

national past. The mother and son portrait additionally speaks to the importance of the

family unit and the figure of the mother as a national symbol. Neshat, in this image, is

perhaps not only a mother to her son, but a figure of motherhood and the mother acting as

a symbol for the birth of the entire nation.[108] The arrangement of the image, veiled mother

with exposed child, more that vaguely resembles the Victorian photographic tradition of

the "hidden mother," studio portraits.[109] In these nineteenth-century portraits, children

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arguably used for the purpose of controlling public space. For more on the contemporary argument regarding veiling practices see: Lama Abu Odeh, "Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference," *Feminist Review* 43, Spring 1993. And: Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women," *RFR/DRF* 22, no. 3 (1993): 5–18. And: Institute of International Visual Arts and Museum of Modern Art (Oxford, England), *Veil*.

[107] Neshat, Paris audiovisuel (Firm), and Maison européenne de la photographie (Paris, France), *Women of Allah*.

[108] Matthew Machowski, "Women of Allah: Veils, Words and Guns: Gender and the Media Coverage of Islam | MidEastJournal," accessed February 31, 2015, http://www.matthewmachowski.com/2009/10/women-of-allah.html. In this article Machowski addresses the use of the mother figure as a symbol for national revolution and hope, as well as the present absence of the veil in Neshat's images.

[109] Bella Bathurst, "The Lady Vanishes: Victorian Photography's Hidden Mothers," *The Guardian*, accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/dec/02/hidden-mothers-victorian-photography.

and babies typically sit or stand around their seated mother, who is entirely covered in an opaque fabric (Figure 30). The mother in these portraits exists as a present absence. She is there, but she is entirely removed. Though the standard of these photographs was for the mother to be entirely concealed, there are additional examples of the Hidden Mother being veiled after the photograph was taken and developed, by scratching the face off of the image.[110] This tradition then, of covering the image of the mother entirely, can be seen in Neshat's work as not only a commentary on Iranian women, but of a global and historical image of women as a whole- that is, an image that is largely unseen.

Iranian-born video artist Ghazel, like Shirin Neshat, began to use herself as a subject in 1997, as a means of exploring her relationship to the national identity of her home country. Having been born in Iran, but educated in Paris where she continues to reside and produce work, Ghazel's video work primarily explores what it means to be an Iranian woman who is residing and existing between two disparate realities.[111] Her most prominent work, *Me Series,* which began in 1997 presently spans eighteen years of Ghazel's life and career. This self-portrait style series examines the paradoxes of life as an Iranian woman who is an outsider both inside and outside of her country. These works explore the liminality of life between two countries. Ghazel, unlike many other artists in her situation, has been able to produce work in Iran as well as throughout Europe and America. Unlike Neshat, Ghazel did not leave Iran before the revolution, and because of this was able to stay in her home country and produce work there before beginning her Parisian education, also allowing her to travel and work back and forth between Europe and Iran as her career

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Rose Issa, *Iranian Contemporary Art* (London [England]: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2001).129-130.

began to blossom.[112] In her early twenties, after living a nomadic life throughout the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, Ghazel returned to Tehran and began staging conceptual happenings in her childhood home reflecting on her multifaceted identity.[113] The themes of her early conceptual works trickled down into the eighteen-year, video-based series that Ghazel is best known for. The *Me Series,* though it does not typically operate in a site-specific location, does trace this nomad artist's journey through negotiating a place for herself and her identity.

Most recently, the *Me Series* has been exhibited with an emphasis on Ghazel's 2013 micro-series *Family Tree.* Taking the same form as the rest of *Me Series*, *Family Tree* is a three-channel installation in which Ghazel's self-portrait videos are combined with screens of text. The videos and the text rotate throughout the three screens, generating seemingly random combinations of text and image.[114] The textual component does not necessarily describe what is being seen in the video, as much as it offers an additional insight. Both the text and the videos together read as it would to read one's diary- ranging from the mundane to confessional. Her actions in the earlier series range from the usual to the unusual. She performs tasks anywhere from eating lunch to mountain biking, all the while wearing a black veil. Having grown up in Tehran during the re-implementation of the veil, Ghazel's 12-episode *Family Tree,* like the beginning of *Me Series* sharply addresses this

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[112] Shirin Neshat was banned from Iran due to the political nature of her work in 1996: for more see: Stephen Holden, "From Shirin Neshat, Sisterhood Found During a Coup," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/movies/14women.html.

[113] Issa, *Iranian Contemporary Art*. 130.

[114] Inge E. Boer, *Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis* (Rodopi, 2006). 269. In 2006, prior to *Family Tree,* the series consisted of 40 videos making up over 8 hours of recorded time. *Family Tree* is shown the same way, but consists of only 12 episodes.

division in her life's narrative-pre and post veil.[115] The veil, in combination with the every

day and even extreme activities, which she represents herself enacting describe the

juxtapositions of an identity that is facing constant contradiction. Valery Behiery identifies

Ghazel's symbolic use of the veil in her 2012 essay, "Alternative Narratives of the Veil in

Contemporary Art," as belonging to a category that she refers to as the *post-colonial veil.*

This representation of the veil, arguably similar to Neshat's work, displaces the dominant

representation of what the veil means using deconstructive mimicry to subvert the

common tropes of the veil.[116]

 Family Tree positions the veil in this tongue and cheek context, but also explores

Ghazel's identity through textual components which suggest that she is acting out the roles

of an aunt, the family dog, and her grandmother.[117] In one episode, we see Ghazel move

through a garden, eventually coming to rest on the top of a rolling card with the text "Dino

sleeps like Snoopy," next to it (Figure 31). Ghazel appears here in the same *chador* she

appears in throughout the *Me Series*, but this time acting out the role of her family pet and

directly referencing her awareness of popular American entertainment. In another episode,

we see a scene that indicates Ghazel is reliving a childhood memory of learning to do

karate, which the text implies (Figure 32). The video that accompanies this description

shows an adult Ghazel, kicking her legs toward the camera practicing her martial arts

maneuvers. Not only do these episodes show Ghazel, a Muslim woman, doing things that

are not represented in the dominant narrative of the veil, but also they exemplify the

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[115] V. Behiery, "Alternative Narratives of the Veil in Contemporary Art," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 130–46, doi:10.1215/1089201X-1545417.
[116] Ibid.
[117] "Ghazel - Family Tree - THE ART VOICE," accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.the-art-voice.com/post-886.html.

fluidity of identity. By taking on the role of a cast of characters that have played a part in her life and formation of identity, Ghazel explores the complexities of personhood. This fluidity, like Neshat's work, is referential not only to Ghazel's personal identity- as someone who has lived and worked globally- but to a national identity for Iranian women. Ghazel's *Me Series,* and specifically her *Family Tree* rethink the possibilities of the domestic space. The actions in these videos do not glorify the confinement of the home space, but rather investigate the spaces potential. In the home, Ghazel is able to take on a number of different roles and identities. She is not trapped by the walls, or by her veil, she is free to explore any character and action that she chooses. In *Family Tree,* the taking on of different identities and genders from the individuals in her family, Ghazel is able to examine the multiplicities of female identity.

Battling for a New National Identity on the Female Body

The explorations of gendered space and identity continued to persist in Neshat's photography and video work, eventually manifesting in her 2009 feature length film, *Women Without Men.* The narrative loosely follows five Iranian women in the summer of 1953, immediately before the American and English- led coup d'état, which would essentially end the democratic presence in Iran from that point onward and eventually lead to the events of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.[118] At this pivotal moment in Iranian history, the elected prime minister, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh- who had taken a stand for independent control over Iran's petroleum supply- was thrown out of power restoring the

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[118] Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010). 241. Additionally, this narrative is told in detail in Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, 2 edition (Wiley, 2008). This historical novel sheds a great deal of light on the circumstances surrounding this event.

total control of the Shah.[119] The reaction to the political turbulence is represented throughout the film in scenes of protest, military harassment, and communist contemplation. Scenes of marching and rioting in the streets mildly echo the visual constructs seen in *Rapture,* an earlier video installation by Neshat (Figure 33). Here we can see two separate groups, one of men, and one of women, physically uniting in the streets in protest, supporting prime minister Mossadegh.[120] In a revolutionary spirit, the division of genders entirely breaks down, and the separation is proven meaningless.[121] Neshat's film, an adaptation of the 1989 novel of the same title by Iranian writer Shahrnush Parsipur, initially began as an individual video series. *Mahdokht* (2004)*, Zarin* (2005)*, Munis* (2008)*, Faezeh* (2008), and *Farokh Legha* (2008)*,* individually explore the five primary women in Mossadegh's novel.[122] The production of the feature length film took place congruently with the production of the video shorts, perhaps accounting for some of the three-year gap in video production between 2005-2008.

When asked in an interview with Eleanor Heartney what the greatest differences were between working in the film and video arenas, Neshat said, "In the art world you are very free, but you end up making something that few people see. In the film world anybody

[119] For additional information on pre- Iranian Revolution history, particularly in relation to art production see: Lynn Gumpert and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution* (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the United States by Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). 47-65. And: Issa, *Iranian Contemporary Art*.14-27.

[120] Shirin Neshat and Palazzo reale di Milano, *Shirin Neshat: Women without Men = Zanān Bidūn-I Mardan* (Milano : Vew York City: Edizioni Charta srl ; Charta Books Ltd, 2011). 15. The production of all of the street protest scenes in this film were actually shot in Casablanca Morocco. Like Neshat's video trilogy examined previously in this text, she was unable to actually film in Tehran, and thus the filming of *Women Without Men* was also produced in Morocco.

[121] It is important to note additionally that the women shown in these scenes of protest are Iranian women who are operating as secular beings, they are not shown wearing *chador.*

[122] Neshat and Palazzo reale di Milano, *Shirin Neshat*. 13.

can view your film for the small price of a ticket, but you are not as free."[123] The separate

bodies of work do reflect this sentiment, as the separate videos tell the story of the women

in the novel as a series of nonlinear glimpses, and the film- as cinema tends to do- offers a

cohesive narrative of the novel's events. Thus, the manifestation of the project in video to

later emerge as a film is a radical choice and an attention-worthy exploration of the

potential for storytelling. Despite the various different forms that *Women Without Men* has

taken, a commonality in the novel, videos, and feature length film is the narrative of the five

women. In short, it is a story about women who are escaping their pasts, for various

reasons, and end up converging at a vaguely mystical orchard in the country that one of the

five women has purchased as a retreat after leaving her husband. The orchard, a domestic

space that becomes inhabited, even dominated, by three of the women, serves as a beacon

of hope. Here, the women are free. They have escaped.

Throughout the more structurally narrative scenes of this film, moments of poetic

independence are interspersed. Like the women in Neshat's video series, there are many

scenes throughout the film that show the women isolated in vast landscapes (Figure 34). At

this moment, we see two of the women, Faezeh and Munis, wearing their *chador* and

wandering down a long and seemingly endless dirt road. Their dark, cloaked figures

punctuate the serenity of the landscape. As they move toward an unseeable destination-

their futures unplanned- their *chador* ripples in the wind. Symbolically perhaps, when the

women arrive at the orchard, Faezeh removes her garments and begins her new life. Munis,

[123] Ibid. 14.

in this film adaptation, does not arrive or reside at the orchard with Faezeh.[124] She has

previously committed suicide, an action that we do not see take place outside of its

aftermath at this point in the film. Her death occurs at the movie's onset, when she

purposefully falls from the roof of her brother's house after an altercation with him

regarding her propriety as an Iranian woman. Feeling utterly controlled and helpless, this

character takes her own life and continues throughout the rest of the film as a ghost or

spirit who is able to do in death what she was prevented from doing in life.

After her suicide, Munis joins the communist protest against take down of the prime

minister and begins existing in a world that previously shut her out- a world of men. At the

film's close we relive her moment of suicide, first seeing from her point of view as she looks

at the sky and the home that is confining her, and then as her body slowly descending

(Figure 35). Her voice plays over the entirety of this final scene, and here we see her

suspended in the air in front of her home utter the word "release." Ultimately, Munis is not

the only woman of the group that is eventually freed through death, as an additional

character previously escapes a life of prostitution only to die after she arrives at the

orchard. The freedom of death, or the freedom of escaping society is represented very

clearly in both of these poignant scenes. Here, the domestic space is the enemy. It is what

has confined and defined womanhood in Iranian life during the time of this film, and in one

way or another each of these women has found a way to escape it, or recreate it making it

her own.

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[124] There is a certain amount of discrepancy between the book and the film. In the film Munis is alive during the journey and the two women are raped on the road.

The women in Neshat's film both cater to and combat the Westernized expectation

for female Iranian identity. These women operate within the standard stigmas of the

oppressed Middle Eastern woman, controlled by men and confined to the domestic space.

What this film does, however, is address the variances in the realities of Iranian women in

the middle of the century. They are not a blanketed image of "Iranian women." They are

diverse characters with disparate pasts and narratives that highlight the complexities of

womanhood, Iranian identity, and the expectations of both of these things from the west. A

review of the film, by critic Stephen Holden, describes the repetition of the visual language

in the film's scenes such as the one described in Figure 32, saying, "Two of the film's

recurrent images are of a long dirt road extending to the horizon on which the characters

walk, and a brook that suggests a deep current of feminine resilience below and impassive

exterior."[125] While this symbolism may be accurate, the repetition of the female figures in

isolated landscapes, moving toward the unknown, these scenes also provide a separate

function. The women's separation literally removed them from the rest- in isolation they

become individuals. Regardless of stereotyping, or the set of expectations that these

women potentially fall into, they symbolize the presence of individual identity- a

multiplicity that is often overlooked in the homogenizing eyes of the West.

Claiming Territories

Also interested in investigating the female relationship to architectural space, *Dafy*

Hagai, an Israeli photographer working between Tel Aviv and New York, has produced a

series that explores the intersections between documentary, fashion photography, and the

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[125] Holden, "From Shirin Neshat, Sisterhood Found During a Coup."

construction of the space and identity of the Middle East. Initially published as an

independent magazine, Hagai's series' *Pink Arab* was published as a book after being

shown at the Melbourne Art Fair in 2014.[126] In a 2014 interview, Hagai addresses the

expectation from the west for her work to tackle religion because she is from the Middle

East, saying, "It's more of a cultural statement than a political one. For the most part, Tel

Aviv and the center of Israel aren't conservative or religious, so these are just girls dealing

with growing up, learning about their body, ownership and sexuality."[127] Outside of

freestanding editorials and blog reviews, Hagai's work as of yet remains largely without a

published textual component. Not unlike Hajjaj's and Essaydi's, her work acts as a mode of

challenging the globalized perception of MENA women. The title of the series, *Pink Arab,*

perhaps indicates the common conflation of MENA culture and religion. Being an Israeli

photographer, shooting primarily in Tel Aviv, Hagai is working with models that are not

Arab at all. The title of the series also, viewed within the context of Israel's contemporary

political state, is potentially contentious given the ongoing state of the Arab-Israeli

Conflict.[128] All of this, in addition to the use of "Pink," a descriptor that connotes that which

is kitschy, playful, and even sexual, suggests that this series will deal with the complexities

of Israeli identity.

Throughout *Pink Arab*, Hagai arranges women in a series of vacant well-lit

architectural spaces. The women are veiled but are also shown in casual, active wear-

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[126] "Dafy Hagai," *Dafy Hagai*, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.dafyhagai.com/about/.
[127] "Israeli Girls," *Dazed*, accessed January 20, 2015,
http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/22024/1/israeli-girls.
[128] George J. Mitchell September 07 and 2014, "How the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Reached This Point - The
Boston Globe," *BostonGlobe.com*, accessed April 5, 2015,
https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/09/06/how-got-
here/5Npe9ungSPbZ4V6FqE9sMI/story.html.

jogging pants and sneakers- and at times garments that are partially sheer, both revealing

and concealing their bodies. Unlike the figures in Al-Ghoussein's photographs, these

women are neither hidden in shadow nor obscured by the scale of the buildings. Instead,

these figures dominate their space. In this image, Hagai's model stands looking outward

from an open window at the façade of a tall building (Figure 36). She is, relatively speaking,

a small element of this image, however, her presence is hardly minimalized. She stands

hands on her hips, facing directly toward the camera. The structure that she peers out from

is blank, flat, and muted. Her figure emerges as a strong presence from within the dark

empty space of the open window, the blue of her veil being the only hint of color aside from

a small tile above her on the structures façade and the clear sky. Without any information

regarding the narrative of this image, it is clear that this is her space. She dominates the

frame. Behind her, and the structure in which she stands, a sliver of what appears to be a

tall minaret pierces the sky- reminding the viewer again of the title of this series, and a

perhaps unexpected Muslim presence in an image that otherwise reads as a commercial

fashion shot.

This costuming and architectural presence, suggestive of some brand of Arab-Israeli

fusion as the title suggests, continues throughout the series (Figure 37). Here, we see

Hagai's model, posed contrapposto in a gossamer white veil, a sheer white tunic, athletic

pants and sneakers. Though she is veiled, her body is exposed- directly opposing the

Western expectation of the image of the veiled woman. Her body language, and the

structure of the image, again at first glance appears to be coming directly from Hagai's

fashion photography background. However, there is still more to be said. Again the figure

stands in an entirely emptied space. The architecture at her back, potentially a domestic

space, is spliced by the presence of a concrete gate that arches over the model. Every

manmade element of the image is washed out, framing her, and pushing the viewer's

attention further toward her presence and her clothing. Though she is not close to the

camera, her eyes peer out directly toward the viewer, confronting them. Unlike Essaydi's

women, the women of *Pink Arab* claim and occupy their space, they do not become part of

it.

     Pink Arab confronts both the stereotypical and overly produced image of the Middle

Eastern woman as subservient and concealed by the home space. As Valerie Behiery has

described in her 2012 essay, "Alternative Narratives of the Veil in Contemporary Art," the

veil in Hagai's photo-series is an intentional displacement of the mainstream of the veil,

contesting that it is a symbol of the dominated by the dominant.[129] The globalized stigma of

veiled, Arab women, suggests an identity that is secondary to that of a man. The veil is a

symbol of oppression, or silencing, and of control. The women in *Pink Arab* are not

dominated by the veil, nor the architectural spaces that they are shown with, rather they

are the dominating force. They are not being controlled by the veil, they are in control of it.

This series directly rejects the standard, and in turn aims to create a new one.

     The desire, or the need, to reclaim the photographic images of the past, and

repurpose their conventions in contemporary photography and video-based art is perhaps

the thickest thread that runs throughout the artists in this chapter. Though each deals with

the construction of a national memory via the photographic or video-based image in

varying shades of directness and indirectness, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige,

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[129] Behiery, "Alternative Narratives of the Veil in Contemporary Art."

Hassan Hajjaj, Mohammed Kazem, Ghazel, Shirin Neshat, and Dafy Hagai, each confront the role of history in the present. Their works cannibalize dominant representations and stereotypes to offer a unique perspective on MENA and migrant identities. The production and circulation of these images and their reinvented narratives provides a chance, not for history to be rewritten, but for the present to readjust its gaze. These photographs and videos are each a means of addressing personal and national histories and identities, as well as they are a call for change. Though, like each of the works in the first chapter, none of the works here are documentary in nature, they each aid in creating a new truth about the contemporary state of home and identity for MENA people. Whether it arrives as a statement about gender roles, global stereotypes, or tumultuous political histories, each of the artists in this chapter is addressing an element of life in the Middle East and North Africa that has shaped their personhood. Though each of the artists in this chapter come from a different background with a different relationship to their home countries, they are all equally invested in creating a bridge between the personal and national, the public and private, and the role that gendered expectations plays in the human experience of these dichotomies.

Conclusion

The discourse of what happens when cultures meet in a fine art context has

expanded significantly in recent scholarship. The ways in which art is produced and

circulated in a globalized world- the very presence of mobility-continues to impact the

relationships that artists have to their national, regional, and personal identities.[130]

Although, "globalization," as we define it now, has impacted the production of fine art and

visual culture for thousands of years, the dialogue surrounding its impacts has never been

as salient at it is today. In a world of instantaneous access and increasingly available

information, the dominance of Western art history has begun to crumble. With this

[130]Gerard Vaughan, "An Introduction to the Conversation," Comité international d'histoire de l'art and International Congress of the History of Art, *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence :the Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson, Miegunyah Press Series (Carlton, Vic: Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Publishing, 2009). 2. The introduction to this tome discusses the general impacts of globalization in the art world, specifically identifying the importance of the post-colonial discourse within the context of globalization.

unraveling, a critical eye has opened and turned to the images created throughout history-specifically those made by the West, of the rest of the globe.

The artists included in this thesis have produced bodies of work that in various ways speak to the impacts of the Western Orientalist tradition. The major themes, set up in the first chapter that are prevalent throughout the major collections of Orientalist photography established a legacy of stereotyping via their production and circulation. These nineteenth-century images were presented as pure documentary, but in reality were being staged by the photographer and in some cases arranged in a studio space, echoing the fictive landscapes created in Orientalist painting of, "The Near East." In photography as well as painting, this imaginary wonderland would be presented as a space that was presented as vacant and ripe for the taking, while simultaneously fully inhabited by sexually available women. The archetypes established of MENA men and women in Orientalist imagery prove that time does not necessarily heal all. Over one hundred years after the production of images such as those in Chapter One, the Middle East and North Africa continues to face the adversity brought on by the Western gaze.

The central aim of this project is to contribute to a growing discourse surrounding contemporary MENA art while also situating that art within a broader historical context. For some, the connection to the past is evident in their work- directly attacking the falsehood of Orientalist imagery. For others, whose work does not as poignantly attack the historical constructs of the West, a certain amount of deeper analysis is required as to understand the deeply entrenched visual mechanisms that symbolize displacement and erasure. There is a thread that runs through all artists selected in this project- a theme of longing for and belonging to. These artists come from different geographic, political,

cultural, and religious backgrounds, and each of them has a different relationship to their place of origin. However, in all of their works, and in more ways than one, these contemporary MENA photo and video artists are working through what it is to exist in a globalized state.

Home, a word that sparks a number of varied connotations, is addressed in each of the works selected for this project. Whether it manifests as a means of reacting to domestic space, country of origin, or a home that is divided between two disparate locations, each artist in this thesis is interested in exploring the relationship between the home space and human identity. These identities, whether they are personal or national, show themselves not as the static and isolated identities of the figures in Orientalist photography- but rather, as complex multifaceted identities shaped equally by the past and present, and from the outside and within.

The value in reinvestigating the past is always immeasurable, and is particularly salient in this contemporary moment. To better understand how globalized understandings of culture are formed and disseminated, it is crucial to look back, and reopen what have been taken for centuries as factual histories. Even as the work of the Orientalist movement as a whole has been heavily criticized and reevaluated since the 1979 of Said's *Orientalism,* the medium of the Orientalist photograph seems to have lead the discourse astray- and the documentary quality of the image has over shadowed the intention of the artist. These highly orchestrated images, which appear in essentially all major collections of Orientalist photography of the nineteenth-century, not only created an image or identity for the figures within them, but also of the places that these figures would call home.

The false documentation of not only who lived in the Middle East and North Africa, but also of what this region actually was, through the vehicle of the photographic lens, would be the beginning of mechanically produced images of the MENA world that persist in popular and world media today. To best understand the works of contemporary artist that reclaim the representations of their homes, whether they are homes that the artist currently live in, live between, or are exiled from, it is critical to first understand the images that these artists are fighting against. To reclaim something, there must be a claim that has already been made. In the case of the works that I have selected in this thesis project, the claim was made initially by the works of the Orientalists, both photographers and not, and the reclaiming is now in the hands of the artists whose identity is wrapped up in their countries of origin.

Although home and identity do not share a definition or meaning, they are intrinsically linked. Identity, personal or national, is without a doubt tethered in some way to a person's place of origin. Regardless of the physical relationship that the person has to their place of home, that space impacts the identity of the individual. While the contemporary artists featured in the first chapter of this thesis investigate home and identity by reacting to the visual constructions of the Orientalist image, the artists in the second chapter have produced works that address the stereotypes of the Middle East and North Africa, addressing home as both a national and domestic space, while pushing for a change in the global consciousness.

The photographic collections of the Bonfils family, Maxime du Camp, and Sir Francis Bedford, exemplify the problematic nature of cultures being represented by the outside eye, for outside audiences. Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Lalla Essaydi, Lida Abdul, Joana

Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Hassan Hajjaj, Mohammed Kazem, Shirin Neshat, Ghazel, and Dafy Hagai, represent diverse culture, political, religious, and migrant backgrounds. Though their relationships to their original place of home vary, each of these contemporary artists addresses the connection of home and identity, reclaiming the image of the MENA world.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Sir Francis Bedford. Giza*, The Sphinx, the Great Pyramid and two of the smaller pyramids,* 4 March 1862. (Royal Collection, Queens Gallery London).

Figure 2. Sir Francis Bedford, *The Prince of Whales and group at the Pyramids*, Giza, 5 March 1862. Party from left to right: General Bruce and Dr Stanley, on kneeling camels; Bower of the Osborne on the camel next to the Prince of Whales (center); Robert Meade, Kanné, Habib Bey, Major Teesdale, on kneeling camel, and Col. Keppel. (Royal Collection, Queens Gallery London).

Figure 3. Felix Bonfils, *Baalbek Lebanon*, 1870.

Figure 4. Felix Bonfils, *Young Jewish Girl in Beirut,* Late 19th Century, Collection of the Harvard Semitic Museum.

Figure 5. Jean- Auguste-Dominque Ingres, *Le Bain turc*, 1862. Louvre Museum, Paris.

Figure 6. Jean- Auguste- Dominique Ingres, *Le Grande Odalisque*, 1814. Louvre Museum, Paris.

Figure 7. *Scenes and Types: no. 162 Arabian Woman with the Yachmak (postcard),* Early 20th Century. (Collection of Malek Alloula).

Figure 8. Lalla Essaydi, *Converging Territories #30,* C-41 Print, 2005.

Figure 9. Lalla Essaydi, *Les Femmes du Maroc: Grande Odalisque 2,* C-41 Print, 2008.
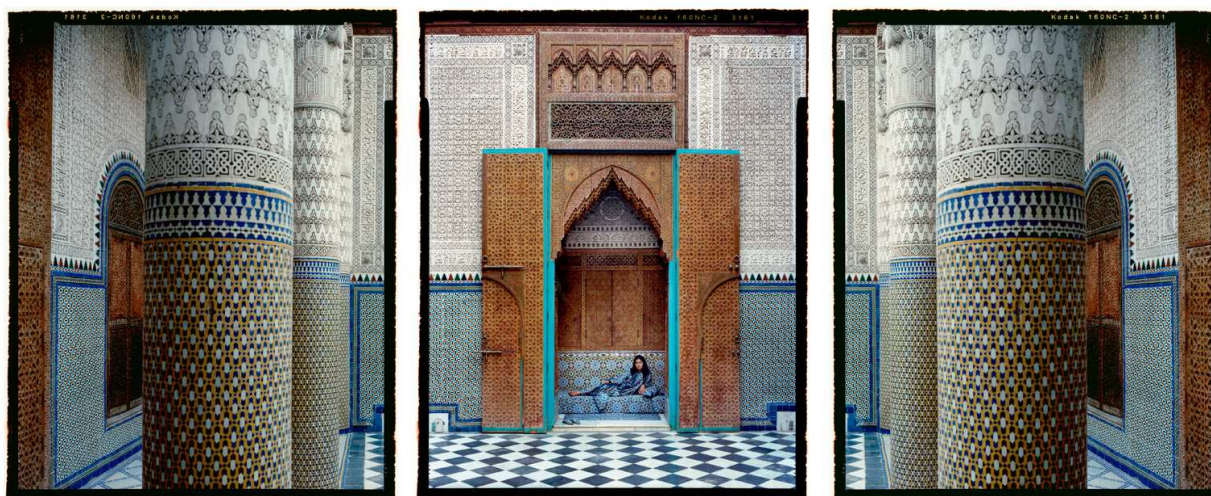
Figure 10. Lalla Essaydi, *Harem Number 1,* C-41 Print, 2009.
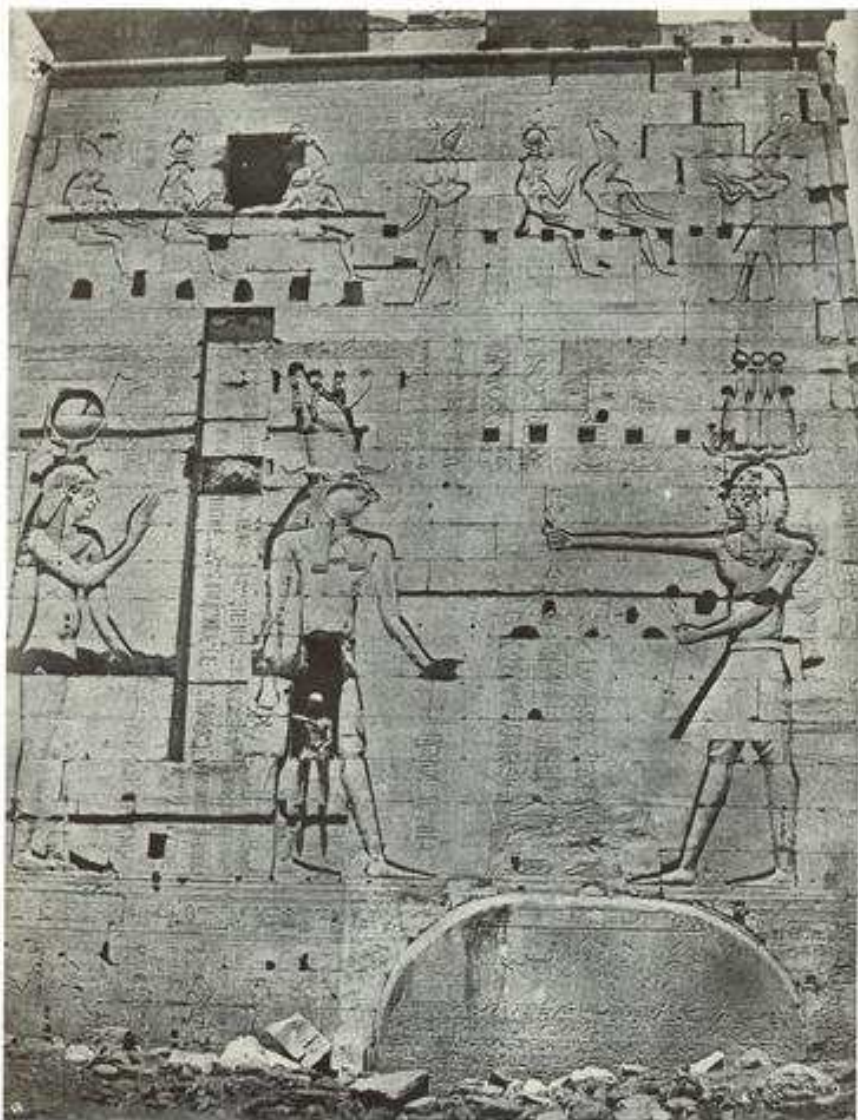
Figure 11. Maxime Du Camp, *Temple of Isis at Philae, Second Pavilion*, Philae Egypt, 1850. salt print and paper negative. (Collection of Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs New York Public Library).

Figure 12. Maxime Du Camp, *Temple of Isis*, Philae Egypt, 1849-1851. The Museum of Modern Art (Gift of Warner Communications Collection).

Figure 13. Tarek Al-Ghoussein, K- Files 025, Edition of 3, 2013, Digital Print, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.

Figure 14. Tarek Al Ghoussein, K Files 323, Edition of 3, 2013 Digital Print, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.

Figure 15. Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 2 From Self-Portrait* series, 2002-2003. Digital Print, Edition of 6.

Figure 16. Tarek Al Ghoussein, (In) Beautification Series, No. 2216, 2012, Chromogenic Print, Edition of 6, Taymour Ghrane Gallery, New York.

Figure 17. Tarek Al Ghoussein, K Files 109, Edition of 3, 2013, Digital Print, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.

Figure 18. Maxime Du Camp, *Cairo, General View Taken From the West,* 1849. Salt print from paper negative. Plate 1 of *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie,* (Collection of New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

Figure 19. Lida Abdul, *White House,* 16mm transferred to video, 2005.

Figure 20. Lida Abdul, *White House,* 16mm transferred to video, 2005.

Figure 21. Lida Abdul, *Once Upon Awakening,* 16mm transferred to video, 2006.

Figure 22. Lida Abdul, *In Transit,* Video, 2008.
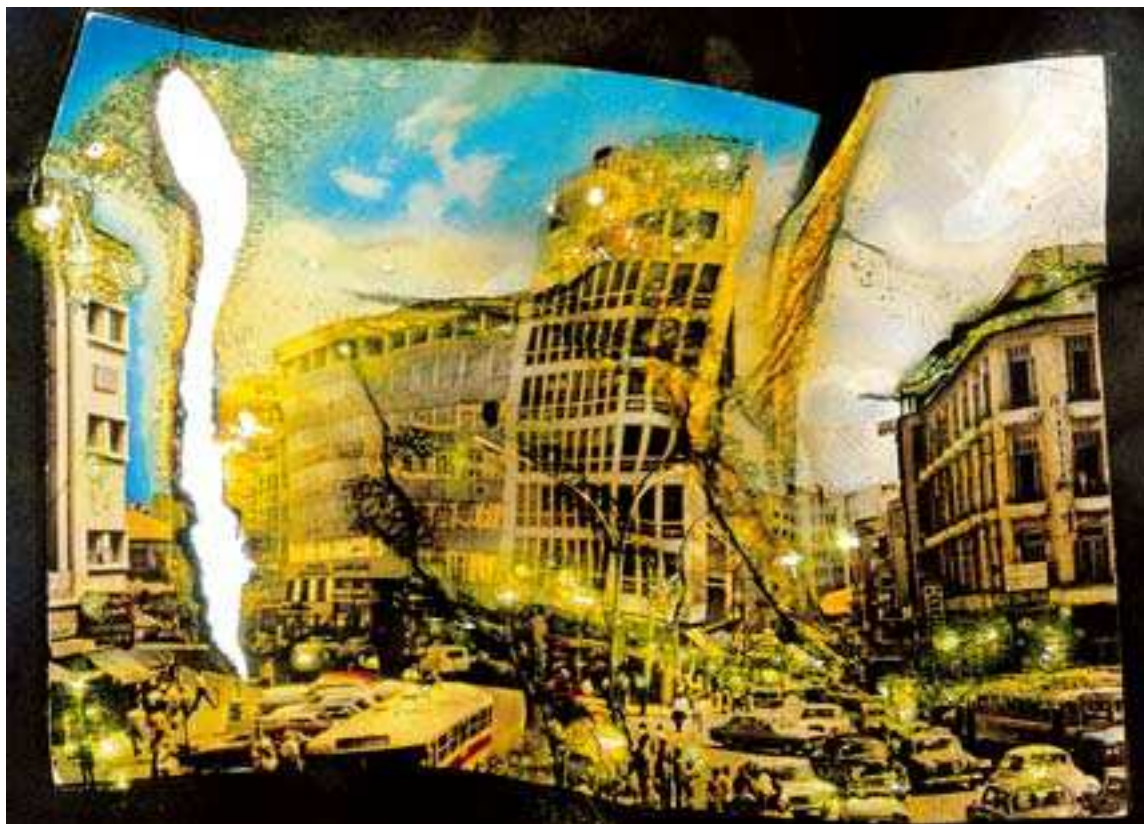
Figure 23. Joana Hadjithomas and Kahlil Jorge, Wonder Beirut, 1998-2006. "Wonder Beirut: The Story of Pyromaniac Photographer." C-print mounted on aluminum. Art Fund Collection of Middle Eastern Photography at the V&A and British Museum.
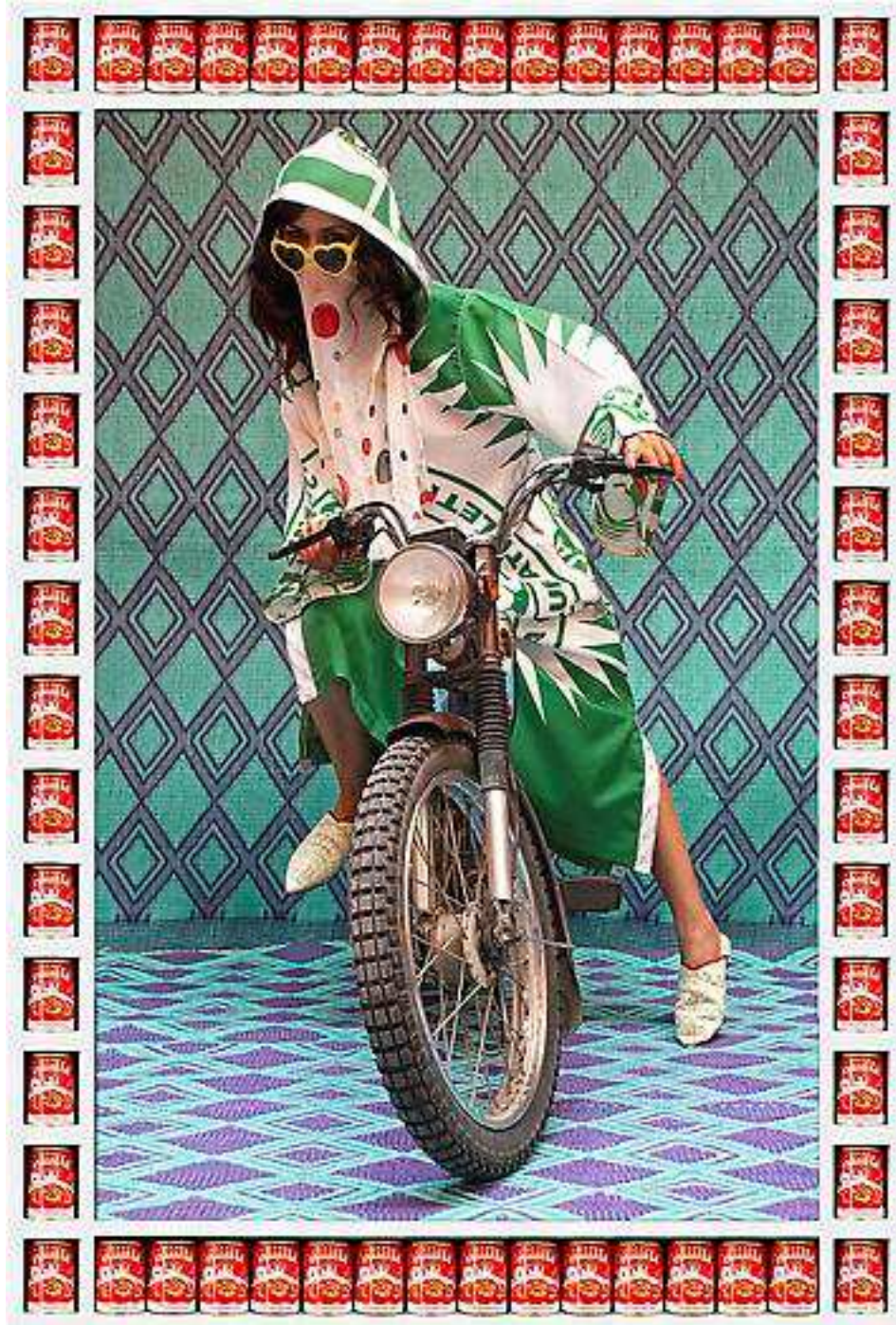
Figure 24. Hassan Hajjaj, *M.* Kesh Angels, 2010, Edition of 7, Metalic Lambda Print, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.

Figure 25. Hassan Hajjaj, Kesh Angels 1431, 2010, Edition of 7, Metalic Lambda Print, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.

Figure 26. Hassan Hijjaj, LV Posse, 2010, 1431, Edition of 5, C-Type print, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York.

Figure 27. Mohammed Kazem, *Directions 2005/2013, Walking on Water,* color video installation, with sound, 2 min loop, 2013.

Figure 28. Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence,* Gelatin and silver print with ink, taken by Cyntha Preston, 1994.
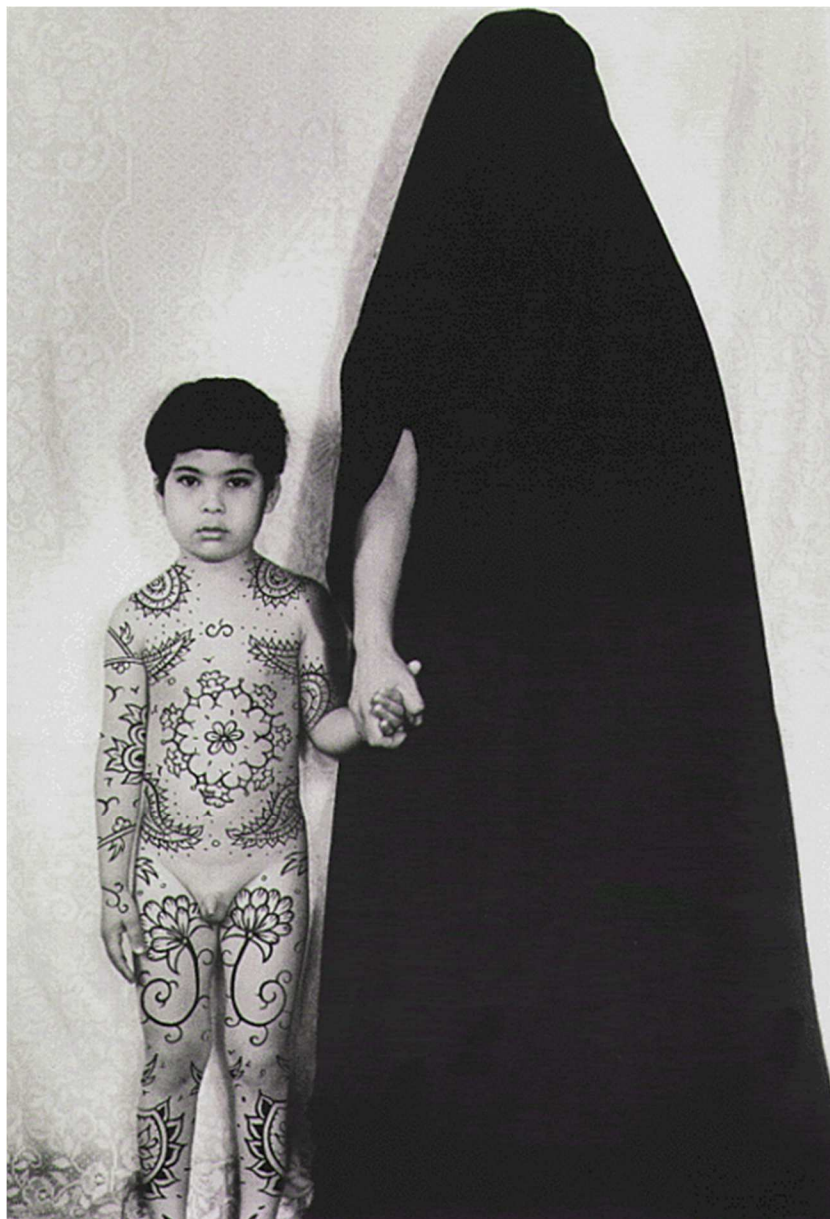
Figure 29. Shirin Neshat, *Untitled,* Gelatin and silver print, taken by Kyong Park, 1997.

Figure 30. The Mathers Children with "Hidden Mother," West Virginia, Albert Enwig Collection, Ohio, 19th century.

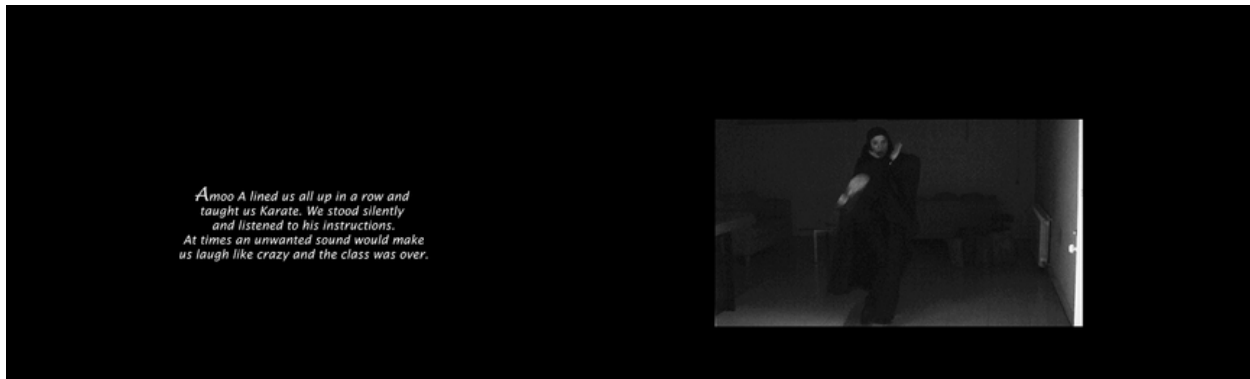Figure 31. Ghazel, *Family Tree,* from *Me Series* (1997-2013), Video installation still, 2013.

Figure 32. Ghazel, *Family Tree,* from *Me Series* (1997-2013), Video installation still, 2013.

Figure 33. Shirin Neshat, *Women Without Men,* Super 35mm colorfilm, Film Still, 99 Minutes, 2009.

Figure 34. Shirin Neshat, *Women Without Men,* Super 35mm color film, Film Still, 99 Minutes, 2009.
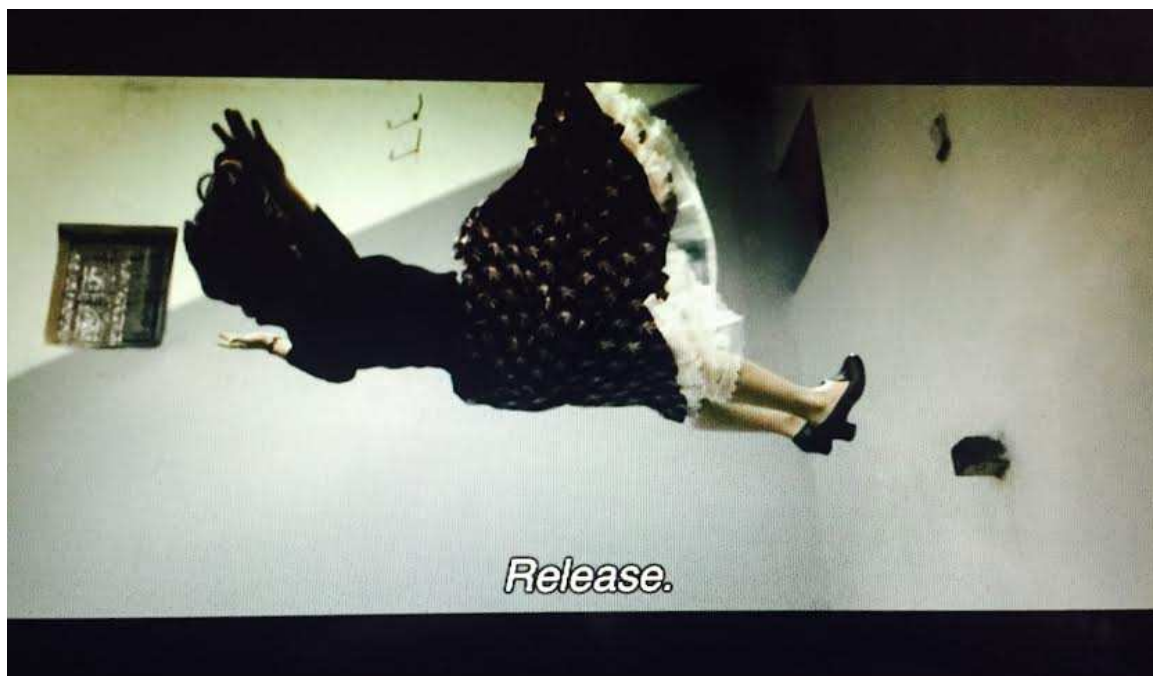
Figure 35. Shirin Neshat, *Women Without Men,* Super 35mm color film, Film Still, 99 Minutes, 2009.

Figure 36. Dafy Hagai, Pink Arab, Digital Print, 2014.

Figure 37. Dafy Hagai, Pink Arab, Digital print, 2014.

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