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‘Je suis croisée’:
The Transnational Scholarship, Literature, and Photography
of Fatema Mernissi, Leïla Sebbar, and Lalla Essaydi

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Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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B.A., Tulane University, 2006

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Abstract

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By Robyn Banton

This dissertation examines the scholarship, literature, and photography of scholar Fatema Mernissi, writer Leïla Sebbar, and photographer Lalla Essaydi. As women born in North Africa, these artists risk being subsumed in a female “eastern” or “Arab” identity, in which gender and birthplace are understood as the dominant categories through which their works are studied. However, their lived experiences, as reflected in their art, go beyond the binaries produced by these classifications and extend to pluralistic positionalities including, but not limited to, nationality, education, ethnicity, class, race, gender, sexuality, and linguistic and cultural influences. While these intersecting categories are crucial to my work, I seek to push them a step further to see how Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi express these various positionalities through multiple and intersecting textual, visual, and embodied mediums. In Chapter One, through a study of three central tropes in Essaydi’s *Converging Territories*—veiling, writing, and space—I identify Essaydi’s “converging territories” in order to examine the artist’s practice of interweaving mediums and establish it as essential to her process of creation as well as to her position as artist. Chapter Two focuses on Sebbar’s historical novel *La Seine était rouge.* In recreating a history for October 17, 1961, I contend that Sebbar forms a multimedia methodology that not only recuperates memories of the events of the Paris Massacre, but also presents a means by which to reclaim historical events more generally. In the third chapter, I engage with the Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldùa’s notion of the “*frontera*” as a framework through which I consider representations of the harem put forth in Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass* and Essaydi’s collection *Harem.* I argue that Mernissi and Essaydi dismantle the historical, cultural, and gendered borders of the harem—a female Moroccan *frontera*—and re-appropriate it as a critical and collective feminine space of artistic production. Finally, I propose that Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi’s *tissage*—a combining of mediums—provides an innovative model for intellectual production that encourages academics to participate in creative and multimedia practices in order to reimagine the possibilities for our own scholarship.

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Introduction—At the Crossroads: Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi

> As a child in a Harem, I instinctively knew that to live
> is to open closed doors. To live is to look outside.
> To live is to step out. Life is trespassing.
> – Fatema Mernissi, "Harem Within" (n.p.)

> Prise par un besoin fébrile de mêler l'Algérie à la France,
> depuis ma naissance, presque… je tente par les mots,
> la voix, l'image, obstinément, d'abolir ce qui sépare.
> – Leïla Sebbar, *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (11)

> As an Arab artist, living in the West, I have been
> granted an extraordinary perspective from which
> to observe both cultures, and I have also been imprinted
> by these cultures. In a sense, I feel I inhabit
> (and perhaps even embody) a "crossroads," where the
> cultures come together—merge, interweave,
> and sometimes clash.
> – Lalla Essaydi, interview with Samia Errazzouki

To trespass. To mix. To interweave. These are just three of the verbs that Moroccan-born scholar Fatema Mernissi, Algerian-born author Leïla Sebbar, and Moroccan-born photographer Lalla Essaydi use to describe their position as artists in relation to their respective autobiographies. At the heart of these three notions lies a desire to exceed the boundaries that serve to "separate" and "close doors," between the intimate and the exterior (Mernissi), between Algeria and France (Sebbar), or between Arab and Western cultures (Essaydi). Their art work, comprised of scholarly writing, fictional stories, and staged images, becomes the ground where physical, metaphorical, and artistic boundaries merge, revealing a crossroads comprised of various countries, cultures, languages, and mediums. But the question emerges: how precisely do these artists trespass? Mix? And interweave?

My main focus in this dissertation is to examine the intersectionalities at the heart of Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's work. As women born in North Africa, these artists risk being subsumed in a female "eastern" identity, in which gender and birthplace are understood as the dominant categories through which their works are studied. However, their lived experiences, as reflected in their art, go beyond the binaries produced by these classifications and extend to other pluralistic positionalities including, but not limited to, nationality, education, ethnicity, class, race, gender, sexuality, and linguistic and cultural influences. While these intersecting categories are crucial to my work, I seek to push them a step further to see how Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi express these various positionalities through multiple and intersecting mediums. In short, I identify their use of mixed media as a privileged mode of analyzing their work and of understanding their complex identity formations. In my approach, I begin with the mixed product of their artwork, rather than with their identity so as to first and foremost see Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi as artists rather than as "Algerian" or "Moroccan" women. My objective is not to prioritize or hierarchize this mix of visual, written, and oral techniques of representation, but to illustrate how these interdisciplinary practices produce interwoven narratives that reveal the multiple and complex positionalities of these artists and their subjects. Such an artistic practice creates a path by which to escape fixed and constraining positions, such as "North African woman," in order to reveal personal and artistic crossroads.

In order to understand the various positionalities of these three artists it is necessary to contextualize their own personal histories, as well as their works, which I proceed to do in the chronological order of their respective births. The feminist scholar

and author Fatema Mernissi was born in Fes, Morocco in 1940.[1] As a child she attended schools funded by the French government under the French protectorate. In 1957 she left Morocco for France where she studied political science at the Sorbonne in Paris. Upon completing these studies, she enrolled at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, from which she earned a doctorate in sociology. Her main academic concerns include women in modern day Moroccan society and gender and Islam. She addresses these topics in works such as *Le Harem Politique* (1987) and *Beyond the Veil* (1975 and republished with a new introduction by Mernissi in 2011). She has also published a memoir (*Dreams of Trespass,* 1994) as well a autobiographical essays in which she applies her training as a sociologist to experiences between cultures (*Scheherazade Goes West,* 2001). She continues to publish a variety of original works in Arabic, English, and French that primarily focus on the intersections of feminism, Islam, and social and cultural practices in both the "East" and the "West."[2] In 2003, along with the American scholar and activist Susan Sontag, she was awarded the Prince of Asturias Award in literature.[3] Mernissi currently works as a professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco.

Born in 1941 in Algeria to an Algerian father and French mother, Leila Sebbar grew up in a system of colonial rule. As tensions grew in the fight for an independent state, Sebbar left Algeria at the age of nineteen in order to pursue studies in French literature at the University of Aix-en-Provence. She moved to Paris in 1963 where she

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[1] Fatema Mernissi has been published under two orthographies of her given name, both "Fatema" and "Fatima." Here and throughout the dissertation I have chosen to use the former spelling.
[2] As well as the original texts written in Arabic, English, and French, her work has also been translated into more than twenty languages.
[3] Conferred by the Fundacíon Príncipe de Asturias, an organization with ties to the Spanish Monarchy, this award recognizes contributions "to the encouraging and promoting [sic] the scientific, cultural and humanistic values that form part of mankind's universal heritage" (http://www.fpa.es/en/prince-of-asturias-awards/).

began teaching while pursuing a doctoral degree at the Sorbonne. Her dissertation, "Le mythe du bon nègre dans la littérature française du 18e siècle," was published in *Les Temps Modernes*.[4] She continued to collaborate with this journal, co-editing a special issue that focused on the education of girls from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, *Petites filles en éducation*. This collaboration initiated her entry into a group of female intellectuals and artists who, concerned with the quality of the "feminine press" in France, participated in creating *Histoires d'Elles,* a short-lived journal (1976-80) that encouraged women to write about diverse political, historical, and international topics.[5] Her contribution to *Histoires d'Elles* marked the first of many collaborative efforts, which include *La quinzaine littéraire*, and *Etoiles d'encre*, among others. While continuing to collaborate on various projects, Sebbar published her first independent work of fiction in 1981 entitled *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*.[6] In the years since, Sebbar has published dozens of fiction and non-fiction short stories and novels, in addition to her essays and literary critiques. Her fiction, often centered on a female protagonist of North African descent living in France, focuses on issues such as identity (personal, familial, and cultural), literal and metaphorical exile, history and memory. Like many of her characters, Sebbar refers to herself as "croisée," citing her mixed

[4] "Le mythe du bon nègre, dans la littérature du xviiie siècle (Littérature coloniale française)." *Les Temps Modernes* 336 (1974): 337-338. Print.

[5] Sebbar, in *Lettres Parisiennes,* describes her experience at *Histoire d'elles* as one in which women of varying cultural and educational backgrounds were able to engage in topics ranging from the private to the political, that mixed "des pays, des cultures, des corps, des vêtements, des accents, des voix, des gestes" (95-96).

[6] Notably, Sebbar has collaborated with fellow author Nancy Huston with whom she has published *Lettres Parisiennes: autopsie de l'exil,* a collection of letters exchanged by the two women writing away from their respective birth lands of Algeria and Canada as well as *Une enfance d'ailleurs,* a collection of short stories by seventeen authors. In addition to her journal collaborations, Sebbar has also contributed to radio programs on Radio-France (1984-1999) and France-Culture.

geographical, cultural, linguistic and genetic origins (*Lettres Parisiennes* 147-148).[7] Her choice of the term "croisée" exceeds the limits of other possible descriptors such as "hybrid" (referring to a product of the mixing of *two* distinct cultures, traditions, or races), "multicultural" (which would restrict her multiplicity to a *cultural* landscape), or "métis" (a term referring to mixed *races*).[8] As a "croisée" she is not restricted to a binary cultural or racial identity, but finds herself at the intersection of multiple identities. Although her oeuvre as a whole is not autobiographical, her personal description as "croisée" and the implications of such an identity of intersecting origins serve as a primary trope of interrogation for her work in both fiction and non-fiction, as we see for example in *La Seine était rouge* (Chapter Two). Sebbar currently lives in Paris and continues to actively write and publish.

While Sebbar and Mernissi have both primarily found success through their literary publications, Lalla Essaydi's achievements have come through her photographic exhibits. Born in 1956 in Morocco, Essaydi has lived in various places including her birth country, Saudi Arabia, France, and the United States. In 1990 she began formally studying art at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. She has since earned multiple degrees in Painting and Photography from Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Essaydi has produced a number of major photographic collections including, *Converging Territories* (2002-2004), *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2006), *Harem* (2009), *Harem Revisited* (2012-2013), *Bullet*, and *Bullet Revisited* (2012-2013), which have captured audiences in the United States, Europe, North Africa, the Middle

[7] In *Leïla Sebbar,* Michel Laronde explores the term *croisée*, locating it as a positive term that, while it results from Sebbar's own autobiography, can also be applied to her work in which countries, cultures, identities, and histories intersect (19).
[8] As Emmanuelle Saada explains in *Les Enfants de la Colonie,* the term "métis" is not used in the North African context. I go into this in more detail in Chapter Three.

East, and Asia.[9] While the majority of her work is large format analog film photography, she has also included video elements, such as her short film *The Echo of Silence*. By and large her photographic work includes two key elements: women and writing on and around these women. Through her work, Essaydi engages with perceptions of "East" and "West," with a specific focus on how western visions of the East create limited narratives about the Arab world. More specifically, she attempts to "help the viewer to see Orientalism as a projection of the sexual fantasies of Western male artists, and as a voyeuristic tradition. But [she] also invite[s] the viewers to appreciate the authentic beauty of the culture depicted" (Essaydi at Bates). In 2012, Essaydi was the recipient of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (SMFA) Medal Award.[10] She continues to make photographs and splits her time between New York and Marrakech.

Although these three women self-identify as either a writer (Mernissi and Sebbar) or a visual artist (Essaydi), their artistic "trespassing," "mixing," or "interweaving" occurs through the combination of textual, visual, and multimedia elements in their works. Mernissi's publications range from what can be considered purely academic (*Beyond the Veil*) to autobiographical (*Dreams of Trespass*) and collaborative (*A Quoi rêvent les jeunes?*). Beginning with *Dreams of Trespass*, Mernissi initiated a project with photographer Ruth V. Ward entitled "Harem Within," in which Ward shoots photos in the harem setting and Mernissi pens accompanying text. Mernissi has also become increasingly interested in the role of young Arab women, whom she names "medina digital feminists." Through this terminology ("medina digital"), Mernissi creates a

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[9] Exhibition catalogues have also been published for both *Converging Territories* and *Les Femmes du Maroc*. For a full list of exhibitions, see Essaydi's full CV on her website, lallaessaydi.com.
[10] This award is presented "annually to individuals who have made a significant and lasting impact on the art world" (https://www.smfa.edu/medal).

captivating juxtaposition. The medina is associated with the oldest and most "traditional" parts of Moroccan towns and villages, often enclosed by walls. "Digital" suggests a space free from physical walls in which individuals from various countries, cultures and linguistic backgrounds can interact. Thus, these feminists—individuals who value equity—are geographically located, yet navigating through a variety of different online communities. These young women engage with the Internet and social media, through which they are creating innovative and collective spaces of communication that promote dialogue rather than conflict ("Digital Scheherazade," 2005).[11] Moreover, recently, Mernissi has also been involved in writing introductory essays for catalogues for two art exhibitions, the Tate Britain's *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* and the Edwynn Houk Gallery's *Les Femmes du Maroc* by Essaydi ("Seduced By Samar or How British Orientalist Painters Learned to stop Worrying and Love the Darkness" and "Lalla Essaydi: A Spinner of Scenarios more Dangerous than Scheherazade" respectively.)

Like Mernissi, Sebbar has increasingly included other mediums within her texts. Dating back to her earliest independent publications, Sebbar has shown an interest in the use of visual media. In her Shérazade trilogy (which includes *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*; *Les Carnets de Shérazade*; and *Le Fou de Shérazade*), she shows a particular interest in Orientalist painting. In both the Shérazade trilogy and *La Seine était rouge* Sebbar incorporates video as a key element of the narrative structure. In more recent years, Sebbar has begun to include actual images into her work, most notably in

[11] One such initiative is "The Casablanca Dream" a group comprised of "women from the Global South—activists and academics—seeking solutions for empowering women who increasingly carry the burden of world wide poverty" (http://www.casablanca-dream.net/). In a paper entitled "Weaving Peace into Globalization" given at a meeting for the "Casablanca Dream," Mernissi proposes that the group must also work "to transform globalization into a voyage free of anxiety and fear" for Muslims who are seen as either "terrorists" or "clandestine migrants" (n.p.).

Mes Algéries en France, and *Journal de mes Algéries en France* in which she intersperses photographs, paintings and drawings with writing. In addition, her latest books (*Isabelle l'Algérien* and *Une femme à sa fenêtre)* combine her texts with the drawings of Sébastien Pignon, a Paris based artist and illustrator working in the mediums of drawing and painting.

Whereas both Mernissi and Sebbar began with text and progressively became interested in multimedia techniques and images, Essaydi began with visual images and then started including text within these images. Trained as a painter, her first works were in fact tableaux. They have rarely been shown, but were on display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art's 2012-2013 retrospective on Essaydi's work, *Lalla Essaydi: Revisions*. Since creating these paintings, Essaydi has worked in diverse medium including installation art, video, and most notably photography. One element that continually emerges in these different mediums is Essaydi's use of text on and around women's bodies. Her signature calligraphic-henna text, written in Arabic, comes from her own journals and appears in all of her photographic collections.

By and large, respective research on Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi has isolated and analyzed *singular* elements of their work: textual aspects in the case of Mernissi[12]

[12] Scholarship on Mernissi's written work tends to focus either on her location in regards to religion or her memoir *Dreams of Trespass*. Readings of Mernissi as a secular, Muslim, or Islamic feminist, can be seen for example in Raja Rhouni's *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi* or "Women's Rights in the Muslim World: Reform or Reconstruction?" by Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbrazadeh, and Carine Bourget's "Politique et éthique islamique chez Fatima Mernissi et Assia Djebar." Critiques of *Dreams of Trespass* include Bourget's "Complicity with Orientalism in Third-World Women's Writing: Fatima Mernissi's Fictive Memoirs," Ziad Bentahar's "Beyond Harem Walls: Redefining Women's Space in Works by Assia Djebar, Malek Alloula and Fatima Mernissi," Diya M. Abdo's "Narrating Little Fatima: A Picture is Worth 1001 Tales," Anne Donadey's "Portrait of a Maghrebian Feminist as a Young Girl," Hasna Lebaddy's "Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*: Self Representation or Confinement within the Discourse of Otherness," Melissa Matthes' "Shahrazad's Sisters: Storytelling and Politics in the Memoirs of Mernissi, El Saadawi and Ashrawi," and Filiz Turhan-Swenson's Voices Across the Frontier: Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Girls of a Harem Girlhood*."

and Sebbar,[13] and visual components in the case of Essaydi.[14] However, scholars have not yet fully considered how these artists use a combination of textual and visual elements to develop intersecting female subjectivities and history.[15] The notion of intersectionality is a key organizing feature of this dissertation. Emerging out of feminist debates of the 1960s and 1970s that contended that gender was the primary factor in influencing female

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[13] Although there is a fairly large published body of work on Sebbar, very little deals with her use of image within the text. However, there have been a few articles that address this relationship. Donna Wilkerson-Barker's essay "Photographic memories in Leïla Sebbar's 'Le Chinois vert d'Afrique'"and Karina Eileraas's "Reframing the Colonial Gaze: Photography, Ownership, and Feminist Resistance" each discusses how Sebbar uses photography to create alternative memories and resist masculine dominance. In addition, Helen Vassallo in "Re-mapping Algeria(s) in France: Leïla Sebbar's *Mes Algéries en France* and *Journal de mes Algéries en France"* argues that by combining images in these works, Sebbar reconstructs a French/Algerian history. *Fictions de l'Intégration* by Sylvie Durmelat explores how literary and filmic representations by Maghrebi authors produce a literary, geographical, and memory-based Franco-Maghrebi identity that both allows and encourages diverse forms of creative expression and fiction in order to "raconter autrement l'histoire." Soheila Kian's *Ecritures et transgressions d'Assia Djebar et de Leïla Sebbar* engages with an historical and orientalist framework in order to argue that Djebar and Sebbar subvert both "eastern" and "western" stereotypes by creating overlapping spaces of cultural encounter. Citing gender as a crucial factor Anne Donadey in *Recasting Postcolonialism* studies works by Djebar and Sebbar in order to redefine postcolonial literature. She argues that Djebar and Sebbar create literary works that both oppose and conform to power structures, rewrite colonial histories, and are part of an "intertextual matrix" that allow for the propagation of female histories and genealogies.

[14] The publications on Essaydi's art are a combination of scholarly articles and newspaper reviews. Although almost all articles concerning her work refer to her use of writing within her images, most examine this only on a cursory level, deeming it either inaccessible or empowering. These include: Isolde Brielmaier's "Re-inventing the Spaces within the Images of Lalla Essaydi;" DeNeen Brown's "Challenging the Fantasies of the Harem;" Jerry Cullum's "Review: Critiquing cultures with Lalla Essaydi, Greg Lotus, Paper-Cut Project, Ed Pfizenmaier;" and *The Photography of Lalla Essaydi: Critiquing and Contextualizing Orientalism*, edited by Sarah T Brooks. On the one hand, the text is dismissed, like Benjamin Genocchio in his *New York Times* Review "Reviving the Exotic to Critique Exoticism" as "obscured," "illegible," and "decorative." On the other hand, Amanda Carlson in her introductory essay to Essaydi's *Converging Territories* recognizes Essaydi's writing as an important element within the photograph, but warns that the audience may be "duped" if they do not read Arabic. Notable exceptions include Naïma Hachad's "Configuring the Feminine in Lalla Essaydi's Photography" and Mernissi's "Lalla Essaydi: A Spinner of Scenarios more Dangerous than Scheherazade."

[15] Although this study does not deal specifically with the works of Assia Djebar, it is necessary to note her contribution to female Maghrebi artistic production. Through her diverse works in literature and film, Djebar has created a model for female production by and about North Africa women that embraces multiple points of views and mediums. Starting in her earliest novels (*Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde*, 1962) and continuing throughout her career (*La Femme Sans Sépulture*, 2002), Djebar relies on non-linear and complex narrative structures that privilege multiple points of view. While recognized as a "Francophone author," Djebar's methods of production extend beyond the literary, as she has produced two films (*La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, 1977 and *La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli*, 1979). Regardless of the chosen medium, Djebar's representations extend beyond it by engaging with other artistic practices, such as painting in the collection *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1979), or musicology in the film *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* and the novel *L'amour, la Fantasia* (1985). Through her diverse works in literature and film, Djebar has created a model for female production by and about North Africa women that embraces multiple points of views and mediums.

experience, intersectionality was first articulated in the late 1980s by feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics."[16] At the heart of this notion is the idea that factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality do not act independently of one another, but rather are part of a larger and interconnected system of oppression and social inequality. As such, examining any singular aspect (race *or* class, gender *or* sexuality), fails to account for the intersecting practices that dictate female experience. Growing out of Black Feminist thought, intersectionality critiques a system of binaries that privilege either/or dichotomies: male or female, female or black, black or lesbian, rather than embracing pluralistic identities: female and black and lesbian, for example.[17] This notion of intersectionality is salient in my own work on Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi. The three artists all locate themselves and their art in positions of intersectionality ("trespassing," "*croisée*," or at a "crossroads," respectively). This dissertations seeks to explore not only how Mernissi, Sebbar and Essaydi depict intersecting cultural, linguistic, national and gendered identities, but also how their artistic production reflects a process of intersectionality by creating works at the crossroads of different textual, oral, and visual mediums.

[16] Crenshaw also expands on the origins of intersectionality in a 2004 interview with Sheila Thomas in the American Bar Associations *Perspectives Magazine* entitled "Intersectionality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender."

[17] Although Crenshaw was the first to articulate this theory of intersectionality, the notion predated her scholarship and was a reaction to the second wave feminist discourse in the 1960s and 1970s that located gender as the key factor of oppression, ignoring factors such as race and class. bell hooks in *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and Audrey Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (1984) put forth similar theories that locate oppression as system of interlocking factors including gender and race. Intersectionality is also closely related to Feminist Standpoint theory as theorized notably by Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, Nancy Harstock, and Dorothy Smith. They argue that one's standpoint, from a socio-political position, can serve an important position in producing epistemological points of view that are not available to the oppressors.

The roots of this study have grown out of the coincidence of three crucial binaries in regards to the artists: their positionalities in regards to the "West" or "East," in regards to male/female identities, and their relationship to textual and visual mediums. First, all three of these artists were born in North Africa, a part of the global "East." In his seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*, Edward Saïd describes the romanticized and fetishized ways in which the "West" constructs and describes the "East," revealing engrained prejudices. As Saïd notes at the beginning of *Orientalism*: "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). These observations that Saïd made more than thirty-five years ago remain prevalent today. Notably we can see these prejudices played out in the ways in which literary artists in the French speaking-world are regarded as either "French" (those with European heritage—the so-called *Français de souche*) or "Francophone" (all other French speakers) authors.[18] This is a pertinent example because

[18] In recent years, discussions have surfaced over the way in which literary productions in French have been labeled as either French or Francophone based on the perceived nationality of their authors. In a 2007 manifesto, "Pour une littérature monde en français," published in the French newspaper *Le Monde,* more than forty "Francophone" authors, including Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun, Guadeloupian Maryse Condé, and Vietnamese-born French citizen Anna Moï, criticize these categories, asserting that they only reinforce hegemonic and colonial practices that place continental France as the center of literary, artistic, and cultural production in French. As such, "Francophone" authors and their works occupy a secondary and marginalized position. This manifesto can be found online on *Le Monde*'s website: http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html. It was followed in 2010 by *Je est un autre: Pour une identité-monde* (edited by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouand), a collection of essays by numerous additional French-speaking authors (including Sebbar, Congolese-born Alain Mabanckou, and Djiboutian-born Abdourahman A. Waberi) that echoes the sentiments of "Pour une littérature monde en français," calling for an "*identité-monde*." Also in 2010, *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*, a volume edited by Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy was published that included essays by some of the foremost literary and postcolonial scholars, including Deborah Jenson, Lydie Moudileno, and Jane Hiddleston. While some praise the manifesto for attempting to conquer the hierarchical divide between French and Francophone studies, others critique it for reinscribing these same categories. Regardless of point of view, the manifesto serves as an organizing framework through which these scholars examine the future of "French," "Francophone," and "Postcolonial" Studies.

Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi all have ties to French colonial practices and the French language, and thus can be labeled as "Francophone." Mernissi and Sebbar were born in the 1940s in regions (Morocco and Algeria) that were under the control of the French government. Essaydi was born in 1957, the year in which the French Protectorate ended in Morocco. While the results of political policy have shaped their identities—all three artists speak French, have studied in France, and have produced work in French—labeling them as French of Francophone, Western or Eastern artists reduces their work to their place of birth or linguistic capabilities. Such a reduction fails to account for the various and non-binary influences—gendered, sexual, classed, national, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural—that shape their identities and artistic productions.

One criticism of Saïd's Orientalism is that it fails to adequately account for differences that go beyond "East" and "West," namely gender and sexuality. In her *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Meyda Yegenoglu's criticizes the ways in which Saïd and others regard issues of gender and sexuality as secondary in relation to colonial discourse. Through an intersectional approach, Yegenoglu argues that gender and sexuality must be examined at the same level as colonialist practices, and not be relegated to subgroups of Orientalism. In the North African context, while literary works began to emerge post-World War II, publication was largely reserved for men, with the one notable exception of Assia Djebar. In June of 2005, Djebar was the first North African woman and only the second African writer—the other was Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1983—ever elected to the prestigious *Académie française*. Djebar also remains one of the most studied

"Francophone" authors both by scholars and in the classroom.[19] It is not until the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s that North African ("Eastern") other women artists begin to be accepted more broadly as artistic producers.[20] With this emergence of female artists, more nuanced portraits of women, specifically in regards to gender and sexual representations, start to surface. In response to the limited and often sexualized depictions of female characters (portrayed for the most part by male authors) Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi assign gender and sexuality a prominent role within their works.[21] This can notably be seen in Mernissi's *Scheherazade Goes West,* Sebbar's *Shérazade; 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts,* and Essaydi's *Les Femmes du Maroc,* for example, in which the artists engage with both Orientalist and sexualized female stereotypes in order to critique them and present female subjects who are not defined simply by their "eastern" identity or sexual or reproductive capabilities. By including critiques of both Orientalism and sexualized female characters, Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi account for intersecting systems of oppression, acknowledging how both are equally harmful.

In the same way that the "East" has been viewed as secondary to hegemonic Western culture, images have been understood as ancillary to text. Over the past few decades, numerous visual culture scholars, notably John Berger, David Freedberg, David MacDougall and Barbara Marie Stafford, have argued that the overriding importance of

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[19] While several studies have compared Sebbar and Djebar (for example, Mildred Mortimer's "Language and Space in the Fiction of Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar;" Rafika Merini's *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djebar and Leila Sebbar: A Thematic Study of Their Works*; Soheila Kian's *Ecritures et transgressions d'Assia Djebar et de Leïla Sebbar;* and Anne Donadey's *Recasting Postcolonialism),* I seek to go beyond the frame of Francophone Algerian women (Djebar and Sebbar) in order to see how the textual and visual techniques employed within this setting can be translated to a broader context.

[20] We can see this not only through the emergence of works by Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi, but also through other women artists such as Nassira Belloula, Maïssa Bey, Nadia Chafik, Laila Lalami, Malika Madi, Leïla Marouane, Malika Mokeddem, Mouna Siala, and Maria Zaki, among others.

[21] These portrayals can be observed in works by European artists such as the painters Eugène Delacroix or Jean-Léon Gérôme and writers Guy de Maupassant and Théophile Gautier as well as North African authors such as Kateb Yacine and Rachid Boudjedra.

semiotics among twentieth century theorists has resulted in images being subjected to the same "reading" as texts.[22] This semiotic reading, according to Stafford, "has either marginalized the study of images, reduced it to a subaltern position, or appropriated it through colonization." The colonization to which Stafford refers hierarchizes text and text-based analysis over image. Similarly to other forms of colonization in which a hegemonic power dominates, text rules over images. This marginalization refuses the inherent power of images as crucial producers of non-verbal knowledge. As previously mentioned, Mernissi, Sebbar and Essaydi have employed different visual and textual mediums throughout their oeuvres. Such a practice challenges "colonization" by resisting the text/image hierarchy through making both equally necessary as complementary producers of meaning in their work.

In order to examine these intersectionalities, it is necessary to engage in a methodology that incorporates varied approaches. Through my training as a literary scholar, I have developed methods of "close reading" by analyzing words, syntactic structures, and passages within the texts. By paying close attention to these textual details, patterns begin to emerge that structure my understanding. For example, in Chapter Two, I perform a close reading of an initial exchange in Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* between the main character, Amel, and her grandmother Lalla. Through a careful reading, I identify two verbs, *dire* and *savoir*, which are used multiple times in this short passage, and which frame my understanding of the rest of the text. However, in this multimedia study, textual readings provide only a singular means of analysis. As such, I incorporate other modes of inquiry from fields such as art history, visual culture, and

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[22] See John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*; John Berger and Jean Mohr's *Another Way of Telling*; David Freedberg's *The Power of Images*; David MacDougall's *The Corporeal Image* and *Transcultural Cinema;* and Barbara Stafford's *Good Looking.*

feminist studies. From an artistic perspective, I attempt to place Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's works within a historical framework that responds to specific traditions. For instance, I identify the Orientalist influences on Essaydi's photographs (Chapter One), the historical and political factors surrounding the Paris Massacre (Chapter Two), and the historically constructed notion of the harem (Chapter Three). Through this contextualization, it becomes evident that multiple mediums serve to create this historical perception. Textual critics such as Anne Donadey, Mildred Mortimer, Michael Rothberg, and Réda Bensmaïa influence my literary reading of Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's work. However, due to the multiple mediums used within their works, a "textual" analysis is not sufficient. As such I also engage with visual scholars including Stafford, John Berger, David MacDougall, and Malek Alloula. In so doing, I seek to assess the visual aspects in their own right in such a way that they are not subsumed to a textual reading. For example, in Chapter One, I show how Essaydi's *Converging Territories # 30,* in which four women increasing (or decreasing) in age and veiling status stand side-by-side, can have multiple interpretations based on the visual comprehension of the juxtaposition of images. By not assuming a traditional Western left to right "reading" of the image, I am able to evaluate the different "converging" visual and textual elements that make the image and produce meaning.

My visual and textual analysis is further influenced by feminist critiques, such as the Black feminist notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw) as well as Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the *mestiza*—a theory of intersection between various physical, social, gender, sexual, cultural, artistic and psychological borders. These feminist and cultural critiques provide a means by which to link various artistic

practices in order to evaluate them from a position of equality rather than hierarchy. For example in Chapter Three, working through a *mestiza* framework I show how Mernissi in *Dreams of Trespass* and Essaydi in *Harem # 14c* create textual and visual portraits of the harem—their own productive borderland.

In transposing these modes of analysis onto Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's work, I do not mean to suggest that these North African diasporic artists have not formed a distinct theoretical and artistic practice. Rather, I suggest that Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's works are in fact informed by a set of critical fields and that through these practices these artists "trespass," "mix," and "interweave" in order to artistically articulate innovative modes of production that escape binary stereotypes, highlighting the crossroads at which they, and so many other diasporic individuals, inhabit.

Using this framework of intersectionality, this dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter One focuses on selected photographs from Essaydi's first major collection, *Converging Territories* (2002-2004). I begin this chapter by contextualizing the factors that influence Essaydi's emergence as an "immigrant artist" in the United States. These include but are not limited to the September 11, 2001 attacks and the events of the "Arab Spring," both of which sparked interest in "Arab" women as a group in need of "saving" according to Western media and politicians. At the same time that political dynamics were thrusting Arab women into the spotlight, curatorial practices, influenced by feminist discourse including notions of intersectionality, were emerging that resulted in a more inclusive artistic reception for both women and non-Western artists. Rather than being presented as merely "tokenist" representations of their Western counterparts,

"Eastern" female artists, including Essaydi's *Converging Territoires,* began to be included and displayed based on their own merits.

In her title, *Converging Territories*, Essaydi intimates the interweaving nature of the elements in her art. First, in choosing the term "converging," Essaydi highlights the coming together-ness, mingling, combining, merging, or intersecting of different elements in her photographs. Such "convergence" seeks to blur distinct dividing lines and singular characterizations by exploring the fluidity between different "territories." While convergence exceeds singular characterization or boundaries, "territories" is a politically loaded term, especially in colonial politics. Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* describes "territory" as having etymological roots associated with the "earth" (*terra)* and the verb "to frighten" or "to terror."[23] Thus, in Bhabha's colonial contextualization, territory amounts to a place from which people are frightened off. In Essaydi's case, there is a relationship to a specific "territory," as the artist returns to her childhood home in Morocco to shoot the photographs. However, the territories that Essaydi represents extend beyond a relationship to any specific piece of land, to include cultural, linguistic, and artistic zones. Through examining the cultural, gendered, and sexualized connotations of veiling between East and West (*Converging Territories # 30*), the gendered, artistic, religious, and cultural associations of writing (*Converging Territories # 10*), and the physical, psychological, metaphorical, and artistic spaces (*Converging Territories # 21)* complex and nuanced female subjects emerge that exceed assignment to any singular category. In this sense, Essaydi's work corresponds to a theory of

[23] Bhabha associates this definition of "territory" with colonial power in which colonist authority controls certain areas, or frightens "natives" away. See the chapter "Sly Civility" in *The Location of Culture* (pp. 93-101).

"deterritorialization."[24] However, whereas deterritorialization attempts to reach across boundaries, Essaydi's work seeks to blur and dissolve them by creating spaces or "territories" that reflect the intersecting or "converging" experiences of individuals living at the crossroads of countries, cultures, languages, and artistic practices.

These "converging territories" are not unique to Essaydi's work, but are also evident in Sebbar's 1999 work *La Seine était rouge*. Chapter Two examines this novel, in which Sebbar creates a fictionalized account of the events of October 17, 1961—the day in which an unknown number of peaceful Algerian protestors were killed or otherwise disappeared in Paris. In attempting to excavate the history of the Paris Massacre, the novel follows three young adults, a French-Algerian woman (Amel), a French man (Louis), and a French-Algerian man (Omer), as they reconstruct these events through a mix of verbal accounts, photographic evidence, documentary film, and embodied experience. Throughout the episodic novel, we see the interwoven recollections of various individuals, such as "Le Harki de Papon," "L'Algerien sauvé des eaux," and "L'étudiant français" as the chapters alternate between the past (as recounted in Louis' film) and the narrative present.

Scholarship on *La Seine était rouge* by Anne Donadey and Mildred Mortimer contextualizes the novel within a framework of anamnesis, a response to the amnesia of the Paris Massacre. This anamnesis,—a collective process of remembrance— illustrated through the diverse set witnesses, creates a history for this forgotten day. This collectiveness is revealed through the multiple interlocutors that Sebbar names in her dedication as well as the numerous characters of different backgrounds that she gives

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[24] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri conceive of this deterritorialization as going beyond political terms, and extending into social, economic, and cultural domains—across boundaries. See *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) by Deleuze and Guatarri.

credence to within the novel. Building upon Donadey and Mortimer's work and engaging with Michael Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory,"—a type of memory "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing [from other historical events and commemorations]" (3)—I suggest that this collective remembrance is achieved through a variety of intersecting mediums, including textual, photographic, filmic, and embodied experience. By tracing the lineage of *La Seine était rouge* through Sebbar's own remembrance triggered by photographs of the Paris Massacre, as well as Sebbar's "interlocutors"—a group of journalists, photographers, filmmakers, and writers—to whom Sebbar dedicates the novel, I illustrate how her narrative draws on multiple witnesses and mediums—textual, oral, filmic, photographic, and embodied-- to recreate a history for October 17, 1961. In the end, Sebbar proposes a methodology through which the main protagonists—Amel, Louis, and Omer—can examine their own history and identities. Moreover, with this methodology, Sebbar challenges her readers to reexamine, through a collective and multimedia approach, our own identities and positionalities in respect not only to the Paris Massacre, but also to historical events more generally. Such an examination produces recoceptualizations of personal and national identities that exceed either/or categories such as French or Algerian to embrace identities that fall at the intersections: French *and* Algerian *and* female *and* student *and* artist *and* daughter *and* friend.

While Chapter Two focuses on how multiple mediums can produce nuanced and representative articulations of national identity, Chapter Three studies how Mernissi and Essaydi, in *Dreams of Trespass* and *Harem* respectively, respond to Orientalist visions of Arab female identity as articulated through the harem. Through the example of the 1965

film *Harum Scarum* starring Elvis Presley, I examine how the harem has been constructed in the Western imagination as a space bounded by historical, cultural, and gendered expectations that result from male fantasy. Such a conceptualization of the harem places it with a binary system that engages with notions such as inside/outside, male/female, free/confined. However, engaging with Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of *la frontera,* I propose that the harem can also be imagined in non-dualistic terms. Anzalduá imagines the *frontera* as a female borderlands in which gendered social, political, and linguistic differences are seen as productive rather than restrictive. In so doing, she refuses the notion of a border as a simple dividing line that creates clear and distinctive binary structures. Rather she reimagines borders as culturally embedded, socially inscribed, and psychologically important terrains that shape identities. Using Anzaldúa's *frontera* as a framework, I proceed to investigate how Mernissi and Essaydi break down the historical, cultural, and gendered borders of the harem—a female Moroccan *frontera*. I first explore the multiple harems in Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass.* Mernissi presents various harems that have dictated the lives of her grandmothers, her mother and other family members, and even French soldiers. In deconstructing these harems, she provides a means of "escape" that consists of reimagining the harem as a place of female collectively and creativity. Similarly, Essaydi's photograph "Harem # 14c" in which a single female figure sits on the threshold between the inner sanctum and outer room, engages with the trope of the harem. Although in conversation with Orientalist depictions, Essaydi's staged photograph rejects these portrayals by representing the female model as both a powerful and beautiful subject at the crossroads. Although Mernissi and Essaydi represent their harems differently—the former relies on familial

memories from her childhood harem while the latter employs models to construct a performative space in a rented house—both conceptualize of this space on the threshold or borderlands. In this way, it becomes clear in their works that the harem, although often a physically restrict*ed* place, does not have to be restrict*ive*. In fact, for both Mernissi and Essaydi, the harem is a boundless space of female collaboration and artistic creation.

By "interweaving" these chapters on Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi, I hope to show how although they come from different scholar, literary, and artistic backgrounds, these three artists employ similar multimedia tactics, breaking down binary systems that serve to restrict and limit their own experiences and artistic identities. Although I have chosen to focus on three artists for the purpose of the dissertation, future studies could include other diasporic and multimedia artists, such as Algerian essayist, novelist, and playwright Maïssa Bey, Algerian photographer and author Ourida Nekkache or French-born painter and author Catherine Rossi, and even the publishing house Chèvre Feuille Étoilée, which has embraced artists with diverse Mediterranean backgrounds and mixed textual, oral, and visual mediums. Although hailing from regions on both sides of the Mediterranean and employing different mediums, these artists as well as the publishing house recognize the Mediterranean as a point of intersection and productivity. In further work, I anticipate to envisage the Mediterranean as a potential zone of linguistic, cultural, geographical, ethnic, and racial inclusivity rather than a dividing line between "East" and "West." Such an enlarged study would show how intersecting artistic practices have become common and crucial tools through which artists can represent identities that inhabit the crossroads. Furthermore, my future work will engage more heavily with web-based content and social media in order to see how Mernissi and Essaydi, for example,

engage both theoretically and artistically with technological mediums that permit and even encourage linguistic, cultural, geographical, national, and artistic intersections. In my conclusion, I suggest that Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's weaving of artistic practices provides a compelling model not only for other diasporic artists, but also for scholars. While scholarship is often limited to reading and writing, engagement with multiple creative mediums—painting, music, photography, video, etc.—produce embodied experiences, creating the potential for fresh and innovative modes of analysis.

Chapter One: *Converging Territories*: Intersections of Veiling, Writing, and Art in Lalla Essaydi

Introduction

On November 17, 2001, just over two months after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, then-First Lady Laura Bush was tapped to deliver the Weekly Presidential Address. In the first line of the her discourse she states: "I'm delivering this week's radio address to kick off a world-wide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the al-Qaida terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban." A few lines later she adds: "Afghan women know, through hard experience, what the rest of the world is discovering: the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists" (George W. Bush: "Radio Address by Mrs. Bush"). Although her stated objective is to launch a campaign in support of the well being of women around the world, the undergirding principal lays the foundations for the ground war in Afghanistan. A key component of this strategy, as convincingly argued by Amira Jarmakani, is to position the military intervention as a "civilizing mission" that would "save" women from their male oppressors.[25] In so doing, Mrs. Bush invokes a neo-colonialist discourse that recalls British and French colonial missions of the

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[25] See Jarmakani's book *Imaging Arab Womanhood* pp. 12-13. Jarmakani also notes the work of other feminist scholars on this same speech. See Lila Abu-Lughod's "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"; Therese Saliba's *Gender, Politics, and Islam*; and *Just Advocacy* by Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol. Such a statement also recalls the work of the feminist theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Specifically, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she critiques the colonial British abolition of certain Hindu rites, namely the *sati* tradition. Spivak describes this as being part of a practice in which "'white men are saving brown women from brown men'" (284). Such colonial policies place white men as both wielders of power and as protectors of Indian women who need saving from the male aggressor—the brown man. Mrs. Bush revises this statement, essentially asserting that: white women are saving brown women from brown men. This gendered assertion shifts power dynamics in affirming a white female position of dominance while still denying self-determination to non-white women.

nineteenth century. In addition, her delivery of this speech—the first ever weekly address given by a First Lady—places it within a highly gendered context. The First Lady, generally seen as a neutralizing figure around whom the whole country can rally, uses her position as a woman to introduce a gendered political justification for war. In the end, the framing of the war in Afghanistan put forth by Mrs. Bush comes down to women—and other "civilized" individuals—coming to the rescue of other women.

While her speech is ostensibly about Afghani women, in the social climate of the United States in the months and years following the 2001 attacks, it encompasses a much larger group: Arab women in general.[26] In the post-9/11 atmosphere, anyone perceived as Arab or Muslim by default is also associated with terrorism. This can be seen over and over again through a variety of governmental organizations and individual hate crimes. A study released in 2005 by the Council on American-Islamic Relations notes that between 2003 and 2004 hate crimes against Muslims rose by nearly fifty percent in the United States (*Status of Muslim Civil Rights* 5). On the institutional level the association of all Muslims to terrorism can be seen through the creation in 2003 of the "Demographics Unit" within the New York City Police Department. The stated mission is to, according to a piece by National Public Radio, "detect possible terrorist threats by carrying out secret surveillance of Muslim groups" (Neuman n.p.). The unit was disbanded in 2014 after more than a decade in which it had not identified one credible lead. On a more

[26] While "Arab" can have varying meanings, I here am using it as a generic term that refers to individuals with either genealogical, linguistic or cultural roots in the Arab world, as seen by the West. In addition, I also employ the terms Middle East and Middle Eastern. Using the broad definition of the terms, they refer to the region or people of the region extending from North Africa in the west to Afghanistan in the east. Such a definition differs slightly from that of the Arab League, a regional organization seeking to encourage collaboration to preserve the common interest of Arab countries. The League is comprised of twenty-two countries that identify ethnically or culturally as Arab ranging geographically from North Africa to horn of Africa to southwest Asia. See the Official Web page of the Arab League: http://www.lasportal.org/wps/portal/las_en/home_page/.

individualized level, we can point to the numerous crimes perpetuated in the United States against groups falsely identified as Muslim, such as Sikhs. On September 15, 2001, just days after the September 11 attacks, a Sikh man named Balbir Singh Sodhi was fatally shot in the gas station he owned in Mesa, Arizona. The convicted shooter, Frank Roque, reportedly shouted upon being arrested: "I stand for America all the way!"[27] Roque foresees the phrase that will become part of the Bush doctrine over the remainder of his presidency: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." In this heightened state of fear, anyone who appears to not be "American" is assumed to be a terrorist. Similar hate crimes would be repeated over the course of the following decade including the mass shooting that killed six and injured four at a Wisconsin Sikh temple in August of 2012 (Markin and Laris).[28]

Views, such as though put forth by Roque, stem from stereotypical portrayals of non-Western individuals or "Orientalism" as described by theorist and intellectual Edward Saïd in his eponymous 1978 book. The term "Orient," sometimes replaced by the "East," evokes historical divisions and is most often contrasted against the "West" or Occident—considered to be Western Europe and North America. The "Orient" refers to a number of geographical areas ranging from Western Africa to India, from the Maghreb to Japan, and from the Middle East to Eastern China—in short more than half the world. In *Orientalism* Saïd argues that Western fascination with the Orient often results in sweeping generalizations and streamlined representations that reinforce cultural prejudices against the "East" or "Other." Post September 11, 2001, the "Other" is seen to

[27]As reported by Tamar Lewin in *The New York Times*. After killing Sodhi, Roque continued to another service station where he shot at a clerk of Lebanese descent. He then fired on a home where a family of Afghan descent lived. In these two later attempts, he did not hit anyone.
[28] Also see Sunny Hundal's "Wisconsin temple shooting: Sikhs have been silent scapegoats since 9/11" in which he argues how groups such as the Sikhs have been wrongly targeted in the "war on terrorism."

pose an outright threat. In this context, men are identified as the prime aggressor or terrorist "other." The women associated with them become consumed within the single "saving" narrative put forth by Mrs. Bush. The Afghan women to whom she refers become place holders for all "Arab" or Muslim women who are suffering at the end hands of their oppressors—men. In 2001, the political and social story constructed about Arab women left them as "supposedly powerless and oppressed behind walls and veils" (Goldberg, n.p.). They were at the mercy of their male persecutors and in need of Western help.

Fast forward to December 2010, when protests broke out in Tunisia following the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six year old street vendor.[29] This action sparked demonstrations that spread throughout the region and were dubbed the "Arab Spring."[30] In response to these protests, numerous Western media outlets flocked to the region in order to cover the protests.

As Edward Saïd argues in his 1981 book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, such Western media representations tend to focus on the Muslim world only as a place of crisis, conflict, and war. This coverage portrays Arab states as devoid of their rich and diverse histories and cultures. Although Saïd contextualizes his argument in the pertinent issues of the time (the aftermath of oil crisis of the 1970s, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, and the

[29] The police confiscated his equipment and goods, which resulted in his inability to earn a living. Feeling humiliated and harassed by the police, he set himself on fire.
[30] These events commenced in December 2010 in Tunisia. By 2013 they had spread throughout the regions with protests in more than a dozen countries. These demonstrations had various effects ranging from forcing rulers out of power in Egypt and Tunisia to the voicing of dissent in, for example, Morocco.

Iran Hostage Crisis, lasting from 1979 to 1981), such a phenomenon continues to be seen in the media coverage of events such as the so-called Arab Spring.[31]

To accompany such coverage, the media tends to seek out "authentic" representative voices in times of international crises. In her 2010 essay/memoir *Create Dangerously*, Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat describes how in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, she was highly sought after to respond to the destruction: "even before the first aftershock, people were calling me asking, 'Edwidge, what are you going to do? When are you going back? Could you come on television or on the radio and tell us how you feel? Could you write us fifteen hundred words or less?'" (18-19). Danticat, due to her role as expatriate literary artist, becomes the voice *par excellence* of a country and a people. In the midst of such upheaval the "immigrant artist," to borrow Danticat's term, emerges as a crucial figure through whom a Western audience can relate to the "other" culture and people.

Danticat borrows the title of her book, *Create Dangerously*, from a 1957 lecture given in Sweden by the French philosopher Albert Camus in which he reflects on the role of the artists and the act of creation: "Créer aujourd'hui, c'est créer dangereusement. Toute publication est un acte et cet acte expose aux passions d'un siècle qui ne pardonne rien" (*Discours de Suède* 28). Although articulated in a different time, Camus' statement continues to resonate for artists today, especially for those who, like Danticat, or like Essaydi, Sebbar, or Mernissi, occupy a location in-between cultures. On the one hand, Danticat is seen as a spokesperson (especially for U.S. outlets) for Haitian people. On the other hand she must deal with harsh criticisms from the very community that she

[31] By even referring to the various uprisings and demonstrations in different countries as the "Arab Spring," the Western media fails to account for the nuanced and varied issues that distinguish the protests in Tunisia from those in, for example, Egypt.

purportedly “represents” (Danticat 32-33). Given this precarious position, artistic creation is a dangerous, yet necessary endeavor, functioning as a “revolt against silence ” (11).

Although Danticat’s situation relates directly to Haiti, her experience as “immigrant artist” can be translated to different social and political contexts, notably the Middle East. In a 2011 review of work by contemporary Arab artists on view in Paris, Yasmine Youssi writes: “C’est donc une réalité politique et sociale méconnue qui s’ouvre à qui prend le temps de se familiariser avec ces artistes” (Youssi n.p.). Paradoxically it is precisely due to the increased media visibility of specific geographical areas that certain artists, and as Youssi argues Arab artists, gain visibility in the “Western” landscape. The Arab artist and their work emerge as representative of his or her culture. As North African literary and visual arts scholar Naïma Hachad notes: “In a post-9/11 world, not only is the artist’s work, to a certain extent, conditioned by the West’s novel interest in the Arab and Muslim worlds, she/he also finds herself/himself somewhat forced to counteract new and enduring stereotypes of Islam and Islamic cultures” (98). The “immigrant artist” must negotiate his/her own practice in relation to competing forces of Western interest and stereotypes and the “desire to interpret and possibly remake his or her own world” (Danticat 18).

As “immigrant artist,” Moroccan-born photographer Essaydi attempts to negotiate these competing interests in her own work. Her first major collection, *Converging Territories*, through the use of a series of elements such as female models, veils, and calligraphic-henna text, lays out some thee contrasting terrains or “converging territories” that shape her images. Before examining the photographs, this introduction seeks to explore some of the “converging territories” that frame the reception of Essaydi’s

photographs in the U.S.. These include political factors associated with the Arab world, social perceptions of Arab women, the place of women's art in the tradition of art history, the emergence of feminist and minority discourses, as well as factors related to geography and the photographic medium.

In the past decade and especially following the "Arab Spring," major U.S. museums have shown an increased interest in exhibiting works by Arab women artists. One such example is the 2013-2014 exhibit *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World* at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It traced the careers of various Persian and Arab (Yemeni, Moroccan, Lebanese, Iraqi, Egyptian, and Palestinian) women photographers from the 1990s to present day and sought to explore the multiple and complicated dimensions of their female identities. The exhibition, displaying works from twelve Persian or Arab female photographers, was comprised of two sections "Constructing Identities" and "New Documentary." The "Constructing Identities" portion assembled a variety of images from Boushra Almutawakel, Lalla Essaydi, Rania Matar, Shirin Neshat, and Newsha Tovakolian, all of whom place women as the central subject in their photographs. Their construction of female identity engages with and challenges Orientalist and neo-Orientalist perceptions of Middle Eastern women in relation to themes such as the harem, the odalisque, the veil, Islam, and violence.[32] The second half of the exhibit "New Documentary" portrayed a range of lived experiences. Shadi Ghadirian, Gohar Dashti, and Jananne Al-Ani capture the diverse landscapes of war, domestically, geographically, and topographically, respectively. Rana El Namr and Tanya Habjouqa photograph scenes of women in their daily life, including riding the subway or relaxing on a park bench. Nermine Hammam

[32] For a more in-depth discussion of Orientalist perceptions and their origins, see Chapter Three.

and Rula Halwani depict "occupation, protest, and revolt and concerns about photography as a medium" through their multimedia work (Gresh 30). This exhibition, the first in the U.S. devoted solely to works by female Middle Eastern artists, sought to confront simplistic and stereotypical "Western" views of "Oriental" women by engaging with multiple artists who tell complex social and political stories of their homelands.

The exhibition was subject to some criticism for "subsuming" Persian and Arab women into one category, thus reinforcing stereotypes. However, the curator Kristen Gresh argues that the intentions were actually quite contrary. She explains: "The selection of artists is not an attempt to categorize, ghettoize, segregate, or create false commonalities, but rather, an effort to show the strength and diversity of some of the most compelling contemporary photography from Iran and the Arab world" (22). Instead of reinforcing a single monolithic voice for all Middle Eastern women, *She Who Tells a Story* privileges multiple voices and points of view by showcasing captivating artwork. In short, it charges the viewer with confronting her own perspectives and the "stories she thought she knew" (21). In fact, the title for the exhibit comes from a photographic collective, "Rawiya" founded by Persian and Arab women in 2009, two of whom are featured in the exhibit, Newsha Tavakolian and Tanya Habjouqu. "Rawiya," translates into English as "she who tells a story" (Gresh 21). This title immediately places female artists as authors and, as the New York Times art critic Vicki Goldberg writes, a "force in society and the arts," more than capable of producing their own stories.

Moroccan-born photographer Essaydi's work served as an anchor for the exhibit and also a transition between the two parts. Although only two of her images were included, they were displayed prominently at the two entrances. *Converging Territories*

#29 (2003) appeared in one doorway. In this image, an unknown figure steps away from the viewer.[33] This body is obscured from head to foot by a sort of drapery, covered in calligraphic Arabic text. Only the heel and the sole of a half-raised foot, appearing to be in mid-step, remain visible. Beside this photograph, the title of the exhibit appears: *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World*. Given the title and the viewers assumed familiarity with the *burqa*—a veil that covers a woman's body—we assume that the figure is indeed a woman. The unavailability of this female body and the overabundance of illegible Arabic text suggest a person who exceeds the veiled and oppressed stereotype. She has an individual identity and story to tell.

A second image by Essaydi, *Bullet Revisited # 3* (2012), a triptych, occupied the other entrance to the exhibit.[34] In this large format photograph a single model lays flat on a short bed-like structure. On the left hand side, her feet are even with the end of this bed. On the right, her head extends slightly beyond the length of the structure, allowing her face to recline and her long straight hair to fall to the floor. Her reclined position evokes the odalisque portrayed by numerous Orientalist painters, perhaps most notably by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres in *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). Beautiful glittering gold and bronze objects, which are woven together and appear to be jewels, surround and clothe the woman. A close up reveals that these shiny pieces are, in fact, bullet casings. This realization introduces an element of violence into the image that disrupts its beauty. Placed at the secondary entrance, *Bullet Revisited # 3* served both as an introduction to the exhibition and as a transition point between the "Constructing Identities" section to its

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[33] A reproduction of this image can be found on Jackson Fine Arts' (a gallery that has hosted a number of shows by Essaydi) website: http://www.jacksonfineart.com/artist_exhibit.php?id=209&exhibitid=74&imageid=1732

[34] This image can be found on Essaydi's website: http://lallaessaydi.com/11.html.

right and the "New Documentary" part to its left. In this photograph, Essaydi seeks both to challenge the Orientalist image of the reclined and stagnant odalisque and reinsert her female subject into a contemporary narrative. The bullet casings—a medium that Essaydi began to use in the aftermath of the Arab Spring—that are woven onto and around the model, signify how personal female experience becomes intertwined in the larger political and social history.

While *She Who Tells a Story* was a collective exhibition featuring numerous Middle Eastern artists, Essaydi has also been featured in solo shows at major museums in the U.S. In fact, from May 2012 to February 2013 the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (NMAfA) curated a "mid-career retrospective" (Bilbassy) on Essaydi entitled *Lalla Essaydi: Revisions*. This show, which included photographs, paintings, installation art, and video was "the first solo exhibition to bring together works of diverse media by Essaydi" ("Lalla Essaydi: Revisions"). It included photographic images from different collections including *Converging Territories* (2002-2004), *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2006), and the rarely seen series *Silence of Thought* (2003). In addition, a space was devoted to a hanging installation, *Embodiment,* accompanied by a video in which the artist read the English translation of some of the Arabic text found in selected images from *Converging Territories*. Finally, a number of her early and seldom displayed paintings were on view. In these paintings, Essaydi mimics French Orientalist tableaux of the nineteenth century that portray women as sexualized beings. She replaces the eroticized and nude female figures with men or hermaphrodites. By exposing male figures, Essaydi critiques historical representations that have reduced women to sexualized objects, and instead places men as objects for visual consumption and

pleasure. While this gesture seems to only reverse and reinscribe erotic positions, the portrayal of hermaphrodites reimagines “other” bodies that put into question traditional male/female roles by displaying both sexual parts. Although still highly sexualized, the hermaphrodites blur the line between male and female. These early tableaux set the stage for Essaydi’s later work, in which she presents a subtle and layered female sexuality.

By including Essaydi in its growing list of exhibits of North African arts and artists, the NMAfA continues to expand its purview. Since its inception in 1964, the museum focused primarily on arts from Sub-Saharan Africa, however over the past fifteen years, the curatorial direction has broadened its geographic scope to be more inclusive of North Africa.[35] The show’s guest curator, Kinsey Katchka, was fundamental in bringing Essaydi’s work to the museum. She had previously co-curated one exhibition at the NMAfA entitled *In-Sights*, that highlighted various contemporary pieces from the museum’s collection. Since that 2004 exhibition, Katchka has devoted significant time to developing and promoting “monographs and solo exhibitions of individual contemporary African artists (as opposed to featuring them in larger exhibitions)” (Katchka n.p.). Despite inclusion within museums and exhibitions, contemporary African artists were often seen as a group, rather than as individuals. Through her curatorial role, Katchka promotes contemporary African artists, especially women such as Essaydi.[36] The inclusion of *Revisions* at the NMAfA in a show curated by Katchka highlights the fluid position that Essaydi occupies as both an “African” and “Arab” artist. Up until this show, Essaydi’s work had been promoted and publicized as “Arab.” Her entrance into a museum with the word “African” in its name acknowledges the artist’s pluralistic identity

[35] The museum began to broaden its scope under the direction of curator Rosalyn Walker (1997-2002).
[36] In 2008 Katchka curated a solo show at the Detroit Institute of Arts entitled *City Sitings* that exhibited works by the Ethiopian-born artist Julie Mehreta.

and geographic and artistic roots. This gesture also situates Morocco as part of the African continent, a geographic and cultural reality often bypassed, in part, because of the imagination of the Maghreb as part of the proverbial "Orient." Even if these two descriptors take a step in the right direction, both fail to fully and adequately characterize the diverse influences on Essaydi's work, resulting from her personal transnational history and studies in North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

These exhibitions (*She Who Tells a Story* and *Revisions*) are just two examples of an increasing awareness of Middle Eastern and North African artists in the United States. Essaydi's appearance in both the solo and group exhibits highlights her works' resonances with current dialogues in relation to Arab and African women. These shows are part of a larger shift in the visibility of both female *and* non-western artists. Before conducting a more in-depth study of Essaydi's work, it is necessary to examine the tradition of female art and artists, notably in the United States where these exhibitions took place. It was not until fairly recently that women were even considered within the art history canon. Art historian Linda Nochlin in her groundbreaking 1971 article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" contends that it "was indeed *institutionally* impossible for women to achieve excellence or success on the same footing as men, *no matter what* their talent or genius" (37, her emphasis). Nochlin recounts the historical and social factors that have excluded women from achieving "greatness" in art. These include but are not limited to the general discouragement of women from pursuing art, the lack of schooling opportunities, and the institutionalized practices in the discipline of Art History that have systematically ignored female artists and any study of them.

Nochlin writes that women were excluded from the annals of history of "great" art due simply to their position as women. In her final assessment, she concludes:

> Disadvantage may indeed be an excuse; it is not, however, an intellectual position. Rather, using their situation as underdogs and outsiders as a vantage point, women can reveal institutional and intellectual weakness in general, and, at the same time that they destroy false consciousness, take part in the creation of an institution in which clear thought and true greatness are challenges open to anyone—man or woman—courageous enough to take the necessary risk, the leap in the unknown." (37).

While Nochlin's feminist claim was groundbreaking at the time, in retrospect her approach seems overly optimistic. Her conclusion avoids complex aspects of identity that go beyond gender and the great many barriers that exclude many individuals—male or female—from participating in such a process of creation. However, her work is characteristic of the time in which it was published. In the 1970s second-wave feminist thought predominated. This discourse identified gender as the key hurdle that prevented women from being considered as equals. It is not until the late 1980s and 1990s that the "other difference"—race, class, national identity, etc.—emerged as a salient issue within feminist thought. Despite its simplistic conclusions, Nochlin's article remains an essential text concerning women and art history as she takes a reflective look at the shortcomings of her own discipline.[37]

Nochlin's essay led to the 1976 exhibit *Women Artists: 1550-1950.* Curated by Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, this "was the first museum exhibition in the U.S. to

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[37] In later works, for example in "The Imaginary Orient" in her book *The Politics of Vision*, Nochlin engages more critically with the representation of diverse bodies (radicalized, gendered, etc.) and the tendency of the art history discipline to reinscribe rather than deconstruct Orientalist tendencies.

offer a large sampling of work by Western women artists and, by extension, to challenge the dominant (read masculinist) art-historical canon" (Reilly 15). This survey covering 400 years of Western art by women marked a point of departure for subsequent efforts to exhibit female artists' work. Maura Reilly in her introduction to the exhibit catalogue of *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* compellingly and succinctly summarizes the place of female artists since the 1970s. Over the course of the ensuing thirty-five plus years, various exhibits have highlighted female artists' contribution to the canon.[38] Many of "these group exhibitions in the U.S. that dedicate themselves to the history of women's artistic production successfully disrupt the hegemonic discourse from within by showing the gaps in representation" (28). Yet, despite these efforts, "women's art" remains relegated to "special exhibitions" that are only temporary (19). Female artists have yet to find a permanent place in the major museums, exhibitions, and collections (17-24).[39]

The special exhibitions featuring female artists that have taken place have been subject to criticism for the lack of works by non-Western, non-white women. Despite efforts at diversity, many exhibits have fallen short by placing female and "minority" voices as marginal counter-points to (American- or Western-centric and often) male works. According to Reilly:

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[38] For a detailed account of these various exhibitions see Reilly pp. 25-28.

[39] Reilly notes for example, citing art critic Jerry Saltz of *The Village Voice*, that following the 2004 expansion and reopening of Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, of the 410 works displayed on the fourth and fifth floor of the museum, only 14 were by female artists. Essentially, less than four percent of the collection represented works by women. Even when women's works are evenly represented in number, other disparities reflect the patriarchal attitudes that continue to permeate the field. Reilly points out: "the Venice Biennale of 2005, for instance, cited above for the uniqueness of its gender parity, yet labeled a 'garden party' in one sexist review, was the first one in the 110-year history of the Biennale to be organized by women. Two women—as if one were not enough to handle the job" (19).

> Instead of offering a broad, more inclusive selection of contemporary feminist art worldwide, which could function to dismantle the center/periphery binary, these international exhibitions continue to position the West as the privileged center, and to present not a multiplicity of voices, but rather a select sampling of Euro-American art with a tokenist inclusion of a few non-Western artists." (31).

These "tokenist" representations fail to adequately represent a variety of voices. They continue to place the West as the central and organizing point of "great" art, and by extension minimize the contribution and cultural importance of all "others."

Reilly's own curatorial practice has emerged in response to these symbolic representations. Particularly, she engages with a wide range of feminist discourses dating from the late 1980s.[40] These feminisms that inform Reilly's curatorial practice reject the monolithic female experience—often characterized as a white, middle-class existence—and begin to take into account regional, racial, class, sexual, social, and religious, etc. differences among women. By placing these feminisms in dialogue with contemporary art, Reilly proposes an alternative curatorial practice that privileges female artists from around the world, promoting a "transnational perspective" (31). As opposed to the "international" and "tokenist" standpoint that she critiques, such a perspective seeks to shift the dominant discourse by showcasing diverse global viewpoints.

Notably, this curatorial practice can be seen in the 2007 exhibition, co-curated by Reilly, entitled *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art.* Held at the

[40] Reilly engages with such diverse feminist thinkers as theorist Gayatri Spivak, sociologist Patricia Hills Collins, writer and activist Audre Lorde, critical race theorist and law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, postcolonial and transnational feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and feminist scholar Uma Narayan, among others.

Brooklyn Museum as part of the inaugural celebrations of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, this show displayed the work of over eighty female artists from around the world. It had the "aim to present a multitude of feminist voices from across cultures" (15). The opening of such a space of feminist artistic encounter (The Sackler Center), as well as the display of so many practicing female artists from around the globe signals a paradigm shift. This new direction in regards to women's art directly implicates the foundational work of Nochlin in both her academic and curatorial work and marks a deviation from it. Since Nochlin's publication in 1971, feminist art has progressed from the Euro-American-centric model, to the international tokenism of the 1980s and 1990s, to a more globally inclusive feminist practice of the new millennium. In presenting the works of various women artists "whose work visually manifests their identities (socio-cultural, political, economic, racial, gender, and or sexual) in myriad innovative ways" (16), *Global Feminisms* sets a new precedent for feminist exhibitions in the U.S.. Although Essaydi's images were not included in this exposition, the themes that they engender would have been a fitting addition to it.[41] The two previously named exhibitions, *She Who Tells a Story* and *Lalla Essaydi: Revisions* follow in the practice of *Global Feminisms.*

Before advancing any further in my discussion of Essaydi in relation to this transnational feminist art movement, it is necessary to pause to consider my approach to her work. I am placing the viewing of Essaydi's photographs in an American-centric context. In so doing, am I not simply repeating the center/periphery dynamic that is being critiqued? First, the American art scene served as Essaydi's point of entry. Educated in

[41] One criterion for the exhibition was to include female artists work who were born after 1960, Essaydi was born in 1956.

art at Tufts University and the Museum School at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, her first exhibits as well as her initial success came in the United States.[42] In addition, the artist choses to live in New York and is represented by a gallery there (Edwynn Houk Gallery). As such, my discussion of the reception of (Arab) female artists in the United States responds directly to the exposition of Essaydi's art.

Secondly, it is also crucial to understand the historical and regional limitations of her chosen medium—photography. When photography became popularized and accessible in the late 1800s, it was primarily used in North Africa as a means of documenting anthropological studies backed by European political and social organizations.[43] Thus, early photographs portrayed scenes of interest to European men—often fantastical and sexualized representations.[44] Whereas in many parts of the world photojournalism gained a foothold in the twentieth century, many Arab and Middle Eastern countries nationalized their media, which "curtail[ed] photographers' freedom and discourage[ed] the establishment of visual archives" (22-23).[45] It is not until the late 1990s that institutions are established (the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut and the photographic archives in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library at the American University in Cairo) with the goal of documenting and preserving photography from Arab countries (23). As such, Essaydi's decision to pursue photography in the U.S. that portrays Moroccan women challenges photographic traditions both in Western Europe and North Africa.

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[42] Of the forty-seven solo exhibits listed on her CV between 2001-2013, thirty-two of they forty-seven took place in the U.S. Her first show outside the U.S. took place only in 2008 in the Netherlands.

[43] See Gresh's analyses of the emergence of photography in the Middle East by Gresh (22-23) and Michket Krifta in her essay "Digressions of the Portrait" in *Arab Photography Now* (20).

[44] See Chapter Three for a more in depth analysis of European representation of North Africa. For more on the photographic medium in the North African context, see also works by Malek Alloula and Marc Garanger.

[45] Curator Rosa Issa makes a similar assessment in her introduction to *Arab Photography Now* (2011).

However, it is not simply the union of these exterior factors that attribute depth and meaning to Essaydi's work. Within her images, we are confronted with various converging and transnational territories, some of which align with and/or confront the external influences and some of which do not. In the introduction to this dissertation, I situate Essaydi's self-described position as an artist at the "crossroads" who "merges" and "interweaves." In this chapter I examine this position of intersectionality as portrayed in her first major collection *Converging Territories.* By closely studying three photographs, *Converging Territories # 30*, *Converging Territories # 10*, and *Converging Territories # 21,* I identify three topographies—veiling, writing, and architectural and photographic space respectively—that are crucial to Essaydi's aesthetic practice. Each one of these features results from a practice of interweaving of "Eastern" and "Western" perceptions in the case of the veil, of gendered artistic and textual practices in the case of writing, or of personal, cultural, and political spaces. Through the examination of these images, I seek not only to identify Essaydi's "converging territories," but also to theorize what this practice of interweaving (or convergence) accomplishes and why it is essential in her process of creation as well as to her position of artist. In addressing these questions, I illustrate how the various concepts that merge in Essaydi's portrayal of the veil, writing, and architectural and photographic space respectively, engage with, replicate, challenge, and reject proscribed stereotypical visions of female "Arab" subjectivity and produce new territories that exceed the boundaries of any one story, medium, or space.

***Converging Territories # 30*: Veiling**[46]

In *Converging Territories # 30*, a horizontally oriented image, four female figures stand one next to another.[47] They progress in age and size from right to left. As the women age, they become increasingly veiled in a cream-colored cloth. Calligraphic Arabic text written in henna covers this fabric. The same material that clothes the models also conceals the wall and floor. The henna calligraphy, which continues outside of the photographic frame, extends onto the female bodies, camouflaging any exposed skin.

Standing side-by-side and touching slightly the female bodies progressively disappear, replaced by an excess of fabric. The smallest and youngest model, who appears to be perhaps six or seven years old, stands on the right hand side of the image. She wears a cream-colored caftan, the traditional Moroccan dress. It is completely covered in henna writing with the exception of the stark-white color that extends to the girl's torso. Her entire face and hair as well as her hands and feet are clearly visible, although obscured by the calligraphy. She has a neutral expression on her face and she seems to be looking into the camera. To the viewer's left stands a second girl. She is slightly taller, appearing to be perhaps twelve years old. Unlike her neighbor, she wears a headscarf, or *hijab,* a term deriving from the Arabic word for veil. The short square piece of fabric conceals the girl's hair, but leaves her face and eyes. Like her younger counterpart, the exposed skin on her face, hands, and one foot is decorated in henna-script. She also wears a neutral expression and gazes into the camera lens. The drapery from her taller companion, the third model, brushes up against this second girl's caftan.

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[46] This image can be found on the Houk Gallery website (the gallery that represents Essaydi): http://www.houkgallery.com/artists/lalla-essaydi/.

[47] As the photographic medium can reproduce prints varying in size, the dimensions of the prints differ. However, one version displayed at the Brooklyn Museum measures 30" by 40".

The body of this third figure is completely hidden by her *niqab.* This long veil covers the woman's hair as well as her mouth, revealing only her eyes and forehead. Her temple, the only exposed skin, remains obscured by calligraphic henna-text. The final model, on the left-hand side of the photograph, appears only as a tall silhouette. A text-laden *burka* hides her body and face.[48]

In this description, I have chosen to start on the right-hand side and proceed to the left, following the progression in age. A similar explanation might begin on the left-hand side and progress to the right.[49] The direction of these readings (right to left or left to right) depends on cultural norms. Those who have the habit of reading from right to left, as in Arabic, encounter a different narrative than those who read from left to right, as in Germanic or romance languages such as English or French. An "Arabic" narrative (right to left) tells the story of a small, unveiled girl and ends with a faceless woman who is completely enveloped by cloth and words. Conversely, an "English" narrative (left to write) shows the opposite: an obscured, older woman giving way to a small, visible girl. Although perhaps a subtle difference, as both projected narratives contain the same elements, their order shapes the viewer's individual interpretations. In either "reading," the act of veiling plays a prominent role.

In this image, Essaydi's use of the veil, resulting in an increasing concealment of the female models gives, at first glance, the impression of physical restriction associated with both gender and age. As a woman gets older, she must cover more and more of her body. The youngest girl remains fairly unhindered. Her hands, feet and face are visible

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[48] For complete descriptions of different types of veils and their etymologies see Fadwa El Guindi's *Veil.*
[49] Other viewings of this image may not start on either side, but somewhere in the middle. However, for this descriptive process, a linear or horizontal or vertical "reading" provides the most straightforward verbal account.

and she is free to move about. However, she has entered into a gendered world, which is represented by her inclusion in the photograph. She can no longer roam freely with whomever she wants, but must begin to comport herself as a young lady.[50] Her slightly older counterpart represents puberty. The headscarf symbolizes her passage into adolescence and the increasing physical restrictions and responsibilities in relation to her developing and increasingly sexualized female body, including reproduction and marriage, as we see in more detail below. The older and more concealed third model prepares to perhaps marry and have children, thus embodying young adulthood. The most concealed model represents old age, complete with husband and children. She seems consumed and limited by the fabric that envelops her. The drapery completely conceals her body, leaving only an outline that appears incapable of movement. The covering of both of the older models' faces reinforces this sense of restriction. As the mouth functions as the primary vessel for speech, concealing it effectively silences these women. In this interpretation, female aging, conceptualized by adding increasingly obstructive layers of fabric, is seen as a boon and restriction on movement and choice. However, such an explanation reduces these figures to their veils and fails to account for the diverse elements that work to both individualize and unify these women.

The trope of the veil is not unique to Essaydi's artistic work. Rather, it appears as a central figure in both historical and contemporary representations of Muslim women.[51]

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[50] Fatema Mernissi poetically portrays this realization of gender difference in *Dreams of Trespass* as she recognizes that she can no longer carelessly play with her beloved male cousin, Samir. Such representations of gender difference can be seen throughout Sebbar's oeuvre for example in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square,* the Shérazade trilogy or *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère*.

[51] These representations are documented in numerous scholarly works. However, as Jennifer Heath argues much recent study amounts to "veil fetishism" (19). El Guindi echoes this sentiment and adds: "The veil is avoided as a subject of study because of what it stands for ideologically or for its associations with Orientalist imagery. And while the word 'veil' is found in many—too many—titles, scholarly discussion of it occupies a few pages, even paragraphs, in most works. In most the veil is attacked, ignored, dismissed,

The discourses surroundings these representations have often been reduced to two predominant schools of thought. As Islam scholar Leila Ahmed states:

> To a considerable extent, overtly or covertly, inadvertently or otherwise, discussions of women in Islam in academies and outside them, and in Muslim countries and outside them, continue either to reinscribe the western narrative of Islam as oppressor and the West as liberator and native classist versions of that narrative, or conversely, to reinscribe the contentions of the Arabic narrative of resistance as to the essentialness of preserving Muslim customs, particularly with regard to women, as a sign of resistance to imperialism, whether colonial or postcolonial" (Ahmed 55).

In *Converging Territories # 30*, Essaydi uses the veil as a means to engage with both of these discourses. On the one hand, a complete elimination of the veil would affirm its metaphorical use as oppressor, and play into a Western discourse. On the other, an unreflective analysis would affirm the veil as essential to women in Muslim culture. Essaydi's progressive (un)veiling, however, reveals a much more nuanced understanding of the veil and the relationship that contemporary Muslim women have with it.

Various artists and scholars have expanded on how the veil serves as a marker delineating between public and private space for Muslim women.[52] Essaydi first began to

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transcended, trivialized or defended" (xi). While the texts with which I engage often include the word "veil" in the title, they amount to serious academic works that thoughtfully engage with the complex issues surrounding the veil. These works include Heath's edited volume, *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*; anthropologist El Guindi's *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*; sociologist Christian Joppke's *Veil: Mirror of Identity*; and the edited volume by David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros *Veil, Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, and art historian Lynne Thorton's *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting*.

[52] See for instance Essaydi's artist statement in *Converging Territories*, Mernissi's *Scheherazade Goes West;* Malek Alloula's *Le Harem Colonial.*

understand how this spatial division was perceived in a Western context while a student studying art in Paris and the United States. Although she admired the artistic beauty of works found in Orientalist paintings such as Eugène Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur apartment* (1834*)*, Jean Dominique Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814), and Jean-Léon Gêrome's *Le Marché aux esclaves* (1866) she found their representations of gendered spaces troubling. Notably, Essaydi sees in *Le Marché aux esclaves*, a violent unveiling in which the female figure serves only as an object of male commodification. In this painting, a nude women stands amongst a group of three clothed Arab men who appear to be inspecting her. Her discarded robe lies beside her on the floor. As two men look on, a third has a hand on the women's head and one hand in her mouth, seemingly verifying her oral health in order to determine her selling price. In the background, numerous men mill about, unconcerned with the uncovered woman before them. In her analysis of Gérôme's painting, Essaydi states: "Hidden behind the veil, she [the woman] becomes something to be unwrapped for presentation, her true image a sort of prize. Gérôme takes what in a domestic sense would be a private moment of unveiling and creates a public act. And the public unveiling of *The Slave Market* is an act of commodification and of economy" (Essaydi at Bates College). However, there is not a single "unwrapping" or unveiling, but a rather a series of them. The first occurs by placing this female figure in a male dominated environment where the primary concern is an exchange of objects. The woman is figuratively and then literately stripped of her human dignity as her clothing is discarded, doing away with any illusion of privacy. Her personal space is further infringed upon by the insertion of the man's fingers into her mouth—a gesture of physical inspection with both sexual and silencing overtones. Within

this representation, Arab men are depicted as the buyers and sellers who disrobe women. However, in depicting this scene Gérôme also plays his part in unveiling the woman. The painting acts as a final incursion into the private female domain, allowing this scene to travel and gain a wide audience. Regardless of the viewership, the male sellers and buyers in the painting or the Western spectators, this figure is reduced to a commoditized object. This multi-layered invasion of female space, which is repeated by the Orientalist artist to enhance his "exotic vision" of the Muslim woman, incited Essaydi to create her own multi-layered depictions of women in regards to the veil.

Essaydi's own (un)veiling in *Converging Territories # 30* also occurs in four stages, but is expressed through four different women. Men, both inside and outside of the frame, are eliminated, leaving women as the primary subjects of the image. As a subject, each model is individualized. The veil that she wears contains a script that differs from that of her neighbor. This illegible text, a metaphorical veil, places a second layer of distance between her body—the private domain of the woman—and the viewer. The models are further distinguished by their range of ages. In many Orientalist tableaux, all Arab women are depicted in the similar way—of the same age and with a similar body type. For example, in Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, the painter uses the same model to portray two different women.[53] Such a practice emphasizes an underlying belief among Orientalist artists that Arab women are all alike. Given this perception of sameness and interchangeability, there is no need to differentiate between them. By portraying female models of various ages and in diverse modes of

[53] The Musée du Louvre owns Delacroix's tableau. In its description on their website, Malika Bouabdellah-Dorbani points out Delacroix's reuse of the same model. A close look at the image reveals a nearly identical corporal features among the seated women: http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/women-algiers-their-apartment.

veiling, Essaydi highlights distinctions among women. They are not a monolithic body, but live assorted experiences at different stages of their lives.

Furthermore, the double veil—the actual veil and the text—rejects the overt exhibitionism as portrayed by Gérôme. The gradual (dis)robing that takes places in Essaydi's photograph is controlled and deliberate. It increasingly hides (or reveals) parts of the female body. This measured progression dismisses the violent disrobing performed by Gérôme that results in a completely exposed object that is being prepared for sale. Rather than being on the selling block, these models stand strongly in unanimity. Dressed and surrounded in similar fabric and touching as they stand side-by-side, the models assert their rootedness to both the space and to one another.

This rootedness also presents these various women as being part of a community. Other photographs in the collection depict women engaged with various objects that represent Moroccan female traditions and enhance a communitarian notion. For instance, in *Converging Territories # 32* women sit in a semi-circle decorating eggs and sticks of sugar—traditional wedding gifts.[54] This scene evokes the night before a marriage ceremony when female friends and family congregate to participate in a henna ceremony. During this ritual, women decorate the bride in henna patterns while offering her eggs, bundles of goods, and sugar. In Essaydi's images, these gifts, each carrying their own meaning, are also covered in henna-text. The eggs are a sign of fertility whereas the sugar sticks are offered "to sweeten and enhance the brides move to married life" (29). Although not present in *Converging Territories # 30*, these objects remind the viewer that the stages of life, expressed through the women of various ages in *Converging Territories*

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[54] A reproduction of this image can be found in an article by Kinsey Kathcka entitled "Photographs by Lalla Essaydi: L'Écriture Féminine / Le Corps Féminin" in the online journal *Blackbird*: http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n2/gallery/essaydi_l/katcha_widepage.shtml

 # 30, are celebrated and experienced through community. The eggs, symbols of fertility, evoke women's reproductive responsibility as bearers of children. Such an alignment with procreation risks reducing women to a role firmly rooted in a patriarchal position that places value on them based on their fecundity, thus reducing female bodies to commodity. Here, however, the eggs, rather than being inseminated with male sperm, are being fertilized with calligraphic-henna text. Each woman writes directly on the eggs, as a form of self-expression. In this way, the eggs are no longer representative only of the reproductive role, but also of personal expression and production. After writing on the eggs, the women place them in a pile in the middle of the group. The eggs and the ideas and thoughts expressed on them intermingle and enter into dialogue with one another. These objects that generally serve as reminders of fertility are used to express an alternative vision of femininity—a vision related to personal production and expression rather than reproduction. These images of femininity in both *Converging Territories # 32* and *Converging Territories #30* confirm the power of both individual and community and present nuanced versions of female subjectivity, notions absent from Orientalist depictions.

Essaydi has stated: "I use the veil [in my images] to evoke the Western fascination, as expressed in painting, with the seemingly inaccessible interior realm, the private space, that is the precinct of women in traditional Arab culture" (Essaydi in Waterhouse). This fascination with the veil is, however, not restricted to painting. It also can be seen historically in Essaydi's own medium, photography. Malek Alloula, in his 1981 book/essay *Le Harem Colonial*, critiques late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographic postcards created by and circulated by European men depicting Algerians,

notably women.[55] Alloula engages with a number of depictions of Algerian women, including those veiled in the street, as well as staged in the studio, in prison-like settings, in couple portraits, and in the harem. Here I limit my own observations on Alloula's work to his characterization of street and studio photos of veiled women.

Alloula contends that studio photographs of Arab women emerged as a reaction to images shot in the street. The latter of these often depict veiled women in groups as they travel through town. Alloula argues that these photographs of veiled women "non seulement posent au photographe [européen] une énigme embarrassante mais, de plus, l'agressent"(15) due to his inability to see and access the obscured feminine figure.[56] In order to counter this "aggression" or attack and regain his colonial power, the European photographer turned to the studio, a private space where he could control the presentation of the female body. Alloula describes one such studio image that captures a smiling and jeweled woman whose "voile sera écarté des deux mains en une invite inaugurale que le photographe aura mise en scène" (17). The photographer, through dictating the ornamentation, the placement of the veil, and the movement of the female figure, uses the photographed woman as a prop in a carefully staged production that projects his own fantasy of the Arab woman. As in Gérôme's *Le marché aux esclaves*, the process of making the photographic image reduces the depicted woman to a commodity. Algerian female models were paid to enter into the male studio and perform for the photographer. Such an exchange amounts to a sort of pictorial prostitution in which Muslim women

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[55] Alloula deals specifically with photographs taken by European male photographers of Algerians. Given the French colonial relationship to Morocco and Algeria, as well as the tendency to conflate the Arab "other," Alloula's analyses can be extended to the Moroccan context and even to orientalism and exoticism as expressed by Edward Saïd in *Orientalism*, for example.

[56] Frantz Fanon echoes this same sentiment in his 1959 essay "L'Algérie se dévoile" in *Sociologie d'une Révolution: L'An V de la révolution algérienne*. He expresses the fear the French associate with veiled women. In effect, by controlling the veil—that is to say unveiling women—, France could in turn control women and thus all of Algeria.

pose for the male photographer so that he might enter into her personal space beneath the veil in order to assert power and fulfill the "phantasms" of his own desire.

In many ways, Essaydi's process of photographic creation recalls some of the practices of the European male photographer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her shoots take place in a studio in Morocco, she engages local women on her own constructed performative stage, and she directs the placement of objects, such as the veil. Despite these surface similarities, a further investigation reveals an altogether different relationship between the photographic practice, the photographer, and the photographed. Essaydi leaves her home in the United States in order to go to her homeland of Morocco to shoot *Converging Territories*. Unlike the European photographer who went to the Maghreb in search of "cultures more colorful than [his] own," Essaydi's trip is a return to her homeland (Essaydi at Bates College). In fact, the artist uses a family-owned home as a studio, eliminating its architectural features and filling it instead with the text-laden fabric and women that fills her images.[57] She constructs within this familial space her own vision of Moroccan womanhood based on her experiences as Arab woman in both Morocco and abroad.

Whereas Essaydi's relationship to the photographic space differs from the colonial photographers that Alloula discusses, so too does her relationship to the models. First, like the photographed subjects, the artist is also a Moroccan woman, not a colonizer. These correspondences in both gender and nationality eliminate the inherent hierarchies in the colonizer male/colonized female relationship. Secondly, the artist enlists family friends and acquaintances who voluntarily participate in her artistic project.

[57] I discuss the spaces in Essaydi's work in more detail below in the section entitled *Converging Territories # 21*.

Although Essaydi has not stated if her models are compensated monetarily, the gendered and economic dynamics of such a situation favor maintaining interpersonal relationships over profiting from a sexual exchange.

Moreover, Essaydi strives to create a partnership with her models: “I use family acquaintances as models and take great pains to acquaint them fully with the thinking behind the work and their roles in it. I consider them partners in the creation of these photographs” (Essaydi in Waterhouse 146). Essaydi’s ideas are the driving force behind the images. As such, she directs the models to perform in order to suit her artistic vision. By consenting to participate in the shoot (as in any shoot), the models put their trust in the artist. A number of the models appearing in *Converging Territories* appear in later collections, indicating that these women feel comfortable enough with their roles to repeat them.

While it would be ideal to name her different collaborators in acknowledgement, if, as Essaydi states, they are indeed partners in creation, the artist has resisted doing so; she refers to them only collectively as Moroccan women. At first glance, this might seem to repeat a colonial gesture that reduces all female women to a monolithic group. However, there are alternate motivations behind leaving her models nameless. In a personal conversation with Essaydi in November 2011, although she did not specifically address this issue of naming, she described how one model participated in the shoot despite the objections of her husband. Thus, the choice to refer to her models only as “Moroccan women” is in part to protect the identity of this woman, and perhaps others,

who participated in defiance to their families.[58] Such a gesture marks solidarity with all the photographed women.

This solidarity among women also becomes evident in Essaydi's use of the veil. In his explanation of the supposed "outright attack" felt by the European photographer, Alloula cites the color white as a key element of this veiled violence. The white veil worn by Algerian women in various photographs cited by Alloula conceals their faces and bodies, producing a white hole within the photo, thus producing an absence: "*le blanc c'est la non-photo, la photo voile en termes techniques*" (14, italics in the original). Despite the photographer's desire to capture veiled women, the final image always creates the same result: an absence into which he cannot penetrate. The photographer is unable to trespass into the space behind the veil, refusing his penetration into what Essaydi calls the "interior realm"—the private space reserved for women.

Although Alloula purports to be condemning the Western male mentality that created the Orientalist photographic images that he condemns, critics have argued that he merely repeats "the objectification of the colonial (female) subject" (Yee 7).[59] Such objectification can be seen in Alloula's construction of this female "absence" as a positive development that in fact deflects an unwanted male gaze. The celebrated Algerian author Assia Djebar has a distinctly different approach to this "whiteness." In her autobiographical and historical novel *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (1996), she, through examining the Algerian War for Independence, the Algerian Civil War, and the deaths of a numerous Algerians, attempts to reconstitute a history for her country. She addresses the issue of *le blanc,* which refers to both the color white and a blank:

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[58] Essaydi herself has noted how when first shooting, she hid her project from her family out of fear of their reaction.

[59] For a succinct summary of these critiques see Jennifer Yee's "Recycling the 'Colonial Harem'?"

> Je ne peux pour ma part exprimer mon malaise d'écrivain et d'Algérienne que par référence à cette couleur, ou plutôt cette non-couleur, 'Le blanc, sur notre Ame, agit comme le silence absolu,' disait Kandinsky. Me voici, par ce rappel de la peinture abstraite, en train d'amorcer un discours en quelque sort déporté (271).

Unlike Alloula who projects absence as a positive way in which to deflect an unwanted western male gaze, and protect personal interior space, Djebar's conceptualizes of this "non-color" as a device that serves to silence its subject. In Djebar's terms, the "whiteout" described by Alloula amounts to an erasure of history, and contributes to a veil of silence that continues to plague characterizations of Muslim women.[60]

The veils that Essaydi uses in her *Converging Territories # 30* are, at the base, white, but covered in a calligraphic henna script. The abundance of this text renders the women who wear the veils as neither "absent" nor "silent." In fact, the women and their veils become a canvas for writing.[61] The excessive Arabic text that fills the veil-canvas suggests plentitude rather than emptiness. Furthermore, it serves as a feature that links the four different women. They stand on and are surrounded by connected words and ideas. Just as the absence created by the white veil disrupts the nineteenth century photographer, so too does the abundance of unreadable text disrupt the twenty-first century viewer. This double veil, created by the excessive drapery and text, produces a shroud that cannot be penetrated by exterior scrutiny. The text serves as layer or boundary that distances the cloaked woman from the uninhibited gaze of the viewer.

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[60] In Djebar's text, white is also the color of mourning. Thus it is understood to be associated with death and loss.

[61] I explore this writing more in depth below in the section on *Converging Territories # 10*.

Although Essaydi explicitly claims that her use of the veil is in relation to a specific Orientalist context, it cannot be dislodged from contemporary politics surrounding the headscarf, especially in Europe. In a new introduction (2011) to her book-length sociological study *Beyond the Veil,* originally published in 1975, Fatema Mernissi asks "Why Does the Veil Scare Europe?" In this essay, she explores why European countries have been so keen on adapting measures that restrict women from veiling. She argues that the "obsessive twenty-first century debates among European heads of states, governments and parliaments about the veil in fact reveal a compulsive need to deal with the unconscious fear of demographic extinction…of being invaded by Muslims" (7-8). While the stated argument against the veil has to do with the oppression of women, the "white men saving brown women" mentality, the underlying anxiety has to do with preserving cultural dominance and superiority. Just as the photographers in Alloula's account feel "attacked" by the veiled figures, so too do modern European states. Rather than try to understand the complex social, cultural, and religious explanations, these governments prefer to ban the veil.

Perhaps the most recognized of the state-sponsored bans on veiling, what historian Christian Joppke calls "the mother of all European headscarf controversies," took place in France between 2004 and 2011. Although the 2004 "*laïcité"* law theoretically bans all ostensible religious symbols, it is largely understood to be aimed specifically at the veil (viii).[62] In 2010 the French Senate passed a second law prohibiting

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[62] The official name is: "loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées public." The full text of the law can be found the French government's website: http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000417977&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id. Numerous books have been published on the passage of this law and the surrounding controversy including Joppke's *Veil: Mirror of Identity*; anthropologist John Bowen's 2006 *Why the French don't like*

facial concealment in public. Enacted under the auspices of public safety, it too is aimed at preventing Muslim women from wearing veils that cover the face such as a *niqab* or *burka*.[63] While the French legislation serves as a prime example of Europe's fear of the veil and Islam, Joppke concedes "there is no country in Western Europe today which does not have its own headscarf controversy" (1). Besides France, veil legislation has been introduced in the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands, just to name a few countries.[64]

At the same time that legislation around the veil has increased, so too has esteem for Essaydi's work. Although not directly related, a correlation does exist between interest in veiling and Essaydi's portrayal of it. In "Configuring the Feminine in Lalla Essaydi's Photography," North African scholar Naïma Hachad notes that the trope of the veil "has become an indispensable, even an unavoidable, language to which artists of Muslim heritage must subject themselves if they want to be relevant to Western audiences" (97). As a Muslim woman using this "unavoidable language," a Western audience expects Essaydi to present the veil in certain ways, namely as a contestation to Orientalist visions or as a rejection of oppressive practices of Islam.[65] Some critics have argued that a failure to represent these points of view realigns Essaydi's images with Orientalism or reinscribes cultural and religious oppression. For instance, *The New York*

Headscarves; feminist Joan Wallach Scott's 2007 *The Politics of the Veil;* and the philosopher Olivier Roy's *Secularism Meets Islam*.

[63] The official name of the law is: "Loi n° 2010-1192 du 11 octobre 2010 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public." The law in its entirety can be read on the French government website: http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022911670. This law went into effect on April 11, 2011. This same day a number of women wearing the *niqab* protested against this legislation. See: "Une dizaine de manifestants contre la loi interdisant le niqab."

[64] See: Joppke's book, Beverly M. Weber's *Violence and Gender in the "New" Europe,* Anastasia Vakulenko's *Islamic Veiling in Legal Discourse,* or Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer's *Politics, Religion, and Gender: Framing and Regulating the Veil*.

[65] I discuss Essaydi's perceived and actual reception in Arab countries in *Converging Territories # 21*.

Times art critic Benjamin Gennachio, in a review of a subsequent show, *Les Femmes du Maroc*, claims that Essaydi reproduces stereotypical, voyeuristic, and Orientalist images. Additionally, art historian Murtaza Vali, in evaluating Essaydi's use of calligraphic text asserts that she "reduc[es] the women represented to the stereotype of veiled females oppressed by Arab/Muslim culture" (244). Such criticisms, however, only reiterate dualistic interpretations of the veil in relation to female Muslim subjectivity. In this view, the veil represents either stereotyping or originality, oppression or freedom. However, the lived reality of the veil is much more complex than the simplistic narratives being coopted by any one individual or group. Essaydi, in *Converging Territories # 30*, attempts to carefully navigate historical and contemporary mindsets in regards to Muslim women and the veil. By engaging with such notions, Essaydi creates an image at the convergence of these disparate dualities in which women are both individuals and part of a community, expressive and resistant, and veiled yet present.

***Converging Territories # 10*: Calligraphic Henna-writing**[66]

In the previously examined work, the veil serves as a crucial organizing figure in relation to the female body. In *Converging Territories # 10,* although the veil is still present, our main concern shifts to the act of writing. In this image, a single female model occupies the center of the photographic space, which is concealed by calligraphic henna-laden cloth. The form of her body remains undistinguishable, as she is covered in swaths of fabric that encircle her and on which she writes with henna. The only visible parts of her body are her hair and her right hand. Her long black hair extends in waves to the bottom of her back. Her right hand, covered in henna-writing, holds a paintbrush with

[66] This image can be found on Essaydi's website: http://lallaessaydi.com/3.html

which she applies henna-script to the back wall. Next to the model is a bowl filled with a brown-liquid substance: henna.

The position of the model, her formless body and her writing hand create numerous incongruities. At first glance, the overabundance of fabric that hides her figure leaves her disembodied and unavailable to the viewer. Seated and turned away from the spectator, she appears weighed down by the cloth and immobile. This formlessness also serves a purpose in defeminizing her body. In the last section, we saw how Gérôme's Orientalist depiction of the female body as an unveiled and commodified figure left her readily available to both the men in the tableau and the viewer's of it. Essaydi's depiction of her model in *Converging Territories # 10* seems to be in contradiction with Gérôme's gesture. By completely obscuring the body, the photographed model is available to no one. This unavailability is consolidated through the positioning of her face, turned away from the camera. In a study on Carrie Mae Weems' photographs *Four Black Women,* visual cultural scholar Irit Rogoff examines the physical position of the women in relation to the camera lens: "turned-away figures do not simply defy or avert the gaze of the viewer. Rather they create an acute perception of what is missing, of the inability to continue the processes of identification through the fixated forms of 'negative differentiation'" (199).[67] This system of "negative differentiation" to which Rogoff refers relates back to a means of interpretation based in a linguistic system elucidated in the early twentieth century by Ferdinand de Saussure in which identification relies on distinguishing one object from another. In Rogoff's description, this "negative differentiation" would—although it does not—occur between self (the viewer) and other

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[67] Carrie Mae Weems is an American artist who is most well known for her photographs depicting African-Americans in everyday settings. In *Four Black Women* (1987-88) Weems captures four different women in a bare room, some of whom are turned away from the camera.

(the photographed figure). Such a "differentiation," however, results in binary productions of meaning. In Rogoff's estimation, the turned-away figure denies identification through "negative differentiation," leaving room for meanings that fall outside of such a binary system of thought.[68] Similarly, in *Converging Territories # 10*, the turned-away figure refuses the viewer the ability to differentiate from the photographed women. As a result, the viewer must find alternative ways of assigning meaning to the image.

In critiques of Essaydi's work, too much attention has been paid to "what is missing," namely the woman's body. In "Reviving the Exotic to Critique Exoticism," a review of Essaydi's *Les Femmes du Maroc* in 2010, *The New York Times* art critic Gennachio notes that "too often [Essaydi's] photographs look like an exercise in voyeurism, replicating [through the female body] rather than revising the stereotypical imagery she is working with." In *Converging Territories # 10*, Essaydi rides a fine line in regards to the disembodied figure. On the one hand, the tent-like garment defeminizes the body, removing any sexual appeal that play into Orientalist stereotypes. On the other hand, Essaydi risks dehumanizing the body altogether and repeating Gérôme's gesture, in reducing the model to no more than a commodity to be bought, sold, and examined. In this image, Essaydi does not simply "replicate stereotypical images" of the female body, but through the turned away woman moves attention away from the female figure (an Orientalist trope), opening up possibilities for multiple means of interpretation. One such possibility emerges through the only visible and animated body part: the hand.

By concentrating only on the "what is missing," we fail to see "what is there," that is to say the model's hand. The obfuscation of the female frame directs the

[68] See also: Rogoff's essay "Studying Visual Culture."

spectator's gaze to this hand. The model, whose gaze is also focused on the writing limb, repeats this gesture. This attention to the act of writing creates a common organizing point for both model and viewer. Despite the common focal point, the model and viewer have different relationships to the text—as producer or observer. The words being inscribed by the model remain inaccessible to the observer, as they are illegible due to their small size. Thus, the act of writing, rather than the words themselves, emerges as a crucial element in this image specifically, but also in the rest of *Converging Territories* as well.

Essaydi's stylized writing contains two main components: henna paste and calligraphic text. As "ink" for her writing, Essaydi choses to paint on her models and the surrounding cloth with henna. The use of henna, a plant-based substance, corresponds to a tradition of female body art, most notably practiced in North Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia. It is often used to mark periods of passage in a women's life: puberty, marriage and childbirth. Henna paste stains the body to create temporary and ceremonial artwork, often depicting flowers or abstract designs.[69] Once the paste hardens, it can be wiped off the skin. Upon removal, the skin-treated henna becomes exposed to the air and darkens slightly through a process of oxidation. Over time, as skin cells die and fall away, the henna becomes lighter. Within a period of two weeks, all traces of the henna disappear. In this sense, the henna creates a temporary tattoo. On the fabric the paste also hardens, although it does not fade because unlike the skin, it does not die and regenerate. These two surfaces produce two different temporalities. Skin provides the

[69] In her introduction to Essaydi's *Les Femmes du Maroc* collection, "Lalla Essaydi: A Spinner of Scenarios more Dangerous than Scheherazade," Mernissi also points out that henna tattooing has been related to health benefits, such as increased fertility, and "magic" (13). For a more detailed account of the purported uses of henna, see Mernissi's essay.

opportunity for revision and regeneration. It is a constant work in progress. Although skin contains a limited amount of writing space, fabric is nearly limitless. More fabric can be added to accommodate more writing, encouraging the continual development of ideas. In tandem, these two surfaces encourage both renewal and growth through writing.

Instead of using the henna in the "traditional" sense to portray graphic designs, Essaydi re-purposes it as an "ink" with which to write not only on women's bodies, but also on the fabric which envelops and surrounds them. Due to the abundance of her writing, Essaydi has adapted her own method of applying henna with a syringe. This enables her to swiftly write on both the models and the cloth. The application of the henna is extremely labor intensive. She notes: "It takes more than six months to prepare enough fabric, for once the henna has dried, it flakes off easily, so that some rewriting is required during the shoot each time the women move" (Essaydi Interview in Waterman, 146). In *Converging Territories # 10*, we witness this act of re-writing, which is at once both a repetition and a recreation. The model refreshes the already written text. A strong connection exists between the female model and the words that she writes. First, the model serves as a vessel that carries and inhibits these words on her skin, on her clothes, and in her surroundings. At times this text, whether written on the body or on the fabric, becomes obscured; the female body hides the writing and the scripted fabric conceals the body. They work together to create gaps in the text. Furthermore, the model's movement wears away the henna so that it must then be re-applied. Her body has the ability to hide, erase, and also to produce and reproduce text.

In many respects, this henna-writing is a hybrid art form that combines henna-design and calligraphy. In the Arabic tradition, calligraphy is thought of as a hallowed

form of writing, reserved for sacred texts, namely the Quran (Simonowitz 78). As such, calligraphy is taught to few individuals, and mostly men.[70] It is a highly stylized type of writing and is "the highest form of visual culture" in the Muslim world (Simonowitz 78). Essaydi, having never received formal instruction in calligraphy, is self-taught and concedes that her calligraphic style is somewhat basic. While the calligraphic style itself may be undeveloped, the combined use with henna makes it decidedly original. By writing with the paste, Essaydi takes a traditionally low-art female craft (henna design) and combines it with a high-art and male dominated field (calligraphy), creating an innovative non-gender specific art form that questions the established gender and art norms.

Essaydi's use of calligraphic text recalls the photographs of Iranian-born artist Shirin Nesaht, particularly her series *Women of Allah* (1993-1997).[71] In these black and white images, Neshat captures veiled women, gazing directly into the camera lens, and often wielding a gun. Unlike Essaydi's photographs in which the artist writes directly on her subjects and the surrounding space, Neshat enhances her photographs by covering the prints in Farsi texts borrowed from Iranian women authors. Neshat, in a statement in the introduction to a 2010 book about her work, notes:

> Although the Farsi words written on the works' surfaces may seem like a decorative device, they contribute significant meaning. The texts are

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[70] In "A Modern Master of Islamic Calligraphy and Her Peers," David Simonowitz acknowledges how calligraphy has historically been attributed to men. However, he goes on to trace the influence of female scribes dating in the Ottoman Empire and how their legacy can be seen today in the increasing number of women who are being educated in traditional calligraphic techniques. Similarly, in her introduction to Essaydi's exhibition catalogue *Les Femmes du Maroc*, Mernissi details the practice of *washi* dating from ninth century Baghdad in which women wrote on cloth worn by other women ("Lalla Essaydi: A Spinner 12).

[71] This collection has been documented in an exhibition catalogue, *Women of Allah*. Shirin Neshat does not as of now have a website and there is not an online venue where images from this series have been collected. However a Google image search returns a number of key photographs from this collection.

> amalgams of poems and prose works mostly by contemporary women writers in Iran. These writings embody sometimes diametrically opposing political and ideological views, from the entirely secular to fanatic Islamic slogans of martyrdom and self-sacrifice to poetic, sensual, and even sexual meditations" (*Shirin Neshat* 19).

Neshat carefully selects the texts that she choses to include on her photographs that promote a wide range of political and social ideas. Despite the beauty inherent in the calligraphic technique, its usage exceeds a merely aesthetic function. Neshat imbues her "strong and imposing" female models with powerful and varied opinions and points of view. Though unreadable to even those trained in Farsi due to the small size of the print, the chosen text adds to the already striking stature of the female figures, leaving them impenetrable to a curious male gaze.

Despite the fact that Essaydi's work resembles Neshat's, Essaydi does not acknowledge these parallels, nor cite Neshat as an influence. However, the calligraphic similarities between the two artists' images have not been overlooked by curators or museums. In the previously mentioned *She Who Tells a Story* exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Essaydi and Neshat's works were placed side by side in a very intentional gesture. Essaydi attempts to avoid identifying with Neshat's work so as not to subsume them both into a generalized grouping as Muslim women. Such a categorization risks lumping their diverse artistic works into a singular female Muslim style, in which all photographs must include women and calligraphy. This is precisely the type of reductive stereotyping that both Essaydi and Neshat are attempting to overcome. Still, this non-identification with Neshat's images is counter-productive and reinforces the

typecasts that Essaydi is trying to avoid. By simply acknowledging Neshat's work as critical to "immigrant artists" such as herself, Essaydi could address both the similarities and differences between their photographs and their calligraphic styles that also reflect their similarities and differences as female Muslim artists.

One of these key differences emerges from their application of text. Neshat pens on the printed images whereas Essaydi writes directly on her female models. The variety in these two techniques is immediately apparent to the viewer. On the one hand, Neshat's Persian text is so meticulously applied to the photographs that the viewer questions if it is indeed written by hand or computer generated. On the other, Essaydi's writing is immediately identifiable as applied by the human hand, as we actually see the model in the act of writing in *Converging Territories # 10*. These two techniques create different relationships between the photographed subjects and the process of writing. Neshat's models are distanced from this process whereas Essaydi's are implicated in it. The over-writing by the Persian artist on the printed image means that the script does not conform to the contours of the female body. Instead it lies flat on the printed surface, just as text lies flat on the page. By contrast, Essaydi's subject inhabits and produces the script, affording it a multidimensional, and even living, quality.

The form the writing takes within the images reflects the origins of the text. Neshat, in borrowing from Persian authors, must abide by the written script. She does not have the artistic freedom to alter the published words. This rigidity is reflected in the flat and one-dimensional final product. Unlike Neshat's, Essaydi's text is written in Arabic and is composed of her own personal reflections. Although coming from her own journals, the writing is not "personal" in the sense that it does not recount her daily

routine or emotions. Rather, it addresses her position as an Arab women and artist who is attempting to tell personal and collective stories. As Essaydi is the author of this text, she can easily alter it in order to accommodate the needs of the artistic space and bodies that it fills. The text appears as multi-dimensional, disappearing in the folds of the henna-laden cloth, only to appear again. This ebb and flow creates continuity between text and female figure, entwining them with each other.

Although largely unreadable, portions of Essaydi's text have been deciphered and made available. In part of the *Lalla Essaydi: Revisions* exhibit, Essaydi reads parts of the *Converging Territories* text, which have been translated into English: "I am writing. I am writing on me, I am writing on her. The story began to be written the moment the present began…I didn't even know this world existed, I thought it existed only in my head, in my dreams" (Brielmaier 20). This act of writing becomes crucial for Essaydi as it opens up possibilities for engagement in relation to other women, history, and the world around her. For Essaydi, the personal act of writing reveals the presence of that which was previously unrealized. This presence is revealed through multiple, and sometimes conflicting gestures, as revealed in the above passage. First, Essaydi's acknowledgement of the "present" is evoked in the past tense ("began"), creating an irregular temporality. How can the present be in the past? In continuing in the past tense in the following sentence, the artist refers to the existence of a previously unknown and unrealized sphere that encourages female expression and collaboration. This move reveals what, in fact, it means to be in the present; it is the moment in which personal creative existence is realized. For Essaydi, this creative existence is, in part, expressed through a process of writing ("I am writing on me"), which has occurred in the past and is continuing to occur

in the present. However, existence is not realized independently, but occurs with and through others ("writing on her"). Moreover, Essaydi's writing is not a one-way process. It requires the participation and interaction of both the female models and the artist, before, during, and after the photographic shoot (Essaydi and Carlson 26-27). In this way, it is not only about writing *on* the model, but also about collaborating with "her."

The verbal and bodily communication that occurs as the women prepare for the shoot influences the henna-script. Although the inspiration for the text comes from Essaydi's journals, the photographed women orally add their own reflections and personal stories as the henna is applied. The verbal interactions between the photographer and the models provide content that is then inscribed on the skin. This interaction reveals fluidity between orality and writing, as both provide a means for expression in relation to the body. The verbally articulated statements return to the body through a written inscription. In this way, "I am writing on me, I am writing on her" also becomes: I am listening to her, and writing with her, on her, and about us.

This text, which is often illegible, is part of a larger narrative. Essaydi has expressed that for her, each element of the photograph, each woman, represents a page and each different photograph that she makes, represents a chapter. Thus, *Converging Territories # 10* is just one chapter in a book that is the collection of photographs. If each woman represents a page in this larger work, they become importantly linked to one another, as we saw in *Converging Territories # 30*. The removal of any one woman would result in an unfinished story. All the women are of equal importance in the final product: there is no hierarchy between either the artist or the models.[72] That which is written, illegible or not, tells the story of the women in the photographs as well as the

[72] I develop this idea further in Chapter Three.

photographer's. This notion of writing associated to female subjectivity can be traced back to Hélène Cixous' 1975 "Le Rire de la Méduse," in which the author encourages women to reclaim their position in history through writing. Originally published in French, it was republished in 1976 in the American journal *Signs* under the tile "The Laugh of the Medusa." Since its translation into English it has become a staple of feminist thought, most obviously by its inclusion in feminist anthologies and Women's Studies/Feminist Theory classes. In the opening lines of this text, Cixous writes:

> Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps; pour les mêmes raison, par la même loi, dans le même but mortel. Il faut que la femme se mette au texte—comme au monde, et à l'histoire,—de son propre mouvement (39).

In citing Cixous, I mean to trace the genealogy of the notion of writing women by women and the formative nature that "Le Rire de la Méduse" has had on Essaydi.[73] While I do not know if Essaydi has read Cixous or been informed directly by her ideas, a convergence seems to exist between Cixous' thought and Essaydi's own feminist concerns. Cixous argues for and then promotes a type of female writing, both in "Le Rire de la Méduse" and her vast subsequent oeuvre. Essaydi takes Cixous' suggestion of writing women quite literally and in fact, writes directly both on and around women's bodies.

It is, however, not only Essaydi who writes, but as we see in *Converging Territories # 10*, the models as well. Their writing extends beyond the ink applied to the

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[73] This influence is further elaborated in Fatema Mernissi's introductory essay "Lalla Essaydi: A Spinner of Scenarios more Dangerous than Scheherazade" found in *Les Femmes du Maroc*.

body or fabric. According to Cixous, "writing" is not simply accomplished with the pen, but involves communicating with and through the body in order to "invente la langue imprenable que crève les cloisonnements, classes et rhétoriques, ordonnances et codes" (48). The interaction between Essaydi and her models creates embodied female experiences that, while producing actual texts, also generate new relationships for women to their own bodies, as well as those of others. These relationships work to create collective corporeal languages that reject the divisive "cloisonnements" or partitions shaped by the phallocentric rhetoric that dominates. In this way, in *Converging Territories # 10* Essaydi does not simply photograph a woman, but rather by collaborating with her, the artist and model, as Cixous suggests, collectively insert themselves into the image as producers of text, language, and therefore, into the world.

However, Essaydi's henna inscriptions are not only textual gestures, but relate to a more general artistic practice. In his 1976 study *L'Art Calligraphique de l'Islam,* Moroccan author Abdelkebir Khatibi describes the intersecting place that calligraphy occupies between art, language, identity, and religion. He writes: "Sans doute, chez les peuples non calligraphes, une belle écriture peut éclore d'un texte quelconque, d'une lettre personnelle par exemple. Cependant, c'est là une émotion non enracinée dans un savoir-faire, une technique du graphisme. Elle demeure donc un élan personnel dans l'ensemble d'une culture" (15). Khatibi implies that calligraphic text occurs as part of a larger system of knowledge, notably in relation to Quranic teachings. While Essaydi does not engage in religious doctrine, her calligraphic style is part of a method of understanding in relation to female expression and artistic power, articulated through her reflection on writing on "me" and "her," the "present," and her place in the "world."

Khatibi adds that calligraphy is "un art qui se pense comme tel, se fondant sur un code, des règles géométriques et ornementales. Qui se pense comme tel, c'est-à-dire qui implique dans son trace une théorie de la langue et de l'écriture" (14). This appraisal underlines a clear relationship between calligraphy both as an art form and as a style of writing, which inform one another. Essaydi's calligraphic writing is thus not writing in and of itself, but also an art. This aesthetic and linguistic gesture is supported by other artistic forms including painting, performance, and photography: the calligraphy is applied in a painterly style, upon performing women, and documented through a photographic lens.[74] Interestingly, this style combines calligraphy, the "highest form of visual culture," formally taught to only a select few, and photography, a widely accessible medium. Essaydi relies on this more democratic medium, to document the high art of calligraphy. Due to the close relationship between calligraphy and art, Essaydi's writing cannot be separated from her artistic practice.

Despite this convergence between art and text some reviews have criticized Essaydi's use of calligraphic text, claiming that it only reinforces a stereotyped image of Arabic women. Gennachio, the previously mentioned art critic, finds her work visually stunning, yet questions the use of Arabic text.[75] He asserts: "No doubt the use of text on the images is meant to give these women a voice, to show them as more than just passive bodies. But given that the text is mostly illegible, it becomes just another decorative

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[74] This relationship to painting is revealed in two ways. First, as we saw earlier in the chapter, Essaydi's work reacts to an Orientalist painterly tradition. Secondly, Essaydi was in fact originally trained as a painter and applies these techniques, such as the use in *Converging Territories # 10* of a paintbrush, in writing. I address this notion of performativity in the following section.

[75] Although Gennachio reviews a different body of work, the visual aesthetic between *Converging Territories* and *Les Femmes du Maroc* is very similar, especially the use of calligraphic writing. It is easy to misidentify an image from *Converging Territories* as belonging to *Les Femmes du Maroc* collection and vice versa. For this reason, it is appropriate to include Gennachio's remarks even though they are not directed specifically at *Converging Territories # 10*.

element enhancing the aesthetic appeal." Gennachio confuses illegibility for lack of meaning. I would suggest that rather than simply being aesthetically appealing, the text serves to disrupt the image, creating a distance between the spectator and the photographed subject. In *Converging Territories #10*, the model-scribe, with her head turned towards and her body obscured by text-laden fabric, remains completely inaccessible to the viewer.

In addition, other critics have misread Essaydi's text. In a review of Essaydi's work at Saltworks Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia dating from 2005, Susan Richmond writes: "if one is unable to read Farsi, Essaydi's *mise-en-scènes* potentially reiterate Western misconceptions about Muslim females—they appear exotic, or conversely submissive, rather than empowered" (Richmond 47, my underline for emphasis). Richmond's tries to point out that typical Western viewers may be misled by Essaydi's message because they are unable to read her foreign script. Ironically, Richmond falls into the very trap that she warns against. She notes that Essaydi writes in Farsi, while she writes in Arabic. She mixes up Neshat's work with Essaydi's reiterating Western misconceptions about "Muslim" females in thinking that they are all the same and must write in the same language. This mistake, while banal, sheds light on a bigger issue: the monolithic perception of the East, in which Iran and Morocco, Farsi and Arabic—are interchangeable nations and languages.

Both of these criticisms fail to account for the complication of the writing that occurs through the various artistic mediums. In an introductory essay to *Converging Territories*, Amanda Carlson notes: "Audiences may miss the implications of these images if they are consumed by the voyeuristic tendencies that are actually being

critiqued. If you do not read Arabic, you might be duped into the suggestiveness of these images, misreading these bodies as available"(5). Unlike Gennachio and Richmond who interpret the writing as either clichéd or Persian, Carlson warns against such inclinations. She argues that the writing combats voyeuristic implications, and as such marks a sort of reclaiming: the women's body is not available to the pleasures of the male gaze. By inserting the female body as a sight of subjectivity that is written textually and artistically into the photograph, Essaydi, to once again invoke Cixous, writes both herself and other Moroccan women "into the world and into history."

The figure in *Converging Territories # 10* provides us with the opportunity to examine in a detailed manner the various influences that inform the writing present throughout Essaydi's work. It becomes clear that this calligraphic-henna script emerges from various traditions, including traditionally male Quaranic calligraphic script and traditionally female henna design; influences from other artists such as Neshat; interaction between Essaydi (I) and her models (her); feminist thought; and "high" (calligraphy) and low (painting and photography) art forms. Essaydi engages with these various territories, exceeding any one, in order to fashion a unique artistic practice that defies singular categorization.

Converging Territories # 21: Artistic and Performative Spaces[76]

Converging Territories # 21 echoes the composition of *Converging Territories # 30* with the depiction of four female models at different stages of life. Unlike the latter photo, which captures the women side-by-side in one single frame, the former is divided

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[76] A reproduction of this image can be found in an article by Kinsey Katchka entitled "Photographs by Lalla Essaydi: L'Écriture Féminine / Le Corps Féminin" in the online journal *Blackbird*: http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n2/gallery/essaydi_l/katcha_widepage.shtml

into four frames, each containing one figure. Each model stands alone in the center of the shot, clothed and surrounded by the calligraphed henna-fabric.[77] The key difference between the two images occurs in the spatial positioning. While *Converging Territories # 30* lends a sense of solidarity with the four women side-by-side and touching, *Converging Territories # 21* creates a sense of isolation. This seclusion, I argue, replicates Essaydi's own childhood relation to the space where these images were shot.

Although Essaydi was living and had a studio in Boston at the time, these images were all photographed in the artist's family home in Morocco. This was a place to which Essaydi was sent for solitary punishment as a child.[78] Although in her subsequent collection, *Harem*, she showcases architectural features of the traditional Moroccan house, in *Converging Territories*, the photographer completely eliminates them. She transforms this space into a studio by covering all exposed walls and floors with the calligraphic fabric. From a technical standpoint, this collection could have been shot anywhere, however it was not.

As the cultural critic Sarah El-Shaawari notes: "Space is an important component of Essaydi's work, whether she is creating a set, or working within existing structures, great thought is put into location." This thought is reflected in Essaydi's choice to return to her family's home in order to shoot *Converging Territories*. The house occupies a significant place in the artist's personal history. By no means a neutral space, it is filled with childhood memories. As Essaydi explains in an interview in the exhibition publication, "I was sent there when I transgressed what was expected of me. I spent long

[77] Notably, in a reproduction of *Converging Territories #21* that was sold through Christie's Auction House, the four frames were not placed horizontally, but rather in a rectangular shape in which the frame with the young girl progressing to the oldest and most covered woman in the bottom right hand corner.
[78] I examine this gendered space of the harem more in depth in Chapter Three.

days in silence there…" (Essaydi and Carlson 29). For Essaydi, this house was a place of punishment and isolation where she was forced to go as a child. Now, she makes a very conscious decision to return. Her return marks a sort of transgression. Instead of languishing in solitude, she fills the house with her female collaborators. Although in *Converging Territories # 21*, each photograph can stand alone, the four images are meant to be seen as a series. With the awareness concerning the artist's own relation to this space, the smallest model could be illustrative of Essaydi as a child. As such, the progressive aging and veiling represents the artist's meditation on her possible destiny in relation to this physical and metaphorical space –one of gradual solitude and confinement. It seems to be a contemplative comparison of her childhood relationship with this house to her current position as photographer and director. When viewed with the other images in this collection, in which we see multiple women in various states of veiling and in assorted positions, this meditation on her own destiny becomes one among many possibilities.

Essaydi has turned the house where she suffered her penance into a studio, a place of creation. She states: "Now, when I go back to shoot in that place, it always takes me a while to readjust to my new situation as a willing visitor. I remember when I started photographing there; I took so many pictures in a short time. I just wanted to go away. But after many visits I started to love the house" (Essaydi and Carlson 29). In order to overcome this powerful mental marking, she needed to reclaim this space. By choosing to shoot in her childhood harem in Morocco, Essaydi willingly returns and re-appropriates not only a physical place, but also a psychological one—a place of memory—of childhood punishment and solitude. For Essaydi, the walls that created her childhood

prison are no longer confining, but rather have been turned into a stage for artistic performance.

By repurposing this house, she also turns it into a performative space in which all of her images are deliberately staged. As she states: “Creating the photographs is in many ways performance-based, and this process is crucially reflected in the finished work” (Essaydi in Waterhouse 146). Essaydi as well as her models step into their appointed roles as photographic director and female model-actor. The final product depends on the ability of each participant to perform a character for the camera. This performative nature of Essaydi’s photos recalls Judith Butler’s work on performativity. In her article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Butler asserts: “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way” (527-28). In *Converging Territories # 21* each female figure dresses in text-covered costumes in order to take her place in the re-purposed family house, which also serves as the stage. The veiled, inscribed, and staged characters take on roles that conform—in so much as they are veiled and isolated— and also contest expectations. This occurs through the purposeful placement of the veils, the multiple connotations of the calligraphic henna-text, and the reclaiming of this place of confinement.

Up until this point, I have been examining the various “converging territories” that meet *within* Essaydi’s images as illustrated through the trope of the veil, the text, and the physical space of the photographs. However, it is also necessary to consider the

various spaces in which her final products—the printed photographs—appear. These spaces of encounter between photographer, photographed subject, and viewer provide crucial insights into the reception of the art. They include actual places such as galleries and museums, distributed and circulating mediums such as books, and virtual spaces such as websites and social media.

Much of Essaydi's early success came in private galleries in the United States. Of the ten solo exhibits of *Converging Territories* between 2003 and 2006, eight were held at private galleries, while the other two were shown at art museums in Columbus, Ohio and New Britain, Connecticut. The gallery and the museum provide two divergent but complimentary settings. On the one hand, both spaces are limited by geographical and temporal constraints—the fixed exhibitions last only for a short period. On the other hand, the monetary situation and public reception for each is different. While art museums are frequently publicly supported institutions that encourage cultural exchange and learning, galleries are often smaller, privately funded venues that promote artists and their works, ultimately with the goal of selling their creations.[79] As such, galleries are a capitalist venture whereas museums are generally regarded as public resources. These monetary differences often result in a different clientele for each venue. Whereas galleries are free, they continue to be regarded as exclusive spaces, open only to those who either are involved in the art community or who have the means to purchase the marketed product—works of art. Conversely, although individuals must (often) pay to enter into art museums, these spaces are created with the public in mind. The goal is not

[79] Despite the more educative goal of museums, they too exist within political and cultural economies. As Carol Duncan argues, a country's ability to posses a high quality art museum places it as " a member of the civilized community of modern, liberal nations" (89). An investment in art is also an investment in the reputation and world standing of a country. Duncan's notion extends to smaller communities as well. Cities with quality art venues are more highly regarded than those that do not.

to sell the artwork, but rather to have a culturally enriching and informative experience. As *Converging Territories* was initially shown almost exclusively in galleries, public exposure to it was very limited. However, these gallery-shows exposed Essaydi's work to museum curators and art critics, setting the stage for her images to gain a larger audience at art museums, online, and in various publications.[80]

Regardless of the space in which an exhibition takes place, the geographical location also functions as a vital aspect of an artist's reception. The ten solo shows of *Converging Territories* previously mentioned all took place in the United States. Furthermore, of Essaydi's forty-seven listed solo exhibits from 2001 to 2014, nearly seventy percent were held in the U.S.[81] This is perhaps not surprising given that the majority of her formal art training occurred at Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Despite this initial success in the U.S., since 2008 Essaydi's work, including various images from *Converging Territories*, has been shown around the world in Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.[82] She continues to gain a global audience with her art being displayed in various venues and localities.

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[80] The monetary element pays an important role in the sustainability of the artist. The more the artist's works are shown at any venue—gallery, museum, or elsewhere—the larger the consumer base becomes. Numerous of Essaydi's prints have sold, many through the art auction house Christie's. Of the sales handled by Christie's, the price range has varied between approximately $10,000 to more than $80,000 USD.

[81] Thirty-two of forty-seven exhibitions were in the U.S. This number includes her *Converging Territories* shows as well as subsequent exhibits including works from *Les Femmes du Maroc*, *Harem*, *Harem Revisited*, *Bullet* and *Bullet Revisited*. A full list of Essaydi's solo exhibits can be found in her Curriculum Vitae found on her website: http://lallaessaydi.com/2.html.

[82] A sample of these exhibitions include: *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2008) at the Witzenhausen Gallery in Amsterdam, the Netherlands; *Lalla Essaydi: Power of Writing* at the Bab Rouah National Gallery in Rabat, Morocco; *Les Femmes du Magreb* at the Orientalist Museum in Doha, Qatar; *Lalla Essaydi:* BOUNDARIES at Amelia Johnson Contemporary in Hong Kong, China; and *Lalla Essaydi: Beyond Time and Beauty* at the Museum of Modern Art in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The reception of her work in each of these various geographical areas is framed in part by the response to Arab women who serve as both subject and producer of Essaydi's images. In the introduction to this chapter, I laid out some of the contemporary events that mark the reception of Essaydi and her photographs in the U.S., including the September 11 attacks, the subsequent wars, the Arab Spring, as well as the general reception of art by female and non-Western artists. *Converging Territories'* debut in 2003 came at a critical moment, accommodating an interest in Arab women. This interest, however, often reflects embedded stereotypes associated with Arab women as is evident in a 2002 review of Essaydi's work entitled "Lalla Assia Essaydi: Forbidden Things." The unnamed author indirectly names the women that she depicts in her artwork as "forbidden things." The author also points out how these "things" are a "hot-button issue." Despite having a positive impression of her work, the reviewer avoids a nuanced appraisal of it by playing into stereotypes.

Despite the Orientalist, Western discourses surrounding Arab women at this particular historical moment, the artist embraces the opportunity to share her photographs with a Western audience and even finds the art scene in the U.S. to be more accessible and welcoming to a woman such as herself than the Arab art scene. In fact, she contends that her entrance onto the Arab art scene has been delayed due to preconceived cultural notions that haunt her subjects. In a March 2011 interview with the Swiss German-language newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger*, Essaydi discusses why her work had up until that point mostly been shown in the West:

> My works have only recently been shown in the Arab world. For a long time I was totally ignored. People apparently didn't know how to deal

> with my images. People were afraid. I'm a woman, I work with women and I criticize how women are treated. That's a taboo. In the Arab world practically nothing is said about that … The reception was indeed frustrating. No one wants to hear what I have to say, but they emphasize only how beautiful indeed the women are. I had the feeling of being treated like a child (Cited in Rüttimann, my translation).

Regardless of where her work is shown, it is safe to say that there are political and cultural beliefs that regulate its reception. No place is perfect. As a female artist, Essaydi has preferred the prejudices in the U.S. to the demeaning, misogynistic and demoralizing reception that she perceives in the Arab world. As she becomes better-known as an artist and as her photographs are seen in more places around the world, including the Arab world, it would be interesting to see how the artist's perceived reception as a female artist changes.

Despite Essaydi's perception, in recent years, an ever-increasing number of her photographs have been on display in the Arab world. In 2009, Deepa Pant in the *Arab Times* describes enthusiasm regarding Essaydi's show in Kuwait City: "Art connoisseurs can rejoice at the upcoming show of highly acclaimed Lalla Assia Essaydi's artworks." Similar interest in Essaydi's work extends to her homeland as well. In 2011 the National Gallery in Morocco in collaboration with the Moroccan Ministry of Culture sponsored a retrospective on Essaydi's work that travelled to five Moroccan cities, including Rabat, Fes, Tangiers, Meknes and Casablanca. Moreover, in anticipation of a 2013 show at Galerie Tindouf, Abdellatif Mansour asserts in the *Maroc Hebdo International*, "C'est l'un des plus grands évènements artistiques de l'année 2013. Un happening de la

photographe Lalla Essaydi est toujours un grand moment d'art et de réflexion sur le sens même de toute création." The sponsorship of her work by the Moroccan government as well as its eager reception in both Kuwait City and Marrakech mark either an evolution in attitudes or a misperception by Essaydi, or perhaps a combination of both. In any case her work is being met, at least by some in Arab countries, with enthusiasm and anticipation.

In addition to her solo shows and combined exhibitions, Essaydi's photographs have also been collected in book form.[83] Images from the *Converging Territories* shown at the Laurence Miller Gallery were compiled into a book of the same name, published by PowerHouse Books.[84] *Converging Territories*, printed on 8.5 by 11 inch paper and horizontally oriented, is comprised of thirty-two pages, fourteen of which contain photographs. The remaining pages are blank, display publishing information, or include statements by either Essaydi or her collaborator Amanda Carlson.[85] The written remarks by both Carlson and Essaydi serve as bookends within the publication. Carlson's essay, "Leaving One's Mark: The Photographs of Lalla Essaydi," precedes both Essaydi's photographs and her written statement. It frames our reading of the images by placing them within a defined context. Carlson argues that through layering elements of these established categories, Essaydi creates a "more complicated [North African female] identity" (5). While Carlson's essay provides grounding remarks that situate our viewing

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[83] As we saw in the introduction, selected images from *Converging Territories* have been included in other exhibitions such as *She Who Tells a Story*. In addition, individuals, galleries, and museums have collected individual pieces. For a full list, see Essaydi's Curriculum Vitae: http://lallaessaydi.com/2.html.

[84] PowerHouse Books is a New York-based independent publisher of art and fashion books. It claims: "We have blazed a trail through the staid book publishing industry, releasing books that have sparked cultural trends and redefined commonly held perceptions of the purpose and role of art books in contemporary culture" (http://www.powerhousebooks.com/?page_id=2). PowerHouse Books also published a selection of Essaydi's images from *Les Femmes du Maroc* in a book of the same name with an introductory essay by Fatema Mernissi.

[85] At the time of publication, Amanda Carlson was an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Hartford whose research focuses on African art as well as African art in Florida. Her collaboration with Essaydi on this project includes an essay about the work as well as an interview with the artist.

of the proceeding photographs, it also risks limiting our readings of them into her prescribed categories.

Following these images, we find Essaydi's Artist Statement in which she explains and gives reasons for her work. It is notable that her remarks come only after her images. As such, she privileges her photographs over her own justifications. In other words, she permits first and foremost the art to speak for itself. The Artist's Statement is followed by "A Conversation with Lalla Essaydi," an interview conducted by Carlson in which the scholar poses questions about the process of creation, writing, and the specifics of shooting. This exhibition catalogue extended the life of *Converging Territories*, allowing it to live on in a collective and coherent form.

By far, the most accessible way to see Essaydi's art for the largest number of people is found online, notably on the artist's website. The unpretentious display of lallaessaydi.com makes it easy to navigate. Its aesthetic style also replicates that of *Converging Territories* with its white background and light-brown text. A number of tabs ("Bio," "Statement," "Work," "CV," "News/Reviews", "Links," and "Contact,") direct the visitor to the appropriate page. For example, in the "Work" tab, a small sampling from each of her major collections is available for viewing. In addition to her website, the artist runs an active Facebook page where she posts links to upcoming exhibits as well as reviews of her shows. Besides this online presence, controlled by the artist and her gallery representatives, there are also various other digital outlets that provide access to her works.[86] These include outlets containing art reviews and interviews such as the New York Times and Asharq Al-Awsat, auction houses such as Artnet or Christie's, gallery

[86] The artist is represented by the Edwynn Houk Gallery in New York and Zurich, the Kashya Hildebrand Gallery in London, the Miller Yezerski Gallery in Boston, and Galerie Tindouf in Marrakech.

and museum websites such as Galerie Tindouf and the Brooklyn Museum, arts blogs such as ArtsATL and ArtsIslamica, and personal blogs. While, of course, each online source must be evaluated for accuracy, these resources enhance the distribution of Essaydi's work. However, they also alter their visual aesthetic. The original size is greatly reduced and the quality of reproduction can vary widely. Moreover, the click-culture of the Internet risks a cursory examination of the photographs, reducing them only to their aesthetic beauty and removing them from any contextualization. Despite these negatives, online exposure is the most effective way to eliminate geographical barriers in order to reach the greatest audience.

Conclusions

In her essay/memoir *Scheherazade Goes West,* Mernissi extols the virtues of travel: "travel is not about fun but about learning, about crossing boundaries and mastering the fear of strangers, about making the effort to understand other cultures and thereby empowering yourself. Travel helps you to figure out who you are and how your own culture controls you" (90). Essaydi, as an individual, has crossed national boundaries, notably between Morocco, Saudi Arabia, France and the United States. Her photography serves as a lens through which to examine how these physical national boundaries manifest themselves in actual and metaphorical ways to shape perceptions of women, specifically Arab women such as herself. In *Converging Territories*, through employing different tropes, such as the veil, writing, and space, Essaydi travels to historic, artistic, and actual spaces where boundaries converge, in order to better understand the limitations of these national and cultural norms. Through her constructed territories, she

refutes the boundaries that encourage dualistic thinking—veiled or unveiled, visual or textual, painting or photography, calligraphy or henna, high art or quotidian craft, male or female practice or space, and East or West. The creation of these hybrid in-between artistic spaces leads not only to the self-empowerment of the artist, but also to empowerment of other Arab women who are not limited by culturally inscribed borders.

In this chapter we saw the convergence of various territories within and surrounding Essaydi's artwork. In the following chapter, I examine the various mediums and histories that converge in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, a novel that recreates a history for October 17, 1961, the day numerous peaceful Algerian protestors were killed or disappeared by French police forces. In acknowledging the historical silence that surrounds the events of this day, Sebbar engages with the diverse set of individuals--authors, journalists, photographs, cinematographers, and historians—who, through their multimedia works, have labored to counteract this silence. Employing the diverse methods of her interlocutors, Sebbar creates a trio of young adult characters (Amel, Louis, and Omer) who through filmic, photographic, oral, and embodied mediums try to reconstitute a history of the Paris Massacre, and subsequently their personal and familial histories. Although Amel, Louis and Omer all identify themselves differently—French-Algerian, French, and Algerian respectively— through their multimedia investigation of this day, they begin to understand the intersecting nature of their own histories and identities that exceed the narrative telling-power of any single medium or nationality.

Chapter Two: "…parce que je suis moins amnésique…": Memory-Making Images in Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*[87]

Prologue: Kateb's "La Gueule du Loup"

> Peuple français, tu as tout vu […]
> Tu as vu notre sang couler […]
> Ces corps martyrisés
> Qui rappelaient aux Parisiens
> Leurs propres révolutions
> Leur propre résistance.
> Peuple français, tu as tout vu,
> Oui, tout vu de tes propres yeux,
> Et maintenant vas-tu parler,
> Et maintenant vas-tu te taire?
> Excerpts from "La Gueule du Loup,
> 17 Octobre 1961"
> --Kateb Yacine[88]

October 17, 1961. On this day an unknown number of peaceful Algerian protestors were killed in the streets of Paris at the hands of the French police force, under the reigns of then-commissioner Maurice Papon. Subsequently dubbed "The Paris Massacre," in its immediate aftermath, this event was forcefully repressed and erased from the French political, historical, and social narrative. It is only decades after the initial incident that it began to re-enter into the public consciousness. It is precisely this act of erasure that Kateb Yacine foresees in his poem entitled "*La Gueule du Loup*," written in 1962.

Kateb, born in 1929 in French-occupied Algeria, became a significant figure in the French-Algerian literary scene. He belonged to a long line of erudite scholars; his

[87] Parts of this chapter appear in *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies: Sites* 18.3/4 in an article entitled "*Dire, Voir, Savoir*: Remembering the Paris Massacre in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était Rouge*."
[88] Due to copyright reasons, I have included only excerpts from this poem. For the full poem see: http://dormirajamais.org/yacine/

forefathers practiced poetry, theology and law in Arabic (Chaulet Achour 228). His surname—*kateb* signifies book in Arabic—makes reference both to his predecessors and foretells his future vocation. Kateb's successes as a journalist, poet, author and outspoken activist for Algerian Independence, unlike those of his ancestors, were accomplished in French, not Arabic. Kateb began writing as a young man, and was initially published as a poet in 1946 with his collection *Soliloques.* Due to his timely emergence, as well as his engagement with key social and political issues, he has been called "le fondateur de la littérature algérienne d'expression française" (Boudraa 13). Until his death in 1988, he continued to pen poems as well as novels and plays in both French and colloquial Arabic.[89] He is perhaps best known for *Le Polygone étoilé*, a novelistic compilation of lyrical, prose, and theatrical texts and *Nedjma,* a novel based on the love that four men have for the title character.[90]

Nearly all of Kateb's writing –including the poem "La Gueule du Loup"—contains personal reflections that expose the larger social and historical context in which he lived. As the scholar Mehana Amrani writes, "son histoire personelle et la grande Histoire de son pays et du monde contemporain entrent-elles en dialogue, en interpellation, en croisement et en entrechoc" (12). These clashing dialogues are marked by two foundational events in Kateb's life that represents the author's personal struggles as well as those of the Algerian people. The first is Kateb's boyhood entry, under the insistence of his father, into the French school, otherwise known as *la gueule du loup.* The literal translation of this colloquialism, "mouth of the wolf," alludes to the animal as

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[89] Kateb has a troubled relationship to classical Arabic, having never mastered the language and finding it inaccessible to the majority of the population. Rather, he is interested in colloquial Arabic and later in life turns to writing plays in spoken Arabic (Amrani 9; Chaulet Achour 232).
[90] Nedjma is a recurring character in Kateb's work and is loosely based on his aunt with whom he lived for a period during his adolescence (Chaulet Achour 229).

it approaches its prey. It also takes on the proverbial meaning of a trap or danger.[91] In a 1962 essay entitled "Dans la Gueule du Loup," Kateb describes his acquisition of the French language, the painful distancing it causes him, both from his mother and his ancestral history, and his triumphal return to the language of his *ancêtres*. At the end of *Polygone étoilé* Kateb summarizes his relationship with the French language: "Ainsi, avais-je perdu tout à la fois ma mère et son langage, les seuls trèsors inaliénables—et pourtant aliénés!" (182). His mention of "ma mère" refers to the loss of his birth mother (who even while alive suffered from psychiatric problems), his mother tongue (Arabic), and his motherland (Algeria).[92] While personally alienating for Kateb, the French school—*la gueule du loup*—serves as a microcosm of the larger colonial situation in Algeria. It is a vessel through which French values are transmitted—notably through the French language. In this sense it is a trap, as it is at once both the necessary language of communication as well as a tool of assimilation.

As a teenager, Kateb witnesses first-hand the vicious nature of the French wolf as it attacks its prey: native Algerians. As Algeria was officially part of France during this time period, labels of Algerian or French are in fact misleading; all inhabitants of Algeria were officially French citizens. Over the course of this chapter, I will use the terms "Algerian" and "French." My use of "Algerian" refers to individuals of Arab or Berber decent. "French" indicates individuals of European descent who call continental France their home. I also reference the *pieds-noirs,* whom I call French or European. They consist of European settlers in French occupied North Africa. They moved there during

[91] Entry in *Le Grand Robert*: "dans un danger certain, et de façon imprudente."

[92] Multiple scholars have taken up the trope of Algeria as a feminized and violated land. See for example: Réda Bensmaïa's *Experimental Nations* especially the chapter entitled: "(Hi)stories of Expatriation: Virtual Countries" or for an analysis in relationship to Kateb's work, the chapter "Nedj(e)ma, la femme-patrie au cœur d'une œuvre colonial et d'une œuvre algérienne" in Amrani's *La Poétique de Kateb Yacine.*

the colonial period and many spent generations in North Africa, considering it their home. It is important to keep these distinctions in mind given that the white European experience of colonization differed greatly from that of native Algerians.

On May 8, 1945—Victory-Europe Day—France and the rest of the Allied forces take to the streets to celebrate victory over Nazi Germany. This celebration extends to the French department of Algeria, as many native Algerians as well as *pieds-noirs,* fought as French citizens for the Allied forces. Indigenous Algerians saw V-E Day—the acknowledgement of a Europe and France free from oppressive Nazi rule—as an opportunity to promote a similar goal—an Algeria free from French rule. As such, in Sétif and Guelma, native Algerians took to the streets, waving Algerian flags in protest. French forces considered these actions as a threat to the French state and began shooting into the crowd. In the following days and months, both *pieds-noirs* and native Algerians engaged in battle. Approximately a hundred Europeans died in the fighting, while an estimated 15,000-45,000 native Algerians were killed (House and MacMaster 37). Notably, the massacres in Sétif and Guelma were underplayed by the French government and even to this day have yet to be fully acknowledged.[93] Kateb, a fifteen-year-old middle-school student was one of the Algerian protestors present in Sétif on May 8, 1945. As a result of his participation in these protests, Kateb was arrested and detained for two months (Chaulet Achour 228-229). This tactic of detentions, oppression and silencing would prove to be a key factor in French domination throughout the Algerian War for Independence. It is during this period that Kateb commits himself to the nationalist cause. In addition to serving as a model for future French oppression and subsequent denial, the

[93] In 2005 the French ambassador to Algeria, Hubert Colin de Verdière, issued a vague apology for the "tragédie inexcusable" during a speech at the University of Sétif.

Sétif massacre marks a turning point both in Kateb's personal narrative as well as in the battle for Algerian Independence (House and MacMaster 35-37).

These two forces within Kateb's life come to a head in the poem "La Gueule du Loup." The title and poem, which I analyze further below, alludes to French colonial rule and the accompanying language assimilation that is propagated through the imposed educational system. Meanwhile, the content reflects the tactics of denial, oppression and silencing used by French forces—a displaced repetition of the massacres of Sétif and Guelma. In this text first read on the radio, the poet addresses the French people, asking them if they will speak about the atrocities of the fateful day in October 1961 or if they will keep silent about them. Although the French people may not have directly responded to Kateb's poetic and political question, the institutionalized silence that obscured the events of October 17th, 1961 in the collective French and Algerian memory have provided a resounding answer.

While my main concern in this chapter is Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, Kateb's poem succinctly brings to light the elements of suppression and their relationship to national identity that become relevant in the reconstruction of the events of October 17, 1961. Most importantly, Kateb anticipates the silence that becomes a substitute for the events themselves. He does this through implicating three groups: you, us, and them. Starting with the first line of the poem, he addresses "*le peuple français*" through the use of the second person singular pronoun "*tu*." Interestingly, Kateb uses interchangeably the collective *peuple français* with the singular *tu.* In so doing, he connects individual subjectivity to united national identity (*français*). Likewise, this exchanging of the collective for the individual serves as a powerful rhetorical device given that this poem is

initially disseminated over the radio. The spoken *tu* acts as a personal appeal to the individual listeners who belong to the larger collective. Moreover, the singular "you" creates a contrast with the first-person plural adjective "*notre*" in the third line. Given the personal history of the author, we can assume that this "our" refers to the Algerian people, in which Kateb includes himself. He asserts a position of solidarity and mutual understanding with the victims—he has not only seen death, but also experienced indefinite detention at the hands of the French forces for his peaceful dissention towards colonial practices. The author also introduces a third party with the "*leur*," *les Parisiens*, creating a link between "their" history and the repression that transpired in Paris in October 1961. Within the span of eighteen lines, Kateb raises crucial questions: who precisely is affected by these events and the silence that surrounds them? Who is responsible or accountable? You? Us? Them?

Although Kateb's ultimate question concerns the act of speaking or keeping silent, he also highlights the importance of seeing through the repetition of the past participle *vu* from the verb *voir*—to see. The entire poem, save the last two lines, reiterates the poet's claim: you, the French people, saw these events (*tu as tout vu*). In the last two lines, Kateb juxtaposes what has been "seen" by the French people with what you (*tu*) are now going to say (*parler*) or keep quiet (*taire*) about. The homophonic resonance of *tu* and *vu* creates a strong link between the individual you (implying *le peuple français)*, the act of seeing, and subsequently the choice to speak. Kateb suggests that individuals have access to knowledge through the events that they witness first-hand. Speech (*parler*) acts as a powerful means by which to bear witness to the violence perpetuated on the peaceful protestors.

By evoking *les Parisiens*, Kateb inscribes the October violence in a larger historical narrative. (*Ces corps martyrisés/ Qui rappelaient aux Parisiens/ Leurs propres révolutions/ Leur propre résistance*). The martyred bodies serve as reminders to Parisians of their own history and the need to protest for their rights. The phrase "Leurs propres révolutions" could reference multiple revolutions, starting with the 1789 French Revolution in which the people rejected the monarchy and embraced the values of "liberté, égalité, and fraternité." This would be followed by a series of other revolts in 1830, 1848 and 1871.[94] These popular revolts throughout the nineteenth century evoked the promise of the 1789 Revolution—*liberté, égalité*, and *fraternité* for *all* men. Furthermore, through the use of the word "résistance," Kateb equates the Paris protests to the Resistance movement of World War II, which rejected the policies of the Nazi Regime and battled for a free France. By citing "révolutions" and "résistance," Kateb reminds the French of their own history of occupation and activism and of their own not so distant position as an oppressed people. In effect, he calls attention to the shortness of the Parisian memory and the alarming ease of transition from victim to perpetrator.

The three tropes that Kateb creates anticipate the types of silences that will subsequently exclude the Paris Massacre from public and historical discourse. First, he establishes a multiplicity of involved parties: you, us, and them. Secondly, he defines a clear relationship between seeing and saying (*tu* and *vu)*. A combination of visual accounts and oral narratives serve as imperative elements in the construction of a specific

[94] These uprisings led respectively to a disruption, which led to abolishing the monarchy and electing a president, and to a revolt against the government. Although these campaigns did not prove successful in the long term—the 1830 July Revolution replaced one Constitutional Monarchy with another, the February Revolution of 1948 lasted only until 1852 when Louis Napoleon, the elected president, stripped the elected assembly of power and established the Second French Empire, and the Paris Commune lasted only a few months—, they raised essential and lasting questions concerning, for example, relationships between social classes, the rights of the working class, and the public's role in government.

history. Finally, through referencing historical events, he infers the foundational nature of the act of protesting in securing identity—precisely what identity remains unknown. These constructs provide useful points of entry into the subsequent artistic creations that document the events of October 17, 1961. Since the early 1980s, due both to the emergence of associations led by young people of Maghrebi origin devoted to the preservation of memory,[95] as well as the implication of Maurice Papon as a key player in the Vichy government,[96] numerous writers, photographers, filmmakers, and journalists, among others,[97] have engaged in projects that attempt to break this silence by engaging with diverse mediums.

La Seine était rouge

The author Leïla Sebbar counts among these individuals. As a 19-year old college student living in southern France, Sebbar experiences the protests from afar. Like Kateb,

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[95] These groups include *Sans Frontières* and *Association pour une nouvelle génération immigrée* both of which were invested in recalling and perpetuating the memories of previous generations. The actions of these groups led to the *Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*, ulteriorly named *La Marche des Beurs,* which took place in 1983 and is recognized as the first commemoration of October 1961 organized by the progeny of protestors (House and MacMaster 290-293). In the year following the March, a new group SOS Racisme—Touche pas à mon pote, an anti-racist organization, was founded. With the support of the French government, this group has been criticized for usurping the social power created by the *Marche* in order to introduce a moderate approach to combatting racism. As Stora has noted, "*les mouvements de banlieue…*ont été étouffés" by the French government's support of SOS Racisme (*La Guerre des Mémoires* 39). Instead of allowing for these periphery movements to develop, SOS Racisme centralized power and moved away from a discourse focused on racism against individuals of Maghrebi decent to a broader agenda of denouncing all acts of racial discrimination. Another notable event that makes the *Beur* community visible is the *Affaire Malik Oussekine,* the 1986 murder by the police of a French student of Algerian descent who was wrongly identified and targeted as an aggressor in the student protests against university reforms. As Sylvie Durmelat shows in "Petite Histoire du mot *beur*: ou comment prendre la parole quand on vous la prête," the media coverage of the 1983 march extends the word "beur" from colloquial parlance into the mainstream. Designating its usage as part of familiar speech, *Le Grand Robert* defines *beur* as: "Jeune Arabe de la 'deuxième génération', né en France de parents immigrés." Durmelat outlines the disputed etymology as well as the different debates surrounding the designation *beur,* dating from its inception in the 1970s to its use as a politically and socially charged term in the 1990s.

[96] Documents emerge in 1981 that implicate Papon as the individual who ordered the deportation of over a thousand French Jews to the Drancy Internment Camp during World War II. This revelation raises questions about Papon's character and leadership, notably his actions as police commissioner in 1961.

[97] See "Sebbar and Her Interlocutors," later in this chapter.

who inscribes his personal and political history within his writing, much of Sebbar's work contemplates her own Algerian-French identity as it reflects and intersects with larger political, social, and cultural questions. Her 1999 work *La Seine était rouge: Paris, octobre 1961* follows three young people, a French-Algerian woman, a French man, and a French-Algerian man as they reconstruct the events of October 17, 1961. The novel attempts to excavate the history of the Paris Massacre by creating a fictionalized narrative that relies upon oral, textual and visual mediums of transmission. First published by Editions Thierry Magnier in 1999 (and re-printed in 2003), *La Seine* takes place in and around Paris in 1996.[98] Although Sebbar's work centers on a young woman, Amel, and her quest to learn about October 17, 1961, it relies upon multiple narratives by diverse individuals to tell the story. Born in France to Algerian parents, 16-year-old Amel desires to learn about her family's history, specifically in relation to Algerian Independence and the events of October 17, a day that is referred to as *ce jour-là* (that day). This term that Sebbar repeats in two forms, *ce jour* and *ce jour-là,* throughout the book stands in for the events of October 17. These few simple words represent that which cannot be expressed, that which remains unsaid and unsayable about the brutal massacre and detention of the peaceful protestors, which Kateb references. Amel is offered entry into the events of this unspeakable day through a film made by her friend, Louis. Louis, born in France to French parents, was inspired by their participation in the fight for Algerian independence, and decides to create a documentary film that consists of the first-hand accounts of a varied set of witnesses of the 1961 massacre, including Amel's own mother. After seeing Louis's film, Amel, along with Omer, begins to meander through Paris, retracing the path

[98] Editions Thierry Magnier publishes mostly works that are aimed at a young adult audience. Although characterized as "young adult fiction" this work garners a larger and more diverse audience.

of the Algerian protestors. She seeks out individuals who are willing to recount their own experiences from this day. Omer, a 27-year-old Algerian refugee is an aspiring journalist who has left Algeria due to the ongoing civil war. Although these three characters hail from different circumstances, a French-Algerian adolescent (*Beure*[99]), a Frenchman, and an Algerian man, they are all born in the post-independence era and share the fact that they know very little about the history of *ce jour-là,* a history in which their families are directly implicated (Donadey, *"*Retour*"* 192).

Amel, Louis, and Omer all share a connection to Algeria and Algerian history through their mothers. Amel's mother, Noria, and grandmother, Lalla, took part in the October 17 protests in Paris. Noria, who was a small child in 1961, accompanied her mother during the protest. Due to the violence perpetuated in the streets, Noria and Lalla were unable to return to their home in Nanterre and so spent the night of the protests with Flora, Louis's mother. Flora, a French doctor, was known in the slums of Nanterre for her medical expertise and loyalty to the Algerian cause. She had previously been imprisoned for "collaborating" with the Algerians as a *porteuse de valise*.[100] It is while in prison that Flora met Mina, Omer's mother. Despite the nearly forty years that have elapsed since Independence and the narrative present, these women, as well as their children, remain connected. Remarkably, these intergenerational relationships remain intact despite the fact that these women refuse to their children about the war.

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[99] See footnote 7. My use of the word "beur" relates to its popular usage and the way in which Amel would be characterized by her contemporaries in 1996. Any use of such a term must take into account its social and political connotations as well as the potentially neo-colonialist implications (Durmelat, "Petite Histoire" 202).

[100] French *porteurs* and *porteuses de valise,* as the name indicates, carried papers, monies, and other supplies to aide the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)* in attaining their goal of independence.

The episodic novel is divided into a series of vignettes. Each chapter contains the name of one or two individuals and focuses on its namesake(s). The chapters alternate between the present (1996) and the past as recounted by witnesses in Louis's film. The narrative present centers on the whereabouts of Amel. These chapters either recount her journey through Paris as she retraces the path of the protestors in 1961 or depict the worries of Amel's entourage after she goes missing. Amel's disappearance parallels that of so many Algerian men who disappeared (were killed or deported) in the aftermath of the Paris Massacre. The filmic recollections are told in chapters named either "La mère" or "Octobre 1961." In each of the six chapters entitled "La mère," Noria, Amel's mother, recounts her memories of the October 17 protests while Louis films her. Noria's recollections are often interrupted either by the narrator or by archival photos from the protests. Within the text, Noria's testimony is isolated through the use of quotation marks and often corroborated with archival photographs. Each section entitled "Octobre 1961" also includes a description of a witness: *Le patron du café l'Atlas, Le harki de Papon, l'Algérien sauvé des eaux, la patronne du café La Goutte d'Or, L'amant français, L'étudiant français, le libraire de la rue Saint-Séverin*, and *Le flic de Clichy*. These vignettes constitute uninterrupted testimonies and take the form of a screenplay, complete with stage directions: *intérieur jour, extérieur jour*, or *extérieur nuit*. These visual directives emphasize the cinematic nature of these testimonies. As I will elaborate further in this chapter, Sebbar is unique in her use of textual, oral, and visual mediums in order to relate the history of the Paris Massacre.

From Amnesia to Anamnesis to Multidirectional Memory

Much scholarly work done on *La Seine* has focused on aspects of memory. Anne Donadey, who has published extensively on literature in a French-Algerian framework, contextualizes the aftermath of the Algerian War of Independence and notably the Paris Massacre as part of France's "Algeria Syndrome." She draws on the work of historian Henry Rousso who coined the term *Le Syndrome de Vichy*. Donadey recycles the four stages of Rousso's "Syndrome": "interrupted mourning"; "forgetting and amnesia"; "return of the repressed and a shattering of established myths about the war"; and "obsession" (*Recasting* 7) and reappropriates them in the French-Algerian context. She contends that Sebbar's *La Seine* participates in the third stage, that is to say a recuperating of repressed memories in an effort to dispel the "established myths" concerning the Paris Massacre. Donadey asserts that Sebbar's work, published in 1999 (and whose plot occurs in 1996), takes place at a time when the history about the Paris Massacre was being reexamined. I will re-examine Donadey's assessment of the "Algeria Syndrome" at the end of this chapter where I argue that following both the fiftieth commemoration of both the Paris Massacre and Algerian Independence in 2011 and 2012 respectively, we have moved into the fourth stage: obsession.

Other critics, notably Michel Laronde and Jonathan Lewis, assert similar claims concerning memory in *La Seine*. On the one hand, Laronde notes that recollections of *ce jour* remain part of "une continuité interrompue" ("Effets" 146). Sebbar participates in creating memories of *that day* that are fragmentary and partial. On the other hand, Lewis contends that Sebbar's work seeks to "fill in the blanks" of a silence imposed by the French state "not only by drawing attention to what happened, but by highlighting the

lack of state recognition of what happened" (320). Key to all these accounts of memory recovery is understanding the tradition of silence that has plagued both French and Algerian history and which has been characterized by Benjamin Stora, eminent historian on the subject, as a condition that precludes a healthy commemoration of the past. Indeed, in *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, Stora writes: "Pour les Français, une 'guerre sans nom'; pour les Algériens, une 'révolution sans visage': un des plus durs conflits de décolonisation de ce siècle n'a vraiment jamais été 'assumé' des deux cotés" (8). Stora thus indicates that both France and Algeria have been unable to recognize the war, resulting in textual and visual "amnesia." He seems to suggest the necessity, in order to cure the "gangrene" experienced by both countries, for alternative strategies to remember their shared histories. Such an approach would require for both countries to assign an articulated term—name—*and* a visual identity—face—to the conflict, an idea I will return to at the end of this section.

In her critiques of *La Seine*, Donadey engages with Stora's concept of amnesia. Her response to overcoming this "amnesia" is "anamnesis" or collective memory. She points to Sebbar's use of multiple characters and perspectives "issues de générations, d'audiences politiques, d'origines ethniques et de sexes différents" ("Retour" 191) as necessary in the creation of this collective memory. Even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify the real "truth" of *that day*, Donadey suggests that by presenting as many testimonies from as many perspectives as possible, a collective memory emerges that begins to reflect the actual events. These shared perspectives work to counteract the imposed silence that has plagued the commemoration of events related to the Algerian War of Independence.

Scholar Mildred Mortimer expands upon Dondaey's work on amnesia and the possibility to participate in anamnesis by parsing out different meanings of silence. She asserts that the historical amnesia in relation to the events of the Paris Massacre can be explained by three principal reasons. First, October 17 was an agonizing ordeal that families preferred not to transmit to future generations. As such, families involved in the conflict simply did not discuss it with their children as we see in *La Seine*. In addition, the Algerian protestors experienced *ce jour* as a defeat—they were overpowered both by the physical and political force of the French police forces. Individuals prefer to commemorate victory rather than loss. Moreover, Mortimer contextualizes this silence as part of a gendered discourse: "Algerian culture teaches women to distinguish between public and private events, male and female space. Demonstrating alongside the men, women participated in the political demonstration but considered their role to be supportive, their own realm being the private world of domestic space" ("Probing" 1250). It is precisely in this domestic space that the women in Sebbar's story begin to describe their memories.

This phenomenon of amnesia is not unique to French and Algerian history. Notably, it can be seen played out in the aftermath of the world wars and decolonization of the twentieth century. Drawing on both Holocaust and Post-colonial studies Michael Rothberg in *Multidirectional Memory* theorizes memory as multi-directional, that it is to say: "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing [from other historical events and commemorations]: as productive and not privative" (3). He points to Sebbar's *La Seine* as one example of multidirectional memory (among others). He identities the various *lieux de mémoire* evoked by Sebbar and how they serve as "site[s]

for the transformation of multiple histories of violence into a potentially peaceful future through the agency of a just and relational remembrance" (306-307). Rothberg argues that by visiting sites around Paris, Sebbar's characters negotiate their own past through engaging with other troubled histories, ultimately overcoming amnesia in order to envision new processes for commemoration.

Earlier, I noted that Kateb's poem "La Gueule du Loup" proposes three tropes that are key to understanding the Paris Massacre: collective recognition (you, us, them), the relationship between seeing and saying (*vu, dit*); and the recognition of identity that emerges through struggle. Scholars including Donadey, Mortimer, and Rothberg have firmly and convincingly established the phenomenon of anamnesis or collective memory in Sebbar's text. The goal of this chapter is not to dispute this foundational work, but rather to build upon it by examining how these multiple perspectives are formed through diverse mediums. In other words, I will examine what I have identified as Kateb's second trope: the relationship between seeing and saying. Above, I argued that Stora suggests the necessity for alternative strategies—textual and visual—in order for France and Algeria to overcome their shared amnesia and "gangrene." I propose that *La Seine* is unique in its engagement with multiple mediums. Sebbar inserts herself into an exchange, evoking multiple interlocutors ("Sebbar and her Interlocutors"), which include historians, writers, photographers and filmmakers. She draws on all of these mediums to create collective memories within the text that break the textual, oral, and visual "silence" of *ce jour-là* by filling this void with multiple names, places, and faces. In the end, it is the use of multiple media that allow Sebbar's young protagonists, Amel, Louis, and Omer to begin

to understand the intersecting nature of their French-Algerian, French, and Algerian identities.

Two Photographs or Forgetting Amnesia

> "Moi je suis seule, recluse, et dans ce fauteuil d'où je ne bouge pas, j'écoute l'histoire violente et mémorable qui est en train d'avoir lieu en même temps que je suis assise là."
> ("La Seine était rouge" 96)

In the above excerpt from her article "La Seine était rouge," Sebbar describes her distance from the events taking place in Paris. Although she was not in Paris, she still experienced the violence of this day. She recalls being alone in her small, cold room in Aix-en-Provence where she was a student. The radio acts as her connection to the world, keeping her informed of the peaceful Algerian protests and the violence that ensues. Markedly, Sebbar notes her own detachment from these events: Algerians are undergoing forceful repression in the streets while five hundred miles away she experiences stability as a student. However, this relative stability leaves her unable to react to the events; she remains immobile in her room ("*je suis assise là*"). The notion of being seated in her chair also evokes the French expression "être ou demeurer le cul entre deux chaises," which is defined by *Le Grand Robert* as "hésiter entre deux avis" or "être sollicité par deux séries d'obligations contradictoires." Sebbar is in the in-between, stuck between French and Arabic, Algeria and France, childhood and adulthood. Her physical distance from the Parisian protests as well as her described stasis reinforces her detachment from the situation in Paris and Algeria. As the daughter of a French mother and an Algerian father, Sebbar's existence as a student in southern France differed greatly from the

experience of Algerian workers living in the *bidonvilles* around Paris such as Nanterre, or those Algerians living under French rule in Algeria.[101]

Her immobility seems to be a reaction to her own desire to forget Algeria. As the author later recounts in a personal letter to Mildred Mortimer, "I was in Aix-en-Provence, where I had forgotten Algeria. This amnesia lasted a long time. France represented freedom. I could finally live without fear of war, without surveillance, without protection" ("Introduction" xv). As a university student in France, Sebbar initially attempted to create a physical and emotional distance between her former life in Algeria and her present and future life in France. This emotional distance was achieved through a strategy of forgetting—a term she uses interchangeably with amnesia. As we have seen in the Prologue to this chapter, scholars such as Donadey and Rousso use these terms interchangeably, I would suggest however that the act of forgetting differs from amnesia. On the one hand *Le Grand Robert* defines "oubli" as: "Défaillance temporaire ou définitive de la mémoire, portant soit sur des connaissances ou aptitudes acquises, soit sur les souvenirs."[102] On the other hand "amnesia" is characterized by "oubli pathologique." In this sense, amnesia is far more of a medical and psychiatric condition than simple forgetting.[103] This forced act of forgetting allowed Sebbar to live peacefully, without the fear of violence. It is however not without consequence. In forgetting Algeria, she also seemed to be rejecting a central part of her own identity—her Algerian half. Sebbar has

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[101] In her 1997 three-part film series entitled *Mémoires d'Immigrées*, Yamina Benguigui depicts the movement of Algerian workers to France and the effect that this had on them and subsequently on their families.

[102] I use the French terms and definitions here because this letter exchange between Mortimer and Sebbar was conducted in French.

[103] Stora, in an interview with Thierry Leclère, documented in *La guerre des mémoires: La France face à son passé colonial* explains French amnesia: "D'une part, il existe une névrose collective dans la classe dirigeante, une blessure narcissique et des mémoires traumatiques…"(25). His use of the psychiatric language "névrose," "narcissique," and "traumatiques" in addition to the physical or mental term for injury, "blessure," inscribes this condition within a medical capacity that goes beyond simple forgetting.

spent much of her literary career attempting to negotiate this identity. Various aspects of this negotiation can be seen in works such as *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003), her journal trilogy—*Mes Algéries en France* (2004), *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (2005), and *Voyages en Algérie autour de ma chambre: Abécédaire* (2008)—as well as in *La Seine était rouge*, among others.

Her article "La Seine était rouge" explicitly evokes a process of recuperating memory. First published in a 1990 issue of *Actualité de l'émigration hébdo* commemorating the events of October 1961, "La Seine" was updated and re-printed in *Le Maghreb Littéraire* in 1998 (Mortimer xv).[104] This collection of short autobiographical anecdotes serves as a precursor to the longer fictionalized novel of the same name. The shared title of both the article and the subsequent book (*La Seine était rouge*) links Sebbar's personal memories to the various fictionalized experiences recounted within the episodic novel. By employing the same title for the two works, she blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction, specifically in relation to memory. In both iterations of the work, her readers rely on the accuracy of various individuals' recollections to recount a history of *ce jour-là*. In so doing she poses an implicit question about the veracity of individual memory. However, by multiplying the number of individual accounts, specifically in the fictional work, Sebbar shows how powerful collective memory can be in uncovering a previously unspoken past. Her use of multiple literary genres (the essay and the novel), as well as her incorporation of visual (photography and filmic) and embodied aspects into these works, highlights the unspeakable nature of this history. In order to tell it, Sebbar

[104] The 1990 version of Sebbar's is difficult to locate. For the purpose of this research, I have used the reprinted 1998 version that includes a section entitled "1997. Octobre. Paris." In this addition, the author reflects on the opening of the French archives concerning the Algerian War for Independence as well as the civil war that is being waged in Algeria.

must employ her own voice (the essay), a narrator and various witnesses (the novel), as well as complementary photographs and videography.

In the article Sebbar traces how she first begins to remember Algeria and her experience of the Paris Massacre, notably though the aid of two photographs. The author notices the first photograph in 1976 while living in Paris:

> Je regarde une photographie découpée dans un journal, un carré mobile sans mots autour, sans place définie dans une page de reportage. La photographie est floue et grise comme le papier journal. Il faut la regarder de près pour voir, au pied d'une colline, entre les oliviers, des femmes, des enfants rassemblés, serrés les uns contre les autres. Les femmes crient et chantent, l'une d'elles brandit un drapeau avec une étoile" (96).

Sebbar describes this untitled photograph: women and children squeezed together at the foot of a hill in between some olive trees. Although not explicitly stated, the presence of the flag with a star leads the reader to believe that this image was taken in Algeria. Indeed, in the following paragraph the author begins to reflect on Algeria and her childhood there. Through this blurry photograph, Sebbar is transported back to memories of her youth. Her recollections animate the photographed subjects. Although the still image has no means of conveying sound, Sebbar depicts the women shouting and singing. Her own sensory memories complement the visual image.

Sebbar does not know what to make of the photograph, as it seems out of place. Its description as "découpée" and "sans place définie" relegates it to a secondary and unclear status, which is disconnected from the rest of the newspaper. This status is further reinforced by both its visual ("floue et grise") and textual ("sans mots autour")

unintelligibility. The black and white image, while seemingly banal and quotidian, moves Sebbar: "je ne saurais pas dire pourquoi cette petite photo que je pouvais ne jamais voir, m'a, à ce point, boulversée" (96). It evokes emotion in the viewer that she is unable to express adequately in words. Although indescribable, this feeling experienced through the unidentified photo triggers a flood of memories that despite having no direct relationship to the image translate into written material about her childhood, Algeria, women, and blood. Through this short description, Sebbar affirms the power of an image to undo years of forgetting and amnesia.

Some ten years later, the writer sees a second image in a newspaper that catches her attention. This photograph depicts a woman carrying a flag with a star. She leads protestors through the streets of Paris. Sebbar is transported back to the small, cold room in Aix-en-Provence: "Dix ans plus tard, parce que je suis moins amnésique et que les retours de mémoire se précipitent, je peux lire cette photographie et entendre à nouveau les mots percutants qui me parvenaient, il y a vingt-cinq ans dans la chambre fermée et froide" (97). As her amnesia recedes Sebbar begins to identify not only the generalized memories of her childhood, but also very specific ones such as October 17, 1961. Her contention that she is "less amnesic" suggests that amnesia is not an absolute condition, but rather exists along a continuum. As a medical condition, it can be treated and improved, if not cured. The author's treatment, and that put forth in *La Seine était rouge,* consists of viewing images associated to the "forgotten" event in order to recall otherwise suppressed memories. Although not present in Paris on *that day*, Sebbar "reads" it by deciphering the images and identifying the appropriate context. Like the first image that conjured up the cries of its subjects, this photo also causes the viewer to listen. She hears

the long-forgotten radio reports of "l'histoire violente et mémorable." The ultimate irony of course is that this "memorable" event has nearly been forgotten. Visual evidence—the photograph—is required to invoke the oral record—the radio broadcast—that only then provides a path for Sebbar's textual documentation—Sebbar's multiple versions of "*La Seine.*"

After this encounter with the second photograph in 1986 Sebbar has a change of heart regarding her relationship to Algeria. No longer does it provoke amnesia within the author. Rather, she proclaims herself inseparable from her native land: "c'est ma seule certitude, je sais que rien ne pourra plus me séparer de l'Algérie et que si je m'enferme, c'est pour parler d'elle" (98). Any future confinement will serve to remember Algeria, rather than to forget it as she did in her student room in Aix. The author identifies her viewing of these two images as key turning points to overcoming amnesia. Sounds, sentiments, and memories emerge from her visual encounter linking her to her Algerian roots. These two photographs—as well as the women pictured in them—serve as Sebbar's first interlocutors in recapturing a history of October 17, 1961.

In the addendum to the original "La Seine" article published in 1997, Sebbar reflects on the current state of affairs in both France and Algeria. On the one hand, France, through the "trial within a trial" of Papon, is beginning to recognize the Paris Massacre (House and MacMaster 310).[105] His condemnation as well as the opening of the archives will clarify the atrocities committed in the past: "le tribunal dira la vérité sur

[105] Arguing that it was key to illustrating Papon's character, groups such as the *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'Amité entre les peuples* (MRAP) and the newly formed association *Au nom de la mémoire* (ANM) actively worked for and succeeded in including evidence concerning the former police chief's role in the Paris Massacre within the Crimes Against Humanity trial—ostensibly about his role in the Holocaust. In this way, the trial, ostensibly about Papon's role in the Holocaust, also become a trial about his leadership in ordering the disappearance of Algerians on October 17, 1961 (Einaudi *Octobre,* 16-70).

les morts de ce jour-là et que la Seine… cache en elle des corps algériens. Ils ne seront jamais rendus ni à la morgue, ni au linceul des Ancêtres, la Seine n'est plus rouge aujourd'hui, mais elle sait, si elle ne parle pas" (98). Sebbar creates a tension between the visual and the spoken. While the court will speak the truth of the Paris Massacre (*dira la vérité*), the personified river will remain silence. Just as the river is an important actor in the daily movements of the city, so too is it a crucial, yet silent, witness to the Paris Massacre. The Seine hides the mute bodies that will never be properly identified, acknowledged, or memorialized.

On the other hand, Algeria, after thirty-five years of Independence, is embroiled in a brutal civil war. The threat of violence no longer comes from the French government, but rather from different factions within Algeria. The author asks: "Pour qui cet holocauste? De quel pays je parle aujourd'hui et comment écrire cette Algérie, inconnue, étrangère? Le pays natal, ogresse sanguinaire, insatiable, je le reverrai un jour? (98)" By invoking the word "holocauste," Sebbar references three events that are separate, yet similar in their propagation of violence. At the same moment that Papon is being convicted of crimes against humanity for his role in the deportation of Jews during World War II, and the Paris Massacre is being exposed within this same trial, a third "holocaust" is taking place in Algeria—the massacre of Algerians by Algerians. Sebbar's choice of the loaded term "holocaust," points to her view of the interconnected nature of various histories, or what Rothberg describes as multidirectional memory. While some have argued that the Holocaust acts as a "competitive memory" that systematically undermines the significance of all other genocides,[106] Rothberg contends that, "early Holocaust

[106] See Rothberg's analysis of Walter Benn Michaels' work in relation to slavery in *Multidirectional Memory* pp 1-12.

memory emerged in dialogue with the dynamic transformation and multifaceted struggles that define the era of decolonization" (7). Thus, rather than characterizing the Holocaust as a unique and singular event, it is one of many that intersect and can be "cross-referenced." Sebbar illustrates this concept by cross-referencing Papon's war, the Holocaust, with other holocausts: the Algerian War for Independence, the Paris Massacre, and the Algerian Civil War. Her own personal memories are cross-referenced through the images that she sees, associating the Massacre with the Civil War of the 1990s. In the same way that Sebbar is unable to adequately express the emotion she feels for the two photographs depicting women bearing the Algerian flag, she is likewise unable to sufficiently describe the country of her childhood, a country that she no longer "knows." Sebbar, like Kateb, creates a relationship being saying, writing and seeing (*parle, écrire, reverrai*). Although unable to describe Algeria in words, written or oral, somehow the possibility of seeing it will make it less unknown, less foreign.

Sebbar and her Interlocutors

The reactions offered by Sebbar in "*La Seine était rouge*" are key to understanding her longer eponymous work. In this article, she proposes that visual evidence can serve as an antidote to decades-long amnesia. This visual trend is suggested by the title of these works: the Seine was red. While simple and straightforward, this image is troubling in its suggestion of blood and violence. The evocation of the visual arouses multiple sensory reactions educing other visual, textual, and auditory memories that begin to provide a basis for Sebbar's written texts. These memories are not always Sebbar's personal recollections, but rather belong to a collective of artists and authors who, despite being

silenced and all but forgotten, constitute key pieces of the puzzle in understanding both the actual events of October 17 and their fictionalized accounts in *La Seine était rouge*.

The Dedication

Sebbar recognizes the multiple mediums that have inspired her work in the Dedication. Here, the author acknowledges her debt to filmmakers, historians, photographers, and writers who, through their respective work, have made the events of October 17, 1961 part of a visual, textual, historical and political landscape:

Aux victimes algériennes d'octobre 1961
à Paris.

Au comité Maurice-Audin

À Didier Daeninckx,
Jean-Luc Einaudi,
Elie Kagan,
Nacer Kettane,
Mehdi Lallaoui,
François Maspéro,
Georges Mattei,
Jacques Panijel,
Paulette Péju,
Anne Tristan (9).

This dedication honors two groups of people as well as ten individuals. These writers, historians, and filmmakers, among others, are catalogued in alphabetic order. As Donadey points out, such recognition of other authors and artists and their work occurs throughout Sebbar's oeuvre and "permettre à un lectorat qui ne connaîtrait pas ces sources d'apprendre qu'elles existent et d'y avoir accès" ("Retour" 191). Donadey links this bibliographic tendency to Sebbar's work as a teacher in a Parisian high school. This theory is further advanced by the fact that Editions Thierry Magnier, a publishing house

mostly dedicated to distributing books for children and young adults, published *La Seine*. The marketing of this book to a young adult readership exposes these events to an audience who, like the book's protagonists, were not alive in 1961. For the author, her fictionalized account fills in the gaps left by the history textbooks. For the publisher, it allows them to engage with a wider audience. They seek out a young readership that might identify with the central protagonists Amel, Louis, or Omer.

Moreover, this alphabetic list of characters, preceded by two specific groups, resembles a war memorial, one of Pierre Nora's named *lieux de mémoire*.[107] Often memorials are dedicated "aux victimes de la guerre." Throughout *La Seine*, Sebbar proves her familiarity with numerous memorials around the French capital. Her main characters, Amel, Louis, and Omer, perform a rewriting of these state-authorized dedications. For instance, Louis films a plaque near the entrance to "La Santé" Prison found in the fourteenth *arrondissement*:

'EN CETTE PRISON
LE 11 NOVEMBRE 1940
FURENT INCARCÉRÉS
DES LYCÉENS ET DES ÉTUDIANTS
QUI À L'APPEL DU GÉNÉRAL DE GAULLE
SE DRESSÈRENT LES PREMIERS
CONTRE L'OCCUPANT' (28)

[107] Nora's conceptualization of *lieux de mémoire* is key to Rothberg's "multidirectional memories" thesis. Notably, in Nora's multiple volume work *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, in which he identities the various physical, intellectual, and emotional places of memory that form the French nation, he scarcely mentions Algeria.

Upon seeing this Omer decides to correct the details of the commemorative plaque with red spray paint:

‘1954-1962

DANS CETTE PRISON

FURENT GUILLOTINÉS

DES RÉSISTANTS ALGÉRIENS

QUI SE DRESSÈRENT

CONTRE L’OCCUPANT FRANÇAIS’ (29)

This inscription recycles the words of the original in order to recall the similarities of the events that happened inside the prison during World War II and during the Algerian War for Independence. The protagonists share a close connection to this prison, as their female relatives (mothers or grandmothers) were imprisoned here during the War. The reclaiming through rewriting of *La Santé* is, as Rothberg suggests, a way to acknowledge the violent past while proposing “a potentially peaceful future through the agency of a just and relational remembrance” (306-307). It is a very visible dissent to the official French history found in educational texts and inscribed on buildings throughout Paris. However, unlike the engraved words, Omer’s spray paint does not carry the same memorializing power, as it is only temporary. It will either fade or be cleaned off in short order. Omer hopes that before his text disappears it might be seen and understood by others, who like him, question the history that the French government choses to acknowledge and engrave.

Sebbar’s Dedication serves a “just and relational remembrance” that looks towards the future. In it, she consecrates the book “aux victimes algériennes” and “au

Comité Maurice-Audin." More precisely, Sebbar's choice of words mirrors those found on another memorial that was dedicated in 1994, just two years before *La Seine* takes place: the memorial commemorating those detained at *le Rafle du Vélodrome d'Hiver* during World War II. During this incident, which has been compared to the Paris Massacre, the French Police force aided in rounding up tens of thousands of Jewish citizens and detaining them at large venues throughout the city, before deporting them to internment and death camps. The memorial for these individuals, found on Quai de Grenelle in Paris' fifteenth arrondissement reads:

LA REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE
EN HOMMAGE AUX VICTIMES DES PERSECUTIONS
RACISTES ET ANTISEMITES ET DES CRIMES
CONTRE L'HUMANITE COMMIS SOUS L'AUTORITE DE FAIT DITE
'GOUVERNMENT DE L'ETAT FRANCAIS' 1940-1944.
N'OUBLIONS JAMAIS.[108]

By replacing "antisémites" and "1940-1944" with "anti-musulmane" and "1961" respectively, this monument could easily be interchanged for one commemorating October 1961. The author resists the red spray paint of her young protagonists in favor of the pen. In the absence of any official state memorial—it is only in 2001 that a small plaque was placed on the St. Michel Bridge to commemorate those lost on October 17, 1961—, Sebbar pays tribute to the nameless Algerian victims of the Paris Massacre. Her memorial, rather than being anchored to any one place, has the advantage of being able to

[108] Azagury, Mario and Walter Spitzer. *Monument Commémoratif des Victimes de la Rafle du Vel d'Hiv*. 1994. Quai de Grenelle, Paris, France.

circulate widely. As such, her "monument" can share the multiple histories—not the singular engraved history—of *ce jour-là.*

The dedication to the Audin Committee invokes Maurice Audin. Audin, a young family man of French origin living and teaching in Algeria in the 1950s, was an outspoken supporter of Algerian Independence and a member of the Algerian Communist Party (PCA). Following the Battle of Algiers in 1957,[109] Audin vanished never to be heard from again. It is widely believed that he was tortured to death by French forces. His disappearance became a rallying point for French intellectuals and resistants who saw "l'affaire Audin" as the opportunity to raise questions about the situation in Algeria as well as the use of torture.[110] The Comité Audin was founded in order to find the truth about what happened to Audin as well as denounce French actions in Algeria.

Sebbar's dedication to both the Algerian victims and the Audin Committee immediately announces her desire to respond to the institutionalized silence surrounding Algerian Independence. She acknowledges the participation of both native Algerians and French individuals in the conflict. Her intention is not to create a polarized discourse that sets "us" against "them," Algeria versus France. Rather, it is to recognize the complicated and often unclear relationships that exist between populations. Furthermore, the nod to both groups recognizes the intertwined nature of conflict. The disappearance and death of the Algerian victims was the result of the same oppressive policies that played into Audin's death. In the end, it does not matter who one is, of Algerian or French origin,

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[109] The Battle of Algiers was a campaign led by the Algerian Front de libération nationale (FLN) as an attempt to root out French forces in the capital. It is notably depicted in the Italian director Gilles Pontecorvo's 1966 film of the same name. The title of Jean-Luc Einaudi's 1991 book about the Paris Massacre entitled *La Bataille de Paris* evokes this earlier battle.

[110] Audin was scheduled to defend his doctoral dissertation in math at the Sorbonne in Paris shortly a few after his disappearance. His defense was held without him, and he passed with honors. For more on "L'affaire Audin" see: *La Question* by Henri Alleg and *L'Affaire Audin: 1957-198* by Pierre Vidal-Naquet.

visible dissent to French policies leaves one vulnerable to the ultimate punishment: invisible death.

This invisibility is underlined by the fact that Sebbar is unable to name those disappeared during the Paris Massacre. In lieu of inscribing these names, Sebbar instead includes the names of those who have worked to ensure that the actions of October 17, 1961 are not forgotten.[111] These individuals have created films, books, and photographs that interrogate the motivations, actions, and repercussions of this day. Despite the political silence surrounding the events, the work of these artists has kept a memory of *that day* alive. In this sense, Sebbar's enumeration is a sort of living memorial.

By dedicating her book to these ten individuals, she enters into dialogue with them. The author recognizes the diverse contributions of each interlocutor to her own project. Subsequently, multiple scholars' work on the Dedication has by and large underplayed the diversity of perspectives introduced by Sebbar. Instead, they focus on the authors. In the "Introduction" to the English translation of *La Seine était rouge*, aptly titled *The Seine was Red*, the translator Mildred Mortimer notes:

> Sebbar is neither the first nor the only novelist to examine the massacre and the silence that surrounded it. In fact, at the beginning of *La Seine était rouge*, she acknowledges the other writers who preceded her in this endeavor: Didier Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, 1984; Nacer Kettane, *Le sourire de Brahim*, 1985; Medhi Lallaoui, *Les Beurs de Seine*, 1986; Georges Mattei, *La guerre des gusses*, 1982. She pays tribute to the

[111] At the time of publication, the deaths of these "victims" had not been acknowledged and thus their identities remained unknown. It is only later that Jean-Luc Einaudi publishes a full list of individuals who were killed on October 17, 1961 in his 2001 book *Octobre 1961: Un massacre à Paris.* Einaudi's list will be criticized for its inaccuracy by the historian Jean-Paul Brunet in *Police contre FLN* as well as by House and MacMaster.

> historians, photographers, and journalists who struggled to bring this hidden chapter of French history to light as well. Sebbar is, however, the first to use the historical event as the entire subject of a novel" (xiv-xv).

Mortimer's remarks place a heavy focus on the other authors to whom Sebbar makes reference while hardly recognizing the artists who have employed other formats to make the events visible ("She pays tribute to the historians, photographers, and journalists who struggled to bring this hidden chapter of French history to light as well"). This is perhaps not surprising, given the fact that Mortimer herself is a professor of literature and approached this as a project of literary translation. However, by highlighting these four authors, Mortimer in effect "silences" the six other individuals (and two groups) to whom Sebbar dedicates her book. These "historians, photographers, and journalists" remain nameless to Mortimer who, through this move, places an overwhelming importance on literature over other forms of interrogation. In her analysis of Sebbar's novel, the scholar notes: "Significantly, Noria's process of remembering is mediated through a camera held by an outsider" (xix). Mortimer recognizes the need for other media, but only in so much as they are mediated by and through writing. I use her comments only as an exemplary phenomenon of the way in which multiple critics tend to privilege the written word over all else.[112] Sebbar, with this dedication, seems to be actively rejecting this notion by acknowledging the diverse materials that have guided and enlightened her own encounter with this event.

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[112] Donadey in both "Retour sur Mémoire" and "Anamnesis and National Reconciliation" showcases the authors and their novels while merely mentioning the other contributors. Catherine Dana focuses specifically on Daeninckx's work in "Les enfants Antigone." Karin Schwerdtner in "Enquête, Transmission et Désorde" alludes to others who have "documenté ou fictionnalisé l'événement," but in a footnote only specifically names Daeninckx (n. pag.). Laïla Amine in "Double Exposure" selectively includes these other interlocutors, naming Kagan and Péju (185). She later expands upon Daeninckx's *Meurtres* (187) and Kettane and Lallaoui's works (195).

Up until this point, we have seen two methods of categorizing Sebbar's interlocutors: the author's own alphabetic naming and Mortimer's thematic groupings. Absent from both of these strategies is an understanding of how these individuals chronologically fit into the documenting of the Paris Massacre. Such non-chronological approaches reflect the work of memory in the countering of forgetting, as Sebbar demonstrates in the poly-narrative and non-linear structure of *La Seine*. In her filmed recounting of October 17, Noria states:

> 'J'ai oublié de te dire…Louis quand on raconte, on oublie, tout vient dans le désordre, je ne peux plus dire exactement l'emploi du temps de ce soir-là, tu demanderas à Lalla, il faudra que tu remontes ton film dans l'ordre chronologique, si tu en trouves un, parce que je crois que la manifestation a eu lieu dans plusieurs endroits au même moment. Flora te dira ce qu'elle sait…' (103).

Noria's statement underlines a few key points. First, one of the constants in the process of remembering is forgetting. Throughout the novel, Noria repeats similar formulations: "j'ai oublié de dire qu'il pleuvait ce soir-là" (57). On a related note, memories do not resurface in a chronological order, but rather in "disorder." At the same time that Noria requests Louis to create a chronological order to his film, she doubts its existence. Finally, Amel's mother implores Louis to ask Lalla and Flora about their recollections of *that day*. She recognizes her own *oubli* and the possibility of others to complement her recollections. In this way, for Noria, memory is a collective endeavor. While remembering may be a non-linear process, a chronological approach allows us to identify both temporal and referential trends through connecting Sebbar's various interlocutors.

Through a sequential examination of the contributors to the history of October 1961, three time periods (the 1960s, the 1980s, and the 1990s) begin to emerge, each characterized by different mediums. In addition to paying homage by naming these individuals, Sebbar also acknowledges their multi-media contributions through weaving their documentary techniques into her own text.

The 1960s: Banned Image, Banned Text

The first time period of notable artistic production about the Paris Massacre that Sebbar acknowledges occurs in the days and weeks surrounding October 17, 1961. The materials that emerge from the likes of filmmaker Jacques Panijel, photojournalist Elie Kagan, journalist Paulette Péju, and publisher François Maspéro provide unparalleled audio, visual and textual documentation of the events. Although the government bans them shortly thereafter, these materials mark the first step in creating an historical memory.

Two of the most significant sources that emerge in the aftermath of *ce jour-là* include visual representations captured by Panijel and Kagan. In the days leading up to the planned pacific protests, Panijel, a former resistance fighter, clandestinely filmed the FLNs preparations. On October 17, he, along with his camera, took to the streets with the Algerian protestors, capturing the initial peaceful rally and the chaos as violence interrupted. In the days following the Bataille de Paris, Panijel continued filming and captures the reactions of the participants. The footage that he captured was made into a documentary entitled *Octobre à Paris* that was immediately banned by the French

government, although illegal screenings continued. His documentary was the only source providing visual and audio coverage from an Algerian point of view.

His recordings of FLN organizational meetings prove the peaceful intent of the protests. In one scene in which the FLN brass are captured planning the protests a member clearly states: "C'est une manifestation contre la violence, c'est une manifestation de pacifique, donc on n'a pas le droit de prendre des armes, même un couteau." In acknowledgement of Panijel's work, Sebbar re-uses this precise language within the filmic testimonies of *La Seine*. Throughout Louis's film multiple witnesses repeat the notion that the protests were initially planned and indeed carried out as non-violent. Noria describes the protests: "Une manifestation pacifique pour protester contre le couvre-feu imposé aux seuls Algériens, par le préfet de Paris, Papon" (42). Again later in her recollection, she remembers her father's description of the event before leaving the house: "Il a ajouté: 'c'est pacifique', il a répété plusieurs fois 'pacifique' (56). Although only a small child in 1961, Noria has a clear memory of the intent of the demonstrations. Her recollections are supported by another witness, *L'Algérien sauvé des eaux* who states: "Et ceux qui one été tués pendant la manifestation pacifique? Je sais qu'elle était pacifique. Pas de couteaux, pas de bâtons, pas d'armes, la consigne de la Fédération de France. Je le sais." He affirms the actual non-violent nature of the protests by reiterating the organizer's claim: *pas d'armes, même un couteau*. A third witness *Le Flic de Clichy*, a partisan of the French cause rather than the Algeria one like Noria and *L'Algérien*, confirms this pacifism: "ils étaient pas venus à Paris pour tout casser, c'était une manifestation pacifique. Ils ont pas tiré sur nous, ils étaient pas armés…" (121). The iteration and re-iteration through filmed colloquial speech of the intent of the

demonstrations shows just one instance of the influence that Panijel had on Sebbar's work, both in terms of content and style.

Panijel, however, is not the only visual artist referenced in *La Seine*. Another witness in Louis's film, *L'étudiant français*, remarks: "Un ami de mes parents, Elie Kagan, a traversé Paris avec sa Vespa jusqu'à Nanterre où il savait que des Algériens avaient été tués. J'ai vu peu de photos de ce jour tragique. Les journalistes n'on pas fait leur travail" (95). Many of the photos that appear in the days following the protests were indeed made by Kagan. Kagan, a French-Jewish photographer who survived World War II in hiding, entered into photojournalism in order to capture on film the ongoing oppression by those in positions of power. With this in mind, on October 17, 1961 Kagan travelled to the different protest spots around Paris (*Pont de Neuilly, Grands Boulevards*, and *Saint Michel*—much like Amel and Omer) in order to filmically shoot the events of the day. He was one of the few, if not the only photographer, to capture the events of October 1961 as they unfolded. His photographs visually document the repression and violence exercised by the French police force against Algerians in Paris: dead bodies on the street, a wounded Algerian man in the Solférino metro station, and even an image of the unharmed Maurice Papon.[113] Many of his photos were included as part on an exposé done by the left-leaning newspaper the *Témoignage chrétien.* Shortly after its publication, the article, much like *Octobre à Paris*, was banned and Kagan's images were confiscated. As the old saying goes "a picture is worth a thousand words" and the circulation of these images almost single-handedly discredited the official narrative put forth by the French police.

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[113] These images (forty-four in all), along with the rest of Kagan's archive, are now housed in Nanterre, France at the *Bibliothèque de documentation Internationale contemporaine,* where they are available for public viewing.

In *La Seine*, included at intervals throughout Louis's film are archival photos. Although Sebbar does not explicitly identify these images they are clearly Kagan's. There are three notable instances, all following Noria's textimony, where photographs appear. First, "On voit des photos d'archives de La Folie à Nanterre" (35). The few details make it difficult to identify both the image and the photographer, although we know that Kagan shot in Nanterre. The second occurrence of a photograph is more descriptive: "On voit une rue, la nuit. Des images d'archives où des hommes en uniforme frappent d'autres hommes en civil, des Algériens" (43). This description leads us directly to one of Kagan's photos in which uniformed men beat Algerian protestors. Sebbar explains the third photograph most graphically of all: "On voit les photos de la station Concorde. Sur le quai, CONCORDE, en lettre capitales géantes, blanches sur fond bleu, dans un cadre de céramique décorée. Des policiers en képi poussent des Algériens contre les carreaux blancs. Ils ont les mains sur la tête." (81). Kagan captured this very scene. Although Sebbar does not physically include Kagan's images, the increasingly vivid descriptions recall them for all who have at one point or another encountered these photographs.

The question arises: why does Sebbar include descriptions of unattributed photographs? Her choice to include these few images within Louis's film relates back to her own photographic encounters. If a single photograph could aid her in recalling her experience of the Paris Massacre—an event at which she was not even present—, could a photograph help others in remembering too? Furthermore, these pictures provide a visual context with which the young viewers who have no memory of the events can connect. Although Amel, Louis, and Omer may not have been in the Concorde Métro on October

17, 1961, they have been there since. Although they may never have been personally detained by the police, the threat is always there. In fact, there are concerns for Omer's wellbeing because he is in France *sans papiers* (87). By including these photographic descriptions, Sebbar attempts to make the history of *that day* accessible to multiple generations.

Visual documentation however was not the only kind to be banned, written accounts were as well. Péju, witness to the atrocities committed against Maghrebian citizens in Paris, notably documented her journalistic investigations in two books: *Les harkis à Paris* (July 1961) and *Rattonades à Paris* (November 1961). The second of these two texts deals directly with the October aggressions. Both of these works, initially published by Editions François Maspéro, a left-leaning publishing house, were immediately seized and banned by the French police (Vidal-Naquet "Préface," 6).[114] Sebbar is inspired by the journalistic integrity showed by Péju, who despite censorship continued to write about oppressive tactics by French forces. Within *La Seine*, Sebbar includes a nod to Péju through Omer's character, an aspiring Algerian journalist. She connects the suppression of journalistic integrity in 1961 to the clampdown in Algeria in the 1990s. While refusing to articulate why he is in France, Omer mentions casually: "A Alger je me déguisais … j'ai pris l'habitude" (32). Although not explicitly stated, it is implied that Omer was forced to hide his identity in order to survive the civil strife. Although Omer's safety as a journalist was compromised in Algeria, there remains some integrity to the Algerian press: Omer reads the paper everyday, specifically "la page des massacres" where he reads the names of the dead (40). Despite the continued violence, at least the contemporary newspapers include the names of those being killed.

[114] They were finally republished together in 2000 by La Découverte.

In light of the ban on the visual, audio, and textual documentation experienced throughout the struggle for Algerian Independence, François Maspéro played a crucial role in distributing illicit material. In addition to his publishing house, mentioned above as the distributor of Péju's investigative accounts, he also owned a bookstore in Paris that not only sold books, but also served as gathering place for those engaged in social causes that were not supported by the government, such as the battle for Algerian Independence. Sebbar evokes both of these roles within *La Seine*. On the one hand, *l'étudiant français* describes purchasing banned books such as *La Question* (on the Audin Affair) and *Le Déserteur* at La Joie de lire also known as "librarie Maspéro" (96-97). On the other hand, the bookstore is a haven for Noria and Lalla on October 17, 1961. In order to escape the brutal arms of the police they sought out shelter: " 'On a couru jusqu'à une librairie. La porte s'est entrouverte, on nous a tirées à l'intérieur. Ma mère s'est accroupie avec moi, au fond, derrière des piles de livres. Un jeune libraire m'a emmenée aux toilettes, j'avais eu tellement peur…' " (105). This anecdote serves as a metaphor for Maspéro's work as a publisher, store owner, and engaged citizen. Maspéro saw the truth that was available through books to serve as a shield and protector of the most vulnerable citizens, in this case a little girl and her mother as they participated in a "peaceful" protest.

These four actors played key roles in immediately documenting the violence that took place on October 17, 1961. Although their visual, oral, and textual accounts were officially banned, they remained alive through the back channels of entrepreneurial individuals like Maspéro. Sebbar's naming and citing of these individuals and their techniques serves a recuperative function in overcoming public visual and textual amnesia.

The 1980s: Return to Text

While the immediate aftermath of the Paris Massacre saw Panijel's documentary, Kagan's photos, and Péju's texts, the ensuing twenty years were marked by audio, visual, and textual silences that were a result of the systemic interdiction of all materials that did not support the official French history. However, 1981 signaled a turn in the public outlook. As previously mentioned, in 1981, Papon was first implicated in the Drancy deportations, leading also to the questioning of his role in other state events—namely the Paris Massacre. In the wake of these allegations, a series of texts appeared that make mention of these events. Mortimer enumerates these "French" and "Beur" fiction writers and their contributions: Didier Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, 1984; Nacer Kettane, *Le sourire de Brahim*, 1985; Medhi Lallaoui, *Les Beurs de Seine*, 1986; Georges Mattei, *La guerre des gusses*, 1982. The fictional narratives of these four authors comes at a critical juncture both in terms of history (the accusations launched against Papon) as well as in Sebbar's coming to terms with her Algerian past. It is during this same time period—in between the viewing of the two photos—that Sebbar reports becoming "less amnesic" and having more and more frequent "retours de mémoire" ("La Seine" 97). These authors' fictionalized references to the Paris Massacre create a textual road map that aids Sebbar with these "retours" and on which *La Seine* builds.

Sebbar's characters, as well as Sebbar herself, seek to introduce a history that more accurately corresponds to actual events. The French author Georges Mattei's 1982 novel, *La Guerre des Gusses,* provides a compelling critique of historical documentation. The title recalls *La Guerre des Gaules*, the French translation of Julius Cesar's *Commentaril de Bello Gallico*, a historical account of the Gallic Wars. Cesar's first-hand

account remains the most complete historical resource documenting the wars. Yet it also raises some key issues: what is the status of a historical record written by the perpetrator and the victor? Where is the line between truth and fiction? Mattei's novel puts into question the ways in which history is portrayed and who gets to portray it. His main character Nonoss, a French soldier drafted to participate in Algerian Occupation deserts his post and becomes a supporter of Algerian Independence. It must be noted that this refusal to participate in French occupation comes from a French man rather than an Algerian or French-Algerian. The publication and success of Mattie's narrative is contingent upon who tells the story—in this case a French author and a French protagonist. Moreover, the use of *les gusses,* a colloquial term for French soldiers fighting in Algeria, establishes a linguistic familiarity that is reinforced by Nonoss's continued relationship with his soldier friend who remains in Algeria. War becomes complicated by personal relationships with individuals of conflicting political affiliations. It is perhaps for this reason that silence shrouds the events of October 17, 1961: how does one denounce their friend, neighbor, or countryman?

Sebbar carefully navigates her fictionalized history in *La Seine.* Notably, the narrative has no one central voice of authority; it is split between the present-day search for truth by the young trio of characters, Noria's recounts, and the testimonies of diverse individuals. Although Sebbar privileges Noria's account by assigning multiple chapters to her, she also provides a wealth of other histories by diverse individuals—*Le harki de Papon, l'Algérien sauvé des eaux, and L'amant français*. Furthermore, *La Seine* addresses the complicated nature of individual relationships. In recounting her family's

history, Noria evokes the death of her uncle, a member of the MNA, at the hands of the FLN, the organization for which her father served as a *chef de réseau*:

> Est-ce que mon père savait que son frère appartenait au MNA, un parti rival du FLN? Il n'a pas répondu à mes questions. […] J'étais étudiante et mon père refusait de me parler de ces histoires entre le FLN et le MNA, de son frère et de lui dans ces histoires, de son frère assassiné, son corps exposé à tous, pour l'exemple….D'autres, aujourd'hui assassinent, laissent pourrir les cadavres sur les places, au bord des routes, des frères, des pères, des amis….des ennemis… (42-43).

Just as Mattei explores the historically relevant and deeply personal circumstances of War, so too does Sebbar. In 1961, political allegiances trumped family allegiances. Noria's uncle's murder advances the cause of the latter's brother, Noria's father. Yet, this political death suffers from personal amnesia on the part of the father: a pathological refusal to speak about it. This Sebbar critiques the narrative present (1996) and the civil war raging in Algeria in which political loyalty continues to undermine personal relationships.

While Mattei inscribes his novel within an historical framework, Didier Daeninckx's, in his 1984 *Meurtres pour Mémoire*, uses the medium of the detective novel to interrogate two connected historical events. Throughout the course of the novel, Daeninckx parallels the Drancy deportations of World War II—the same deportations for which Papon will be condemned of crimes against humanity—and of October 17, 1961, implying that during both, the same individuals were in positions of power, orchestrating and systematically attempting to eliminate certain sections of the population. The French

author's fictional work anticipates what will be made clear during Papon's trial over a decade later—there is a direct link between the players in World War II and the Paris Massacre, namely Papon himself—a theme that returns in Sebbar's work. Throughout *Meurtres pour Mémoire*, the main character Detective Cadin, tries to solve the murders of Roger Thiraud and his son Bernard. The senior Thiraud is shot in the head as he leaves the cinema on October 17, 1961. His son is similarly murdered years later in Toulouse as he attempts to finish writing a book that his father had started on his (the father's) hometown of Drancy—including the history of the internment camp. Daeninckx's novel is a series of mises-en-abymes investigations: Roger Thiraud studies the Drancy internment camps, Bernard Thiraud probes his father's October 17 murder and the Drancy internment camps, Detective Cadin seeks answers to the murders of both Thiraud men and information about the internment camps. These narrative threads allow the author to examine through a popular medium of the detective novel, the relationship between the Paris Massacre, the French internment camps, and the imposed silence—notably the deaths of the Thirauds—that surrounds them.

Although not explicitly a detective novel *La Seine* employs strategies that mirror those found in Daeninckx's work. From the outset, Amel, Louis, and Omer seek information about *ce jour-là.* Through his film Louis, much like a police investigator, interrogates diverse witnesses. Amel and Omer, working as a team, cover different areas of Paris and question individuals about their experiences of *that day.* In order to uncover the truth, the investigators (Amel, Louis and Omer) must persuade silenced witnesses of this past to speak about it. In the end, this investigative work to find out about the Paris Massacre provides the three detectives an avenue to probe farther back in history to

Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt—where the novel ends. In the absence of any official police investigation or history, Sebbar's main characters become detectives who seek answers about their familial and cultural histories.

The genre of the detective novel occupies a peculiar status. In her analysis of Daeninckx's work, Catherine Dana explains this position:

> Il [*Meurtres pour Mémoire*] est un des premiers [livres] à revenir sur l'événement [le 17 octobre, 1961] et le premier à l'intégrer dans un roman, un roman policier de surcroît. C'est-à-dire dans un livre populaire, destiné à la lecture de masse….Daeninckx inscrit l'historiquement inacceptable et tabou, l'intransmissible, l'incommunicable dans une structure policière….Les livres de Daeninckx se veulent littérature populaire certes mais également littérature des marges, c'est-à-dire qui conserve le privilège de parler du centre à partir de la périphérie, de commenter le discours officiel à partir des marges de l'histoire, de créer au nom des marginaux une parole filée constitutive (114).

Daeninckx's use of a popular medium allows for him to speak about the center from the periphery. In other words, the author is able to delve into issues that have traditionally been ignored and silenced. This contribution opens up the public's minds to the possibility of considering what happened on October 17, 1961 and the consequences of these events.

Daeninckx's "constitutive speech" within the popular genre sets the stage for more marginalized authors to enter into the discourse regarding the Paris Massacre—notably "Beur" authors. In his only published novel, *Le Sourire de Brahim* (1985), Nacer

Kettane, a "beur," consecrates a chapter to the events of October 17, 1961. In "Octobre à Paris"—a nod to Panijel's documentary work—Kettane sets the tone for the book by placing the book's protagonist, at the center of the Parisian protests. Brahim, a child, participates with his family, mother, father and two siblings in the protests during which Brahim's younger brother Kader, caught in the gunfire, is shot in the head and killed. This marks a turning point in Brahim's life: "Ce jour-là, le sourire de Brahim s'envola" (19). The remainder of the novel focuses on Brahim's ability to overcome this foundational event and once again find his "sourire." As the scholar Alec Hargreaves notes: "Although *Le Sourire de Brahim* is narrated in the third person, the protagonist's life history corresponds very closely to that of Kettane" (662). In the end, Brahim, like Kettane himself, credits his ability to overcome the trauma of his youth—and regain his smile—to his educational successes.[115] It is thanks to his education that Kettane is able to write a novel that is published by a French publishing house. Sebbar, too, engages with this question of education, notably in regards to Amel. Although unlike Brahim, Amel's traditional education will leave her underwhelmed when it comes to her own Algerian-French history. The detective work in which she engages with Louis and Omer—not her University courses—will truly teach her about history.

Kettane's novel is characteristic of early "Beur" novels that tend to have "simple semi-autobiographical formats" (Hargreaves 665). Mehdi Lallaoui's *Les Beurs de Seine* (1986) does not follow this structure. Notably, his novel is characterized by "gaps and other disruptions in the chronology of events" (662), as well as a "trio of central characters" (663). These same terms accurately characterize *La Seine.* The structure

[115] Kettane, in addition to being a licensed doctor, also co-founded Radio Beur, Beur FM and Beur TV—media outlets aimed at Franco-Maghrebi audiences.

throughout the episodic novel alternates between the present, the past (the recollections of the different witnesses—*Le harki de Papon, La Patronne*, etc), and Noria's past-present in which she interacts with Louis in the present as he films her recounting the past. This tri-narrative structure (present, past, past-present) is further bolstered by Sebbar's own "trio of central characters"—Amel, Louis, and Omer and their multiple identities as French-Algerian, French, and Algerian respectively. The non-linear narratives created by both Lallaoui and Sebbar reflect the complicated nature of history and identity.

The 1990s: From Oral to Visual to Trial and Beyond

If the 1980s were characterized by fictional retellings of the Paris Massacre, the 1990s favored historically accurate accounts. Sebbar's 1999 fictionalized *La Seine* is preceded by Jean-Luc Einuadi's 1991 *La Bataille de Paris—17 octobre 1961* and Anne Tristan's book and documentary both entitled *Le Silence du Fleuve*. Einaudi's book is one of the first full-length studies devoted singularly to this day. Notably, it implicates Papon, the then police commissioner of Paris, as the chief organizer of the violent attacks. Einaudi's characterization of Papon as a nationalistic, calculating, and coldhearted leader will become the basis for a defamation lawsuit by Papon against Einaudi—Papon accuses Einaudi for defamation following the formers conviction of Crimes against Humanity in early 1998. Although not explicitly stated, the impetus for Amel's interest in the Paris Massacre is linked with this trial. As Noria notes: "le préfet de Paris, Papon….celui dont on parle et qui sera jugé pour avoir envoyé des Juifs dans les

camps Nazis, on en parle beaucoup, c'est le même" (42). Papon's visibility due to the trial serves as a reminder to many, such as Noria, of his role on *ce jour-là*.

Also appearing in 1991 is Anne Tristan's documentary film *Le Silence du Fleuve*. Made in collaboration with Lallaoui, Agnès Denis, and the newly formed organization *Au nom de la Mémoire,*[116] *Le Silence* includes interviews and archival footage in order to recreate a history for October 17, 1961. This documentary, which no doubt was inspired by Panijel's film, serves as a model for *La Seine* due to the range of perspectives it incorporates. Over the course of the hour-long documentary, various individuals including leaders of the FLN, a female protestor, a French police officer, a "gardien de la paix," Parisian city councilors, and a Catholic priest, among others, testify about their experience of October 17, 1961. Although clearly one-sided in its message (French forces were responsible for the brutal massacre of peaceful Algerian protestors), the documentary does not shy away from differing perspectives. Instead, these countering viewpoints, ranging from complete condemnation of French aggression to complete condemnation of Algerian aggression (those who ordered the protests), strengthen the overall narrative. Sebbar repeats this structure in *La Seine*, employing a variety of different witnesses including *le patron du café Atlas, le flic de Clichy,* and *l'amant français.* These witnesses offer multiple perspectives of the events of October 17, 1961 and refuse a singular historical narrative.

In addition to the documentary, Tristan published a book of the same name. While *Le Silence du Fleuve*, both the documentary and the book, focus on breaking silence and recuperating memory through naming—an oral process— *La Seine était rouge*—through

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[116] Founded in 1990, to date the association has funded numerous projects including books, films and hosted debates and other public forums that encourage antiracist discourses in promoting memories of immigrant workers, urban life and colonization.

the title alone—invokes a more visual approach to history. The need to do this can be related to each medium. Whereas a documentary film is by nature a combination of visual and oral stimulation, a book tends to emphasis its textual elements. By calling the reader's attention to the visual through the declaration "the Seine was red," Sebbar from the outset places her text in a visual framework. This structure is reinforced throughout by the aforementioned documentary techniques and photographic archive.

The "order" created by this chronological accounting reveals how each generation borrows from its predecessors, especially Sebbar. Just as for Noria, each instance of remembering among these interlocutors brings to light a different detail or a new approach to the situation. In the end, it is the collective memories of all these contributors—photographic, filmic, journalistic, historical, and fictional—that create *La Seine était rouge.*

This Section, "Sebbar and her Interlocutors," has focused specifically on the diverse individuals who have contributed, starting in the 1960s and continuing into the 1990s, to the creation of a visual, oral, and textual (fiction and non-fiction) narratives about October 17, 1961. Notably, Sebbar, by acknowledging their contributions, aligns *La Seine* with their work. Through this Dedication, Sebbar sets up the various techniques that she will then use in the body of the novel. These extra textual gestures are central to the argument that for memory to be recovered, various individuals and mediums must be involved. In the following section, I examine how the multi-media methods used by these other authors and artists contribute to the advancement of *La Seine*'s plot, and the education of the central character, Amel.

Amel: Learning How to See

Up until this point, we have encountered the different mediums (radio, photography, documentary film, and investigative and fiction texts) and interlocutors (photographers, filmmakers, historians, journalists, and novelists) with which Sebbar engages as related although independent and at times seemingly disjointed pieces of a larger whole. In *La Seine*, the author employs the character of Amel to link these various formats and contributors together. Even though the progression of the narrative is not linear *per se*, the intersecting plot lines—Amel's story, Louis's film, and Noria's retelling of *that day*—build upon each other. In the end we find that framed within the context of the Paris Massacre is Amel's journey to locate her own French-Algerian identity, that is to say both French *and* Algerian. Amel finds that in order to understand her own cultural and political history, she cannot rely on any *one* narrative whether French or Algerian, written or spoken, visual or textual, etc. Rather to truly understand her own hybridity, she must identify how all these mediums are parts of a complex network that complement one another. Over the course of the novel, Amel slowly begins to understand this complexity and develops new oral, visual, and placed-based ways of processing identity.

Dire

As we have seen *La Seine* weaves together oral and visual accounts from numerous individuals from October 17, 1961 in an attempt to tell a previously silenced history. From the outset, we follow Amel's quest to learn about her cultural and family history in relationship to the events of *ce jour,* but is unable, due to the cultural and family silence that surrounds it.

Even though Amel's mother and grandmother discuss this history, the former's inability to speak Arabic prevents her from learning about it. Starting with the first line of the book ("Sa mère ne lui a rien dit ni la mère de sa mère"" (15), Sebbar inscribes an intergenerational silence that drives the narrative structure.[117] Paradoxically, Sebbar exploits this silence in the first chapter of the book through a verbal exchange between Amel and her grandmother, Lalla, during which Amel implores Lalla to tell her about her experiences from October 17, 1961:

> 'Tu m'as *dit* que c'était des années difficiles et si je te pose des questions, tu ne réponds pas.' 'Plus tard, ma fille, plus tard, pour l'instant j'ai pas envie. Parlons d'aujourd'hui…' 'Tu *dis* toujours ça, plus tard, plus tard et je sais rien. Tu parles avec maman, tu pourrais me *dire* tout, et tu ne *di*s rien, et maman ne *dit* rien. Tu répètes que je suis savante, tu te moques, je ne sais rien. Tu parles de secret. C'est quoi un secret? C'est si affreux pour tout cacher?' 'Tout, non, mais ce qui fait mal, oui. Voilà, je voulais pas te *dire* que le Malheur existe, et tu m'obliges…' 'Mais je le sais, tu m'apprends rien. On le voit tous les jours à la télé, on le lit, je le lis dans les livres…' 'Dans les livres, à la télé…C'est pas pareil ce que je te *dirai* un jour, *au jour dit*, et ta mère aussi.' 'Au jour *dit*? Comment tu sauras?' "Je sais, c'est tout…' (16 my emphasis)

This conversation, beseeching Lalla to share her silenced "secret," revolves around the verb *dire,* which communicates two main ideas. First, this passage reveals a strong correlation between telling (*dire*) and knowing (*savoir)*. Although Amel and her

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[117] See Mildred Mortimer's "Probing the Past" in which she identifies three reasons for this silence.

grandmother have had some limited interaction concerning the "difficult years," when Amel presses Lalla to expand upon them, she only wants to talk about the present. Due to Lalla's reticence, Amel must turn to other sources of knowledge: television and books. At first, this does not pose a problem for Amel who is considered the family scholar: she is enrolled at university, spends much of her free time at the library, and speaks English, Latin and Greek (16). For her family, such studies represent the foundation of a solid French education that will provide Amel with many opportunities, but as Donadey contends the educational system also serves to "reinforce a sense of national identity"(*Recasting* 6)—in this case French. This scholarly appropriation of a French national identity acts as a hindrance in Amel's search for her cultural and familial past. Moreover, the French academic resources do not provide her with the information she seeks, as the events of October 17, 1961 have been largely excluded from French historical accounts (especially in 1996 when this book takes place).[118] Even if the French classroom had provided Amel access to a shared French and Algerian history, Lalla discounts this type of learning. Although she values Amel's classical education, in accounting for her own cultural history she privileges first-hand accounts over those found in books or on television. Yet, when she is asked to share her experience, she puts it off until another day, *le jour dit*. As such, despite her desire to learn about the Paris Massacre, Lalla's refusal to speak about it in French relegates Amel to a status of outsider to her own history. In other words, because Lalla *ne dit rien*, Amel *ne sait rien*.

[118] Notably we can point to the controversial February 2005 law (Loi n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés) that required high school textbooks to present French Colonialism in a positive way. Although amended in 2006, the initial passage of such a law reflects the public and political support for historical narratives that reject facts in favor of French positivism. Donadey in part accounts for a lack of available resources documenting French and Algerian history as part of France's "Algeria syndrome."

Additionally, in this exchange between Amel and Lalla, *dire* is used as an adjective in the phrase *au jour dit*. Amel questions her grandmother about how she will know when the time is right to talk about the Paris Massacre: "*Comment tu sauras?*" By posing this question in the future tense, Amel inserts doubt about the possibility of this *jour dit* ever taking place while simultaneously re-inscribing a relationship of telling (*dire*) and knowing *(savoir)*. Notably, Amel's question emphasizes her lack of knowledge in comparison with her grandmother. Lalla reinforces this divide by responding affirmatively, "*je sais, c'est tout*"(16). Amel begins to realize that if she really wants to learn about the Paris Massacre, she cannot rely on her grandmother and her *jour dit*—a day that may never come.

Amel's relationship with Louis and Omer provides her an alternative perspective on the events of October 17, 1961. The narrator notes: "Si elle n'avait pas rencontré Louis et Omer, Amel n'aurait rien su. 'Au jour dit', répète Lalla. Elle peut mourir avant le jour dit" (19). Louis, the son of a French *porteuse de valise,* and Omer, an aspiring Algerian journalist who takes refuge in Paris in order to escape the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, belong to the same generation as Amel—born a decade or more after Algerian independence. Like Amel, both Louis and Omer are interested in learning more about French-Algerian history, specifically the Paris Massacre. Together, they begin to interrogate this history through Louis's documentary film, by retracing the route that the Algerian protestors took through Paris, and by engaging with different individuals who were present on October 17, 1961. Through these diverse experiences, Amel stops simply accepting what she has (not) been told and begins to interrogate the past.

Voir

Louis's documentary film, consisting of a number of different individuals who recount their memories of October 17, 1961, reinforces Amel's interest in these events. Sebbar incorporates this film by interspersing scenes throughout the novel. These filmic passages are immediately distinguishable from other chapters due to their naming and staging. First, each chapter is titled *Octobre 1961* followed by a description of the filmed individual: *Le patron du café l'Atlas, Le harki de Papon, l'Algérien sauvé des eaux, la patronne du café La Goutte d'Or, L'amant français, L'étudiant français, le libraire de la rue Saint-Séverin,* and *Le flic de Clichy*. Secondly*,* these recorded vignettes differ from other chapters because each begins with filmic directions that set the scene: *intérieur jour*, *extérieur jour*, or *extérieur nuit*.

In addition to these diverse individuals, Louis also films Amel's mother, Noria. Her accounts are represented in five different chapters each entitled "La mère." In each chapter, Noria talks in detail about her own memories from October 17, 1961. Her choice to share these recollections with Louis troubles Amel: "“à elle, sa mère n'a rien dit et elle a parlé à Louis. Longtemps. A elle, jamais plus d'une minute et demie….Et là, sa mère parle, parle, parle, elle ne s'arrête plus, et elle regarde Louis qui la filme. Son visage surtout" (31). Amel reacts to two aspects of Louis's filming of her mother. Noria's loquaciousness bothers Amel: she cannot stop talking. This is in strong juxtaposition to Amel's interaction with her mother in which Noria said "rien." Also, Noria and Louis have a visual connection: Noria looks at Louis and Louis returns this gaze through the camera lens. This interaction recalls Stora's assessment of the Algerian War for Independence in so much as it was a war without a name (for the French) or a face (for

the Algerians). For Amel (a French national of Algerian descent) it has neither a name nor a face: it is a complete void.

This combination of oral and visual communication between Noria and Louis proves too much for Amel. In both seeing and hearing her mother, Amel is overcome with emotion: "Si elle allait pleurer…Amel a fermé les yeux, un instant. Ne pas pleurer. La voix de sa mère. Sa mère est belle" (31). She closes her eyes to prevent herself from crying. Instead of looking at her mother, she listens to her voice and recalls her beauty: "sa mère est belle…Amel sait qu'elle est belle parce qu'on le dit" (31). Confronted with a recorded visual image of her mother's face, Amel rejects what she sees and resorts to her default setting: saying equals knowing (*On le dit donc elle le sait*).

Sebbar reinforces Amel's reaction to Noria. Unlike the other first-hand accounts, which are introduced through filmic staging (*intérieur jour, extérieur jour, extérieur nuit*) Sebbar refuses Noria a visual framework. Instead, Noria's testimony is strictly oral and as such is introduced by one of three sentences: "*Amel entend la voix de sa mère*" (18, 26, 40, 87), "*Amel entend sa mère*" (63), or finally "*On entend la voix de la mère*" (102). Furthermore, her recorded testimony is always placed in quotation marks (none of the other filmed testimonies are). However, there is a visual aspect to Noria's filmed accounts. Each of Noria's five chapters is supported by archival images. For instance, after describing her childhood in Nanterre, corroborating pictures appear: "La mère d'Amel s'est interrompue. On voit des photos d'archives de La Folie à Nanterre" (35). Interestingly, in order for this visual evidence to be seen, Noria must stop talking. Once her voice goes silent, these archival documents appear to support her testimony. It is only

after having watched the film and walking through Paris, that Amel will begin to unite her mother's voice and these images.

Savoir

Film scholar David MacDougall in *The Corporeal Image* examines the relationship between words and images and how they influence access to knowledge. He argues:

> By treating images—in painting, photograph and films—as a product of language in themselves, we ally them to a concept of thought that neglects many of the ways in which they create our knowledge. It is important to recognize this […] in order to reexamine the relation between seeing, thinking, and knowing and the complex nature of thought itself " (1-2).

Through Louis's film, Amel is able to rethink her own relationship to the Paris Massacre leading her, along with Omer, to retrace the route that the peaceful Algerian protestors took in 1961. Sebbar records their journey through assigning a chapter to each of the major protest landmarks: Nanterre, La Défense, République, La Concorde, Bonne-Nouvelle, and Saint-Michel. At each site there is a figure or inscription that symbolizes the French nation. For example at both La Défense and République Amel points out a statue of Marianne, the emblem representing France and its values. At Saint Michel and La Concorde, they identify inscriptions commemorating the French nation. Notably lacking from all of these sites is any acknowledgement of French-Algerian history, specifically any mention of the events of October 17, 1961. In the absence of such

physical markers, Louis's film acts as a monument to the Paris Massacre, inciting its viewers to revisit these famous landmarks and experience them in a new light.

By retracing the protestor's route, Amel and Omer are able to participate posthumously in the protest. Their physical presence at the different sites provides them with the opportunity to visualize and contextualize the events as depicted in the documentary in a new way. While at La Défense, Amel asks Omer:

> 'Tu sais que de l'obélisque de la Concorde, on voit l'arche de La Défense?' 'Non. Et alors?' 'Alors…*si tu as vraiment regardé le film de Louis, tu sais* qu'à la Défense, au rond-point de La Défense, au pont de Neuilly, à la Concorde, la police française et les harkis de Papon ont raflé, frappé, tué des Algériens, le 17 octobre, 1961. *Tu l'as vu, non? Tu le savais déjà*? Ca t'intéresse pas ou quoi?'" (51-52, my emphasis).

Amel and Omer's visit to La Défense (as well as the other sites) prompts Amel to reconsider Louis's film. Although she has undoubtedly visited these places before, they now take on new meanings. These landmarks are no longer just points on the Parisian landscape, but rather occupy an important role in Amel's own history.

Moreover, this passage reveals an evolution in Amel's thinking about her access to historical knowledge. On two occasions she relates seeing to knowing: "Tu sais que de l'obélisque de la concorde, on voit l'arche de la Défense" (51) and then again "tu l'as vu, non? Tu le savais déja?" (52) Amel contends that by closely watching Louis's film, Omer should have learned about the role of different landmarks in the Paris Massacre. Then, Amel expresses her surprise that Omer did not have a stronger reaction after seeing the archival images. In both cases, Amel equates seeing (*voir*) and knowing (*savoir*).

Earlier in the novel, Amel asserted that she did not *know* about the Paris Massacre because Lalla refused to *tell* her about it. Amel's viewing of the documentary, and her subsequent reflection about it as she moves through Paris, provides her with knowledge about October 17th, 1961—knowledge that she sees disseminated by a variety of individuals and images, that she watches with a mixed French and Algerian audience (Louis and Omer), and that can be viewed, re-viewed, interpreted and reinterpreted over time.

In the end, Amel starts to truly *see* the world around her. This consists engaging, through Louis's film, with various oral, visual and finally embodied experiences that reveal, as MacDougall suggests, access to complex ways of knowing. Sebbar uses Amel as a vehicle to expose predilections for certain types of knowledge (written, oral, visual, or embodied) and how these preferences limit our understanding of historical events and personal identity.

Postlogue

In the fifteen years since the publication of *La Seine était rouge* the public discourse surrounding the Paris Massacre has dramatically changed. In 2001 the Archives containing French government documents about the Algerian War for Independence were opened (House and MacMaster 314). In this same year, on October 17, Bernard Delanoë, then-mayor of Paris dedicated a plaque to the "nombreux Algériens tués lors de la sanglante répression de la manifestation pacifique du 17 octobre 1961" (Bernard and Garin). In addition, the year 2003 was named "Année de l'Algérie en France" or "El Djazaïr." Conceived of by the French and Algerian presidents, respectively Jacques

Chirac (1995-2007) and Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1999-present), the yearlong celebration was meant as a symbolic "*recommencement*" of the troubled relationship between France and Algeria. The numerous cultural events held throughout the year included an exhibit on the Sahara at the Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Paris and staging of Kateb Yacine's work at the Comédie Française (Nouel).[119] In 2012, fifty-one years after the deadly protests the French Senate adopted a measure officially recognizing the repression exercised against Algerian protestors on October 17, 1961 ("17 octobre 1961: le Sénat reconnaît la repression").

In this same year, the French president François Hollande, on the fifty-first anniversary of the Paris Massacre, issued a written statement in regards to French actions of that day. It read: "Le 17 octobre 1961, des Algériens manifestaient pour le droit à l'indépendance ont été tués lors d'une sanglante répression. La République reconnaît avec lucidité ces faits. Cinquante et un ans après cette tragédie, je rends hommage à la mémoire des victimes" (Cited in "Hollande reconnaît"). This statement was met by opposition on almost all sides within the French government. Those on the left as well as surviving participants of the demonstrations contended that Hollande did not go far enough. Nowhere in his statement did he name the perpetrators of this violence—French officials—or the precise human cost ("Hollande reconnaît"). Those on the right argued that Hollande's recognition of these events further eroded French power and added to the "culpabilité permanente" of the French state ("17 octobre 1961: Vives Critiques"). In the end, by merely paying tribute ("je rends hommage"), Hollande negotiates a middle

[119] These events were not without controversy. Dominique Wallon, the French director of the event resigned after he found that the budget allocated by the French government was not sufficient. In addition, many claimed that Franocphone artists were being chosen to participate instead their Arabic-speaking counterparts. In the end numerous Kabyle artists boycotted the events, refusing to "danser dans la mare de sang de nos martyrs fraîchement enterrés" (cited in Nouel).

ground between the two sides. He neither denies the events nor apologizes for them. He simply recognizes that they happened. In effect, he continues to keep silent about the involvement of the French state. However, this acknowledgment, vague as it might be, opens the door to the possibility of continued and evolving concessions concerning the Paris Massacre.

Just two months later in his first visit to Algeria Hollande orally addressed this troubled history in a speech delivered to the Algerian Parliament. In it, he poses a rhetorical question in which he challenges both France and Algeria: "Sommes-nous capables d'*écrire* ensemble une nouvelle *page* de notre histoire?" A few lines later he adds: "la vérité, elle n'abîme pas, elle répare. La vérité, elle ne divise pas, elle rassemble. Alors l'Histoire, même quand elle est tragique et même quand elle est douloureuse pour nos deux pays, elle doit être *dite*. Et je vais la *dire* ici devant vous" (my emphasis). While Hollande does seek to overcome the amnesia that has plagued this history, his methods are rather limited. First, he places an overwhelming importance on the ability to express this forgotten history through words, avoiding visual or embodied mediums. Secondly, he denies the power of anamnesis—collective memory—proposed by Dondaey, Mortimer, Rothberg, and recounted by Sebbar. Instead, Hollande claims that he, as an individual and as the head of the French nation—a privileged and no doubt biased position—can recount this history ("*je* vais la dire ici devant vous"). Lastly, he minimizes the variety of identities that this history has produced. He acknowledges France and Algeria—*nos deux pays*—yet fails to recognize, in the words of Sebbar, the *identités croisées* resulting from this history. His speech illustrates the limitations that continue to plague historical and political narratives regarding Algeria, France, and Algerian-French relations.

Since the publication of *La Seine était rouge*, the public's "Algeria Syndrome" has progressed from the third stage, "return of the repressed and a shattering of established myths about the war" to the fourth and final stage "obsession" (Donadey *Recasting* 7). This obsession can be seen in the plethora of publications, protests, and political speeches that made headlines between 2011 and 2013, the years surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian Independence as well as the Paris Massacre. Numerous books appeared during this time period that both chronicle the Algerian War of Independence and recount the current state of affairs. [120] While many of these books are (nearly) exclusively text-based, there are numerous titles that are image-based such as *L'Algérie vue du ciel* and *L'Algérie en couleurs: 1954-1962, Photographies d'appelés pendant la guerre,* among others. In addition, there has been a renewed interest in filmic depictions of the events. Television outlets such as TV5Monde have broadcast Panijel's documentary as well as a second entitled *La Nuit Noire du 17 octobre 1961*. In 2010 Rachid Bouchareb's film *Hors-la-loi,* which depicts increasing calls for Algerian Independence post-World War II (including in the final scenes the Paris Massacre), received critical acclaim and was chosen as an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival and nominated for an Oscar for the best foreign language film. Moreover, the anniversary of both the Paris Massacre and Algerian Independence spawned numerous protests in the French capital. On October 17, 2011 between 2,000 and 5,500 individuals

[120] Numerous books were published during this time period to commemorate the end of the Algerian War of Independence. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, it begins to give an idea of the range of publications about Algeria in the aftermath of Independence, ranging from photographic essays to the current state of affairs to calls for a French Algeria : *L'Algérie vue du ciel* (2011-reprint) by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, Benjamin Stora, Djamel Souidi and Jean Daniel; *L'Algérie en couleurs: 1954-1962, Photographies d'appelés pendant la guerre* (2011) by Tramor Quemeneur and Silmane Zeghidour; *Algérie* (2012) by Reza and Yasmina Khadra; *Vive l'Algérie française* (2012) by Robert Ménard and Thierry Rolando; *Algérie, le vrai état des lieux* (2013) by Frédéric Pons.

marched through the heart of Paris, retracing the steps of those lost ("Manifestations à Paris")—much like Amel and Omer.

These marches through the capital recall the key role that Sebbar, among others, assigns to the city during the Paris Massacre. Works such as *Octobre à Paris* (Panijel), *La Bataille de Paris* (Einaudi*), Ratonnades à Paris* (Péju)*,* name Paris as a central organizing figure, while *La Seine était rouge* (Sebbar), *Le Silence du Fleuve* (Tristan), and *Les Beurs de Seine* implicate the city's foremost geographical landmark: the river Seine. The city is composed of a variety of converging figures including citizens and visitors, transportation systems, buildings—both old and new and in all possible conditions—, sites that pay homage to the history of Paris, France, and its people, as well as natural geographical features. Unlike the individuals and the man-made sites—all of which are temporal in nature--, the river remains a constant on the Parisian landscape. Regardless, the city and its landscape, including the Seine, serve as significant characters in the 17 October 1961 protests. They incurred wounds during this battle. The evolving nature of the cityscape, that is to say the coming-and-goings of people and their frequent building and rebuilding, create (at least) the possibility for continual renewal and healing. By contrast, the permanent nature of the Seine, Sebbar's red and flowing wound, continues to cut through the city-center, absorbing the pollutants, blood, and bodies thrown into it, including those of the Paris Massacre.

As a "place of memory" the Parisian landscape for many years remained, like the participants in the 1961 protest, silent. The *Institut du Monde Arabe*, dedicated at its present location on the banks of the Seine in the city's fifth *arrondissement* in 1987, has a permanent collection as well as numerous exhibitions that showcase cultural, artistic,

political movements of the Arab World. Despite having temporary exhibitions focusing on various aspects of Algerian art and culture,[121] as well as on social and political movements in the region,[122] the Institute is yet to have an exhibition focusing on the struggles of Arabs in its own city. Moreover, in 2002, then-French president Jacques Chirac inaugurated the "Mémorial national de la guerre d'Algérie et des combats du Maroc et de la Tunisie" on the Quai Branly in the seventh *arrondissement* facing the Seine. However, this memorial commemorates French and Harki soldiers who died for France, not those individuals who protested for Algerian Independence.

There are two noteworthy exceptions to the silent Parisian landscape of silence. In 2012-13 the *Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration* (opened only in 2007)[123] in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence launched an exhibit entitled *Vies d'exil-1954-1962. Des Algériens en France pendant la Guerre d'Algérie*. It sought to elucidate the experience of the 220,000-350,000 Algerians in France during this time period, which includes the events of October 1961. Notably, this Museum is located in Paris' twelfth *arrondissement,* quite near to the *périphérie*, the highway that encircles Paris. This exhibition was however only temporary. The plaque inaugurated by Bertrand Delanoë, cited above, remains the only the only lasting monument or *lieux de mémoire* commemorating the Paris Massacre. At its location overlooking the river on the Pont St. Michel, it serves as the only bandage and memorial to heal the once bloodied Seine.

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[121] Such recent exhibitions include: *Designers algériens* (2012); *Les Berbères du Haut Atlas* (2010); *l'Algérie éternelle* (2010).

[122] Notably, there was a 2012 exhibition focusing on the 2011 Tunisian uprisings entitled *Dégagements…la Tunisie un an après*.

[123] Dominic Thomas analyzes how this museum, which he refers to as the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*, in his book *Africa and France,* has served as a touchstone regarding the place of immigration in French history. Upon it's opening in 2007, its mission conflicted with the political philosophy concerning immigration espoused by then-president Nicolas Sarkozy.

At the 1999 publication of *La Seine*, Sebbar had no way of knowing of what the next decade and a half would bring. In some ways, her young main characters—Amel, Louis, and Omer—were ahead of their time. Their obsession with the Paris Massacre had yet to be embraced by those around them—everyone else was still trying *not* to forget. However, their obsession is educational. Through individual snippets (oral recollections, photographs, archival footage, and moving through Paris), Louis creates a collective memory that will also be experienced by Amel and Omer. They are collective not only in the many individuals, but also in the multiple mediums that are present. These young adults, on film and in actuality, reconstruct the events of October 17, 1961. In so doing, they realign their own identities—French-Algerian, French, or Algerian—in such a way as to understand the how their histories are inextricably linked. In other words, the "you," "us," and "them" that Kateb evokes as part of the collective recollection in his poem applies to Amel, Louis, and Omer. Who is implicated in this history? They all are, as are we, the readers. In the end, Sebbar challenges her characters, as well as her readers, to rethink through a collective approach (multiple individuals and multi-media) not only our relationship to the Paris Massacre, but in a more general sense to History itself. Such a practice would result in radical reconceptualizations of both personal and national histories.

This chapter demonstrated how the Paris Massacre was for decades forgotten and omitted from history as part of a collective amnesia. Its re-entry into public discourse occurred in part thanks to anamnesis, specifically through the use of multi-media, as illustrated in Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. These diverse mediums allowed for individuals of various ages and backgrounds to reimagine identity through intersecting

textual, visual and embodied discourses. Sebbar's *Seine*, however, serves as only one example among many of the ways in which multiple and layered discourses create paths that allow for the exploration of diverse identities—especially those who have been relegated to the margins of history, such as the victims of October 17, 1961. The following chapter focuses on a similarly marginalized population: Arab women. Although Arab women have not been completely erased from memory, in the Western imagination over the past few centuries, this group as a whole has been reduced to a few confined and stereotypical roles and spaces. In order to overcome these stereotypes, Arab female artists, such as scholar Fatema Mernissi and artist Lalla Essaydi, are producing works that portray diverse images of women that refuse the limited and limiting constraints of Orientalist discourse. In considering Mernissi's memoir *Dreams of Trespass* and Essaydi's photograph *Harem #14c* and their portrayal of the harem, I examine how these artists employ different mediums to create histories and subjectivities for Arab women. In contrast to the stagnant and sexualized harem of various Orientalist works, Mernissi and Essaydi's harems emerge as artistic spaces, central to the formation of personal and shared female identity. Their textual and visual portrayals create nuanced and layered images of Arab women that seek to remediate historical (mis)representations.

Chapter Three: "Were you really born in a harem?": Harem as Artistic "Borderland" in Mernissi and Essaydi

Introduction

> A few years ago, I had to visit ten Western cities for the promotion of my book, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, which appeared in 1994 and was translated into twenty-two languages. During that tour, I was interviewed by more than a hundred Western journalists and I soon noticed that most of the men grinned when pronouncing the word 'harem.' I felt shocked by their grins. How can anyone smile when invoking a word synonymous with prison, I wondered. For my grandmother Yasmina, the harem was a cruel institution that sharply curtailed her rights (Mernissi *Scheherazade Goes West* 2).

Throughout Fatema Mernissi's oeuvre, the harem occupies a crucial organizing space in relation to power, gender, and identity. In her essay/memoir *Scheherazade Goes West*, written in English and published in 2001 by Washington Square Press, she documents her interactions as a "woman born in a harem" with Western journalists. In the excerpt cited above, Mernissi sets up the harem as an institution that varies in meaning depending on one's relationship to it. The Western journalists conceptualize this space and its implications differently than Mernissi's grandmother Yasmina, just as Yasmina's experience contrasts with the author's.

From the outset of *Scheherazade Goes West,* Mernissi couches one's position to the harem in relation to geo-political and gendered realities. The title of the book spells out these contrasts. Scheherazade—*the* Arab or Eastern woman *par excellence*—travels

to the "West." These divergent positions are repeated again in the above citation. In this short passage, Mernissi twice mentions the word "Western."[124] By acknowledging her travel to "Western" cities and her engagement with "Western" journalists, Mernissi situates herself as non-western. In the bi-polar geo-political environment in which we live, this positions her as "Eastern" by default. She further delineates her position from these Westerner's by pointing out the "men's grins," which introduces a crucial gendered distinction. As the only Easterner and the only woman, Mernissi's position is marked by difference. The divergent understandings of the harem, embodied through the male journalists' smiles, are informed by one's geographical association and gender identity. This passage sets up Mernissi's situation as "Eastern" woman against the perceptions of these "Western" men.

The theorist and intellectual Edward Saïd spent much of his career exploring the construction of the East and West. As I note in Chapter One, in his 1978 book *Orientalism,* Saïd argues that Western fascination with the Orient often results in sweeping generalizations and streamlined representations that reinforce cultural prejudices against the "East." He explains, however, that these perceptions are the product of fantasy: "the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences…and [the place where we find the] most recurring images of the Other" (1). The smile that Mernissi describes is a physical manifestation of the interior thoughts of the Western journalists. As she later makes clear (and as I explore below),

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[124] See Chapter One for a contextualization of the terms "East" and "West."

their conceptualization of the harem is based on ideals of romance and exoticism.[125] Mernissi's consideration of the harem builds on Saïd's monumental reflections. Whereas Saïd focuses primarily on the East/West divide, Mernissi pushes this poled distinction in order to acutely consider its gendered implications. In Chapter One, we saw how the discipline of Art History largely ignored female production until the 1970s. Even once art by women was included in exhibitions, it was limited mostly to Western artists. The few non-western women who were included came to be seen as "tokens." Western galleries and museums have only recently begun to incorporate the work of female artists from a variety of "global perspectives." Similarly, in the field of Orientalism, despite its influence on Middle-Eastern conceptualizations of feminism, it is not until fairly recently that there has been a true reflection on how orientalist and gender-specific discourses function in tandem.[126] Thus, Mernissi's work marks a shift in positionality. Rather than focusing on either Orientalist stereotypes or feminist concerns, she considers how both influence perceptions of women such as herself. Moreover, this shift is further marked by her engagement with scholarly discourse and lived experiences. Employing her formation as a sociologist, Mernissi does not merely reinterpret historical facts in order to construct abstract theories, but rather, she investigates her own contemporary experience as doubly other—as both Eastern *and* woman.

The harem emerges as a crucial site of inquiry in Mernissi's work. She notes that *Dreams of Trespass*, the book at the center of the tour where she encounters the grinning

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[125] I discuss this further at the end of the following section, "Popular Representations of the Harem: 'Go East, Young Man!'"

[126] In the early 1980s Leila Ahmed's "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem" opened up a critical dialogue about Western perceptions of Eastern women. However, it is not until the 1990s and 2000s that other scholars such as Billie Melman, Reina Lewis, and Charlotte Weber engage with her work. These scholars argue that Western women (Melman and Lewis) and feminists (Ahmed, Weber) were complicit in accepting and even promoting monolithic Orientalist images of Muslim and Middle Eastern women.

Western journalists, has been translated into twenty-two languages. It becomes clear to Mernissi that the meaning and connotation of the "harem" differ according to the language and cultural context. "Harem," derives from the Arabic word *haram* meaning that which is forbidden, "*défendu*" or "*sacré"* (*Grand Robert*). This is in contrast to *halal*—that which is permissible (Mernissi *West*, 13, 22-23). In translation, this notion of the forbidden applies specifically to women and their space in relationship to men.[127] However in Arabic, the harem refers to both a gendered and proscribed physical and psychological space. In French, *harem* references either to a place or a group. *Le Grand Robert* lists three definitions. First, a harem is an "appartement des femmes, dans la civilisation musulmane." This meaning refers to the collective space within a home reserved for women and protected from the view of outsiders, specifically foreign men. In formal language and in older iterations of French the term *gynécée* is used in place of harem. I mention this alternate term because in my personal interaction with an older French man, I was corrected multiple times for using the word *harem*—a term that he found unacceptable. His discomfort and refusal to use *harem* suggests the underlying connotations, notably associated, as we will see, with the third definition. Secondly, this term also evokes a group of women: "Ensemble des femmes qui habitent le harem." Comprised of individuals of all ages, these women live under the same roof and are related either through blood or marriage. Finally, in a more colloquial or familiar register of language, harem also refers to "les nombreuses femmes que fréquente un homme aux multiples liaisons." This common sexualized usage seems to have very little in common

[127] In Arabic, *haram* and *halal* have broader definitions that go beyond the relationship to women, such as in relation to meat. However, over time and through translation, some of these definitions have been lost. This is evident in the translation of *haram.* The etymological roots given by *Le Grand Robert* specifically link the notion of *haram* to women.

with its Arabic root. Instead, it reflects an Orientalist view of Eastern women in which they are available for the exploit of men. The erotic nature of this third meaning often leads to a conflation among the diverse definitions—lending a sensual element to all of them.[128]

The harem appears as a crucial organizing space in Western representations of the Orient. The depiction of the harem and women's role within it arise from uninformed and fantastical notions perpetuated by Western men of the foreign other. Having situated Mernissi as a key player in the interrogation of the perpetuation of orientalist and female stereotypes, in this chapter I examine how she and another Moroccan-born artist, Lalla Essaydi, disrupt widespread representations of the harem.[129] After analyzing how popular

[128] Some of the most critical work on the conceptualization of the North African harem has been done by feminist Leila Ahmed (as mentioned in footnote 2), Algerian literary and visual critic Malek Alloula and Algerian author Assia Djebar (in addition to Mernissi). In *Le Harem Colonial,* Alloula argues that colonial photography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed to accurately portray North African women. Instead, these images were visual representations of the European Orientalist phantasm. Assia Djebar also focuses her study of the harem in orientalist images, specifically painting. In "Regard interdit, son coupé" found in her collection, *Femmes d'alger dans leur appartement,* Djebar examines Delacroix's eponymous painting in order to show how his entry into the harem (during his trip to North Africa) and depiction of it is representative of a colonial attitude that confines women to limited spaces, only to then penetrate them to reinforce a dynamic of power. In "Beyond Harem Walls," academic Ziad Bentahar argues that Alloula and Djebar (as well as Mernissi) "condemn French colonial representations of the harem as necessarily a place, a part of the domicile inevitably defined by impregnable walls, by accusing them of stemming from an imperial imperative to access and control all aspects of colonialized societies" (26). Beyond these works, a cursory book search on Amazon.com with the keyword "harem" reveals that while the harem continues to be a trope of scholarly interrogation, it also serves as an organizing plot device in numerous popular novels. One revealing example of such a novel is *For the Pleasure of Men (A Harem Masters novel)* by Nora Weaving. The cover shows a shirtless man on top of a shirtless woman. The glistening bodies, closed eyes, and nearly touching puckered lips overtly suggest sex. The novel tells the story of Kalliope who is sold into prostitution. Becoming successful in her profession, she is purchased by a rich courtesan who abuses her. In the end, Kalliope is saved from her abuser by an unlikely man who takes her as his lover. Such a plotline exposes the most rampant stereotypes of Eastern women: sexualized and enslaved objects in need of saving.

[129] The fact that both Mernissi and Essaydi are of Moroccan descent is merely coincidental. The harem, as a physical and metaphorical space, representing gendered division of public and private space is not limited to the Moroccan context but can be seen in works by other artists of the region. In her "Unthinking Manifest Destiny," Susan Stanford Friedman through a study of Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* and Iranian author Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) illustrates how gendered spaces, such as the harem, participate in the "theorization of multiple, polycentric, and travelling modernities" (82). Other artists from around the region also engage with gendered harem-like spaces including Algerian writers Malika Mokeddem and Maïssa Bey, Lebanese photographer Rania Matar, and Egyptian author Leïla Ahmed, to name a few.

mediums such as the 1965 film *Harum Scarum* construct women as sexualized and immobilized objects of male desire, I proceed to consider how Mernissi and Essaydi reject these stereotypical representations in the autobiographical novel *Dreams of Trespass* and the photograph *Harem # 14c*, respectively.

In line with Gloria Anzaldùa's conceptualization of the "*mestiza* borderland," Mernissi and Essaydi recreate the harem as a borderland that, rather than being restrictive and confining, functions as a place of scholarly and artistic production.[130] As a Chicana, Anzaldùa is physically, linguistically, and culturally distanced from Mernissi and Essaydi's Moroccan-based context. However, Anzaldùa's approach to issues of gender, sexual, linguistic, cultural, and national differences (among others) provides a framework that exceeds geographical or social constraints. The multifaceted critical lens that she constructs allows her to enter into dialogue with Mernissi and Essaydi, as well as numerous other artists, scholars, and individuals who inhabit the in-between or borderlands. The trans-cultural, trans-linguistic, and trans-national exchanges that result from such dialogues reveal complex and nuanced identities for both Mernissi and Essaydi that reject singular characterizations in favor of more globalized understandings that take into account the multi-layered topographies of each artist. By comparing Essaydi and Mernissi's work with Anzaldúa's we see how it resonates outside the boundaries of Arab/Muslim womenhood, by engaging with globally pertinent issues in relation to

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[130] In her semi-autobiographical work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Anzaldúa rethinks notions of identity through the framework of the *mestiza.* Anzaldúa questions the notion of the border as a firm dividing line between here/there, or us/them. Instead she proposes the border as a physical, social, physiological and cultural terrain. Through the use of prose and poetry and different languages and registers of English, Spanish, and Chicano Spanish, Anzaldùa reimagines borders as places of multiplicity rather than duality. The linguistic, social, gendered, sexual, and cultural borderlands that Anzaldúa proposes serve as productive, rather than restrictive, spaces of creation and potential personal and cultural power.

language, movement, and identity. This juxtaposition of Chicana and Arab women, however, rather than reducing these artists to the well-worn trope of "third-world woman," highlights the associations between them, exposing complex and layered aesthetic practices born of the circumstances that exile, migrations, and linguistic plurality and fluidity present.

Popular Representations of the Harem: "Go East, Young Man!"

The sexualized connotations are in part a result of the popular representations of the harem, as portrayed by Western artists, dating from the eighteenth century. One exemplary depiction of the harem appears in a 1965 film entitled *Harum Scarum* starring Elvis Presley. While at best a second-rate or "B" film, its plot, treatment of women, and portrayal of the harem succinctly encapsulate the stereotypes of Arab women that emerged wholeheartedly in the nineteenth century and that continue to be promulgated throughout the twentieth century. Even the title, *Harum Scarum*, seeks to place the film in an imagined context. The intentional misspelling of "harem" allows for this taboo term—this film came out in 1965—to be used. It also adds a lively touch, inventing the word "scarum"—a conflation of "scare" and the abbreviated version of them, or " 'em." Placed side-by-side, these two made-up words create an air of playfulness and mysteriousness surrounding the film.[131]

Harum Scarum is the story of a film star, Jonny Tyrone, played by Elvis, who "goes East"—an "East" referring to an unspecified and exotic place—to film *Sands of the Desert.* Upon his arrival, he is invited to the King's palace, where he falls for a woman,

[131] The Merriam-Webster dictionary also lists "harum-scarum" as an adverb meaning "reckless" or "irresponsible."

Aishah. Soon after, some men who intend to murder the king kidnap Jonny. Having seen his action scenes in other films, these men assume that he has the skills needed to assassinate the king. While in captivity, he falls for a slave girl, Shalimar, who turns out to be the king's daughter. Shalimar learns of the assassination plan of her father, foils the plan, and falls in love with Jonny. Jonny and Shalimar marry and honeymoon in Las Vegas accompanied by some Eastern "dancing girls."

Marketed as an "adventure spoof," the film exploits stereotypes of Eastern women (and men). The movie poster (*Harum Scarum*, Advertisement, Image 1) depicts two different versions of Elvis: a "Western" representation and an "Eastern" representation. On the left side, the Western Elvis is wearing a white collared shirt and a blue cardigan with black dress pants. His body is slightly turned, his legs spread apart and bent, with his arms extended out to either side, hands open. To the left, the poster advertises: Elvis "brings the Big Beat to Bagdad in a riotous, rockin' rollin' adventure spoof!!!" Between Elvis's split legs, an inset depicts Jonny Tyrone staring into the eyes of a beautiful woman with long black hair, Aishah. To the right and slightly behind "Western" Elvis, a second Elvis wears khaki-colored pants and shirt, a maroon vest, and a turban on his head. His raised left leg along with his right arm extended above his head give the impression that he is dancing. Between his split legs sits a beautiful woman with long black hair, Shalimar. The expansive skirt of her blue dress swirls as she too dances. This "Eastern" Elvis stands on a desert-like landscape with palm trees on either side of him. In the bottom right hand corner, a brown-skinned man with a turban, presumably Shalimar's father, looks up towards "Eastern" Elvis and his daughter. In the opposite corner, an unknown man seems to be taming a green snake as it stands vertically in a pot. The name

"Elvis" appears across the top of the poster in large red block letters. His name is part of the film's tagline: "1001 Swingin' nights as Elvis."

The movie poster represents some of the most common stereotypes of the East. First, its "exoticism" is represented by the snake charmer who reinforces "exotic" stereotypes. Secondly, the uninhibited dancing of both Elvis' and Shalimar present the "remarkable experiences" available to the Western visitor in the Middle East. He can enjoy himself unreservedly through song, dance, and other pleasurable activities. This sense of freedom is reinforced by the words "swingin'" and "rockin' rollin'." By dropping the final "g," we escape the constraints of formal language—and by extension social conventions,— leaving space for uninhibited indulgence. These indulgences include Eastern women. Due to their placement between Elvis' gyrating legs, both Aishah and Shalimar become sexually available objects. Their role is to fulfill Jonny Tyrone's (and the audience's) sexual fantasies.

Moreover, the "1001" in the tagline creates a clear reference to the classic *One Thousand and One Nights* (often referred to in English as the *Arabian Nights*).[132] This collection of tales tells the story of the king, Shahryar and his wife Scheherazade. In the story, Shahryar is shocked to find that his wife has cheated on him and kills her. After her murder, he marries a number of other women, each time choosing a virgin so as to be sure of her purity and ensure that she (and her virtue) belongs exclusively to him. However, convinced that all females are liars, after consummating the marriage, he promptly kills each wife. As such, his spouse never has the occasion to dishonor him. After a number of marriages that end in Shahryar's murder of his wife, he marries

[132] See: *The Arabian Nights: Tales from a Thousand and One Nights* translation by Richard Burton and A.S. Byatt.

Scheherazade. In order to escape the fate of death, Scheherazade begins to tell stories each night that leave her audience, the king included, in a state of suspense. Due to his desire to hear the end of the story, the King allows for Scheherazade to live another night to recount the next part of the story. This continues, as the title states, for one thousand and one nights, at which time the King realizes his love for Scheherazade, the mother of his children, and decides not to kill her. Although not fighting for her own life, *Harum Scarum*'s Shalimar, like Scheherazade, uses her cunning to thwart a murderous plot. While her shrewd intellect saves her father's life and ensures Jonny's freedom, her most cherished characteristics continue to be her exquisite beauty and availability to marry Jonny. Rather than being regarded as a hero who foils a fatal scheme, she remains the desired object of Jonny's affection. Her utility is reduced to her ability to fulfill the Western-male fantasy.

Scheherazade first entered into the French imaginary in the early 18th century with Antoine Galland's translation of *Mille et Une Nuits, contes arabes*.[133] Following the translation of these "Arabic" tales, Scheherazade becomes the quintessential model of the Arab woman for the Western world. Galland, as a result of this work, became according to Madeleine Dobie, "a key figure in the development of Europe's fascination with Oriental cultures" (25). Notably however, this "fascination" minimizes Scheherazade's role as an actor in her own destiny and instead focuses on the sexualized aspects of her position within a closed female harem. While already a central space of fantasy in texts as

[133] Despite Galland's choice to subtitle his translation "contes arabes," it is interesting to note that the stories that comprise the *Mille et Une Nuits* are not only related to Arabic tradition, but also have ties to Persian and Indian traditions of storytelling. However, in the Arabic tradition, the stories of *Mille et Une Nuits* date from the Middle Ages, and are taken from Egyptian and Syrian writings. While initially translated into French, *Mille et Une Nuits* was subsequently translated into numerous other languages and proved hugely successful in Western Europe. See: Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*.

old as *A Thousand and One Nights*, the harem continued to emerge as a popular and often fantasized site of encounter between Western men and Eastern women in the last three centuries. Academic Ziad Bentahar traces this obsession with the enclosed space of the Eastern woman throughout the eighteenth century through the works of Montesquieu, Diderot and De Jaucourt (26-27). They focus largely on the "*sérrail [sic]*"—"a palace where the women of Turkish and Persian emperors were locked up" (26). These authors concentrate on Muslim women in Turkey and Persia and name the place of imprisonment by its Latin root, *serraclum,* rather than the Arab root, *harem* (27). Bentahar argues that "the inaccessibility of Muslim women in their space, and the perception of that space, the harem, as an impregnable fortress, became the stereotype upon which a vast body of Orientalist art was subsequently based" (27). The ability to enter into this space through their work fulfilled the Western-male desire to penetrate the exotic fortress, freeing its female inhabitants and making them accessible and available to their liberators.

Moreover, Bentahar suggests the early eighteenth century letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, wife of a British ambassador in Turkey, provided a description of Eastern women in female-only spaces.[134] In these missives, she describes her visits to Turkish baths. Her accounts served as an epistolary template for artists, most notably Jean-Auguste-Dominque Ingres who famously painted Eastern women as odalisques ("La Grande Odalisque," 1814) and at Turkish baths ("Le Bain Turc," 1862), and yet never set foot in North Africa or the Middle East. With the 1830 conquest of Algeria, North Africa became more accessible for European writers and artists. Despite visiting the Maghreb, interaction with Eastern women remained minimal and the previous century's stereotypes

[134] As a woman, she had unique access to female-only spaces. Reading her letters was the closest many men would come to these Eastern women. Notably, she described in detail nude women in bathhouses, giving fodder to the imagination of Western men.

continued to influence European perceptions. The impressions continued to permeate the Western imaginary well into the twentieth century, as witnessed through Jonny in *Harum Scarum.* He embodies the fascination of "Western" men with "Oriental" women. His attraction to Shalimar is not based on her intelligence and astuteness. Rather it is centered on her status as the exotic and enslaved other.

Jonny's voyage to the East is marked by adventure. This adventure mirrors that of numerous nineteenth and twentieth century French writers and artists who travelled to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in order to, as Réda Bensmaïa notes, "prowl for new, exotic experiences" (1).[135] French Painters such as Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Leon Gérôme and authors such as Alphonse Daudet, Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, Eugène Fromentin, Guy de Maupassant, Henri de Montherlant and André Gide, among others, document these "new, exotic experiences" once back in Europe through their art (1).[136] These literary and painterly portraits also give way in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to photographic representations that are circulated as postcards. Malek Alloula, in *Le Harem Colonial*, demonstrates how this popular medium reinforced the exotic stereotypes produced in literature and art and "set the stage for the deployment of phantasms" (3).[137] The inexpensive and easily reproduced photographic postcards were

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[135] French colonization in the 19th century provided the opportunity for many of these artists and authors to travel to North Africa. The installation of French outposts ensured that they would be received as guests.
[136] All the artists that I have mentioned are men. A captivating counter-example to these male figures is Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), a female Swiss writer and explorer who lived in North Africa. Unlike her male contemporaries who visited North Africa only briefly before returning to Europe, Eberhardt spent extensive time there. She learned Arabic, converted to Islam, and married an Algerian man. While traveling, she often dressed in men's clothing, which allowed her freedom that she was not afforded as a woman. Eberhardt wrote articles for European newspapers. In addition she published a number of books including *Yasmina* (1902), *Le Major* (1903), *La Rivale* (1904) during her lifetime and *Nouvelles Algériennes* (1905), *Dans l'Ombre Chaude de l'Islam* (1906), and *Les Journaliers* (1922), which appeared posthumously. Notably, her extended interaction with North African peoples produced texts with more subtle portrayals of Maghrebi women than her European male counterparts.
[137] Despite Alloula's criticism of the colonial photographic practices, contemporary scholars have criticized Alloula for reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes by refusing "subjectivity and agency" to the photographed

easily disseminated, making them accessible to fulfill the exoticized fantasies of the masses.

It is from these popular representations that movies such as *Harum Scarum* emerge. Film is the popular medium of choice in the 1960s. It reaches a wide audience, much as painting, writing, and postcards did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although unable to travel widely, the big screen provides the audience with the opportunity to experience the exotic Orient through Jonny. Somewhat early in the film, Elvis's character performs for the king. Specifically he sings "Go East, Young Man."[138] This tune details the fun and romance readily available to young men in the "East." While on stage Jonny glares longingly at his first Eastern love, Aishah, and belts out: [I want to go] "where the desert sun is, where the fun is, where there's love and romance… Where I'll make love the way I plan, Go East and drink and feast, go East young man."[139] Jonny, through the visible sexual tension and the auditory innuendo, "feasts" like the painters and artists before him on all the consumable goods that the "East" has to offer—notably women. Thanks to the camera work, which places the viewer in Jonny's shoes as he croons and gazes out at Aishah, the audience members see and experience from Jonny's point of view, and thus also become "feasters."

While *Harum Scarum* is an early filmic representation the harem, it is only a precursor to the widespread films that we will emerge throughout the twentieth century,

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Algerian women a "second time" (Rahimieh 91). See Nasrin Rahimieh's "Refocusing Alloula's Gaze" and Jennifer Yee's "Recycling the 'Colonial Harem'?'"

[138] The song-writing trio Florence Kaye, Bill Giant, and Bernie Baum penned "Go East, Young Man." They wrote a number of other tunes for Elvis. The song's title plays with the nineteenth century American phrase "Go West, young man" that encouraged young men to participate in westward expansion (*The Oxford Companion to American Literature*).

[139] The full lyrics to the song can be found online: http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/elvispresley/goeastyoungman.html.

including many aimed at children, such as the beloved 1992 Disney film *Aladdin*. [140] While auspiciously a retelling of the tale included in Galland's *Mille et Une Nuits,* the Disney production takes many liberties, including changing the setting from China to a fictionalized Arabian city named Agrabah and renaming the Princess Jasmine. The reference to the fragrant flower equates the Princess to a blooming plant, a figurative way to describe her sexual promise. Her wardrobe reinforces her name. In the Disney version, when Aladdin initially sees Princess Jasmine at the market, having escaped her father's confining palace, she is wearing a long brown robe and veil, and her face and hands are exposed. This initial appearance of Jasmine is in sharp contrast to her appearance throughout the rest of the film. While at home in the palace, presumably in her "harem," Jasmine wears brightly colored "harem pants" and a small top that covers only her breasts, leaving her midriff bear. The juxtaposition of her public and private appearance presents two contradictory images of the "Arab" woman. On the one hand, when in public, she remains muted, evidenced by her brown clothes that blend into the landscape, and lack shape. On the other hand, in her private space at home, in the harem, her

[140] Over the years the harem has emerged as a pervasive trope in Western popular culture as confirmed through Hollywood cinema, which has produced various iterations of the harem. As such, in this study I have a vast body of work from which to choose. I choose to analyze *Harum Scarum*—a film to which Mernissi alludes in *Scheherazade Goes West*—and *Aladdin* for two main reasons. First, I wanted to have films from different time periods in order to show visual how visual representation of the harem remains troublesome throughout the twentieth century. *Harum Scarum*, a mid-century production (1965), bridges the gap in visual representation between the early twentieth century postcard imagery (documented by Alloula) and the early twenty-first century revisions by Mernissi and Essaydi. There are a variety of other mid-century films from which I could have chosen including *Arabian Nights* (1942), *Night in Casablanca* (1946) or *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958). *Aladdin*, which debuted in 1992, continued to show narrowly conceived representations of the harem similar to those of both the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century. *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983), *Mountains of the Moon* (1990), or various James Bonds films (with the "Bond girls") are other late-twentieth century films that provide interesting case studies of the representation of the harem. Secondly, *Harum Scarum* and *Aladdin* are popular films that, although perhaps not of the highest quality, attract large audiences: the trope of the harem is pervasively portrayed to the masses. As a cultural icon and star, Elvis plays the lead role in *Harum Scarum*. *Aladdin* attracted unheralded audiences and became a huge hit for Disney. Moreover, both Harum Scarum and Aladdin engage with *1001 Nights*.

womanly figure is exposed, and the dull shades of her wardrobe are transformed into exotic hues.

In addition to Princess Jasmine, the "harem girls"—recalling the "dancing girls" in *Harum Scarum*—serve as another female representation in the movie. These unnamed characters resemble the white, blonde Bimbettes from Disney's 1991 *Beauty and the Beast*. Although unlike the Bimbettes (Claudia, Laura, and Paula) these brown-skinned and black-haired "girls" remain unnamed. The three look nearly identical, distinguishable only by the hue of their brightly colored costumes (light pink, dark pink, and purple). Like Jasmine they also wear harem-pants and a bedlah top that covers their breasts. Their stomachs are exposed and their voluptuous chests accentuate their hourglass figures. The lightly shaded V-shape found at the crotch of their pants highlights their genitals, presenting them as readily available for sex. In most scenes the three women wear transparent scarves covering their mouths, in effect creating a sense of voiceless. The three provocative and flirtatious women seem to live in a sort of "massage parlor" where they are managed by a mother-like figure—a madam of sorts. The viewer learns that they knew Aladdin when he roamed the streets and that they only become fully enamored with him once he attains the status of prince. Their provocative dress, unclear relationship to Aladdin, and living arrangements all create the impression that these characters are whores. Thus, the female representations that are presented in this popular film are either the sweet and blossoming Jasmine or the overtly sexualized group of women—the harem girls.

While these depictions seem incongruous to the reality of the harem for many women, they continue to permeate Western discourse. Mernissi's work exposes these

pervasive stereotypes by decoding the grins of the Western journalists that she encounters on her book tour. The facial reactions clearly are in relation to the sexualized fantasy of the harem as it has been portrayed in popular culture. Mernissi interprets these smiles:

> We can break the West into two camps as far as smiles are concerned: the Americans and the Europeans. The American men, upon hearing the word 'harem,' smiled with unadulterated and straightforward embarrassment. Whatever the word means for Americans hinges on something linked to shame. The Europeans, in contrast, responded with smiles that varied from polite reserve in the North to merry exuberance in the South, with subtleties fluctuating according to the distance of the journalists' origin from the Mediterranean. French, Spanish and Italian men had a flirtatious, amused light in their eyes. Scandinavians and Germans, with the exception of the Danes, had astonishment in theirs—astonishment tinged with shock. 'Were you really born in a harem?' they would ask, looking intently at me with a mixture of apprehension and puzzlement" (11-12).

Mernissi goes on to explain that for Western men the harem represents a highly sexualized and eroticized fantasy where women are freely available for male enjoyment. Sexual fantasy provokes various reactions for the Western men—shame for the prudish Americans, unadulterated joy for the southern Europeans, and astonishment for the Northern Europeans.[141] These grins that signal erotic imagination shock Mernissi. For her female family members, specifically her mother and grandmother, the harem—that is to

[141] Here, Mernissi simultaneously critiques the Orientalist stereotyping of Arab women by "Western" men while engaging in a practice of stereotyping "Western" men by creating monolithic groups based on nationality.

say the physical house and the family in which they lived—served as a prison that restricted movement and dictated choice. Such limitations are hardly reasons to smile.

While Mernissi is perplexed by the male grins, the journalists are equally puzzled by the author's relationship to the harem. Through posing the question: "were you really born in harem?" they attempt to reconcile the woman before them—the educated, well-spoken, and published feminist author—with the popularized and eroticized fantasy of the harem—the female nexus of "romance" and "exotic beings." Mernissi's book tour for *Dreams of Trespass* serves as a new point of encounter between conflicting perceptions of the harem, ultimately leading to another publication: *Scheherazade Goes West*. Her description in this work of the Western journalists' grins and their various meanings opens up the possibility for a discussion of the harem and its various connotations. Like the smiles of the Western journalists, the reality of the harem is full of complexity and nuance.

Essaydi's Harem

Much of Essaydi's work has directly or indirectly implicated the harem as a central architectural figure in her photography. As we have learned in Chapter One, Essaydi in fact shot *Converging Territories* in her family's home in Morocco, her girlhood harem. Although living in the United States at the time, the artist makes a conscious choice to return to her home in order to shoot this collection. She transforms her girlhood harem into an art studio. Notably, Essaydi eliminates the architectural features and any clues that indicate the shooting space; these images could be made anywhere. As such, Essaydi erases this harem in order to create a studio.

In her second major collection, *Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2006) Essaydi exposes the popular representations of North African women dating from the nineteenth century, which have become firmly engrained in the Western imaginary. Essaydi mimics the composition of various Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century such as Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, Ingres' *La Grande odalisque* and Gérôme's *Marché d'esclave*. By restaging these images, she produces her own photographic reinterpretations. Her chosen title for the collection closely resembles the title of Delacroix's painting. Of her major collections, this is the only one that is not titled in English, but rather in French. By keeping the French, Essaydi puts her work into conversation not only with Delacroix, but also with the whole artistic tradition of French Orientalism. Although mimicking Delacroix's title, she drops they key second part "dans leur appartement" –an important omission that eases the physical limits placed on the women. [142] This lack of restriction is first evidenced in the title. Whereas Delacroix's title "*Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*" already restricts with the phrase "in the apartment", Essaydi's title *Les Femmes du Maroc*, by not assigning women to a certain location, remains open to movement and action.

The first image in this series, *Les Femmes du Maroc # 1*, reproduces the composition of Delacroix's tableau. In this painting, Delacroix depicts four women in their "apartment" or harem. While at first glance, it may seem that Essaydi's *Les Femmes du Maroc* replicates the confinement and restriction as portrayed by Delacroix, a closer

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[142] We are also reminded of Djebar's work that reuses Delacroix's title in her collection of short stories and essays *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement.* Djebar critiques Delacroix's painting in her essay in the collection, "Regard interdit, son coupé." Although not explicitly stated, Essaydi's invocation and reimaging of Delacroix's painting engages her into dialogue with Djebar. Through their work, textual in the case of Djebar and visual in the case of Essaydi, both artists put into question Delacroix's representation of North African women.

inspection of the space reveals otherwise. Although Essaydi retains the composition of the original, she eliminates the rich colors and opulent decor and replaces these elements with a simple color scheme of henna writing on cream-colored cloth. By removing the encumbering cushions and rugs, the extravagant slippers and jewelry, and the hookah-pipe, Essaydi opens up the space allowing for movement. The two props that do remain, the cushion and the curtain, become integrated into the composition of the photo. As such, the women themselves become the subject of the photograph and not just authentic cultural objects. In addition, the writing, which is present on the floors and walls as well as on the women themselves, extends beyond the frame of the photograph and outside of the "apartment" walls. Thanks to this writing, the walls do not act as enclosing and confining barriers, but rather act as pages that encourage self-expression. This style, invoking and challenging Orientalist paintings, is repeated throughout this collection.

In her third major collection, *Harem* (2009), Essaydi explicitly evokes the female apartment. In addition to naming it in the title, she shoots this collection in her own childhood home or harem where she makes use of the existing architectural elements. This marks a departure from both *Converging Territories* and *Les Femmes du Maroc*, as she introduces color as a major element in the work. In both of the previous collections, Essaydi removed any architectural features from the photographed space by concealing every inch of it with calligraphy-covered cloth. The most prominent features of this architectural structure revealed in *Harem* include the brightly colored mosaic tiles and the wooden decorative pieces that complement door and window openings. This brightly colored harem is occupied by various female models, all of whom are covered in the henna-calligraphy that is also found in the earlier collections.

Essaydi has two iterations of this work: *Harem* and *Harem Revisited* (2012-2013). These two projects are immediately distinguishable from one another. In *Harem,* the photographer exploits the architectural features of an actual harem in Morocco. She places her female models, whose clothes mimic the geographical patterns of the harem wall, in various positions throughout the harem. By contrast, in *Harem Revisited* the architectural space is eliminated. Instead, the walls and floors are covered in ornate tapestries and rugs. The color palate changes as well, accentuating the gold and silver palates that create a shimmering and glossy effect. The visual composition, including the position of the female models, recalls images from both *Converging Territories* and *Femmes du Maroc*.

Essaydi photographed her most recent collections *Bullet* and *Bullet Revisited* (2012-2013) in the harem-like atmosphere of her earlier works. In these images inspired by the events of the Arab Spring, the background as well as the models, are covered in a woven type of fabric made entirely of spent bullet casings. The overwhelming use of bullets places the traditional, enclosed space of the harem in juxtaposition to more recent developments in light of the so-called Arab spring, and the uprisings that often turned violent through the emitted gunfire and bullets. The bullet-laden yet strikingly beautiful landscape that Essaydi creates evokes larger questions about the role of women in relation to conflict. Such integrations recall the way in which the West has positioned women in relation to conflict over the last fifteen years. In Chapter One, I showed how Laura Bush, in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 placed Muslim women at the center of the “saving” mission, otherwise known as the War in Afghanistan. In Mrs. Bush’s conceptualization, these women are incapable of protecting themselves as

the victims of terrorists—identified as their fathers, brothers and husbands. In *Bulle*t, by surrounding and clothing her models in spent bullet casings, Essaydi creates a very different relationship between her women models, their surroundings, and conflict. They are not merely victims, relegated to their apartments, and in need of saving. Rather, they embody, wear, and carry the conflict with them. In fact, the French verb *porter* is helpful in parsing out the role of these women. In French, *porter* connotes wearing, carrying something externally, such as an object, and carrying internally, for example a pregnancy. The ammunition that is worn by the models indicates their active role in conflicts that seek to bear inclusive social and political orders.

This notion of *porter* also recalls the *porteuses de valises—*like Flora and Mina, in Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* as explained in Chapter Two. These women carried money, papers, and weapons for the FLN during the Algerian War for Independence. In *La Bataille d'Alger* (1966), the director Gillo Pontecorvo depicts these *porteuses* as they prepare themselves in the Casbah and then deliver bombs to the European part of the city Algiers. His portrayal resonates with Essaydi's images. First, there is a long scene in which the *porteuses* prep themselves, putting on clothes and makeup and doing their hair. Their primping allows them to "pass" as French at the checkpoints without being subject to interrogations or pat-downs. Their initial appearance conceals their real mission: to blow-up popular destinations for the French population. Similarly, Essaydi's models at first glance seem to be the perfect, dazzling image of beauty. The gold shine hides the fact that these women are covered in bullet-casings. The viewer, like the French soldiers at the checkpoint, could easily be misled by these models' appearances, failing to perceive their active role in wars and conflicts. Both Pontecorvo and Essaydi exploit the

misconceptions of the viewer who equate beauty to peace, not violence and conflict. Essaydi further destabilizes the viewer by placing her models in the reclined and immobile positions associated with the harem. These strong figures refuse to tell a singular familiar and stereotyped narrative, leaving them inaccessible to the penetrating gaze of the spectator.

The harem occupies a critical space throughout Essaydi's body of work. It is both unequivocally and covertly present. *Harem* expressly names its photographed space and themes, whereas the spectator must be quite familiar with the artist's work to know that *Converging Territories* was shot in her girlhood harem. Moreover, Essaydi subtly references the harem through *Les Femmes du Maroc,* which plays both textually (dropping the "dans l'appartement") and visually (imitating the composition) with Delacroix's historical and fantasy-filled representation of the female apartment. The artist's representations of the harem lie in stark contrast to those that have been promulgated since the eighteenth century, in high art, literature, and popular mediums such as song and film. Rather than the simplified, sexualized, stagnant, and restrictive harem of the Western male imagination, Essaydi's harem complicates the model's relationship to the space, to each other, to the viewer, and to the artist. This limited and limiting space is transformed into a space of female artistic production and performativity.

The Harem as *Frontera*

In her groundbreaking 1987 work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* which was re-released in 2007, Chicana feminist and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa examines

borders. She refuses the notion of a border as a simple dividing line that creates clear and distinctive dualistic categories: here/there; us/them; self/other. Rather she re-conceptualizes borders as culturally embedded, socially inscribed, and psychologically important terrains that shape identities. Although theorized within the Mexican-American and Chicana context, Anzaldúa's rethinking of gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies within a framework of colonization, provides a path to what Paola Bacchetta in the Introduction to the Third edition of *Borderlands* calls, "cognitive decolonization" (n.p.). This notion joins the mental processes of cognition such as learning, remembering, or thinking, to the geographical, historical, and political realities of (de)colonization; the mind, just like the land, can be (de)colonized.[143] Anzaldúa expresses this "cognitive decolonization" by engaging with different written forms: essays, poems, historical accounts, and personal narratives in both English and Spanish as well as a variety of "border tongues" such as "North Mexican Spanish dialect, Tex-Mex, working class and slang English, Chicano Spanish, and *Pachuco*" (77). By blurring the lines between modes and languages of discourse, Anzaldúa's "*mestiza"*—a reconceptualization of various physical, social, gender, sexual, cultural and psychological frontiers—reaffirms her own personal power—a power often discredited for being on the wrong side of the border. [144]

[143] Bacchetta's term "cognitive decolonization" recalls Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1986 book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* In this collection of essays Ngũgĩ asserts how language shapes national history, culture, and identity. He contends that literary production in the language of the colonizer serves only to reinforce imperial and colonial practices that minimize indigenous languages and cultures. Thus through reclaiming one's language, one can begin to "decolonize the mind."

[144] This notion of the *mestiza* is undoubtedly linked to a specific history of colonization. A similar term in French "métis" has historically been applied differently, specifically in the Maghreb. As Emmanuelle Saada explains in *Les Enfants de la Colonie,* the notion of "metis" hardly exists in North Africa. In the Algerian context, mixed marriages or "mariages croisés" take place as part of adaptation: "Ainsi les 'mariages croisés' sont-ils envisagés sous l'angle de l''acclimatement', processus considéré comme essential pour l'enracinement durable de la population française outre-mer" (38). Thus, "mixed marriages" were in service to the French nation and therefore the offspring were not considered *métis*. However, like in other colonized areas, some children were products of "unions irrégulières"—children conceived out of wedlock. These cases of "métis" children "restent invisibles," (40) meaning that "métis" North African

Anzaldúa's own concern in *Borderlands* extends beyond the notion of racial and ethnic hybridity expressed by mestizo or *métissage*.[145] She devotes particular attention to the gendered and sexed implications of such an identity, indicated by the feminine ending "a" in mestiz*a.* Traditionally, the position that Anzaldúa and her fellow Chicana women inhabit places them in the status of "other." In the Mexican cultural context, "culture is made by those in power—men" who subjugate women to subservient roles deemed as appropriately feminine—wife, mother, and homemaker. In the United States, Chicana acts as a code word for non-white "others," "who are neither Spanish nor live a country in a country in which Spanish is the first language; […] who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; […] who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English" (77). These individuals do not conform to the standards of any tongue. As such, they are marginalized by Anglo, Spanish, and Latina communities (80-81)—the mixture of "living languages" used by the Chicana fails to meet pure linguistic standards expected in these established communities. Regardless of the context, the Chicana woman is always an outsider, an "other."[146]

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children did not become a political or social issue as they did in other regions of the French colonies. Saada posits two reasons for this invisibility. First, she claims that many of these illegitimate children were taken in by the extended family—most notably the birth mother's mother—and integrated into the Algerian family (40). Secondly she asserts that many of these children, products of interracial affairs did not look particularly "Arab." In effect, they could "pass" as European (40-41).

[145] The two concepts, while similar, are not the same. Mestizo derives from the Spanish and refers to Spanish-speaking individuals of European and Native American ancestry. This term dates back to Spanish colonization of the Americas. *Métissage* is defined as the "production d'individus métis dans une société; croisement, mélange." Such a definition places it as the opposite to "pureté (de la race)" (*Le Grand Robert*). See the previous footnote in which I cite Saada's discussion of the absence of *métissag*e in the North African context.

[146] Similar concerns are raised in the Chicana context by feminist scholar, poet and playwright Cherríe Moraga who, along with Anzaldúa, coedited *This Bridge Called My Back*. Her recent work *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010* comprised of prose and poetry mixes autobiographical accounts with political and social commentary.

Throughout *Borderlands* Anzaldúa employs this mixture of living languages to articulate positions that are on the borderlands of countries, cultures, and political systems. For example, in the first chapter "The Homeland, Aztlán" Anzaldúa, through a mix of poetry and prose, traces a migratory history of what is today known as Texas. She writes: "In the 1880s, Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico, in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the *tejanos* (native Texans of Mexican descent) from their lands" (28). This Anglo migration led to the creation of an official "border" in 1848 separating the United States and Mexico and dislodging indigenous people from their land. This set the stage for the legal and illegal migrations and the related political debates that continue today. Anzaldúa weaves together a personal, migratory, and historical account for *tejanos* returning to the their "homeland." The actual U.S.—Mexico border serves as a metaphor for many types of dualistic boundaries: gendered, political, and linguistic, among others. Throughout the remainder of the book, the author illustrates how these multiple borders, which serve to divide, dislocate, and isolate, leave many individuals, specifically women, in the "in-between"—a space that does not conform to binary categorizations. However, rather than conceptualizing of this "in-between space" as restrictive or limiting, Anzaldúa understands it—a space she names *la frontera*—as a productive ground of "cross-pollination" between races, cultures, and modes of thinking, which promote intersecting perspectives that "include rather than exclude" (99-101).

Using Anzaldúa's "*frontera*" as a framework, the remainder of this section focuses on how Mernissi, in *Dreams of Trespass,* and Moroccan artist Lalla Essaydi in *Harem #14c*, dismantle the historical, cultural, and gendered borders of the harem—a

female Moroccan *frontera*. Both artists have spent much of their life negotiating their own position in relation to the frontiers imposed by various harems. It is my contention that although for Mernissi and Essaydi the harem has served as a personally restrictive space, through their work they, just as Anzaldúa reclaims the borderland, re-appropriate it as a critical and collective feminine space of artistic production.

Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass*

In her autobiographical novel *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood,* Fatema Mernissi retraces her childhood within the harem.[147] Notably she illustrates two harems: the house where she grew up in Fez and her grandmother Yasmina's home in the countryside.[148] From the outset of the book, Mernissi characterizes her childhood harem in Fez, specifically the border between the house and the street, as a sight of struggle for women. In the first paragraph, she writes: "I was born in the midst of chaos, since neither Christians nor women accepted the frontiers. Right on our threshold, you could see women of the harem contesting and fighting with Ahmed the doorkeeper… women dreamed of trespassing all the time. The world beyond the gate was their obsession. They fantasized all day long about parading in unfamiliar streets" (1). In this initial description,

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[147] While many critics (Ziad Bentahar, Melissa Matthes, Diya M. Adbo, and Filiz Turhan-Swenson) have accepted Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* to belong to the category of autobiography or memoir, others, such as Carine Bourget in "Complicity with Orientalism in Third-World Women's Writing," reject such a categorization. Bourget points to the variations between the English and French versions, as well as Mernissi's own statements as illustratory of the fictional aspects of this work. I would argue that Mernissi's character in this book is a little girl, no older than eleven. As such, the fictional aspects to which Bourget refers can be accounted for by the imagination, fantasies, and naivety of Fatema as a little girl.
[148] Some scholars, including Bourget, Hasna Lebbady, Faiza Shereen and Suzanne Gauch, criticize Mernissi's use of the harem, claiming it only reinscribes Orientalist visions of "Eastern" women. However, the Orientalist stereotype of the harem reduces it to one monolithic space, which is experienced in the same way for each woman. Mernissi resists such a characterization, creating multiple perceptions of the harem depending on location (urban, rural) and age. Furthermore, Adbo in "Narrating Little Fatima," notes that while Mernissi may exploit the colonial vision of the harem, she does so only to "to invite, and then undermine, the expectations of the Western reader" (n.p.).

Mernissi constructs a fine line ("our threshold") that divides her family's house in Fez from the outside world. Like at an international border crossing, a guard watches the entrance to her home, ensuring that those who do not have the proper credentials—women—stay on the inside. The gates create a boundary between outside and inside, men and women, freedom and confinement. Interestingly, consistent with the Western male fantasy discussed earlier, this female fantasy consists of exploring unknown territory and becoming acquainted with the unfamiliar. In this first instance, the harem is easily defined: an enclosed and monitored space that women dream of leaving.

Yet not all harems are walled in and guarded. Mernissi recalls her grandmother Yasmina's house to be significantly more fluid. Yasmina lived in the countryside, where she and her husband's other wives were free to roam both in and outside of the farm's gates. They took long walks, gardened, and even swam in the river. Mernissi recalls: "There were really no limits to what the women could do on the farm. They could grow unusual plants, ride horses, and move freely about, or so it seemed. In comparison, our harem in Fez was like a prison." (55). As opposed to the walls and the gatekeeper at her house in Fez, Yasmina's farm seemed so open and so free. Yet both the farm and the house in Fez were called harems, how could that be?

In trying to reconcile these differences, Fatema asks anyone who will listen to her about the harem. In a conversation between Fatema and her grandmother, Yasmina concedes that she is "stuck in a harem." Perplexed, Fatema asks her to explain. Mernissi writes:

> I asked Yasmina what that meant, to be stuck in a harem, and she gave me several different answers, which of course only confused me…Sometimes,

> she said that to be stuck in a harem meant simply that a woman had lost her freedom of movement. Other times, she said that a harem meant misfortune because a woman had to share her husband with many others (34).

Yasmina teaches her that the harem escapes a singular characterization; it means different things to different people. Although the physical walls surrounding her home in Fez created distinct boundaries, not all walls are visible. Even though Fatema's grandmother could physically move about, she remains stuck in a less than ideal personal situation as one of many wives to her husband. Yasmina's life remains dictated by institutionalized practices—in this case, multiple brides—created by and for the profit of men. In other words, as Anzaldúa contends, "culture is made by those in power—men." Although she and the other women do not have access to public life—as they are relegated to their harems—, the laws enacted and upheld in the public sphere directly affect their private lives.

While not physical, there are other walls constricting Yasmina's movement. Mernissi goes on to explain: "A harem was about private space and the rules relegating it….it did not need walls. Once you knew it was forbidden, you carried the harem within you…a law tattooed in the mind" (61-62). This is a particularly evocative image (specifically "a law tattooed in the mind") because it evokes a notion of public/private, male/female; and outside/inside. First, the "tattoo" in the Moroccan context is a gendered notion related specifically to the art of henna tattoos. These designs, drawn with henna paste by women on other women's bodies, often celebrate major occasions in a woman's life. These milestones, such as passage into puberty, engagement, marriage, and birth—

especially the birth of a boy—are by no means neutral: they all recognize a woman's potential or worth in relationship to men. Yet, the henna ceremonies are uniquely female affairs and serve as a sort of artistic reclaiming of the body. These tattoos, which fade over time, replicate the flowered and mosaic designs often found in Moroccan architecture.

However, tattoos do not always represent milestones, they can also mark possession. In her 2001 novel *Cette fille-là*, Algerian writer Maïssa Bey describes the provenance of tattoos:

> Ces tatouages ne sont que la marque de sa tribu. Marques distinctives, indélébiles, communes à toutes les femmes. Inscrites en des endroits visibles, le visage et les mains, seules parties du corps que peut découvrir une femme de haut rang élevée dans la tradition la plus rigoureuse. Tradition venue, nous explique-t-elle sans en être certaine, du temps des conquêtes arabes, où les tribus toujours en guerre marquaient, pour les reconnaître, leurs filles et leurs femmes souvent prises comme esclaves en tant que butins de guerre, tout comme leurs précieux troupeaux de chameaux (56-57).

Unlike the henna tattoos that women themselves apply, these markings do not fade and rub off over time. They are stamped on from childhood, acting as signals of male, tribal possession. The women and girls that Bey describes are seen only as the booty of war. This sort of branding places women on the same level of animals such as cattle or camels in their worth to the group. The equivalency to animals reminds the reader of Yasmina's description of her life on the farm: she and the other women were free to roam about, just

like cattle. These visible signs distinguish women from one tribe from women of another tribe. As such a woman's value is determined by her worth in terms of a commodity to the group. She is not seen as an individual with distinct personhood, only as on object of potential use. The marks on both the face and the hands are visible both to the outsider and to the woman herself. A glance at the hands or a look in the mirror reminds a woman to whom she belongs. In Bey's novel, these markings take on a greater meaning as they occur on women and girls who have been abandoned and have no home except an asylum where they live with other homeless and family-less women and girls. As such, Bey asserts that these markings work only one way: they prove a woman's belonging to a group when the leaders of that group find it convenient and beneficial. However, these tattoos have no value once the owner is no longer a commodity of war. They serve only as a reminder to the exiled woman, and other bystanders, of her banishment from the group.

In both of the preceding examples, henna tattoos are inscribed on the female body in order to mark celebration or possession. The notion of a tattooed inscription extends beyond the body and onto the mind, as Mernissi states with her pronouncement of a "law tattooed in the mind." Such a conceptualization is also reminiscent of Abdelkebir Khatibi's novel *La Mémoire Tatouée*. In it Khatibi, a Moroccan novelist, playwright and critic, traces various autobiographical experiences through a fragmented, non-linear, and poetic style. As a Moroccan author who made a conscious choice to write in French, he denounces intolerance through an autobiographical study that rejects cultural, linguistic, and territorial limitations. The "tattooed memory" to which he refers in the title invokes the *dédoublement* that permeates his work. The memory that the author records is at once

a psychological reality and a physical condition, which together create a connection between memory, words, and the body. In describing his relationship as a boy to reading, he writes: "J'oubliais la chaise, le corps se dédouanait, librement, des muscles à étoiler entre les mots" (54). In using the verb *dédouaner*, Khatibi evokes a politicized zone—*la douane*, or customs. This space at the border controls the movement of goods and people. His body emerges as a political space, occupying the borderlands between embodiment, words, and memory. It ignores its own constricting corporeality and becomes entangled with the text. This entanglement, however, is not limited only to the physical body, but can also be applied to intersecting textual, linguistic, and national border zones, or in Anzaldúa's terms, *la frontera*. This emotional experience so marks Khatibi that it is inscribed in his memory and influences the author's future relationship with words. After growing older and moving to France, Khatibi experiences first-hand a sort of "cognitive colonization," to borrow the phrase from Paola Baccheta. He, as an Arab man living in Paris in the era of decolonization, becomes the object of disdain and racial othering. However, he embraces his childhood memories of disembodied reading by repeating these techniques in his writing. In effect, he exercises, like Anzaldúa, a practice of "cognitive decolonization" by using his pen to inscribe his memories and lived experiences as other.[149]

Mernissi's "tattooed law" represents some combination of the gendered, physical, and psychological characteristics associated with the tattoo. The notion of the "law" reinforces this gendered dynamic. In the Moroccan (Islamic) context, the law, inspired by

[149] Contemporary scholarship on Khatibi's work highlights the ways in which he, through his literary writings, is able to inscribe a "dynamic" (Mdarhri-Alaoui) postcolonial identity "without borders" (Hamil 75). See Lucy Stone McNeece "Colonizing the Sign," Adballah Mdarhri-Alaoui's "Abdelkébir Khatibi: Writing a Dynamic Identity," and Mustapha Hamil's "Integrating identity: Abdelkebir Khatibi and the Postcolonial Prerogative."

the Quran, often has a relation to *Shari'a* law, the precise application of which remains at the heart of debate in many Muslim societies. The main question consists of: who made *Shari'a* law? Was it an invention of man, or is it a divine directive? If men created this law, it can be reformed. That is to say, that those things which are considered to be "haram" or forbidden (that which is inside the harem—women), might one day be *halal* or permissible (*West*, 13, 22-23).[150] In painting this image of the "you carry the harem within you….a law tattooed on the mind," Mernissi creates the harem as physical, psychological and embodied space that although seemingly private and feminine in nature, is patrolled and controlled by rules instated by public authorities—in this case men.

Even though men define and patrol the borders and create the laws and institutions, they cannot escape them. Mernissi witnesses this in the comportment of the French, in the Ville Nouvelle in Fez. She notes:

> The French were afraid to walk. They were always in their cars. Even the soldiers would stay in their cars when things got bad. Their fear was quite an amazing thing to us children, because we saw that grownups could be as afraid as we could. And these grownups who were afraid were on the outside, supposedly free. The powerful ones who had created the frontier were also the fearful ones. The Ville Nouvelle was like their harem; just like women, they could not walk freely in the Medina. So you could be powerful, and still be the prisoner of a frontier" (23).

[150] Although in *Dreams of Trespass* Mernissi does not specify her position towards religion, in other works including *Beyond the Veil* and *The Veil and the Male Elite*, she does. In their article "Women's Rights in the Muslim World" Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh trace Mernissi's evolving views and her various positions as both "Muslim" and "Islamic" feminist.

Although these boundaries, for instance between the Ville Nouvelle and the Medina, create the illusion of power, it remains only an illusion. In fact, fear consumes the so-called powerful and free. This fear itself acts as wall, a boundary, displacing the female harem to the European Ville Nouvelle. If even the powerful are prisoners of the system that they created, is there any hope for escape?

The borderlands that are being negotiated become a mix of public and private, familial and national, intimate and political spaces. The political boundaries of the Ville Nouvelle were created in service to the French nation that sought to expand its power. Yet the power of the French nation does not extend to the individual soldier who often remains enclosed within his car. He seeks the intimacy and safety of his vehicle to shield him from the potential violence that threatens his security to circulate freely. The soldiers and their actions—retreating to their "harem"—are the physical representations exercised by individuals in service to their nation. While the soldiers desire confinement, Fatema's female relatives jump at the opportunity to leave their harem—a trip to the local movie theater was cause reason for excitement (114-122). [151] Yet, the boundaries within the harem—physical and interpersonal—are just as political as those of the Ville Nouvelle. Within the harem, there are divisions and hierarchies among women. While sometimes co-wives could be like sisters (36), one wife could also leverage her position to harm the others. This was indeed the case with Yasmina and Lalla Thor, Grandfather's most recent wife on the farm. Lalla Thor is a real menace to the other women, wielding her power and acting superior to the other wives. In order to remind her of her place as one wife among many who was also "stuck in a harem," Yasmina calls her fat pet duck Lalla Thor

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[151] In "Double Agent: Fatima Mernissi's Interventions in the Narratives of the Self, Nation, and the Other," Adbo explores how different national, intimate, and political spaces can be unbounded through various *fissures* or "avenues of escape" (7).

(26-34). Her co-wife is furious that she dares to use her name for the duck. In the end, Yasmina regains some power in her relationship with both her husband and her co-wife thanks to her strategic duck naming. As Fatema recounts: "Naming the duck Lalla Thor was Yasmina's way of participating in the creation of the beautiful, new Morocco, the Morocco that I, her little granddaughter, was going to step into" (37). Despite merely being "stuck in a harem," Yasmina's intimate interactions take on political meaning. She attempted to disrupt the systems of power and hierarchy from within in order to create a new nation based in equality rather than hierarchy—a *frontera.*

Yasmina's greatest desire for her granddaughter is to *no*t be "stuck in a harem," but to be able to escape. For Fatema, possible escape comes from accessing power through two mediums: self-expression and the collective intergenerational power of women. Both within the harem walls in Fez and in Yasmina's harem in the countryside, storytelling among women was an important means of trespassing borders, if only for a few minutes.

> When you happen to be trapped powerless behind walls, stuck in a dead-end harem, you dream of escape. And magic flourished when you spell out that dream and make the frontiers vanish. Dreams can change your life, and eventually the world. Liberation starts with images dancing in your little heads and you can translate those images in words. And words cost nothing! (114).

Dreams facilitate a means for escape. Although at first they are only abstract images, as they flourish and develop, these dreams are translated and transformed into words and stories. These oral accounts, which are freely available to all who have access to

language, evolve over time—unlike written tales that remain the same over time. This possibility of narrative transformation infuses the narrator with emancipatory power. By articulating and sharing these dreams, the harem walls begin to disappear.

Dreams become collective aspirations, affording the dreamers—women—a certain power that is denied to them as individuals. Although they may be stuck in a harem, none of the women in Mernissi's autobiographical account is alone, either at the harem in Fez or at the farm. At the farm, even though Yasmina and her co-wives are in competition with one another for the affections of their husband, they also survive thanks to one another. Over the course of the book, Yasmina communicates her happiest memories of life at the farm. They all occur in the company of her co-wives, whether washing dishes in the river, or telling stories in the shade of a tree. At the harem in Fez, Fatema's mother, who she refers to as Mother, would prefer to have a separate house just for her husband and children, but she accepts living in the harem as part of the extended family. In many instances living in a multi-generational community of women gives her optimism.[152] She sees on a daily basis how attitudes towards women have changed between her mother's generation and her own and hopes that mentalities will continue to evolve so that her daughter, Fatema, might one day be able to escape from this harem. After one particularly trying discussion about education Mother proclaims to Fatema:

> 'You *are* going to transform this world aren't you? You are going to create a planet without walls and without frontiers, where the gatekeepers have off every day of the year.' Long silences would follow her speeches,

[152] Filiz Turhan-Swenson discusses the community aspects of the harem in "Voices across the Frontier," in which he names it as both a "nourishing" and "oppressive" place.

> but the beauty of her images would linger on, and float around the courtyard like perfumes, like dreams. Invisible, but powerful (201).

Although the mental and emotional barriers that confine women within the harem are invisible, so too are dreams and as Mother states, they are equally as powerful. In creating a vision for her child's future, Mother does not simply wish for Fatema to be free, to be on the outside. Rather, her planetary vision is much more radical: she imagines a world free from walls.[153] Mother's choice of the word planet, deriving from the Greek verb "to wander," expresses both substance and fluidity of movement. Unlike the stars that are fixed, planets, with enough mass to generate their own round gravity fields, create orbits or paths through space.

In many ways, Mother's planetary predication about Fatema's future has come true. As an adult Fatema Mernissi has broken down the walls—visible and invisible—that once enclosed her. Fatema has travelled. She has lived in Morocco, France and the United States. Fatema has studied. She has received degrees from La Sorbonne in France, from Brandeis University in Boston, and currently teaches at Mohammed V University in Fez. Fatema has written. Her academic and autobiographical works, originally written in English, French or Arabic have been translated and distributed in numerous countries around the globe. Today, she is regarded as an international scholar, feminist, sociologist, and author. Just as Anzaldúa embraces her position as a gendered cultural, linguistic, sexual other in order to image a new productive space—*la frontera*—, so too does

[153] This notion of "planetary" is reminiscent of Gaytri Spivak's recent work that examines the relationship between postcolonial theory and theology. A product of the "Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium" held in 2007, *Planetary Loves* documents conversations held between Spivak and theologians Serene Jones, Catherine Keller, Kwok Pui-lan, and Stephen D. Moore. Within these conversations Spivak proposes a need for a shift from "postcolonial" discourse to "planetary." Such a move would decenter nationalist or colonialist discourses in favor of more globalized or "planetary" imaginaries.

Mernissi embrace the harem. She envisages it as a central place of encounter, a borderland, and as a point of departure that grants her access to both her own and other cultures.

Essaydi: *Harem*

Similarly to Mernissi, the artist Lalla Essaydi exceeds any one simple identity. Born and raised in Morocco, as a young adult, Essaydi spent time in Paris, before marrying and moving to Saudi Arabia, where she gave birth to and raised two children. She left Saudi Arabia for France and then the United States in the early 1990s. Today she splits her time between New York and Marrakesh. Essaydi's movement between these four countries has caused her to reflect on her own place in relation to each of them. She notes that regardless of where she is, she is perceived as other: "When I'm in Saudi Arabia, they call me Moroccan. In Morocco, they call me Saudi. In the West, I am someone from a different culture"(Essaydi and Carlson 28). In this description, Essaydi characterizes her identity as expressed by others in relation to a specific homeland.

In his work *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*, film and media scholar Hamid Naficy parses out the meaning of homeland, a term he relates to both house and home. In his estimation, the house refers to a physical object that "involves legal categories of rights, property and possession and their opposites" (5). It is a fixed place. In contrast, "home" can be anywhere; "it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination…" (6). Home is thus that which is transported within the individual. It is not material in nature, but rather subject to the creativity of each person. "Homeland" can refer to an actual place or nation-state, but as Naficy notes,

it “has been the most absolute, abstract, mythical and fought for of the three notions.” (6). Fraught with irony, people can be displaced and homeless in their own homeland. These terms are key in the construction of our relationships to places and things that form our “primordial identity.” When Essaydi is designated as other, her interlocutors are effectively pointing out her own exile from her own homeland. Naficy writes: “everyone has a culture (or home), but some are in exile from it, living the alienation of a double life, marked as other but never recognized for what they really are” (Nacify 32). Essaydi exists within this constructed form of exile in which she is consistently marked as other. It is from this place of otherness that Essaydi approaches her work. Her artwork provides a new space in which she is free from constructed boundaries—national or other.

Interestingly, Essaydi’s “exile” is a result of this “othering,” rather than an actual exile. The artist can and does return to her house and homeland. In this way, Essaydi’s status as other is similar to Anzaldúa’s position as a woman in the in-between. Like Anzaldúa, Essaydi, too creates a space that she can productively inhabit. *Harem,* her collection dating from 2009, actively engages with these spaces by returning to *Dar El Basha,* a traditional Moroccan house in Marrakech in which Essaydi shoots this collection. In contrast to her two earlier collections *Converging Territories* and *Femmes du Maroc,* the visual features of this space serve as a central motif in the photographs. The traditional Moroccan architecture and rich colors that surround her models become vital components of the images. These elements are particularly striking in *Harem #14c*.[154] In this image, Essaydi captures a young woman as she stretches out in a doorway within *Dar el Basha.* She appears to be on the threshold between two rooms: in the foreground, an unknown interior room, in the background, an interior courtyard. Both

[154] This image can be viewed online at Essaydi’s website: http://lallaessaydi.com/8.html.

spaces appear illuminated, the foreground lit with artificial light, while the back courtyard appears bathed in natural light. The model occupies an in-between position between these two rooms. This space has no singular light source; rather it absorbs light from the surrounding rooms in such a way that is both front and backlit.

The threshold that the model occupies has two doorway-like openings. The larger entranceway (closest to the viewer) is rectangular in shape and also rounded. Mosaic tiles create the appearance of a rectangular entry, framing the vaulted opening. The interior of this vaulted doorway is completely covered in mosaic tiles and angles back to a second, smaller doorway. A white wooden frame surrounds this second entryway. Although the opening is rectangle in shape, it reproduces the vaulted appearance of the outer opening with a carved-wooden ornamental piece. The shape of this double-doorway is replicated at the back of the inner courtyard with a window. This window again is rectangular in shape but is topped by a circular wooden cutout. The repeated structure of the openings creates the effect of a mise-en-abyme. Unlike the two open doorways, the window has wooden shutters that help to create a closed-off space. In fact, the window has two sets of shutters, one that remains open, the other closed. The closed shutters do not allow for light to pass and in effect put an end to the mise-en-abyme structure, recasting the gaze of the viewer back into the framed space of the image—the doorway. The doorways as well as the shuttered windows create multiple thresholds for the harem. The architecture of these closed-off spaces, along with the title of this piece, and the presence of a female model suggest that is indeed a “harem.”

In addition to the framing elements contained within the physical space, the medium of photography introduces other frames as well. I would argue that a second

shuttered window is present in the photograph, although not visible: the shutter of Essaydi's camera. The opening and closing of this shutter allows for the passage of light, permitting the photographer to selectively capture moments. These captured moments, once developed, are framed in the printed product by the actual film surrounding the image—the dark edge that includes the film's brand name, Kodak, as well as the number of the negative. This deliberate decision by Essaydi to frame the image with the film reminds the viewer that this photo is only a staged representation. The negative number indicates that it is only one image among many. Furthermore, it indicates how the line between reality and representation become blurred. Unlike the fine, strict lines of the doorways, the edges of the film remain jagged and imperfect. The filmic border and the colors of the image blend into one another posing the question: where does representation begin? The medium of photography, with its shuttered window and filmic frame create a small entryway for the viewer into this *haram* space.

The walls, as well as the floors in both rooms are covered in bright mosaic tiles in which blue, green and white predominate. The model's body, which extends across the threshold, is outfitted in a fabric that replicates this mosaicked wall pattern. Using the geometric shapes on the walls of the house as her pattern, Essaydi designed the fabric to reproduce the interior of the home (Cullum n.p.). As the Christie's catalogue notes, the resemblance between the home's interior and the woman's clothing acts as a camouflaging: "They [the models in the multiple *Harem # 14* photographs] become intrinsically linked to these spaces; they are constrained and bound by these walls. By camouflaging the models in *Harem #14* with the decoration that surrounds them, women literally become part of the space that they occupy" ("Lalla Essaydi 14c," Christie's n.p.).

This notion of camouflage is compelling and worth further examination. Both humans and animals perform the act of camouflaging. For humans it often occurs within situations of violence and war. Soldiers don green and brown camouflaged gear so that they might blend into their surroundings, protecting themselves from the eye of the enemy. Animals, such as the chameleon, disguise themselves within their environment in order to hide from predators. In this way, camouflage serves as protection from danger, "concealment" and "disguise" (Merriam-Webster). Having already established that the harem is a protected space reserved for woman, the camouflaged patterns on the garb protects the model from the prying eyes of the viewer. It also conceals her body. This is in sharp contrast to popular portrayals of harem women in which they are scantily clothed.

Essaydi's camouflaging recalls Martinican writer Susan Césaire's work *Le Grand Camouflage: Écrits de Dissidence (1941-1945).* Although written in a very different context, this collection of essays celebrates a long-neglected female voice that promotes Antillean identity in tandem with a constructed physical and imaginary home—the Caribbean Islands. In his Introduction to this volume published only in 2009 (more than forty years after her premature death from cancer), the Guadeloupian author Daniel Maximin writes of Césaire:

> …malgré tous les malgrés qui font taire scandaleusement l'écriture des femmes, malgré tant de place laissé à l'homme dans sa vie comme dans ses textes, malgré la réticence des poètes à libérer les muses, elle a, dans tous ses articles ici présents, enraciné sa pensée non sur un territoire

> littéraire balisé, une propriété privée d'altérité, mais dans une terre fertilisée par tous les possibles de l'écriture et de la mémoire vive (22).

Like Césaire's island, Essaydi's *Harem* represents a fertile ground of possibility. Both Césaire and Essaydi use their own home turf as a place of production. Césaire acknowledges the beauty of Martinique, while also understanding its inherent danger. At the end of her essay "Le Grand Camouflage," she writes: " si mes Antilles sont si belles, c'est qu'alors le grand jeu de cache-cache a réussi, c'est qu'il fait certes trop beau ce jour-là pour y voir" (94). Césaire, who was overshadowed by her male counterparts, roots herself in and inhabits "her" island through her beautiful yet defiant prose. Her writing calls into question the accepted beauty of the islands by prefacing it by "si" or if. Her experience as black Martinican woman leaves her unconvinced of their exceptional splendor. Like the beauty of the harem, the beauty of the Caribbean islands camouflages the racial and gendered problems left by their colonizers.

Despite the limited portrayals of Arab women that have permeated the imaginary, Essaydi's photographs refuse the proscribed artistic territory that relegates her and her work to a position of alterity. Instead, she sees the inherent possibilities—visual, written, spatial, and memorial—that such a position informs. By returning to Morocco in *Harem*, Essaydi exhibits her own dissidence to the notion of her so-called otherness, by recreating in a traditional "house" in her "homeland," an artistic "home" that places Arab women—herself and her models—at the center.

In 2012 selected images from *Harem* appeared at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in a retrospective on Essaydi's work entitled *Revisions.* Guest curator Kinsey Katchka commented on the complexity of Essaydi's work noting that

"'there are many layers, literally, in terms of skin, cloth and architecture,'" that inhabit Essaydi's photography (Cited in Brown). These various layers within *Harem #14c* build upon one another. At the heart of the photograph is the model's body, vertically placed in the threshold. The henna-calligraphy text that covers her skin creates a second layer. However, the majority of this text is obscured by a caftan. Unlike the white cloth in Essaydi's earlier works, which is the traditional Moroccan dress, the artist has dyed the fabric to replicate the mosaicked patterns of the wall, creating another layer. On the model alone, there are no fewer than four layers of skin, writing, cloth, and design. This same layering techniques continues in the rest of the image with the tiled walls—in the front room, threshold, and backroom—, the multiple doors and windows, and frames, including the frame of the photo. In effect, within a singular photograph, Essaydi has multiple canvases: the film, the harem wall, the mosaicked fabric, and the female body. By and large, these canvases build upon and communicate with one another. The different framing structures, including the filmic edge, the doorways and windows repeat the mise-en-abyme structure. The mosaic pattern of the model's clothing echoes the design on the walls.

Although she literally wears the room, the model's position as well as her calligraphed skin disturb the otherwise interconnected surroundings. First, her body, the face looking towards the camera with the frame turned away, appears contorted. This physical position, like her location in the threshold, places her in the in-between: she gazes outwards while her body turns inwards; she gazes at the lens while she hides her body from it. The calligraphic henna writing that covers the model's exposed skin further confirms this disruption and in-between status. As explained in Chapter One, the henna-

text exploits male and female practices, "high" and popular art techniques, and confirms a community and collectivity with other women—who are absent from this image. Furthermore, the Arabic calligraphy conveys narratives about the models and artist's lives that remain inaccessible to even the Arabic reader.

The calligraphed female body at once creates a distance from the viewer and establishes a relationship between the model and the artist. Essaydi is not an outsider—such as the Orientalists like Delacroix—whose presence is in the goal of portraying an exotic other, but rather her presence is in the goal of subverting common stereotypes of women in the Arab world. While not physically present in the image, she inscribes herself within it—reinforcing a community among women. In her artist's statement, Essaydi writes: "it is obvious that while my photographs are expressions of my personal history, they can also to be taken as a reflection on the life of Arab women in general" (26). Essaydi by no means believes that she can speak for all Arab women. The immense diversity of the lived experience of Arab women would render such a task impossible and reinscribe them within a limited and limiting discourse—precisely that which Essaydi attempts to overcome. She does seek, however, to expose the common experiences shared by Arab women. Due to her position, Essaydi's stake in the final product is not only that of the artist, but also as Arab woman. Although the model in *Harem # 14c* appears alone in the threshold, she is in effect accompanied by the artist who has created the patterned cloth and worked with her to carefully apply the henna text—a process that takes many hours. Together, these women create and perform their own "Harem." This collective process among women recalls Anzaldúa's reflections on the word "*nosotras*": "The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word '*nosotras,'*

I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse" (76). Anzaldúa's astonishment of a female specific term for "we" or "us" allowed her to reflect on the secondary status of women within her language and culture. The existence of the feminine "we" verbally announces the possibility of female collectively—a key aspect of the *frontera*. Essaydi's work alongside her models suggests her own embracing of the *nosotras.*[155] Her presence on both sides of the camera builds a relationship with the photographed model in which they are both implicated in the final product. The collaborative nature of the photograph minimizes the hierarchy that could exist between artist and model. Neither one "speaks" for the other. Model and artist incorporate both of their experiences as Arab women in order to create an image of the harem as borderland.

This collaborative spirit extends to the text. Essaydi inscribes her personal journals onto the model. In effect, her body becomes an extension of the artist's notebook. Essaydi's words create a temporary tattoo on the photographed body. As we saw earlier in this chapter, tattoos come in numerous forms. The impermanence of these words written in henna will fade over time—they are neither the permanent branding that Bey describes, nor the psychologically inscribed marks to which Khatibi refers. In this image, the calligraphic henna remains largely unreadable due to the distance from the viewer. Essaydi notes that her lyric style of writing is open to interpretation: "'It is public but private; even if they [the viewers] read it, it is not literal. It could apply to anyone or any person' " (Essaydi cited in Brown). As opposed to the branding, which signals ownership, Essaydi's henna writing does not serve to mark or label the models. The artist

[155] In Arabic the pronoun "we," like in French or English, remains unchanged regardless of gender.

does not insist on any specific interpretation, leaving it open-ended. This allows for each model to wear the text, interpret, and perform it as she sees fit. Even within this process of collaboration between photographer and photographed subject, the model remains autonomous. The public yet private thoughts that she wears characterize her availability to the viewer. On the one hand, the model's body is visible to the public and open to interpretation—as confirmed by my own analysis. On the other hand, thanks to the protective camouflaging, inaccessible positioning, and unreadable writing, she remains private.

Mernissi, in *Dreams of Trespass,* names the threshold as a place of female struggle. Again, here in Essaydi's work, the threshold, as seen in *Harem #14c*, emerges as an important terrain. The model occupies a space between two doorways and two windows, disrupting the space. Her body refuses a distinct pathway: it is unclear if she plans to go in, to the interior courtyard (her body appears to be turned that way) or if she plans to come out towards the camera lens (the way she is looking). Her physical and corporeal positions do not allow for a simple binary reading of the image. To attempt to place her on either the inside or outside misses the point: she occupies the threshold, or in the words of Anzladúa, the borderlands. In imagining these mixed, feminine borderlands, Anzaldúa writes: "The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her [the Chicana] a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended" (102). Essaydi literally shows, through her images, models in the flesh who reject the dualities that would keep them prisoners in the harem of the Western imaginary. The model's position, on the threshold, embodies Essaydi's work, which exceeds the boundaries of either the inside or the outside. The

jagged filmic edge of the photographic frame blurs the borders of the image. The seeping of the color into the film during development creates a fluidity that transcends a dualistic construct. This fluid artistic "contact zone" between film and image reflect the artist's own experiences. [156] Essaydi has known both the confinement of the harem and the freedom available to her outside its walls. Her artistic production is derived from neither one nor the other, neither the inside nor the outside, but rather exceeds the boundaries of both.

Living in the Borderlands

At the beginning of this chapter, the harem was evoked as either an overly sexualized place of male enjoyment or as a prison. Such radical portrayals tend to reinforce binary categories: inside/outside, enslaved/free, powerless/powerful, etc. It is precisely these limiting dualisms that both Mernissi and Essaydi, much like Anzaldúa, seek to avoid. Although Anzaldúa comes from a different background—as a Chicana feminist in the United States—the gendered linguistic, cultural, and national barriers that she seeks to negotiate are not dissimilar from those of Mernissi and Essaydi's harems. Anzaldúa, Mernissi, and Essaydi come from and inhabit different contexts. Anzaldúa, a Mexican national who was born, lived, and worked in the United States, attempts to negotiate her own circumstance as the queer daughter of immigrants living on the Texas-Mexico border. Mernissi, a sociologist professor, born and living in Morocco and

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[156] Mary Louise Pratt in "Arts of the Contact Zone" defines the "contact zone" as an area in which different cultures intermingle: "I use the term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). The blurring of the filmic edges is representative of larger themes in Essaydi's work and marks the artistic meeting of inside and outside, confinement and freedom, architecture and photography, and high and low arts forms. These themes are inscribed in relations of power associated with colonialism and gender.

educated in France and the United States, seeks to understand the constraints of her own culture as well as the limitations of Western cultures in relation to the harem. Essaydi, an artist who has lived in Morocco and Saudi Arabia, trained in art in France and the United States, and who splits her time between Morocco and the U.S., returns to Morocco in order to create layered photographs. Their works are shaped by the specificity of their cultural, linguistic, and social experiences as women in these contexts. Despite the autobiographical nature of their production, their work neither provides clichéd representations of Chicana or Arab women, nor is it destined solely for consumption by these groups. Instead, these artists create spaces that engage with numerous identities at once. They invite their audiences to join them in these contexts in order to explore their own borderlands. In one of the final poems in *Borderlands*, entitled "To live in the Borderlands means you," Gloria Anzaldúa writes:

> To survive the Borderlands
> You must live *sin fronteras*
> Be a crossroads (217).

Mernissi and Essaydi's work is, to return to Paola Bachetta's term, one of cognitive and, I would add, artistic, decolonization—it exceeds the mapped and patrolled international borders that privilege western or masculinist cultural production. Mernissi and Essaydi do not seek to reside within the restrictive boundaries of any singular institution or practice. For both artists the harem walls have served as a frontier. Both have lived in the harem, inside the borders. Both have lived outside of the harem walls, on the other side of the border. Yet, their greatest production, as scholars and artists, emerges when they go beyond these limited and limiting frontiers, and are not bounded to any one geographical region (Morocco, France or the United States), not constrained to any one language

(Arabic, French, or English), not limited to any one identity (eastern woman or western woman, feminist, sociologist, oriental, henna artist, calligrapher, and so on). Thanks to this multi-polar identity, the transnational work of both Mernissi and Essaydi exceeds established boundaries, or as Anzaldúa puts it, lives *sin fronteras*.

Conclusion—Subversive Weaving in Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi

In the introduction, I frame this dissertation around Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's respective "trespassing," "mixing," or "interweaving" of various positionalities as well as mediums. These "interweavings" can be observed through the actions of female characters within their works, specifically in their engagement in diverse crafts, such as embroidery (Mernissi), *tissage* or weaving (Sebbar), and henna (Essaydi). Each of these crafts demands a interlacing of different materials, including threads and fabric (embroidery), yarns (weaving), and henna paste and the female body (henna), in order to produce a final product—clothes, rugs, or tattoos. Considered as decorative, these generally female crafts are thought to be inferior to "higher" (traditionally male) artistic practices. While *tissage* in the North African context can be practiced outside the home by men, as we see for example in Mohammed Dib's novel *Le Métier à Tisser* (1957) in which the main character Omar gets a job in an *atelier de tisserands*, the practice of *tissage* to which I refer here is the female craft produced in the home. The anthropologist Brinkley Messick, in "Subordinate Discourse: Women, Weaving, and Gender Relations in North Africa," describes the exclusive female nature of *tissage*: "As the preeminent old domestic craft of non-elite North African Muslim women, weaving represents an elaborated body of specialized female knowledge combined with an active exclusion of males from craft processes" (211). Weaving is not simply a hobby or pastime, but a skill developed in the company of other women that demands discipline and creativity. The skills acquired during weaving translate beyond the craft itself, producing "specialized female knowledge." This knowledge is part of what Brinkley calls "subordinate

discourse:" a non-verbal means of communication unavailable to men. Although Brinkley names this non-verbal discourse "subordinate," a better descriptor would be "suubversive" as the type of communication he describes exists outside the dominant paradigms of discourse: male and verbal. Moreover, Brinkley adds: "Never fixed in written text, the subordinate discourse of weaving nevertheless existed and was widely shared by women, irrespective of the boundaries of ecological zones, languages (Arabic and Berber), and political states" (221). As a non-verbal and non-fixed style of communication, Brinkley situates weaving as a gendered practice that surpasses any singular geographical location, language, or political affiliation. In short, it exceeds the boundaries of any one characterization.

In the works of Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi the female characters perform various types of *tissage*—embroidery, weaving, or henna design. While *tissage* is elaborated physically in each of the artists' work, these craft processes also serve as a model for the Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi in stitching together their works. The embroidery, *tissage,* and henna being produced by the female characters—the mixing of different elements—translate to other mediums, and become influential to Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's processes of production. For instance, in *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar employs the skills learned through a process of weaving—the interlacing of different threads—to create a narrative structure that relies on various mediums (textual, oral, photographic, filmic) and histories (as depicted through a variety of witnesses).

Throughout this dissertation, the notion of intersectionality—between genders, histories, spaces, and mediums—has played a key role. *Tissage* occurs when these multiple intersecting elements are combined together. Weaving is not just one

"crossroads," but a whole series of them. Any single stitch is meaningless and will fall apart without the support of those around it. The same can be said of Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's work. The *tissage* that they create by engaging with notions of East and West, male and female, high and low art forms, or text and image, cannot be dislodged from one another. Taken together, these overlapping crossroads provide a multiplicity of (non-binary) possibilities for history, subjectivity, and artistic creation.

In *Converging Territories* (Chapter One), I show how Essaydi uses henna design in order to apply text onto the bodies and surroundings of her female models. Essaydi's collaborators participate in the application of the henna-text, acting as both the producers and the bearers of the unique henna design. As such, they weave their ideas, writing, bodies, and craft together. This application process produces a sense of female community between the models and photographer who are all invested in the creating a meaningful final product. While employing the conventional paste, Essaydi mixes the henna design with other forms of art such as calligraphy, painting, and photography. This interweaving of "high" and "low," traditionally male and female (calligraphic and henna design) art practices create the "converging territories" in which Essaydi bases her work. This aesthetic process of creation composed of the weaving of various territories (East and West, henna and calligraphy, male and female techniques, painting and photography) creates an original subversive discourse that exceeds the limitations of any one of them.

In Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, "tissage" is revealed as a crucial practice that serves to unite the older generation of French and Algerian women—Mina and Flora—when they are imprisoned together (Chapter Two). During the Algerian War for Independence Mina (Omer's mother) and Flora (Louis' mother) meet while imprisoned

for their activism against the French colonization of Algeria. While the specifics provided within Sebbar's narrative concerning the circumstances of their arrest and imprisonment remain vague, the details that Mina and Flora do describe relate to the community created with the other prisoners particularly through a practice of *tissage*. Having no other way to pass the time, Mina, Flora, and the other inmates in the women's prison continue their activism by petitioning the guards in order to acquire the necessary materials –"de la laine de récupération" and "des aiguilles"— to engage in different craft projects including *tissage* (weaving) and *le tricot* (knitting). Mina recalls: "Flora a gardé la sienne [the scarf that she knit], vert et rouge, au point mousse. Elle ne savait pas tricoter…Elle a appris les lettres de l'alphabet arabe et des mots de Kabyle" (22). In learning to knit, Flora does not only learn a craft, but also begins to learn a language. In this case, the weaving creates an opportunity for communication among the imprisoned women. As such, the weaving becomes a productive activity not only to fill up hours of captivity, but also to create a female community. The scarf that she keeps—in the green and red of the Algerian flag—serves as a physical reminder of her time in prison, the women she meets, and the skills and knowledge that she acquires. As Mina teaches knitting and language to Flora, the two women develop a friendship and become intimately entwined in each other's lives. This relationship, first established in prison, has lasted for decades. In the narrative present, thirty-five years later, Mina escapes the violence of the Algerian Civil War, fleeing to Paris where she is staying with Flora.

While weaving—the interlacing of strands of thread or yarn—is generally thought of as a pastime or craft, *La Seine était rouge* also integrates weaving as a narrative practice. This is illustrated through the interlacing of different mediums (textual, oral,

photographic, and filmic), histories (evidenced by the witnesses in Louis' film including *La mère*, *Le Harki de Papon*, and *l'Algérien savué des eaux*), and generations (Mina, Flora, and Lalla and Amel, Louis, and Omer). Although she does not physically weave together different yarns, Sebbar appropriates a type of "specialized female knowledge," as described by Brinkley, in order to engage in an alternative, historical, and media-driven "weaving." Sebbar illustrates a method of *tissage* by combining elements—history, nationality, identity—and mediums—text, photography, oral accounts, and video—passed between generations and genders in order to produce art forms that reflect mixed and intersecting identities and experiences.

Similarly, in *Dreams of Trespass* (Chapter Three) Mernissi describes how embroidery is an essential collective activity for women. It allows them to gather together and to create tangible objects with their hands. These objects, are not however meaningless, as they highlight differences between women, creating silent "wars" between those who subscribe to traditional (*taqlidi)* and modern *('asri*) embroidery methods. Traditional Moroccan embroidery (as done by Fatema's grandmother Lalla Mani and aunt Lalla Radi) depicts flowers or geometric designs and is slowly and carefully stitched so that both the front and back of the fabric have a polished look. The "modern" embroidery (stitched by Fatema's mother and cousin Chama) includes wild color combinations, nontraditional objects (such as birds), and is quickly stitched so that the back of fabric looks messy and unrefined (205-207). These methods are reflective of general (traditional and modern) attitudes towards the world at large. In one "war" between traditional and more modern embroidery practices, Fatema's mother expresses her ideas pertaining to her needlework that extend to her outlook more broadly:

> But there are some very personal things, like embroidery, which allow me to breathe, and I am not going to give those up too. I have never enjoyed traditional embroidery, and I don't see why people can't stitch whatever they like. I don't harm anyone by creating a strange bird, instead of embroidering the same old desperately repetitive Fez design (205).

The embroidery—the weaving of different colored threads into fabric—serves as a metaphor for other practices in life. Mernissi puts forth a method in *Dreams of Trespass,* stitching together various harems, generations, insides and outsides, dreams and realities, in order to propose means of trespass, which extend beyond the boundaries of any one of these categories.[157]

These crafts do not necessarily take center stage within these artists' narratives and aesthetic production, but they do provide a crucial model for Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi's own artistic practices. Although they do not "weave" in the traditional sense, that it is to say interlacing strands of yarn, their works are composed of various weavings between individuals, histories, languages, geographic locations, and textual, oral, visual, and embodied mediums. These weavings are not limited to these specific works, but can be seen throughout their oeuvres. For example, in *Mes Algéries en France: Carnets de voyages*, Sebbar writes specifically about sewing—the joining together of different materials with threads—while simultaneously stitching together a narrative structure that

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[157] These artists are not the only examples of *tissage* in North African writing. Other forms of *tissage* can be seen for example in Abdelkebir Khatibi's *La Memoire Tatouée* (1971) in which he does not conform to a single genre but includes autobiographical, parable, poetry, and commentary in his text in order to address questions of identity and bilingualism. Practices of *tissage* in writing can also be seen for example in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (1985) in which she entwines the story of a young Algerian girl with the history of Algeria ranging from the French Conquest in 1830 to the War for Independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, Djeabr mixes in a musical element or fantasia. Another type of weaving takes place in Maïssa Bey's *Bleu, Blanc, Vert* (2006) in which Bey weaves together the narratives of two Algerian children a girl and a boy ("Elle" and "Lui") as they grow. Through their overlapping narratives, Bey reveals how gender plays an increasingly important part in their lives.

includes personal, familial, and historical references depicted through essays, stories and anecdotes, as well as a variety of visual mediums including photographs, paintings, watercolors, drawings, and advertisements. Described as a *carnet* or notebook, *Mes Algéries* is an autobiographical pastiche of writings and illustrations stemming from Sebbar's own life ("Portrait de famille"). It also includes passages on other women and men of Algerian origin ("Algériennes" and "Les hommes assis"), on artistic practices (Arts et lettres), on individuals who have influenced Sebbar ("Une Passion algérienne and "Le champ des morts"), and on geographical landscapes ("Parcs et Jardins. Bestiaire"). These sections are woven together by placing complementary text and images side by side. For instance, in one recollection entitled "Fatima et sa Singer," Sebbar remembers seeing a worn out advertisement for a Singer sewing machine hanging on a building in Paussac (Aquitaine, France). This advertisement (reproduced in *Mes Algéries*) prompts memories of a woman named Fatima, her Singer, and the sewing shop she set up in her apartment in La Courneuve (Ile-de-France, France).[158] By including both her text and an image of the sign that triggered her memory, Sebbar provides her readers with dual access to her story. Moreover, in Mernissi's introductory essay to Essaydi's collection *Les Femmes du Maroc*, entitled "A Spinner of Scenarios More Dangerous than Scheherazade," Mernissi names Essaydi as a "spinner," a characterization that links Essaydi to the crafting of yarns and threads. The threads that she "spins" together are

[158] La Courneuve is a Parisian *banlieue,* which due to its proximity to Paris and jobs in industry nearly doubled in population in the 1960s with the arrival of a large number of workers from French colonies or former French colonies, notably Algeria. Today, the population of La Courneuve (approximately 38,000) remains diverse, composed of individuals from over one hundred different nationalities. Social and economic problems plague the municipality. According to the town's website ("La ville en chiffres") over fifty percent of all housing is government-subsidized (HLM), nearly forty-five percent of the population over fifteen does not possess a high school diploma, and the unemployment rate hovers near twenty-five percent (and exceeds thirty-five percent for those twenty-five years of age or younger).

photographed "scenarios" that, like those of Scheherazade, create strong and independent female characters.

These practices of *tissage* have also influenced my own scholarship, specifically in a mixed media photographic project I completed entitled *Les Origines du Monde*. This project originated in a graduate class I took at Emory University in Spring 2011 entitled "Experimental Texts." Co-taught by Professors Angelika Bammer and Anna Grimshaw, the goal of the class was to identify possibilities for engaging in innovative and creative modes of scholarship. In the humanities, there is often a singular privileged practice of research based almost exclusively in reading and writing in which affect, embodied experience, and non-textual "readings" and "ways of knowing" are discouraged.[159] By examining scholarship that engages with affective, personal, and visual mediums such as *Ordinary Affect* by anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, *Landscape for a Good Woman* by historian Carolyn Kay Steedman's, or *A Fortunate Man* by art critic, artist, and writer John Berger and photographer Jean Mohr, the class began to understand how scholarship and personal practice can not only co-exist, but provide critical insights into one's work. Students were required to complete a project that combined academic interests with a personal aesthetic or affective practice to see how this might alter his/her approach to scholarship.[160]

My project was inspired by Essaydi's series *Les Femmes du Maroc* in which the artist restages Orientalist tableaux.[161] My aim was to replicate Essaydi's artistic process—influenced by her position as a female born in Morocco in the 1950s—, but

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[159] I presented this project *Les Origines du Monde* at a roundtable discussion entitled "Experiments in Scholarly Form" at Emory University in April 2011.
[160] I would like to thank Professors Bammer and Grimshaw for encouraging a practice of creative scholarship, which served as a precursor to this dissertation.
[161] I have included two representative photographs from this project. See Image 2 and Image 3.

replace it with my own experience and influences as a female born in the United States in the 1980s. This prompted me to examine the choices that Essaydi made in creating her work such as medium, paintings to recreate, models, staging, and decorative and clothing elements. While Essaydi uses Orientalist paintings, Moroccan women and henna calligraphic writing, I needed to recognize similar elements that would speak to my own experience and history. As such, I began this project by identifying paintings that applied to my own historic context. In keeping with Essaydi's style, I chose to replicate the composition of nineteenth century French paintings, although I opted for portrayals of women in a Western setting. While Essaydi's collection (*Les Femmes du Maroc*) was inspired by Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, my project, *Les Origines du Monde,* was inspired by Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting *L'Origine du monde,* which exhibits a close-up of a woman's genitals. Like Essaydi, I chose a nineteenth century painting that engages with notions of female representation and (re)productivity. Following in Essaydi's style, I also strove to incorporate writing within the staged photographs. Taking personal excerpts from my own journal, I wrote in English both on and around my female models—friends whom I recruited to help me. These writings were done in lipstick, an aesthetic paste applied to the body in order to "enhance" beauty. As a colored pigment, lipstick is part of a female aesthetic tradition, but at least in my own case, is reserved for special occasions. The application of lipstick to another women's body is a rare experience, but occurs as part of female ritual (like henna) that marks milestones in individuals lives—as a mother helping her daughter apply makeup for the first time or as a bride prepares for her wedding.

The choice of paintings to restage, text, and lipstick were just a few of the decisions I had to make in recreating Essaydi's process. While the intended goal for my mixed media project was to better understand Essaydi's artistic process, in the end it provided a practical means by which I could engage with my own scholarship. Instead of focusing on Essaydi's final product, I was prompted to think about the individual elements in her photographs: why choose a certain painting? What does it say about the artist's positionaility? How does one work with models and share our vision with them? What is the thought process goes into each detail? Although conceived of through Essaydi's work, the goal of *Les Origines du Monde* was not to make photographs, but to experience a process of creation. As a scholar (not an artist), my experimental project is more concerned with practice rather than product. This project became an essential precursor to the dissertation. It led me to embrace not only the traditional modes of scholarship, but to see how processes of creative expression requires interaction with various modes of scholarship, history, and mediums.[162] I was able to create my own sort of *tissage*, not limited to a scholarly reading and writing, but welcoming of hands-on creativity and artistic experimentation. Such an examination of process has influenced my engagement with both Essaydi's work as well as with the work of others. For example, this project altered my reading of Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. I became much more aware of the way in which the author constructs the novel, as I illustrate in Chapter Two, through tracing Sebbar's memories triggered by photography, her various interlocutors, and how they inform and structure the novel.

[162] This type of scholarship can be seen in John Berger and Jean Mohr's *A Fortunate Man* or Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affect* as noted above.

Although such practices are not yet fully integrated in Higher Education, they are beginning to be implemented more and more. This can be seen in the undergraduate classroom, in which students, while writing traditional research papers, are also engaging in creative and collaborative projects that include visual, audio, and technological mediums.[163] Academics and academic journals are also producing alternative mediums and scholarly practices. For instance, the online Emory-based journal *Southern Spaces* is a model for interdisciplinary and multimedia scholarship. It accepts and even encourages a variety of types of scholarship including video, audio, and image. Individual academics are also practicing alternative forms of scholarship. Clifton Crais in *History Lessons: A Memoir of Madness, Memory, and the Brain*, uses his training as a historian to write a history for himself and his family. Moreover, anthropologist Anna Grimshaw continues to produce her own scholarly films. In her most recent, *Mr. Coperthwaite: A Life in the Maine Woods,* Grimshaw spends time over the course of a year and the four seasons with Bill Coperthwaite. While documenting his "handmade life" it also engages with themes of time, process, and nature. Although still perhaps the exception to the rule, these endeavors result in a rethinking of academic disciplines by encouraging scholarship and thought processes influenced by a range of human knowledges—textual, visual, auditory and affective.

Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi provide a model not only for other female artists of diasporic origins, but for all of us, to trespass the established boundaries for a field, mix a variety of mediums, and interweave different modes of thought in order to create practices of scholarship that can engage with intersecting modes of production. These

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[163] See "'Writing in That Other Space': Digital Storytelling and the Scholarship of Teaching in American Studies" by Matthias Oppermann; "Multimedia Dryden: All For Love and a Performative Baroque Aesthetic" by Dianne Dugaw; or "Teaching Text and Context through Multimedia" by Claire Kramsch.

alternative modes of discourse provide a means by which to escape the stereotypes and pigeon holes that limit our ability to engage fully with all types of knowledge production—textual, visual, affective and embodied.

In considering the interwoven mediums employed by Mernissi, Sebbar, and Essaydi, this dissertation does not adequately address one key medium: the World Wide Web and related methods of digital production. The Web, as its name suggests, is the ultimate model of *tissage* as it combines various linguistic, cultural, geographical, national, and artistic *tissu* or material. In the coming years, as the Web plays an increasingly essential role in our global lives, navigating its various layered interweavings will be crucial to situating oneself in the world. In her current work, Mernissi is examining the effect of satellite communications, namely television and the Internet, on the Arab world. Notably, in her "Digital Scheherazade" project, she argues that these evolving mediums of communication provide a platform for female political and social visibility. However, she warns against the "digital chaos" that can be a result of one's inability to effectively navigate, insisting upon *ru'ya* or a clear vision of the future ("The Rise of Women as Key Players in the Arab Gulf Communication Strategies").[164] Such a vision results from one's ability not only to "navigate" through the complexities of digital communication, but also to steer through time and space. As such, one's engagement with digital media reinforces skills, such as navigation, that extend beyond this one medium. In short, the ability to navigate is key to understanding past histories, future possibilities, and the various mediums through which they are represented.

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[164] *Ru'ya* literally means "vision" and refers to literal vision or sight as well as foresight (*The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*).

Images

Image 1

Harum Scarum Movie Poster (1965)

Image 2

L'Origine du Monde
Robyn Banton

Image 3

L'Origine du Monde # 4
Robyn Banton

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