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The Right to Transparency and the Right to Opacity: The Works of Safaa Mazirh and Alia Ali

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THE RIGHT TO TRANSPARENCY AND THE RIGHT TO OPACITY:
THE WORKS OF SAFAA MAZIRH AND ALIA ALI

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE RIGHT TO TRANSPARENCY AND THE RIGHT TO OPACITY: THE WORKS OF SAFAA MAZIRH AND ALIA ALI

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This research focuses on a study of the photographic works of two contemporary female photographers from the MENA region: Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh. Rather than trying to define art in the region and its diasporas, this research stresses the distinctiveness of two artists' specific experiences in relation to gender, religion, tradition, and modernity. A common thread is the constant navigation between the artists' lived experiences of their postcolonial reality and collective memories of the colonial past. When comparing these artists, I argue that viewing their works in conjunction highlights the principle of "the right to opacity" as discussed by the French post-colonialist thinker Edouard Glissant and makes way for what I am calling "the right to transparency." The original contribution that this thesis makes is to use these theoretical ideas as a lens to interpret and understand the work of these two photographers. Glissant believed that the West had a fixation on a method of understanding the other based on making them transparent. In turn, we reduce and classify others against the existing dominant structures of worth we have formed of them. Female artists like Alia Ali from the MENA region are working against these existing dominant structures of worth by creating opacities in their work. Alternatively, Safaa Mazirh, is working against an opaque historical record of her culture and its practices. She welcomes transparency in her work of her body and the language of the Amazigh symbols.

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I would like to thank my husband, Anas, for his encouragement, support and patience as I pursued my passion in undertaking this research and course of study. I would also like to thank my thesis committee chair, Dr. Jeanette Nicewinter, for her willingness to help with my research and challenge my conclusions over the course of the last two years through insightful discussion and commentary. Finally, I extend my thanks to my committee members, Dr. Mysoon Rizk and Dr. Esperanca Maria Camara, for their critical reading of my research and for further challenging me to consider additional avenues of scholarship.

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Introduction

MENA, referring to the Middle East and North Africa, is an English acronym designating the 24 countries that comprise the Arab States in the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen—plus the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, the West Bank, and Gaza. These countries share common challenges and cultural links distinct from their neighboring economies, such as Israel and Turkey, with Islam as the dominant religion and Arabic the principal language.[1]

Visual arts produced in the MENA region are as rich and varied as every other region in the world. However, the definition and historiography of Islamic art is generally held to be "the art made by artists or artisans whose religion was Islam, for patrons who lived in predominantly Muslim lands, or for purposes that are restricted or peculiar to a Muslim population or a Muslim setting.[2] The academic field of Islamic art has had a problematic relationship with the religion of Islam. While some Islamic art may have been made by Muslims for purposes of the faith, much of it was not.

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[1]George T. Abed, and Hamid R. Davoodi, *Challenges of Growth and Globalization in the Middle East and North Africa*, (USA: International Monetary Fund, 2003) accessed Oct 10, 2022, https://doi.org/10.5089/9781589062290.054

[2] This definition is taken from the introduction to the multi-author article “Islamic Art,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), vol. 16, 94ff. There are many discussions about what Islamic art is and isn't. For a convenient start and bibliography, see Oleg Grabar's thoughtful introduction to the Dictionary of Art article on Islamic art, vol. 16, 99-102

Nineteenth centuty Orientalist artists represented North Africa and the Middle East with a mix of fantasy and reality. Orientalism developed at the same time with European colonial activity.

These Western male artists made their work to satisfy an enormous public interest in these far off lands. In his painting *La Grande Odalisque*, painted in 1814, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres carries the viewer away to the Orient, a far-off land for his Parisian audience in the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] A woman reclines on a divan wearing no more than a turban and jewelry and peeks over her shoulder towards the viewer. Oriental elements like the silk fabric, turban, peacock feather fan, and hookah were used to create an "othering" of the scene. The female nude Odalisque primarily exists for the enjoyment of the male viewer who can safely gaze at her. In contrast to earlier arguably romanticized images of the MENA region like *La Grande Odalisque*, artists in the last decades of the twentieth century have confronted the historical and political forces that bind the cultures of the region, such as globalization and the consequences of decades of civil war.

The voices of women are among the most difficult to hear in the dominant narrative about the Middle East. Their voices are often drowned out by our perceptions of their oppression and alienation within the belief that their culture is monolithic. Contemporary female photographers throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and the diasporic communities that have planted their roots in adoptive cities are working tirelessly to contest Western, reductive constructions of difference through lens-based work. These women are navigating a dialogue which faces

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[3] Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Une Odalisque, Dite La Grande Odalisque,* 1814, oil on canvas, .91 m x 2.067 m, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010065566.

head-on the fragile topics of historical erasure, neocolonial oppression, sexuality, and gender in a part of the world that has been ideologically flooded by international politics and Western media images.

This research focuses on a study of the photographic works of two contemporary female photographers that work with portraiture: Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh. The choice of these two artists specifically was made because of a personal connection to Morocco. Ali worked in Marrakech for a time, and Mazirh lives and works in Casablanca. I have lived and worked in Morocco for over eight years and am deeply inspired by female artists that work in this region.

A lack of scholarship on these artists is also a driving force for this research. These artists both emphasize the border between the private and the public, and make powerful statements about the agency of the body in the cultural realm. They depict the opposite of the tired trope of the repressed Muslim woman that is so pervasive in contemporary art from the Middle East. When comparing these artists, it is argued that viewing their works in conjunction highlights the principle of "the right to opacity," as discussed by the French post-colonialist thinker Edouard Glissant. However, this thesis argues that the "right to opacity" has an equal opposition in the "right to transparency," as demonstrated by the juxtaposition of Ali's and Mazirh's figural photographs.[4] For the purposes of this project, I focus on his particular interest in opacity or unknowability. According to Glissant, the West has fixated on making the "other" transparent in order to be understood. The "other's" cultural identity, he suggests, is something that we cannot ever fully know or share. Glissant critiques the colonial tendency to reduce otherness into familiar models and categories that offer a false sense of understanding. Opacity disrupts the transformation of subjects into categorizable objects of Western knowledge. The right to opacity

[4] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189.

is the right to not have to be understood on others' terms, as demonstrated by the photographic works of Ali. My interpretation of the right to transparency is having the right to be understood on your own terms, as demonstrated by the photographic works of Mazirh. These artists use both the principles of opacity and transparency as forms of resistance to break the image that has historically been conceived of women from this region. Let us consider the artistic practices of Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh.

One female artist from this region that has emerged with rich and creative practices is the Yemeni-Bosnian-American artist Alia Ali born in Austria in 1985. Ali explores themes of diaspora, migration, and identity through the lens of Afro- and Yemeni Futurism. When introducing herself, Ali often says she is from "two countries that no longer exist: Yugoslavia and South Yemen."[5] Growing up, she experienced the difference between the European sentiment of her Bosnian mother and the Yemeni customs of her father, which allowed her to cross the cultural boundaries between them. Informed by her own transnational and multilingual upbringing, her works use various visual languages—photography, textiles, videos, and installations. Transnational artists of the diaspora, like Ali, are helping to draw international attention to contemporary art from the MENA region.

In Ali's untitled photograph (fig. 1), from her "Borderland" series, an anonymous person sits in solitude, swathed in layers of colorfully embroidered layers of fabric and lace. The brightly colored radiating blossoms jump out of the stark black backdrop. The flowers have a liveliness that the sitter beneath lacks. The contour of the sitter can be easily traced by the distinctive lines of the body, only made possible by the juxtaposition of the material and the background. We do not know who the sitter is. We are shielded from connecting with anything

[5] Yosra Emamizadeh, host. "Alia Ali," September 17, 2020, in *In Conversation*, produced by Tavan Studios, podcast, Accessed September 20, 2020. https://anchor.fm/tavanstudio/episodes/Alia-Ali-ejp1fm

beyond the fabric as their entire body is concealed within it. The material becomes a border between us and this unknown person. Ali's artistic practices, which are conditioned by a dedication to meticulous staging, intricate textiles, and ideas of identity, reflect the artist's unique experiences as being a part of the diaspora.

Another female artist from this region that this research focuses on is the Moroccan photographer Safaa Mazirh. Mazirh brings attention to themes like cultural identity, the female body, Amazigh culture, and traditional tattoos as symbols of prayers and protection in her work. Mazirh, born in Rabat in 1989, is a self-taught female artist who also lives and works in Rabat, Morocco.[6] Mazirh first encountered photography in 2009 in the workshops of the Fotografi' Art Association, which brings together several young photographers in Rabat, Morocco. Fascinated by body movements on stage, she quickly started working on this theme with several theater companies. From their shows, Safaa Mazirh has retained the art of staging, with which she builds a photographic theater of reality.

In her black and white photograph *Aouchem Cross*, Mazirh is turned away from the camera, revealing her backside with her left leg crossed in front of her right, bracing her palms against a deep black background (fig. 2). Her skin is bright and piercing against the contrast of the black backdrop which has also been smeared with white paint in vertical and arching patterns. Her long hair sweeps between her shoulders and reaches the small of her back. In the foreground, Mazirh has hand-drawn an Amazigh cross tattoo pattern in opaque white sketchy lines that repeat and frame her body in the center of the composition. Her physical body occupies

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[6]"Safaa Mazirh." Galerie 127 - Photographies, May 27, 2022. https://www.galerie127.com/safaa-mazirh/.

the central space of the photograph and she creates a sense of balance with her outstretched arms pushing against the wall.

The two postcolonial artists discussed in this study—Alia Ali, and Safaa Mazirh—act as parallel layers of different, yet closely related, narratives of personal experiences. Postcolonial art has been produced by artists from the MENA region in response to the aftermath of colonial rule and Orientalist art, oftentimes confronting the issues of national and cultural identity, race, and ethnicity. Artists like Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh use the medium of photography as a means of self-expression and representation to counter European and North American stereotypes. Artists from the MENA region are able to determine what they reveal about their culture and identity by piercing these preconceived notions and beliefs. Ali and Mazirh are closing the gaps between cultures and presenting their work and their world through their own lenses.

In the words of the Moroccan feminist writer Fatima Mernissi, from her book *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, which is about what her Aunt Habiba taught her about finding happiness:

> Happiness, she would explain, was when a person felt good, light, creative, content, loving and loved, and free. An unhappy person felt as if there were barriers crushing her desires and the talents she had inside. A happy woman was one who could exercise all kinds of rights, from the right to move to the right to create, compete, and challenge, and at the same time could be loved for doing so...Happiness was also about the right to privacy, the right to retreat from the company of others and plunge into contemplative solitude. Or sit by yourself doing nothing for a whole day, and not give excuses or feel guilty about it either. Happiness was to be with loved ones, and yet still feel that you existed as a separate being, that you were not just there to make them happy. Happiness was when there was a balance between what you gave and what you took.[7]

Contemporary female photographers Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh are facing the very topics Mernissi wrote about nearly thirty years ago in their lens-based work today. These artists are engaging with the binary ideas of opacity and transparency, privacy and openness, as well as

[7]Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Perseus Books, 1995)

exclusion and inclusion. Their challenging images give viewers a new way to understand the multiple ways that women from the MENA region challenge Western reductive constructions of identity. This thesis argues that these female artists assert their presence and a renewed sense of identity through their diverse art practices. Their images give viewers a new lens to understand the multiple identities from the MENA region as they question cultural and religious traditions and challenge Western perceptions. Both Mazirh and Ali have found their own affirming and liberating ways to use the body as a narrative in their photographs for the empowerment of the self and their community. Through both transparency and opacity, these artists are veiling and unveiling the body to subvert imagery that has historically been conceived as representing women from the Middle East and North Africa.

This thesis explores the photographic works of Yemeni-Bosnian-American artist Alia Ali and Moroccan artist Safaa Mazirh to examine the unique ways that each of them approaches portrait photography. The use of the French post-colonialist thinker Edouard Glissant's idea of the "right to opacity" is used to support the work of Alia Ali. In contrast, Glissant's ideas are inverted in the photographs by Safaa Mazirh; in her works, Mazirh demonstrates a "right to transparency" by using her own naked body in her images. I argue that Mazirh challenges the taboo of bringing private images into public spaces as her "right to transparency." In this way, the contrast between Ali and Mazirh's photographs demonstrates the distinct, but not oppositional, ways that contemporary female photographers from the MENA region utilize agency through being transparent or opaque in their art.

Literature Review

Art in the MENA region

Slowly, but surely, art from the MENA region is gaining international recognition. In cities all over the world, art made by Arab female artists is becoming an integral part of museum exhibitions and gallery shows. The number of exhibitions shown across the globe today, spanning both commercial and institutional spaces, points to a shift toward increased interest in art from the Middle East and North Africa. Female art from the MENA region is a field of modern and contemporary visual arts that has been largely unexplored and somewhat misunderstood because the media and popular opinion have equated the region's political situation with terrorism and war. Exhibitions of Middle Eastern art pursue a specific aim, reaching beyond art historical purposes. Academically, the globalization of the art scene has raised the issue of how to write an accurate global art history. In the last fifteen years, art historians—including James Elkins, Hans Belting, Thomas DaCošta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel have considered this question.[8] However, for the most part, this global art history, especially as it pertains to the Middle East, has still to be written. Thus, exhibition catalogues are often the only available references and play an important role in the field of modern and contemporary art of the Middle East, although many new books and articles have emerged in the last few years.[9] Against this backdrop, this project underlines the relevance of working on this research, in hopes to fill a void in these fragmented historiographies. This research stresses the two ways that women from the MENA region are being excluded: first,

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[8] See James Elkins, "Is Art History Global?", New York/London, 2007; See also Hans Belting, Andrea Bud- densieg and Peter Weibel Belting, "The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds," Cambridge MA/London, 2013; See also Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Circulations in the Global History of Art," Farnham/Burlington, 2015.

[9] For a discussion of major academic publications on modern and contemporary art in the Middle East, see Silvia Naef, "Visual Modernity in the Arab World, Iran and Turkey-Reintroducing the 'Missing Modern'," Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques 70, 4(2016): 1005-18.

there are practices in Arab/Muslim-majority countries, often overlooked by Western scholarship if not entirely misunderstood—and, second, the modern and contemporary artistic practices are either excluded from the canon or absorbed by the global art platforms, which tend to ignore local complexities and homogenize the margins.

Collectors, writers, directors of museums, and curators from what are still considered the main art capitals—e.g., New York, Paris, and London— have seen this shift and recognize that artists from the Middle East and North Africa are playing a vital role in the contemporary art scene. Glen Lowry, an American art historian and director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City since 1995, was a featured panel member of a conversation hosted by the Middle East Institute (MEI) and The Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA). The discussion centered around the changing social and cultural significance of museums in Lebanon, and more broadly in the Middle East, as they seek to move beyond their traditional role as authorities in the arts to become more relevant to the cultural and socio-economic concerns of communities at a local, regional, and international level.[10] Lowry is the former curator of Islamic Art at the Freer and Sackler Galleries in Washington, DC. In the panel he focused on how artists in the Middle East are using their works to explore history using fact and fiction, reality, and virtual creations to deal with sometimes highly-charged political and religious issues.

One of the most widely shown and studied international contemporary female photographers Shirin Neshat, born in Iran in 1957. *The Fertile Crescent: Gender Art and Society* was a showcase of exhibitions, symposia, lectures, film-screenings, musical, and literary events by contemporary Middle Eastern women artists, scholars, filmmakers, composers, performers,

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[10] Elene Janadze, Saskia M. van Genugten, and Ruba Husari, "The Changing Role of Museums in the Middle East," Middle East Institute, https://www.mei.edu/events/changing-role-museums-middle-east.

and writers.[11] The volume was published by Rutgers University Institute for Women and Art in November 2012. Shirin Neshat's photographic work is featured in *The Fertile Crescent: Gender Art and Society* volume as well as in their exhibitions. The authors Brodsky and Olin describe Neshat's work as being celebrated and shown globally, often addressing the theme of the alienation of women in repressed Muslim societies. She is known for exploring the relationship between women and the religious and cultural value systems of Islam. She provides us a broader context of contemporary female photography from this area that has been seen worldwide. Her photograph *Rebellious Silence,* in which the artist's face is bisected vertically by a rifle and her eyes stare intensely towards the viewer from both sides of this divide, is one of the most arresting photographs to emerge in contemporary art over the course of the past twenty-five years (fig.3). The unforgettable black-and-white portrait, created by the Iranian artist in 1994, has been recognized for winning the International Award of the XLVIII Venice Biennale in 1999. Neshat was named Artist of the Decade by Huffington Post critic G. Roger Denson.[12] As female portrait photographers, Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh have undoubtedly been influenced by Neshat's black and white portraits. Like Neshat, both of these artists also use written language, an array of competing emotions, and themes of culture.

Another female photographer with work that parallels Neshat's is the Moroccan artist Lalla Essaydi. Like Neshat, Essaydi, who was born in Marrakesh in 1956, is known worldwide, and serves as an example of a female photographer. Christa Clarke's *Global Africa* describes Essaydi as an internationally renowned African artist whose artistic practice draws upon

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[11] Judith K. Brodsky, Ferris Olin, and Margot Badran, *The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, and Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Institute for Women and Art, 2012).

[12] Roger G. Denson, "Shirin Neshat: Artist of the Decadem" HuffPost, December 7, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sherin-neshat-artist-of-t_b_802050.

autobiography.[13] Primarily known for her carefully constructed photographs of women, Essaydi draws from her own cross-cultural experience to investigate the complex roles of Arab women in contemporary and past societies. Her work is included in sixty-one public collections in museums, ranging from the Louvre to the Smithsonian African Museum of Art.[14] *Les Femmes du Maroc: La Grande Odalisque*, one of Essaydi's most recognized photographs, was modeled after the nineteenth century Neoclassical painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (fig.4). Essaydi's work challenges the viewer to reconsider the nature of historic poses and subject matter through shifting contemporary cultural lenses. Essaydi claims to challenge the way that women have been conceived in Orientalist art. She asks her viewers to inquire why women from the MENA have served as objects of representation and as objects of eroticism. She also says that the nuanced personal narratives explored in her work challenge essentialist ideas about the singular identity of the African artist. Neshat and Essaydi broke barriers in the field of photography and have set the tone for those after them; they have encouraged future women from the MENA to take their place in the realm of photography and in art history as a whole. They have inspired the current generations of female photographers to continue firmly in what they are doing until parity is realized.

It is important to have in mind that, as a consequence of political turmoil in countries from the MENA region in the late twentieth century, many artists felt forced to exile or uproot themselves at an early age, living mainly in Europe and the United States. The relocation of artists has resulted in the propagation of diasporas, a term which is often associated with identity

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[13] Christa Clarke, "3.7 Art, Identity, and Autobiography: Senzeni Marasela and Lalla Essaydi," *Global Africa* 2, Vol. 2. University of California Press, (2015).

[14]Lalla Essaydi, "Curriculum Vitae," Lalla Essaydi, Accessed April 27, 2022. http://lallaessaydi.com/2.html.

loss and cultural displacement. Shirin Neshat, Lalla Essaydi, and Alia Ali are among the great number of artists working outside their homelands. Many other artists from the Middle East and North Africa discuss the diasporic issues in their art, like Mona Hatoum and Emily Jacir, and they often embrace all of the cultures that have formed them, resulting in an adoption of a hybrid identity.[15]

Karin Adrian Von Roques, researcher of contemporary Arab art, writes about how the Arab art scene has gone long unnoticed by the Western world, in her article "An Investigation of the Situation of Contemporary Arab Art Today." Negative political events were foregrounded and the Arab world was more readily associated with terrorism and religious fanaticism than with art and culture. Von Roques observed a widespread prejudice that exists in the idea that the Muslim world is "backward and backward-looking"[16] and has not continued to develop. This observation is vital in understanding the preconceived notions that Westerners have about women artists from the Middle East and North Africa. According to the view that Van Roques lays out, modernism never took place and consequently no modern or contemporary art has evolved.[17] When conducting research about the Arab art market, Van Roques found that amongst several art gallerists there was an ambiguity surrounding Arab art from its quality to its stereotypes. She asked them why Arab artists are not represented and they answered by asking her whether contemporary art in the Arab world even exists, and if so if it is any good.[18]

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[15] Salwa Mikdadi, "West Asia: Postmodernism, the Diaspora, and Women Artists," Metmuseum.org, October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dias/hd_dias.htm.

[16] A. K. Von Roques, "An Investigation of the Situation of Contemporary Arab Art Today," *Contemporary Practices,* vol 1., (2007): 128-134

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

Linnea Dietrich, in a review of Fran Lloyd's book *Contemporary Arab Women's Art,* writes about how most Westerners know very little about the people and culture of the MENA region, and how art can be a particularly effective means of building transnational understanding.[19] Dietrich discusses the preconceived notions that we as Westerners have about artists from the Middle East and North Africa. Dietrich highlights how Western viewers have considered non-Western art in general to be a curiosity or separate from Western civilization, ignoring centuries of cross-cultural influences, thoroughly chronicled by Frederick N. Bohrer in *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, and earlier by Edward Said.[20][21] Despite the obstacles female artists from the Middle East and North Africa face, they continue to emerge in international exhibitions.

Female Artists in the MENA region

Providing important coverage of *Here and Elsewhere*, for *ARTnews*, Lilly Wei described the New Museum 2014 exhibition as the first comprehensive survey of MENA contemporary art and photography to be shown in New York. In her article, the New York-based independent curator, writer, journalist, and critic, whose interests include global contemprary art, emerging artists, and international exhibitions as well as biennials, focused on the exhibition's female artists, who numbered half of the forty-five exhibited. She asked her readers to think about these questions: Does the presence of so many talented Arab women mean that the culture is changing

[19]Linnea S. Dietrich, *Woman's Art Journal* 26, no. 1, (2005): 56-57, Accessed May 30, 2020. doi:10.2307/3566541.

[20] Frederick Nathaniel Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

[21] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) Print.

in the Middle East? Do women there now have a greater public presence and greater independence of movement—freedom to travel and pursue a profession, and freedom from patriarchal and familial authority? Is perceived gender discrimination in some instances simply due to cultural differences? Wei highlights the voice of artist and philosopher Etel Adnan who said:

> Gender discussions are long and complicated and, I think, less theoretical in the Middle East than in the West...Women are concerned with divorce and violence, mainly. They appreciate the value of family but fear its authority in cases of conflict. But the number of women working in all fields is increasing, and accordingly, their visibility. Women are finding in art, as opposed to politics, a world that is open to them. And they are welcome in that field partly because most men ignore the power of art, considering it harmless.[22]

The civil war in Lebanon and the Arab Spring, Adnan observes, has amplified the realm of artists' activities all over the Arab world. "It stimulates their imagination, and the pain they go through witnessing so much horror pushes them to express it forcefully, openly," Adnan says.

> I have been one of the very first Arab women to concern myself with contemporary history and politics in my writings; I did it spontaneously, not thinking about whether I was breaking rules or not. I can say that it encouraged many younger writers to do so. For art, it's a bit different, because for many years I was an artist working in the U.S., while, little by little, many women artists in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and elsewhere were starting to work and to make their work known all over Arab capitals. It is heartwarming.[23]

Three years after "Here and Elsewhere," the work of MENA female photographers was the subject of a landmark show *I AM,* at the National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman, Jordan. *I AM* was a multidisciplinary exhibition that featured thirty-one artists from across the MENA region. Twelve of the artists were female photographers, two of which were Alia Ali and Lalla

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[22] Lilly Wei, "The Women of the Arab Art World," ARTnews.com, 2019, www.artnews.com/art-news/news/women-of-the-arab-art-world-3036/.

[23] Ibid.

Essaydi. The exhibition showcased the experiences of women from the MENA region as they confront issues of culture, religion, and social reality in a rapidly changing world. “I AM” called its viewers to challenge their perception of the “other,” or an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging and being different in some fundamental way, regardless of cultural differences. In Alia Ali’s obscured self-portrait, she is both the photographer and the subject, the observer and the observed. In her piece *I AM (NOT)*, she questions the fabricated barriers in society that vilify the other (fig. 5). Ali encourages us to ask how we can break through the lens through which another views us, and consider how we are all enveloped in stereotypes created by the other.

Artists have helped to foster a more vibrant civil society and have pointed the way toward more durable democratic institutions, according to Nama Khalil, an artist writing for the Institute for Policy Change and who also teaches courses in Cultural Ethnography and the Anthropology of Media at Columbus College of Art and Design. She paints a visual landscape of the Arab World that has changed greatly as various forms of creative expression have flourished in the days since the Arab Spring. A cultural awakening is taking place alongside the political revolution. She gives examples of artists all over the MENA region that are making art that engages in critical discussions about politics, religion, culture, nationalism, and identity.[24] These artists are questioning the relationship between the state and cultural production and imagining new ways for culture to transform society. Khalil helps us to see that the dialogue between artist and audience has expanded considerably as a result of the tumult in the Arab world. That, in fact, has helped to foster a more vibrant civil society and to point the way toward more durable democratic institutions. Female artists from this region of the world are building more stable and

[24] Nama Khalil, “Art and the Arab Awakening, ”ips-dc.org/. Institute for Policy Studies, August 2, 2012. https://ips-dc.org/art_and_the_arab_awakening/

tolerant communities through their art, and the Arab Spring has expanded the realm of female artists' activities in the Arab world.

In her book *The Art of Reflection*, Marsha Meskimmon argues that women artists are seeing and exploring the "self" within male social and discursive structures. Self-portraiture is a critical intervention for women artists.[25] The concept of self-representation has broadened and groups formerly excluded are now represented. According to Meskimmon, during the twentieth century, women's self-representational art, both in literature and visual arts, has been determined by their lack of fixed subject position and subversion of traditional narrative structures. Since the 1970s, the presence of the artist's body has blurred the line between conceptual art and self-portraiture and artists have increasingly been physically present in their work. Visual self-representation has grown beyond visual likeness and it now includes visual, textual, voiced and material imprints of subjectivity.[26] The traditional mode of portraiture materializes as a painting or photograph of a head and torso. However in the case of these two artists that obscure their sitters faces, artists construct their own experimental engagements with portraits that do not include the head and torso.

Contemporary photography reflects the complexities of the remarkable changes happening in the MENA region. One of the most powerful trends to emerge from this region recently is the work of female photographers. Their images give their viewers a new understanding of Middle Eastern and North African identity as they question tradition and challenge our Western perceptions. The MENA region has gone through unparalleled change

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[25] Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996).

[26] Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

over the past twenty years, and national and personal identities have been destroyed and rebuilt.[27] Female artists from the region have engaged the notion of representation with passion and power. Their images, which range in style from photojournalism to staged and manipulated visions,

explore themes of gender stereotypes, war and peace, and personal life, all while confronting nostalgic Western notions about women of the Orient and exploring the intricate political and social landscapes of their home regions.[28]

With regards to literature on the two artists in this study, thus far there is very little published. There have only been two significant art historians to write about the artist Safaa Mazirh. In the catalogue for the exhibition *Looking Out, Looking In,* Cynthia Becker, curator of the show, focuses on Mazirh's use of the tattoo in her series "Amazigh," and sees the series as a nostalgic look into what these symbols once meant for women.[29] Mohamed Nait Youssef, a writer for the Moroccan journal *Al Bayane,* wrote an article about Mazirh's series "Amazigh"' titled "In the Tattooed World of Safaa Mazirh." Youssef describes Mazirh's photographs as being written with signs and tattoos rather than with light. He says that her body is a fabric of signs, a collection of hard to interpret and mysterious symbols.[30]

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[27] Patricia Bauer, "Mediterranean Security: New Trajectories after 2011," *Trajectories of Change in Post-2011: Challenges and Prospects* (2017): 194.

[28] Kristen Gresh, and Michket Krifa. *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World.* (MFA publications, Museum Of Fine Arts, 2013).

[29] Cynthia Becker, and Nadia Sabri, *Looking Out, Looking In: Contemporary Artists from Morocco* (Boston: Boston University Art Galleries, 2019) Exhibition catalogue.

[30] Mohamed Nait Youssef, "Dans L'univers Tatoué De Safaa Mazirh," AL BAYANE, February 18, 2018. https://albayane.press.ma/lunivers-tatoue-de-safaa-mazirh.html.

There is an absence in both of these accounts of her body as a form that she models and molds in constant motion throughout her work. Her physical body occupies the central space of each photograph. Her naked body becomes an instrument of a narrative that goes beyond the obvious connection to the erotic, which I examine with the help of postcolonialist thinker Edouard Glissant, the feminist writings of Fatima Mernissi, and the writings of the French philosopher Michel Foucault.

There is a complete absence of academic research on Alia Ali. Journalists and art critics have, however, written about her work and have interviewed her. Jad Dahshan of *Hyperallergic* focuses his discussion on how Ali has confronted colonial histories, challenged viewers' preconceived racial and gendered biases, and put pressure on borders both physical and conceptual.[31] Interest in her work has also focused on how Ali conveys her ideas and experiences through textiles, dyeing, weaving, and embroidery. Laura Staugaitis of Adobe Create described how Ali got into patterning and textiles by thinking about her grandmother from Yemen. She was "illiterate by written language but was extremely literate in motif," says Ali. "Just because you don't have verbal written language doesn't mean you don't have a way of documenting." Yemeni culture is largely oral and visual, so ideas and experiences are richly conveyed through textiles, dyeing, weaving, embroidering.[32] This research hopes to fill these gaps in the literature about these two artists.

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[31] Jad Dahshan, "Alia Ali's Yemeni Futurism," Hyperallergic, 2021.https://hyperallergic.com/647489/alia-ali-yemeni-futurism/

[32] Laura Staugaitis, "Alia Ali and the Power of Seeing," Adobe Creative Cloud, January 6, 2020. https://creativecloud.adobe.com/cc/discover/article/alia-ali-and-the-power-of-seeing?locale=en.

Photography and Orientalism

Before we can look at the photography of Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh, we must first recognize the effect that Orientalism and Imperialism has had on female photographers from this region. According to Edward Said's book *Orientalism,* Orientalism is a discourse produced in the West and exported to the Near East along with European missionaries, diplomats, businessmen, and soldiers.[33] Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short: Orientalism as a Western means for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.[34]

Principle to Said's idea of Orientalism is its role of helping the West define itself by constructing an "Other" whose essence was understood as being opposite to the West. The Orient was understood to be stagnant in time and place and incapable of defining itself. The West saw itself in opposition to the Orient—because it was dynamic, inventive, and expansionist. This sense of cultural superiority granted Westerners the authority to be the judge of Oriental behavior.

In his book *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography 1860–1910*, Stephen Sheehi writes about how the birth of photography occurred at the same time as the spread of European imperialism in the Middle East. Many of the medium's first images are Orientalist pictures taken by the first European photographers. This production of imagery was inextricable from the "period of colonial expansion and imperialist adventures."[35] These early

[33] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978)

[34]Ibid.

[35] Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography 1860–1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016): 264

photographs have formed and manipulated the Western visual imagination of the MENA region. The legacy of how this region's history has been written still has a powerful hold over how we view photography from this region.

Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation, in a volume of eleven essays edited by Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, presents a broad impression of the development of the field of the history of photography from the region. It provides an introduction to the early foundations of the field through a series of essays rooted in Said's framework. Ali Behdad, literature scholar, introduces a series of short reflections on the "Orientalist photograph," asserting the inability for nineteenth-century photography to escape Orientalism. Behdad defines this as "a network of aesthetic, economic, and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries" and that generate an exotic portrayal of the region.[36] Photographers working in the MENA region today, including Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh are facing these same inabilities to escape the entangled legacy of Orientalism.

Postcolonial art produced by artists from the MENA region was produced in response to the wake of colonial rule and Orientalist art, very often confronting issues of national and cultural identity, race, and ethnicity. Female photographers, like Shirin Neshat, Lalla Essaydi, Alia Ali, and Safaa Mazirh, use the medium of photography as a means of self-expression and representation to counter European-constructed stereotypes. They convey their culture and identity by piercing these preconceived notions and beliefs. Artists are able to close the gaps between cultures and present a different view of their world through their art.

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[36]Ali Behdad, and Luke Gartlan, eds, *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, (Getty Publications, 2013).

Rather than trying to define art in the region and its diasporas, this research stresses the distinctiveness of two artists' specific experiences in relation to gender, religion, tradition, and modernity. A common thread is the constant navigation between the artists' lived experiences of their postcolonial reality and collective memories of the colonial past. This research goes beyond the current discussion to look at how the effects of feminism, nationalism, and colonialism has shaped her art and art making process. The focus is on how she gives her audience the chance to experience portraiture through the lens of opacity.

Research Methodology

The complex questions about how and why female photographers from the MENA region, specifically Moroccan artist Safaa Mazirh and Yemeni-Bosnia-American artist Alia Ali, are able to be active participants in the counter representation of the stereotypical images of the region are examined with a social and critical approach. Formal analysis is used to examine their photographic works, observing the stylistic attributes of their photographs relating to their use of the elements of shape, color, space, texture, form, and the design principles of transparency and opacity, movement, pattern, repetition, and contrast will be used. Feminist assessments by Fatima Mernissi, postcolonial assessments from Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Édward Glissant, and the post-structuralist assessments of Michel Foucault address the challenges these artists face when combating cultural, political, and religious identity constructions.

In his essay "A Short History of Photography," Walter Benjamin, German philosopher, critic, and writer, wrote about the important consequences of the invention of photography for global culture.[37] Benjamin's essay introduced the notion of "aura," the "here and now" of an art

[37] Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography* (Screen 13: no. 1, 1972): 5-26.

object, its unique existence in space and time, which defines its authenticity. He provided insight into the influence that early photographic technology had exerted on the development of its aura as well as into separate genres and individual artists. Benjamin also spoke of a "tiny spark of contingency" that lives in every photographic image. An aura of the past still exists in the present photograph, a reality has been burned into the image.

Ali Behdad considers Benjamin's "tiny spark of contingency" with reference to a print by commercial photographer Hyppolyte Arnoux circa the 1870s, of five Sudanese males titled *Tirailleurs Soudanienes* (Sudanese sharpshooters or light infantry) (fig. 6). The photographer's orientalist fantasy of these Sudanese sharpshooters was made possible by props such as a cork wood fort that he placed behind and a studio backdrop that he put them in front of. Arnoux seems to have directed them to savagely hold their spears to please the colonial beliefs of the day. However, the "spark of contingency" happens as soon as the image is captured. The figure on the left has a detached gaze, the central standing figure's curiosity at the movements of the photographer, and the figure on the right's hesitation. This live noncooperation that was captured shows the unpredictability of portrait photography that Benjamin talked about. Somehow, despite the orientalist fantasy of this arranged portrait, an aura of these individuals has still come through. Their resistance is palpable.

In Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, he insists that we must "clamor for the right to opacity for everyone."[31] For Glissant, the demand for the right to opacity functions as an ethical stance against imperial conquest and domination. Glissant theorizes opacity specifically through postcolonial conditions in Martinique, however the concept is used in political thought, media studies, queer theory, and art criticism increasingly today. Opacity is an unknowability, incapable of being known or understood, and for Glissant it is a poetics, a theory of literary forms and

literary discourse, that makes up the world, and he believes it must be defended in order for any radically democratic project to succeed. Glissant defines opacity as an alterity that is impossible to express or measure in terms of quantity. It is a diversity that goes beyond categories of identifiable difference. Opacity has the power to expose the limits of schemas of visibility, representation, and identity that prevent a true understanding of multiple perspectives of people around the world. According to Glissant, the limitations that opacity exposes are a form of barbarism. Glissant's opacity creates a new potential for contemporary feminist and queer politics. It is in contrast with identity politics' claim to visibility as a political platform.

Homi Bhabha, a critical theorist with a focus on contemporary postcolonial studies, writes about cultural hybridity in his book *The Location of Culture.* Bhabha grew up in Bombay as a middle class Parsi, a member of a small Zoroastrian–Persian minority in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim context. He says living with these unresolved tensions between cultures and countries have become the defining characteristic of his work. In the introduction to his book, Bhabha demands that we, as members of society and as literary critics, should try to understand cultural differences as being based on hybridities created in moments of historical transformation. We should no longer classify groups of people based on "organic", pre-existing traits attributed to ethnic groups. Instead, we should locate the differences created "in-between" time and space spanning different cultures. People's characteristics are not limited to their ethnic heritage, but rather are subject to change and modification through experience.

In his book *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault examines the impact behavior modification can have on a person - namely prisoners. These same fundamental ideas can be seen in the essays *The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries,* by Fatima Mernissi. Foucault labels two bodies of existence that arise through spatial manipulation. First,

the mechanical body he defines as “the body composed of solids and assigned movements” and the second is the natural body, he defines as” the body susceptible to specific operations, which have their order, their stages, their internal conditions, and their constituent elements”[32] The manipulation of bodies begins to condition the person to live and act according to orders given to them. This renders the body’s natural inclinations weak and easily overtaken by commands.

The study below demonstrates through formal analysis and scholarly assessments that Safaa Mazirh and Alia Ali use the medium of photography as a means of representation in order to counter European and North American stereotypes. These artists determine what they reveal or conceal about their culture and identity. Their work shows how they accept and reject the “right to opacity.” Both Mazirh and Ali have found unique ways to use the body as a narrative in their photographs for the empowerment of the self and their community.

Analysis

This analysis will focus on a study of the photographic works of two contemporary female photographers that work with portraiture: Alia Ali and Safaa Mazirh. The complexity of textiles, the versatility of language, and the opacity of resistance in Ali’s work will be studied by looking at her work *[Laysa] Ana - I Am [NOT]*, her series “Borderland,” her series “Flux,” and her series “Liberty.” The ways that Mazirh explores the cultural knowledge passed down through the ancient practice of tattooing amongst the indigenous Amazigh women of Morocco will be studied in her series “Amazigh.” I will argue that viewing their works in conjunction highlights the principle of “the right to opacity” as discussed by the French post-colonialist thinker Edouard Glissant and makes way for what I am calling “the right to transparency.”

Textile as Portrait

Ali, who is primarily a portrait photographer explores themes of colonization and imperialism, and is primarily a portrait photographer. In one of her first works, - *[Laysa] Ana - I Am [NOT]* Ali photographed herself covered in a garment she constructed out of shredded newspaper (fig.5). Both the garment and the backdrop of the photo are made of newspaper that is cut into thin strips and sewn back together in a repetitive vertical and horizontal pattern. The garment she wears has strips that follow the contour of her face and body, forming a cocoon-like structure. Ali is both the photographer and the subject, the one being observed and the observer. The covering she wrapped herself in creates a barrier between herself and the viewer. In *[Laysa] Ana - I Am [NOT]*, she wants her viewer to think about the fabricated barriers in society that stigmatize the other. Ali, as a person who comes from two countries that no longer exist, does not have the power to create her own identity. Her reaction to the gaze of her viewer is to break it by creating a barrier. Ali is embracing the multiple layers of what creates her complex identity by wrapping herself in this cocoon.

In her series "Borderland*,"* Ali started with fabric from one of her native countries, Yemen. Ali's Bosnian mother lived in Yemen for sixteen years and collected colorful and intricate traditional dresses made by Yemeni tribal women. These fabrics were entirely Yemeni. They were woven from resources solely from the land. The dye was made of the flowers and plants that grew in Yemen, the symbols that are embroidered on them are Yemeni, and everything had a purpose—each told a story, whether it was a garment for a man or a woman, a specific class, a particular tribe, or a symbol to ward off the evil eye. Alia says that Yemen, like most of the countries she visited, has an oral society. Their societies' stories have been abducted by their colonizers and reframed. Their stories have been translated into languages that are

inaccessible to the communities themselves. Ali believes it is important to let the fabric speak for itself. She lets the fabric tell its own history on its own terms. This is why she leaves her photographs in her series "Borderland" without a title.

Ali's textiles conceal any direct gender or racial signifiers. However, viewers are tempted to use the visual or cultural cues of the fabrics to categorize the people depicted. Taking the stylish patterning or posture of the subject into consideration, one might make an assumption about the identity of those pictured. However, it is not known who is underneath the fabric's folds or what their story is. This kind of portrait is contrary to the traditional idea of the portrait which shows us what a person looks like. Portraits can also tell us how a person wishes to be seen, and capture a particular mood that the sitter is feeling. Ali likes the tension she creates by concealing both the sitter under the fabric and any kind of title that would identify who the sitter is or where they are from. Ali says, "Well you don't get to have everything. Not everything is accessible to you because there should be some kind of privacy."[38] Viewers of art are used to having this information at their fingertips, and Ali takes this away from them.

In Ali's images from the series "Borderland," a figure sits or stands against a dark black background or a contrastingly-colored textile, enveloped in a colorful and patterned fabric (fig. 1). Sitting or standing underneath each piece of intricate cloth sits the artist who created it. Ali blurs the distinction between artist and artwork and asks her viewers to question what it means to be excluded by borders, and whether all are free to be anonymous or if they must continue to be oppressed and appropriated unwillingly. Ali's series "Borderland" calls into question the ideas of identity and anonymity, exclusion and inclusion, oppression and freedom.

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[38]Yosra Emamizadeh, "Alia Ali," September 17, 2020, in *In Conversation,* produced by Tavan Studios, podcast, Accessed September 20, 2020. https://anchor.fm/tavanstudio/episodes/Alia-Ali-ejp1fm

In an interview with Ali about her work "Borderland," Finn Schult of *Ours* magazine asked her what led her to start making the "Borderland" work. Ali explains that "Borderland" is a series of portraits compiled over a nine-month project, inspired by the hatred towards Arabs and Muslims that had become normalized from post-9/11 and the long drawn-out wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Ali believed that the poisonous discourse of ignorance had to be balanced with knowledge and beauty by means of art. Ali says that borders enact violence on the geography and identity of those living in borderlands and are imprints of power and scars of destruction.[39] She doesn't see them as only geographical borders, but also as philosophical, political, and personal borders. Ali sought a medium that was more physically and visually evident, a material that has the power to divide us and unite us all at once: fabric.

Almost everyone in the world touches fabric on a daily basis. We are swaddled in it as babies, wake up in it in our beds, define ourselves by it with our clothing, shield ourselves with it, and even clean with it. Ali explains that Yemen's history has been mostly told through the words of its British colonists, not in Arabic, but in English. Inescapably, so much history has been lost, and remains untold. For her, the untold stories can be found in the honey, the jewelry, the music, the architecture, the gestures, the language, the ceremonies, and most importantly, the treasured textiles.

Through her series "Borderland," she re-examines these divided lands as zones of exploration, bringing attention to them as temporal physical spaces and a present-day phenomenon from within the body of artwork presented, and the viewer is the participant. Ali

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[39]Finn Schult, Interview with Alia Ali, *Ours,* June 12, 2017. https://www.oursphotomag.com/blog/alia-ali-feature

believes that the textile lends itself to questioning the fabricated barriers in society that prohibit the incorporation of others. Fabric is narrow but long, like borders and like paper, characterized physically and still interpretive in nature—all three have a capacity of exploration and culminate into one photograph. All of these are canvases by which culture reveals itself. Fabric is a historical document. Ali believes that fabric, like the human that lies underneath it, or the border it symbolizes within her work, or to be more precise the paper it is printed on, is vulnerable to the elements and to time. Borderlands, like textiles, are places of exploration and zones where our humanity will be judged. The portraits in "Borderland" are the reflection of what our society is destroying, and within these reflections are a collection of people that make up all of humankind.

In an interview with Ali, Yosra Emimazadeh asks Ali why she covers the faces of her sitters. Ali says that what the person looks like is not important to her. She's more interested in the genius that the person and the community produces, it's what their hands produce. It's their stories. The textile becomes the portrait. The textile itself becomes a representation of all that this community and culture and heritage can provide. She says," by the erasure of these communities so much is at stake.[40]" She spent 5-6 weeks with each of the textile masters that sit underneath their creations in her photographs in different communities. For nine months Ali traveled from New Orleans, Louisiana to Oaxaca, Mexico; Bokhara and Margillon, Uzbekistan; Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan; Hanoi and SAPA, Vietnam; Rajasthan and Mumbai, India; and Nairobi, Kenya. In each place she went she was introduced to artisans,

[40]Yosra Emamizadeh, "Alia Ali," September 17, 2020, in *In Conversation,* produced by Tavan Studios, podcast, Accessed September 20, 2020. https://anchor.fm/tavanstudio/episodes/Alia-Ali-ejp1fm

masters, curators, collectors and educators who welcomed her into their communities and shared their history, processes, methods, materials and wisdom.

Speaking in Image

Ali is the child of two linguists who grew up listening to and speaking five languages, living in seven countries. She believes that language can often be a vehicle for misunderstanding rather than understanding. Ali speaks about how she was raised in Yemen and how important learning Arabic was to her family in an interview with *Feel Desain* on May 26, 2020.[41] As a child, she traveled many places with her family and she sees how that early foundation helps her to navigate and reflect herself in the world. Through these experiences, she learned interconnectedness among people and their surroundings and how to approach cultures by listening, observing, and interacting, rather than taking, preaching, and "capturing."[42]

By using fabric to tell a story, Ali reveals how photography can cut through language to communicate deeper truths. Ali's work is based on the idea that spoken and written language is not fundamental for communicating. Ali believes words are misinterpreted based on how they are used for propaganda and political agendas through the U.S. and Europe. She noticed that post September 11th, the Arabic language has been misused. She decided if she couldn't use her own language, she would become a visual artist. Ali sees language as a tool and as a weapon. She recognizes the inherent language of photography is violent. We use words like "capture" and "shoot" when we talk about taking someone's photograph. Aphrodite Désirée Navab writes

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[41]Feel Desain, "8 questions with Alia Ali." Feel Desain, Accessed November 16, 2022, from https://www.feeldesain.com/8-questions-with-alia-ali.html

[42] Ibid.

about the disturbing linguistic conventions used by practitioners, critics, and historians about photography. She begins by sharing an imaginary monologue:

> I had been roaming the streets looking for something to shoot. I loaded, then waited and watched. Once I had caught my subject in view I aimed and took a shot. I worked alone in the darkroom developing the negative. I stopped it, then fixed it. Then I cropped, dodged and burned the positive until I was satisfied.[43]

Navab uses this monologue to illustrate the violent terminology embedded in the practice and culture of photography. She asks us to question what effect this kind of language has on the photographer, on the person being photographed, and on those who look at photographs. She wants us to see that we have all grown numb to these words and that the worst violence is that we do not even notice the violence in them. Both participants and observers in photography use the metaphors as if they were innocuous, as if to take a shot, to point and shoot, to frame, to burn, and to dodge somehow transcend their meanings when they are applied to photography. Ali is able to change this inherent violent language of photography in her series "Borderland" in her practice of participatory methods with the textile workers. By spending 5-6 weeks with each of the textile masters, Ali is not capturing and shooting her subjects, they are working together on the final image.

Susan Sontag, American writer and philosopher, wrote a collection of essays in *On Photography* in 1977; however her insights on visual culture remain timeless, and could be even more relevant today because of the proliferation of photographs online. Sontag argues that the photographic image is a control mechanism we exert upon the world — upon our experience of it and upon others' perception of our experience. Sontag says this about the act of appropriation:

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[43] Aphrodite Désirée Navab, "Re-Picturing Photography: A Language in the Making," Journal of Aesthetic Education 35, no. 1 (2001): 69-84. Accessed September 12, 2020. doi:10.2307/3333772.

> Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood. To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power.[44]

Sontag had real foresight in arriving at this more than thirty years prior to the age of social media—the ultimate attempt to control, frame, package, and consume our lives.

Opacity as Defense

Ali takes away our chance as viewers of appropriating her images not only because she covers her sitters' faces, but also because she leaves her photographs unlabeled in her series "Borderland"—they are undocumented so we don't have the power of knowing who they are or where they are from. Identifying who is seen is not possible. By concealing her sitters' faces, she prevents an "othering" that often happens. We cannot capture those sitting beneath the fabric—they remain free and anonymous. Ali uses the element of unknowability in her representation of the Other as a defense. She complicates the process of viewing. Ali uses the dominance of visuality in understanding art and takes that away from her viewers. The gaze of the photographed subject is also hidden. We cannot read whether the photographed person's gaze is passive, or defensive, or indifferent. She wants us to understand that seeing does not necessarily mean knowing. Alia Ali uses the power of opacity, as explained by Edouard Glissant, as a form of resistance in her work, a powerful tool that prevents her subjects from being reduced.

Homi Bhabha talks about an idea in *The Location of Culture* that is a recurring theme in Ali's work. He says that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking from those who have suffered the sentence of history- subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement[45]"

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[44]Susan Sontag, *On Photography,* (London: Penguin, 2001).

[45]Homi K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

Living as someone that is a part of the diaspora and perpetually being displaced are important themes in Ali's work. Bhabha challenges the binary opposition of West/Non-West. Instead, he sees post-colonial cultures as "hybrids" identified by their own people as well as the colonial power.

Using Bhabha's idea of the possibility of being a cultural hybrid, this means that the viewer can be on both sides of Ali's fabric at once. Ali helps her viewer to see that when the exclusion of others happens, it comes from the fear of being excluded. Perhaps there is a fear of what will be found beyond the fabric border. Ali may not be the only one bestowing the barrier on them. The power is in the fabric, Ali uses it to create a boundary, a border, to give her sitters anonymity, not confinement.

Something as universal as a textile is often taken for granted, as are people's assumptions, biases, and misconceptions. Alia Ali's work in "Borderland" helps viewers to appreciate the complexities of fabric as well as the intricateness of the cultures that create them. Ali destabilizes our position in relation to the artificial boundaries created between cultures, languages, and, on the most basic level, people, through her right to opacity.

In "Flux,"" one of Ali's more recent series from 2020-2021, she began upholstering the frames of her pieces in the same fabric she covered her sitter in. By doing this, she is pushing the borders further to the edge of her work. She once again becomes the sitter in her work, wrapping herself under the fabric. She is gazing at us and we are gazing at her. She pushes the idea of fabricated borders that divide us as humans even further by wrapping her frames in fabric. In *Scales,* the sitter is almost entirely swallowed by the repetitive cool colored organic pattern (fig. 7). It is reminiscent of an optical illusion, where you must squint and cross your eyes to see the object.

The most current work that Ali is exhibiting now is entitled “Liberty,” and it is full of even more patterns and colors than the work in her previous series “Flux.” Its patterns and colors contrast with each other and you can see clearly where one starts and the other begins. The individual being photographed in *Blue Tides & Pink Palms* is no longer sitting but standing with a strong stance of one arm resting on their hip (fig. 8). “Liberty” represents her earliest memories of walking through the marketplaces in her mother’s home of Sana’a, Yemen. The hidden figures become repositories for the textiles to fill with memories of the culture that is being actively erased.

Signs and Symbols: Safaa Mazirh

Safaa Mazirh, born in 1989, is a self-taught female artist who lives and works in Rabat, Morocco. Mazirh first encountered photography in 2009 in the workshops of the Fotografi' Art association which brings together several young photographers in Rabat, Morocco. I was fortunate enough to interview Mazirh about her practice, as we both live and work in Morocco. She was not only generous with her time, but also with her resources. She forwarded high quality images to me as well as videos that have been recorded of her and her work that have not been digitally shared before. Because of a language barrier, we conducted our interview mainly through email and WhatsApp. One of the first questions asked of her was her artistic influences. Mazirh said:

> When I was twenty, my first photographs were in the theater. I found great pleasure in taking photos, I was fascinated by the body and movement on stage. I signed up for a theater workshop, but I was too shy, and I was scared, so I created my own theatre, a dark room and a camera, and I started taking pictures, and telling all my sorrows through photographs and my body.”[46]

[46]Saffa Mazirh, interview by author, October 12, 2022.

From these humble beginnings her work began to grow. Fascinated by body movements on stage, she quickly started working on this theme with several theater companies. From their shows, Mazirh has retained the art of staging, building a photographic theater of her own. In June 2012, her photographs were exhibited at the Goethe Institut of Rabat as part of an exhibition collective organized in partnership with the company DabaTeatr. In 2013, she produced her first photographic series, *An Essential Discovery.* Safaa Mazirh was selected by Jean-Hubert Martin to appear in the exhibition on contemporary Moroccan art to be held at the Institut du Monde Arabe in October 2014. Mazirh's most recent series, "Amazigh," works hard at invalidating the orientalist fantasies and colonial fictions that have altered the history of image making in Morocco for well over a hundred years. Morocco is a kingdom rich in diverse heritage and culture. It is a country located at the crossroads of the African, Mediterranean, and Arab world, with gateways to Europe sitting at its doorstep. It is a place where Jewish, Arab, and Amazigh roots blend together. Mazirh captures the cultural and ethnic roots of her Amazigh background in her photographs from the series "Amazigh." "Amazigh," as a series, refers to the indigenous people of North Africa, to whom Mazirh traces her lineage. Mazirh became fascinated by the meaning and symbolism of the markings that the elderly women in her family tattooed on their bodies as young women. Mazirh also critiques the lack of an Amazigh record in Morocco, and she reclaims these tattoos as a significant part of Amazigh memory and history and puts this female-centered practice on center stage.

Safaa Mazirh's photographs are made up of self-portraits that have blurred contours, oftentimes ghostlike and obscured. Mazirh uses her own naked body in these portraits, normally a private image in Moroccan society, and presents it to us publicly. In "Amazigh,"" she has taken a series of self-portraits with hand-drawn "scenery," inspired by Amazigh female tattoos, known

as Aouchem (pronounced wa-shem) in Arabic (fig. 2, 9-10). These tattoos not only have ornamental and aesthetic dimensions, they are also social signs indicating status, and by Amazigh women to express their feelings. I felt it was important to ask Mazirh about what the symbols meant to her in her work. She responded:

> "Signs and symbols were a language for the Amazigh woman. They mainly told their stages of life (marriage, pregnancy, separation, depression, education, responsibility, sexual problems).They carried their stories through symbols in tattoos, carpets, or drawings in their home and on the walls."[47]

This important language is what Mazirh is trying to preserve.

Creating History with Image

In Morocco's Middle Atlas mountains, this ancient tradition is quickly fading away. These distinctive tattoos that indigenous Amazigh women acquired in a coming of age ritual are slowly disappearing as their bearers age and die. Strictly observant Muslims and women who want to be modern have shunned the practice, which dates to pre-Islamic times. Today, the tattoos largely are found on older Amazigh women who farm in rural areas.[48]

Amazigh tattoos usually consist of a combination of lines, dots, triangles, and circles and can be found between the eyebrows, chin, hands, and both sides of the wrist in green ink (fig. 11). Tattoo designs parallel those woven by women into textiles. These symbols repeated throughout Amazigh culture are gendered symbols of female agency and creativity. The tattooed body plays a communicative role, placing cultural knowledge permanently on a part of the body that can be seen and read by those around them. Amazigh girls get their first tattoos during

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Nat Castañeda, "In Morocco, Tribal Tattoos Fade with Age, Islam," AP Images Spotlight, AP Images Spotlight, October 25, 2018. https://apimagesblog.com/blog/2018/10/25/morocco-berber-tattoos.

puberty; those who can tolerate the pain without showing their discomfort are considered mature enough for the adult responsibilities of life in the Middle Atlas mountains. These young women communicate their membership within a group non-verbally, because their place of origin can be understood by the unique style and placement of her tattoos. The ink work is done for more than aesthetic or ornamental reasons. The symbols tell stories of tribes, ties to the land, and families. The designs are added to new places, highlighting milestones like marriage and motherhood. When the tattoos were most popular, they were seen as having the power to drive away bad spirits and bring good fortune. Some stories passed down say that during French colonial rule, Amazigh women believed their tattooed faces would make them undesirable to European men.[49] However, this story is disputed seeing that the Amazigh tattoos predate the colonization of Morocco.

Enhancing the beauty of the body seems to be a characteristic of the Mediterranean that Islam failed to curb in Morocco.[50] Body adornment with tattoos was a structural part of socialization. However, the tattoos etched decades ago fade on the faces of women who have grown old, and they have also lost social acceptance. In Morocco, wearing "aouchem" is now seen as outdated and sometimes worse, prohibited. An awareness that some branches of Islam forbid tattoos has led some Amazigh women to try to have theirs removed. There is no doubt that Islam took a negative attitude about body ornamentation on women and required them to be modest in their appearance.[51] Religious beliefs are the most important reasons that parents decided against tattooing their young daughters with these traditional symbols.

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Susan Bordo, M. Cristina Alcalde, Ellen Rosenman, *Provocations: A Transnational Reader in the History of Feminist Thought* (Univ of California Press, 2015): 353

[51] Ibid.

In Safaa Mazirh's series "Amazigh," her monumentally scaled hand-drawn sketchy lined tattoos become scenery, architectures, and multiply to form infrastructures where her own black and white image is lodged. Mazirh makes a home within these symbols that have started to fade from her own Amazigh family tradition. Mazirh is able to take back possession and create a record of these tattoos that are fading away from her culture by overlaying them on her own nude body. Her modest disposition interacts with the moment, as if she has constructed the scene with complete freedom. Certainly, it is through photography that Safaa Mazirh is revealed and is also freed. It is as if she has instinctively built her scenes, letting the meaning gradually come forth as she builds each one on its own. This is what shines through in her black and white photographs, these images made in the moment, dictated by a necessity to externalize a part of herself and her fading culture. Amazigh tattooing has been historically marginalized from the written record. The Imazighen people of North Africa "did not leave a genealogy, oral traditions, nor written texts or any other cultural expressions in the Berber [Amazigh] language."[52] One question that was important to ask Mazirh was which themes in her work were the most important to her. Mazirh said,

> My inspiration and identity, memory, and the body, is as much Moroccan as Amazigh origin. My work encourages me to question my Amazigh roots and my heritage forgotten in history by shedding light on the Amazigh mythology and to give my own interpretation on the symbols through self-portraiture and photography.[53]

Mazirh saw the failure to record the personal stories and the voices of tattooed women themselves and decided to manifest a new form of archival knowledge beyond the written text using her own body within her photographs.

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[52] Maya Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State: The Marinid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco* (Princeton: M. Wiener, 2017):18.

[53] Saffa Mazirh, interview by author, October 12, 2022.

Right to Transparency

Mazirh's body is a form that she models and molds in constant motion throughout her work. Her physical body occupies the central space of each photograph (fig. 2, 8-9). By putting her body on "stage," Safaa Mazirh is challenging stereotypes related to the status of women. From a generation uninhibited by the internet and following the Arab Spring, she is one among many female artists exhibiting her private images in public exhibitions. Mazirh wants to battle the exotic image conveyed by Orientalist painting and its women isolated behind harem walls.

Many of Mazirh's peers feel that in this age of surveillance, they need to use every mode of protection that they have available to them. Oftentimes, censoring their faces helps them to maintain a sense of invisibility, giving them their agency back as women and as individuals living in a diasporic or marginalized community. However, Mazirh is able to accomplish the same goals as her peers in an act of transparency. This work by Mazirh is representative of the opposite of what Edouard Glissant calls the "right to opacity." Safaa Mazirh, unlike Alia Ali, does not feel the need for anonymity. Her source of power does not come from opacity, as she has determined that she wants to reveal her private and intimate images, not conceal them. Artists also have a "right to transparency."

Fatima Mernissi describes the accepted behavior between Muslim men and women in public spaces as "regulatory mechanisms (that) consist primarily of a strict allocation of space to each sex and an elaborate ritual for resolving contradictions arising from inevitable intersections of space."[54] Space does not have as much of a physical property as it does social. The ability to manipulate the body and the space of interaction is a key principle surrounding Muslim

[54]Susan M. Cristina Alcalde, and Ellen Rosenman, eds, *Provocations: A Transnational Reader in the History of Feminist Thought* (University of California Press, 2015).

expectations of public spaces and power dynamics, which can be seen and felt in Mazirh's home of Morocco. Mernissi describes the Muslim perception of public spaces as "male space" in which women "trespass." Mazirh shares her private images, her own naked body, in "male spaces."[55] Mazirh is tackling these societal, cultural, and religious expectations that women's bodies should be manipulated in a system of the power/powerless binary. Mazirh, a woman, who would usually be limited to the universe of women, which is the domestic world of sexuality and family, is manipulating the spatial boundaries of women, and is taking back her agency, her authority to have power and command over her body and her ability to share it transparently with others. For example, in *Sans Titre #8* from 2013 (fig.12), Mazirh arranges the composition so that her figure is blurred or caught mid-gesture. One has the sense that she is moving across space from right to left, ending her three-part movement with the laughter of happiness. The viewer gets the sense that Mazirh is slowly opening herself up to the camera, uncovering her face, turning, and then facing the camera joyously as she faces forward. The viewer may ask why she would choose to share her private images in a public space. They may see her as taking control and liberating herself from the oppressive spatial boundaries she has grown up in.

Safaa Mazirh, although raised and living in a society that so often manipulates and renders female bodies docile, does not act according to the orders given to her. Instead, she uses her body in place of a historical record, as evidence of her Amazigh heritage, as well as to show the importance of the female body as a powerful recorder of history.

[55] Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Basic Books, 1995).

Ali & Mazirh / Opacity & Transparency

If one were to view their work together as a dialogue with one another, you would find that they are both affirming one another for the ways that they are finding their power. They do not oppose one another. They have simply developed in different directions because one does not want to be categorized and reduced and the other so desperately wants to be given the chance to be seen. Female artists from the MENA region have many different ways of being, acting, making and doing. One could argue that these artists deploy both principles of transparency and opacity. There are many overlapping layers to identity, and their work makes us aware of all of these layers. Mazirh's work could alternatively be described as employing elements of opacity, such as by covering her form with the Amazigh symbols, turning her back to the camera, and blurring the details of her face. In Ali's more recent work *Blue Tides* & *Pink Palms,* the subjects become much less anonymous and less opaque (fig.8). They become less camouflaged within the textile and more boldly assert themselves in their stance. Both artists show beauty in their work rather than suffering. Ali could choose to show despair because she comes from two places that no longer exist, and Mazrih could wallow in the fact that the historical records of her ancestors are incomplete. However, they choose to show the beauty of the ancestral knowledge that has been passed down to them rather than the contemporary trauma they face.

Together, Ali and Mazirh are expanding our understanding of the portrait. A portrait, traditionally, is a pictorial representation of a person usually showing the face. Neither Ali, nor Mazirh, reveal the face in their portraits. They either cover it completely or obscure it in a blur. The absence of a face, however, does not stop a portrait from representing a human subject. A faceless portrait means the viewer can not identify the subject, but that doesn't mean the image is any less powerful—quite the opposite. Ali and Mazirh create visual intrigue by eliminating the

face from their portraits. Their faceless portraits encourage the viewer to pause and ask questions about the subjects. The viewer of their photos are also apt to spend more time looking at the other elements in the frame. In the case of Ali, the patterned fabrics grab all of the attention. For Mazirh, the hand-drawn Amazigh symbols are the eye-catching elements in her scenes. Ali and Mazirh's photographic works can be categorized as portraits because they represent their subject through the elements surrounding them.

Ali and Mazirh are also expanding our understanding of language. For Ali, her textiles speak in powerful narratives. Ali sees patterns in fabric as a language with which communities share their narrative on their own terms. In Ali's series "Flux" she used wax print fabric sourced from Côte d'Ivoire. When Ali started looking at the history of wax print, she learned that it is a fabric that is transglobal in both beautiful and extremely disturbing ways. Many wax prints have been produced in the Netherlands. Ali saw the complete breakdown of language through pattern in these communities that once shared their narratives through these fabrics. Many of the symbols that had been used for hundreds of years were copyrighted by the Dutch colonizers. Artists from West Africa could be sued for using their own symbols of heritage.[56] In "Flux" Ali believed that the wax print made from artists in Côte d'Ivoire deserved its own conversation, and was featured extensively throughout it.

For Mazrih, her work pays tribute to the lost history of language through Amazigh tattoos. The cultural knowledge passed down through tattoos was a non-verbal communication only shared by women. Because of the oral history of the Imazighen, much of the knowledge of

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[56]Natasha Amar, "Alia Ali On the Power of Narratives Through the Language of Textiles," Departures, September 25, 2020, https://www.departures.com/lifestyle/art-culture/alia-ali-profile-narratives-language-textile.

these tattoos has been lost. Mazirh's photo-based works can also be viewed as a living history and an act of preservation. The symbols used to induce fertility, to cure illnesses, and protect against spirits become living breathing agents of power in her photographs The palm tree is a symbol that Mazirh used in her work *Aouchem Visage*, which translates to Face Tattoo (fig. 10). It is drawn as a straight line surrounded by dots that represent seeds. It is placed between the bottom lip and chin of a woman as a "siyala," which is the first tattoo given to women. The tattoo correlates with the Carthaginian goddess Tanit, who is the fertility, war, and lunar goddess to the Amazigh people.[57] The tattoo is a symbol of fertility and is seen as one of the most beautiful symbols a woman could have. Ali and Mazirh create meaning in their work by changing our perception of what a portrait can be and through their powerful use of language through textile and symbols.

Conclusion

The complex questions about how and why female photographers from the MENA region, specifically Moroccan artist Safaa Mazirh and Yemeni-Bosnia-American artist Alia Ali, are able to be active participants in the counter representation of the stereotypical images of the region were examined. This research has stressed the distinctiveness of two artists' lived experiences. Something that has formed both Ali and Mazirh's practice is their postcolonial reality and the memories they hold of their families colonial past. It has shaped their work in similar but divergent ways.

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[57] Carolina McCabe,"The Disappearing Tradition of Amazigh Facial and Body Tattoos," https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/, April 7, 2019, https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/04/269903/tradition-amazigh-facial-tattoos.

Glissant believed that the West had a fixation on a method of understanding the other based on making them transparent. In turn, we reduce and classify others against the existing dominant structures of worth we have formed of them. Female artists from the MENA region are working against these existing dominant structures of worth by creating opacities in their work. Alia Ali conceals her sitters to prevent them from being a spectacle. Viewers cannot grasp them or own them or have a revelation about them. She has freed them from comprehensibility and complete coherence. Instead, Ali wants us to see these sitters wrapped in the beautiful tapestries they have created rather than through them. Something as universal as a textile is often taken for granted, as are people's assumptions, biases, and misconceptions. Alia Ali's work helps viewers to appreciate the complexities of fabric as well as the intricateness of the cultures that create them. Alia's aesthetic destabilizes our position in relation to the artificial boundaries created between cultures, languages, and, on the most basic level, people.

For Glissant, transparencies are limiting. They disregard the countless things we cannot know about a person that makes each of us who we are. However, Safaa Mazirh, a young self-taught photographer from North Africa, is working against an opaque historical record of her culture and its practices. She welcomes transparency in her work of her body and the language of the Amazigh symbols. Although this invitation into her world creates an intimate atmosphere that may feel similar to the one created by the Orientalists, her photographs are temporal. Mazirh points out the artificiality of her own construction of her scenes. She draws on specific cultural references while she carefully avoids the reproduction of decontextualized and fixed images.

Safaa Mazirh, has found a way to use her body as a narrative in her black and white photographs in a public space as a tool for self-empowerment. As a woman, photographing herself nude, Mazirh positions herself within a long line of feminists that claim agency over the

female body through self-representation. Through transparency, not through opacity, Mazirh acts using her own source of power, determining that her mode of protection is to act not according to the orders given to her by the society she was raised and living in, but to manipulate the space into a place where her body is free and joyful and full of beauty, passion, and power. She is able to break the cycle of manipulation of the female body through transparency of not only her body, but also of the Amazigh symbols that are slowly fading away from the Amazigh faces that they once so beautifully adorned. This young artist is putting her body on stage to not only break the boundaries of space, but also to break the image conveyed by orientalist painting and its women isolated behind harem walls. Mazirh is breaking the framework, she is revolting, she is transforming her rights and the rights of other women from the MENA region to use her body uninhibited, transparently.

Both Mazirh and Ali, young female photographers from the MENA region, have found ways to use the body as a narrative in their photographs for the empowerment of the self and their community, through transparency, and through opacity. These artists are both revealing and concealing the body in order to break the image that has historically been conceived of women from this region of the world. Mazirh and Ali are opening up the framework for other women from the MENA region to use the body opaquely and transparently. For further research, I would like to explore the possible connection between artists of the diaspora and their use of opacity, as well as artists that have stayed in their home countries and their use of transparency. I would like to study if they are connected and then explore why this might be a trend.

Figures

Figure 1, Alia Ali, *Unnamed*, "Borderland Series," Color Photograph, 2017, 107 cm x 72 cm 1 AP + 1 EP + 5 Editions.

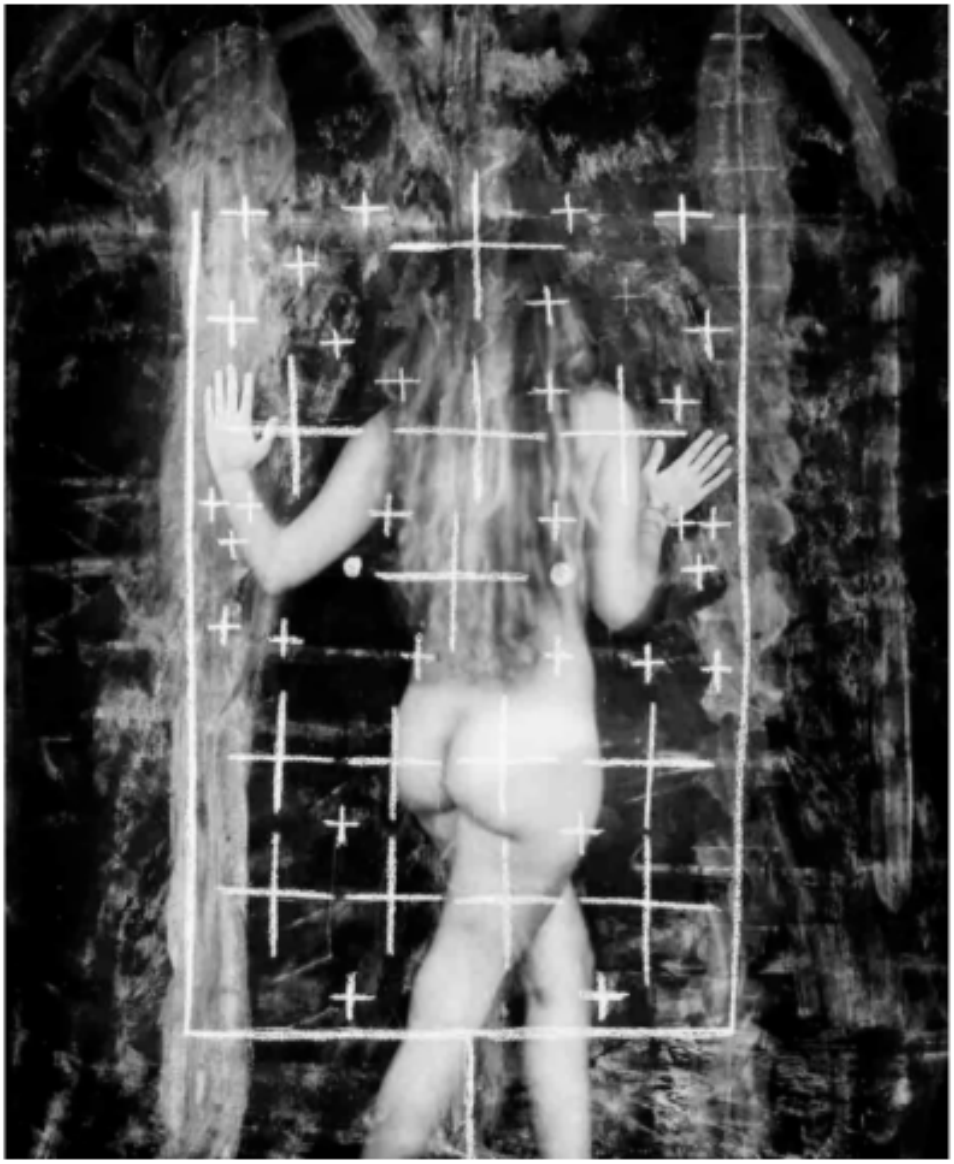

Figure 2, Safaa Mazirh, *Aouchem Cross*, "Amazigh Series," 2017, Black and White Photograph.

Figure 3, Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence,* "Women of Allah" series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

Figure 4, Lalla Essaydi, *Les Femmes Du Maroc: La Grande Odalisque,* 2008
Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.

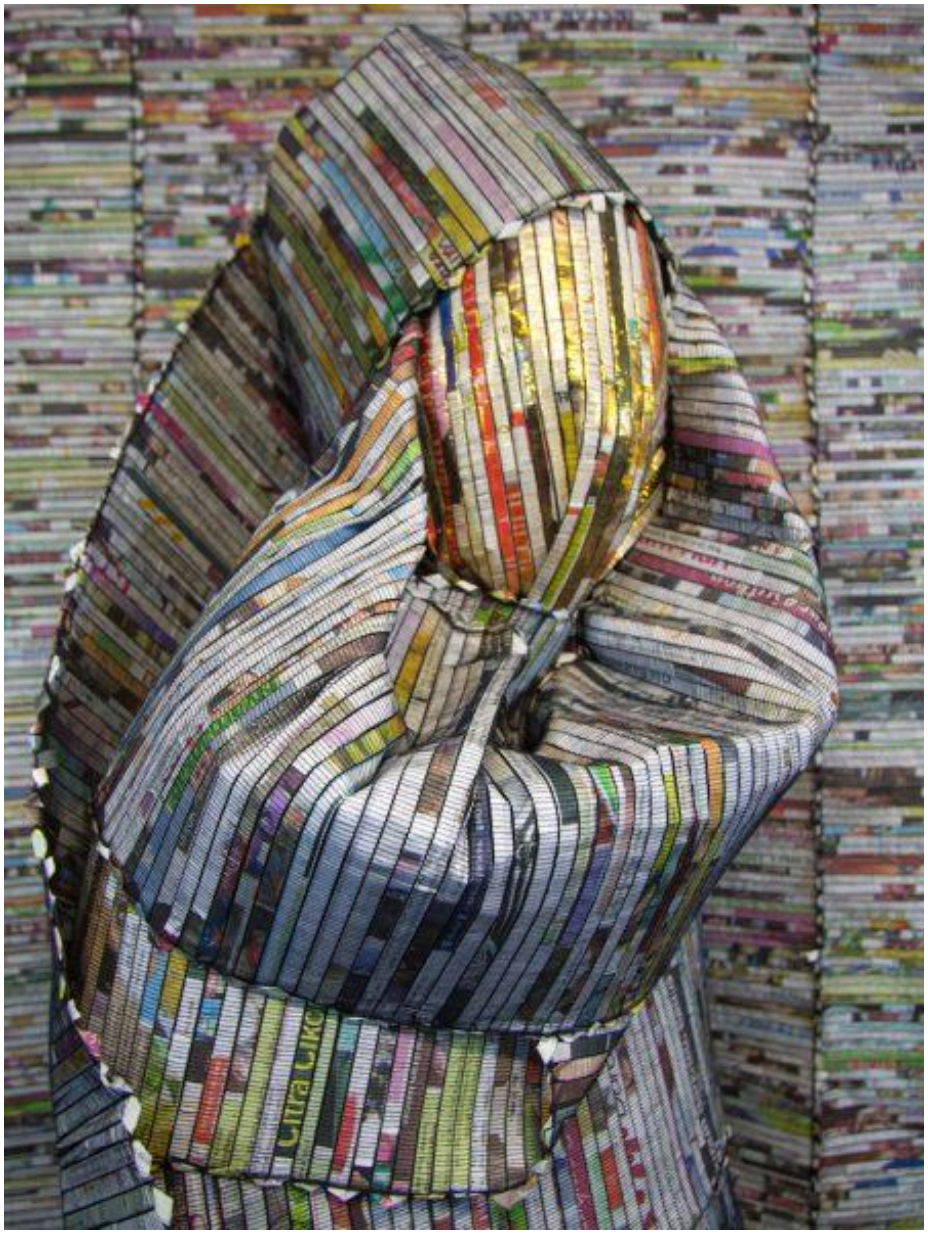

Figure 5, Alia Ali, *[Laysa] Ana - I Am [NOT]*, 2017, Pigment print on Aluminum Dibond Ed 1/5 + 2 AP, 100 cm x 72 cm.

Figure 6, Hippolye Arnoux, *Tirailleurs Soudanienes,* Albumen Print, ca. 1870's, 27 x 21.6 cm (10 ⅝ x 8 ½ in.) Cambridge, University of Cambridge, P. 57068.

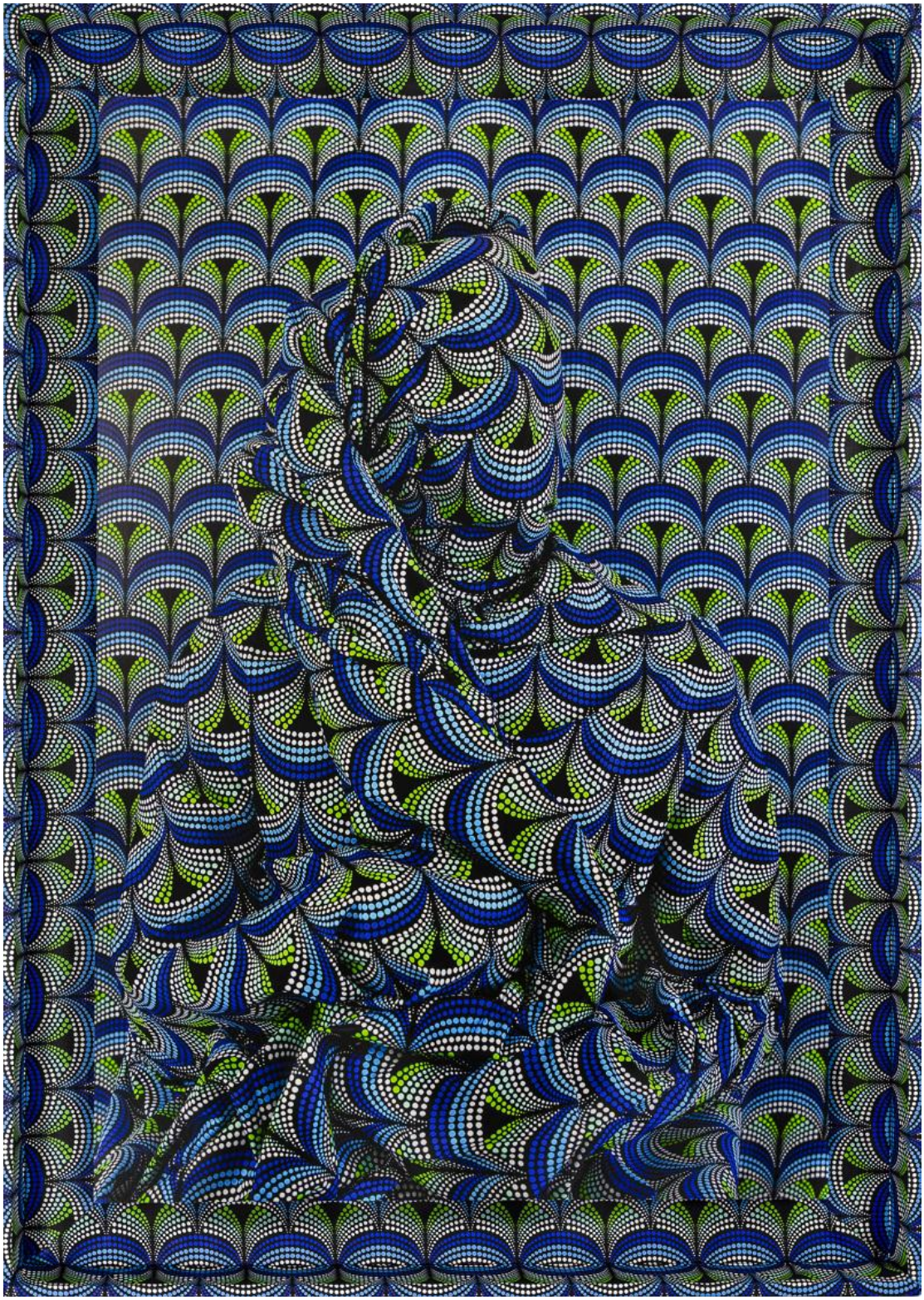

Figure 7, Alia Ali, *Scales*, FLUX Series, 2021, Pigment print with UV laminate mounted on aluminum dibond in upholstered frame (wood & wax print), 49 in x 35 in // 124.5 cm x 89 cm (framed) Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP.

Figure 8, Alia Ali, *Blue Tides & Pink Palms,* "Liberty Series," 2022, Pigment print with UV laminate mounted on aluminum dibond in wooden box frame upholstered with 100% cotton manually block printed in Udaipur, Rajasthan with unbleached 100% muslin lining, 49 in x 35 in // 124.5 cm x 89 cm (framed), Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP.

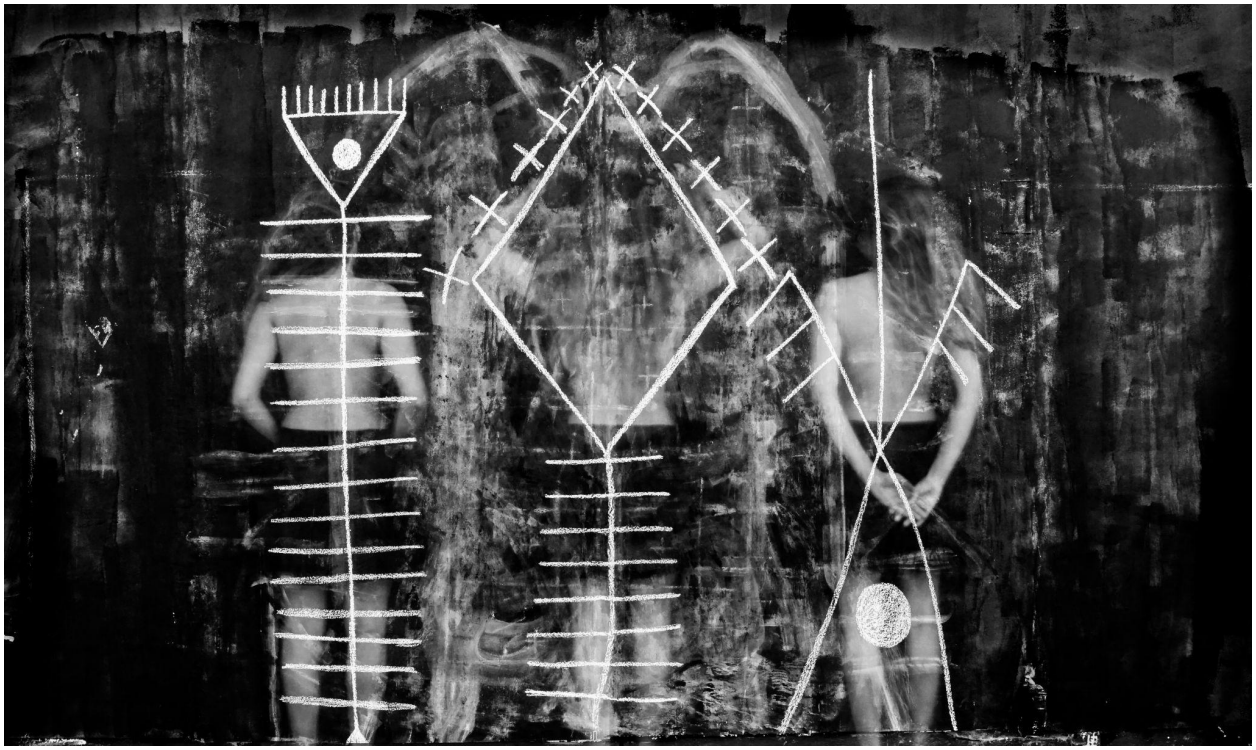

Figure 9, Safaa Mazirh, *Aouchem Corps*, "Amazigh Series," Black and White Photograph, 2017.

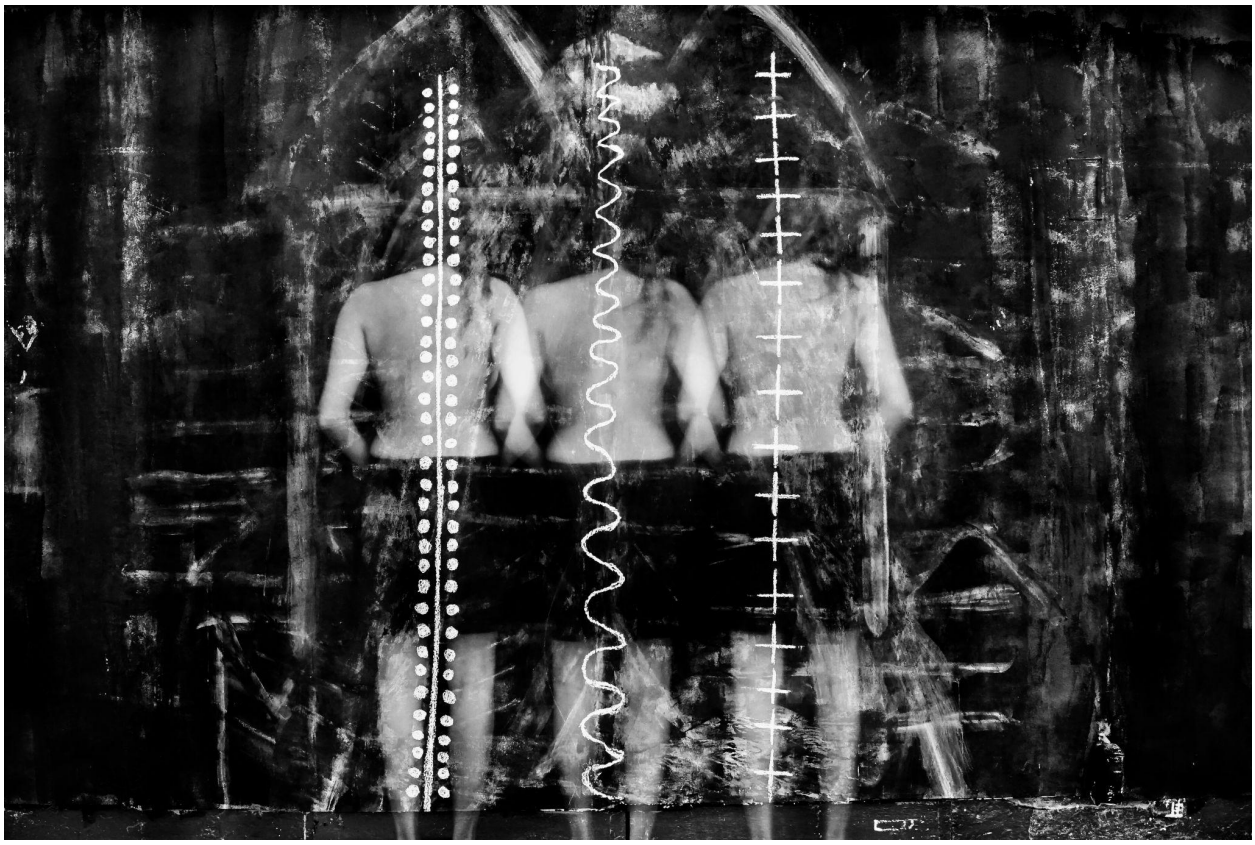

Figure 10, Safaa Mazirh, *Aouchem Visage*, "Amazigh Series," Black and White Photograph, 2017.

Figure 11, Castañeda, Nat, *In Morocco, Tribal Tattoos Fade with Age, Islam.* AP Images Spotlight, October 25, 2018, https://apimagesblog.com/blog/2018/10/25/morocco-berber-tattoo.

Figure 12, Safaa Mazirh, *Sans Titre #8*. Black and White Photograph, 2013.

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