

Moving Femininities: Queer Critique and Transnational Arab Culture

by

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Dedication

for my parents

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Abstract

Moving Femininities focuses on three diverse and eminent figures of Arab femininity: the Golden Era Egyptian belly dancer Samia Gamal (1924-1994), the pan-Arab storyteller of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade, and the Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khaled (b. 1944). By examining Arab and Arab American representations of each figure, my research demonstrates how Arab femininity is repurposed and remade by Arab and Arab American writers and artists struggling to represent Arab cultures against racism and Orientalism, all while remaining “authentically” Arab. I perform close readings of Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled in film, literature, and visual culture respectively; archival research, conducted in Egypt, Palestine, and the US provide cultural and historical context for my analysis. The project reveals how colonial logics limit the representations of femininity and produce a normative, narrow vision of Arab sexuality. My analysis reveals how Arab responses to colonialism and Orientalism have informed the representation of sexual and gendered norms; by destabilizing the representations of gender, sexuality, and race in these figures, I am able to locate subversive performances of gender and sexuality across their texts. As such, my work is a feminist and queer of color intervention in the scholarship on and representations of Arab gender and sexuality. Moreover, this dissertation examines how nations of origin affect those in the diaspora *and* how those in diaspora inform the home culture. *Moving Femininities* thus traces the movement of Arab

cultures across national lines, the political movements enabled by attention to and regulation of femininity, and the new movements we might imagine for our queer Arab futures.

Introduction

I began this project with a very clear mission: to explore, narrate, or otherwise draw attention to the lives of queer Arabs living in the US. I wanted to know how non-normativity manifested in Arab communities, how desire looked and felt, how one might be queer and Arab and OK all at the same time. What I learned almost immediately, is that while Arab American cultural production is flourishing, and texts that deal explicitly with queer content certainly exist, the materiality and possibility of “queer Arab America” eluded me. Perhaps it was the terms at hand—the vast capacity of Arab, the over-signified and simultaneously unclear content of queerness, the exclusivity and exceptionalism of the United States of “America.” To think about queerness in Arab/American culture, I could not in fact, look directly toward LGBT articulations of Arab culture produced in the context of the US. Aside from the dearth of such representations, it was also the case that the categories lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender did not always find traction in Arab and Arab American representations of sexuality. While a variety of gender performances and desire practices exist within Arab representations, I had to decenter the search for LGBT identity and broaden my scope; the representation of sexuality became richer and more nuanced when I looked at that which surrounded, obfuscated, and sometimes foreclosed explicit LGBT production. In order to understand how gender and sexuality were produced in representation, I zoomed out: to trace the racialization of Arabs in the US; to understand that

within an ongoing colonization of the Arab world by the US, Israel, and its other interlocutors; to consider how anti-racist and anti-Orientalist efforts within the US shaped Arab/American discourses of gender and sexuality; to articulate how anti-colonial and post-colonial efforts within the Arab world shaped those same discourses; and finally, to imagine a future in which it was indeed, OK, to be queer and Arab, in any place.

Moving Femininities: Queer Critique and Transnational Arab Culture examines representations of gender and sexuality in Arab and Arab American literature, film, and art in order to make space for queer and feminist transnational Arab politics that do not end at nationalism, inclusion, or citizenship. While these political aims have value for some kinds of Arab subjects both within and without the US empire, nationalist campaigns in the Arab world and bids for cultural and national citizenship in the US have often, at best, neglected non-normatively gendered and sexual subjects and at worst, positioned them as sacrifices to the greater aims of a respectable or incorporable Arab community, whether in the homelands or diaspora. To make space for a queer and feminist transnational Arab politics, I offer critiques of nationalism, normativity, and assimilation. I locate articulations and refusals of Arab politics in transnational representations of Arab femininity and sexuality. In so doing, I assume the inherent political value of representation, and additionally assume its capacity to offer models, new and old, for thinking about our cultures, our freedoms, and our futures.

My project exists in the cross currents between the Arab world and America insofar as it rejects an isolated or sealed Arab American culture “here” and an isolated or sealed Arab culture “there.” It instead, attends to the movement of Arab peoples, ideas, and stories across international boundaries. This is one of the movements in *Moving Femininities*; Arab culture, should such a singular thing exist, moves constantly within the “Arab World” and outward

toward its imperial poles. It relays between disparate locations. Any attempt to understand the “Arab” in Arab culture must also be mobile. As such, the dissertation centers three figures of Arab femininity whose movements in the Arab world, outside it, and across the US profoundly affected how they continue to be repurposed, remembered, and forgotten. Those figures are: the Golden Era Egyptian belly dancer Samia Gamal (1924-1994), the pan-Arab storyteller of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade, and the Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khaled (b. 1944). Following the movement of these figures, the dissertation asks: What happens to Arab femininity when it moves? What kinds of political moves have been made on the bodies of Arab women? What kinds of political moves can we make instead, to center Arab women and other minority groups? How can we move, in our representations, in our right now, and in our futures, toward centering the experiences of women, queers, and other marginalized communities? How do we keep it moving in an American empire bent on our death and in an Arab world still stifled by colonial legacies?

Arab femininity is a site for the political negotiation of Arab culture in response to and in refusal of Orientalist and colonial representations of the culture. As Arab culture becomes increasingly transnational, women’s bodies and femininities function as discursive sites for debates around what constitutes Arab culture. Specifically, femininity and its practice, are key sites for how we define that culture. What is celebrated, normalized, or penalized in feminine performances functions as an over-determined representation of “Arabness” within and without Arab communities. This project examines how femininity is used to negotiate the various politically motivated definitions of Arab culture that are produced and reflected in representations of Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled. *Moving Femininities* situates Arab representations of femininity in dialogue with a shifting colonial imagining of the Arab World,

which relies on patriarchal and homophobic understandings of gender and sexuality. Arab artists and writers are impossibly tasked with representing a sexuality that first, refuses Orientalist renditions of Arab culture as overly erotic and second, undermines neo-colonialist descriptions of Arab culture as essentially misogynist and homophobic. They must do so while remaining “authentic” to Arab culture. Here, authenticity functions as means to police Arab cultural production that does not put forward a version of Arab culture that can be mobilized toward the current reigning regime’s political ends. In this sense, authenticity is a moving signifier of what is “Arab” about Arab culture, but what is “Arab” changes in each historical and social context. My research makes transparent the effects of colonialism and Orientalism on representations of Arab femininity while simultaneously surfacing alternate modalities of gender and sexuality possible within those representations. Specifically, my analysis reveals how colonial logics circumscribe the representation of femininity and produce a normative, narrow vision of Arab sexuality.

Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled are figures that appear repeatedly in Arab film, literature, and art respectively, and their stories and images offer multiple modalities of Arab femininity. By deconstructing Arab and Arab American representations of each figure, my project reveals Arab femininity is a dynamic site for resisting or affirming normative iterations of culture, nation, and sexuality across the Arab world and its diasporas. *Moving Femininities* demonstrates how Arab femininity is repurposed and remade by Arab writers and artists struggling to represent their culture against the still salient frames of colonialism and Orientalism. Since the Orientalist framing of Arab culture as hypersexual functions as one justification for colonial intervention in the Middle East (both in the colonial era and the current imperial moment), Arab responses to colonial and Orientalist representation also take on

gendered and sexual dimensions. Namely, colonial discourses set up a demand or mandate for representations that reject Orientalist versions of Arab gender and sexuality that are framed, in opposition to the Orientalist and colonial image, as authentic to the culture. The demand for authenticity relies on exclusionary gendered and sexual representations that reproduce respectability and/or assimilation as political options for Arab subjects in the Arab world and the US.

My analysis of Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled deconstructs these intersections of sexual and gendered norms with colonialism. I index exclusionary concepts of gender and sexuality in each figure, and demonstrate the failure of exclusion to shore up cultural or national boundaries. Each chapter traces the triangulation of Arab femininities with and within discursive adaptations of colonialism that seek to regulate performances of gender and sexuality in service of a respectable or incorporable Arab culture: in chapter one British colonization and Egyptian nationalism; in chapter two European Orientalism, British Victorian morality, and US multiculturalism; in chapter three diasporic authenticity and the politics of cultural belonging; and in chapter four anti-colonial, anti-globalization, and anti-settler colonial struggles. Put another way, this project traces how colonial and Orientalist discourses shaped and continue to shape representations of Arab femininity and sexuality as evidenced in the originary and remade narratives of Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled.

I am less concerned with Scheherazade, Gamal, and Khaled being “properly queer” in that their representations are not LGBT or feature LGBT themes or characters per se; instead, following queer of color critique, my project refuses to accept heterosexuality, assimilation, and nationalism as “natural” in Arab culture. By destabilizing the performance of gender, sexuality, and race in these cultural texts, my project locates alternate histories and performances of gender

and sexuality in Arab culture. Building on that queer history, I suggest queer relationalities and kinships are at the center of current and future transnational Arab communities.

My research implements cultural studies methods as informed by theories in ethnic, queer, and feminist studies. Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled are recurring figures across numerous cultural objects; I collected and surveyed the repeated representations of each figure in Arab and Arab American cultural production in order to understand both how each figure originated and became popular as well as what about their origin story facilitated their repeated invocation in Arab texts. The first chapter focuses on film, the second on literature, and the third on visual culture. Thus, each chapter wields different analytic tools appropriate to the genre. In the chapter on film, I pay attention to how scenes are sequenced and cut; in the chapters on literature, I am inordinately consumed with what language does and how it might do it; in the final chapter, I offer exhaustive detail on how a photograph is composed. I try in each chapter to be accountable to the fields that study such texts, while remaining focused on the mission of the project, to think critically about representations of femininity and sexuality as sites for colonial, Orientalist, and national meaning.

Given the historical sprawl of the figures (Scheherazade can be dated to the early 13th century while one representation of Khaled was produced in 2011), I selected two sets of representative texts for each figure; the first set of texts offer genesis points while the second set of texts offered new mobilizations. For example, in the first chapter on Scheherazade, I look toward the translation of *the Nights* into English in order to understand how Scheherazade became an iconic representation of Arab femininity across the Arab world and in the West. In the second chapter I look at contemporary Arab American texts that re-narrate her story and her character partially in response to her initial popularity. In addition to critical analysis of each

text, I conducted archival research to provide historical and cultural context. For Gamal, I researched 1950s Egyptian cinematic production, the social norms around bellydance in Egyptian culture at the time, the public persona of Gamal as produced by her coverage in magazines, newspapers, and interviews, and her cinematic presence. For Scheherazade, I contextualized her translations within theories of: Orientalist representations of the Middle East in the 1800s; moral and social imperatives of femininity in the Victorian era; and debates around US multiculturalism and inclusion in the 1990s. The latter chapter continues the conversation around multiculturalism and branches into how debates around white and transnational feminism were elaborated in the representation of Arab and Arab American women in feminist movements. Finally, in the chapter on Khaled, I collected the numerous brief and incomplete bibliographic accounts of Khaled in media and academic work in order to offer a more complete biography of her life and place that written narrative alongside the narrative circulated by her famous 1969 photograph, taken by Eddie Adams. My research on Khaled also involved searching Adam's archives in Texas and New York to establish a history of production of Khaled's photo, and site research in Palestine to catalogue the reappearances of the icon in Palestine. I also interviewed two contemporary artists whose texts are featured in the second half of Khaled's chapter.

In the sections that follow, I will discuss the three bodies of scholarship that enabled the formulation of this project. In each I address salient themes within the literature that provided points of departure and intervention for my project. In the segment on feminist and queer critique, I am concerned with the centering of white and Western subjects in each respective field, and with the erasure of femininity and feminine subjects within queer and queer and color critique. In the segment on Arab American studies, I attend to the formulation of the "Arab American" subject of Arab American studies and feminist critiques of Arab American studies. I

put Arab American studies in conversation with Middle Eastern gender studies, specifically reviewing the feminist responses to Orientalism and critiques of nationalism and colonialism. The dialogue between these two bodies of scholarship enable a mobile history of Middle Eastern gender and sexuality that has changed in response forces that affect Arab lives in and outside the Arab world. In the penultimate section, I discuss representation and my methodology around selecting and analyzing Arab and Arab American texts. Finally, I offer outlines for the chapters that follow.

On Femininity and Queer Critique

The two foremost critiques of queer theory that concern this project are first, the tendency of queer theory to foreground a white, masculine subject despite its alleged commitments to a subject-less critique, and second, the assumption that queer theory and queerness at large were arrived at through progressive travel through Western iterations of sexuality. To wit: queer of color critique, the category of scholarship which attempts to redress if not both, then at least the first, replicates the emphasis on masculine subjects in queer theory and maintains the US and the West as its geographic and ideological center. I will demonstrate these three points as a means to arrive at my uses of queer of color critique in this project.

In 2003, the University of Michigan hosted a conference titled “Gay Shame.” The conference prompted an evaluation of the field of queer studies and its relationship to race because the organizers had only successfully invited one speaker of color, Hiram Perez. Moreover, the representation of people of color within the field seemed to fall specifically within the purview of entertainment. In response to the conference, a number of attendees, Perez included, contributed to a special issue of *Social Text* titled “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” In the special issue, Perez’s article responds to the violence perpetuated by the

conference against queer bodies of color, and uses the specific example of a pornographic representation of Kiko, a “Latin” porn star in Ellis Hansen’s presentation. For Perez, Hansen’s presentation replayed hypersexualized fantasies projected onto black males. Perez uses Ellis Hansen’s presentation and the other elements of the conference to argue that brown bodies continued to occupy a marginal space within queer studies, while the intellectual labor of the field fell to white scholars. He suggests, following the critiques of Judith Butler, and Bidy Martin, that “The shift from gender to sexuality [in queer theory] does not effectively anticipate how institutionalized patriarchy and racism might be retrenched precisely as a result of this transition” (173). Put another way, the brown body is “variously sacrificed at the exigencies of white privilege and white desire” (188). Perez’s experience and article thus easily demonstrates how queer critique repeatedly fails bodies of color. Though notably, his piece repeatedly invokes a brown or black male body but only gestures, fleetingly, with queer women and queer women of color.

Regarding the genealogy of queer studies, the same imperative toward a white masculine subject underlines the means by which queerness is understood as the purview of Western culture. We can find these critiques in Martin Manalansan’s *Global Divas* and Joseph Massad’s *Desiring Arabs*, for example. *Global Divas* demonstrates how queerness does indeed function outside of Western contexts while *Desiring Arabs* rejects Western narratives of sexuality as potentially inappropriate to Arab subjects. *Global Divas* is an ethnographic study of gay Filipino men in New York City based on interviews and fieldwork from 1990-1995. Manalansan’s rich monograph takes the quotidian as a starting point, focusing on the everyday lives of his informants, which refract complex dialogues around race, class, family, citizenship, religion and longing. Manalansan frames his discussion of Filipino queers linguistically first, showcasing the

myriad ways Filipino queers use language (bakla, biyuti, drama, swardspeak) to negotiate the hybridity of their diasporic identities. Marked by movement, globalization, and transnationalism, his subjects routinely engage citizenship in a way that is both resistant and recuperative. While the forces of displacement from the homeland and settlement in the new land certainly impact queers, they do not simply take up normative scripts. Instead, through queer performances (from drag to cross dressing to language choices) they rewrite scripts to make space for their modes of subjectivity. As such, he demonstrates the means by which queerness is not nascent or centered in the West.

In *Desiring Arabs*, Massad critiques the notion of “the Gay International,” the propagation of LGBT human rights frameworks as a means to justify continued intervention into the Middle East. He suggests that gayness is not a universal category and given the history of sexuality in the Arab World, might in fact be a particularly violent reorganization of the culture. It is, in fact, a simultaneous attempt to create a universal identity (gay, for example) and liberate that identity (40). This move erases how sexuality might otherwise function in the Arab context. Since queerness is touted as intrinsically progressive by LGBT organizations, the so-called barbaric treatments of queer desire and practice in the Arab world (that is, the absence of categorical LGBT identities, and supposed religious mandates against categories which do not firmly exist) is a new take on the old favorite, Orientalism. Here, Arab nations are backward because their sexuality has not been civilized into identity categories and identity politics. Repressed, their heady sexuality is rerouted into the violence of terrorism. The emphasis on the repression and oppression of homosexuality in the Middle East thus serves as yet another way to criminalize Arab bodies and justify intrusion on Arab states: to liberate the queers. An LGBT narrative is particularly inappropriate, especially since Arab sexualities might more readily and

accurately be described as queer. But it's the failure of the Arab subject to pass from LGBT identity into identity-free queerness on a Western chronology that makes queer subjects in the Middle East invisible.

The notion that queer theory has unwittingly foregrounded a particular normative subject—white, masculine, Western, at least middle class, able bodied—is certainly not a new or original argument. Rather, that critique is foundational to the genesis of queer of color critique and can be evidenced in the work José Muñoz, Siobhan Somerville, Roderick Ferguson, and Robert McRuer to name a few. It also functions as a parallel critique made against second wave and contemporary feminist theory, which attends to the category of gender while being blind to race. Women of color feminists, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Angela Davis, and numerous others offered this critique consistently since (at least) the late 1970s and it's precisely through the work of women of color feminisms that queer of color undercuts queer theory's normative whiteness.

If queer critique invisibilizes race, queer of color critique seeks to re-center race as a significant axis of difference. However, women of color feminisms' concern with gender as a significant category of analysis becomes eclipsed in much of queer and queer of color critique. For example, Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, which introduces the theoretical paradigm "queer of color critique," is entirely configured around the image of the drag queen prostitute, while his fourth chapter, which indicts sociology and literary studies for its disavowal of black queer subjects, rests on an in-depth and comparative analysis of Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *The Moynihan Report*. Ferguson neglects to comment on how the figures of the drag queen prostitute, the welfare queen (ubiquitous in the *Report*), and *Sula* operate through the debasement of femininity. He uses these feminine forms instead as

mobilizations of queer of color critique: through *Sula* we can identify some of the threads that make her an outsider figure and form a progressive response around her body, a politics of critique rather than a demand for equality. Thus he follows queer theory's guiding impetus, putting sexuality in conversation with power in the specific venue of the academy. Ferguson uses the black novel to challenge liberal articulations of aesthetics and canonical enunciations of sociology, but he erases how his novels use and are configured through gender.

Even when queer of color critique attends to the question of gender, even to femininity, it does so in a manner that often ignores the lived experiences of women of color. For example, David Eng's *Racial Castration* focuses on the feminization of the Asian American subject. He couples psychoanalysis and ethnic studies to convincingly articulate scenes of psychic and material abjection, scenes that cannot be disentangled and are constitutive of Asian American subjectivity. While *Racial Castration* is a masterful case study of how ethnic and racial identity is in simultaneous production with gender and sexual identity under the auspices of the nation-state, it focuses on the would-be masculine subject, rather than subjects that are always already "castrated" by their engagement with the nation state, by virtue of their female Asian embodiment. The organization under sexuality functions to obscure other affects of power.

Thus the fissure between women of color feminisms, queer of color critique, and queer theory is around the kinds of attention paid to the identities each theoretical paradigm eventually posits. Using the subjectless critique becomes in the latter two manifestations a means by which to ignore (intentionally or otherwise) the *multiple* effects of power on subjects. Queer theory abstracts sexuality from other subjects of power; queer of color critique attempts to rectify queer theory's racial blindness, and asserts that how power effects sexuality is intricately bound to race. To clarify this act, I turn to Cathy Cohen's landmark article, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and

Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” Here, Cohen questions queer theory’s claims to radical politics. Where it hoped to enact a subjectless position, one where non-normativity and marginality formed the basis for resistance to normative structures of sexuality, what it had instead done was establish a new binary between heterosexuality and everything else. The prioritizing of sexuality as the major effect of power, as the one that instantiates all other critiques, makes invisible how race, class, and gender interstice with the former and transform it, such that subjects are an effect of not power in its diverse and varied forms, but rather an effect of sexuality alone. This is queer theory’s magic trick: it proposes itself transparent, but uses that transparency as a shield to obfuscate its actual, practical object: the queer subject is actually the white male middle class homosexual. Queer of color critique also commits this act of transparency, but here around maleness or masculinity, the subject of sexuality is a homosexual (man) of color.

Building on these fields and the evaluation thereof, in this dissertation, queer critique finds its genealogical roots in the work of women of color, particularly women of color feminists from the 1970s -1990s whose work critiqued the failure of the feminist movement to speak to race and the failure of ethnic studies to attend to gender. Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Joe Kadi, amidst others, offered intersectional frames for thinking about race and gender in the experience of minority communities within the US and the Americas more broadly. While some worked actively to decenter the US from their analysis, the transnational turn in feminist theory in the authorship of Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Inderpal Grewal, Ella Shohat, and others enabled a more pressing critique of empire and the means by which colonization colluded with racism and sexism to create others within and without the nation state.

These influences combine rarely in contemporary scholarship, but one guiding text has been Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. In *Impossible Desires*, Gopinath brings queer diasporic subjectivity to bear upon questions of home, nation, and belonging through her incisive analysis of texts emerging under the vanguard of South Asian public cultures. Like Gopinath, I am interested in examining how nationalist and inclusionary frames position heterosexuality as "a key disciplinary regime" in which women's bodies are regulated in order to produce and bind the idea of the home nation. Unlike Gopinath, I am not convinced that either queerness or the diaspora necessitate, or even contain transgressive possibilities within their mutlititudes. I maintain queerness first as a methodological means to question normativity that relies on sexuality: this includes, of course, heteronormativity, but understands heteronormativity as deeply foundational to other oppressive projects, including racialization, nationalism, and rhetorics of inclusion. Second, as a critical method, queerness *makes* possible other visions of how community and solidarity and politics may work, but possibility is not inherent in properly queer objects or subjects. This is why my textual objects are not necessarily queer. This is also why I am not interested in or arguing for a proliferation of queer Arab objects. While such texts are certainly welcome, and they contribute to a polyphonic Arab voice and offer multiple avenues of inquiry, their objective queerness does not and cannot make promises. Put another way: I don't expect queer arts and literatures to take up the burden of politics alone. No one is unclear on the point that homophobia and heteronormativity makes life hard for queer people. But what queer critique does best, in my opinion, is demonstrate how those forces impact life more broadly, not just for queers, but for anyone whose non-normativity becomes a cause or invitation to violence, dismissal, regulation, or other punishments, both personal and systemic.

As Massad and other's work indicates, the Arab subject is difficultly positioned with regard to articulating sexuality. Before Arabs were repressed and homophobic barbarians, the Orient functioned as an open space to experiment with gender and sexuality for Western travelers. Juxtaposed against the firmly bound and proper Victorian West, the Middle East's homosociality, its extended kin networks, and the imaginary of the harem and the desert functioned as a queer tableau. Between the imperialist impulse of American racism and the old Orientalism, we are left with two contradictory impulses about Arab sexuality: the Orientalist version, that is queer in the queerest sense: full of the rampant desires of men and "impossible" female subjects, and the contemporary anti-Arab racist version, that Arab sexuality is deeply and inherently homophobic and as such, barbaric with regard to human rights. This binary is paralleled in representations of femininity. In *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*, several authors write about the limited horizons of representations available for reading, writing, and seeing Arab women. Amira Jarmakani writes how discussions of the veil obfuscate Arab feminists ability to discuss politics beyond the veil, and in so doing, makes invisible Arab feminist work. Amal Amireh discusses how the trope of female suicide bombers invibilizes the effect of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian and attributes their genesis strictly to Arab patriarchy. These tropes join the exotic genie, harem dweller, or belly dancer presented in Orientalist discourse to stand in for Arab femininity at large.

Thus, a project devoted to a feminist and queer of color critique of Arab representations of Arab femininity must navigate how writers and authors sidestep or engage both the masculinist and western urges of queer critique and the limited representations of Arab femininity. *Moving Femininities* contributes a feminist and queer of color intervention in the scholarship on and representations of Arab gender and sexuality. My project redresses these

stifling representations in three ways: first, it looks to representations of femininity and womanhood produced by Arabs and Arab Americans rather than those produced about them, as much contemporary scholarship does. Second, following feminist critiques of Orientalism, it resists stagnant interpretations of femininity that have served to eclipse women's agency in transnational Arab communities. By underscoring the impact colonialism and racism have had on representations of gender and sexuality, my work undermines the Orientalist and racist vision of Arab culture as repressive and thereby in need of Western rescue. Similarly, it disarms anti-Arab sentiment, which strategically employs old and new Orientalist tropes to deny Arabs cultural and legal citizenship in the US. Third, it highlights how these representations, contrary to Western and some scholarly accounts of Arab culture, resist narrow ideals of sexuality. I look to transnational Arab art, literature, and film to expand how femininity is produced and performed in Arab culture, and to demonstrate that Arab culture is neither especially sexist nor homophobic. As a result, my work contends that women and queer people are not only present in the Arab world, but also vital to its history and future.

On Movement and Transnational Arab Culture

In the same ways a direct reading of LGBTQ Arab culture eluded me in this project, so too did a transparent or discrete Arab America. While I had intended to produce a project grounded in Arab American ethnic studies, what constituted a “proper” Arab American subject was unclear. Arab American studies, a still emergent field of study, has attempted to address this question in numerous forums. Early immigrants and cultural producers struggled with the designation of Arab American—one example of that struggle can be located in Alixa Naff's *Becoming American*. *Becoming American* seeks to explain the rapid assimilation of Syrians into Americans, and what Naff understands as the erasure of Syrian culture across a short span of

years. In an unmarked historical materialism, she charts the economic systems Syrians participated in as playing the most significant role in their acculturation. Naff claims that both peddling and later shop keeping, contributed to the evaporation of Syrian culture, changing the familial and kin structures that she defined as characteristic of the culture. For Naff, then, Arabness was centered in generic culture talk that was readily undermined by US capitalist economies.

Following the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, more and more Arabs in the diaspora felt the acute pressure of war on their lives, and Arab American studies became more explicit and political in their discussions of “Arab” as a category of analysis. This coincided with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which marks a profound period of agitation around race in the US. The civil rights movement provided the impetus to understand race as socially constructed, which bore consequences for Arab Americans as well. Though published later, one example of this move is Lisa Majaj’s article “Arab Americans and the Meaning of Race,” which interrogates the relationship between Arab racial classifications and whiteness, looking to the phases and contributing factors to the racialization of Arabs in the US. Whether Arabs were understood as white or not depended on a number of factors, including governmental classification, religion, proximity or similarity to other (colored) races, languages spoken, physical appearance, trade and so on. She demonstrates that the stakes of Arab identification were both material in regards to access to resources and discursive, in terms of how a community regards and understands itself. Majaj also notes how the material and discursive realities of Arab American experience felt contradictory: Arabs might have been legally white but faced discrimination or had cultural experiences that eschewed the

mainstream. In Majaj's work and other like it, Arabness is tacitly transformed into a political and racial marker.

The construction of "Arab American" shifted in the 1990s in the wake of the Gulf War, where the representation of Arabs *over there* began to have even more significant effects on the lives of Arabs *over here*. We see two trends emerge in this period in Arab American studies. The first articulates the importance of Arabs to American society, and points to their engagement with Americanness as the basis for a critique of discrimination. The second group begins from the presumption that Arabs are integral to the US, and uses that position to critique how the US engaged Arabness abroad. We see in this moment the formation of Arabness as a domestic concern and a diasporic one, where domestic concerns the lives of Arabs in the US, and diasporic reflects how Arabs in the US were still connected to their first homelands. Michael Suleiman's 1999 anthology, *Arabs in the Americas* models both tendencies. The first half of the anthology, including Suleiman's introduction, focuses on asserting and describing the Arab presence in the United States. The last half investigates the means by which Arab American negotiate their hyphenated identities and challenges some of the assertions made in the introduction and previous chapters regarding Arab American's relationship to race, identity, assimilation, and activism. The anthology thus captures Arab American Studies in a moment of movement—locating its struggle within and without the US.

In the aftermath of 9/11, what constitutes "Arab" becomes the explicit subject of investigation. The contestation of this category is central in the anthology *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, edited by Nadine Naber and Amaney Jamal. This anthology asks: what is race and how does it work for Arabs? Discourse around Arabs in the American hegemony inscribed physical markers on Arabs,

making them, for the first time *undeniably* brown, though they had been murkily non-white in the past. These physical markers went beyond biology, and included fantasmic renditions of Arabness that make it at once hypervisible and invisible. That is, 9/11 brought the tableau of the Orient to the US and inscribed it selectively onto Arab bodies, primarily male bodies and bodies presumed Muslim. The treatment of these bodies by the American state opens new avenues for the theorization of Arab Americanness that make central questions of citizenship and subjectivity. So, what had been previously tacit becomes in the anthology explicit, and the essays marks a paradigmatic moment in Arab American studies, opening possibilities for new Arab American theoretical formations that deviate from assimilation or negotiation with race, to the use of racial theory to critique and oppose the racist state. In both the transnational turn evidenced in Suleiman's anthology and the critique of empire foregrounded in *Race and Arab America*, Arab American studies underscores the ongoing importance of considering movement between the homeland and the diaspora in order to properly imagine an Arab American subject within the realm of Arab American Studies. This dissertation engages the moving trajectory of "Arab America" and considers the means by which Arabs engagement with racial logics in the US has impacted the representation of gender and sexuality within the culture.

Similarly, Nadine Naber's *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politic, and Activism* challenges the Orientalist vs. anti-Orientalist framing of Arab American culture by employing a "diasporic feminist anti-imperialism" that highlights the intersecting impact and interplay of diaspora, authenticity, religion, and Arab politics on the lives of Arab American subjects (204). I bring Naber's critique, developed in the ethnographic context, to Arab American cultural studies and emphasize how representations of femininity are circumscribed through the Orientalist binary and the politics of cultural authenticity. As such, my work contributes to the growing

conversation in Arab and Arab American studies about the ongoing impact of Orientalism on the material and discursive experiences and representations of transnational Arab culture, particularly with regard to non-normative gender and sexuality.

Naber's work is undergirded by a strong engagement with Middle Eastern gender studies. Here, I also drew on Middle Eastern gender studies, which, in its responses to colonialism, Orientalism, and nationalism has allowed me to insist on the transnational production of culture in these texts as well as point toward a non-Western genealogy of feminist thought that informs my analysis. Middle Eastern feminist critiques of Orientalism, colonialism, and nationalism offer the means with which to examine femininity and sexuality as a site of discursive production, while the insistence on queer of color critique and transnational culture help refute those sites as essentialist or strictly allegorical.

For better or worse, many Middle Eastern and Arab scholars have had to reckon with the impact of Orientalist discourse on Arab communities and cultural production. While Edward Said's *Orientalism* clearly articulated the means by which Orientalist discourse produced spectacular Arab femininities and masculinities, it did not always attend to the ramifications of those productions on Arab women's bodies and sexualities, and it overlooked the nuance of Orientalist discourse production over time in favor of imposing Orientalism as a monolith. Mohja Kahf's *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman* interrogates what comes before *Orientalism*. Kahf shows that Said dates Orientalism to cultural productions of the nineteenth century and is careful to explain why and how Orientalism arrived on the scene (hint: colonialism). But what occurred before this? Rather than allow a "once and for all" image of the Orient, Kahf studies images of Muslim women in Medieval and Renaissance texts, as well as throughout the periods of Enlightenment and Romanticism of the western literary and

philosophical traditions. What she discovers is that women were not always oppressed in this texts, that indeed, many were feared and fearful. By slowing down our travel through these centuries, Kahf offers nuance in the image of Arabs in the world and in doing so actually makes a stronger case for how and why contemporary images are never just images but instead carriers of temporal, spatial, and political significance. My project invokes Kahf's emphasis on changing gender and sexual roles over time as well as its interest in how shifts in Orientalist discourse inform the reception and production of femininity. I do so, perhaps fittingly, with some of Kahf's other, non-scholarly work.

Kahf's project examines Orientalism outside of colonialism by focusing on the "pre-colonial" period. It is difficult to disarticulate Orientalist from colonialist discourse in this and other projects because the material aspects of colonizing projects were enabled in part by circulation of Orientalist discourses. To that end, we can follow the robust scholarship produced by Middle East gender studies scholars that attempt to respond to both simultaneously. One example is Leila Ahmed's "Discourse of the Veil" which deconstructs how the veil is a symbolic location for competing Orientalist and colonial ideologies about Muslim women. Ahmed offers three key notes in this piece: First, the emphasis on veiling as in indicator of Muslim culture originates with European fascination with the veil rather from within Islam itself, even when reproduced by Arabo-Islamic scholars. That is, the focus on certain modes of Arab feminine performance as a site of authentic Arab culture is not "authentic," but produced instead in response to Western intervention. Second, the topic of veiling acts a discursive field in which the battles of Orientalism and empire are fought, with little regard to actual lived experiences of Muslim and Arab women. Like Ahmed, I undertake a study of representation of Arab femininity to determine what battles are being fought in their allegory. Third, western feminists have blindly

engaged with the rhetoric of veiling to enact what Ahmed calls colonial feminism, or feminism that is in service of imperialism. Ahmed's criticism of western feminist discourse is echoed in the critiques of this project, but with the expansion toward how competing notions of feminism and authenticity *within* Arab cultural production may also produce these exclusionary paradigms or enact new ones.

In this project, Orientalism, colonialism, and nationalism function alongside one another in their diverse effects on the production of culture in Arab texts. Orientalist discourses, as evidenced by Said's work, underwrite colonial practices, which in turn are met, at least partially with nationalist efforts in previously colonized Arab communities. Feminist responses to Orientalism and colonialism bear witness to the means by which Arab cultural production responds to Western influence, and here, feminist responses to nationalism further expose how political paradigms like nationalism also inform and effect the representation of femininity and the material reality of women's lives in the post-colonial Arab world. *Dangerous Liaisons*, a collection edited by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, investigates how the nation—once a concept of liberatory promise—has now become “the property of national elites that have been increasingly revealed to be corrupt, capitulationist, undemocratic, patriarchal, and homophobic” (3). They regard the nation as a produced rather than organic entity, and in the essays that center gendered analysis, speak critically to “the often male-dominated culture of nationalist or ethnic movements, but also to the First World and “Eurocentric” bias and often heterosexist assumptions of mainstream feminism itself” (6). As such, the essays reveal the “complicities between colonialism and nationalism around the figure of the woman” (7). As such, *Dangerous Liaisons* collects and represents the feminist critiques of nationalism that underwrite this project, particularly in the chapters on Gamal and Khaled. I take as a starting

point the feminine as a place to disarticulate nationalist, colonialist, and Orientalist entanglements that circumscribe Arab cultural production. Thorough critique, I offer revisions of Arab gender and sexuality that recuperate non-normative histories and attempt non-normative futures.

A second area within Arab American studies central to the formation of this project is the intersectional discussion of gender as a salient axis of identity. I include it after the segment on Middle Eastern gender studies because the feminist impulse in those critiques is and was immediately apparent in the narrower scope of Arab American studies scholarship and because feminist Arab American studies, given the transnational scope of this project, can be understood as a branch of Middle Eastern gender studies. We can chart the transformation from gender consciousness to feminist consciousness in the responses of Arab American women, scholars, and activists to the emergence of women of color critique and intersectional analysis. Arab American studies had already begun to adopt the language of the civil rights by 1990s, and to model itself along other ethnic studies paradigms. Thus, when Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaluda's ground-breaking *This Bridge Called My Back* was published in 1981 without mention of the struggles of Arab American women as women of color, Arab American feminists brought their long-engagement with feminist and feminist movements of color into the foreground. Especially pertinent to this moment is the publication of Joe Kadi's *Food For Our Grandmother's: Writings by Arab-American And Arab-Canadian Feminists*, which made its position in response to *This Bridge*, explicit and modeled its structure on the same text. *Food* also attempted to optimize the framework of intersectionality put forward by Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." Intersectionality posits that it is impossible to understand how identity and/or

discrimination function without recognizing that categories of identity mutually constitute each other. To be a person of color is not an objective category, universally experienced; it is instead variegated by one's socioeconomic position, sexuality, gender, nationality, and so on. *Food* presents pieces that attempt to capture Arab American women's lives at this nexus.

Historical scholarship also reflected feminist influence. In Evelyn Shakir's *Bint Arab*, we see a profound awareness of how sex informed and constituted the experience of Arab migrants. Her Shakir takes a micro-approach, narrating the lives of individual Arab women, including some family members, and ultimately, herself. The book keeps with the historical schema of waves of Arab migration, broken into three sections: the first wave, the transition phase, and the second wave. Shakir's interviewees span different ages and perspectives. Although each section focuses closely on one person, Shakir avoids the tendency to generalize a broad, singular Arab American experience, while taking some moments to contextualize each person in the larger social and political geography of the community. So while the *Bint* of the title is singular, in fact, what Shakir presents is a widely diverse image of Arab America women in the US.

Finally, we can see continuation of the feminist "turn" in Arab American and Middle Eastern gender studies more broadly in Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany and Nadine Naber's anthology *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*. Like Kadi and Shakir, the editors offer means by which to comprehend the lived realities of Arab America. The works and authors are concerned with tracing gender across masculinity and femininity, privilege across class and poverty, and violence across material, discursive, and psychic lines. As Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber note in the introduction, the anthology is committed to a "theory of the flesh" and questions "what would analyses of race, gender, sexuality and nation look like if we were to center Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender

experiences” (xxx, xxxi). By moving from the inclusion of diverse voices to centering the diversity of the Arab and Arab American experience, the collection fractures essentialist renderings of “Arabness” via attention to gender and sexuality.

Representing Transnational Arab Femininities

This dissertation centers a feminist Arab and Arab American studies analysis in its exploration of how Arab femininity is constituted through the intersectional influences of Orientalism, colonialism, and other forces. What does Arab culture look like when we center the feminine figures of Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled? I take up three kinds of texts, each which have numerous origin points, forms, traditions, and uses. Dominantly in this project, I look at texts produced by Arab and Arab American writers and artists. I sometimes include non-Arab texts when Arab writers have intended to respond to those texts, as in the case of Richard Burton’s translation of *the Arabian Nights*, or when those texts are explicitly in conversation with Arab and Arab American art and iconography, as in the painting and poster by Erin Currier and Jesus Barraza respectively. By centering the figures rather than aligning with a firm definition of “Arab American,” I am able to expand our Arab American archive to address the mobile means of Arab cultural production.

I turn now to the specific texts in Arab and Arab American studies that take up the question of Arab America in *representation*. Arab American studies has a strong interest in cultural studies, though often those projects are oriented toward representations of the culture rather representations of the culture by Arabs themselves. Arab American cultural studies has thus also reckoned with how to locate and interpret texts as “Arab American.” One close interlocutor can be found in *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader’s Guide*. Here, Steven Salaita defines Arab American literature as “creative work produced by American authors of

Arab origin and that participates, in a conscious way or through critical reception, in a category that has come to be known as ‘Arab American Literature’” (4). He additionally defines the genre as “a *political* category, not a cultural or historical given” (7). Salaita’s definitions offer some initial organizing paradigms for how we might come to think of Arab American cultural studies, but one that is profoundly capacious: what and whom constitutes an Arab origin? Does my reception of a text as Arab American, even if it is not produced by an Arab-origin author, or one intending to be read within the Arab American literary canon, hail that text as Arab American? Is there violence in such inclusions? What does it mean to talk about a genre as political and not culturally or historically given?

Carol Fadda-Conrey’s deliberations on Arab American literature in her book, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Configurations of Citizenship and Belonging*, begin to address some of these points. Fadda-Conrey defines Arab American as “a minority collective whose members are connected not only through a shared cultural or linguistic Arab heritage but more importantly through a common investment in shaping and performing a revisionary form of US citizenship that alters the simplistic binary constructs inherent in dominant understandings of the US nation-state” (10-11). In this sense, the work of Arab American culture is inherently political, intentionally transformative. That revisionary form of US citizenship takes its shape in *Contemporary Arab-American Literature* as an insistence on the transnational character of Arab American literatures and identities. For Fadda-Conrey, the transnational “highlights the crucial ways the influences and factors shaping Arab American identities [lie] beyond the US nation-state” (8). Moreover, she argues that the transnational frame changes the US terrain by imposing an imagined Arab terrain upon it and offers new paths of solidarity and connection with other communities of color. In both Fadda-Conrey and Salaita,

we see the echoes of the debates around what constitutes Arab culture in Arab American Studies more broadly.

In *Moving Femininities*, I adopt Fadda-Conrey's definition and insistence on the transnational because it captures the means by which Arab American texts are in fact, Arab *and* Arab American. They are shaped by forces within the Arab and American worlds; they are representative of trends in both contexts; and they also occupy a new and strange space that is neither here nor there. In my work, transnational offers a counter to strictly Arab American or strictly Arab renditions of culture, but it also designates a failure of Arab culture to reside either here or there. It is, at the risk of repetition, moving. I try to combat the pan-Arab or monolithic representation of Arab and Arab American culture in my chapters by looking at specific national contexts (Egypt; the US; and Palestine), with the understanding that the national gives us the contextual and historical frame within which to place a text while demonstrating within that text, the failure of the nation to hold Arab culture in its bounds.

What does it mean to insist on movement? It has meant, here, to insist on reading figures and texts whose legacies traverse multiple geographic, linguistic, and generic registers. It has meant an attempt to articulate arguments that cover these scattered plot points without falling into simplistic or prescriptive measures. It has also meant, I think, choosing to think about the space between the diaspora and the homeland, and how that space reflects the multiple constituencies of the nations of origin and nations of residence, be they the same or different. As a demonstration, I return to the concept of queerness deployed in this work. Transnational Arab culture is mutually constituted by so called "Western" discourses like queerness at the same time that it is constituted by so called "Eastern" ones that supposedly refute those possibilities. It is a disservice to Arab cultural production to assume that queerness is a concept that has all its roots

and meaning in Western or European worlds. Meanwhile, it is important to recognize that “East” and “West” are fictive (and violent) categorizations and even as we employ them frequently, we must acknowledge that they are constituted by reference to one another, and indeed construct each other rather than being seen as mutually exclusive terms with no crossover. We cannot deny the impact of imperialism, colonialism, and globalization that force knowledge and its modes of production to be disseminated across national and geographical boundaries. Thus, to assume that any use of “Western” discourse by “Eastern” scholars as inherently Orientalist disregards the complicated way concepts and epistemologies occur. It disregards the dialectic that is so central to the ways we understand others and ourselves. It is in this regard that I use “transnational Arab culture” in this project: in reference to texts that move, texts that should not be regarded as only Arab American or Arab.

Moving Femininities is informed by a strong literary and cultural studies framework that is committed to discussing representation as a significant axis along which meaning is produced, consumed, and circulated. And moreover, that representation has a significant meaning, pushback, or constitutive relationship with the material lives of those subjects represented. Indeed, much of the field of Arab American studies can demonstrate this point: Melani McAlister’s work in *Epic Encounters* convincingly narrates how popular American film both reflected and influenced the US’ political and strategic interests in the Middle East; in *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*, Evelyn Alsultany deftly articulates the *trompe-l’œil* in the proliferation of sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims in US popular culture post 9/11 that obfuscate the continued violence visited upon Arab and Arab American subjects. My work follows the impetus of Arab American studies to catalogue and consider the

importance of representation, but turns instead toward what meanings and materials are made in transnational Arab culture by those identified with that culture.

For example, if we take nationalism and inclusion as political strategies, not only performed by representational texts, but enacted in the real lives of Arabs in the US (as in Sarah Gualtieri's work on Arab relationships to whiteness) and the Arab world (in the examples of Arab nations as they attempt to emerge from colonial rule), we can articulate a connection between how we see ourselves on the page, and how we want to be seen in the world. If a narrator finds redemption in inclusion, we might imagine inclusion a viable strategy in our lived realities. It is in this capacity, on the potential material ramifications of discursive and aesthetic choices, that I often refer to politics—as Stuart Hall did—as a politics of representation and a politics of the people represented. Alternately, we might say that our representations bear witness to our political engagements, our imaginations of Arab life wherever we might reside.

Chapter Outlines

I chose Samia, Scheherazade, and Leila for their continual movement in the Arab world, the US, and Europe. I chose them because each tells a different story about Arab femininity, and each articulates one mode of representational and political strategy. I chose with some thought to temporality. Many are familiar in name with the great Scheherazade; similarly, many are familiar with the face of Leila Khaled. Few might remember the glimmer and glamour of Samia Gamal. I start with Gamal; I ask readers to begin by remembering, I ask readers to refuse to forget her. Gamal's story takes place within Egypt as it transitions out of monarchical reign and into what continues to be a contentious national project. Her legacy is lost in the cracks of this shift. As the “National Dancer of Egypt,” and star of over 160 golden era Egyptian films, Gamal is an index of contradicting impulses regarding westernization, femininity, and nationalism in Egypt. I

situate analysis of two of her popular films alongside the narration of her brief biography, her cinematic presence, and the surprising refusal of the Egyptian ministry to mourn her death. I argue that the desire not to remember Gamal overcorrects against westernization and Orientalism in order to create a more respectable international Arab face. The project of respectability contributes to the impossibility of an Arab or Arab American femininity that is not predetermined by debates regarding authenticity. I suggest that the refusal to remember Gamal's legacy points toward the failure of nationalist project. I argue that we might choose to remember Gamal and heed her example as we envision queer Arab futures. I recuperate her to remind us how nationalism was written on Arab women's bodies while simultaneously failing them. I recuperate her to remind us of a rich cultural history that holds vast stores of gendered and sexual variety often deemed unimaginable to both Arab and non-Arab audiences, audiences who are conditioned to understand the Arab world through the Orientalist frames of patriarchy and misogyny. In other words, Gamal disrupts a normative history of gender and sexuality in Arab representation of femininity.

If Gamal offers a glimpse into our past, Scheherazade is an iteration of our present. In the next two chapters, I trade places with Scheherazade, the infamous storyteller of *the Thousand and One Nights*, to tell her story. Her story takes place in a thousand and one locations; I detail two and three of them in each respective chapter. Unlike Gamal, Scheherazade is remembered vividly, and recurring frequently in the work of Arab and Arab American writers, in particular. In "A Thousand and One Scheherazades: the Life and Times of a Literary Muse," I offer a literary biography of Scheherazade, detailing her travels through *The Thousand and One Nights*, her sojourn to Europe, and the remaking of her image through translation. To ground and establish important parts of her fictional character, I study two translations of *the Nights*: Richard

Burton's rendition in 1850 and Hussain Haddawy's 1990 translation of the definitive Arabic version of the text, compiled by Muhsin Mahdi in 1984. I argue that the long fascination with Scheherazade is due in part to her ability to straddle two spheres of culture, two models of femininity. As a female figure of indeterminate "oriental" descent, Scheherazade symbolizes Arab nations, and her embodiment in the literary text becomes the grounds for the negotiation of power between the "East" and the "West." She is at once the fantasy of the East's self-sufficiency and a parable of its cultural perversion. The perversion both repellent and attractive, justifies the logics of imperialism. Scheherazade's image in translation represents the attempts of Western audiences to fetishize and domesticate a wild Arab femininity and masculinity, but simultaneously presents the impulse of Arab authors to make a "good" Arab through recourse to Scheherazade's legacy. It deploys western (nee Victorian) respectability tropes to legitimate Arab culture through its womanhood. Scheherazade's troubling femininity alongside the desire to recuperate her from Orientalist discourses offers insight into the legacy of bound representations that Arab writers and artists inherit. Through my feminist and queer of color critique of Scherazade, we are able to disentangle how responding to Orientalism and colonialism necessitated a heteronormative and assimilative Arab subject.

In the third chapter of the dissertation and the second on Scheherazade, "Scheherazade and the Limits of Inclusive Politics in Arab American Literature" I examine the increased use of Scheherazade by Arab American writers after 9/11. The retellings of her by Arab American writers symbolize struggles around representation and cultural citizenship for Arab American subjects. Using Scheherazade to respond to both anti-Arab racism in the United States and Western Orientalism at large, *Scheherazade's Legacy* (2004) edited by Susan M. Darraj, *Emails From Scheherazad* (2003) by Mohja Kahf, and *The Night Counter* (2009) by Alia Yunis,

deployed Scheherazade to create an “authentic” Arab subject who could belong to the U.S. nation. Yet in doing so, they produced new forms of exclusion and marginality among Arab Americans. I argue that each text uses Scheherazade’s normative femininity and sexuality to negotiate inclusion, but only for subjects whose identities are constituted by a similar normativity. I demonstrate how the displacement of non-normative Arab bodies in the texts relies on a long-standing pattern in which minority groups seeking acceptance in the U.S. do so through the colonial and racial regimentation of gender and sexuality. Centering Arab American representational strategies, I expose the limits of an inclusive paradigm for both the discursive and material lives of diasporic Arabs. Here queer of color critique enables me to argue that we cannot exchange racial belonging for sexual and gendered exclusion.

Khaled and her attendant chapter shift the focus from the past and present into the future. In “Lipstick and Liberation: Leila Khaled and the Struggle for Transnational Solidarity,” I turn my attention to Palestinian activist and revolutionary Leila Khaled and the 1969 photo of her, taken by Pulitzer Prize winning wartime photo-journalist, Eddie Adams. Khaled was dubbed the “poster girl for Palestinian militancy” and her photo became adopted as a symbol for contemporary radical activism, both around the Palestinian Israeli conflict and beyond it. The first part of this chapter analyzes the black and white images produced by Adams, and situates them in the context of their creation, namely: Khaled’s membership in the PFLP and the auto/biography of her that emerged at this time. I argue that Khaled’s popularity is tied to the interplay of femininity and violence in her image, and the ways her public persona refused heteronormative and heteropatriarchal standards of Arab womanhood. The second half of the paper examines three contemporary reimaginings of Khaled’s image, how they highlight and dismiss parts of her narrative, and how they imagine transnational Palestinian politics. The first,

“Leila Khaled” was created by US-based artist Erin Currier in 2010. The second, “The Icon” was created by native Palestinian artist Amer Shomali in 2011. The third, “Sobreviviendo” by Xicano artist Jesus Barraza in 2004. I propose the three pieces as means to imagining an alternate form of politicization for transnational Arab activism, one that does not rely on narrative (as it did with Scheherazade) or national affiliation (as it did with Samia Gamal), but rather organizes around relationality and overlap with other communities, Arab and others alike. I see in the recreations of Khaled’s photo the possibility for new forms of subjectivity that do not eclipse the queer Arab subject, but center it. My queer reading of the contemporary pieces of Khaled offer new representational strategies for Arab femininity and begins to offer alternate political strategies—against nationalism per Gamal, and inclusion and assimilation per Scheherazade—and rather move toward renarrating our histories, turning away from global capitalist movements, and connecting with other communities in struggle.

Although none of my chapter texts are “properly queer,” Samia, Scheherazade, and Leila all bear witness to the manipulations of femininity and sexuality that occur as transnational subjects negotiate their cultural and national belonging in multiple literal and figurative locations. This dissertation begins a conversation about how transnational Arab culture can be queered and to what political aim or end. It is, I hope, a first step in beginning to imagine what it might mean to be queer, Arab, and OK.

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Chapter 1

Dancing Queen: Denial and Desire in Golden Era Egyptian Cinema

In December 1994, the Hosni Mubarak regime banned public attendance of dancer Samia Gamal's funeral, previously set to take place on the streets of Cairo, Egypt. All plans for a procession, akin to the large processions in honor of other Egyptian celebrities like Um Kulthum were canceled. Despite being named by King Farouk "The National Dancer of Egypt" in 1949, bringing international acclaim to Egypt's dance scene, significantly altering the trajectory of modern belly dance, and starring in at least 180 films, Gamal's legacy seemed unfit for memorializing by the then firmly established leadership of Mubarak.¹ Samia, once lauded for her movement, her star power, and her cosmopolitan career, was willfully lost in the cracks of a rapidly shifting nation. It is impossible to speak of the history of belly dance without uttering Samia's name; yet whatever grief felt over her death, lacking any public structure, passed as fleeting and ephemerally as dance itself, undulating in ripples over Cairo and across the worlds she touched.

What to make of Samia's whirlwind life, her illustrious film career, her influence on belly dance, and the pointed disavowal of her death by her beloved home nation? The contradiction between her flashy life and her quiet death provoked the following questions: Why weren't we

¹ The estimate of 180 films comes from the Egyptian newspaper, *Al Gomhoreya*, December 1, 1994. In his eulogy for Tahia Carioca, Edward Said mentions the ban on the attendance of Samia Gamal's funeral in contrast to the procession planned for Tahia.

allowed to mourn Samia? Why were we asked to forget her? How is Samia's legacy remembered and forgotten and what purpose does recollection or erasure serve? How did her transnational movements in life affect the memorialization of her death? How was the cancellation of her funeral impacted by her career, her association with the Farouk monarchy, and her ties to the West? In this chapter, I outline Samia's biography and the significance of Egyptian cultural production for Arabs in the Arabic speaking world in order to argue that Samia's legacy offers an important reminder about how nationalist projects work, or fail to work, for its non-normative subjects. Samia's movement across the Arab world and outside it highlight that these concerns are not regulated to the Arab world alone, but are instead transnational in scope. In positioning Samia as a transnational figure, I intend to foreground the means by which Arab cultural production has been informed by shifts in Arab politics, enacted through and in response to Western forces of colonialism and Arab postcolonial initiatives.

Next, I turn to analysis of two of Samia's popular films, *Habibi al Asmar* (My Dark Darling) and *Sigara wa Kass* (A Cigarette and a Glass) in order to discuss how gender and sexuality functioned in her work. I juxtapose the textual analysis with commentary on her life, and on the Egyptian political milieu at the time of production, in order to make transparent the ways the films conversed with the contemporary social order, and how Samia's body became grounds for the debate around femininity and authenticity, westernization and Orientalism. I conclude that we must remember Samia—not only for her contributions to belly dance and her extensive film archive, but also for the capacious nature of her performances that avail viewers to the queer possibilities in our recent past. I read Samia's films, and the Golden Era at large, through a queer and feminist lens to establish a history of gender and sexual diversity in the Arab world. When we remember Samia, we understand what happens to Arab femininity when it

dances across national and geographic borders. Samia's movement outside the Arab world alongside the significance of the Golden Era both attest to the scope of transnational Arab culture. Attending to Samia's life and legacy opens up a transnational analysis of Arab femininity that is pertinent to Arab women in the Arab world and the diaspora; her story offers an allegory for how femininity and sexuality are regulated in service to Arab nationalisms and Western Orientalism.

I position Samia as an index of contradicting impulses regarding westernization, femininity, and nationalism. Her biography parallels the rapid shifts in Egypt's ruling governments, which had large reverberations both through the film industry, belly dance, other Arab nations, and the Arab diaspora. Her career tracks alongside Egypt's struggle for independence and her body becomes a metaphor for attempts, successful and failed, to negotiate a modern Arab identity, primarily through the regulation of femininity. I use modernity here in its postcolonial iteration: as a set of practices, attitudes, and ideological positionings that created duality between colonizer and colonized: for example, that the West was modern in regards to its strict Victorian moralities, those which enabled colonial regimes to colonize in the name of salvation. In the current political milieu, of course, modernity is precisely "laxity" in these moral structures that enable the acceptance and championing of women's and LGBT rights in order to justify, again, imperial intervention in the Arab world and/or Middle East. Thus, when I say Samia "modernized" I mean that she, both in her personal presentation and in her inter/national circulation, represented a new "modern" Arab subject that was not mired in the old traditions, one that saw the benefits of Western culture and incorporated them into her work. This is particularly true of Samia because of her affiliation with the Farouk monarchy, which was

notoriously “Western” in its creature comforts and lavish spending habits while many of Egypt’s population suffered.

Samia lived through four new leaders: Muhammad Naguib’s one year rule after the 1952 revolutions; Gamal Abdel Nasser’s reformist era ending with his death in 1970; the turning tides of Anwar Sadat’s leadership until his assassination in 1981; and the first decade and a half of Hosni Mubarak’s now infamous 30 year presidency. It was perhaps her very affiliation with the monarchy, and her “Westernization” in contrast to other performers, which marked her peculiar disavowed death. I use westernization here as shorthand for the means by which Samia distinguished herself from other performers of her era: e.g. her use of ballet and other styles of dance to enhance her raqs sharqi (literal translation: eastern dance; common translation: belly dance). Samia’s styling and her performances adopted aspects of “Western” culture that set her apart from her contemporaries. I elaborate on these aspects later in the body of this chapter.

While I recognize that the “West” is a troublingly large signifier, it is the term used in academic, legal, and cultural scholarship about the Arab world to signify practices that allegedly come from without the Arab world—those things that are not “inherent” or “organic” to the culture. In this case, ballet influences are “Western” with regards to the “traditional” movements of belly dance. In the strengthening of nationalism in the post-monarchist Egypt, perhaps Samia, once lauded for her sophistication and worldliness was now felt to be a problematic, inauthentic figure.

Thus, I examine Samia’s work, life, and legacy toward two ends: first, I would like to suggest that her troubling presence on screen and in real time illustrates the failures of Arab national projects and her transnational acculturation illustrates the vexing effects of colonization and globalized movement on Arab identity politics. I employ transnational feminist scholarship to illustrate how feminine bodies like Samia’s serve as discursive sites for debates about what

constitutes Arab culture. In addition to the curiosity of her funeral ban, I highlight Samia because her body (and her body of work) was available for scripting and scrutiny via its presence in a transnational Arab public, because she witnessed significant shifts in Egypt's ruling structure, and because her work was positioned as "national" while her performances were themselves international. For these reasons, I argue she is an allegory of Egypt's complicated entanglements with the "West," both as a colonial power and as a cultural producer. My use of allegory intentionally hails postcolonial feminist debates around Fredric Jameson's suggestion that all third world literature serves as an allegory of the nation. Rather than reify Jameson's essentializing definition of third world culture, my piece outlines the discursive frames around which ideas of nationalism, femininity, and Arab cultural identity are formulated in response to Western colonial practices and Orientalist imaginings of the Arab world.

My second aim in this argument helps enact and elaborate on the first. As one of the prominent stars of Egypt's "Golden Era," Samia's popular films encapsulate some major themes and trends regarding not only Egyptian but pan-Arab culture at the time of their production. Namely, her cinematic presence reveals social strata more flexible and diverse with regards to sexual paradigms. In her films, as well as other work produced in the Golden Era, it was not uncommon to witness homoeroticism, narcissism, non-normative gender performance, and unclearly oriented lust. There was also more laxity and playfulness with regard to religion, dress, and vice in these productions. It was not uncommon to see men and women kissing, women undressing women, women drinking and fighting, and cross-dressing, for example. In her work and the Golden Era in general, we see diversity and non-normativity in performances of gender and desire that today seem "impossible." I borrow impossibility from Gayatri Gopinath's work in *Impossible Desires*. Here Gopinath recovers a seemingly impossible queer female subject via

critical readings of Bollywood film. The subject's alleged impossibility, she posits, is a result of deep nationalist and diasporic investments in patriarchy and heteronormativity (15-17). Like Gopinath, my work around Samia and the Golden Era aim toward possibility.

Though perhaps not explicitly celebrated, I argue Samia's performances made considerable space for homoerotic exchanges amidst women, enabled in part by the homosociality of female performance prominent in Arab entertainment at large, but especially in the realm of dance. Additionally, the films articulated narratives of non-normative gender and sexuality that indicate Arab culture was engaged in discussions about sexual behaviors and desires that may or may not be legible under Western rhetoric of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity. Watching Samia in the Golden Era reveals the rich gender and sexual diversity in Arab culture, rather than the neo-colonial representation of an explicitly homophobic "traditional" or authentic Arab culture. In her work and in the period, we can see how sexuality wasn't in fact a foregone conclusion, but actively questioned. In this sense, this chapter recovers non-normative and queer legacies within popular Arab texts. My aim here is not to insinuate homosexuality as inherent rather than impossible in Arab culture, but instead locate possible cultural engagements with queerness in order to imagine new strategies for Arab communities in which non-normativity is not only possible, but also welcome.

What can we learn from Samia's memory? In the refusal to grieve Samia, we are asked to forget not only how national projects seek to regulate feminine bodies, but to forget the possibilities and diversity witnessed in her films. Thus, I suggest the impulse to forget Samia seems to be first about forgetting Westernization, and rejecting the ideals of modern subject as formulated by colonial logics. But it is also about responding against reading the Arab world as an Orientalist tableau, where gender and sexuality run amok (Said 103). The desire to not

remember Samia overcorrects against westernization and non-normative sexual potential to create a more respectable international face and contributes to impossibility of Arab femininity that is not predetermined by debates regarding Orientalism and authenticity. In short, to forget Samia is to forget our varied past.

Dancing Queen

The absence of a formal public grieving procession for Samia's death was deeply at odds with her glamorous and well-publicized life. Samia Gamal, nee Zeineb Ibrahim Mahfuz, got her start dancing in the club circuit for the legendary Badia Masabni, owner and operator of The Casino Opera House. Badia gave Samia her stage name, and the venue that would eventually catapult her onto the silver screen. Badia's Cabaret, as it was known, catered to Egypt's elite: both those involved in the film industry, as well as other wealthy business folks, even garnering international visitors during WWII. With Badia, Samia trained in the baladi style of belly dance as well as in ballet and other modern dance elements. Her style evolved there, incorporating new elements from ballet into belly dance, and transforming it into the "oriental" movements most of us recognize today. She incorporated upper body movement, including the arms and ribcage. These modifications put the dancer in perpetual full-bodied movement—thus requiring greater control, endurance, and elegance. In short, Samia achieved mesmerizing virtuosity with her dancing, and it did not go unnoticed.

Badia's Cabaret also introduced her to a singer by the name of Farid el Atrache. Their torrid love affair would provide gossip fodder to Egypt for over a decade, and their chemistry on screen fashioned them the Egyptian Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Several years into their "unofficial" relationship, Farid cobbled together his savings to finance their first feature length film together, *Habib il Omar* (Love of a Lifetime). The film was immensely popular and enabled

the duo to go on and star in several more blockbusters with one another until their relationship ended in 1951.² The cause of their breakup has been salaciously debated: Farid didn't believe in marriage, because he felt it destroyed artistry; Samia was involved with other men; Farid, an alleged former aristocrat, would not marry her because she was a dancer and his family wouldn't approve of her low standing; Samia tired of waiting for him. Most scandalously, some rumor King Farouk demanded they part and in retaliation, Farid seduced the King's wife. Samia's relationship with Farid and the potentiality of their romance erupting on screen and stage encouraged ticket sales in both the box offices and the cabarets where she still performed, often selections from her films' choreography.

Her favor with King Farouk helped Samia achieve circulation outside of Egypt. Farouk named her "The National Dancer of Egypt" in 1949; when he vacationed in Paris the following year, he flew Samia in for entertainment. Her visit with Farouk established her name on the French scene, where she would return after her split with Farid. In 1951, in the Paris nightclubs, she met Shepherd King III of Houston, a "Texas Millionaire." LIFE reports that Samia swept him off his feet over the course of one night and at the dawn of the next morning he proposed (LIFE 46; 1951). Within a month, King divorced his current wife Gloria, converted to Islam, renamed himself Abdullah, married Samia, and secured her a visa and wardrobe for a trip to the US. Meanwhile, Samia wrapped filming in Cairo of her last film with Farid, *Ma Takulshi la Hada* (Don't Tell Anyone). In the US, Samia had a robust tour schedule. She danced in Miami, Houston, Chicago, and New York (at least).³ With Shepherd's exposure and contacts, she secured a role in an American film called *Valley of the Kings* (1954) and a French film *Ali Baba*

² One newspaper lists 13 films in which they appeared together, though it does not list their final film, so they appeared in at least 14 (*Al Ahrām*, Dec 2, 1994).

³ Based on mentions of her performances and schedule in American newspapers and other periodicals (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, *LA Times*, *Variety Magazine*).

et les quarante voleurs (Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, 1954). Ironically, *Valley of the Kings* co-starred Roushdy Abaza, Samia's soon to be second husband, with whom she would remain for approximately nine years.

Her marriage to Shepherd made Samia the subject of US gossip for the year the marriage lasted, but it also brought further attention to her career—The LA Times reviewed her films, now playing at the Esquire Theatre; the Chicago Daily Tribune tracked her frequent visits to Egypt to continue filming. In March 1952, her photographs appeared in LIFE magazine for a third time (the first recording her dance for Farouk in Paris, the second her engagement to King).⁴ This time Gjon Mili, an artist known for his series on Pablo Picasso in the same periodical, photographed Samia. Mili attached a light bulb to Samia's waistline and photographed her dancing. The resulting photos have trails of light that track the rotation and rapidity with which she moved, an enchanting and simultaneously "scientific" spectacle of her other-worldliness. All manner of publications reported on her tensions within her marriage, and then divorce from Shepherd. Their union lasted only a year. She married fellow actor Abaza in 1958, and stayed with him until 1977. Before her marriage ended, she had appeared in her last film, *Tarik il Shaitan (The Way of the Devil, 1963)*. She retired from film but remained active in live club performances, primarily in Cairo where she died from cancer in 1994, at 70. Samia never remarried nor bore children. Her recorded appearances in the public diminished after her film career; only a few interviews and news items showcasing the last 30 or so years of her life. As she quipped in one, few people are interested in seeing a 50-year-old belly dance (Interview on Youtube). Despite her protests to the contrary, it's rumored that Samia routinely sold out Badia's Cabaret when she chose to perform even late in life, her reputation and legacy drawing out crowds who hoped to catch one

⁴ There are more photos circulating that appear to have been taken during her other *LIFE* appearances but are not in the magazine. I am trying to place them since they showcase her performances in Houston and Miami at least.

last performance by the Golden Era giant. Her funeral, had it been allowed, would likely have drawn out crowds by the thousands if not millions, as had the processions for other beloved artists. In the present, Samia's felicitous smile and beckoning body can still be seen in black and white all across the Arab world, and through the success of satellite television, stream into homes across the diaspora.

Her biography avails us to the means by which Samia can be understood as a transnational Arab figure at best, and an expendable "Western" one at worst. Her westernization can be marked in a number of ways: her incorporation of non-Arab elements of dance into her performance. Consider that in his eulogy for Tahia Carioca, one of Samia's contemporaries, Edward Said describes belly dance as the opposite of ballet: "Belly-dancing in many ways is the opposite of ballet, its Western equivalent as an art form. Ballet is all about elevation, lightness, the defiance of the body's weight. Eastern dancing as Tahia practiced it shows the dancer planting herself more and more solidly in the earth, digging into it almost, scarcely moving, certainly never expressing anything like the nimble semblance of weightlessness that a great ballet dancer, male or female, tries to convey" (par 5). Samia's expansive use of the stage, the airy movements of her carriage, the heels that elevated her from the earthy context Said describes certainly riveted many viewers. It would also be notably marked against the more traditional forms of the practice. Samia's styling further echoed Western influences. On the covers of magazines, Samia wore her auburn hair in a short crop, appearing in off shoulder and cinched waist dresses, her aesthetic summoning Liz Taylor and Marilyn Monroe alike (Al Kawakib pgs NA; 1951-1952). In the adaption of Aladdin she starred in alongside Farid al Atrache (*Afrita Hanem*), her dark black wig, with short blunt bangs over long barrel curls signified in all ways the notorious Bettie Page. In interviews, Gamal was fond of discussing her experience working

with film studios outside the Arab world, e.g. Italy, and encouraging international cooperation between the Arab world, Europe, and the US (Al Kawakib p NA; 1951) In this, Samia differed from her contemporaries, whose productions took place entirely within the purview of Studio Misr and other Arab production units. This is all to say: Samia's femininity traveled—first metaphorically as it traversed and engaged multiple modes of dance and feminine styling, and second, as she traveled to Europe and the US as a performer. Her femininity was shaped by multiple influences, those at home and those elsewhere. What Samia makes clear is that the “home” was not hermetically sealed; by this I mean, Samia did not have to travel in order to don Western style or incorporate it into her work. It was available to her; it is perhaps because she took up some of these aesthetic markers that she was able to travel at all. I site here the correlation between her mode of femininity and the frequency and nature of her travel, rather than a causality. Samia offered a taste of Egypt's belly dance and entertainment culture, packaged and polished in the styles of the moment.

Though I'm not concerned with how or why Samia came to incorporate Western influence in her work, I am concerned with how that Western aesthetic positioned her Arab femininity and subjectivity in the shifting political terrain of Egypt. To understand this, I want to take a brief detour through King Farouk's reign, which alongside her films (which I deconstruct later) afforded her international recognition and national status. In “Repackaging the Egyptian Monarchy,” Matthew Ellis demonstrates the new Egypt Farouk cultivated in his own image: young, an authentic Egypt (in that Farouk spoke Arabic and used it to address Egyptians), and embracing of Islam (192). Ellis suggests the onset of WWII shook Farouk's reign, and enabled his eventual downfall, rather than assuming the revolution as an organic evolution of Egyptian national culture. Though popular in this early period, Farouk eventually fell out of favor in

popular Egyptian opinion, due in large part to his largesse in expenditures and lifestyle, the continued colonial presence of Britain in Egypt, and the failure of Egypt to prevent annexation of Palestinian territories to Israel in the 1948 Arab Israeli war (Ellis 206). In later years of his reign, then, Farouk's credibility with the Egyptian people was shaken and it was during this period that he dubbed Samia "the National Dancer of Egypt." Since her moniker was not in name only, indeed, she traveled with Farouk or at his behest at least twice on record, Samia's association with the monarchy would have been firmly cemented in the eyes of her public, but more importantly, in the eyes of other political parties. As a beneficiary of Farouk's largesse, Samia in contrast to other performers who had numerous experiences with the changing political orders (e.g. Tahia Carioca, jailed by both Nasser and later Mubarak) or others who still are remembered fondly with regards to their liberationist stances (e.g. Um Kulthum, known for her deep love of Nasser), Samia would be affiliated with a King who is most remembered in his failure, the squandering of his youth and the nation's good will in favor of chasing pleasure and wealth in his frequent trips to Europe. While it's difficult to speculate on exactly why Samia's funeral was banned, barring the language of the ban itself, we can situate Samia's position with regard to other performers, as I have attempted to do above.⁵ She was more "Western" than her contemporaries and readily affiliated with a unanimously contemptible political group (Farouk's). Whatever the reasons behind the banning of her public funeral, her biography and public image offer a tableau of the ways feminine subjects were underwritten by competing and complicated discourses around westernization and the nation.

Hollywood on the Nile

⁵ Thus far, all of the archival research I've conducted on Samia has revealed that a procession was planned, but I have not been able to determine when, by whom, and how it was canceled. It's entirely possible this took place via radio, and was thus only recorded in memory before making its way into Said's eulogy for Tahia.

In many ways, the film industry in Egypt blossomed and grew along the same lines as the industry in Hollywood, causing the Egyptian version to be cheekily dubbed “Hollywood on the Nile.” However, Egypt’s cinema wasn’t strictly a western import; rather, it was heavily influenced by its American counterpart (Shafik 5). In 1886, the Lumiere brothers’ films screened in Egypt, and by 1908, five cinemas had sprouted throughout Alexandria and Cairo (10). Egypt was the only Arab country to develop a film industry during the colonial period, and although it began with newsreels, by 1917, the first company emerged in Alexandria. The next twenty years would see a bump in Egyptian production, leading to the establishment of Studio Misr in 1934.⁶ Studio Misr would be accompanied by six other studios, and by 1948, the country had produced 345 feature length films (12). For many, the next thirty years would constitute Egyptian film’s golden age. This era came to an end as political turmoil grew in Egypt, specifically with regards to the Arab-Israeli wars. Colonial censorship started in 1947, ended in 1976, only to be replaced with anti-colonial governance that enacted taboos against sex, politics, and religion in new ways (Mansour 11; Fahmy 1). Samia’s work then, precedes much of the regulation now placed on Arab film. Her films, featuring men and women kissing, women undressing women, women drinking and fighting, and cross-dressing, would likely not pass screening in twenty years.⁷

While the distribution of films in Arab countries was 2/3 European and American, the final third was almost entirely from Egypt, making Egypt the dominant mode of self-representation for Arabs during the Golden Era (Shafik 20-21). Many nations like Algeria and Tunisia could not begin film production until the post-colonial era, their economic markets faltering after struggles for independence. It’s not surprising then, that one of the most imitated

⁶ Misr is the Arabic word for Egypt.

⁷ For evidence of this, we might look at Egypt’s controversial censorship ruling, e.g. in the case of the film *Dunya*. See: Samir, Farid. “Creative Censorship.” *Al Ahram Weekly Online*. Issue 820 (November 18-22, 2006). <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/820/cu1.htm>>

and recognizable Arab dialects is the musical Egyptian one. It stands to reason then that Egypt and her stars stood in for “Arab film,” both in the Arab world and outside it. Moreover, Egypt relied heavily on her celebrities. Studios catered to their stars, and audiences. Because the stars appeal exceeded regional affiliations, the films found pan-Arab audiences (26). As such, the stardom and circulation of individuals like Samia cannot be overlooked. Stars were included in films not only for their talent, but because Arabs recognized them, followed them, and would ultimately pay to see them. The celebrities’ lives became public domain in a way recognizable to Americans in the US today. As much as one here might go see *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* to witness Angelina and Brad’s chemistry first hand, in the cinema halls of the Arab world, one might go witness Samia and Farid’s fabled love illuminated on the big screen.

Still considered a cultural powerhouse of Arab production, Egypt represented the Middle East to the West as well. As Edward Said lovingly points out in his eulogy for Tahia Carioca, one of Samia’s contemporaries:

Most Eastern Arabs, I believe, would concede impressionistically that the dour Syrians and Jordanians, the quick-witted Lebanese, the rough-hewn Gulf Arabs, the ever-so-serious Iraqis never have stood a chance next to the entertainers, clowns, singers and dancers that Egypt and its people have provided on so vast a scale for the past several centuries. Even the most damaging political accusations against Egypt's governments by Palestinians or Iraqis are levelled [sic] grudgingly, always with a trace of how likeable and charming Egypt -- especially its clipped, lilting dialect -- as a whole is. (Par 3).

Egypt as the center of cultural production and the circulation of Egypt’s exports suggest that it functions to create three viewing audiences, at least: the Egyptian, the Arab world, and the diasporic Arab. If Arabs left the Middle East during the Golden Era, the Arab films they would most likely be able to access were Egyptian. Even today, movie houses that distribute Arab films rely heavily on Egypt’s classic cinema, perhaps even more so than their contemporary work. A cursory exploration of Arab satellite television demonstrates the primacy of Egypt’s cultural

production as well as the lingering attachment to Golden Era work. Of Dish Network's Arabic Elite Super package, the primary provider of Arab television in the US, five of the twenty-nine channels feature Egyptian content exclusively. One, Nile Drama, touts itself as the viewer's choice for classic Egyptian film. Moreover, the channels that are not regionally affiliated, those channels understood as pan-Arab (e.g., Al Arabiya) all explicitly name Egyptian content in their programming descriptions (Dish Network p NA). These same channels populate televisions in homes all across the Middle East as satellite television provides the primary mode of broadcast in the region (Kraidy par 9).

However, a satellite connection is not necessary to watch Egyptian films. Youtube serves as a virtual shelf of the classics, where many films are available in their entirety. For example, Farid Al Atrache alone has approximately thirty full films on the site, uploaded by multiple users. Several of those films, given his long relationship with Samia, feature her as well. I have highlighted the dominance of Egyptian film in the virtual and satellite worlds to help explain why I consider Golden Era texts, seemingly dated, as significant to contemporary audiences, in diverse geographic locations. They are not only nostalgic memories for Arabs in the home and the diaspora, but widely accessible to multiple generations. What then, do we learn about gender and sexuality in Arab representations when we undertake a study of the Golden Era, particularly through one of her stars?

Derision and Desire on Screen

In this section I will close read two of Samia's successful films, *Sigara wa Kaas* and *Habibi Al Asmar* respectively, to elucidate how Arab femininity was configured for Samia, both as a character in film, and as a woman in Egypt. Both films place Samia in the role of dancer, or aspirational dancer, and thus place the lead characters in a narrative about femininity already

circulating at the time of the production of the film, a narrative that has specific opinions about the world of entertainment and dance in particular. In her study of female performance in Egypt, Karin van Nieuwkerk traces how performers understand and experience gender expectations as they pursue what many deem *A Trade like Any Other*. Nieuwkerk's qualitative research revealed that women's social status rested largely on the kind of performance, and for whom and where they performed. Public opinion seemed to designate musicians most respectable, followed by singers, actors, folk dancers, and belly dancers (129). If women performed at weddings and saint's day celebrations, they were accepted as proper women because these were familial and religious venues. They were literally celebrating heterosexuality and Islam. If they managed to work at theatres or the clubs of five star hotels, they were read as artists, albeit ambivalently. If they worked at nightclubs, as Samia did, they were seen as potentially shameful and morally corrupted. The nightclub, catering to men alone rather than families, serving alcohol, and inviting intimacy between patrons, placed female performers in an always already non-normative space: the nightclub threatened family values, as well as religious ones (against temptation and alcohol).

Thus, Samia's birth in the nightclub circuit affected her identity in certain crucial ways: her name changed and with it, we lost a sense of her heritage and lineage. Arabic names reference fathers and grandfathers, and Samia's particular name also included the location of her childhood: Ali Khalil. With her name change, Samia exists without familial tether, instead the daughter of Badia and the nightclub. The nightclub solidifies her abjection because she becomes a figure of potentially loose morals—a woman who uses her body to make money, and is not even reinvesting that money into a family. While Samia moves beyond the space of the nightclub, the image of the loose woman follows her into her films and haunts her performances.

She appeared as a dancer in many of her films, including the two I analyze below. After her relationship with Farid ended, she played increasingly risqué characters of questionable morals: appearing as a prostitute, alcoholic, murderess, and thief. In all these, she played a dancer as well. Her relationship with dance in the films I analyze is part of the guiding impetus for choosing said films. Additionally, both occurred in the center of her roaring career, and both, due to their involvement of other key actors, Dalida and Tahia Carioca respectively, would have drawn large audiences.

Sigara wa Kaas (1955)

Samia appeared in *Sigara wa Kaas* as Hoda Gamal, a famous dancer who leaves her trade to marry an up and coming doctor, Mamdouh (played by Nabil al-Alfi). Later, jealous of Mamdouh's relationship with his head nurse Yolanda (played by Dalida), Hoda relapses into a consuming alcoholism. Incensed, Mamdouh takes their child and leaves Hoda. She attempts to return to her stardom, but her best friend and fellow performer Azza (played by singer Kouka) sabotages her return, knowing that if Hoda returns to dancing, her life with Mamdouh will be over.⁸ It is Azza who saves Hoda from her alcoholism, from the so-called unfulfilled life of performance Azza chooses to endure, and ultimately, from herself. Bemoaning the loss of her stardom and her child, Hoda gets drunk one last time and kidnaps her daughter from school. She brings her home, where she continues to imbibe. This ends in tragedy: Hoda accidentally sets fire to her home, endangering the life of her daughter and suffering numerous injuries. Alongside Azza's meddling, the near death experience changes Hoda, and gives way to her reunion with Mamdouh. Thus the film reiterates the triumph of the heterosexual family, and the

⁸ Kouka means what it sounds like: "kooky" or "crazy". Kouka was also well known, and her stage name indicates the kinds of roles into which she was often cast.

disparagement of other lifestyles. It does so through and at the expense of its non-normative subjects.

In this section, I will argue two related claims: first, that the space of performance Azza and Hoda inhabit, marked by female homosociality, gives way to unruly, non-normative, female homoerotic desires. Second, in order to discipline these desires, queer bodies are sacrificed: Azza and the cross-dressing stage manager are made foreign and pathologized. It is only against and through their abjection that the heterosexual couple can survive. I trace two main threads that converge to articulate and discipline queerness: the homosocial space of performance, centered around belly dance, that allows for queerness's emergence; and Azza's affected (alongside the stage manager's seemingly actual) "madness" as a tool to produce and buttress heteronormative relationships. I am concerned in this film with revealing some of the prevailing attitudes around belly dance and femininity produced and reflected in the film as well as finding moments that rupture dominant narratives about Arab culture that render it simply misogynistic and homophobic.

Hoda works at Casino al-Galaa'. This venue allows her to meet and fall in love with Mamdouh, but he will only marry her on the stipulation that she gives up her stardom. That is, the space of performance is read as incompatible and mutually exclusive to family and respectability. This notion of belly dance as against or outside of family is buttressed in that Hoda seems to have come from nowhere: we know nothing of her family, her life prior to the stage. The only person who seems to have any tether to Hoda is Azza, with whom she performs and also lives. If we take seriously Jack Halberstam's contention in *In a Queer Time and Place*, that queer time is outside familial and reproductive, then we might consider that the space of the Cabaret, both in the film and in Samia's life, is already a non-normative and potentially queer

organization because it offers modes of kinship that are not organized through acceptable modes of heterosexuality. We must read the possibility of alternative networks of community against the notion that cabaret performances were organized around heteroerotic fulfillment of the male spectator by the female dancer. In her work on spectatorship, however, Patricia White suggests that the lines of spectatorship are not so clear as to refuse multiple readings and instead, offer homoerotic possibilities in the space of the homosocial, particularly amidst women (14-15).

White notes the means by which a lesbian gaze is possible alongside the heteronormative male gaze. In some ways, Gayatri Gopinath's work in *Impossible Desires* activates this alternate reading practice. While eschewing standardized western identities like "lesbian" in favor of the more amoebic "queer," Gopinath locates the many intimacies Bollywood film allows precisely in those spaces where female sexuality is quieted by heteronormativity. Building on this practice, I read scenes between the protagonist Hoda (and later Samra) and the second main female character as creating homoerotic tension that is not duly resolved by the heterosexual plot.

In both this film and the following, we might also engage in a flipped reading of Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men*. *Between Men* delineates a triangular relationship between two men and a woman, in which the competition and tension between two men is re-routed through woman, played out in competition and conversation around her body. We can "flip" this reading in both Samia's films, where two, and sometimes all three of the points, occur between women. Azza's and Hoda's relationship is conducted primarily through their relationship to men in the film, namely Mamdouh, and occasionally, Dalida, Mamdouh's nurse. In the second film, the relationship between the two lead women is presented as primary, and of more influence than either's relationship with the main love interest, Ibrahim. It also is established, as in *Sigara wa Kass*, chronologically before the heterosexual plot line. I'd suggest that the intimacies allowed

between women offer an alternate, non-normative story line to emerge, one that repeatedly engages spectators beyond the male gaze.

The triangulation in *Between Men* should sound familiar to those within postcolonial studies as well—namely the work of Minoo Moallem and Lata Mani, who highlight the ways women’s bodies become discursive sites for national politics in Iran and India respectively. When we bring queer critique to the postcolonial frame, we can observe the overlap on women’s bodies as signifier: they are space not only for national or racial negotiation, but for negotiations of gender and sexuality as well. Samia the actress and Hoda the character are sites for negotiating the nation primarily through policing her gender and sexual non-normativity. When we re-map the triangle and locate its points between women, we enable, as had Gopinath, the seemingly impossible homoerotic desires that must be subjugated for the normative sexuality and nationhood to flourish.

Moreover, while the male gaze certainly exists, it’s worth noting that the sexual desire produced in the club circuit was considered immoral and troubling in and of itself, even though it was allegedly organized around a proper subject and object pair; the club challenged normative family structures because it offered the opportunity for desire and its enactment outside the formality of marriage. In this way, it is queer in the same manner Cathy Cohen renders queerness in her critical essay “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” It is queer in that it lacks access to normative structures, and thus access to the power or safety normativity confers.

Our introduction to the relationship between Azza and Hoda in *Sigara wa Kaas* occurs in the opening moments of the film. A sign outside the nightclub features their images facing one another. Azza’s image is captioned “Azza the Tunisian Singer” and “Hoda Gamal the Dancer.”

This provides the necessary context to understand the women's social roles. While Azza may be more respectable as a singer than a dancer, she is also marked by her foreignness. Her Tunisian status will become important later in the film because as a foreigner, she can only reside in Egypt six months at a time, on a visa. Hoda's personality, in contrast, is encapsulated by dance. Inside the club, we follow a waiter bringing a glass of wine (or cognac, as Hoda seems to favor it) to Hoda as she peers nervously through the stage curtains. As soon as Hoda has the glass in her hands, Azza appears and takes it away, chiding her for drinking night after night. Here Azza functions as an authority figure over Hoda, and Hoda is appropriately shamed. Hoda explains that she drinks for bravery, so that she can tell Mamdouh, her lover in the audience, what she can articulate only through dance. Her consumption of alcohol here and alcoholism later thus function to suggest the difficulty she has in expressing and coping with her emotions and desires. Azza and Hoda peer together through the curtain at Mamdouh, and in enactment of an alternate to the male gaze, Mamdouh appears as the scopophilic object of desire, even in so far as he is framed by the dark color of the curtain. Azza allows Hoda to drink her glass, and from this moment on, we understand Azza's role as a manager of Hoda's feelings. The stage manager, who calls the "girls" to prepare for their performance, disrupts their scene of camaraderie. The stage manager, who remains unnamed throughout the film, fawns over Azza's beauty, but she rejects him, closing her dressing room door in his face. Azza's attention to Hoda and her dismissal of the stage manager are repeated throughout the film, and underscore the primacy of the relationship between the two women over the relationships of the women with men.

The next scene of the film is set on the stage of the nightclub. Azza is already on stage, softly chiming finger bells as Hoda emerges to instrumental music. When Hoda appears in the foreground, Azza follows her first with her gaze, and then physically, singing a song whose

lyrics praise Hoda's beauty and grace: "Who is greater than her? Who is lighter than her?; I fear people jinxing her (il 'ain), but where can I hide her?...Her beauty is dark and there is none like it..."⁹ Azza sings that her heart belongs to Hoda, and that she admires and envies her beauty, and worries for her under the gaze of men: "My heart is hers alone..." During these lines, the shot moves to a close up of Azza's face, and she gazes adoringly at Hoda. Although men are on stage and in the audience, it is Azza the singer whose gaze Hoda meets. It is to Azza that Hoda turns her body as she undulates her hips and rhythmically moves her arms. Notably, the singing portion of such performances is usually executed by men, and in Samia's previous films, would have been performed by Farid Al Atrache specifically. Azza is then replacing the male lead momentarily but does so in a production of hyperbolic femininity. Both women are ornately dressed: Azza in more traditional Egyptian dress, and Hoda in a Western style dress with a scarf around her hips. Both women are very made up, both wearing hair extensions. Azza's femininity enables her to touch Hoda during the dance, which would have been in poor taste by a male singer. While Hoda performs for a roomful of men, on a stage with some male performers, it is only Azza who can touch her. In the space of performance, the women's performance to, with, and against one another can be read erotically. Azza's attention to Hoda's features and testament in her music, and the intimate touch she gives Hoda, standing behind her, and resting her hand on Hoda's hip, produce Azza as the desiring subject and Hoda as the object. The camera keeps both women in frame simultaneously, never allowing the viewer to forget that the performance happens between them first and to the audience second. Indeed, the only interaction we have

⁹Here lightness refers to her personality and presence rather than her skin, necessary. If the song referenced coloring, she would have been described as "baydah" instead of with "khiffa." The phrase "khiffat dam" praises a pleasing personality. In contrast, her beauty is described as "dark." Samaar, or darkness, was as frequently praised in song as bayaad, or whiteness/lightness. Ironically, elsewhere, Samia would definitely be read as baydah vs. samrah.

with the audience, in a four-minute song and dance sequence, is a three second shot of Mamdouh, whose gaze seems to rest on Hoda. We see him just before Hoda dances to a quick musical interlude in the song; I suggest that the temporary recession of Azza's singing allows Mamdouh to make an appearance, but that again, his desire is secondary in order and scope of Azza's. The stage not only enables, but also necessitates Hoda and Azza perform desire for one another. Mamdouh's presence, despite the seemingly heteroerotic cabaret scene, takes a secondary position to the interplay. At best, his desire and the desire of the other patrons are enabled and enacted through the female presence of Azza. Even still, the primary dialectic is Azza and Hoda.

Another moment I suggest implies female homoeroticism in the film is the scene in which Hoda performs her farewell performance for Casino al-Galaa'. The scene directly follows a conversation Hoda and Azza have had at their shared apartment before bed, in which Hoda agonizes over leaving show business for a man. Azza suggests that if she had met a "good" man, she would have left the business in a heartbeat, though we know from her interactions with the stage manager, and her later interactions with some friends of Mamdouh that virtually no men meet this qualification. Azza jokes that perhaps they should share Mamdouh. Hoda jokes that she'll only put her own name on his lease. This comment takes on some relevance when we find out later that Hoda finances Mamdouh's entire career, and the home they live in through her previous earnings from dance. Her financial stability and her role as provider subverts again the appropriate gender roles for women in marriages. This scene ends with Azza's face pressed against a pillow, praying God will send her love. In the scene that follows, Azza watches Hoda dance from the wings of the stage; Hoda has decided to leave the club for Mamdouh and is performing a farewell dance. Azza watches, and is followed by the stage manager, who is giving

her tokens of his affection. Undistracted, Azza categorically rejects the stage manager's gifts and throws them back at him instead. In the scene, Azza is mesmerized by Hoda, often forgetting the manager's presence, and ushering away his attentions to immerse herself in Hoda. By cutting the scene of Hoda's dance in immediately after Azza's dream of love, the audience is able to read Hoda as Azza's wish fulfillment; this reading is affirmed by Azza's response to male affection from the stage manager, and her rejection thereof in favor of watching Hoda. The audience of the cabaret doesn't appear until the performance is over; the main audience, and the person with whom the viewer identifies, is Azza. Azza becomes the conduit of desire once again and like her, the viewer is enchanted with Hoda.

Hoda's farewell dance is steeped in fantasy. She enters a room full of ornate chandeliers and mirrors. She is wearing a rather plain costume; akin to dresses she will wear later in the film. She pauses in front of a mirror, and the screen darkens. Upon illumination, Hoda's wardrobe has changed, and she wears a revealing and provocative costume with multiple scarves that elongate and exaggerate her movements. Her bare feet are now in high heels, significant insofar as Samia was the first to wear heels while dancing in film. A voiceover has told us that Hoda is performing at Casino al-Galaa', but the only visible audience for her fantasmic performance is Azza; the stage manager is not even watching. Hoda is most dominantly pre-occupied with her own image, and the scene is almost narcissistic as she revels in herself. Per Freud's narcissism of beautiful woman, Hoda doesn't seem to see men. She sees her own image, and delights in it (Cheng 53). Hoda's attention to herself renders her performance non-normative in so far as the production of desire is aimed at herself, rather than for a male audience. I emphasize the narcissism of the moment not to mark narcissism as a queer attribute, though that has certainly been theorized, but rather, to note the ways the performance space again has allowed alternate

geographies of desire to emerge, geographies that disrupt the map of heterosexual desire and underscore the cabaret and club as spaces which challenge heteronormativity. Moreover, they offer a vision of the dancers that has not been yet noted— the pleasure in dance as dancers, rather than: a means to an end, an index of female corruption, an indicator of nationalism, or whatever else may be written upon the dancer’s body.

The fact that Azza constitutes Hoda’s actual and only audience further queers this fantasy scene: desire is conducted homoerotically through the filter of Azza and as such, the scopophilic gaze is once again arrested from men. We might note that in Hoda’s fantasy, there is no audience; she does not seem to even be aware of Azza. For her, there is only dance and the pleasures of dance. Azza is not here, nor was she before, rendered as the masculine subject, however. She remains as hyperbolic in her femininity as Hoda, and her longing for her fellow performer does not come about by occupying a male social position or affect. In fact, femininity is centered in the appearance of both women, and the means by which Azza cares for and interacts with Hoda. Their shared femininity is what allows for their intimacy. The similarity in their identity positions enables the enactment of desire. Moreover, Hoda’s performance can also be read against Samia’s identity. Such an elaborate dance number, showcasing Samia’s unique style, is only afforded to Hoda because of Samia’s stardom. Thus it is the reality of Samia’s real life celebrity that is at stake when Hoda fictionally leaves the dance.

When the fantasy sequence ends, and Hoda returns to a more pedestrian aesthetic, the presence of men in Casino al-Galaa’ reasserts itself, and Hoda informs the audience that she is leaving the stage for the home. A slippage in language occurs when Hoda says she’s leaving for the “next house” and bashfully correct herself, claiming she leaves instead for the house of marriage. “Next house” is a double entendre: it signifies the next phase of life, but could also be

used to describe death, or the “last house.” For Hoda, leaving the stage functions as a kind of death, an ultimate policing of her non-normative intimacies and her narcissism. Again, the mutual exclusivity of home and performance is articulated, and performance, specifically dance, is rendered antithetical to family life and the kind of normative femininity it entails. Meanwhile, the stage manager has once again returned to Azza, and asks her to take him as her husband. She responds testily that she would rather take his life. Both women have thus linked heterosexual marriage to dying. Azza’s snappy responses to the stage manager certainly provide comic relief throughout the film, but perhaps more so, they repeatedly mark Azza against Hoda: she will not leave her life of stardom for a man, though earlier she claimed she is but waiting for one to ask.

The movie here plateaus as Mamdouh (with Hoda’s money) builds a hospital and becomes a top-notch surgeon. Meanwhile, Hoda gives birth to a little girl who she names Azza after her only family. We do not witness this transformation; merely catch up with characters approximately three to four years later, based on the age of the child. The regulation of Hoda into a more heteronormative role happens off screen, which I would suggest, again, relegates Hoda’s relationship with Mamdouh to a non-primary position. Back on screen, when Hoda and Mamdouh go out to dinner, or to see Azza perform while she’s in town, it is Mamdouh who is recognized, and Hoda’s discontent at his recognition begins her relapse into drinking. In her previous life, she was the celebrity. Her envy at Mamdouh’s new celebrity status registers, perhaps shallowly as narcissism, though narcissism as discussed above, can be an anti-normative position. This scene also reminds us that Mamdouh’s success was only enabled through Samia’s sacrifice of her career and her funds for Mamdouh’s pursuits. What cinches her alcoholism is her jealousy of her husband’s head nurse, a meddling vixen named Yolanda (from Italy) who actively perpetuates miscommunications between Hoda and Mamdouh. When Azza Jr. becomes

gravely ill, and Hoda cannot reach Mamdouh because he is away performing surgeries with Yolanda, Hoda begins to fall apart. Azza Sr. comes to visit her but Hoda is already drunk. Seeing no alternative, Azza Sr. tries to help Hoda into bed. Hoda attempts to remove her own clothes, but becomes tangled in them. Azza Sr. intervenes, undressing her carefully. When Hoda questions why she is removing her clothes, Azza Sr. slaps her butt and carts her into bed. The intimacy between the two women can be shown on screen because they are two women; the most contact Mamdouh and Hoda have are walking arm in arm or long hugs. Even after their marriage, they do no kiss on screen. The eroticism that lacks between the heterosexual couple is supplanted with homoeroticism between Azza and Hoda. Hoda's body here becomes a site of pleasure for the viewer who watches her disrobe, though our gaze is disrupted by her inability to complete the action. Our problematic desire (because she is drunk) is executed through Azza, who finishes removing her clothing and settling her into bed. As in the dance scenes above, Azza becomes the arbiter of desire on screen, and does so without assuming a masculine position; indeed, she can only do so from the safety of her femininity.

Later, Mamdouh returns and Hoda mocks his success, claiming that her face appeared on chocolate boxes and his will appear on bottles of disinfectant, suggesting each should have married people of their own kind, her a performer, and him a nurse. Azza Sr. explains to Mamdouh why Hoda is so upset. She knows what will make Hoda forgive him, and advises him of the correct course of action to take: throw her a party. The party gets Mamdouh back into Hoda's good graces, and functions as a social event where Azza can hunt for a husband. Although Azza Sr. sings at the party that she needs love, I suggest the real reason she wants to marry is to stay in Egypt with Hoda. One way for Azza Sr. to stay in Egypt is to marry an Egyptian. Instead, she has been traveling to Tunis periodically to renew her visa. She only

decides to alter to this course of action in light of Hoda's anguish. In order to stay with Hoda permanently, she must marry. Up until this point, she has avoided all marriage proposals, both from the stage manager and from Omara, a friend of Mamdouh. While the stage manager would perhaps not constitute a tempting offer, the proposal she receives from Omara would have been an acceptable match. But Azza Sr. doesn't just refuse Omara after his initial proposal—she convinces him she is “crazy” in order to put him off marriage to her. Azza Sr. uses insanity to escape normative heterosexuality, and her person is thus doubly queered by her madness and her avoidance of men. The absence of men in Azza Sr.'s life so far would read queerly; her refusal to pursue men and the absence of at least one reasonable suitor in the years that film spans make her single status seem rather odd. So, her queerness is marked both by her gaze of Hoda's performing body and by lack of heterosexual relationships rather than the presence of homosexual ones. At the party, Azza peruses men like someone shopping for a good car. She finds one that seems useful, but abandons him when she realizes he's not Egyptian, and therefore unsuitable to her purposes. She has no intention of marrying for love, desire, or even money. She is only really concerned with national status, the necessary requirement for staying with Hoda.

The party, in addition to establishing Azza Sr.'s non-normativity, also serves as the final wedge between Mamdouh and Hoda. When Omara shows up with Yolanda in tow, and Yolanda convinces Hoda that she has picked out the anniversary gift Mamdouh gave her, and finally, when Yolanda performs a song and dance at the party, Hoda begins to drink. Meanwhile, Azza Sr. has forced Omara to kiss her, and wrangled a marriage proposal from him. By forcing intimacy, she manipulates him, because no honorable man would kiss a woman and then refuse to marry her. Because he is convinced she is insane, he goes along, fearing for her and his life. Here, adult Azza's madness is once again used, but this time to support rather than thwart a

heterosexual relationship. Underneath those trappings however, we cannot forget that Azza's main goal, even in conducting a heterosexual relationship, is to remain close to Hoda. How else are we to understand her sudden deep interest in staying with Omara, when she could have done so previously, without any trickery?

By this point at the party, Hoda is belligerently drunk, and her drunkenness culminates in a fight with Yolanda. Hoda follows Yolanda into the bathroom and administers several sharp slaps before Mamdouh pries her away. Azza Sr., quick on her heels, pretends to comfort Yolanda before pinching her, head butting her, and kicking her in the stomach before finally throwing her into the running shower. One of the most entertaining scenes of the movie, both women depart from appropriate feminine behavior, and what's more striking is Azza's departure comes from fierce loyalty to Hoda, and her defense of her inappropriate friend. Azza joins Hoda in hurting Yolanda, despite the effect it will have on Mamdouh and on her reputation. Her loyalty to Hoda outweighs even her notions of propriety. I suggest then, that her top priority is Hoda's happiness, which she will secure by any means necessary: fixing Hoda's marriage to Mamdouh, marrying an Egyptian to stay in Egypt, and showering Yolanda. Their relationship once again supersedes others in the film.

It should be clear at this point how Azza's behavior could be read queerly in the context of the film. I want to pause on Hoda, who mostly serves the object for Azza's desire, while her own desire is geared toward the stage and the acclaim that it brings. There is, however, one moment that briefly disrupts this mapping. When Hoda wakes up the morning after the party, Mamdouh, Azza Sr., and Azza Jr. are gone. She runs through the house screaming "Azza, Azza", but it's unclear until the scene's end if she is looking for her child, or her faithful friend. We might be inclined to automatically read this as concern about her daughter, especially given her

actions later in the film, but it's worth indulging in the moment of confusion. Azza Jr. appears on screen very little, perhaps three minutes total in the entire film. Hoda has spoken of her not at all in the film's entirety. The child's name is Azza, clearly named for Hoda's former roommate and long time friend. It is as reasonable that Hoda would wake wanting her friend over her daughter. After all, what has the daughter done for her lately? Wouldn't Azza Sr. inspire as much if not more longing?

Azza Sr. continues to display her attachment to Hoda in the remainder of the film: violating her visa to stay in Egypt and checking in on Hoda everyday after Mamdouh leaves her. Azza Sr. is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for Hoda: she will marry the stage manager who has loved her from afar for years, the same stage manager she has routinely rejected for the entire film. When she informs him that she will marry him, the manager is at first ecstatic. When Azza leaves the scene, he claims he feels odd, and faints. The next and final time we see him is in a hospital room in complete female drag. Azza has gone to visit her erstwhile fiancé (her plot to kidnap and marry Omara gone awry), and finds him sitting on the bed, dressed as a "hajja," or older woman. He is even slapping his palms together in an instantly recognizable cultural gesture attributed to worrying women.

I suggest this drag has three covert functions: first, it marks the possibility of a heterosexual union as threatening: the stage manager is so overwhelmed by marriage to Azza, he "becomes" a woman. Since Azza has never assumed a deviant gender role within the film, it seems suspect to read his gender variance as a response to her gender performance and to locate it instead around the threat of sexuality. It might be possible to read his transformation as a mode of identification with the object he desires; after all, it's the similarities between Azza and Hoda, their shared femininity and positions that allow for their intimacy. Perhaps the actualization of

the stage manager's desire is not a sexual union with Azza, but an emulation of her gender performance. In either case, what is not desired is heterosexual coupling. In "Unlocking the Arab Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in Egyptian Film," Garay Menicucci outlines two possible reasons for men dressing as women in Egyptian film, which became a recurring trend during the Golden Era. He argues that cross-dressing often introduced questions of class, and "the cultural transition from traditionalism to...nationalist modernity" (34). He indicates that what he names "drag comedies" often tie cross-dressing persistently and explicitly to homosexuality in men (34). I would suggest that the film's gender play as a whole was indeed testing the waters of modernity: the tension between tradition and modernity exists all the way into the costuming choices of Hoda and Azza, and outward as it engages Hoda's struggle with appropriate femininity with regard to being a wife and mother. If Menicucci is correct in his assertions that drag codified homosexuality, we can affirm again how the stage manager's transformation refracts back onto Azza. The stage manager's infatuation with her, and his subsequent terror marks Azza as queer by association. When Azza gives in to the request he has been making throughout the film, the request is revealed as more complicated than marriage. Our understanding of the stage manager's motivations may be unclear, but the results of decisions mark his non-normativity.

Second, the scene reinscribes queerness as pathology. Azza has already done this throughout the film by avoiding marriage with "insane" behavior and the presence of the stage manager in the hospital for the "mental illness" of cross-dressing solidifies it. The pathologization of the stage manager overshadows Azza's queerness through its visibility, and in some ways, she is made more normative through his blatant non-normativity. The stage manager's body becomes the tangible site of queerness, and diverts our attention from Azza's

queer subjectivity. But ultimately, per Robert McRuer's reading of *As Good as It Gets* in *Crip Theory*, the queer and disabled bodies serve to move along the major heteronormative plot of the story (26-28). The hyper queer body of the stage manager buttresses Azza's sketchy sexuality, and Azza's now less queer but still non-normative body serves the supposedly "solid" heterosexual relationship between Hoda and Mamdouh. The story secures its normativity through the characters that disrupted its normativity in the original moment; I attend to this disruption and its solution because it avails the viewer to performances of gender and desire that are inherent in the dominant narrative rather than preceding, succeeding, or underlying it. Queer desire takes up as much, if not more, space in the film as non-queer desire does. And while heterosexuality will ultimately be restored in the conclusion of the story, the presence of non-normative bodies and wants makes space in the culture of the film and the culture of the viewer for alternate geographies of kinship, coupling, and desire to assert themselves. I borrow here from Gopinath in *Impossible Desires* to summarize the significance of this queering in Egyptian and Arab film:

This resignification of 'home' within a queer diasporic imaginary makes three crucial interventions: first, it forcefully repudiates the elision of queer subjects from national and diasporic memory; second, it denies their function as threat to family/community/nation; and third, it refuses to position queer subjects as alien inauthentic, and perennially outside the confines of these entities. (15).

Azza, Hoda, and the stage manager repudiate the elision of queer subjects from national and diasporic memory. They are indeed not threatening to the family, community, or nation. Instead, they buttress it and participate in new modes of family, nation, and community. Finally, they are not outside or alien to the world the film constructs and the viewer engages: they are central to it.

I have mentioned before that Hoda's body through its narcissism enacts a kind of queerness, and I would like to cinch that argument by turning to the second fantasy/dream

sequence in the film. Part of Azza's dedication to Hoda manifests in her sabotage of Hoda's return to the stage. Knowing Hoda wants to go back to performing after Mamdouh leaves her, Azza visits with producers and directors and nightclub owners before Hoda can, and convinces them not to allow Hoda back. Azza knows that if Hoda returns to dancing, Mamdouh will divorce her. Hoda's disappointment at being cast out from both the space of the family and the space of performance results in a delightful bender (to watch, at least). Azza has taken Hoda a performance to help distract her. Hoda is drunk. In a slight reversal of the first fantasy sequence, it is Hoda who is mesmerized by Azza, and she proceeds to imagine herself the object of Azza's song, dancing alongside her friend as Azza sings the titular song of the film (*A Cigarette and a Glass*). Hoda is transformed from her pedestrian clothing, and is once again the object of Azza's gaze as she performs. This particular scene also speaks to Samia's training as a dancer, the backdrop fluctuating from the nightclub, a Spanish flamenco hall, a Western desert with cacti, a balcony with other Egyptian style dancers, and finally again the Nightclub. Through dance, Hoda/Samia transcends space: bending the boundaries of nation in her travel through multiple cultural scenes and fusing the transnational styles into a seamless, cohesive belly dance. This was indeed Samia's gift: she pulled together the multiple strains of her training into one set of seamless movements. She used gestures and postures from other dance styles, including ballet and Spanish flamenco to enhance the traditional Arab belly dance. It is only the backdrop shifts that enable non-dancers to pinpoint the diverse influences. When the number ends, and Hoda is back in the audience, bowing, she realizes her dance has been but a fantasy, drinks more, and stumbles out of the nightclub, only to end up on a stranger's front steps. When she wakes up, she is in another man's bed.

Our shock at Hoda's potential adultery is mitigated when she realizes a man and his wife have taken her in. Her shock at her behavior pushes her to kidnap her daughter from school. They spend the day together, and when Azza Jr. finally sleeps, Hoda returns to drinking. In her stupor, she passes out holding a cigarette, which ignites and starts a house fire in the child's bedroom. Hoda gathers her wits about her and saves Azza before the fumes overtake her. She wakes up in a hospital bed, convinced Azza is dead. When it's shown that Azza survived, Hoda vows to never drink again, and she and Mamdouh reunite for their daughter. Meanwhile, Omara has finally agreed to marry Azza Sr., and her wish to remain in the country is granted. The story ends with an image of the laughing extended family.

While the film repairs Hoda's deviance (her narcissism and alcoholism), it does so through the queer figure of Azza. Azza, too, is somewhat "unqueered" at the film's close, but it's through the blatant pathologization of the stage manager and her manipulative and loveless marriage to Omara. Both women are ultimately removed from the performance space that fostered their queer kinship, and allowed for the articulation of queer desires. Thus the homosocial space of dance in the cabaret is made oppositional to the heteronormative space of marriage and family. The film "ties up" its queer loose ends, for the most part, but it witnesses the possibility of other desires and subjects. Their traces remain.

Habibi al Asmar (1958)

In "How Can We Watch the Film With Sand in Our Eyes" David Giovacchini claims that Samia's performance in *Sigara wa Kaas* is a dramatic turn from her previous work (62). This is partially true; many of her films before *Sigara wa Kaas* were shot with her *Habib il Omar*, Farid al Atrache, and her character was at most mischievous in those films, rarely if ever engaging with vice or appearing as the villain. She was, as *al Kawakib* often reported, a sweetheart on and

off screen and her later films would attempt to dispel the one dimensionality of her theatrical (but not dancery) performances. So it's strange to find Samia playing the darling again in *Habibi al Asmar*, released three years after *Sigara wa Kaas*. Perhaps it was her relative youth next to her costar, Tahia Carioca, or perhaps it was the latter's reputation for being more easily given to witty repartee and sexual innuendo. However, as my analysis will make clear, the similarities and contrasts between the two women and their respective positions within the film and Egyptian society are much more complicated than a sweetheart and a femme fatale.

Habibi al Asmar follows two women, Samra (Samia Gamal) and Zakia (Tahia Carioca), as they negotiate love and money in 1950s Egypt. Samra is a baladi girl, living in her father's home and engaged to her childhood sweetheart, Ahmed. She dreams of dancing on stage with Zakia, her next-door neighbor, an older woman (perhaps late 20s, early 30s) who works in Zamalek. Samra sneaks around to see Zakia, of whom her family and fiancé do not approve. They hold a negative attitude about dance and particularly dancing in public. When Samra sneaks out one night to see Zakia dance, she catches the eye of a prominent businessman named Rostom. Rostom convinces Zakia to bring Samra to his house the following day. Samra is hesitant, because when she returns from her adventure, she is scolded and pushed around by her father and her fiancé. Zakia convinces Samra that opportunities like this don't come around every day, and that she would be a fool to pass up meeting with Rostom. Feigning sleep, Samra sneaks off again, and after another pep talk from Zakia, is convinced to marry Rostom overnight. Rostom immediately begins to transform Samra, cutting off her hair and dressing her in the finest furs. He attempts to smooth over the discord with Samra's father with money, but her father refuses, and even goes so far as to give Rostom the money he intended to give Samra upon her wedding to Ahmed.

After this scene, her parents disappear completely from the film, and we are left with the four principles: Samra, Zakia, Ahmed, and Rostom. We also spend considerable time with Rostom's right hand man, Sim Sim. While Samra is being treated to all that money can buy, we discover that Zakia is seducing Samra's former fiancé Ahmed, whom she claims to love. With Zakia's influence, Ahmed ceases to do mechanic work and becomes a businessman, eventually working for Rostom in what we are beginning to learn is an international jewel and money smuggling operation. Rostom has been using Samra's feminine trappings (shoes, furs, etc) to hide money and diamonds and transfer them across borders: France, Switzerland, and Lebanon at least. When Samra and Ahmed reunite, they feign ignorance of one another in front of Rostom, though he suspects something is amiss. Ahmed is working toward revenge against Rostom for stealing Samra away, and behaves coldly toward her, though she admits to still being in love with him. When Samra comes clean to Rostom, he has Sim Sim attempt to murder Ahmed (by throwing him down a mountain while knocked out from chloroform). Samra, meanwhile, has finally understood what Rostom does for a living and tries in vain to return to her father's house. Rostom stops her, hits her, and threatens her with death, which she claims to welcome. He does not kill her however, but continues to use her as a prop for his business. We learn that Ahmed survives the murder attempt (surprise!) and makes his way back to Zakia, one side of his face heavily scarred. Zakia begs for his forgiveness and together they plot to bring down Rostom and liberate Samra from his clutches. They ultimately do so, but the cost is high. Zakia dies by gunshot wound and Rostom kills himself to avoid being captured by the police. This leaves space for Samra and Ahmed to reunite and presumably, live happily ever after.

There are many strange elements in this film: the cultural disdain for dance Samra's family articulates, the fantasy sequences that allow Samra to dance while maintaining her virtue,

the fact that Zakia deliberately steals Ahmed from her friend, that Zakia seems to have once been married to Rostom herself. There is also Zakia's dire attitude about love, and the tensions around class that saturate the film. The film constantly suggests sex, but the most involved physical intimacy is one kiss on the lips between the two women. There is also the vague paralleling between life and fiction, wherein Tahia in fact trained with Samia, and where indeed, Tahia married Roshdy Abaza years before Samia would.

As above, my analysis will argue two related claims: first, that the relationship between Samra and Zakia, facilitated by dance, and performed in secret, gives way to female homoerotic desire and heterosexual desire that is also non-normative because of its relationship to vice and its occurrence outside of the confines of marriage. Second, in order to discipline these desires, deviant bodies become sacrificed: Zakia must die in order to allow "good" love to flourish. It is only against and through her abjection that the proper heterosexual couple can survive. As in *Sigara wa Kaas*, I trace several threads that converge to articulate and discipline queerness: dance performances in Samra's imagination and in Zakia's life; the ways femininity is manifested, performed, applauded, and disciplined; and how class differences are used as proxies for debates about traditionalism and modernization. I read the film to understand some of the prevailing attitudes around belly dance and femininity produced and find moments of rupture, where we can begin to see how demands on femininity are impossible. In this film, we begin to witness the pushback against Samia's modernization in Egyptian culture and the dire consequences it promises.

As the opening credits roll, Samra dances alone in her room, wearing a white dress and her hair long, in two braids on either side of her face. She is dancing for what seems to be an imaginary audience, her eyes making contact with the camera but also traveling across the room.

Her braids and simple dress indicate that Samra is not wealthy nor a cabaret worker; instead she appears to be a simple girl, but perhaps one with expectations of grandeur. She moves around her record player and dances to the entire empty room until she hears the honk of a motorcycle from her window. This turns out to be her fiancé, Ahmed, played Shokry Sarhan. Ahmed has brought Samra a gift of guafa and balah zaghoulouli.¹⁰ The meager offering marks Ahmed as a member of similar class to Samra, and gives the couple the opportunity for some sly innuendo. Samra seductively bites into a piece of balah and exclaims, “Allah, this balah is so sweet!” which prompts Ahmed to say he is jealous of the balah, and the guafa, and the air, and all people: indeed anything that touches Samra, because he wants her all to himself. Later, Samra bites into a piece of guafa, “mmm, this guafa is sweet too! Try it!” and proceeds to offer him a bite from her fingertips. Ahmed proclaims, “it drips honey.” This repartee gives a nice sense of the couple’s desire for one another, as well as offers some playfulness of the era, where many conversations happened with a wink and a nod. Indeed, the exchange of fruit isn’t only sexual, it’s also political. Ahmed gifts Samra and her family Zaghoulouli dates, which became affiliated with Egyptian revolutionary and political leader Saad Zaghloul in the early 1920s, when Sayid Darwish wrote a sha’bi (people’s) song about Zaghloulouli dates that Egyptians could sing to speak of and honor Zaghloul during his exile (Assir, par 8-10). Zaghloul was fiercely anti-imperialist in his politics, working toward Egyptian governance that did not cater to Britain. In this way, Ahmed becomes marked from the opening minutes of the film as the hero, the right kind of man. This nationalist seal of approval is muddled with heterosexual romance, when, as the screen pans out and Ahmed drives away, we see that Samra lives in Habiba’s Neighborhood. The right kind of love, with the right kind of man, becomes one of the central concerns of the film.

¹⁰ I’m unsure what guafa is in English (it’s not guava, though the spelling might suggest similarities). Balah zaghoulouli is zaghoulouli dates.

The next scene finds Samra gazing longingly at her record player, again alone in her room, dressed for bed. As she watches the record spin, a small figure appears on the player, and begins to dance. The woman is Zakia, and she is wearing a belly dance costume that sits low on her hips and wraps around her breasts in a halter-top fashion. She dances alone for about fifteen seconds, and Samra watches her intently. Then, a second figure appears. This time it is Samra, also dressed in a belly dance costume, wearing her hair cropped shortly against her neck, rather than in braids. The two apparitions dance with one another, while Samra watches. At first, they take turns: one dancing while the other watches, and then simply dance with one another. The camera zooms in so we can see the looks of admiration on each apparition's face for the movement of her friend, and pans away to Samra's face a couple times where she continues to watch, sighing with pleasure and smiling slightly. The fantasy is visible to viewers for a minute and a half, before the two women disappear, and Samra is left staring at the record player, which has started to skip. It skips for ten seconds, but Samra does not notice, enchanted by something only she sees, before her mother comes in and turns off the music. In this scene, the object of Samra's desire initially appears to be Zakia; her pleasure at Zakia's presence is not intuitively around Zakia's dancing, but around Zakia herself, performing for Samra's eyes alone. Even when Fantasy Samra appears, she too is taken with Zakia's movement, shaking her head in disbelief at Zakia's virtuosity. The fantasy becomes not about Samra as a dancer, or Zakia as one, but about the camaraderie and kinship between the two women as they dance together. This reading echoes the female homoeroticism of the previous film, where Zakia and Samra, like Azza and Hoda, perform and dance for one another before their bodies turn outward for the other spectators. That the primary spectator, Samra, conjures this erotic fantasy is evidence that Samra's desires are somewhat unruly and non-normative. This evidence is corroborated by

Samra's mother, who admonishes Samra for wanting to see Zakia, for wanting to dance in public, and for dancing in her room to her music in the first place. Zakia, it seems, is an unsavory character, and dance is an unsavory thing.

The first real and not fantasy interaction between Zakia and Samra happens shortly after their fantasy dance, where Samra opens her window to find Zakia waiting for her at hers. They converse about Zakia's night dancing at the club, and Samra wishes she could come see her dance there. Zakia promises to sneak her out the next night to do just that, and suggests that, if she likes it, perhaps Samra will start dancing too. Zakia suggests that it would help bring more into Samra's life: more fun, more worldliness, and more money! They two end the evening with hope that the plans for the following night will come to fruition. Given what we have just learned from Samra's mother, we begin to suspect Zakia is not as wholesome as Samra believes. Indeed, she lures her out of her father's house with the promise of a night on the town that will remain secret. Their "secret" relationship is indicator of its unacceptable nature. I want to suggest that it is unacceptable not only because Zakia is a dancer, but because Zakia represents other dangerous qualities: the independence of women from fathers and fiancés, women earning their own keep, women who suggest that there is more to life than men in the old neighborhood. It is perhaps Zakia's insistence on pleasure and taking it where one can, which makes her the most dangerous.

The following evening, we find ourselves at Zakia's club. We understand its difference from Habiba's neighborhood immediately: there is a woman at the bar, sipping a cocktail and smoking a cigarette. She is wearing a low cut dress, with a hint of cleavage. Her hair is styled in loose waves that sit on her shoulders. In short, we know immediately, that we are out of the balad (the country) and into the medina (the city). Zakia appears on stage in the shadows, her arms raised and draped with scarves, before the lights come up and she begins to dance. The

camera remains in its initial position behind the bar while we watch her opening sequence, before cutting to where Samra stands watching, from between two curtains, on the eaves of the stage. She executes a couple of her own dance moves in glee, and looks delighted by what she sees, and indeed, Zakia looks ravishing. When the stage manager sees Samra moving, he suggests that she come work at the club herself, but she responds that she doesn't dance in front of people. It's useful here to recall Nieuwkerk and the taboo on dancing in front of men she establishes in her study, although, comically, Samra has just danced in front of a man. For Zakia's number, we cut between watching her from the original camera position behind the bar, and watching Samra watch her and converse with the stage manager, who is later joined by Rostom. Rostom takes an immediate interest in Samra, but she is completely disinterested in him, and faces away to watch Zakia. When the number ends, Zakia exits to the curtains to find Samra, and kisses her on the mouth. Unless I am much mistaken, this is not a common mode of greeting between women or men. Generally, the kisses are offered on each other's cheeks in varying number depending on context and relationship. While Zakia may have other interests in mind, as becomes clear later in the film, Samra's interest at least is in Zakia, and she attempts to leave the club alone in order to avoid Rostom's company.

I suggest here Samra's relationship with Zakia takes primacy over all others in her life: she goes to the club to watch Zakia against her father's and fiancé's wishes, she enjoys watching the other woman dance, and she only agrees to the ride home Rostom offers because Zakia will be along. It is tempting to read her attachment to the older woman as idol worship or simple naïveté, but Samra is quite quick herself, knowing intuitively that Rostom's interest in her is troubling and insulting him and the manager, Sim Sim, frequently. When either man tries to touch her shoulder or back as if to lead her, she snaps "your hand!" and looks at them

threateningly. Samra is entirely capable of flirting and of coquetry, but she reserves it for Zakia and for Ahmed. Her relationship with the woman goes beyond neighbor, student, or friend: for Samra it has larger influence and deeper intimacy.

I want to fast forward in the film to a conversation Zakia and Ahmed have about love. At this point, Samra has left her family and fiancé for Rostom, whom she married overnight, under the advisement of Zakia, who tells her happiness is paramount, and that any ruffled feathers with her father will be smoothed with money. Zakia promises Samra that the money, gold, and joy she will have with Rostom will eclipse the love she has with Ahmed. Samra seems particularly vulnerable to this line of logic, given the heavy handed way Ahmed has been treating in her light of her night out. When it is revealed that Samra has left, Ahmed, incensed, seeks out Zakia to find her but Zakia diverts, telling him she loves him instead. By the time this conversation between them occurs, Ahmed has mellowed about Samra's departure and Zakia's deception. We find him watching her dance at the club, and then visiting her dressing room after the performance. Indeed, he is like a whole new Ahmed, dressed in a black suit, drinking, and smoking a cigarette. (All cigarette smoking indicates moral decline). Zakia greets Ahmed from her chaise lounge, and he sits on its edge. She accuses him of still being in love with Samra, and he denies it, stating he is just trying to figure out how to get revenge. Zakia claims that's just another kind of love, and then tells him "The thing you're looking for? It doesn't exist. Loyalty is just words." Ahmed responds, "So there isn't anything called love?" and Zakia says "Exactly...there is something in the world called 'passing time.' I, for example, am dying for you." Ahmed states she's too honest, and Zakia says it's better to be honest than cheat him, like Samra did. Like she promised Samra, she promises Ahmed that she will show him the world as it is, without makeup. He will see everything, live, eat, drink, and get paid. When he questions

where the money comes from, she promises to set him up with a new job that will change everything. This sets the ball in motion for Ahmed to work for Rostom and confront Samra, though he doesn't know it yet. At the conclusion of the conversation, Ahmed says no one has ever spoken to him like this, and that he has a lot to think about. Together, the couple raises a toast to their new worldview.

Zakia's comments are easily interpreted as non-normative, given the prevailing generic standards for dramas, comedies, and romances, all of which intersect in this film. That Zakia doesn't believe in love, that she only believes in making the most of the moment, stands outside not just Arab or Egyptian attitudes about love, outside the formulas proscribed by the film industry in its narratives, but outside many attitudes about love in the mid twentieth century. Certainly, the attitude she has cultivated threatens monogamous, heterosexual marriage; her lack of belief in loyalty makes her betrayal of Samra logical if not acceptable. As I suggested before, it is this attitude, of fun and money at any cost that makes Zakia so dangerous to those around her: she threatens many of the foundations upon which their social order relies. For a while, it seems Zakia is correct: she has a Mr. Right Now, in Ahmed; she has the money the club provides her; she has her lavish life and style. She is even in this way generous, spreading the wealth to Ahmed. But like all good thrill seekers, she meets a bad ending, which the logic of the genre must meter out to discipline her unruly desires. She meets her death righting the wrongs she did to Samra and Ahmed, indicating that the choices she advocated are immoral and must be corrected or punished. For Zakia, it is too late to be saved but her lesson is passed on to Ahmed and Samra, who can return to their pure, marriage driven, and loyal love in the wake of her death.

As for Samra, she is spared death, but certainly educated by the film's events. Two moments in her story are particularly significant and they occur within a short span of one another. Samra has discovered that far from being a "salesman," her husband Rostom is instead a smuggler of money and diamonds. She learns something is amiss when Ahmed shows up in Lebanon where they are visiting, and goes by the name Ibrahim, the name given to him by his new bosses. When she tries to confront Ahmed about his presence, he prevaricates, says he is there for business and hints at the darkness of Rostom's character. They argue, and Ahmed leaves. Samra removes her shoe and throws it after him, and it slams into the closed door, breaking at the heel and revealing a hidden gem! She recalls how many heels and furs her husband has bought her (the furs hide the money) and realizes that she has been little more than a smuggling mule, a front for her husband's operation. As we have seen, clothes, hair, and styling in this film indicate changes in status, morality, and class. I want to suggest that all of Samra's aesthetic overhaul in the aftermath of her marriage to Rostom were indicators to the audience, either immediately or in hindsight, that he could not be trusted. The clothes were modernist vs. traditional, mimicking Western styles. The film implies that no good can come from replacing the old with the new, from modernizing. The modern comes at the cost of one's morality and strength of character. In short, the film suggests, by making Samra's transformation suspect and sully her fine goods with the taint of smuggling, that the modernity gained by association with the West comes at the cost of the nation's character, and could cost its life, as it did Zakia's.

Following Samra's confrontation with Rostom about his activities, during which he gives the order to have Sim Sim kill Ibrahim/Ahmed, Samra falls asleep crying and enters her second dream/fantasy sequence in the film. The scene opens on a long hallway with a domed ceiling and open windows along the left and right sides. It's a fairly dark background and the hallway is just

lit enough to witness Samra enter from the left, wearing a long, fitted ball gown, elbow length gloves, and two sheer scarves draped over her shoulders like a cape. She is also wearing a small tiara in her hair. She walks all the way to the back and begins dancing forward, then back. At first she is alone but when she reaches the end of the hallway for the second time, men in black suits start appearing at the open windows, and attempt to grab her as she walks by. Each time she advances in the frame, new men appear, until there are six of them pawing at her from both directions. The men are smoking cigars in one hand and obstructing her with the other. When she tries to flee the hallway entirely, the men step into it from the windows and stop her movement. Eventually they surround her and she twirls between them looking for an escape route until she passes out. When she awakes, she is back in what appears to be Habiba's neighborhood. There are stone steps and potted plants and a rustic looking water fountain. Samra's garb changes. Rather than the sleek evening wear of the first phase of the dream, she is wearing a two-piece belly dance costume. Here she is smiling and her movements are light and fluid instead of sharp and frenetic. Around her, several men are wearing abayahs and hattas, typical Arab clothing that is mostly worn today by Bedouins. They are playing instruments instead of smoking, their presence encouraging rather than threatening. After Samra dances for a bit, Ahmed enters the scene, wearing his suit. She dances for him and to him, and they embrace. Just as he puts his hands around her face as though to kiss her, we hear a gunshot and he crumples. The scene cuts back to Samra in the present, waking up with a start.

The contrast between the two phases of her dream are quite stark: one menacing and modern, the other comforting and traditional. The differences relay to the viewer that Samra's choice of money over love, her choice to be more like Zakia and Rostom, was mistaken. The world she occupies with Rostom is full of dark deeds and dishonorable men, indicated by their

smoking and pawing at her. She cannot make them remove their hands and she suffers physically from their presence. The world she left was light and safe. Here the men support her song, do not touch her, do not bring her harm. Both scenes are patriarchal. But in the neighborhood scene, she is protected by paternalism. In the hallway, she becomes just another person in the path of Rostom's diamond empire, to be disposed. Curiously, in both, she danced, despite the taboos we heard about dance in the beginning of the film from her mother. Whatever the message about the failure of the modern promise, Samra cannot give up her desire for dance: it held her captive in one scene and set her free in the next. The vision of herself as a dancer, supersedes now all three relationships she cultivated in the film: Zakia, Rostom, and Ahmed. I suggest she is able to dance in this scene and be redeemed later first because it's a fantasy sequence, so no real harm is done, and second, because the eventual spectator for her dance is Ahmed. Ahmed's presence allows the scene to take on a heteronormative rather than homoerotic nature as the previous fantasy with Zakia did. It also obfuscates the fact that Samra's interest in dance and her pursuit of it goes against the logic of honor in the film. Ahmed serves as screen for Samra's lapse into this seemingly small (next to Rostom's) vice.

What to make of Ahmed's murder at the end of the fantasy sequence? This scene occurs before Zakia's death and before we learn that Ahmed survives his attempted murder. Thus, his death in the sequence is the cost Samra must pay for the poor decisions she made: she chose money and class ascendancy over love and honesty, luring Ahmed into her seedy world. The drama formula demands that someone must pay the price, and to Samra, it seems that person will be Ahmed. However, the film has already associated the success and well being of the nation with a heteronormative plot, in the scene with the fruit that I analyzed above, so in order to deliver a healthy nation, Ahmed must be saved and Zakia's deviant presence eliminated. Ahmed

survives the narrative of the film to enforce the message that Egypt can triumph without the trickery and vice western modernity brings. It certainly would have been possible to have Zakia appear in that fantasy sequence with Samra, and foreshadow her death in the film, but since Zakia cannot achieve the triumph Ahmed pursues, by virtue of his masculinity and ties with the traditional neighborhood, her death is literal rather than imagined.

The film plays out the drama of the nation on the bodies of two women, Samra and Zakia. Neither male hero can redeem Zakia, neither the anti-imperialists nor those in bed with the colonizer. Meanwhile, Samra, her roots clear, her lessons learned, could be saved. Eerily, this is the reverse of what occurred in the actual lives of the actresses. Samia would be left to die unmourned, and Tahia would remain a beloved bint balad. I suggest this occurred in real life very much as it did in *Habibi al Asmar*: Samia represented too completely the Western influence on Egyptian women. She married twice, but before that had an eleven year affair with Farid al Atrache. One of her marriages was to an American. She traveled the world extensively, becoming a star in the US and France in addition to Egypt. Meanwhile, Tahia married a rumored fourteen times! However, she never conducted relationships outside of marriage, and never married a non-Arab man. She had children, while Samia did not. In her films she was more often Samra than Zakia, just as Samia was more often Zakia than Samra. Tahia also never left Egypt, her fame while huge, still isolated to those in the Arab world and its diaspora.

While each of the films I discussed found ways to tidily discipline its non-normative characters, I suggest that Samia, the actress and dancer, remained queer. Not in the sense of her sexual behavior, though who can really say what went on for all those years? But in the sense that she, like many women, failed to be the right kind of Arab, the right kind of feminine demanded of her at the time. Her body, its sexuality always at the front because of the nature of

her profession, never satisfying the demands of the nation. Her stratification between multiple worlds disabled her from every being Arab enough, but naturally, she was neither truly Western or American or French either. Her mere association with Farouk, complicit with the British occupation, was enough to cast her dye. She was the experiment of the Arab world with a certain kind of modernity, and when it failed, she had to be sacrificed.

Conclusion

In *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* Amira Jarmakani argues that belly dancers are figures that American audiences used to reckon with shifting understanding of the relationship between the US and the Middle East. She traces the appearances of belly dancers in the US starting with the world fair in Chicago, into post cards and cigarette ads that tracked in the Orientalist exoticism. As the relationships between the East and West changed, so did the cultural significance of the dancer. Sunaina Maira picks up this argument in “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire” and demonstrates through ethnographic research how the popularity of belly dance in non-Arab communities in the US reflects the practitioner’s “imperial feelings” about the East, while simultaneously allowing them to appropriate the culture in an act of liberal multiculturalism. Both witness the ways the Arab female body becomes the site for nationalist and imperialist, both patriarchal, discourses to take shape. In other words, the body becomes merely a proxy war zone for the continued colonial and anticolonial wars.

How do we reckon these depictions, and implicit condemnations of dance, with the centrality of dance in Arab homes and communities, both within the diaspora and in the Arab world? How do we reckon its centrality with its murky moral legacy in the nations of its origins, evidenced by Nieuwkerk and transparent in the films under analysis in this chapter? For me,

another important question is what happens to those dancing bodies? Who will claim them? To what world might they belong? Who will mourn Samia?

As I hope this chapter has made evident, Samia was an enactment of the belly dance controversy, celebrated in her success but shunned in her final hours. Her title, the “National Dancer of Egypt” and her favor with the Farouk monarchy eventually contributed to her internationalization. She became fluent in three spoken languages: Arabic, English, and French, though one paper alleges she was illiterate (Al Ahram 32). Her presentation off screen often resembled Hollywood starlets, in many magazine spreads mimicking the likes of Marilyn Monroe, and in one film, a dead ringer for Bettie Page’s distinctive haircut and color (in *Afrita Hanem; Al Kawakib* p NA, 1950-1951). Even her style of dance, incorporating ballet to help give fluidity to her turns, and engaging the upper body, removed her from the classic, baladi style personified by other dancers, dancers like Tahia, who remained, as Said wrote of her, untranslatable (“Farewell” par 5). By contrast, Samia could and would be translated, but at what cost? All her legibility in American and French presses, all the admiration she garnered in Egyptian culture, the countless stories on her in *Kawakib*, seeking her views on everything from smoking to marriage to international cooperation for film making, all these moments where her body shimmered and traveled as ambassador and beyond, all these moments if not forgotten, repressed and quieted in her literal wake. Perhaps I make too much of her banned funeral. Perhaps forgetting her is not exceptional, but the rule. In which case, I remain alarmed.

Samia’s mode of femininity, routed through the nation to represent it internationally, highlights the contradictory messages regarding acceptable and authentic Arab womanhood for women who travel within and across the national border. While certainly not the first Arab to dance in America, she was a very visible figure negotiating the crossroads created by

Orientalism and authenticity. A figure, like women in films before her, sacrificed so that the right image, the right nation, the right Egypt, the right Arab might emerge alone. I attend to her example in particular because belly dance, more than many other cultural products, makes explicit the central role female sexuality plays in determining respectability and belonging. Even in this chapter, she is evidence for iterations of queer Arab gender and sexual performance, of argument for a version of Arab society that included, represented, and negotiated non-normativity within its logics. What we learn from Samia is that battling between binaries is a zero sum game. Westernized, she fell out of favor with her home. In the diaspora, she is the exotic other, no matter how beautifully she performed femininity, performed dance, and performed Western worldliness in her life and work. When her Arab femininity traveled, it became the tableau for debates about what Arabness looked like, and became policed through the forced forgetting of her dancing body. I propose again, that we remember Samia, that we remember her movements, and we honor her legacy as the legacy of so many dancing ephemerally across the diaspora.

In this chapter, I outlined her biography and her position within Egyptian film history in order to demonstrate how femininity becomes a site for negotiating Arab ideas of race and national identity. Samia's body and her body of work bear the marks of Egypt's engagements with varied projects of Westernization, modernity, and postcolonial subject formation with regards to Orientalism. I turned from her biography to a selection of her films in order to reveal non-normative performances of desire and gender that were common in Golden Era film, and in doing so, begin to posit the possibilities of queer Arab futures built out of a queer Arab past.

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Chapter 2

A Thousand and One Scheherazades: the Life and Times of a Literary Muse

In the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade escapes death by spinning stories for a murderous King. The King Shahryar took a new woman as his wife each night, and had her executed in the morning. Scheherazade volunteers for this fate, but arranges for her sister, Dinarzad, to request one last story as a goodbye. Scheherazade tells a long tale, one that extends beyond the dawn of morning. So intrigued is the King by her story, he lets her live to tell the ending the following night. Scheherazade completes the first and begins another, repeating the pattern one thousand and one times over one thousand and one nights. By this time she has bore children unto the King, and he has come to respect and trust her. The King pardons her and they rule together ever after. This uncommon fairytale, where the heroine's own determination, wit, and cunning rescue her from destruction has served as an inspirational metaphor for Arab and Arab American writers, and even more-so for Arab and Arab American women writers who recognize Scheherazade's ability to narrate is a matter of life and death. Scheherazade appears in numerous Arab and Arab American texts as both metaphor and muse. The variety of genres in which she's invoked is a testament to Scheherazade's versatility. But what makes her such an alluring figure for writers? Why do we return to her again and again? What hope, refuge, or inspiration do we seek from her mythologized figure?

One might be tempted to argue that Scheherazade's position as a storyteller is sufficient to explain her popularity. Yet other storytellers have come and gone without accruing her fame. Why is Scheherazade special? In this chapter, I tell the story of Scheherazade as it occurs in English language versions of *the Nights*, in order to articulate how Arab femininity is shaped by colonialism and Arab responses to colonization. I offer a biography of Scheherazade, her travels in the world of *the Nights*, her sojourn to Europe, and the remaking of her image through translation. I contemplate the function of Scheherazade textually and metatextually, with explicit focus on how she mediates colonial tensions with her complex femininity. Her popularity, I argue, is due in part to how Scheherazade straddles two spheres of culture, two models of femininity. Her position within *the Nights* as the daughter of the vizier, her learned brain, her facility with language, the simultaneous familiarity and exoticism of her beauty, her management of the King, her fertility, and concomitantly, her engagement in normative gender and sexual paradigms, present Scheherazade as a model Arab. Neither docile nor fearsome, the Easternly Scheherazade is desired and domesticated through Western tropes of the feminine, classed and raced via Victorian morality—tenets which still inform contemporary ideals of womanhood. Scheherazade negotiates the complex task of being exotic, but not too exotic—assimilated, but not whitewashed. Her tasteful blend of assimilation and authenticity make Scheherazade the perfect figure for multiculturalism, and as such, a powerful referent for Arab American writers who seek to establish their dual Americanness and Arabness in the US, where both their citizenship and humanity is threatened by new Orientalisms. One of the goals of this chapter, then, is to articulate the means by which Orientalism imprinted representations of Arab femininity, as witnessed by the two translations of Scheherazade.

Following the work of transnational feminist theory (e.g. Mani and Moallem), I expose the means by which Orientalism produced a specific version of Arab femininity in service of its colonializing project, specifically in the translation of *the Arabian Nights* by noted travel writer, Sir Richard Burton. I juxtapose this with the contemporary translation of *the Nights* by Hussein Haddawy in order to measure how Arab writers attempted to salvage or rescue Arab culture and its humanity from that Orientalist portrayal, once again through representations of Arab femininity. As such, in line with the impetus of this dissertation, I foreground femininity as a sight of negotiation of race and ethnicity, particularly in regards to Arabs' capacity for culture and civilization, descriptors denied to them by colonial regimes. In tracing the translations of Scheherazade, I develop a framework for understanding representations of femininity as in persistent dialogue with Orientalism—postcolonial representations of femininity are always responding to Orientalism, even when they are refusing it as a defining feature. A clearer understanding of the impact of Orientalism on femininity will allow us to witness more plainly the contradictory but collusive way US based anti-Arab racism interacts with Western Orientalism to circumscribe the range of possible representations for Arab femininity and sexuality—the subject of the next chapter.

The Thousand and One Nights, better known in English as *The Arabian Nights*, is a collection with diffuse origins, namely Persian, Arab, Indian, and Asian. It stems from an oral tradition, as does much of pre-Islamic and early-Islamic culture. Historians have found reference to existence of the stories in partial form as early as the tenth century, particularly in the now lost Persian story *Hazār Afsān*, from whence Scheherazade's story hails. The ambiguous origins of *the Nights* add to Scheherazade's allure—since she belongs to no clear codified nation, she offers a generic legacy to the region, available for citation by any and all writers who understand *the*

Nights as part of their literary history. While the Persian origins of the collection might muddle Arab inheritance of the stories, the survival of only Arab version of the story often obscures its other ancestries. *The Nights* as we know them now, a collection of magical realist folk tales over which Scheherazade presides, only seem to appear in collected, written form in the second half of the thirteenth century. The thirteenth century manuscript was copied and regenerated for subsequent renditions and is considered the “authentic,” albeit now lost, form. It contained the frame story of Scheherazade and approximately eleven other stories that occur over the course of two hundred and eighty-two nights. Two versions of *the Nights* grew from the historical seed, one Syrian and one Egyptian. The Syrian copy is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, while the Egyptian version proliferated endlessly, often deviating in dramatic ways from the Syrian and consequently, from the thirteenth century version. As *the Nights* traveled through time, particularly in the Egyptian tradition, they gained stories and became more deeply heterogeneous. They would also become somewhat more formal and less colloquial during these times; originally an oral tradition, *the Nights* would have been relayed in the informal version of the diglossic Arabic language. However, with transcription to the written would come standardization, such that Arabic versions of *the Nights* are themselves historic archives of the changes in the Arabic language over the course of one thousand (and one!) years. They are composed in formal and colloquial Arabic, featuring phraseology and grammatical structures since antiquated. *The Nights*, then, offer the genealogy of Arab literature and lyricism in one collection, adding further to the significance of the collection for Arab writers as well as offering a long history of Arab culture. The historical legacy refutes the idea of Arab culture as lacking or underdeveloped as suggested by colonial and Orientalist discourse. Instead, *the Nights* witness another aspect of rich Arab cultural production.

At the same time, the content shifted considerably in the Egyptian edition during the period of Ottoman reign, which is often considered a waning of Arab culture and traditions. The travel of the manuscript to the European context would alter the stories even more, particularly in the hands of the first French translation, performed by Antoine Galland in 1704. Galland collaborated with Hanna Diab in 1709 to add approximately twelve new stories to the collection, most famously, the stories of Aladdin, Ali Baba, and Sinbad (Haddawy xvi). It is due to this watering down of *the Nights* in the Egyptian context that many scholars of the text refer to the Syrian copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale as the most authentic version of the text, and thus the most referential of Arab culture. Eventually, the collection would make its way into English based on the success of Galland's French translation, and most famously in the ten-volume work of Richard Burton, circa 1850. Translation, while central to the texts of this chapter, is not the theoretical framework around which the chapter is organized. That is, in speaking to various translations of *the Nights*, I attempt to understand what is at stake in the translated text, rather than the process of translation itself.

In the absence of the Persian edition of the stories, and in the wake of the many translations of *the Nights* into romance languages, Scheherazade became synonymous with the stories of *the Nights*, and *the Nights* themselves typify Arab culture during the Mamluk period (1250-1517). Due in large part to the work of Orientalism, *the Nights* continue to signify the Arab world for non-Arabs. Yet, they also resonate loudly with Arab and Arab American writers as literary legacy and the points of departure for new literature. If colonialism and Orientalism denied Arabs cultural sophistication, the artistic and literary legacy of *the Nights* offers one avenue of redress for Arab writers responding to the devaluation of Arab culture and Arab

cultural production. Recourse to *the Nights* then, is simultaneously about producing new visions of Arab literature and Arab culture via citation of Arab cultural histories.

If the Burton translation is the best prototype for the Orient as spectacle, the 1990 Haddawy translation is the careful and loving attempt to restore *the Nights* and Scheherazade to their best “authentic” selves. Given the popularity and familiarity of the Burton translation, it is all but impossible to understand any new translations of the Nights without reference to Burton’s adaptation. In Burton’s much criticized translation, the “East” resembles the now familiar Orientalist tableau of unbridled lust and violent savagery (Said 197). Meanwhile, Haddawy’s rendering of Scheherazade refuses to play into such Orientalist fantasy of the East—the stories are rendered in simple but beautiful detail, with no amplified sexual or savage antics. I analyze the representation of Scheherazade in the Haddawy and Burton translations precisely because they represent the two extreme poles the stories have taken—in one moment, an elaborate Orientalist fantasy of the Arab world, and in the other, a literary legacy to which Arab descended writers refer repeatedly. Haddawy bases his translation on the definitive Arabic edition of the text by Muhsin Mahdi in 1984, who based his work on the Syrian edition in the Bibliothèque Nationale. By claiming its proximity to the original collection, Haddawy views his collection as the more authentic representation of the Arab world, though we must also understand it as correcting what he understands as the failed and damaging *Nights* presented by Burton and the like. Meanwhile, Burton’s version is removed through several translations and adaptations, notably, the Bulaq, Calcutta II, and Breslau editions.

What results from these two editions are surprising moments of consistency and deviation—moments that illuminate femininity as a discursive site for negotiating Arab culture, from within and without an Orientalist frame. While the questions of authenticity, orality, and

literary miscegenation are surely fascinating, the focus of this chapter is Scheherazade, whose frame story and written descriptions remain mostly the same, with a few startling differences. I reference the myriad of debates on authenticity, orality, and the collection's mixed origins when they seem to speak directly to the similarities or differences in the representations of Scheherazade across both texts. Because Burton seeks to titillate and Haddawy seeks to restore, the moments of difference and continuity in the representations of Scheherazade can reveal the demands placed on her femininity by both colonization and anti-Orientalism. In what follows, I offer a point-by-point comparison of the Burton and Haddaway translations in order to explicate the significant moments of tension, rupture, and symbiosis in the portrayal of Scheherazade's character. I demonstrate how Scheherazade's femininity is a site for negotiating Orientalist renditions of, and Arab responses to, the representation of gender and sexuality in Arab texts. Then, I turn to the historical context within which each translation was published: Victorian sentiment in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th century; and liberal multiculturalists politics in the US in the 1990s, in order to explore the popularity of each translation and reveal the deep stakes in the presentations of Scheherazade in specific, but transnational Arab femininity at large.

In both the Haddawy and Burton translations, Scheherazade is described first and foremost as well read and learned. Both Haddawy and Burton underscore Scheherazade's exceptionalism with regards to her education and her intelligence.¹¹ She is reported in both to have "read the books of literature, philosophy, and medicine." She has memorized poetry, studied history, and is familiar with political ideologies. She is the daughter of the King's vizier, and thus occupies a higher socioeconomic position than many of the other women who appear in

¹¹ A note on spelling: due to transliteration, Scheherazade's names can be spelled a number of ways: Haddawy uses Shahrazad, Burton uses Scheherazade. In this chapter, I use the American standard "Scheherazade," except in titles and direct quotes where the spelling differs.

the Nights. Her elite status in both education and class foregrounds her request to marry the King, and her ability to survive said marriage. Scheherazade's access to education and her relationship to a high ranking official within the kingdom offer her two survivalist strategies unavailable to the other women in *the Nights*: she draws on her education and familiarity with history to entertain the King later in *the Nights*, and her social status has thus far protected her from the effects of the King's wrath. Here then, Scheherazade's femininity is made exceptional through its access to education and its elite class standing.

Unnoted in both tales, but implied is another aspect of her identity that is equally important: her virginity. While the most casual telling will offer the King's proclivity for virgins, many are unaware of the source of this particular fetish. Scheherazade's success with the King relies on her displacement of the source of his injury. Prior to the "marry and murder" policy, the King was happily married to another woman, whom he kept comfortably in a palace with her companions. The first Queen's dwelling and household marks the first difference between the Haddawy and Burton translations. Burton allots the Queen no palace of her own, but relegates her existence to the "pleasure gardens," which Shahzaman's (the King's brother) room overlooks. In Haddawy, this location is only referred to as "the garden." In Haddawy, the Queen's court are referred to as twenty slaves, ten white and ten black, while in Burton, there are ten white concubines and ten white slaves. Haddawy's black slaves are men cross-dressing as women. Haddawy's white slaves are also cross-dressing men. By relegating the women to the pleasure gardens, and referring to the Queen's entourage as concubines rather than slaves, Burton proposes the now-familiar harem fantasy, and significantly demotes the status of the Queen. I will return to this point shortly, but I suggest that Burton also erases the racial diversity

of the slave class to save the King from miscegenation when consorting with his concubines. The Queen's miscegenation and infidelity, however, are translated faithfully.

Shahryar learns of his Queen's infidelity through happenstance. One week, King Shahryar sends for his brother, Shahzaman, the King of Samarkand, for a visit. Shahzaman comes as beckoned, but before doing so, discovers his wife in a compromising position, fornicating with a member of his household. In a rage, he kills her and her lover, a cook or kitchen boy in the Burton and Haddawy translation respectively. The class difference between a king and kitchen worker especially exacerbates Shahzaman's rage, and he remarks in both editions how demeaned he is that his wife would betray someone of his "position." As in above, the question of class underscores the feminine failure of Shahzaman's wife, and the eventual success of Scheherazade, who not only comes from an elite position, but does not undermine the King's stature. Sharyrar notices his brother's deflated demeanor upon Shahzaman's arrival, out loud in Burton, internally in Haddawy. Shahryar is duly concerned for the entirety of his brother's visit but Shahzaman will not share the source of his misery. Shahryar assumes Shahzaman is homesick, and goes on a hunting trip to prepare to send Shahzaman back home. Shahzaman, who has elected to forego the hunting trip, discovers Shahryar's wife is also unfaithful. On the first day of Shahryar's absence, Shahzaman witnesses the infidelous acts in the garden his room overlooks. In Haddawy, the ten black slaves remove their clothing to reveal they are men. They then mount the ten white slave girls. The Queen witnesses this, and calls for her lover, Mas'ud, a black slave as well, who "rushed to her, and, raising her legs, went between her thighs and made love to her (7)." The "topping" of women by men goes on until noon.

While certainly not shy, the Haddawy translation seems prudish compared to Burton's. In Burton's garden scene, the white slave men shed their clothes to top the white women, and the

Queen calls for her lover, Saeed.¹² Saeed obliges, and Burton describes it as such: “And then sprang with a drop-leaf from one of the trees a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes, which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight” (6). Saeed then “throws her and enjoys her” for some time. Burton’s racial disgust with the blackness of the slave, and the animalization of the paramour plays into typical associations of blackness during the time of the translation, the late 1800s and early 1900s, particularly alluding to the fear of the black male who desires and rapes white women. While both Haddawy’s and Burton’s translations reveal the inferior position of black slaves during the Mamluk rule, only Burton’s description sensationalizes the racial sexual difference. Indeed, in his footnote on the above passage, Burton claims that “debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts” (6), while Arab men and beasts were smaller than Europeans on average. Burton uses this farcical science to suggest that Arabs are thus not Asiatic, but “partially white washed negroes.” His racial rendering of the Arabs as better than Negroes but worse than Europeans makes the fascination with Scheherazade palatable, in that she is not completely abject because she is not black, but also neither completely assimilable because she is not white. Combined with his whitening of the slaves and the absence of a footnote explaining the marking of the slaves/concubines as white, presumably like Scheherazade and the King, Burton’s understanding of race in *the Nights* render these characters at least, within the realm of sexual desirability for a Western audience. In other words, the character with which Burton sympathizes in this particular moment is the King, who will be sleeping with the women in Burton’s alleged harem and the eventual heroine, Scheherazade. In order to save both the reader and the King’s sexual purity, those women share the King’s racial identification, which as Burton notes above, is not so bad as to be black, but not so good as to be white. In both Haddawy and Burton, however, the Queen is the villain: due not only to her

¹² Saeed and Mas’ud are variations on the same root name.

infidelity, but the presence of her sexual appetite at all. In both, the violation of the King is due to the assault on his property: his wife and his concubines. The insult is especially injurious because it is the Queen in both scenes who summons servants for sexual intercourse, and the queen whose power within the palace is used for deception and sexual conquest. She provides a direct counterpoint to Scheherazade, who uses her power for redeeming the King, and salvaging the Kingdom.

We must also ask: why does the Queen have ten cross dressing slaves? In *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber suggests that the figure of the transvestite or cross-dresser indicates a tension and conflict around gender roles in the text at hand. She also notes:

the apparently spontaneous or unexpected or supplementary presence of a transvestite figure in a text (whether fiction or history, verbal or visual, imagistic or "real") that does not seem, thematically, to be primarily concerned with gender difference or blurred gender indicates a *category crisis elsewhere*, an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin. (16-17)

In the case of *the Nights*, both interpretations of cross-dressing are apt. The presence of the male slaves dressed as women underscores the anxiety around the Queen's aggressive sexual appetite, which goes against appropriate modes of feminine performance, not only in the Arab context *the Nights* creates, but to the readers of *the Nights*, in either Burton's or Haddawy's translations.

Surely in the palaces of the King and Queen, there are ten male slaves who would have literal and figurative access to the Queen's garden, especially during the King's absences, who could be summoned for fornication purposes. Instead, the threat of betrayal is internal to the Queen's life and outside the legibility of the King—it is a threat he does not know about and therefore cannot neutralize. It is simultaneously terror of the Queen herself, her desires, and the failure of the

heteronormative, homosocial structure (in Haddawy, her separate palace; in Burton, her harem) designed to keep her within the King's control. The presence of cross dressers can thus be read as a deeply misogynistic and duplicitous rendering of female sexual desire, one predicated on the manipulation of raced and classed bodies. The Queen's deception of the King through the cross-dressing slaves represents the sexual anxiety around women's sexuality—in this story the Queen's sexual appetite is as ravenous at least as the King's, if not greater. Furthermore, the transposition of male bodies into seemingly female one quiets the homoerotic threat of homosocial spaces, such as the Queen's palace or Burton's harem. The Queen's infidelity with women of her keep is either unimaginable or made unimaginable by replacing the female bodies with male ones. While the male bodies can be discovered, the threat of the female continues to be invisible, and therefore even more threatening. Moreover, the racial tension and the subjugation of black bodies in *the Nights* plays out in the figures of the slaves and the Queen's lover. The derision lobbed at black bodies in both translations of *the Nights* evidences for readers (and indeed the original listeners), how questions of colorism and racism were in play in Arab society well before and well after the experience of colonization. The cross dressing men further obliterate the possibility of an agential and sexual female black body, since only the white women slaves and Queen are capable of sexual action; to affirm this obliteration, the black female is not even a myth or possibility in Burton's work.

I emphasize these notes first, to demonstrate how much we can learn about Arab femininity from the presence of the other women in this story. The queen's femininity is lusty and made vulgar in her interaction with her lover. Her penalty, as we will see, is her death and the repercussions of her betrayal affect not only the King and her court, but the entirety of the nations. Already then, national well-being rests on the wings of female virtue. Second, I

emphasize these notes of racial and class difference in the story of the betrayal to underscore how deeply Scheherazade must undermine this first depiction of women established by the frame story. Her ability to do so I will suggest, is for the Burton audience, at least partly reliant on her proximity to whiteness.

Shahzaman is oddly comforted by the revelation of his brother as cuckold. If Shahryar, a great King, can be so unfortunate in his own home, then no man is safe: All women are capable of betrayal, all women's virtues have deep repercussions. Here the Haddawy translation refers to some of the slave "girls" as concubines for the first time, amplifying the misfortune of Shahryar in that even his "other women" are disloyal. When Shahryar returns from hunting, he finds his brother in good health and begs him to reveal both the source of his anguish and subsequent solace. When Shahzaman relates the story of his wife's infidelity, Shahryar claims that were he to experience such deception, he would not rest until he had slain one thousand women. Then, Shahzaman reveals that Shahryar has also been deceived. They devise a plot to confirm Shahzaman's story, offering both Burton and Haddawy's audiences a repeat of the earlier voyeuristic episode. When Shahryar confirms his wife's infidelity, he tempers his rage by sojourning with his brother from the Kingdom. He does not initially kill his wife as Shahzaman does. They agree that if they find another person less fortunate than they, they will return home. If not, they will roam the earth without the trappings of royalty, in service of the one true Lord¹³.

¹³ In the stories of *the Nights*, religion offers many lessons to the characters. In this way, the stories of *the Nights* are much more like parables than fairy tales or fables. However, in the frame story, religion emerges in passing, as an undercurrent of customary dialogue. To understand why religion is not necessarily central to her narrative, I point again to the oral tradition of this narrative, and the oral traditions of the Arabic language, in which God is a prominent referent. For example, across Islam and Christianity, a common response to "How are you doing?" is "Praise be to God." The reference, though seemingly religious, speaks more to the banality of religion in the Arab context rather than its exceptionality. At the same time, as I will discuss later, Scheherazade's faith and use of faith in her stories support the success of her character and the eventual redemption of the King and Kingdom. As such, I treat Scheherazade's faith as an aspect of her femininity rather than the central or most significant axis of

In Haddawy's translation, Shahryar's outcry at his wife's betrayal, that great is the cunning of women, causes him to forego the Kingdom and the throne, suggesting first that women are indeed so treacherous as to bring nations to ruin and second, establishes again the scope of Scheherazade's task—to save both the man and the Kingdom.

During their wandering the brothers come upon a black *jinni*¹⁴ and his human white bride. When the *jinni* falls asleep, the wife, kept in a locked glass box, coerces both Shahzaman and Shahryar into sex with her as a means of punishing the *jinni* that holds her captive. Here, like the Queen confined to her quarters, the bride is capable of deep deception, despite her relative powerlessness. She threatens the brothers with the wrath of the *jinni*, manipulating the provisions her captor has given her. In this way, the Queen and the *jinni*'s bride are alike: they use the means available for their pleasure, confirming to the brothers and the readers that women are indeed agents to be feared. Indeed, in both translations, the *jinni*'s bride frames the satisfaction of her sexual desire as an immediate form of revenge against the *jinni*. While the *jinni* bride and the Kings' first wives both sought sex for satisfaction, Scheherazade's sexual experience with the King is in service of her greater mission of saving the King and saving the Kingdom. Indeed, there are no descriptions of sex between the King and Scheherazade, allowing her to remain unsullied and exceptional against the crude and voyeuristic depictions of sex in which the other women feature. Here we learn that sex for pleasure is not an appropriate or acceptable mode of feminine sexuality, and as such, is not one in which Scheherazade is seen to participate. After being satisfied by both, the bride takes the brothers' wedding rings, and adds them to a fob of others, each representing a man with whom she's cuckolded her husband. Requesting a material

identity when discussing Arab culture. In other words, rather than recenter the contemporary fascination with religion as foundational to so-called Arab culture, I focus on how femininity works, and how religion sometimes affects that femininity.

¹⁴ *jinni*: ghost or spirit, often mischievous or malevolent.

token solidifies to the bride a more lasting reminder of her power when she returns to her captivity. The fob of rings literally make material and calculable the scope and depth of women's agency, an agency that is rendered to the reader as necessarily deceptive.

In Haddawy's translation, the story of the jinni and his stolen bride is fairly brief; the woman is beautiful, shapely, and with a face like the moon (denoting that she shines but also that she is not dark of skin). She has ninety-eight rings, so Shahzaman and Shahryar bring her lists of conquests to one hundred. In Burton, several lines of verse are devoted to her radiance and she has not ninety-eight rings, but four hundred and seventy! (Debbie does India, Indochina, and Samarkand.) For Burton, she is also quite explicit in her sexual needs, asking the kings to "stroke [her] a strong stroke" (12). Without exhausting the point, Burton's translation serves to titillate the Western reader and further other and distance the Arab from the European. Yet, even without sensationalization in the Haddawy, the jinni and the Queen are already foils for Scheherazade's difference. As noted above, the captive woman of the jinni, like the "captive" wives of Shahzaman and Shahryar, all exercise their agency through sexual exploit, seemingly the only agency they are allowed under the reign of men. Scheherazade will differentiate herself from them and supplement the trope of sexual power through recourse to intellect and wile. None of Scheherazade's interest in the King is represented as sexual; instead, it is immediately in service of the nation and the King himself. Femininity, and appropriate feminine sexuality, are here systems which buttress not only the masculine figure of the King, but the Kingdom itself. The nation here resembles a now familiar normative family, of which the King is the father and figurehead, while the Queen is the mother who upholds the morality and cohesiveness of the royal unit. In this sense, we can corroborate feminist theorizations of the nation as a heteropatriarchal institution that upholds binaristic and limiting gender roles through and with

normative and procreative prescriptions for sexuality. We learn from *the Nights* that normative sexuality for women is the absence of sexual drive and the reproduction of the Kingdom through the upholding of femininity.

Their experience with the jinni and the captive woman convince both Kings that all men suffer at the hands of vile women. Affirmed in the knowledge that someone's fate is worse than their own, they return to their respective kingdoms; the vizier is tasked with murdering Shahryar's wife, her lover, and companions. In this way, the misogynistic violence of the King becomes an expression of the Kingdom he rules; violence against women is institutionalized, carried out by the King's most esteemed political affiliate. Shahryar then begins his ritual of virgin deflowering and execution, exclaiming, "There is not a single chaste woman anywhere on the entire face of the earth" (Haddawy 14). The emphasis on chaste women and their impossibility appears in both translations, indicating that Scheherazade's struggle will involve proving to the King her capacity for purity and honor. The implication for femininity is thus that "good" feminine sexuality is virginal until marriage, monogamous, lacking fervor, and holds in its stake the success and security of masculinity and the nation. The marry/murder practice continues for three years in the Burton translation and in Haddawy until "all the girls perished, their mother's mourned, and there arose a clamor among the fathers and mothers, who called for a plague upon his head..." (14). The King's actions create discord in the Kingdom, amplifying still the urgency of the heroine's task.

At this juncture of national distress, Scheherazade enters, offering to become the King's next bride, strongly against her father's, the vizier's, wishes. In Burton, her gesture is prompted by the vizier's anxiety that there are no more girls for the King to deflower (rather than within the exposition as in Haddawy), and that he will be punished for failing to carry out the King's

commands, indicating her high level of compassion. The Vizier attempts to dissuade her through story-telling but Scheherazade is not to be swayed. He tells two stories, “The Tale of the Ox and the Donkey” and “The Tale of the Merchant and His Wife.” The first attempts to illustrate to Scheherazade how her attempt to save others from sorrow will backfire and cause her own sorrow, as it does for the Donkey in the story. The second illustrates with violence what cannot be reasoned in the first. Here, the Merchant’s wife insistence on her right to access knowledge her husband is bound by God to keep secret results in the Merchant’s decision to beat her desire out of her and cause her submission. But neither the relatively fableistic argument of the first story nor the threat of the second dissuades Scheherazade from her plan to marry Shahryar. Scheherazade is confident in her decision, exclaiming “Either I shall live or else I should be a ransom for the children of the Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine” (Burton 15). In the Haddawy translation, Scheherazade informs her father “I would like you to marry me to King Shahryar, so that I may either succeed in saving the people or perish and die like the rest” (15).

Already, Scheherazade distinguishes herself from the other women of the story. Willing to die to save others, Scheherazade strikes the reader as potentially naïve but also brave, nationalistic in both, and especially pious in the Burton. Burton’s depiction emphasizes religion as a point of difference, while Haddawy’s translation appears more invested in faithful translation rather than faithful subjects. When her father forbids her from marrying Shahryar, Scheherazade threatens to go to the King and accuse the Vizier of betraying the King, which would result in her father’s death. This ultimatum reveals Scheherazade’s cunning: she uses the King’s proclivity for reckless violence to manipulate her father. As an endangered subject, a chaste woman, Scheherazade utilizes whatever means at her disposal, without consideration of

how it might also perpetuate the violence she seeks to disavow. Furthermore, she places the needs of the nation and her future husband over the needs of her father and family, and in so doing, fulfills the heteronormative as a national imperative. In this, Scheherazade occupies the trope of the “good Muslim” as theorized by Mahmood Mamdani in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. In Mamdani’s analysis, the Muslim becomes good via its relationship to the nation state (15).¹⁵ Scheherazade becomes a good woman by identifying and pledging allegiance to the political system in play, and attempting to civilize the King.

The second crucial manipulation of her strategy to save the King/dom involves her sister, Dinarzad. When the vizier capitulates to Scheherazade’s demands, Scheherazade advises her sister that she will send for Dinarzad under the guise of a final farewell. When Dinarzad arrives, she should request a story to while away the night. In both Burton and Haddawy, Scheherazade conveys her conviction that stories will be her and her people’s salvation, indicating at best that the material can be affected by the discursive. In this we can witness the importance of Scheherazade’s literary legacy and the weight placed upon cultural production as a means for negotiating survival. I pick up the questions of legacy and survival in the upcoming chapter on Arab American uses of Scheherazade.

All goes according to Scheherazade’s plan: the night of her marriage, the King begins to “fondle” and “toy” with her (Haddawy 21 and Burton 24, respectively) but Scheherazade weeps. Her feminine gesture unsettles the King, who despite his otherwise unfeeling murder of every woman he beds, apparently cannot stand to see Scheherazade cry. Scheherazade uses conventions of feminine weakness to her advantage in this case; if she is to weep at the thought

¹⁵ Though Mamdani’s study takes place within a specifically US context, it remains salient on the global scale. Positive relationships with occupying powers and imperial states have certainly continued to define “good” Arab states (Jordan, for example) and bad ones (Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser).

of her sister, the King is to know how deeply she cares for her kin, similar to his own relationship to his brother. Second, it puts Scheherazade in the position of needing care from the King, and he is thus less inclined to suspect her cunning in the face of her display of tenderness, possibly interpreted as weakness. When he inquires as to her injury, she explains that she hopes to see her beloved sister before daybreak. Shahryar sends for Dinarzad, who waits under the conjugal bed (at the foot of the couch for Burton) for the couple to consummate their marriage. When their “business” is concluded, Dinarzad prompts Scheherazade for a story. In Haddawy, the exchange is as follows:

Then Dinarzad cleared her throat and said, “Sister, if you are not asleep, tell us one of your lovely little tales to while away the night, before I bid you good-bye at daybreak, for I don’t know what will happen to you tomorrow.” Shahrazad turned to King Shahryar and said, “May I have your permission to tell a story?” He replied, “Yes,” and Shahrazad was very happy and said, “Listen”: (21)

Burton relays it slightly differently, but with important ramifications for the scope of Scheherazade’s power:

But when it was midnight Scheherazade awoke and signalled [sic] to her sister Dunyazad who sat up and said, “Allah upon thee, O my sister, recite to us some new story, delightful and delectable wherewith to while away the waking hours of our latter night.” “With joy and goodly gree,” answered Scheherazade, “if this pious and auspicious King permit me.” “Tell on,” quoth the King who chanced to be sleepless and restless and therefore was pleased with the prospect of hearing her story. So Scheherazade rejoiced; and thus, on the first night of the Thousand Nights and a Night, she began with the... (24).

First, in both scenarios, it is crucial for Dinarzad to prompt Scheherazade’s story. This allows Scheherazade impress upon the King that she is not calculating the purpose or effect of the story. She is simply complying with her sister’s request, one she will only comply with at the permission of the King, implying her submission to his authority. In the Haddawy, Dinarzad is a trusted agent. She awaits and prompts Scheherazade at the appropriate moment, and she will continue to do so throughout the collection. Meanwhile, Burton’s translation takes some of that

trust and agency from Dinarzad and places it back within the control of Scheherazade, adding to her depiction as calculating. The content of Dinarzad's request is also telling: in Haddawy, she manipulates the King in the same manner Scheherazade does earlier, by invoking the King's tendency for violence. He will allow this small grace because Scheherazade's fate is still "death at dawn." Instead of being a distraction for the King's restlessness in Burton, in Haddawy, the King is already obliged to comply with Dinarzad's request, and we know he is likely to do so, given that he allowed her to come to the palace chambers at all.

I want to insist on this particular difference between Burton and Haddawy's description of the genesis of storytelling because Dinarzad and Scheherazade's cunning in the Haddawy makes a strong case for Scheherazade's repeated invocation by other authors; she chooses her words carefully and wields them to the most effect whenever possible. This will reoccur in the segments between stories, where the choice of language reveals Scheherazade's deliberate citation of the King's violence as one reason why her story is always urgent, always the matter and subject of that night and through to the following morning. Haddawy's translation underscores the significance and power of literature for affecting Scheherazade's survival. On the other hand, the Burton ascribes Scheherazade's fate partially to happenstance: the King happens to be tired and happens to be interested in hearing a tale. While this is more likely in line with the seemingly arbitrary nature of state violence, it does disservice the foresight of the heroines of *the Nights*.¹⁶

At the end of that first night, Scheherazade falls silent at a crucial moment, leaving the King's curiosity piqued. Dinarzad compliments her sister on her strange story, and Scheherazade

¹⁶ In this chapter, I use state violence merely as a short hand for the punitive branch of King Shahryar's kingdom, in which Scheherazade, if she fails to entertain or enchant the King at any moment, will be subject to beheading, as the other virgin wives before her. The threat of her murder provides the narrative tension in the frame story and builds anticipation between segments of the other stories within the collection.

promises that she can tell something even better the following night, if the King spares her life. The King is curious, so he agrees to let her live until he hears the conclusion of the story from the first night. But naturally, Dinarzad requests a second, and the cycle begins again. In Haddawy, Scheherazade's silence is described as "But morning overtook Scheherazade, and she lapsed into silence" (23). In Burton, "Scheherazade perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say" (29). Since these lines are repeated in almost every passage between nights, they become part of the fabric of the story, and what might be a minor difference becomes instead thematic. The slight difference in language here is important as it explicitly reveals the degree of calculation to which Scheherazade aspires and reminds us of her precarity. In this instance, Burton's translation reveals the extent and limits of Scheherazade's power more readily than Haddawy's: she may indeed be negotiating and strategizing within the parameters of the state, but let us not forget that the King could kill her at any moment. Scheherazade certainly never forgets. Though not in every passage between tales, she repeatedly notes her precarity, promising stories only if the King spares her life or lets her live. In the Haddawy translation, Scheherazade silence is brought on by the morning, with no foreboding mention of her limited agency.

Description of Scheherazade fades significantly as *the Nights* move along. She lapses into silence at the dawn with promises of wonder when she reemerges at night. As the collection goes on, Dinarzad continues to prompt her to begin storytelling, and Shahryar becomes more lax in his desire to see her dead. He notes that he will extend her life by a night, a month, even two months so long as he gets to hear the rest of her tales (Haddawy 67, 75). At the conclusion of the Haddawy translation, a mere two hundred and seventy one nights later, the following postscript informs us of Scheherazade's fate: "Tradition has it that in the course of time, Scheherazade bore

Shahryar three children and that, having learned to trust and love her, he spared her life and kept her as his queen” (518). How or when this pardon occurs is relatively unknown. We can estimate Scheherazade has been with the King for at least twenty-seven months, since she has borne three children, possibly longer, if she did not bear them back-to-back. We do not know if the pardon comes before or after her childbearing, so that we can imagine her telling tales while suckling an infant or even during or after her labor.

Not to be undone in imagining, the Burton translation offers a fully rendered description of her fate. Here, Scheherazade requests a pardon from the King, but not on her behalf. Instead, she frames the request on behalf of her three sons “one walking, one crawling, one sucking” (Vol 10 54). In Burton’s translation, Scheherazade does not want to abandon her sons. The King admits he had already pardoned her, before the birth of any of her children because of her exceptionality: “her like is not found in the Land” (55). After her pardon, Scheherazade reminds the King of the treacherous and calamitous lives revealed in her tales. In doing so, she demonstrates to him both that his experiences are not the worst in human existence, nor are his actions the most objectionable. Her stories, which often ended in absolution of the character’s sins through religious faith, allow the King to seek his own pardon with Allah and his faith returns. The story then goes one step further and Scheherazade’s sister, Dinarzad, marries the King’s brother, Shahzaman, who undergoes a similar transformation and reconciliation of faith. Since Scheherazade cannot bear to be separated from her sister, Shahzaman gives his Kingdom to Scheherazade’s father, the vizier, and moves into his brother’s palace. Though Scheherazade’s initial disobedience against her father may have troubled her performance of dutiful patriarchal femininity, the King’s bestowal of a castle and new rank to Scheherazade’s father enables her to

recover the devotion to patriarchal order—her success becomes a literal crown for her father's estate.

Even in the minimalist rendering of Scheherazade's future in the Haddawy version, Scheherazade succeeds in transforming the King and the Kingdom. She saves the King from his own loneliness and misery, she saves virginal maidens who would have fallen prey to the King's revenge, and she saves the Kingdom from the death of its citizens and the discontent those citizens felt toward the King after the discovery of his first wife's infidelity. I have argued that she does through an expression of exceptional Arab femininity: elite, educated, not sexually driven, patient, faithful, and importantly, putting the needs of her King and her country ahead of her safety and survival. It is her femininity, so different from that of the King's first wife and the jinni's bride, which eventually redeems the King. He is able to trust women because Scheherazade is an exceptional woman. Even her cunning is in service of a greater good. Even in Scheherazade's final mentions in *the Nights*, she offers the King and his Kingdom its future through the birth of three (!) heirs.

As our examination of her has revealed, in both texts, Scheherazade is exceptional in her femininity, achieved partially through her socioeconomic status. She is exceptional due to her supplementation of sexual seduction with seductive stories. She is exceptional in her duty to her nation. She is exceptional for returning the King to morality. She ensures the good will of her husband, her family, and the nation on the whole through her redemptive narratological acts. In Burton's edition especially, she is also a devoted mother. Scheherazade succeeds as a caring wife, a caring mother, and *in so doing*—a caring queen—the opposite of the two other women foregrounded in the frame story, the previous queen and the jinni's bride. She is then not only exceptional, but also exceptional in a particularly feminine way. We learn from Scheherazade

that exceptional femininity, appropriate and laudable femininity is not only elite, heterosexual, and maternal, it is also national.

I suggest that Scheherazade's exceptional femininity buoys Scheherazade's popularity during the time of her translation into the English-speaking world. Burton's translation particularly appeals to the Orientalist sentiment of the mid-to-late 1800s and early 1900s. Now, I want to contemplate how Scheherazade in particular embodied the fascination with the East and mitigated colonial tension around the Arab body with her femininity. She does this not only in the moment of her emergence in the West, but again and again, each time she appears in the work of Arab American authors. Her ability to balance this negotiation in the European context foregrounds her ability to do so in the context of the United States. This is especially enabled through the nature of print culture during the time of Burton's translation, wherein the reading public of the US was heavily inundated with the British and European print cultures. The time of Scheherazade's translation to English coincides with rise of the British Empire through colonial endeavors in the East and North Africa as well as with the emergence of Victorian morality. As Said notes, the fascination with *the Nights* and the characterization of the Arab world therein are part of the colonizing project. Orientalism created and permitted the East as a discreet object in need of guidance: moral, political, and economic. During this period of colonization and imperial conquest, the Western European nations (with a particular interest in England and France as dominant colonial powers in the Middle East) produced travelogues, scholarly journals, photographs, scientific findings, literature and more to document and penetrate the mysteries of the lush orient. This, of course, is part of the fascination with *the Nights*—their exhaustive spectacularization of the barbarity and sensuality of the East. Said documents this phenomenon extensively in *Orientalism*, citing the problematic framing of the East by the West through

discourses of knowledge. Earlier, I noted some moments that pertained to the Orientalist context of the text's reception: the invocation of a harem, the sexual lasciviousness of the Arab world, Burton's thinly disguised racial politics. These discourses ultimately provide the fodder for why the East needed the West to rule it.

But what of *the Nights* interaction with another ideological force in this moment, namely, the advent of Victorian moral codes? It is in relation to the Victorian that Scheherazade's femininity becomes crucial to the Orientalist project. Numerous literary and historical scholars have noted the circulation and formulation of gender typographies in the Victorian Era, notably, Mary Poovey in *Uneven Developments*, Kimberly Reynolds and Nicola Humble in *Victorian Heroines*, and Nina Auerbach in *Woman and the Demon*. Each of these texts examines the confluence of numerous factors alongside gender: not the least of which are sexuality, class, and religiosity. Often holding up and troubling "fallen women" alongside "exalted angels," these authors articulated the following as the hegemonic ideals of womanhood: piety, purity, domesticity, subservience.¹⁷ These feminine traits were valorized not only because they created a desirable feminine subject, but because her desirability was rooted in what she offered by way of her femininity: piety shone through her to domesticate men's savagery and lust and return him to the faith. Purity ensured her piety and good faith, a marker of her control of bodily deviance and the elevation of her spirituality. Domesticity achieved not only a suitable home, but affected the public sphere. Because the domestic or private sphere was understood as formative for masculine subjects and children who would emerge in the public, a woman's domesticity reflected familial, social, and national interests. Certainly, critics can attest to this, but more importantly, Victorians attested to it themselves. Ladies etiquette and education guides abounded during this period, for

¹⁷Barbara Welter offers a similar canon of femininity in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), 151-174.

example, *The Women of England* by Sarah Stickney Ellis. Four of the chapters detail domestic habits while the introduction stresses “the operation of religious principles on the heart” (36). Two chapters detail humility and modesty—both as social features as well necessary elements of physical presentation.

This is all to say, femininity was a significant locus of interest as translations of *the Nights* proliferated in numerous languages. As Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*, Susan Meyer’s *Imperialism at Home*, and Lata Mani’s *Contentious Traditions* document, the metaphor of the East was highly gendered and sexualized, and the female body, the feminine body oft cited as the most demonstrative figure of the East’s savagery and perversity.¹⁸ This body in Orientalist configurations was simultaneously oppressed and vociferous in its carnal needs, fertile in its womb, and wilting in the dry heat of the desert. Despite, too, its numerous contributions to the maths and sciences, the East was represented as moving so slowly intellectually that its progress actually moved backward rather than forward: tents, camels, clay and swords, over houses, wheels, mortar and shells.

Scheherazade straddles these two spheres of culture, these two models of femininity—educated, she resists the blankness attributed to Oriental women. High ranking in class, she offers the potential of the Arab body when brought out of the desert and into the salon. Her intellect is tempered by her subservience to the King, her manipulation of him slight given the scope of his actual power. Her piety tempers her sexuality, too, making it appropriately directed toward one man alone, not indiscriminately distributed. She is domestic, appearing only in the homes of her father and husband. Her domesticity extended to the realm of childrearing, her fertile body giving way to three children in succession. Scheherazade clearly also influences the

¹⁸ This is obviously still the case, where debates rage on regarding the question of hijab and its representation of the larger concerns regarding Islam.

subjectivity of her husband, guiding him morally back to religion, which in turn affects his management of the nation. In short, Scheherazade embodies the tropes of Victorian femininity, but her tales of exotic locations and shocking characters, alongside the deeply felt errors of her faith maintains her as an Other. Scheherazade serves both as the tale of how Arabs could become cultured, while demonstrating that they can never quite arrive at civilization. She offers an open window for Westerns to desire the Arab body, to see its peculiarity, and finally, to judge it accordingly. As a female figure of indeterminate Eastern descent, Scheherazade symbolizes Arab nations, and her embodiment in the literary text becomes the grounds for the negotiation of power between the “East” and the “West.” She is at once the fantasy of the East’s self-sufficiency and a parable of its cultural perversion. The perversion both repellent and attractive, justifies the logics of imperialism.

It is no wonder then, that Western cultural production proliferated around Scheherazade and *the Nights*. Even a partial biography reveals her popularity: she appears in the fiction of Poe, the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, the critical essays of Borges. These are only three of hundreds of works that actively feature *the Nights* or its heroine by name, not to mention those texts that are influenced by the English and French translations of the texts.¹⁹ With *the Nights* on the tongue of the colonizer and circulating through Orientalist ideology as the vision of the Arab world, it is not hard to imagine that in time, “the Arab world” would seek to reclaim her. Or at the very least, draw on her prestige as an icon of Arab literary production.

In fact, part of Haddawy’s intention in the translation of *the Nights* is the restoration of its greatness to an Arab literary canon. He specifically cites the damage done to the collection by translators such as Burton in his introductory notes (xxvii-xxviii), arguing that Burton’s is more

¹⁹ For more on its circulation in British literature see: Caracciolo et al. For more of *the Nights* in the broad sense, see: Yamanaka and Nishio, Gauch, Heller-Roazen, Makdisi and Nussbaum, Marzolph, Ghazoul.

of an entertaining concoction rather than a faithful rendition. Haddawy instead wants to return to *the Nights* in the most authentic version he argues exists, and in doing so, uncouple the text from its non-literary uses. By non-literary, I mean that Haddawy sees his translation as an attempt to stand outside of time, out of cultural and political context, producing something that merely replicates the effect of the original stories on a contemporary audience (xxx). What Haddawy hopes to offer, perhaps naively, is neutrality (xxxiii). This is an impossible task; if Haddawy is attempting to create a text that reads to a contemporary audience the way that the text first affected its thirteenth century listeners, he does so with assumptions about what a contemporary audience would likely expect and what he expects of them. For example, he chooses to ignore the rhymed prose of the original because he feels it will sound too artificial to the English ear (xxxiii). The notion that rhyming poetics have become jarring or artificial is certainly a commentary on current aesthetic practices that are not themselves without much political and cultural debate. Haddawy's attempt at neutrality makes sense within the time period of the translation's production, the 1990s; in scholarship on the 90s, authors like Jodi Melamed noted the shift away from poetics and into fiction—the dominant currency of English literature in the US and other Anglophone nations (15-16). Moreover, even as Haddawy lists numerous other translations in his introduction, pointing out their successes and faults, he is keenly aware that his rendition will be read in reference and in relation to others. He cannot help but respond to the lurid variations he cites. As such, when we read the Haddawy translation, we read it necessarily in the light of the Orientalist shadow Burton casts; we must also read it the context of its historical moment in literature and literary studies.

If we place the translation in the time and place of its publication, 1990 by Norton Company in New York, we become aware that it emerges at the heart of the canon wars in

American literature, a period where questions of aesthetics and politics were central to the inclusion of minority and racialized group in the American literary canon, and into American cultural citizenship. In Melamed's work, she offers three modes for reading and understanding race and race literature in US literary studies: racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberal multiculturalism. In the first, literature by writers of colors was only tangibly recognized as within the US canon by its proximity to whiteness and white aesthetics. In liberal multiculturalism, writers of color were understood to be directly producing culture and aesthetics in their texts, and the canon adopted a pluralistic approach wherein ethnic writing was indeed legible, but only as ethnic writing, juxtaposed and outside of the white or dominant literary canon. At the same time however, those same writers of color, particularly women and lesbian writers (e.g. in *This Bridge Called My Back*), understood cultural production as a site of resistance and material struggle, a discursive space in which new modes of knowledge and resistance could be produced and disseminated. Melamed argues that the canon wars, that is, the debates about what constituted literary excellence—debates that considered formalism and aesthetics as often outside or oppositional to content that dealt directly with race, racism, and power, enabled the first meaning to eclipse the second. That is, liberal multiculturalism overtook critical multiculturalism and resulted in a pluralistic literary curriculum—a diverse set of offering that in many ways reified a separate but equal legacy of literary production. We can see the reverberations of both the canon wars and liberal multiculturalism in Haddawy's translation. He seeks to simultaneously strip *the Nights* of their Orientalizing citational legacy and at the same time, in the formal and purely aesthetic rendition of *the Nights* he alleges, uphold Arab cultural production as worthy of canon—as texts (and peoples) of literary merit as opposed to subjects of spectacle and denigration.

In the third scheme Melamed offers, neoliberal multiculturalism, enacts a deracialization and depoliticization of literature to a startling degree, wherein texts are expected to be above, without, or blind to race entirely, wherein struggles around racism or representation or material circumstance are in the past, unsuited for contemporary literary consumption. Haddawy's text seems caught between liberal and neoliberal multicultural aesthetic politics. He offers an Arab culture and Arab peoples attempting to approach liberal multicultural representation in order to reap the minor benefits of belonging to a literary canon within the US. Simultaneously, his introduction indicates his desire to present a version of *the Nights* that is merely aesthetic—one that is not concerned with racial representation so much as faithful translation. Thus, what changes from Burton to Haddawy is the tenor of the collection at large: gone are the voyeuristic scenes of copulation, gone are the lurid details of deception. Haddawy's facts are "just the facts," whitewashed so completely as to render the language itself, while certainly beautiful, lacking the lyricism and musicality of the Arabic language, especially its spoken variety. And significantly, what my comparison evidences, is that the Scheherazade of Haddawy's translation is surprisingly in line with the Scheherazade of Burton. Scheherazade remains, in both, serving of family, husband, and Kingdom. She remains faithful and feminine and educated. She has varying access to power, never complete, always under threat of retribution. Scheherazade was in Burton, and again in Haddawy, a perfect consumable figure, poised to offer a glimpse into the East (Burton) while maintaining its respectable face (Haddawy).

Thus, what Haddawy perhaps tries to achieve is a victory on both fronts of liberal and neoliberal multiculturalism: indeed, it is a multicultural canonical text, but it is also borne of great aesthetic traditions. In this sense, the emergence of Scheherazade in the work of Arab and Arab American writers is neither only a response to Orientalism, nor only the continuation of a

literary tradition. It is always both a response and a continuation; as such, the use of Scheherazade is necessarily ambivalent in its capacity to unseat Orientalism and troubled in its attempts at canonization and authenticity.

If we consider the three major thrusts of this chapter in concert: the exceptional femininity of Scheherazade in both translations, the proximity of Scheherazade to whiteness and Victorian morality in the Burton translation, and the racially loaded implications of her translation by Haddawy, we can piece together an understanding of Arab femininity as a significant site of anxiety about, and production of, race for Arab and Arab American writers. Scheherazade offers one example of how racial anxieties are mitigated and enacted on femininity in Arab cultural production, both by Orientalist renditions of the culture, and by those responding to Orientalism in their work. The capacity of Arab writers for inclusion in a great literatures canon hinges on *the Nights*—but not *the Nights* as merely an aesthetic text, but *the Nights* as an allegorical text for the capacity of Arab culture to be included amidst the civilized peoples. The burden of representing Arab culture as worthy or failed falls squarely, and I think not incidentally, on Scheherazade's feminine shoulders. We see in *the Nights* and its retellings the continual positioning of femininity and women's bodies more generally as discursive spaces where power—be it colonial or postcolonial, are negotiated. What Scheherazade further offers is the means by which to see that femininity is not merely a question of gendered expectations but that with those gendered expectations come heteronormative and nationalist ones. Her femininity succeeds due in no small part because of its patriotic uses of heterosexual coupling and reproduction. Whether or not her feminine exceptionality will serve her in the context within which Haddawy revives her, within which Arab American writers re-present her, is the subject of the following chapter.

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Chapter 3

Scheherazade and the Limits of Inclusive Politics in Arab American Literature

In the previous chapter, I charted Scheherazade's travel in translations of *the Thousand and One Nights*. I compared and contrasted two translations of the text into English (Richard Burton, 1850; Hussein Haddawy 1990) to understand how she became an icon of the East for the Western world, and how her femininity was a negotiation of colonial tension. The depiction of Scheherazade by Burton and Hussein, and the subsequent retellings of her by Arab American writers symbolize struggles around representation and cultural citizenship for Arab American subjects. In this chapter, I turn to Scheherazade's passage across the Atlantic and to her appearance in Arab American culture. Scheherazade is a site of contested meaning for Arab American writers. Using Scheherazade to respond to both anti-Arab racism in the United States and Western Orientalism at large, *Scheherazade's Legacy* (2004) edited by Susan M. Darraj, *Emails From Scheherazad* (2003) by Mohja Kahf, and *The Night Counter* (2009) by Alia Yunis, deployed Scheherazade to create an "authentic" Arab subject who could belong to the U.S. nation.²⁰ Yet in doing so, they produced new forms of exclusion and marginality among Arab Americans. I argue that each text uses Scheherazade's normative femininity and sexuality to negotiate inclusion, but only for subjects whose identities are constituted by a similar

²⁰ Since "Scheherazade" is transliterated, it is open to multiple spellings. I use "Scheherazade" unless I am directly quoting a source with another spelling.

normativity. I demonstrate how the displacement of non-normative Arab bodies in the texts relies on a long-standing pattern in which minority groups seeking acceptance in the U.S. do so through the colonial and racial regimentation of gender and sexuality. Centering Arab American representational strategies, I expose the limits of an inclusive paradigm for both the discursive and material lives of diasporic Arabs.

In the US, Scheherazade is the fodder for a variety of generic re-presentations: a beauty pageant in Riverside, California; a television mini-series on BBC and ABC; a children's book published by Simon and Schuster.²¹ Despite her dominance, only two texts have analyzed Scheherazade's deployment as a rhetorical device. In *Arab-American Women's Writing and Performance* (2011), Somaya Sami Sabry studies Scheherazade's appearance in the work of diasporic artists. She argues that cultural producers confront and challenge essentialized racial understanding of Arab identity through rewriting and performing Scheherazade, ultimately contesting the configuration of Arabs in the post-9/11 context. In *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (2007), Suzanne Gauch questions Scheherazade's feminist capacity by examining the work of Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian artists. She highlights Scheherazade's narratorial strength to give voice to the struggles for liberation that women face in those regions. Like Sabry and Gauch, I foreground feminist and critical ethnic studies critiques in reading Scheherazade as a cultural production. However, my aim is to articulate the means by which gendered and racial ideologies formulate, enable, and undermine the other. I argue that the trouble and ambivalence experienced in the manifestation of Scheherazade, which they suggest is primarily structured around race, must also take into account her complex femininity and thereby sexuality, which is always already sutured to her

²¹ The Annual "Queen Scheherazade Beauty Pageant," Riverside, CA County Fair; *Arabian Nights* (2000), BBC; *The Storyteller's Daughter* (2002), Cameron Dokey.

racial and/or ethnic status. I foreground a queer of color and feminist intersectional approach in order to understand *why and how* Scheherazade emerges often in the work of Arab American authors, especially at the turn of the 21st century.

Scheherazade's appearance in the work of Arab American writers in the early 2000s is reasonable: first, she appeared in two celebrated Arab-authored texts prior. Taha Hussein's *Dreams of Scheherazade* was published in Arabic in 1943 and translated into English in 1974. Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* was published in Arabic in 1981 and translated into English in 1995. Both writers and their works became canonical in the Arab literary scene; their dates of publication and subsequent translations approximately 20-25 years prior to the appearance of Scheherazade in Arab American work suggests that the Arabic texts were available to the Arab American authors as they came of age of writers or began to publish, whether they read Arabic or not.

Second, Scheherazade arrived in the wake of 1990s multiculturalism. The '90s witnessed a flourishing of the Arab American literary scene in the form of numerous collections that sought to establish Arab Americans through the creation of a minor literature. These anthologies, like *Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry*, and *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* highlighted poetry as heritage for Arab writers while attempting to situate Arabs alongside other minority groups in the US. That Arab American canonization would occur as the US attempted to "deal" with its ethnic problem seems obvious, as does the coincidence of these attempts with increasing fallout from the Arab Israeli conflict and the first Gulf War. In short, Arab American writers, like other minority ethnics, became legible through the marketing of themselves as hyphenated Americans, while previous generations, for example,

Khalil Gibran and the Mahjar group were ambiguous in their ethnic assignment, partially because of their proximity to migration, and partially because of their own ambivalence toward Americanization (Berman 189). As Arab Americans struggled to craft their image, Scheherazade offers a connection to an Arab literary history while opening space, as a framing device, for more stories.

Finally, the Arab American texts that feature Scheherazade explicitly were published in and after 2001.²² In the face of Arab Americans' simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility, Scheherazade offered respectability through access to an Arab literary genealogy and through her successful negotiation of Orientalism. She invites the American reader into the difference of the East with none of its threats. However, Scheherazade's exceptionality is inextricably linked to her gender and sexuality. Her normativity along these lines is crucial post 9/11, an event that rendered the Arab body queer in a more explicit way than it had been rendered before. While Edward Said noted as early as 1978 that Arabs and the Arab world functioned as "a tableau of queerness" against which European normativity was defined, the many graphic sexual threats issued to Bin Laden after 9/11 and to Saddam Hussein in the second gulf war, and the use of sexual torture against the bodies held captive in Abu Ghraib demonstrate how Arab bodies invoke a sexually queer ontology (103).²³ More than these incidents, the generic Western discourse on Arab love and sexuality renders it simultaneously perverse and homophobic. For example, the notion that many Arabs, through their relationship to Islam, believe in polygamy, in heaven awarding virgins, and in women covering themselves, insinuate a non-Western and

²² In June 2001, Moroccan feminist Fatema Mernissi released *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different harems*. I do not include her in my close readings because Mernissi situates herself as an Arab author primarily, rather than an Arab American one. For similar reasons, I will not be commenting on Joumana Haddad's *I Killed Scheherazade* (2010).

²³ For more on how these events queered Arabs, see: Jasbir Puar; *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007); Puar and Amit Rai; Rai "Monster, Terrorist, Fag;" Trishala Deb and Rafael Muftis. "Smoke and Mirrors."

thereby non-normative practice of sexuality in so-called Arab culture. The men are insatiable sexual addicts whose sexuality is repressed, and the women's sexuality is so repressed that women's bodies disappear in public. Meanwhile, the homosociality of Arab culture along with the sometimes real, sometimes perceived homoeroticism of sex and gender segregated spaces further distance "Arab" culture from "American" or "Western" which understands itself as sexually free and primarily heterosocial. My use of queer in this chapter thus takes two forms: as a designation of the means by which Arab and Arab American culture performs sex and gender non-normatively with regard to Western discourses and as a designation of figures in the literature that actively engage in a non-heterosexual practices which may or may not attach to Western identity categories like lesbian or gay. I argue, then, that recourse to Scheherazade, in part, an attempt to mobilize her dually constituted femininity and normative sexuality to undermine the increased queerness of the Arab body in the American public especially since 9/11.

While many texts hail *Nights*, I offer the three above for several reasons. First, each features her explicitly, as opposed to generically referencing *Nights*. Second, they are written in English and by authors understood as "Arab American" writers, via both their location in the US and the contexts from which their texts emerge. Third, they encapsulate the generic diversity of Arab American literature, including autobiography, poetry, and fiction respectively. They are thus representative in broad strokes of some of the larger themes of the Arab American literary project. For example, her capacity for generic diversity is very much in line with the process of Arab American literary canon formation, while the blatant threat to Arab American life after 9/11 brings "narrative as life-saving" to the foreground. These themes, alongside her femininity, and her successful negotiation of Orientalism with regard to US racial and sexual citizenship,

ultimately provide the explanation for her popularity. Below, I look to each text to explicate: how *Legacy* and the project of anthologization attends to Arab American racialization while erasing queer sexuality; how *Emails* resists Orientalist representations of Arab and Muslim American women as sexually repressed while reifying an Orientalist treatment of Arab masculinity and queer sexual difference; and finally, how *Night Counter* concretely raises the question of queer sexuality but cannot fully recognize or include queer subjects while it wrestles with Arab American racialization and the legacies of Orientalism.

Anthology, Assimilation, and Authenticity

Scheherazade's Legacy is edited by Susan Muaddi Darraj and profiles the writerly lives of twelve Arab American women. The women, like Lisa Suhair Majaj, Etel Ednan, and Diana Abu-Jaber, are recognizable names in Arab American literature, and their projects include novels, poetry collections, and memoirs. *Legacy* includes a preface by Barbara Nimri Aziz, and an introduction by the editor. These two essays touch most on Scheherazade and are the focus of my analysis. Scheherazade is used to argue for the similarity of Arab Americans to other ethnic communities and as a means of substantiating our belonging to an American literary tradition and to the US nation. She allows the authors to authenticate themselves as Arab speakers and to respond to anti-Arab and Orientalist sentiment in the US. In *Legacy*, Scheherazade's capacity to represent Arab American identity is sutured to her capacity to preside over a collection of stories. Since the anthology is a collection of stories, the Scheherazadian frame seems like the obvious choice. So the question first is perhaps not why Scheherazade, though we will return to that point, but why anthologies? What is to be gained or lost in organizing an anthology around an ethnic identity? Arguably, the anthology contributes to the shaping and articulation of a literary field. In my view, *Legacy* configures a racial identity through canonization and then, as it

responds to racism and Orientalism, forecloses non-normative subjects from Arab American identity in order to create an Arab that can be absorbed into the dominant American identity.

Legacy aligns strongly with the traditional ethnic canon. We can see this alignment in the publishing press for the anthology, Praeger, a company committed to “Multiple cultures. Multiple tongues. Multiple ways of viewing the world. Praeger opens the window to the rich world around us.” Praeger and the anthology it underwrites, adopt a liberal multicultural argument criticized by literary scholars like David Palumbo Liu and queer of color theorists like Rodrick Ferguson. *The Ethnic Canon*, Liu’s collection, argues against the additive nature of diversity programming in higher education while detailing the means by which that inclusion has and has not affected minority subject’s inclusion in the democratic process. In *Aberrations in Black*, Ferguson examines how authors use literature to represent the subject’s participation in national ideals of equality, unity, and diversity. The imagining of a fully included subject by minoritarian authors’ signals an agreement with the ideals they mimic. Literature can thus deliver what the nation cannot: belonging. The pursuit of an Arab literary legacy is thus also the pursuit of Arab inclusion in the nation whose ideals their writing mimics. To be a good writer is to be a good citizen.

This is most readily illustrated in Aziz’s preface remarks on becoming a writer. In order to speak for oneself, Aziz suggests a writer must “master the language. Yet, craft is not the foremost issue. Honesty and intimacy, often accompanied by some pain, face us when we really examine our truths” (xii). The remark regarding mastery suggests the anthology may have a hand in creating the identity it represents but it also has a hand in evaluating that identity. By anthologizing a certain group of writers or kinds of writing, those writers and texts are validated as valuable contributions and contributors to the field of literature. As Ferguson demonstrates, to

master literary aesthetic practices is repeatedly a hallmark of American belonging (25). Each author who appears in the anthology does so with degrees of critical acclaim, cementing the Arab voice as capable. Aziz confirms their virtuosity when she articulates that it is through “Art, not nostalgia” that she is reached by authors like Naomi Shihab Nye (xiii).

Far from objective, this emphasis on aesthetic beauty indicates a concern with being understood as capable writers, assimilable subjects, or modern citizens. This struggle is especially verdant for Arab American women; in mainstream representations, “Arab” culture has only three kinds of women: oppressed veiled victims, militant political terrorists, and exotic harem dwellers. None are considered credible speakers. Indeed, Amira Jarmakani argues in “Arab American Feminisms: Articulating the Politics of Invisibility,” that writing itself requires a subjectivity that Western culture has deemed impossible for Arab and Muslim women (235). David Lloyd has further explicated the ways aestheticism becomes racialized and entangled with ethics in “Race under Representation.” In order to be anthologized and canonized, one must produce work that is familiar to audiences insofar as it adheres to the aesthetic guidelines they accept. Recognition relies on similarity and emulation of normative ways of writing oneself. The subject’s ability to measure up aesthetically is also a discussion of the subject’s modernity, and her civilization. Ultimately, then, the efforts of the subject toward anthology and canon are no less than an assertion of the subject’s humanity (65-66).

The anthologizers are seemingly aware of Jarmakani’s and Lloyd’s analyses; Aziz names three tasks for the Arab American writer: respond to stereotypes, overcome her colonization, and represent the self honestly (xii). According to Aziz, Arab American writers may not have matured to the third step in that process, though they are on track to do so. They may still struggle to “expose little of the *real* conflicts we face” (emphasis added); they are stuck figuring

how “to tolerate, to cleanse our image, to move on” (xv). She calls here for an “intimate” experience of Arab American life that is not entirely taken with politicization or assimilation/incorporation into American society. This is indicated by her use of “real” which suggests that what is currently written is not “real,” or dissociates the “real” from the political. Yet, she offers Suheir Hammad’s work as exemplary in its realness, positioning Hammad as a writer with “face-to-face maturity of what it is to be Arab and American” via her poem “first writing since,” which conveys Hammad’s fear for her brothers and the men that look like them after 9/11.²⁴ The piece draws attention to the moment where the personal (Hammad’s brothers), and the political (the discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the US) meet. Yet Aziz “elevates” Hammad out of the political by arguing that Hammad’s concern for her brother is a universal human response. Aziz thus pushes for a more relatable and palatable experience of Arab Americanness that is not tied to critiques of the foster nation, neither built on connectivity to the nation of origin nor politicization per se. A writer’s trajectory is also the anthology’s challenge: to forge the “Arab American Woman Writer” out of the fire. But who is this woman? Who is the inheritor of *Scheherazade’s Legacy*?

Enter here the editor, Muaddi Darraj. Her introduction explicates the title and provides a second frame story for the pieces in the collection. The following passage indicates Muaddi Darraj’s concern for her foremother and her desire to recuperate her from Orientalist imaginings: “Scheherazade, the heroine of the *The Thousand and One Nights*, had suffered terribly at the hands of the translators...Scheherazade became nothing more than a harem sex kitten... reduced to an erotic, shallow, sex-crazed body behind a veil” (1). Thus, the misrepresentation of Scheherazade and minimization of Arab women is one legacy to which the anthology refers, one

²⁴ Surprisingly, this poem does not appear in the anthology.

Muaddi Darraj wants to repair.²⁵ We inherit with Scheherazade a Western public that reads Arab women automatically as victims and against which they must struggle to articulate themselves. Muaddi Darraj goes on to say: “What I needed was the voice of an Arab woman to speak the truth without the filter of translation, without the influence of others sliding in to corrupt her story, because her story was possibly mine as well” (2).

As in Aziz, the language of authenticity deployed here is troubling, as is the suggestion that any speech could be unmediated. Muaddi Darraj suggests Scheherazade is lost in translation and insinuates that by speaking “for themselves,” the authors can offer a true version of Arab American womanhood. The singularity of Scheherazade’s story as representative of Arab American women undermines the diversity the anthology attempts while simultaneously seeking to build an authentic Arab American voice. Muaddi Darraj eventually finds that voice in a novel by Ahdaf Soueif. She claims Soueif offered her an insider view and led her to find other Arab American writers, affecting a genealogy of authorship necessary in the production of canon. From that journey comes *Legacy*. Like Scheherazade, the authors here are “inspired by their Eastern connections, their writing and their themes touch a global audience while reclaiming Scheherazade as a woman who wove a marvelous tapestry of tales” (3). Muaddi Darraj flushes out the parameters of the Arab American voice by pointing out themes of convergence across her relatively small sample group of Arab American women writers. These themes include: consideration of Scheherazade as “common ancestor, the storyteller who saved a nation and healed its king”; matrilineal and patrilineal connectivity; tracing affiliation with Arab culture through language and custom; and the question of Palestine (3). If anthologization is indeed

²⁵ Ironically, Darraj is also partially responsible for misrepresenting Scheherazade, attributing two of the most Orientalist stories, Aladdin and Ali Baba, added by Antoine Galland and Hanna Diab in 1709, to Scheherazade’s narration.

identification, then this list effectively produces some of the attributes of Arab culture for Arab American subjects.

We begin to understand what Scheherazade and her anthologies *do* for the Arab American subject. The anthology and its canonization connect its subject to the nation. If recognized as a national citizen, the subject can then access the material as well as discursive benefits of citizenship. Without such access, the Arab American subject becomes an object, treated outside the realm of law, or made expendable.²⁶ Yet the process of anthologization renders that same subject still inferior to the “American” it tries to become. For Arab identity to become legible, it’s immediately juxtaposed with American, and named for its difference. In making the metaphor “Arabs are like Americans; Arabs can write like Americans” we immediately understand that the first group must render itself along the lines of the second, ceding the second’s superiority. The minority literature metaphor opens the way to assimilation.

The minority literature anthology is a curious place to make a claim about oneself, precisely because it necessitates multiple and varied voices at the same time that it commands unification of these voices. So the anthology has a difficult double task: present unity without eliding diversity. In this way, too, Scheherazade is a perfect medium, offering a collective framework to host multitudes. In *Legacy*, the literary genres and multiple authors underline the diversity of Arab culture that the collections attempts to establish, while the anthologization attempts to quantify and legitimize Arab American identity. This double process of difference and sameness is not unique to Arab American culture but rather symptomatic of immigrant identity; indeed, the hyphenization of minority groups simultaneously reveals their inclusion in American identity and the ways they are separate from it.

²⁶ For more on expendability, see Sherene Razack.

Scheherazade uniquely occupies this doubled position—an Arab who is genteel enough to be assimilable, yet exotic enough to represent Arabness as difference. She is, moreover, the original scholar, with vast archives of history from which to mediate the present. Finally, she produces a metaphorical and literal legacy—ensuring the propagation of her nation through birthing her children. In “Grandmothers, Grape Leaves, and Khalil Gibran: Writing Race in Anthologies of Arab American Literature,” Michelle Hartman shows how writers draw on race and racial discourse to articulate Arab American identity, paying particular attention to the use of symbols (177).²⁷ She suggests the emblem that foregrounds the anthology has symbolic relevance for the identity in place; in Hartmann’s case, grape leaves, grandmothers and Khalil Gibran; in our case, Scheherazade. *Legacy*, like other anthologies of ethnic writing, frames its articulation of identity around a racial discourse. By deconstructing the emblem, we can see their racial classification also entails the sexual. Scheherazade’s suitedness is based precisely in her fictional body’s capacity to make terrifying Arab men less terrifying, make “silenced” Arab women speak, and make little Arab children into little American ones. Starting with her virginity to her triumph of love at the end, Scheherazade’s power has not merely been about story telling.

Despite attention to how racism and sexism challenge “authentic” Arab American representation, *Legacy* takes for granted Arab American’s heterosexuality and implicitly excludes LGBTQ representation and bodies from its vision of Arab American identity. Many texts make a case that heterosexuality is one means of marking oneself as belonging to the dominant community.²⁸ In one example, *Queering the Color Line*, Siobhan B. Somerville argues

²⁷ There is another anthology that invokes Scheherazade, *Dinarzad’s Children* (2009) but I have not included in my analysis since it does not directly address Scheherazade throughout.

²⁸ Two contemporary examples analyze national the anxiety around raced bodies that do not perform heterosexuality: *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) by Jasbir Puar details the construction of the terrorist as a sexual deviant (homosexual, fag); *The Feeling of Kinship* (2010) by David L. Eng questions the significance of miscegenation in the historic sodomy case, *Garner vs. Texas* (they were an interracial

that 19th century discourses of race and sex underwrote one another. Normative sexuality was ascribed to white bodies while sexual deviance was ascribed to others. From Somerville, we learn that membership in the dominant class might not be accessed racially, but adopting appropriate stances on sexuality certainly doesn't hurt. This is especially important in the Arab context, since Arab culture has been represented, as noted above, as both queer and homophobic. As such, it is in need of redemption. We see the effects of this heteronormativity and heteronationalism within *Legacy*, both in the emphasis on familial modes of inheritance as well as in the literal silence of sexuality in the anthology. An idealized femininity and a idealized notion of family, argues Nadine Naber in *Arab America*, are components to a politics of cultural authenticity practiced by immigrant communities in an effort to maintain their cultural heritage in the face of annihilation in the West and at the same time, participate in whiteness and white middle class acceptability. I suggest, via Somerville and Naber, that heteronormativity, a politic of cultural authenticity, is also one means of marking oneself as a member of the dominant community.

In fact, I am not arguing for a politics of visibility here, that if the anthology featured a queer writer (which it does), or a writer who spoke explicitly to queerness that would be satisfactory. Rather, that in an otherwise thoughtful collection about the ramifications of gender, race, class, and nation on the lives of Arab American women, sexuality itself is absent—as though it is not a force that effects life, or that it is self evident. The silence around sexuality is a function of heteronormativity. One of the ways the Arab American voice is recuperated is in its

couple). Meanwhile, numerous queer scholars critique the marriage movement in LGBT politics as assimilationist to white, hegemonic paradigms of US citizenship. Cathy Cohen's 1997 "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens" remains resonant to indicate the similarities in the construction of racially and sexually marginal subjects as a reason for their coalition in politics.

assumed heterosexuality. If *Legacy* is about the creation of Arab American identity, the identity put forward is unmarked by sexuality, and thus defaults to the heterosexual.

The absence of queer subjects in multicultural and minority literature projects, like *Legacy*, that attempt to offer a composite and authentic vision of Arab Americans can result in the denial or abjection (intentional or otherwise) of those queer subjects. If they exist, they do not fit within the paradigm of authenticity being offered. Certainly, Scheherazade, with her piety, her nightly fornication with the King, her three sons, has no room in her boudoir for queer sex, especially in attempts to reclaim her after Burton's translation. For those more familiar with *Nights*, we remember Shahryar's queen before Scheherazade, who betrayed him with a black slave. Her betrayal was thus not only a question of marital fidelity, but also a question of racial fidelity. Consequently, Scheherazade's sexual purity is simultaneously about heteronormativity and racial purity. When deployed in anthologies that also are silent regarding the existence of queer Arab Americans, Scheherazade is not just a metaphor for the inclusion of Arabs in America, but a symbol that excludes queers from Arab identification. She demonstrates, then, the dangers of inclusion, and its ultimate failure. I contend that when arguing for inclusion amidst the American racism and Western Orientalism, the possibility for inclusion requires shifting the boundaries of acceptable subjects within the community, and makes a truly inclusive representation and politics near impossible.

Poetry and Passion

Emails from Scheherazad collects over fifty poems, produced over the course of twenty years in Mohja Kahf's writing career. The earliest was written in 1983 and the latest 2002; as such Kahf's poems both reflect the politicization of Arab American identity around the first Gulf War and what followed it, and challenges mainstream representations of Arabs by citing and

critiquing Orientalism. Like *Legacy*, *Emails* attempts to respond to anti-Arab Orientalist representations of Arab and Muslim women. Kahf's work effectively refuses an Orientalist logic that simultaneously desexualizes or hypersexualizes Arab and Muslim women's bodies. However, it does so at the expense of other marginal subjects within and without the Arab American community, including Arab men, Arab queers, and other minorities. While the heterosexual is assumed in *Legacy*, it is foregrounded in *Emails* as a meter of Arab women's normalcy. Kahf's text provides an opportunity to discuss the tension between anti-Orientalist work and Western liberalism, which offers representations of women's desires and critiques of Arab masculinity as antidotal to Arab and Muslim women's subjugation. I explore this tension and its effects on boundary-making by looking at the titular poem, which offers context for the rest of collection. For this poem and the others under discussion, I offer critical comments on Kahf's negotiation of gender and sexuality to reveal how representations of Arab women are limited by cultural logics of race. My comments are not intended to demarcate Kahf as homophobic or problematic; rather, I hope to illustrate how resistance to racist and sexist representations of Arabs can implicitly affirm heteronormative expectations, that the form of sexuality affirmed for Arab women responding to racism and sexism is often heterosexual. In this case, heteronormativity also essentializes Arab men, and creates new marginal groups.

In "Email from Scheherazad," Kahf reintroduces Scheherazade as narrator, arrived to the new millennium to pursue a career in writing. She is living in New Jersey following her divorce from Shahryar. This geographic relocation positions Scheherazade as diasporic in the classic definition, where the subject no longer lives in her nation of origin. The transposition of Scheherazade to the American context allows Kahf to go beyond calling on Scheherazade as an ancestor, as *Legacy* had, but instead creates her as a contemporary—allowing that an Arab might

come to the US and still be read as Arab or that Scheherazade can come to the US and become “American.” In the poem Scheherazade manages this displacement by asserting her placement in the economic and social fabric of the US:

...I teach creative writing at Montclair State,
And I’m on my seventh novel and book tour. (43)

Her great success in the US implies Scheherazade’s seamless integration into the US, erasing the actual struggle most Arab immigrants have in finding and maintaining gainful employment, especially when their work relies on communication, when we can safely assume that English is not Scheherazade’s first language. At the same time, publication as success echoes *Legacy’s* emphasis that language mastery is one way that Arabs become proper subjects of the US.

Likewise, Kahf’s Scheherazade bucks stereotypical configurations of Arab culture that deem divorce impossible or dismiss women’s potential for individualism. Gendered paradigms are refused for Scheherazade’s calling as an artist. Meanwhile, she describes her split with Shahryar as amicable—Shahryar wanted a traditional marriage while Scheherazade desired publication. That Scheherazade wants beyond the will of her kingdom and her people differs from traditional depictions of her. The desire for publication suggests that her “calling” for artistry is only valid through recognition by a reading public. At the same time, Shahryar is working with Dunyazad, Scheherazade’s sister, to offer workshops “On art & conflict resolution” (line 17).²⁹ They share custody of their daughter, another divergence from the original story, wherein Scheherazade gives birth to three boys rather than one girl. These small changes from *Nights* have broad significance.

First, the decision to drag Shahryar into the future alongside Dunyazad, and place them in

²⁹ Dunyazad is also referred to as Dinarzad in other reproductions of *The Arabian Nights*.

contexts that emphasize narrative as triumph over conflict, reinforces the “write or die” mentality of minority literature wherein one’s survival is predicated on their ability to not only compose a narrative but have that narrative *received*. Second, the decision to change Scheherazade’s offspring from three boys to one girl proposes a disavowal of patriarchal lineages for matriarchal ones. This change, alongside Kahf’s other poems, attempts to attest to an Arab culture that is not misogynist or oppressive to women, where Kahf relies on a version of the liberal feminist woman, raising her child while having her dream job, to modernize the Orientalist vision of the Arab woman. Rather than silenced in her marriage, Scheherazade found her personhood there. Rather than trapped by Shahryar, she is liberated. If Scheherazade, riddled by centuries of Orientalist imagining, can acclimate and become successful in this modern life, so too can contemporary Arab American women.

Kahf responds to Orientalism and anti-Arab racism in other pieces as well. Notably, in the poem “*Thawrah des Odalisques at the Matisse Retrospective*” and in her short, numbered “Hijab Scenes.” In “*Thawrah*” Kahf constructs a fantasy in which all the Odalisques walk out of Matisse’s paintings. In the response to their massive evacuation, some are offered photo shoots with *Playboy*, book, and movie deals. Some don hijabs and are shunned by Western feminist organizations like NOW, that still “wanted [them] up on their dais as tokens of diversity” but wouldn’t let them speak at rallies (66). This particular reference hails NOW’s refusal to condemn Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 as well references the colonial feminist rhetoric of many Western organizations.³⁰ Arab American women are caught between two sets of cultural expectations that limit their agency, both of which emerge in tandem with Orientalism and Arab cultural authenticity (Naber 82). In “*Thawrah*,” Kahf criticizes this false binary that circumscribes representations of women: if they are in hijab, they are oppressed. They can only

³⁰ For more on colonial feminism (also called imperial feminism), see Lila Abu Lughod; Leila Ahmed.

be “feminist” or “liberated” from oppression if they cede to a Western definition of feminism wherein women are allegedly allowed to wear whatever they want. While the poem attempts to reject this binary regarding what is acceptable bodily adornment for Arab women, it finds itself in another binary regarding how to situate sexism in Arab culture.

In the tenth stanza of the same piece, “someone spread conspiracy rumors about [the Odalisques]...Like why had we hung around so long?...With our legs so open?” (66). The narrator later attributes the critique to “Narrow-minded bastards...even though they are [her] Arab brothers” (67). The narrator’s indictment of men is troubling in that it re-inscribes Arab culture with sexism and repressed sexuality, while in the previous stanza arguing for a liberated notion of Muslim womanhood. Does it suggest that Arabs are backwards, but Islam is not? Or is the speaker attempting to divorce Islam from Arab conceptions of femininity and sexuality? The tension between her exoneration of Muslim women and defamation of Arab men reveals the slippage between Arabs and Islam as well as the tension feminists face in airing sexism within the Arab world while fearing reification of Orientalist ideas about Arabs. Since the sexual binary is the grounds on which the battle for women’s “liberation” is fought, and Eurocentric or Western sources define oppression and freedom, the speakers in the poem cannot help but contradict one another. Orientalism represents Arab women as oppressed by religion and by men; it further frames Islam as inherently sexist. While the poem rejects Islam as a source of sexism, and revisions Arab and Muslim women’s strength and sexuality, it persists in depicting Arab men as backward and oppressive, unable to follow the Odalisques out of the Orient and into the liberated present.

The investment in the “liberated Arab/Muslim women” is enforced by the speaker’s description of the women’s lives after leaving the paintings. The narrator herself goes on to

become a lawyer, which enables her to “[sue] the pants off the Matisse estate” on behalf of their collective. Liberation thus not only means leaving Matisse and unmooring their alliances with men, but achieving fiscal success and pursuing justice within the American legal system. The character “Purple Robe” also sues the Matisse estate based on worker conditions: conventions regarding human rights treatment that while not exclusive to the West, are often considered to be the domain of unionized American workers. Interestingly, the *Odalisques* find means to debate and win against *their* Western oppressors but cannot do the same for their Arab brothers. The discrimination faced by men is brought up and dropped, complicating the anti-Orientalist position of the piece and collection: are the women saved because they are able to take up the discourse of rights in the West? Or are they saved because they abject Arab men from their rights discourse?

In her appraisal, Abdelrazek applauds *Thawreh* as an achievement of Arab American feminisms: “This new Arab American woman will have her own feminist theories that fit her place in the third space” (113). But such a celebration is disingenuous for Arab American women, whose struggle with discrimination at the hands of the West is contained in a false binary of oppression and liberation, where liberation is only achieved through first, rejecting the oppressions of Islam, and second, “breaking silence” about Arab men’s sexism. The poem’s speaker is able to reveal how Muslim women’s choices are too complex to be about only veiling or unveiling. Yet, the poem does not offer a similar possibility for Arab men, that perhaps they too are trapped between Orientalism and Eurocentric feminism.

While *Emails* challenges the Orientalist notion of female Arab sexuality as impossible, repressed, or subordinate, it sometimes does so by inadvertently inferring a virile male one. Its emphasis on reworking the category of “Arab woman” relies repeatedly on the sedimentation of

the opposing group's "otherness." In "I Can Scent an Arab Man a Mile Away" the narrator calls Arab men "macho, patriarchal, sexist, egotistical, parochial—" (29). The narrator loves this man anyway, as opposed to say, loving the man who is Arab but is not all of these things, or loving the Arab man who also feels strongly about respecting the Arab woman's sexuality. This move normalizes the Arab man as sexist, reifying the Orientalist interpretation of Arab men, and normalizes desire as heterosexual. Again here, the women are capable of growth, but the men are unchanged, essential sexists. Given Orientalism, Western liberalism, and cultural authenticity, all structured around sexuality, the possibility for a redemptive and untroubled representation of Arab American women is almost impossible—we are much more likely to witness, as we have here, an unrelievable tension between subverting stereotype and inscribing and reinscribing normative ideals for other "others."

We can further trace the process of group formation in Kahf's "Hijab Scenes." There are five numbered scenes within the collection. "Hijab Scene #1" and "Hijab Scene #2," juxtapose the "strangeness" of the Muslim woman's hijab with strangeness of presumably white characters in the US. In "#1" a tenth grade boy with blue hair and tongue-rings tells a hijabi girl "You dress strange" (41). The implication is that the boy has little room to talk about being strange, given his blue hair and tongue piercing. We might argue the poem tries to highlight the hypocrisy of the boy's statement, but it also relegates the boy to outsider status. Rather than finding points of solidarity with this other "other," the speaker suggests his weirdness trumps the hijabi girl's. This labeling process creates new divisions between the stylized boy and the hijabi girl. What the speaker fails to realize is that the boy's markers of strangeness, like the hijabi girl's, are also associated with certain social expectations, and likely render him a social outcast.

"Hijab Scene #2", enacts another version of othering. Since the poem is brief, I reproduce it here in its entirety:

“You people have such restrictive dress for women,”
She said, hobbling away in three-inch heels and panty hose
To finish out another pink-collar temp pool day. (42)

This poem, like the previous one, attempts to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the woman’s statement regarding hijab. It poses that wearing high heels and tight clothing is as, if not more, restrictive than the hijab itself. The hypocrisy the poem intends is readily apparent. Yet, within that hypocrisy is another disturbing element: distaste for or belittling of the woman in her heels and hose. Her dress is correlated with her work, in what is likely an office setting, since the speaker calls it “pink collar.” The woman is a temp, which indicates she lacks consistent employment. In other words, this woman too struggles for respectability within the American workforce, but the speaker jettisons the means by which the pink-collar worker is also subject to male and class dominance.

The speaker in the poem makes the case for her normativity by pointing out the strangeness of other “others” who are, in reality, occupying a comparable position with regard to dominant power (Cohen 439). The fractioning of communities in similar position with regard to power is one of the ways that empire functions: like Somerville’s citizens from earlier, these speakers gain respectability by aligning with the normative ideals they can access, ideals which are not equally accessible to all “others.” The poem illustrates how communities disparaged by the dominant power begin to negotiate their survival by drawing lines of acceptable and unacceptable difference. In this collection, as in many other works, acceptable difference begins to take the form of heteronormativity. The normalcy of the speakers in “Hijab Scenes” denaturalizes other communities through comparison of their position on another axis of difference; the same norm that naturalizes the speaker, outcasts the new “other.” The speakers are naturalized through recourse to ideals of gender—boys who don’t have dyed hair or pierced

tongues, women in work-appropriate heels. Rescuing Muslim women through recourse to classed and somewhat conservative gender norms excludes those without class privilege or those who cannot and do not perform appropriate gender roles. Responding to the false binary constructed to marginalize Muslim results in the construction of new binaries. What Kahf's "Hijab Scences" model is the means by which non-normative gender and sexuality become sacrificial axes of difference. We see here how gender and sexuality become determinants for communal, cultural, and eventually, national belonging.

Emails helps us to understand that Arab American writing is always already between the discursive frames of the colonizer and the discursive response of the colonized. What Arab Americans can say about Arab men and Arab women is also affected by how the Arab world has already responded to Orientalism and colonization, often rejecting "liberated" Western logics of race and sex in favor of remaining "authentic" Arabs (Naber 65). Thus, Arab American representations are over-determined by Western or American demands for assimilation on one hand and Arab and Arab American ones for maintaining cultural authenticity and independence on the other. Like sati debates in India or veiling in Iran (Lata Mani and Norma Alarcón et al respectively), writing sex and sexuality about Arab and Arab American women is the terrain of a "semiotic war"—the women and their bodies become representational proxies that determine who is moral and capable of subjectivity (Alarcón et al 4). Morality and subjectivity are then measures of rule and independence. If the US is the moral determinant, it can continue to disappear Arab men on behalf of Arab women, and eventually, other minorities (e.g., queers) in the Arab world. If instead morality falls to the masculinist and nationalist response of the Arab world to colonization, women are relegated to particular gender roles, which include compulsory heterosexuality. Those whose gendered and sexual practices or preferences fall outside such

roles are outcast.

Scheherazade is an appropriate figurehead for this collection precisely because she models the uneasy tension of being an Arab American woman, one who comes into being not of her own volition, but as the mirror or desire of the dueling fictions of East and West. In the pieces that directly address Scheherazade, she becomes a symbol of the “modern” Arab woman in the West, who brings enough of her Eastern heritage, through narrative, to remain of the East but assimilates enough to succeed in the West. She succeeds through this assimilation, which often necessitates aligning oneself with the center, and accenting the difference of other others like Arab men and queers.

Fiction, Femininity, and Family

Alia Yunis’ debut novel, *The Night Counter* (2009), was published by Three Rivers Press, a trade paperback, making it a “crossover” novel, able to enter the American mainstream in a fashion elusive to both the autobiographical *Legacy* and the poetic *Emails*. *Night Counter* combines the approaches of the previous two works by making Scheherazade an immortal ancestor visiting the contemporary world. As such, she offers both an authenticating link to the “homeland” and a diasporic Arab perspective. As in the previous texts, Scheherazade is used to respond to anti-Arab and Orientalist representations, but here, she: first, makes explicit the impact of state violence on Arab communities, and second, broaches the topic of non-normative gender and sexuality in the Arab American family. By incorporating the heightened surveillance of Arabs after 9/11, *Night Counter* allows us to see how the state interrupts Arab American life in particularly affective ways. I offer an analysis of Scheherazade’s many uses in the novel: as a champion of narrative, as a producer and critic of gender and sexual norms and of Orientalism, and finally, combining the first two functions, as the catalyst and means by which the protagonist

and her family find redemption in one another. The novel thus demonstrates the failure of Scheherazade, the model Arab, to achieve inclusion in the US nation state, and ultimately, some of the limits of representational politics.

Night Counter follows 85-year-old Fatima, a Lebanese transplant from the suburbs of Detroit to Los Angeles, where she has moved to live with her gay grandson, Amir, following her divorce from Ibrahim, the father of her ten children. Since moving to LA, Fatima has been visited by the immortal storyteller Scheherazade. Every night Scheherazade visits Fatima for a tale and Fatima obliges, telling stories of her home in Lebanon. We meet both on the 992 night of their relationship, where Scheherazade is pushing Fatima to tell her love stories and Fatima is anxiously planning her death, which she assumes will occur on the 1001st of Scheherazade's visit. The novel proceeds in a series of small section headings, using multiple narrators, with each section told from the perspective of the chapter's titular character.

The Night Counter uses Scheherazade as a frame to tell the story of Arab Americans as they navigate the obstacles of being Arab in the US. She travels via magic flying carpet, choosing a different person to companion for one thousand and one nights at a time. Scheherazade extracts the story of Fatima's survival in the diaspora and elicits the details of her many, often self perceived, failures. Scheherazade enables the narrators' multiple perspectives to emerge when she visits them on behalf of Fatima. As she learns about Fatima's life, she becomes curious about the players therein, and begins traveling to see them, scattered across the US, and in one instance, Beirut. During the day, she flies to see Fatima's children, trying to piece together the frayed story Fatima tells her. Because Scheherazade offers exposition before each new character is introduced, the reader is able to follow along the multiple threads more seamlessly than is often the case in such texts. Scheherazade stitches the disparate aspects of the

story together through her visits and allows us glimpses into multiple worlds we wouldn't have from Fatima's limited perspective. Thus, Scheherazade enacts her classic function in *Nights*, to set the stage for storytelling. The relationship between Fatima and Scheherazade parallels the relationship between Shahryar and Scheherazade though the roles of narrator and listener are reversed. Scheherazade becomes the listener, and through seeking stories, enables Fatima to find a kind of peace with her children's fates and the truth of her marriage to Ibrahim. However, in both tales, where Scheherazade is the listener or the teller, the outcome is similar: narrative offers redemption.

Scheherazade's second, more complicated function in the novel involves responding to and representing notions of femininity and sexuality that are salient to Arab women and particularly in the story, multiple generations of Arab immigrant women in the US.

Scheherazade does this in a number of ways: she models good femininity and sexuality to Fatima; she reveals the significance of family in the novel; and she responds, quite explicitly, to Orientalist visions of her character. Scheherazade has clear impressions of what is appropriate femininity and sexuality for women, demonstrated by her self-care and her care for Fatima. Scheherazade proposes several common themes around femininity for Fatima: the importance of grooming; beauty as a necessary aspect of one's personality; and more significantly, the responsibility of women to "shine" or keep up their appearance in order to sustain the husband's interest and the passion in a relationship. In this way, Scheherazade links appropriate feminine behavior with heterosexual practice.

In regards to sexuality, Fatima often catches Scheherazade ogling men when they are out together in public (e.g. 85). Fatima finds this overt sexual gaze troubling, while Scheherazade justifies it: "Sexy is not an ugly thing...Vulgar though, is another matter" (195). She laments,

“Why do they always have to make me look so vulgar?” Here, Scheherazade points to the double bind in Arab American femininity: ideal Arab femininity is threatened by Americanness when Arab women “let themselves go” and fail to become appropriately feminine. Then, in a pendulum swing, these same women might confuse femininity with hyper-sexuality, and thereby debase their femininity once more. Moreover, any rendition of their sexuality becomes subject to Orientalist tropes about it. By contrast, Scheherazade is feminine and sexy—the best of both worlds. In the novel, Scheherazade renders herself in the image I have highlighted in the previous chapter: exotic but not too, sexy but not vulgar, feminine but powerful, an assimilable version of the Arab world whose femininity is stitched to heteronormativity.

The novel’s engagement with sexuality and gender is apparent in its emphasis on love and family as well. Though the novel itself is saturated with love, love’s expression as sexual is only enacted through Scheherazade. Fatima, meanwhile, is exceedingly obsessed with matchmaking. Her attention is fixated on her gay grandson Amir, despite his protests, because she wants to leave her mother’s house in Deir Zeitoon to him, but only if he is married, and can thus carry on the family name. She cannot justify leaving it to her other children and grandchildren despite the fact that many are in successful heterosexual unions. So even for Fatima, there is recognition that heterosexuality does not insure her love of her home, a symbol of her diasporic longing and her Arab identity, is passed along. For Fatima, there is no question that Amir belongs to her and to her family. She sidesteps the question of his sexuality by refusing to use the word “gay,” ignoring his uses of it, and pushing for his engagement to a number of eligible women she selects. Fatima only ceases her attempts to marry off Amir after he lands a role as Jesus in a feature film: “Those who were chosen to play a divine prophet do not inherit earthly possessions. Nor do they marry. [Amir] belonged to the world, not just one woman”

(353). Fatima includes Amir in her life and in her family, but sanitized from sexuality in each moment. Amir's openness and assertiveness about his sexuality suggests he understands it as central to his subjectivity, and makes Fatima's pointed avoidance of it painful. Fatima's partial inclusion leaves the question of Amir's sexuality unresolved in the novel. While he is not abjected from the family, his sexuality is first overrode and later dismissed as unnecessary in the face of a greater calling. The novel promotes familiar and unproductive liberal strategies for dealing with non-normativity: the silence around his sexuality is a version of "don't ask, don't tell" and the push toward exalting his character without allowing him human desire a version of "love the sinner, hate the sin" rhetoric. Both are examples of tolerance; both leave the character simultaneously outside and inside the vision of Arab American culture the novel creates.³¹

Scheherazade's third function in the text is to reveal how state violence disrupts and effects Arab American life. While this may seem like a novel use for her as a narrator, recall that she has previously intervened in state violence, by marrying Shahryar and stopping him from killing women in his Kingdom. In *Night Counter*, however, we meet "Sherri Hazzad," an FBI agent tipped off to the Abdullah family by one of Amir's former lovers. Hazzad attempts to question a befuddled Fatima only to realize, too late, that the Abdullah family is hardly worth surveillance. Indeed, it's the FBI's tapping of Amir's phone that creates static on the phone line every time Ibrahim and Fatima try to speak. Their divorce was Fatima's initiative because she believed Ibrahim only married her out of obligation. Ibrahim was attempting to call to explain how he has preserved her memory of her home in Lebanon, an act that Fatima will later recognize as an act of love, proving Ibrahim loved her all along, and that their divorce was a

³¹ For a queer critique on "love the sinner, hate the sin" see Jakobsen and Pelligrini: on tolerance more generally, see Warner.

mistake. Before he is able to reach her, he dies alone on a bus in Detroit on his way to watch arrivals from Lebanon at the airport.

Ibrahim's habit of visiting the airport during arrivals speaks of his longing and his death alone, away from his wife and children expose the ultimate terror of the diaspora—the inability to create a home and the fracture of connection to the home one used to have. Ibrahim's death *alone* is a result of state violence, enacted by the wiretapping and unnecessary surveillance Arabs are subject to in the US. Had Ibrahim been able to reach Fatima in the days before his death, they may have reconciled and he may not have been alone at the time of his death. The psychic violence inflicted on Ibrahim and his family through his solitary death creates a cognitive dissonance for the reader: yes, we will all die, but *no one* deserves to die this way. No one deserves to die alone. Rather, state sponsored violence disrupts the possibility for human connection and leaves Ibrahim unable to resolve the disjointedness in his family. As such, the Abdullahs are a family always already implicated in racialized violence perpetuated by the state. The devastation at Ibrahim's death and the impossibility of Fatima's and Ibrahim's reconciliation are the means by which the couple is rendered human first and Arab second. Therefore their "relatable" humanity is disserved by their racialized treatment by the FBI. The undoing of the family is countered by narrative in the text. Scheherazade pushes to secure Fatima's story in order to save Fatima from Ibrahim's fate: a death alone, an emotional, familial, and national exile. By framing state violence as violence to love and family, through Ibrahim's death, the novel is able to argue for the incorporation of Arabs into the American milieu as subjects that have prioritized family and love above all else. However, this incorporation is refuted by the presence of Scheherazade and the Abdullahs themselves, both subject to material and discursive

violence at the hands of the state and broader American culture. The only belonging either can secure is to family and to one another, not to the state or to the United States.

In sum, the novel ends somewhat ambivalently on the uses of Scheherazade and the possibility of inclusion. It proposes modes of femininity and sexuality, and models of responses to Orientalism, but does not redeem Fatima's family from its losses, perpetuated by diasporic and state violence. It neither excludes queer bodies nor fully incorporates them, in the case of Amir. I suggest then, that the novel challenges the possibility of assimilation to the nation through Fatima and Ibrahim's outsider status, and questions the happiness assimilation is capable of bringing through their children. *Night Counter* reveals Scheherazade's assimilability is a fiction. She, like the Abdullah clan, remains an outsider, no matter how perfectly she performs the feminine ideal. At best, the narrative redemption Scheherazade offers reifies the importance of connectivity and kinship with other humans, particularly one's family, in the face of outcast and othering by the state. Narrative offers a reprieve from diasporic fracture and state violence, but not antidotes to them. It suggests that love is all that matters—a dismissal of the need for successful integration into the state and simultaneously a naïve depoliticization of the challenge and precarity of being immigrants, minorities, diasporic subjects, and otherwise bodies out of joint with the nation.

I have examined Scheherazade's appearance in three Arab American texts and demonstrated her flexibility as a hyphenated subject. Ultimately, I suggest that while Scheherazade has been instrumentalized repeatedly to negotiate Arab American belonging, she has done so at the expense of vulnerable members of the community, and to little success. The functions that she has served, to tell stories, to save lives, to titillate, and to soothe, have

reoccurred and cross-pollinated in Arab American narratives which rebirth her into their service. I have demonstrated that Arab American writers are drawn to her in part because her narrative framework, in part because her conviction in narrative as life saving, and in part because her femininity. She appears in Arab American literature because her feminine body can be the site for material and discursive negotiations of identity, nation, and belonging. Ultimately though, Scheherazade belongs to no one: neither do we know her original authors, nor can we lay exclusive claim to her images or her stories. Yet, the intimacy with which she enters our lives and our stories offers us the fiction of belonging. She makes belonging possible on the surface, but limits that belonging to normative subjects. Her body, interpellated to present ideal modes of femininity, mitigates Arab racial othering. Her body, secure in its heterosexuality, casts out non-normativity and offers itself up as a model for hyphenated subjects.

We return to her body over and over. After the violence enacted upon her in translation and interpretation, Scheherazade is recuperated by Arabs and Arab Americans as a symbol of our desires: to be understood as capable producers of knowledge and artistry, as in *Legacy*; to be free, to be sexual, to be persons and not stereotypes, as in *Emails*; to be loved, to have family, to die peacefully, as in *Night Counter*. Scheherazade is the site for so much because she encapsulates so much: she has witnessed and withstood Orientalism. She has traveled from her home to nations new and faced the battery of diaspora, the racism and discrimination toward minority communities. She watches as the old Orientalisms and the new entangle Arab Americans in an ever-receding horizon of possibility.

What we see when we look at Scheherazade is the status of our communities. No achievement of gender, sexual, or racial ideals by even fictional figures can ensure belonging and survival in the nation-state, especially for subjects of the diaspora. Scheherazade bears witness to

the displacement of bodies in space and time by the regimentation of race and sexuality, of race by sexuality, and of sexuality by race. She reminds us that these violences do not cover one another but amplify the psychic and physical dissonance of immigration and assimilation, isolation and incorporation. When we share her stories, or she shares ours, we might be comforted for moments but still, left to wonder: Who is left living? Are any of us saved?

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Chapter 4

Lipstick and Liberation: Leila Khaled and the Struggle for Transnational Solidarity

The year is 1969. A young woman of 25 boards an aircraft in Rome wearing all white. Her wide trousers, full brimmed hat, and large sunglasses strike the flight attendants as fashionable. She is sitting across the aisle from a man she only just met. A gun is tucked into the waistband of her panties, two grenades otherwise hidden on her person. Together, she and her new partner are about to commandeer the flight. She charges the aisle with her companion, unholstering her gun and carefully brandishing her grenades. Her brazen threat convinces the pilot to acquiesce to her demands. She introduces herself over the speakers as Shadia Abu Ghazalah, of the Che Guevara Commando Unit for the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). She claims there is an Israeli war criminal aboard the flight, Yithak Rabin³², whom she is determined to bring to justice. The passengers on the plane are clearly panicked, but she assures them and the crew that their safety is assured, as long as everyone cooperates. They will be free to go as soon as the aircraft lands. Shadia and her comrade, Salim Issawi successfully convince the crew to fly the plane over Haifa, Palestine. Looking over the ancestral land from which she was expelled in 1948, Shadia finds renewed determination in her and her organization's mission, to return and reclaim Palestine. When the Boeing 707 runs low of fuel, she orders the pilot to

³² In fact, Rabin was not on the flight.

land in Syria. She and her companion blow up the nose of the aircraft after safely debarking the passengers and crew. The mission, though failing to apprehend Rabin, is deemed a success by the PFLP. Shortly after, Eddie Adams, a Pulitzer winning photojournalist, photographs the hijacker and the image becomes standard fare in international media. Shadia's angular face will become known to the world as the face of Palestinian resistance. And her real name, Leila Khaled, will become notorious.

Since her debut in 1969, Khaled has remained a notable figure. She was active with the PFLP for many years, and eventually came to serve on the Palestinian National Council. She has remained radically committed to liberating Palestine, though she continues to be a refugee, barred from her ancestral home and living in Jordan. Public fascination with her also continues—reproductions of her image proliferate, and every few years, someone pursues her story and publishes updates. The sustained interest in Khaled's image and narrative is the starting gambit of this chapter. Why does she compel us? To what end do we remember her image and her story? How does her image remember or rupture her narrative?

For such a recognizable face, there is a surprising dearth of information on Khaled. Under pressure from the PFLP to capitalize on her notoriety, she released her memoirs in 1973, titled *My People Shall Live*. The title is ghost written by another member of the PFLP, academic George Hajjar. In 2001, Katharine Viner published a piece about her in the Guardian, a piece that fixated on her beauty. Later, she is the subject of a documentary by Swedish filmmaker Lina Makboul; *Hijacker* follows Leila up through her life in 2005 and through conversation with the director, catalogues Khaled's reflections and responses to carefully posed questions about her revolutionary life and involvement with her two hijackings. Some writers have included a chapter on her in monographs about notable women; Eileen MacDonald offers Khaled as a

narcissist and attention seeker in *Shoot the Women First* (1991). Robin Morgan attempts more nuance in *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism* (1989), but ultimately finds Khaled unfeminist. Caron Gentry wrote a brief biographical chapter on Khaled in her coedited volume *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (2011), which underscores Khaled's activism and proffers Khaled in mostly her own words. Most recently, Sarah Irving released an updated biography titled *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*, which attempts to fill in the gaps in her story and bring Khaled and her significance into the contemporary moment. Short of these projects, little has been written explicitly about her.

Far less has been written about the image that catapulted her to fame in 1969. While it would be easy to get swept up in astonishing force that is Leila Khaled: a current member of the Palestinian council, a committed revolutionary of the Palestinian cause, a woman who by all accounts regrets nothing, and one who would still die in the name of her land and her people, I am concerned instead with this popular notion of Khaled's image as iconic. I hesitate to say Khaled herself is iconic, given what seems to be a critical disjuncture between how her image circulates and becomes used and the awareness of its users of the "subject" of the photo, Khaled herself. Much like one of her greatest idols, Che Guevara, Khaled's image is experiencing trendiness in activist communities, and it's not uncommon to see a graffiti-ed face gracing a wall, or a silk screened rendition of the Eddie Adam's print. Thus, Khaled's legacy is visual. She is remembered on streets, walls, t-shirts, posters, and more.³³

As did Samia Gamal and Scheherazade, Leila Khaled indexes a number of compelling and contradictory messages about Arab femininity in the transnational frame and further offers

³³ See: <http://aamerrahman.tumblr.com/post/91574775364/doing-a-set-of-these-resist-designs-flipping-the>; <http://www.myiconart.com/retro-style-t-shirts/leila-khaled-retro-style-t-shirt-resistance.html>; <https://leilakhaled.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/leila-khaled-mural-on-the-apartheid-wall-at-bethlehem/>

insight into the significance of Palestine in Arab politics. While Gamal's life and legacy witnessed the ways nationalist projects in Egypt failed its feminine subject, and Scheherazade catalogued the various attempts of Arab and Arab American writers to gain access to a western literary canon, Khaled meets us in contemporary transnational activist communities, where her image is repeatedly repurposed to represent solidarity, struggle, and liberation across diverse groups and in diverse locations. The first part of this chapter examines the relationship between the image and its subject, the icon and her iconicity, the story the image tells and the story the image was presumably, at some point about. I analyze Khaled's black and white images produced by Adams, and situate them in the context of their creation: Khaled's membership in the PFLP and the auto/biography of her that emerged at this time. I argue that Khaled's popularity is tied to the interplay of femininity and violence in her image, and the ways her public persona refused heteronormative and heteropatriarchal standards of Arab womanhood.

The second half of the paper examines three contemporary reimaginings of Khaled's image, how they highlight and dismiss parts of her narrative, and how they imagine transnational Palestinian politics. The first, "Leila Khaled" was created by US-based artist Erin Currier in 2010. The second, "The Icon" was created by native Palestinian artist Amer Shomali in 2011. The third, "Sobreviviendo" by Xicano artist Jesus Barraza in 2004. Each piece foregrounds aspects of Khaled's public image and persona, and suggests if not a plan of action, a political position regarding Palestine. They also comment, in their form and other aesthetic choices, on the process of political and historical memorialization, the effects of globalization and neoliberalism, and the role of transnational solidarity in combating multiple forms of colonialism. I propose the three pieces as means to imagining an alternate form of politicization for transnational Arab activism, one that does not rely on narrative (as it did with Scheherazade)

or national affiliation (as it did with Samia Gamal), but rather organizes around relationality and overlap with other communities, Arab and others alike. Finally, I return to the first half of the chapter's emphasis on femininity and normativity and propose, via these artists and their work, the possibility of a queer Arab transnational politics.

Part One: Making an Icon

Adams first photographed Khaled in October 1969, shortly after the successful mission in August of the same year. The iconic image we readily associate with the so-called “poster child of Palestinian militancy” was taken in Beirut, not in Syria directly following her flight. Adams, a reporter for the Associated Press at the time, photographed her at a PFLP training camp. Adams was well renowned for his portraiture by the time, and incidentally, also captured two other iconic moments, the image of Mother Teresa holding an armless baby and the execution of a Vietcong prisoner on a Saigon street. In this black and white photo, Khaled is wearing a kufiyeh, a black and white checked scarf, around most of her head and neck. She has a dark shirt on under a light colored single button trench coat that cinches at the waist with the aid of a belt. Her gaze is averted from the photographer, eyes looking downward. Thus the light hits her already prominent cheekbones and gleams off her stark black hair. In her hands, she holds an AK-47 vertically, so that the butt rests on her leg or lap. Around the third finger on her left hand, what we call the ring finger, is a thin metal band, and in the place of a gemstone, a bullet. Her backdrop is not as readily recognizable as one might assume, though she appears to be sitting in a wicker chair, its back visible about 2/3rds of the way down the left side, with a piece of wrinkled fabric hanging on the wall behind her left shoulder (see figure one).

It seems particularly significant to me that this photo was not taken on the day of her famous hijacking, but instead months later, in the relatively known and comfortable space of

Beirut, where Leila would have been training and preparing for her next mission. Irving reveals in her biography that the leader of PFLP at the time, George Habash, chastised Leila for failing to meet with the press after her successful mission (Khaled 51-55). Once her face became known, Habash and the PFLP, urged her to capitalize on her notoriety, publishing the memoir and going on tour through the Arab world to educate about and recruit support for Palestine (Irving 41-42). Oddly, two years before Khaled's photograph was taken, a well-known Palestinian author and artist of the PFLP, Ghassan Kanifani released a poster with striking similarity to the 1969 Adams image (see figure two). In this color image, a woman wearing all grey, her hair entirely covered by what appears to be a hijab, also looks toward the left, deferring her black eyes from the artist's gaze. She too holds a large green gun, in roughly the same place as Khaled does in her photo. The shape of the gun also evokes the outline of Palestine, evident in the wide angular bottom and tapering through the top, with a thin gap on the right to place the Dead Sea. Across the top, white text written against a black backdrop, in Arabic reads "The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine." Along the bottom, the same text is written in English, with the first letter of the acronym larger and highlighted. The image is unmistakably a product of the PFLP.³⁴

Of course, to suggest that Khaled's iconic photo was inspired if not entirely based on this poster would be pure conjecture, but to assume that her iconic image was produced with the specific aim of achieving iconic status is perhaps less far fetched. Given Khaled's reluctance to pursue media attention, the PFLP's insistence on it, and Adam's celebrated photography, I would posit that Khaled's image was crafted with the specific aim of becoming a face for the PFLP, and

³⁴ I had hoped to verify this partially with evidence from Adam's archive and contact sheets from the 1969 photo shoot, but they seem to have disappeared. Neither Adam's personal archive at the Briscoe Center, University of Texas, Austin has them, nor his professional archive at the Associated Press in New York. What remain instead is a few prints of Khaled, and the negatives for one other photo from that same set (which I will discuss later).

for Palestine at large. By her accounts, and the accounts of the PFLP, the movement needed a face (Irving 44; Macdonald 107). That Khaled's face is conventionally attractive and that she had just successfully carried out what amounted to a massive publicity stunt cannot be ignored. Moreover, Adams took more than one photo at the time that Khaled's icon photo was taken (see figure three). Many might also recognize the second black and white photo, a shot of Leila laughing, in similar posture and in the same location of the first photo. But the position of her hands has changed, so that her bullet ring is out of frame. The frame of the photo is also skewed right, where we can make out the raggedy fabric behind her as a map, indicated by the vertical Arabic script which reads "mutawasit." Presumably the full text reads "al bahar al abyad al mutawasit," the Arabic name for the Mediterranean. We can also see the arm of the chair in the bottom right of the frame, giving more evidence to it being a wicker seat. The wicker chair summons Huey P. Newton, the leader of the Black Panthers, who was also photographed in a wicker chair in 1967—two years before Khaled's photo was staged.

The difference between the two images of Khaled that Adams took is striking; the first obviously posed, the second like an afterthought, the slouch and sigh of relief the subject assumes when she or the photographer realizes they got "the shot." Indeed, even the lighting in the second photo is darker, playing her off her eyes and grin rather than her austere cheekbones, making her face impish and giddy rather than contemplative and serious. When we juxtapose the two 1969 Adams prints, Kanifani's poster, and the description Khaled and the flight attendants give of her on the day of hijacking, a modern woman in fashionable attire—the meaning of iconic photo and its intentions become less clear, less glossy.

As Viner and others have noted amply, Leila Khaled is a striking woman. While I would not describe her hands as particularly "fragile" as Viner did in her 2001 Guardian piece, her

femininity in the photo is certainly accentuated (par 1). Her eyebrows are shaped and arched, her waistline created through her belted trench coat, her hair swooped across her brow. We know from other images of Khaled in the same time period that she kept her hair boyishly short, and thus the kufiyeh, certainly an icon in and of itself, also serves to heighten the mystery of Khaled. It drapes her hair in such a way that allows the viewer to imagine, should he or she desire, a more robust mane. That her eyes do not meet the camera's gaze is also considered a classically feminine pose. The emphasis on femininity in the photo is seemingly at odds with reports on the PFLP's politics around women, and the struggles Leila encountered achieving militant and active rank within the organization (Khaled 118-119).³⁵ It is also at odds with the large erect gun in Leila's lap and hands. Perhaps Viner was not noticing her fragile fingers so much as her hard phallus. The juxtaposition of Khaled's attractive face and other markers of femininity (hair, cinched waist, downcast gaze) with the aggressive presence of the gun evokes a non-normative representation of femininity, Arab and otherwise. In reports on Khaled in the US, reporters were fond of making this visual tension verbal, referring to Khaled as "the Girl Hijacker" repeatedly (in *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Global Mail*, *The Los Angeles Times*, for example). The masculinity and femininity in the photo garner attention because they are in tension in a singular subject, and thereby unsettling of norms around either.

Morgan goes to great lengths in *Demon Lover* to disparage Khaled's politics around femininity and feminism. She claims Khaled acquiesces to patriarchal demands by becoming a hijacker, and attempts to win entre in a masculine circle while abandoning women's causes.

Early in her career, Khaled might have agreed with Morgan, though not in such strident terms.

³⁵ In conversation with Irving, Khaled discussed how she sought to bring gender to the attention of the PFLP's leadership. Specifically, she discussed how everyone in the PFLP had to compete in the same kinds and numbers of tests to achieve rank. These tests were equal, but not equitable, in that they failed to account for women's different education and access levels in society. Though Khaled would succeed, she'd go on to open up these issues for dialogue in the organization (Irving 104-105).

Khaled spoke candidly about the primacy of the national struggle, especially in early interviews (Khaled 118-119). But both her actions and interviews later in life indicated how she could not, in practice, disarticulate the national struggle from women's struggle. Asked if she is a Palestinian or a woman first, Khaled responds, "I cannot differentiate. A woman and a Palestinian at the same time" (qtd in Viner par 18). Although she did not always understand it as such, her position within the PFLP was a testament to that intersectionality: she furthered the nationalist agenda of the organization as a woman, while creating space within the organization to discuss gender as a nationalist concern.

Meanwhile, Khaled's ring is entirely in line with the understanding she had of herself as a revolutionary. In interviews, Khaled revealed that she constructed her ring out of the pin of the first grenade she trained with, wrapping it around the bullet to create a band small enough for her fingers (Viner par 1). She wears it on her ring finger, as though she is engaged if not married to what it symbolized for her: the training for her missions, in service of the PFLP, which she believed stood to do the most good for the Palestinians through armed struggle. In her memoir, she makes this comparison explicit: "I've had casual boyfriends but never became really attached to any man. The older I grew, the more attached I became to the revolution" (66). She expressed dismay that reporters asked her if she was in love, or how much time she spent in the mirror (Makboul 28.46). In her memoir she notes on numerous occasions how the revolution was her, and she it. And although during the time of the photo, she would have been married to her first husband, that marriage ended as a result of their different positions and obligations to the PFLP and their sometimes divergent opinions on politics. So her ring, aside from whatever street credential it garners her, also symbolizes a stance she holds in relation to power, wherein her

commitment to the movement supersedes heteromonogamous romantic fulfillment. Or stands in its stead.

I don't want to applaud love of that nation or nationalism particularly, but it's worth noting that this reluctance toward the heteronormative imperative as well as the mixed iterations of masculinity and femininity in the photo mark both Khaled and the iconic photo as potentially queer figures. Queer politically, as a position that situates itself not in accordance with identity but in relation to power, queer sexually as resistant to heteronormativity, and queer in gender, explicitly scripting both masculinity and femininity in the image, to reveal neither as "natural" to the photo/subject. I suggest that the "confusion" in the photo and the ambivalence it courts around the marriage of female, feminine, and revolution is precisely why the image resurges periodically in revolutionary representations and activist communities. One needn't know anything about Khaled, not even what she is famous for, to appreciate the tension around gender and violence in the photo.

In her biography, Irving notes that perhaps the image brings forth tension between nationalism and feminism, given some of the feminist backlash against Khaled in the work Morgan and Jill Tweedie, a British writer who also complained of Khaled's alleged anti-feminist bent (Irving 100; Tweedie par 3).³⁶ I suggest this debate around Khaled's feminism illustrates the image's power and provocation, and is only minimally tied to Khaled's actual politics or position. It is about, instead, what acceptable Arab femininity looks like, and whether or not Khaled is sanctioned, by the West, to achieve such iconicity. There are numerous other examples of this Western policing in the work of transnational feminists. In "Do Muslim Women Need Saving" Lila Abu Lughod catalogues the ways western feminist groups lobbied for or against the

³⁶ Although, to be fair, Tweedie is more concerned that Khaled was content to snub her at the UN's women's conference in 1980.

war in Afghanistan based on their understandings of women's needs in Afghanistan—from the remote location of the US. She argues that many of these western positions fail to take into account the actual needs and display a paternalistic approach to minority women. Similarly, in “Palestinian Women’s Disappearing Act,” Amal Amirah discusses the means by which Western feminists participate in Orientalist culture talk in regard to Arab and Middle Eastern women’s lives, and provide the implicit support for US empire. Gayatri Spivak refers to this phenomenon as “white women saving brown women from brown men” (93).

Since the image is captivating, writers like Morgan, Tweedie, Gentry, and other are compelled to take its stock, commenting on whether or not Khaled deserves to be the face of revolutionary politics. If she is to stand for women, they task themselves with disciplining her femininity and her feminism. In *Demon Lover*, Morgan claims “[Khaled] has not survived being female...the women who rebels via the male mode can do so only to the point where her own rebellion might begin” (211). The evaluation implicit in Morgan’s comment is that Khaled’s work within the PFLP was significantly undermined by her identity as a woman; Khaled survived assassination attempts by Israeli secret service, but not patriarchy. She suggests then that in the weights on Khaled’s shoulders, somehow the PFLP has hurt her more than the occupation and continued military aggression visited upon Palestine and her person. In this way, Morgan resembles the feminists cited in Abu Lughod and Amireh’s texts: they offer a simplistic and regulatory version of Arab femininity that suits not Arab women, but Western empire. Morgan and the like use Khaled’s image and the story circulated through and with it to define an exclusionary feminine and feminist prototype, one that Khaled cannot (and is under no obligation) to achieve. Like the debates around Muslim women and veiling, here Khaled’s brand of activism becomes subject to arguments about what truly constitutes liberation, a definition

provided by white Western feminists. When Khaled fails to live up to said definition, or fails to stand firmly for or against it, she becomes unincorporable to a feminist praxis. The debate around if she is appropriately feminine or feminist distracts from the actual agenda of Khaled's political work, the liberation of Palestine, and regulates the symbolic Arab women for whom Khaled (allegedly) stands. While Khaled as a personality cannot evade this gatekeeping, her image can and does—she continues to emerge in activist art and street art, and continues to signify a potentially subversive sexual and revolutionary politics.

I turn now to the aftermath of Khaled's 1969 photo. We know that the international news syndicates swooped down on the image and circulated it heavily in their programming. This was especially the case in Israeli media, which was quick to label Khaled a terrorist of the most dangerous sort, an evil and recognizable enemy of the state (Makboul 24:43; "U.K. Press" 2). Her success in her first mission thus placed Khaled in an unfortunate position. Her notoriety would prevent her from completing another mission, a fate she found unacceptable (Irving 44; Khaled 180). The PFLP assisted Leila in finding a plastic surgeon that would reconstruct her nose and chin. She underwent six surgeries, three before her second hijacking to allow her anonymity, and three after to attempt to restore her face, since the initial surgeries had left her in pain. The second round of surgeries seemed to have escaped popular notice, perhaps because they are less drastically in pursuit of her cause. Still, they explain why contemporary photos of Khaled so reminisce of her earlier ones while being just different enough to imagine the possibility of surgery.

Adams took another photo of Khaled in 1970 after Khaled's second hijacking and first round of surgeries. This second mission was not a success, and Khaled spent several days in police custody in Berlin before being released as part of negotiations with the PFLP, who had

planned and executed several other hijackings on the same day as Khaled's mission. In this second portrait, Khaled is facing the camera directly, her gun over her shoulder, resting along her back but visible from the perspective of the viewer. Her right hand remains in frame, but a band, possibly denoting her recent marriage to a fellow PFLP member, has replaced her bullet ring. Her kufiyeh remains draped around her head and neck, revealing the same shock of black hair. It is difficult to determine the effects of her facial reconstructions in this 1970 photo—though Khaled's autobiography, amidst other sources, claim she was not easily recognizable as the same woman. At best, we might detect a slight difference in the width of her nose, and less emphasis on the devastating cut of her cheekbones. Lost, then, is the angularity of Khaled's face. Her harsh planes replaced with soft, rounded cheeks. These differences might as easily be attributed to the angling of the shot—still eye level, but Khaled no longer looks down to the right, rather up and slightly to the left, facing the camera's gaze directly. She is still striking, beautiful, and in many ways, her gaze challenges the viewer in a way the previous photo did not. She remains unsmiling, her mouth drawn, no faint smile plays there. The direct gaze makes the subject of the photo more aggressive and demanding of the viewer, while simultaneously de-emphasizing the violence by shifting the gun to the back and erasing the bullet from her hand (see figure four). This photo, given its distance in time from the first, but incredible similarity to its styling, seems to me an attempt to secure Khaled's image as iconic, the face AP and other news networks summoned when reporting on both the PFLP and Palestine. The image still calls for revolution, but also seeks understanding from the viewer—to recognize the humanity of the subject by refusing to categorize her as a terrorist. The fact that her bullet has been exchanged for a wedding ring corroborates this reading: while Khaled's gaze is direct and challenging, her humanity is also on display.

The drastic means by which Khaled distances herself from her image for the purpose of her activism once again underscores her ambivalent relationship to femininity and her commitment to revolution. In her interviews with Makboul, she responds to Makboul's query regarding the absence of vanity in the decision to alter her face with a nonchalant shrug (30:23). What is a face in the scope of Palestinian liberation? Here Khaled affirms the subversive femininity proposed in her photo. Her beauty is neither for her nor for the affection of men. It is instead single-mindedly driven toward the political. We might say she wields her face and femininity as intentional tools—ones that can be crafted and recrafted to suit the agenda ahead. In an interview with Jennifer Jajeh, she said the following: "Women change their faces, their lips, and all these plastic surgeries to beautify themselves, but they didn't beautify their minds. I did that. Beautified my mind" (Jajeh par 5). For Khaled then, her surgeries went beyond a surface level beauty and spoke to something ideological, deeper than physicality. They spoke to her sacrifices for Palestine, and allowed her to understand herself with more depth than the press would have allowed.

While other subjects of iconicity repeatedly suture themselves their message to their image, as Bishnupriya Ghosh suggests in her book *Global Icons*, Khaled is unique in ambiguating her connection to the image in favor of the message. The surgical alteration of her face performs a corporeal break of Khaled from her iconic photo—severing her ties to the image. Her face, even after her three additional surgeries, becomes new while the face that existed in the photo no longer exists except as image. It is a photo for which there is no negative. While I do not want to suggest that Khaled's surgeries are the reason why her image can sometimes appear without remembering Palestine or the PFLP, the distance she creates foregrounds that the historical Khaled was and is separate from the image created of her. She might be its basis, but it

is not tethered to her particularly, instead, it circulates a narrative derived from the photo and what stories may or may not accompany it. Khaled's image becomes a shifting signifier, while the signified remains the same: revolution at all costs, revolution without stardom or celebrity, fame or recognition. Ironically then, the historical and photographic Khaled simultaneously contributes to the heightening of awareness around Palestinian issues while contributing to the facelessness of the Palestinian people. Her image calls for revolution and liberation, but does not necessarily call up Palestine. This generic representation allows the viewer to fail to remember Palestine and at the same time allows him/her to find solace and commonality in the image. It's no surprise then, that Khaled's image finds popularity within activist communities and is remade by numerous artists to highlight varying causes under the rubric of revolution. This is not to say, of course, that the image cannot or is not still yoked to Palestine but rather that it is not always necessarily so. Rather, we can imagine how the image has sometimes-hollow signification, such that unlike other icons, it fails to always conjure Palestine for the viewer. Anecdotal evidence supports this. I often tell people that I work on Khaled. When I describe her photo, they have seen her, indeed, they know the image. But they have little to no idea as to who she is or what she might mean.

As such, Adam's 1969 print of Khaled does a number of things: it imagines revolution; it confounds typical assertions of meek Arab femininity and foregrounds a sometimes nationalist, sometimes anti-normative position of Arab sexuality; it remembers and forgets Palestine; it becomes the site, as the female body so often does, for discussions about colonization, liberation, and feminism. These uses overlap and engage one another as often as they exclude. There is no final say on what Khaled's image does because it does so much. The following section takes up then, not what the image does, but given its possibilities, what can be done with it.

Part Two: New Views

Erin Currier's *Leila Khaled* appears in the 2010 *Friendly Skies* collection alongside other notable figures in aviation history: Pancho Barnes, a female stunt pilot who started the first aviation unions, Munir Said, a Indonesian human rights activist who was poisoned with arsenic on a flight; Aminatou Haidar, a Sahrawi human rights activist who conducted a hungerstrike in Lanzarote Airport after being denied reentry into Moroccan occupied Western Sahara, and Ruth Carol Taylor, the first African American flight attendant. The subtitle of the collection "Just what is it that makes today's airports so different, so appealing?" references Richard Hamilton's collage "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?" an early pop art piece that received critical acclaim. Like Hamilton, Currier's piece is multi-modal. Her portraits reuse waste and ephemera: old travel brochures, tickets, napkins, etc alongside acrylic paint and glaze to elevate figures that might otherwise be excluded from the vaunted art of portraiture. In this way, her art functions as a history from below, asserting the significance of individuals often lost under empire (*The Friendly Skies 2*; Currier "Artist Statement.").

Currier's portrait features Khaled in her usual repose though here, as in the other contemporary renditions, she appears in full color. The red backdrop is constructed out of Swiss Air playing cards, which were distributed by many airlines on long or transatlantic flights. Her face and hair are painted, while her kufiyh is constructed from Tiger and Bee playing cards and other scraps. One scrap reads "A stones's throw," another appears to be a napkin from Palestinian Air, and a third includes the discernable phrase "stark reality." In the folds of a scarf flies what might be a white dove, captioned in Arabic. Khaled is also dressed in green fatigues, an image on her right shoulder features a figure in fatigues with a rifle over her shoulder, the caption reads "soldier" in Arabic. Notably absent from this image is Khaled's own gun—the

portrait is a close up, neither of Khaled's hands make it in frame. Currier's signature, "Erin" scrawled in cursive, graces the lower right corner partially obscuring another visible Arabic word (unclear what it is).

The portrait is striking—in some ways it resembles Khaled the least of her many reimaginings. Indeed, when I first saw it, I wasn't sure it was of Khaled at all. I assumed it was a hybrid photo of another woman in Khaled's pose. It is only Currier's embedding of the image in a field of Palestinians signifiers (the airline, the soldier, the airplane playing cards) that led me to believe it was Khaled. Closer scrutiny of her facial features—the slightly wide set of her brown eyes, her straight, blunt nose, high cheeks, and bowed lips remember Khaled ambiguously, as perhaps she might have been in the immediate aftermath of her first surgeries. The emphasis on her features, achieved through the cropping of the frame of the image, further highlight her beauty. The absence of her gun and bullet not only makes it more difficult to identify her; their absence undermines her usually blatant menace. Without her gun, Khaled is almost unrecognizable—so sutured to her image is her militancy. Instead, it is the folds of her scarf and the construction of her uniform that hint at the danger Khaled posed for the *Friendly Skies*.

I suggest that Currier's imagination of Khaled simultaneously ambiguates the icon while asking the viewer to lean in, and connect the dots scattered on the canvas to signify if not Khaled's identity, then her relationship to Palestine. She hails Khaled's hijacking and militancy with the planes in the background and the image of a female soldier on the left sleeve of the subject's green shirt. The result of her interpretation is a coded system that can be read by those in the know around Khaled and Palestine, but potentially only poses questions for those without prior familiarity. The removal of overt references to violence allows Currier to curate Khaled's

image into one similar to the other human rights activists in the Friendly Skies collection that used non-violent means to make their political protests. While Khaled's actions were in fact non-violent, (she insists in multiple interviews that she intended no harm, e.g. Jajeh par 6), the suturing of her image with her rifle makes accusations of terrorism viable. Currier's choice to take the gun out of frame thus chooses to foreground Khaled as an activist and icon, and background, or in this case, embed a more complicated narration of her story. Without her gun, Khaled's feminine pose is unchallenged, her demure posture and gaze might echo depictions of saints, and specifically the Virgin. The removal of her gun thus untroubles her gender, and alleviates her menace, making her more sympathetic. Moreover, Currier's portraiture of the people approach indicates the importance of Khaled's story—which is significant not only in the Friendly Skies, as the collection indicates, but for a political history, as the remaining portraits in the series demonstrate. Currier's portrait lodges then, both a critique of art that would relegate it to elite circles, and a second of history, which fails to remember some of its most important figures. In doing, so her portraiture returns art to the non-elite, celebrating their history, utilizing what would be otherwise considered waste to create beauty.³⁷

The Icon, created in 2011 by multi-media and sculptural artist Amer Shomali, is a pixilated image of Adam's 1969 photo created through 16 colors and 3500 tubes of lipstick, arranged on a 50x70 grid. Shomali and a group of friends, family, and fellow artists installed it at Birzeit University in the fall of 2011. In his artist statement regarding *The Icon*, Shomali notes the recurring popularity of Khaled's image, and other nationalist ones like it, in the Palestinian context today. He is keenly aware that capitalist agencies and industries use Palestinian nationalist imagery and icons to create a consumer base and sell product. His concerns are not

³⁷ I'm in contact with Currier to have a conversation about her work. She hasn't been able to respond to my questions yet, but when she does, I may be able to expand this section or do more with it.

unfamiliar—many activists, Palestinian and otherwise, have noticed a similar consumerist or style driven trend amidst the marketing, production and sale of Kufiyehs, both the scarf that Khaled wears in her Adam’s portrait and a marked symbol of Palestinian solidarity and resistance. Shomali’s piece, then, responds to the commodification of Khaled’s image by replicating it with actual commodities, lipsticks. He remarks that the companies selling nationalism are “transforming a political poster into a shelf and a revolution into a product. From a distance, it is the ‘70s and ‘80s iconic image, but from nearby it is only a shelf of lipsticks in a duty-free market, and the revolutionary visuals are as a Trojan horse” (Shomali *The Icon*). In this sense, Shomali’s *Icon* registers as criticism of not only commodification, but also global capitalism. In the next breath, Shomali discusses pixels and pixilation, saying that if we consider pixels as tatreez (the Palestinian tradition of cross stitch), and mosaic (a mainstay of Arab and Islamic decoration and design) then, *Icon*, a mosaic of lipsticks in shades of red, orange, rose, and white follows a cultural tradition while innovating upon it. Shomali’s piece both critiques the appropriation of the image by capitalist and consumer economies and places it within a tradition of Arab and Palestinian art, updating the technologies of its production. In lieu of fabric, a plastic shell, in lieu of string, lipstick.

And what to make of the lipsticks themselves? While other artists have sought to undermine her femininity, highlight her aggression, or otherwise reinterpret her, Shomali’s piece centers her femininity through the use of lipstick tubes, which can be understood as technologies that seek to alter the face, albeit not as dramatically as surgery might. The piece also plays with the idea of iconicity itself—the medium is incredibly fragile. If touched, the composition of the mosaic can be stunted and its effect as a whole diminished. Given Shomali’s attention to consumerism in the project, it seems worthwhile to think about the product in the art piece—the

lipsticks themselves, and what insight they offer into this reimagining of Khaled. Some of these implications feel obvious: lipstick is a heady feminine marker, and Khaled's femininity has been on trial since well before her iconic photo was taken—since her very engagement with the PFLP where she struggled to gain equity as a female operative. The lipstick is also a technology whose aim is to alter one's appearance—Khaled underwent surgery to achieve this goal after her first successful mission and for many who practice femininity, lipstick serves as a means to enhance an identity or take on another. Because of the pixilation that Shomali's piece involves, the perspective from which one views *the Icon* can affect recognition of Khaled's face. If one stands too close or at the wrong angle, the lipsticks fail to signify Khaled and can be mistaken, as Shomali notes, for a rack of lipsticks on sale at a store. Viewed from an appropriate angle and distance, Khaled appears to us. In so many ways then, lipstick, a technology of femininity, both hides and reveals Khaled to the viewer.

The choice of lipstick is especially ironic given Khaled's vexed relationship with beauty, as indicated in the first section. Khaled rejected conversations that foregrounded her beauty, her femininity, or her womanhood because she felt it interfered with the message of her work, the visibility of Palestine and liberation of all its people. She disliked when interviewers asked her about time spent in the mirror or her personal life. She spoke, earlier in her career, about how the woman question took a backseat to a national question (her later work and words contradict this sentiment, though that has not stopped critics from hailing her as antifeminist and in compliance with the every kind patriarchy.) Like Adams and the many others who revision Khaled, Shomali's piece foregrounds what makes her identity and her image so striking: the association of femininity with violence, beauty with battle. The lipstick re-centers femininity as a representational field for discussions of nation, capital, culture, and revolution.

Shomali notes he considered Khaled's femininity in his reinterpretation of the image, though it was, for him, a secondary consideration to the critique of companies using Palestinian iconography to rebrand themselves and manipulate consumer loyalty. Rather than using the iconic image to promote the Palestinian revolution, these companies used Khaled to sell themselves (Shomali *The Icon*). Since Khaled's image was produced and consumed so regularly in large part due to her femininity, Shomali's piece does prompt, if not on the first, then the second level, a critique of the feminine body as a tableau for capitalist and nationalist imagination, even as it similarly deploys it for resistant and revolutionary purposes. He further comments that art had been and is becoming again, a central avenue through which Palestinians visualize Palestine and Palestinian politics—this is especially true given the enormous number of Palestinian refugees who only have recourse to representation to imagine their ancestral homeland. Thus, his project intends a Palestinian audience first, and notably one that considers Palestinians in and outside the geographic location. Moreover, rather than partnering with national corporations to produce his work, he works almost exclusively with Palestinian trades people and industrial workers, primarily in Ramallah. Like Currier then, he renders art back to the people through collaboration on the form, and calling up, perhaps in some cases, creating, a shared history of the content.

Jesus Barraza is responsible for two contemporary renditions of Khaled, the first a black and white illustration titled *Layla Khaled* created in 2002 and *Sobreviviendo (Surviving)* a color print created in 2004 and reprinted once in 2006 (as part of fundraising efforts for a delegation of artists to Palestine from SNAG magazine). The former has appeared in numerous forms, particularly in street art as far as Beit Lehem in the West Bank and Fresno, California, (two hours outside of Barraza's home city of San Leandro, CA). The latter is a less circulated piece

due to its limited prints; unlike the first, it embeds a narrative within its visual frame.

Sobreviviendo reimagines Adam's second famous portrait of Khaled, taken in 1970, after her surgeries and the second of her hijacking missions. Khaled appears in *Sobreviviendo* in browns, oranges, white, black, and green. The differentiation of pigment adds depth to her hair, but erases the strong lines of her nose and cheeks. The background is no longer plastic siding, but vertical stripes of orange and pale yellow, which emanate from a low invisible center at the bottom of the print, making Khaled appear if not their source, the object of their illumination. A green frame, rounded at the top, surrounds the image and the rays. Above her head, in green block letter, outlined in white and then black, is the English phrase "Long Live Free Palestine." The message is repeated at the bottom of the image in Arabic, and again in the green border, in Spanish.

The appearance of Khaled in color in all three contemporary pieces points, as does Adam's black and white print, to the significance of the medium in which she appears. Adam's photographs appeared in newspapers in the late 60s and early 70s. Black and white film and black and white print were both common and economical. Specifically, Barraza is a print maker and his pieces are often used in activist communities, protests, and online to raise awareness and narrate political struggle in visual structures. For these reasons, the image's reproduction in color makes sense. The colors themselves are softer versions of the Palestinian flag, over the everest green, a lighter kelly green, over red, oranges and reds. The colors are also distinctly earthy. In other pieces about Palestine, for example, *Palestine*, high contrast black, white, and red, are used to render a child's face, with "Palestine" written across his/her cheek in Arabic script. Khaled approaches us more softly in *Sobreviviendo*, though her message, regarding the survival of Palestine, its continued livelihood, is certainly emphasized. While the image of Khaled sometimes fails to conjure its history, let alone its subject, Barraza's piece grounds its reality in

Palestine itself. Its earthy colors suture Khaled and Palestinian liberation to the land, in the same way many illustrations that conjure Jaffa oranges also do. The repetition of Palestine three times on the poster, in three different languages, leave no question as to what political cause the portrait ties.

The use of three languages on the poster is equally significant. In comments on his blog regarding *Sobrevivendo*, Barraza notes “I stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine and see clear connections between our common struggles for land, life and self-determination” (par 2). He recalls memories as a child and today the difficulty with which his family navigated the US Mexico border and the means by which militarization has effected their mobility (par 1). Barraza is additionally an artist educator, working with indigenous youth groups. The poster’s linguistic variety is a testament not only to Barraza’s experience as an artist who moves through multiple cultures with their attendant languages but an extension to its viewers, an attempt to hail multiple subjects from multiple standpoints to the project of the poster, awareness and solidarity regarding Palestine’s colonization and the attempts by Khaled and other “freedom fighters” toward its liberation.

In conversation with him about the piece, he notes that the use of multiple languages is both about clarity of message and access. It’s important that those involved in the struggle for Palestinian liberation be able to access the work, even if they don’t speak English. Thus, the languages selected reflect those involved with that struggle. By using English and Spanish alongside Arabic, Barraza indicated that Palestine is a concern for not only Arabs, but multiple communities, including his indigenous one. In his comments on the piece, Barraza writes:

I am Xicano. My family roots tie me to this land. My ancestors have moved across the Americas for thousands of years. I grew up in South San Diego just 10 minutes from the U.S.- Mexico border. Today my family still struggles to cross this (U.S.)

militarized and surveilled line, sometimes waiting for hours, to cross the same land that only a few generations before they had freely moved across.

My life experiences, historical ties to this land, my spirituality, and my worldview all inform my politics. I stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine and see clear connections between our common struggles for land, life and self-determination. In my role as an artist-activist I have dedicated much of my time to developing young people as leaders of our locally grounded struggles for justice. This work has included teaching how art and culture play key parts in our movements. (par 1-2).

Barraza's comments secure the connection between displaced and migrant communities in the American and Palestine. This shared relation is also evident in the visual remembrance of the figure of Mary of Guadalupe in Khaled's poster, an echo notable in the rays that illuminate her silhouette. Khaled becomes a Xicano familiar. He widens the plausible connected audience of Palestinian liberation and thus proposes a political model in which relationality and solidarity are the only means toward living free, in Palestine or otherwise.

There is no dearth of reclamations of Khaled in Palestine, particularly in the West Bank and in occupied Gaza. Her face adorns many graffitied walls. The significance, I think, of Khaled's longevity in Palestine is how unambiguating her message is in this context. There is no possibility that her face on the apartheid wall at a checkpoint in Beit Lehem is anything but a political act, a defiant one that asks its viewers to reckon with resistance to Israeli occupation. How they do so, and to what end her image enables their activism is uncertain, but there is no misrecognition or invisibilizing of Palestine in this context. The call is clear, whether or not it's heeded.

When Khaled appears outside of Palestine without context, it is possible her image fails to do the work both she and the PFLP desired: the remembering of Palestine. To many, she is just a striking face. Without the visual literacy to read her kufiyeh as a Palestinian marker, or a sense of Palestinian history, she is only a face. The evacuation of Palestine from the image of Khaled is analogous to the evacuation of Palestinians from Palestinian activism circuits,

particularly in US contexts. As Palestine experiences a perhaps unprecedented popularity in academic and activist circles, I have witnessed numerous voices speak about and for Palestine with only nodding references to Palestinians doing activist work. I have also witnessed the strange absence of Palestinians at conferences, panels, and events devoted to Palestine's liberation. In the same way, Leila Khaled can stand for revolution without Palestine, and Palestinian activism can occur without Palestinians. I note this, not to disparage those who stand in solidarity with Palestine, but rather to suggest that something goes awry in the presentation and representation of Palestine and the Palestinian people. That one of the perpetual violences against Palestine is the disappearance of her people and particularity. Rather than intentional, the transience of Palestine is an actively produced result of the Israeli/US media apparatus, repeated so frequently even those who attempt to be outside or against those circuits reproduce it. Like Amireh's female suicide bombers in "Palestinians Women's Disappearing Act" the inability to represent Arab women outside of victim paradigm, of which both the veiled and the harem dweller suffer, make the lives of actual Arab women invisible. Amira Jarmakani echoes this analysis in *Mobilizing the Politics of Invisibility*. Jarmakani writes "the politics of invisibility describes the systemic elision of nuanced analysis regarding gender justice for Arab women and an overemphasis on sensationalist issues and stereotypical categories associated with Arab womanhood. The politics of invisibility, then, is the complicated process by which Arab and Arab American women are doubly silenced by the very categories that claim to get them voice" (234). Thus, the attention to Palestine is scripted into specific archetypes that can obscure realities in Palestinian lives. In calling for activism around Palestine, and endlessly representing Palestinians martyrs, many forget about the Palestinians working in Palestine, those still living and fighting. Take for example, the coverage of the last three attacks on Gaza, wherein media

was inundated with images of dead Palestinians and Palestinians grieving, but few to no images of Palestinians thriving. This limited representation functions as a transparence, a seen but simultaneously unseen version of Palestine and Palestinians.

Instead, the three pieces discussed above adhere Khaled and her image to Palestine, with some overlapping and some exclusive political aims. Currier embeds Khaled's image in a visual field that remembers Palestine and Khaled's history specifically, with the goal of honoring Khaled's activism and publicizing the Palestinian struggle for human dignity. Shomali's intends a more direct audience initially, targeting Palestinian viewers to initiate conversation about appropriation and resistance in Palestine. It also honors a history of Palestinian artistry as inherently tied to its people. Barraza's piece makes explicit Khaled's connection to Palestine and calls for renewed solidarity and activism in the struggle for Palestinian liberation. Each piece then, offers a model for imagining first, a Palestinian liberation politics, and second, an attempt to broach Palestine in a transnational context. Currier and Barraza do so clearly: their art is produced and circulates outside of Palestine and intentionally addresses multiple audiences. But Shomali's piece does as well, because it understands itself to imagine Palestine for Palestinians everywhere, and they are indeed everywhere, including other Arab nations, and Western ones. I want to suggest that this broad geographic reach, and the way each piece proposes a political paradigm can serve as a model for a transnational Arab politics, one that uses representation not to cement belonging to a national citizenry, but to disrupt normative identifications and invite cross-ethnic alliances. Each moves toward the goal of a transnational solidarity politics that organizes outside the rubric of the nation state and thereby undermines a settler colonial legacy. Currier's offers an alternate historical record, a history of the people for the people. Shomali's

emphasizes the need for a global movement in a globalized economy. Barraza's is a model for intersectional and cross-coalitional politics.

Earlier in this chapter, and elsewhere in this dissertation, I have spoken about the project of using the feminine figure as a discursive battleground for national meanings. It is thus with some trepidation that I offer the three art pieces discussed here as examples that succeed in some capacity. This success is due in part to Khaled's image alone, the way it's haunted by violence, the way she courts revolution over love, the way her beauty is discarded in favor of liberation. It is also in part to how these artists reimagine her, refusing to divorce her from her message, infusing her image with further political critique. Certainly, the nationalist project of the PFLP failed in many capacities, its vision for a one state solution lost in the "victories" of Fatah and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. But rather than forget her as Samia Gamal was forgotten, here Khaled is transformed to take on new struggle, new forms of viable political projects. Rather than used to negotiate an exclusionary political belonging as Scheherazade was, new takes on Khaled's image offer intersectional and cross-coalitional identifications that do not rest on national boundary making.

All three pieces remember that one of the most intriguing aspects about the iconic Khaled is her relationship to the feminine, a complicated relationship that exceeds the portrait. It's clear that some of the fascination with her image is how femininity does and doesn't work in revolutionary contexts. Since Khaled's image offers us a non-heteronormative engagement with femininity and politics, one that both centers femininity and holds it alongside other political aims, it enables queer possibility in coalitional politics. Indeed, in some ways it demands engagement with gender and sexuality as central concerns for revolutionary politics. When these artists reproduce Khaled, and toy with her femininity, cite it alongside their political aims, they

heed the call for a non-normative organization of politics. They too only make their demands by re-presenting the feminine. Perhaps this is what is most vexing about the feminine as a site for discursive war—it enables us to cement the importance of gender and sexuality as aspects of the political. Yet in Currier, Barraza and Shomali's work, Khaled is not a locus for debating what is and isn't appropriately feminine or what is or isn't feminist. Rather, she suggests that revolution does and must include conversations about femininity, about gender, and about intimacy.

In so many ways, Khaled as a person exceeds her image, and in many others, the image is too conflicted and transitory to hold Khaled within it. The deliberateness with which the iconic photo was created, and the deliberate measures Khaled took to muddy her association with it stand at odds with the multiple repurposing of the image and the attempts of the PFLP to trade on Leila's notoriety to garner support for their work. The relationship is further troubled by its sometimes failed capacity to hail Palestine and Palestinians, which were undoubtedly the purpose of the image and the hijacking in the first place. Ultimately, then, the relationship between Leila Khaled and the Icon Leila Khaled is unclear. What Khaled and her numerous revisions offer us, instead of stable meaning, is a chance to remake and envision transnational politics in a way that does not subvert or subsume gender, but centers it as a constituting technology.



Figure 1: Photo by Eddie Adams, Associated Press, 1969.



Figure 2: Photo by Eddie Adams, Associated Press, 1969.



Figure 3: Poster by Ghassan Kanifani, PFLP, 1968.



Figure 4: Photo by Eddie Adams, AP, 1970.



Figure 5: *Leila Khaled* Mixed Media on Panel by Erin Currier, 2010.



Figure 6: *The Icon* Installation by Amer Shomali, 2011.



Figure 7: *The Icon* Silkscreen Print by Amer Shomali, 2011.



Figure 8: *Sobreviviendo* Screen Print by Jesus Barraza, 2004.

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Conclusion

On the website YourArabianFantasy.net, Ashley Rahimi Syed encourages visitors to make her, photographed like a paper doll in a ruched white bra and a pair of high-waisted lacy briefs, their Arabian fantasy. Visitors to the site can select one of five “Arabian Fantasies” for her to don for their viewing pleasure. Said can become, with a singular click: Burka Babe, War-Torn Woman, Jasmine, Kim K, or All American-Girl. Each rendition of Syed in the corresponding costume comes with a quick sound bite, a written witticism, and the character in three poses. For each, the first pose is Syed dressed in costume, hands on hips, at least partially facing the camera. The text that surrounds her is placed in sixteen sided golden stars, written in a font that summons Disney’s *Aladdin*. The background is perhaps a still from just that film, complete with its distinct rounded turrets and palm-treed horizon. You can imagine, almost, Syed’s torso as a doll available for purchase, each costume sold separately.

While admittedly heavy-handed, Syed’s site evokes the limited modes of femininity and corresponding sexualities explored in this dissertation. Burka Babe’s ululation is followed by the sound of a gun firing; the text informs us “The only thing she loves more than Allah is her AK-47.” She poses with an AK-47 in both hands, and again with her head bowed and her hands clasped in front of her in prayer. In Burka Babe we meet the revolutionary and the terrorist, the pitied and feared veiled Arab woman. War-Torn Woman recreates the 1985 National Geographic

cover shot by Steve McCurry, of a young Afghani woman in $\frac{3}{4}$ profile, wearing a red scarf loosely draped over her hair, her green eyes trained firmly on the cameras. In her sound bite, a woman sobs. Her caption reads “Her homeland may be destroyed, but with a cover like that, who can complain?” War-Torn Woman also appears with her hands covering her face, eyes closed, and face tilted up in anguish in the third pose. In the second still, Syed has photo shopped her face and curly hair into the original National Geographic cover. War-Torn Woman is the classic victim of the Middle East (though not, perhaps pointedly, Arab) and its War-Torn Woman that enables and justifies both imperial agendas in the Middle East, and as we learned in the second chapter on Scheherazade, Western feminist indictments of Middle Eastern culture.

When we click on Jasmine, we learn “Sure, she’s got a great heart, but she’s got a way better rack.” Her audio is a clip from the film *Aladdin*, in which Jasmine recites, “You’ve stolen my heart³⁸.” Her poses include a typical “genie” posture with her hands clasped above her head, and another with a whimsical bird perched on one finger, one leg kicked up. Here then is the erotic and exotic sexual fantasy of the Arab world gifted to us in Orientalist and colonial discourse. Jasmine is scantily clad, promising to give the viewer not only her heart, but something more. We move next to Kim K, who tells us “[Her] butt is real” via audio, and is captioned with “Exotic enough to be a sexpot without looking like a scary Arab!” Kim takes a selfie, and poses later with the aforementioned butt on prominent display. Kim K is an adaptation of the assimilated Arab woman, one with enough mystery to be erotic, but not as much to be scary. She, like Jasmine before her, is hypereroticized. That Kim Kardashian, upon whom the trope is based, is in fact of partial Armenian descent may not detract from her suitedness to represent this trope—being the right amount of exotic is not reliant on specific ethnic heritage,

³⁸ Embarrassing though it is, I’m deeply familiar with this film, and wanted to note that Jasmine offers this particular line while she is attempting to fool Jaffar and imprison him at the end of the film.

but can instead be performed by anyone just brown enough, or more fittingly, not quite white. Finally, we have “All American Girl.” In this costume, Syed wears jean cutoffs and an American flag t-shirt, and extorts “God Bless America!” Her caption claims, “Whenever someone says ‘al-Qaeda,’ she says the Pledge of Allegiance!” In one image, American Girl holds a drink from Starbucks, her long straightened hair draped over her shoulder; in another she strikes a belly-dance pose, bent back at the waist, one foot forward and bent, one hand gently resting on her head. Though American Girl’s original icon is a white woman (pop and country music star Taylor Swift), Said’s personification of American Girl reverts in the last image still to the assimilated standby offered in Kim K. She is just Arab enough to strike a belly dance pose, but not so Arab as to condone violence. No, this Arab is patriotically, consumptively, American.

What Syed’s project demonstrates is the continued emphasis and demands on Arab femininity to perform or respond to Orientalist, colonial, and imperialist renditions of the culture that would render it colonizable or assimilable into Western and/or US political ends. Syed, an Iranian American artist, muddles the lines around what defines Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Arab culture in her response to demands on her femininity in much the same way those demands muddle the distinctions between Arab culture, Middle Eastern politics, and Islam. Her self-described status as a “first generation US American of Middle Eastern descent” reveals her deep awareness of the means by which the “there” of the Middle East informs the “here” of her US American status. The limited tropes of femininity available are each limited in their capacity to represent a fully realized feminine subject outside the discourses that colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism have allotted. Said, like Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled before her, is caught in a representational bind constructed and enacted on femininity and sexuality (whether in its excess as in Jasmine, or its absence as in War-Torn Woman). Syed’s site, and the numerous

iterations of the project she performs in her work (available on her artist page, www.ashleyrahimisyed.com), underscore one of the primary assertions of this project, that Arab femininity functions as a discursive site for negotiating competing metrics of authentic Arab culture informed by colonialism, Orientalism, nationalism, and new colonialist ventures. If YourArabianFantasy.net demonstrates the horizon of possibility available to artists and writers representing Arab femininity and subjects enacting it, how might we imagine being queer, Arab, and OK? In this conclusion, where might I gesture toward queer Arab futures, toward non-reactive, non-normative femininities?

This project aims to intervene in conversations in critical ethnic studies, Arab American studies, and queer of color critique. To do so, it has primarily focused on understanding and challenging representations of transnational Arab femininity produced by Arab writers and artists. In my analysis of Arab and Arab American representations of femininity, I have located competing colonial logics—Orientalist, nationalist, authentic, inclusionary, settler colonial—that artists and writers must negotiate as they produce representations of women. In our attempts to respond to, or circumvent, stereotypical representations of Arab femininity, we have created new exclusionary parameters that mark non-normative performances of femininity and sexuality as: forgettable, in the case of Samia Gamal and othered, in the case of Scheherazade. While it's certainly not my intention to hold up Leila Khaled as an unproblematic or liberatory performance of femininity, the richness of her image and the polyphonic means by which her image speaks posits political possibilities rather than limitations.

The archetypal nature of the three figures of the this project—the dancer, the storyteller, and the revolutionary—stand in tension with the three dominant representations of Arab femininity made available in Western media: the harem girl, the silenced woman, the suicide

bomber. While it's tempting to see Samia, Scherherazade, and Leila as alternatives to said stereotypes, it is perhaps more accurate to understand how each haunts the others. To recognize how Samia's artistry was performed in the shadow of the exotic and erotic sexuality of Oriental women; to hear Scheherazade's voice echoing against another's silence; to demarcate death as the thin line separating Khaled from some of her successors. We might indeed proliferate the number of types available for representing Arab femininity, as Syed's work indicates, but that proliferation itself has not resulted in inherently liberatory representational politics. Rather, in comparison and conversation, we locate that which inhibits us and attempt to move away from it.

But more than this—to know that violence courted the dancer and the harem alike, underwrote the storyteller and those muted from speech. To know then, that how we are represented is always in conversation with how we represent ourselves. To maintain a vivid dialogue between how we are spoken for and how we speak. To see the representations that result as mutually constituted by “them” and by “us.” This may seem like a rudimentary observation, but in fact, the intimacy between these representations speak to the ways Arabs and Arab Americans are constituted somewhere between “here” and “there.”

It is my hope that this project, and the focus on Arab femininity central to it, helps begin and/or keep moving conversations in ethnic, queer, and feminist studies that have sought to accommodate difference and realized in short order, that accommodations only take us so far. What *Moving Femininities* demonstrates, instead, is how our notions of femininity, ethnicity, and queerness are transformed and continually moved by the intersectionality across these categories of study. In other words, ethnic studies and queer of color critique must recalibrate to a transnational frame when Arab subjects are considered and Arab and Arab American studies must interrogate heteronormative assumptions and strategies to account for its non-normative

subjects. Engagements with representations of Arab femininity in the forms of Gamal, Scheherazade, and Khaled reveal to us not only the limits of inclusion or the nation state, but that the forms of cultural production that teem with possibility are those that do not mimic or reinscribe the oppressive paradigms of heteronormativity, assimilation, or nationalism. Particularly, we can read in Khaled's recreations new political and representational strategies to explore as we move toward anti-colonial, anti-settler colonial, and non-normative possibilities for our femininities and our communities. Carrier encourages us to seek a history from below, Shomali encouraged us to resist relying on capitalist economies, and Barraza encouraged us to seek commonality and solidarity with other communities of resistance.

To be queer, Arab, and OK is a proposition that stretches our contemporary political modalities. In the representations discussed in this work, strategies for a good life have looked like: nationalism, inclusion, respectability, cultural belonging. In the case of Gamal, those nationalist and respectability paradigms failed. In the case of Scheherazade, inclusion and cultural belonging rested, nay relied, on the abjection of queer and other non-normative subjects. It was only in the new depictions of Khaled that we began to imagine more capacious political and social categories, ones that elided nationalism and inclusion, and focused instead on resistance and relationality. It is fitting that we found these strategies in undercurrents of American and Arab culture rather than at their surface. It is within those spaces—those spaces between people, that representation implied possibility over foreclosure.

One of the challenges and rewards of doing contemporary work is the ever-shifting terrain of one's archive. I get emails approximately once a month that alert me to the presence of a new text that discusses Scheherazade, or a new Leila spotting. The future of this project is somewhat reliant on what newness emerges in Arab and Arab American culture regarding the

dancer, storyteller, and revolutionary. But whatever emerges on these figures, I look forward to exploring their movement and its ramifications for queer Arab culture and politics. Particularly, I think an attention to indigenous studies and critiques of settler colonialism will offer concrete structures of organizing and thinking culture when one is geographically dislocated, without replicating impulses toward nationalism or colonization. I also imagine, as Arab and Arab American texts proliferate, more representations of queer Arab culture (perhaps even my Queen!) will emerge, and offer space for thinking about how queer critiques of nationalism, assimilation, and normativity might inflect our reading of “properly” queer Arab texts. Particularly, I am interested in what it will look like to be OK, an ephemeral and affective judgement predicated on relationality rather than objective realities. When we are “OK” we are constructing our position on a sliding scale of feeling, where the poles of good or bad are not clearly defined. It is unclear to me what would be a good queer Arab life in the US or elsewhere, and it’s unclear to me where bad might end. Is good neoliberal citizenship? Is bad “there are no gays in the Middle East”? Rather than thinking things are “good,” “bad,” or “getting better” for queer subjects, Arab or otherwise, I want to while in the OK—to seek and imagine new modalities of being in our current political and social climate.