From Post-Cards to Stand-Up: Cross Cultural Representations of the Veil in France and the Maghreb

DISSERTATION

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By

Adrianne M. Barbo, M.A.

Graduate Program in French and Italian

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:

Professor Danielle Marx-Scouras, Advisor

Professor Jennifer Willging

Professor Youssef Yacoubi

Abstract

Reductive ideas confining Muslim women to notions of the highly erotic, yet cloistered, have been perpetuated to the general public through the consumption of Orientalist material culture. Objects such as colonial post-cards and comic strips, and even music-cafés, have established harem images of Arab women as truth in Western cultural imaginary of the East. Today, a history of Orientalist stereotypes continues to shape many people's ideas about Arab women. In recent months, Muslim women have become the most widespread target of hate crimes in France. Debates concerning the right to wear the Islamic headscarf in French public spaces, including those centered on the experiences of young, Muslim women, have proven to be circular and repetitive. Moreover, the motivating factors of most debates regarding the veil, such as legitimizing a certain conception of Frenchness, profit from a perpetuation of stereotypes that depict the veil as a form of female enslavement. Thus, Muslim women's subjectivity is often superseded in conversations about the headscarf.

This dissertation therefore examines how emergent and cross-cultural artists in France and the Maghreb may be able to represent the veil in a more nuanced fashion than traditional, political Manichean discourse. I consider how the double-cultural backgrounds and trajectories of a Moroccan-British photographer, a Cypriot-French rapper/writer, and a Tunisian-French comedian enable these artists to complicate both

Muslim and non-Muslim behavioral scripts defining what it means to be an "authentic" Muslim woman as well as "authentically" French. I discuss how the work of these artists challenges spectators to expand and to question their conceptions of legitimate behaviors for a variety of things, such as Muslim women, Frenchness, and even rap and rock stars. Analyzing the implications of transcultural artistic creations, pro-active silence (silence as an act of resistance), and moments of (in)visibility (questioning markers of difference), I show how a group of artists has been successful in creating and governing narratives and discourse about veiled women. Using art as a medium of communication provides these artists a position of privilege, or enhanced opportunity for expression, with which to mock or to refuse to contribute to dominant, cultural discourse about Muslim women and the Islamic headscarf. Finally, I consider the extent to which the artistic genres in question are amenable to discussions about the veil. By re-appropriating artistic forms of expression, such as post-cards and photography, that were once responsible for the dissemination of Orientalist narratives of Muslim women, I show how artists are questioning and reclaiming modern narratives concerning Muslim women now circulating in mass culture. My examination of the reception of the artistic works studied is also revelatory of societal and political dilemmas linked to debates concerning French, national identity. Although these artists may not be able to solve identity problems for all French, veiled women, they have succeeded in offering an alternative perspective of the hijab that is slowly permeating hegemonic, cultural discourse.

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Vita

June 2002……...Westlake High School

2006.....B.A. French and Comparative Studies, The Ohio State University

2008……...M.A. French, The Ohio State University

2006 to 2014……Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of French and Italian, The Ohio State University

2008-2009……..French Teaching Assistant, Marseille, France

2010……...Critical Language Scholarship, Egypt

2011-2012, 2013-2014……Peer Supervisor, Department of French and Italian, The Ohio State University

2012-2013……..Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Morocco

Fields of Study

Major Field: French and Italian

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Introduction

In her article "The Discourse of the Veil," Leila Ahmed argues that the colonial narrative of women and Islam has shaped conceptions of the veil in contemporary, political discourse in a number of Arab countries. Through her analysis, Ahmed demonstrates that oppositional responses to colonial and Orientalist narratives have risked reinforcing the very discourses that they seek to overcome and to deconstruct. Reviewing the Algerian resistance against French colonial powers in this particular case, Ahmed argues that the implementation of the veil as a tool of resistance was first dictated by actions of the French rather than the colonized:

> The veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative…the dignity and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack – the customs relating to women . . . the resistance narrative thus reversed – but thereby also accepted – the terms set in the first place by the colonizers. And therefore, ironically, it is Western discourse that in the first place determined the new meanings of the veil and gave rise to its emergence as a symbol of resistance. (49)

As a result of French efforts to unveil Algerian women and to dismantle native, cultural traditions and values, the veil played a key role in the resistance movement and took on new, symbolic meanings. The strategic use of the veil in colonial Algeria was a resistance

tactic with the ultimate goal of attaining liberation from the French as well as the preservation of indigenous values. However, the new connotations of this piece of cloth were ultimately a consequence of the ideologies of *exterior* forces. The very implementation of the veil in the Algerian resistance against the French was an inherent acknowledgement of stereotypes concerning North African women in colonial and Orientalist discourse. As a result, former colonialist agendas and acts of indigenous resistance continue to govern contemporary conversations about the veil in the Middle East and the Maghreb. Haunted by violent, colonial pasts, topics such as women's rights or political campaigns to modernize are now inextricably linked to the veil. The voices of Muslim women who choose to address the latter are often eclipsed by legacies of Western occupation.

Continuing the discussion of the veil today, it is vital to consider the implications of recounting the assault, or rather the deliberate manipulation and misinterpretation of *a* veil whose significance was ultimately determined by an Orientalist narrative. Is it possible to represent instances of Western preoccupations with the veil and Muslim women in the colonial Maghreb without corroborating stereotypes established in the colonial narrative? Malek Alloula attempts to do so in his examination of the portrayal of Algerian women in colonial photography entitled *The Colonial Harem*; however, a number of scholars are critical of Alloula's efforts to analyze Orientalist photography. Lila Abu-Lughod, for example, suggests that Alloula's text perpetuates the colonial gaze:

> The French penetration of the harem is for Alloula a metaphor for the conquest of Algeria . . . In publishing these post-cards, Alloula has once more offered these women . . . to the gaze of people for whom

> photographs of half-naked women are part of a familiar genre - pornography- whose message is women's sexual availability. (393)

According to Abu-Lughod, rather than deconstructing the colonial narrative, Alloula re-exposes Algerian women to a voyeuristic gaze and to power struggles concerning male honor. The women photographed are reduced to pawns used in a war controlled by the male Other as well as the male from within (home). Alloula is not able to evade the perpetuation of Orientalist discourse in his analysis of the representation of Algerian women and the veil in colonial North Africa.

Instead of sustaining the colonial narrative of Muslim women, as Alloula has done, scholars such as Mohja Kahf, Meyda Yegenoglu, and Irvin Schick contend that it would be more effective to offer a framework for analysis which defines the conditions under which Maghrebian women, in this occurrence, were photographed by French colonists in addition to how such an industry was able to thrive. Who, for example, viewed and purchased the photographs? Who (or in the name of what undertaking) funded the photographers? Why were consumers of colonial art work and photography so eager to see "the colonial woman" unveiled or exposed? Offering a conceptual schema that evaluates operative mechanisms of the "economy of Orientalism" (Schick) would produce an alternative way to interpret and to discuss Orientalist images of Muslim women. The question that I would like to address is: what specifically could Alloula have done differently in order to re-present these photos without perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes? Moreover, is it possible to represent the veil in current contexts without reinforcing previously established, Orientalist readings of Arab women's subjectivity? Is it conceivable to find a more nuanced space – in both the West and the East - for a

discourse, one which exceeds the confines of traditional, political Manichean discourse when discussing the veil?

Emergent Artists: A New Conversation?

The hijab, or the Islamic headscarf, has become a highly controversial issue in several European countries in recent years. In the name of secularity and equality, countries such as France and Belgium have banned the *niqab*, or the full face-veil, in all public spaces.[1] Justified by considerations for *laïcité*, or French secularism, the headscarf was formally banned in French public institutions, most notably schools, in 2004.[2] *Laïcité* is a widely debated issue whose problematic interpretation continues to be disputed not only by politicians, but by both teachers and students in French public schools.[3] Banning "ostentatious displays of religion," the 2004 secularity law is viewed by many Muslims as a decidedly racist legislation. While the law does not forbid Christians from wearing small crosses in public institutions, women who practice hijab cannot attend school while veiled. Politicians, such as former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, are at present seeking to pass legislation that would ban the Islamic headscarf in French universities.[4] Although historically, laïcité was enacted as a means to protect the state from the Catholic Church, today, the stakes governing interpretations of French secularity tend to evolve around the issues of visibility and national identity (Bowen 22).

Visible displays of Islam are reminders of the reality of an increasingly diverse, French society, of the presence of an Other. Women who resolutely claim the right to

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1. See Traynor.
2. For more information about French secularity laws and debates, consult Bowen.
3. See "Laïcité: L'Ecole, Le Défi des Religions »
4. See Daley and Rubin.

wear headscarves in French public space challenge ideas of Frenchness by insisting that they "can abide by the rules of the Republic and the life together (*la vie commune*) that is France" (Bowen 249). In opposition to narratives that label veiled women as oppressed and thus incompatible with French, republican values, veiled women today maintain that Frenchness is not embodied in a particular uniform. Although their voices are not always heard, many Muslim women seek to complicate ideas about what it means to be authentically French as well as authentically Muslim. Similar to political discourse concerning the veil in former colonies, the subjectivity of veiled, Muslim women aspiring to express their allegiances to both France and to Islam are often superseded by a hegemonic discourse that frames the choice to veil as one made within the limitations of inherently misogynist traditions. As a consequence, in my dissertation I will examine how new and emergent French and Maghrebian artists may be able to represent the veil in ways that challenge conversations concerning Muslim women, which previously have been governed by reductive discourse of the dominant culture. I will consider how certain artistic genres may have the potential to create spaces of privilege – enhanced opportunity of self-expression - which permit artists to shape narratives about Muslim women within their respective cultures, or which permit artists addressing the veil to choose to which discourses they would like to contribute or to move beyond. Do artistic works portraying the veil offer a better framework with which to discuss the hijab than that of traditional, dualistic political discourse?

The veil has been studied thoroughly in analyses of Orientalist literature and art as well as though anthropological, sociological, feminist, and political frameworks. And

while a great deal of academic work has examined Western representations of the veil from the medieval period through the present, little research in comparison has addressed contemporary, Muslim artistic representations of the veil. In this dissertation I will be examining cross-cultural, Muslim representations of the veil across a variety of artistic expression. By studying the works and performances of a photographer, a rapper/writer, and a stand-up comedian, I will demonstrate how Muslim artists and writers are questioning the validity of discourse about the veil in France and the Maghreb.

Hassan Hajjaj is a Moroccan-British photographer whose "transcultural" (see Pratt, Shilton) background permits him to complicate notions of what it means to be an "authentic" Muslim woman. The focal points of his photography consider the issues of Capitalist consumption, fashion, and the representation of Moroccan women. What is most compelling about Hajjaj's work is the appearance of a dialogue between his photography and the colonial photography of the Maghreb. Hajjaj recreates poses found in Orientalist photographs in order to mock colonial stereotypes. Finally, Hajjaj's work takes on another dimension with the assortment of symbols of Western capitalism (Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Coca Cola bottles in Arabic script) along with traditional items associated with daily life that one might find in Morocco (eye kohl, cooking ingredients, Arabic letter blocks). In addition to photography, Hajjaj's corpus also includes short-films as well as fashion and interior design.

Mélanie Georgiades, whose stage name is Diam's, is a former leading French, female rapper. Diam's is known for her cutting lyrics which have openly criticized French, right-wing politicians for their disinterest in socio-economic struggles linked

with immigration and racism. Because much of her corpus has addressed conditions of the *banlieue* (suburban, impoverished neighborhoods), such as gender inequality and poverty, Diam's also has been considered a role-model for young, *banlieue* women; however, after her conversion to Islam in 2008, many have come to view Diam's as a "threat to young women" (Vertaldi). Furthermore when the public learned that she had also adopted the practice of hijab, the rapper's allegiances to the themes of her music as well as to France were questioned. Shortly after her conversion, Diam's concluded her career as a rapper, deciding to express herself through writing instead.

Samia Orosemane, a veiled, Muslim comedian, is of Tunisian cultural background. In her one-woman show, "Femme de Couleurs" ("Woman of many Colors"), Orosemane recounts her experiences as the daughter of Maghrebian immigrants, cleverly mocking stereotypes about veiled women. In addition to her one woman show, Orosemane also uses social networks, such as Youtube and Facebook, as locations of performance. Although her work is not as well-known as that of Hajjaj or Diam's, Orosemane has expanded greatly the scope of her audience through the use of social networks

The cross-cultural nature of the artistic works examined in my dissertation is significant because it permits me to understand how discourse may evolve depending on context and location. I consider how the different religious and ethnic backgrounds of the artists studied shape narratives and social scripts dictating behavioral scripts for "authentic" Muslim women. Additionally, I will consider the growing phenomenon of auto-representations, or artistic representations of the veil created by Muslim women

wearing the hijab.[5] The following artists were chosen because their works as well as personal trajectories are all transnational and cross-cultural to some extent. Finally, these works have been selected based on their diversity of artistic expression, ranging from pop-culture to memoirs. This study will examine if and how the treatment of the veil in emergent artistic works may result in a certain transformation of the discourse of the veil in Franco-Maghrebi contexts as well as a transformation of the artistic genre under question. To what extent are the genres to be studied amenable to discussions of the veil? How has the general public reacted to the appearance of representations or conversations about the veil in new or previously unexplored forms of expression? How has the media responded to artistic productions embodying the veil? I will consider how certain motifs such as race, religion, and the veil, have evolved in each artistic source. As Danielle Marx-Scouras notes in *La France de Zebda,* a study of a multi-ethnic French rock band, *an* ideal version of France will be a result of a France influenced by its artists; the ideal France will openly accept and embrace diversity:

> C'est la France qui ira de soi; si ce n'est pas aujourd'hui, alors demain. Ce moment où on ne demandera plus de décliner son identité adviendra dans un futur proche. Celui où « tout individu, tout poète, pourra circuler librement. (29)

The extent to which the artistic genres that I address in my dissertation are malleable to serve and to represent marginalized peoples as well as the extent to which they are able to

[5]. "Hijab" comes from the Arabic verb "hajaba" (to cover) and generally refers to an observance of Islamic modesty requirements for women. The word "hijab" is widely used to denote a veil. "Hijabi" is used to refer to a woman who wears the hijab. However in light of its etymological roots, I will also use the term "practice hijab" to refer to women who practice a wide spectrum of different forms of Islamic dress ranging from the traditional headscarf to the niqab (face veil).

orchestrate more nuanced conversations about Muslim women and the veil may reveal just how prevalent the "France of Zebda" is.

Before commencing an analysis of discourse in artistic works representing the veil, I will define my understanding of Orientalism. In its simplest terms, Orientalism is the study of Eastern cultures by Western scholars. It also references the imitation and depiction of Eastern cultures as eroticized by Western artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such depictions were considered accurate or truthful because they were legitimated by a long history of Orientalism that preceded them. In sum, Orientalism refers to the manner in which the West has been able to create and control the manner in which the East is viewed and treated. Including domains such as artistic representation, education, media, and political discourse, the ways in which perceptions of the East, in the West, have been manipulated are abundant; once these fabricated images are accepted as truth, persons or entities in power are able to capitalize on them by garnering public support and authority over both knowledge about Eastern cultures and over the East itself.

In his monumental study *Orientalism*, Edward Said defines a system of power whereby the West has created or "invented" the East. Said notes that the "creation of the Orient" was a gradual process in which Western beliefs about the East were legitimated and transmitted through a system of discourse--namely, Orientalism. Regardless of the accuracy of Orientalist ideas about the East, the authorial power of this system of discourse rendered it nearly infallible. The Other loses subjectivity in the discourse of Orientalism; his or her identity is fixed and inalterable:

> Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

The West defined the Orient in order to control it. Starting with the eighteenth century (a proximate beginning of the colonial era in the Middle East), Said credits Oriental scholars and Oriental scholarly societies for disseminating knowledge about the East and then moves on to discuss the influences of imaginative and travel literatures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The resulting impact that Orientalist discourse in scholarship and artistic creations has had on political discourse is immense. Colonial and imperial "civilizing" missions have been justified by fabricated images and invented knowledge about the East. Today, many Western media outlets persist in promoting a political, Manichean discourse about the East in order to legitimize contemporary agendas and legislation. Many of the artists examined in this dissertation dedicate their work to challenging Orientalist stereotypes about the veil and Muslim women. Thus it is imperative to consider colonial pasts and the complexities of discourses in order to analyze best the nature and implication of contemporary conversations about the hijab.

The first chapter of my dissertation is a two-pronged approach, which provides a contextual setting for the artists whom I will later examine. To begin, in order to understand better the nature as well as societal or political implications of artistic representations of the veil in contemporary France and the Maghreb, I will offer a brief survey of scholarship regarding analyses of Orientalist works depicting Muslim women. Here, my survey will be twofold, consisting of a consideration for scholars whose

research focuses on analyses of historical, Western representations of Muslim women and then an examination of scholarly approaches to the analysis of contemporary, Arab artists. In the former section, I will explore the work of scholars, such as Mohja Kahf, Reina Lewis, and Meyda Yegenoglu, who stress the importance of acknowledging the motivating factors for the requisition, creation, and consumption of Orientalist works in relation to a plethora of relevant cultural issues. To demonstrate effectively the potency of Orientalist discourse, it is necessary to illustrate why perpetuating a fabricated image of the East would be profitable to the West.[6] Kahf and Lewis, for example, name misogynist agendas linked to the maintenance of Western, gender norms as well as women's acquisitions of new forms of agency as key players in the economy of Orientalism. After elaborating theoretical approaches to the analysis of Orientalist works, I will study the work of researchers as well as contemporary, Arab artists who strive to find a way to represent female, Arab subjectivity without perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes. Like artist Zeinab Sedira, I will consider how "the debate [regarding Muslim women's subjectivity and sexuality] can be moved forward." Lastly, in the latter half of this chapter I will map out a short history of Orientalist consumption in the West. I will give a material consideration for Orientalism by discussing how stereotypes about Muslim women were marketed to the West, particularly to the French general public, in the form of objects ranging from oil tableaux to post-cards and cartoon strips. This

[6]. In laying out the foundations for *Orientalism*, Said notes the necessity of understanding how the Orient was produced : "Without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3).

chapter will provide a contextual foundation for the material as well as the theoretical issues that I will examine throughout the rest of my dissertation.

After illustrating how Orientalist ideas about Muslim women may have been "marketed" to French masses, I will analyze Hassan Hajjaj's multi-cultural approach to photography by examining carefully three of his works. Basing my analysis on Mary Louise Pratt's and Siobhan Shilton's definitions and applications of the "transcultural" (non-hierarchal, cultural exchange), I will explain how Hajjaj's cross-cultural background has enabled him to move past the limitations of binary discourse in his representations of Arab women. In this chapter, I will also discuss the significance of Hajjaj's implementation of a "multiplicity of discourses" (a recognition for various dimensions of Arab women's identity as well as a recognition of the relationship between his photography with other works representing Arab culture) (Lloyd) into his artistic productions. By incorporating references to Orientalist photography, Western Capitalist production, fashion, and Moroccan tradition and material culture, Hajjaj challenges both Muslim and non-Muslim spectators to re-consider notions of what it means to be an "authentic" (as defined in other discourses which preclude Arab or Muslim women from partipating in a number of activities or adhering to a number of beliefs), Muslim woman. This chapter will also be guided by my experiences interviewing Hajjaj and viewing his works during my Fulbright experience in Morocco as well as by an opportunity that I had to interview him after he spoke about his *My Rockstars* collection at my graduate institution, The Ohio State University. By means of comparing Hajjaj's re-appropriation of the popular Orientalist motif of the "odalisque" with Alloula's analysis thereof in *The*

Colonial Harem, I will show how Hajjaj has found a way to re-inscribe Moroccan customs and realities on images that have reduced so greatly Arab women to notions of the erotic and the oppressed. This chapter will demonstrate how a greater consideration for the "narrative dimension" (Bal) of colonial photography would have enabled Alloula to present the Algerian post-cards without perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes. The irony of *what is missing* (par rapport à colonial photography of Arab women) in Hajjaj's oeuvre is precisely why the artist's telling portrayal of his love for Moroccan culture is successful in mocking stereotypes about Muslim women.

In chapter three, I examine closely the representation of the veil in Diam's' musical corpus, her written works, and in media reactions to the former rapper's highly publicized conversion to Islam. While there are other, successful Muslim rappers in France, Diam's' conversion was particularly frustrating to many because she chose to practice the hijab. A number of other performers, politicians, and activists have condemned Diam's' choice to veil and now view her as a "negative image for young girls" (Vertaldi). Even though she has ended her career as a performer, accounts of the rapper's conversion in the media continue to portray her as subjugated, desperate, and insincere. In response to polemical and heated debates concerning her adoption of the veil as well as her conversion, Diam's chose silence as a way to refute false narratives about her new life as a Muslim woman. She has been highly selective in agreeing to speak with the press, and since 2009 the former rapper has accorded only one journalist the right to televised interviews. Basing my analysis on Christine Keating's explanation of non-oppressive instances of silence, I view Diam's' "refusal to speak" as an instance of

privileged silence. By controlling how, with whom, and when she discusses her conversion, Diam's is able to refuse "being forced" to contribute to the dominant culture's discourse about Muslim women. Discussing why it is culturally acceptable for artists who are not visibly Muslim to rap as well as why the former rapper's reputation as a role-model to *banlieue* youth was immediately challenged, this chapter maps out the fierce debates concerning national identity and Frenchness which have played out in publicized reactions to Diam's' conversion and adoption of the Islamic headscarf.

In chapter four, I will study Samia Orosemane, a French, Muslim woman of Tunisian descent who has transformed her struggles as a *muhajiba*, or veiled woman, in a European country into a one woman comedy show. Samia Orosemane uses humor to mock French stereotypes about Muslims and the veil. The idea of mixing stand-up comedy with the issue of the veil is undoubtedly a new and interesting phenomenon. Furthermore, as a veiled, Muslim performer, Orosemane is of interest because she performs in order to express her experiences as a veiled woman. While on the other hand, after donning the *jilbab*,[7] Diam's ended her career as a performer. Although the practice of hijab was not the only reason why Diam's chose to terminate her rap career, she was concerned about the visibility of her veil during performances. In response, this chapter elaborates how Orosemane plays with the notions of visibility in her comedic performances. Basing my study on Marjorie Garber's analysis of markers of difference and visibility as well as my interview with the performer in the spring of 2014, I illustrate how Orosemane complicates French social scripts for veiled, Muslim women by

[7]. The jilbab is a conservative form of veiling.

transgressing established markers of difference. This chapter investigates the discourses that have led to the creation of Orosemane's show. Why does Orosemane feel the need to make jokes of her experience being Arab, Muslim, and veiled in France? Does Orosemane's work expand the space for dialogue about the hijab, and to what extent is the genre of comedy amenable to performances by veiled women? Although Orosemane is not as well-known as Hassan Hajjaj or Diam's, she has used social media as a platform from which to broaden the scope of her audience. As a result, she has been invited to participate in a number of French televised and radio broadcasted talk shows. I will consider the nature of Orosemane's appearance – as a veiled, Muslim woman – on national, French talk shows as well as how the medium of comedy has permitted her to make comments on sensitive, polemical topics that done otherwise might be considered highly offensive.

In sum, this dissertation will show how new and emergent artists are working to re-define the symbolism of the veil. This entails both a re-appropriation of old representations as well as the creation of new modes of expression. In order to demonstrate how the artists examined are deconstructing stereotypes about Muslim women that have been perpetuated to mass-culture through Orientalist objects of consumption, I will begin my study with both an examination of methods of analysis for studies of Orientalist works as well as a brief history of Orientalist material culture.

Chapter 1: The Islamic Veil and the West: A Short History of Representations of Muslim Women and the Problematics of Analysis

Before embarking on a study of cross-cultural and emergent artistic works addressing the veil and the representation of Muslim women, I would like to consider the stakes of analysis in works that risk being read as Orientalist simply because of their subject-matter. The veil is a heated issue in both Western and Muslim countries. The divisive nature of debates about the Islamic headscarf is rooted in a tumultuous colonial history as well as in relations of power between the East and the West. In this chapter, by acknowledging the intricacies of inquiry as defined by other scholars examining Orientalist works in addition to providing a contextual, material background, which will explain briefly how Orientalist discourse has been disseminated to the general public, I will map out the risks that contemporary artists representing the veil must combat in order to address the topic without perpetuating a reductive, binary discourse.

Western representations of the Islamic veil and Muslim women date back to the medieval period and have significantly evolved over the centuries. The concept of the veil as something alien to Western society, as an unquestionable indicator of difference denoting the Other, has not always existed. Analyzing the evolution of Western

representations of Muslim women, poet and scholar Mohja Kahf notes that Orientalist notions of the harem and the obsession with the veil do not enter into Western discourse until the seventeenth century: "'The Muslim woman is being victimized' is the litany of a later age in Western discourse. There is no veil and no seclusion in her medieval representations. There is often an attempt to recuperate her as a Christian or a European, rather than an emphasis on her irreducible alienness" (5). According to Kahf, in medieval Western representations, the Muslim woman[8] is not viewed as an inevitably submissive victim of her culture, but rather as a woman who could be European; one who could easily not be the Other but rather an "equal" if she were to convert from Islam to Christianity. She does not need "saving" from what is viewed as an oppressive form of dress.[9] What we can learn from Kahf is that it is imperative to consider the historical and socio-economic contexts in which representations of Muslim women originate in order to understand how systems of discourse and societal norms may have influenced any such works. Before the seventeenth century, the harem fantasy and the obsession with the veil had not yet defined Western conceptions of the Near East, nor was the veil considered a marker of difference. Many European women wore some form of head coverings during the medieval and Renaissance periods. Throughout the centuries following the medieval period and in concurrence with an evolving European culture, the Islamic veil gradually assumed its image as a loaded symbol of irreversible difference.

[8]. I make the distinction in my dissertation between "Muslim women" and "the Muslim woman," where woman denotes the prescribed identity that Orientalist discourse has given to Muslim women in general.

[9]. Lila Abu-Lughod refers to the contemporary Western notion of rescuing Muslim women from wearing veils in her article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" Abu-Lughod discusses how « saving Muslim women » served as one justification for the recent war in Afghanistan.

Kahf continues her analysis by examining later (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) representations of Muslim women where Western perspectives of the veil as a neutral or null marker of difference had shifted. Examining Western society and this shift in perspective, Kahf postulates that the Orientalist framework alone is not sufficient in order to examine effectively more contemporary, Western representations of Muslim women. An inward glance is also necessary in order to do so:

> What continues from eighteenth-century discourse is the use of the harem as a negative ideal to make the glorified domesticity of the ideal Western woman look benign by contrast. The Romantic's rescued harem woman is in fact the best candidate for Western-style domesticity, since she rejects only the more extreme and humiliating elements of her indigenous type of seclusion and does not take advantage of the generous admission of Western women to affective individualism. (158)

As Kahf points out, the eighteenth or nineteenth century European male had an agenda behind his creation of representations of the Muslim woman. The "harem woman" was used as a means to manipulate the Western woman, for by contrast her life in the domestic sphere was much less demeaning or unpleasant. European gender relations and gender construction have played a role in Western representations or the "creation" of the Muslim woman. To disregard these elements in any analysis therein would be a gross simplification. For Kahf, Orientalism is a compulsory tool in the analysis of Western representations of Muslim women, but it alone is not satisfactory. Other discourses and societal factors need to be considered as well in order to understand all of the motivating factors for creating and reading images.

In her study of European women's contributions to the construction of Orientalist images of Muslim women, Reina Lewis also concurs that it does not suffice to consider

only the framework of Orientalism when examining depictions of Muslim women. One must also acknowledge the relationship that the representations have with discourses pertaining to Western conceptions of gender:

> Just as the Orient is constructed into a series of signs whose significance lies more in their relationship to the Occident's self-image than in any truth about the Orient, so has it been argued that the European paradigm of sexual difference constructs women as object of knowledge (the 'other-within') which secure definitions of superior masculinity rather than revealing any truth about women. (18)

Lewis draws a parallel between how one must understand the Other in the context of Orientalism and the "Other-within" in European constructs of sexual difference. Orientalism says more about the West than it does about the East, its Other. One must consider the Occident's self-image when examining Orientalist representations. What do Western representations of Muslim women reveal about Western concepts of masculinity? The image of the European woman says more about European conceptions of masculinity than it does about femininity. It solidifies, as Lewis points out, a given form of masculinity just as the "creation of the Orient" sustains Western authority**.** Thus, in this study it is imperative to consider the context in which representations of Muslim women are constructed as well as how Western discourses on race, gender, and religion may have influenced the creation of artistic representations of the veil in order to interpret accurately the works being analyzed.

Lewis continues her study by addressing European women's depictions of colonial women. Like Kahf, Lewis notes that one must examine the nature of gender relations between European women and men as they were at the time of the creation of

the representations. The female artists that Lewis studies, much like the male artists that Kahf has examined, have an agenda:

> The textual status of the other woman in women's cultural production cannot be separated from the economic and social conditions necessary for the emergence of western women's cultural agency; conditions which relied, among other things, on the displacement onto the feminized colonial other of forms of gendered exploitation now unacceptable at home. (27)

Lewis argues that with the ability to create artistic representations of the female Other, or burgeoning cultural agency, many European women artists and writers transferred their frustrations linked to gender-based limitations of their era onto the female, colonial Other. European gender relations and the accepted gender roles of this period shaped the creation of female cultural productions and the way in which European women viewed Muslim women – regardless of the accuracy of their perspectives or opinions of the condition of the Oriental, female Other.

Continuing the discussion of the limitations of Orientalism as a framework with which to examine Western representations of the veil, Meyda Yegenoglu discusses the consequences of scholarship that oversimplifies how Orientalism is defined and evaluated by looking at Lisa Lowe's analysis of European women's Orientalist portrayals of Muslim women:

> If we admit that the power of Orientalism does not stem from the "distortion" of the "reality" of the Orient, nor from the dissemination of "prejudiced" or "negative" images about Other cultures and peoples, but from its power to construct the very object it speaks about and from its power to produce a regime of truth about the Other and thereby establish the identity and the power of the Subject that speaks about it, then it becomes a peripheral concern whether the images deployed to this end are "positive" or "negative." (*Supplementing* 69)

Yegenoglu argues in her examination of Lady Mary Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, that Lowe underestimates European women's contribution to the discourse of Orientalism. Lowe suggests that because Lady Montagu portrays the veil in a positive light in her letters, she does not contribute to Orientalist discourse about the Muslim woman. Yegenoglu postulates that if one considers a text like that of Lady Mary Montagu not to be Orientalist merely because the images of women wearing the veil are not depicted as "negative" as are those produced by the Western male yearning to unveil the Muslim woman, then the framework of Orientalism would not be sufficient to study such representations. There is an entire economy or system of sub-discourses behind the production of Orientalist discourse and works. One must not oversimplify how this economy functions when analyzing any sort of representation of the East.

Kahf, Lewis, and Yegenoglu have laid out useful stakes to consider when analyzing Orientalist representations of Muslim women and the veil. In sum, it is imperative to be cognizant of the economy of Orientalism, or the way in which the hegemonic discourse functions in relation to other motivating factors, in order to analyze successfully representations of Muslim women. The stakes of analyses of Orientalist works prevail in the creation of modern, artistic works treating Arab women as subject. Currently, Arab artists seeking to create representations of Muslim women must acknowledge multiple factors in order to depict Muslim women without perpetuating Orientalist discourse. Significant to contemporary, cultural debates about Islam and the veil, there seems to be a common trend of seeking to open a new space for dialogue about the veil in current, Muslim artistic works. Without meaningful, scholarly discussions

about new and relevant works it will be difficult to further conversations about the hijab in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art is an anthology that has grouped together several representations of the veil from an array of international artists in order to foster opportunities for new and nuanced dialogue. In the anthology, Zineb Sedira, a female artist of Algerian descent who has lived in France and currently resides in England, discusses her experiences as an artist working both individually and in collaborative efforts to represent the veil:

> The gathering of dialogues evolved into a collaboration with other curators and artists and the work presented in the resulting exhibition is part of a continuing discussion on representation. The aim of the show was never to present a single reading of the veil, but to encourage concerns, questions and exploration to emerge. . . . How do I write about the subject of the veil in the West without worrying that my writing reinforces Orientalist fetishes, commodifying experience? . . . Mapping out an environment is not enough; instead, we must as bell hooks suggests, transform the image – providing new strategies and readings – if we are to move the debate forward. (63-64)

Sedira fears that her work will perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes. She suggests that in order to avoid doing so, citing the feminist scholar bell hooks, the "image of the veil must be transformed." Sedira hopes that her work pushes spectators to question the way in which the veil is perceived by changing its symbolic nature and offering alternative ways to discuss the polemical subject.

In another anthology of Arab women's art, art scholar Tina Sherwell, like Sedira, addresses the concern of legitimizing Orientalist stereotypes in representations of Muslim women created by Arab women artists:

> There is a fine line between critiquing and reproducing the visual strategies that allow for the visual consumption of women. It could be argued that Ghada Amer's [an Arab Egyptian woman artist] sexual imagery reproduces notions of the Arab woman and the activity of the harem; of women consumed by sexual desire inhabiting a private space. However, there is a point of difference. . . .One must acknowledge the work of Ghada Amer for she is one of the few Arab women artists whose art work deals openly with issues of female sexuality and female desire, a subject usually considered taboo for a woman to talk about. (61-62)

Ghada Amer is an Arab woman artist who expresses female sexuality in her artwork - a subject that risks misinterpretation according to many scholars. Why is this "point of difference" to which Sherwell refers so difficult to achieve? Why should one instance of female sexual expression necessarily recollect Orientalist notions of the harem? As Leila Ahmed has pointed out, discussions about the veil and female rights in contemporary Arab gender discourse remain plagued by colonial attempts to dominate the Other by controlling the Muslim woman. Notions of the hyper-sexualized, yet submissive Muslim woman who needs saving undoubtedly linger in Western, and sometimes Eastern, conversations about Arab women. It is incumbent upon artists such as Ghada Amer to produce a "point of difference" through an acknowledgement of Orientalist discourse that complicates commonplace stereotypes about Arab women.

Responding to Meyda Yegenoglu's work in *Colonial Fantasies,* Sherwell identifies a foremost challenge encountered by Arab women artists: "The veiled woman and the unveiled woman are both constructed positions, but the image of the unveiled woman has become over-identified with an idea of a civilized and free-thinking female subject" (69). In order for spectators to recognize the difference between an artistic work portraying a harem fantasy and one expressing female sexuality, the binary of veiled and

un-veiled, uncivilized and civilized, oppressed and liberated needs to become obsolete as a factor of interpretation. The issue of the veil cannot be the focus of analysis when making judgments about women who choose to cover. Contemporary artists who address topics related to Muslim women are striving to find new and inventive methods to disarm readings of their work that are fixated on the veil (whether in a positive or negative perspective) as the deciding factor of identity and subjectivity.

Sherwell has brought to light certain obstacles that contemporary female, Arab artists encounter when representing Arab women. In her article "Cross-Cultural Dialogues: Identities, Contexts and Meanings," Fran Lloyd offers a possible solution to these challenges, suggesting that in order to complicate certain binaries, multiple dialogues need to be present in artistic works that take into account the cultural identities of both artist and spectator:

> These include the dialogue of each of the artists with their own histories and geographies, the continuous dialogue between the east and west, and that within the complex territories of the Arab world and in the diasporic communities spread throughout the globe. They also include the dialogue where meanings are produced and negotiated on the basis of difference and sameness by the artist and the audience in the encounter with the art work and the texts which surround it. Finally, it is a dialogue within the spaces of Arab women's art and an intervention into the local, national and international art spaces within which these artists work. (45)

Lloyd suggests that the burden is upon Arab women artists to enter into dialogues with fellow artists and the Arab community as well as their spectators, be they from the West or from the East. Just as we have seen that it is essential to understand Orientalism as a system and to consider contexts, histories, and sub-discourses when analyzing Orientalist works, it is essential that artists representing Arab women acknowledge the myriad of

ideas and histories that have impacted how Arab women are (and have been) viewed. Without recognizing diversity within the Arab community itself, as well as a history of relations between the East and the West, and discourses that have contributed to ideas about the veil (in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts), artistic works representing Arab women risk gross oversimplification; hence the necessity of "multiplicity of discourses."

To offer an example of multiplicity of dialogues, in her article "Disorienting the Subject in Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia,"* Clarisse Zimra illustrates how the late Algerian historian, filmmaker, and novelist Assia Djebar has been successful in re-presenting Maghrebian women without reinforcing a binary discourse between the West and East. Aiming to provide a voice for Algerian women, Djebar challenges accepted narratives of colonial Algeria by superimposing stories of the female ancestors over French historical accounts. Zimra elucidates the significance of this re-appropriation of history by noting:

> The resulting 'intercession' . . . challenges the dual hegemonic discourse that cloisters and mutilates from within - that of the Islamic brothers who extol the return to tradition - as well as that which maims from without, the representation of a monological, liberal West that reifies Islam's Woman on canvas, the better to bewail Islam's reification of women. . . . Recontextualizing the iconography, Fantasia reminds us that this prescribed representation hides a much less honorable reality. (161-162)

Djebar offers a multi-layered and complex response to Orientalist stereotypes in her representation of "Islam's woman." As Zimra shows us, Djebar is able to challenge successfully a binary discourse between the West and Islam. Djeber acts as an "intercessor" on behalf of her female ancestors by rewriting history. In terms of narrative

techniques, Zimra argues that the absurdity of the "reality" that Orientalists (here, artists Delacroix and Fromentin) disseminated is undeniably called into question through Djebar's juxtaposition of her re-appropriation of history aside the Orientalist artists' erotic creations. Djebar's account of the actual and tumultuous daily life of "the (female) ancestors" during colonial occupation (struggling to survive, evading the attacks of colonial forces, etc.) renders paintings fixated on the harem or the odalisque slightly ridiculous.

In *The Woman in the Muslin Mask,* Daphne Grace furthers the discussion of contemporary representations of the veil, noting that Muslim women need to have a voice in order to escape dominant discourse:

> The plight of the veiled woman still largely remains determined within masculinist discourse, confirming that female history is always 'disfigured,' confined to the shadows of colonial and phallocentric representation. It now appears that the veiled subaltern woman is once again in danger of being 'rewritten' by the newly emergent US world-imperial discourse, being represented without recourse to opportunity for self-expression or transaction between speaker and listener. (211)

Grace addresses the importance of a consideration of a history of discourses into studies of representations and narratives of Muslim women artists living in the Muslim world.The representation of Muslim women remains little changed since the era of colonization and the possibility of challenging Western discourse is bleak. Grace suggests that Muslim women living in non-Western countries do not possess the agency to express themselves. In my study, I will consider the possibility of voice and agency for Muslim women and men living between the West and the East, between France and the Maghreb.

Can an artist living in a Western country, one who incorporates "multiple dialogues" into his or her artistic oeuvre, somehow speak for those who are deprived of a voice?

The above works will be helpful theoretical tools in analyzing to what extent emergent artists' representations of the veil and Muslim women are successful in breaking free from Orientalist discourse, whether or not this be an explicit goal of the artist at hand. Sedira, Sherwell, Lloyd, Grace, and Zimra have laid out the potential intricacies of analysis in contemporary Arab artists' work. A "multiplicity of discourses" – considering various aspects of Arab women's subjectivity – is necessary for a certain transformation of the image of the veil. The binary of "veiled and oppressed" versus "uncovered and liberated" must be deconstructed. Inherent to the act of incorporating a "multiplicity of discourses" into Arab artists' representations of the veil is addressing the economy of Orientalism as it relates to the particular work in question. In my dissertation, I will analyze how successful, cross-cultural artists in France and the Maghreb are incorporating the methods here addressed as necessary to the work at hand.

(Mass) Consumption of the Orient: A Brief Survey of Orientalism in France

Before moving on to a study of contemporary artistic representations of the veil in France and the Maghreb, I would like to review ways in which the Orient and the Muslim woman were *manufactured and consumed* in France during the colonial era. I have already acknowledged the fact that authors, scholars of the Orient, and artists have perpetuated Orientalist stereotypes through scholarly and artistic productions; however, I have not discussed how images of the Orient might have been disseminated to the masses during the colonial period. What were the driving forces behind the production of the

Orient as a material object to be marketed and sold? How did the actual consumption of Orientalist products shape and broaden the scope of Orientalist discourse? What may an examination of the *consumption of the Orient* during the colonial era reveal about the West? The answers to these questions and the contextual background that they provide will enrich my analyses of contemporary representations of Muslim women and the veil by better mapping out the economy of Orientalism.

Though a monumental text, there have undoubtedly been many criticisms of Edward Said's *Orientalism.* Said does not address how Orientalist ideas were distributed from the European elite to the masses. Mark Mckinney discusses this concern in his book *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics.* "Said's major scholarly works of prose fiction and poetry by European artists considered to be masters – means that he neglected the hidden mass of cultural iceberg: representations of and debates about colonialism and imperialism in popular cultural forms, which daily affect far more people than do the works that he studied" (16). While there is a great deal to be learned about Europe as well as Western views of the East in high-culture literary and artistic productions as well as political discourse, neglecting the significance of representations in popular culture masks half of the story. Orientalist ideas about the Maghreb were diffused to the French general public during the colonial period not primarily through productions of prose and poetry, but rather through representations in the form of popular culture (cheaper productions readily available to the less wealthy). Two of the most significant catalysts of popular cultural representations of the Orient during the colonial period in French history were the travel and entertainment industries.

Sparked by the travel and entertainment industries, the illusion of the Orient was marketed to the general population in France during the nineteenth century in the form of material objects and amusement. This is significant because it shows us, at least in part, how Orientalist images of the Muslim world and more specifically the Muslim woman, have been disseminated to the general public. It is also necessary to acknowledge the fact that large-scale consumption obviously would not have been possible before the advent of mass manufacturing processes born during the industrial revolution. An analysis of the production and consumption of the Orient is also significant because it exposes tensions regarding socially acceptable European gender roles of the time as well as France's self-conception as a dominant force vis-à-vis the Orient. As Europe experienced greater and greater economic growth during the nineteenth century, the Orient came to be regarded as feminine (Eldem 141). The narrative of the Orient as feminine is obviously more revelatory about the West than it is about the East; this image was strategically upheld as a means by which to justify colonial missions as well as the status quo of European gender relations at the time.

Said notes that the very presence of the Orient in European material culture has shaped the way in which the West views itself:

> The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (1-2)

Through the opportunity to purchase inexpensive material products representing the Other, it was not just the elite, but also members of the European lower-classes who were granted a chance to participate in the politics of Orientalist discourse. The lower-classes may not have been responsible for inventing narratives that justified colonization, but they did grow to construct their self-image in opposition to the colonial Other through exposure and vicarious possession in the form of material objects. Examining the consumption of material objects that represented the Orient during the colonial period will be revelatory about certain social struggles and world views in nineteenth century France, thus providing a larger framework with which to analyze contemporary discourse about the veil.

The Influence of the Oil Tableau: Delacroix as a Case-Study

The oil painting is a significant point of departure for examining how the idea of the Orient was disseminated to the French general public because it is indicative of a specific moment in the creation of representations of the East where the Orient, and more pertinent to this study – the Muslim woman, becomes a commodity:

> What are these paintings? Before they are anything else, they are themselves objects which can be bought and owned. Unique objects. A patron cannot be surrounded by music or poems in the same way as he is surrounded by his pictures. It is as though the collector lives in a house built of paintings. What is their advantage over walls of stone or wood? They show him sights: sights of what he may possess. (Berger 85)

In his study of human sight and perception, John Berger suggests that the significance of oil paintings - as opposed to other, earlier forms of artistic expression - is that the objects which they represent are buyable goods. Though many oil paintings depicted material objects, I argue that the principal remains the same with images of persons. Paintings

representing the Orient and the Muslim woman portrayed objects and ideas that were desirable to Western artists and spectators, objects (women, fantasies, territory) that could be possessed or "consumed" by the West. Nineteenth century oil paintings depicting colonial women may have been destined for the viewing pleasure of the elite, but they also served as catalysts for future forms of consumption that would reach the mass public.

During the nineteenth century, the patronage of many artists shifted from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie:

> Many of them [Orientalist painters of the nineteenth century] had royal and aristocratic patrons, but these generally provided the cachet which helped to increase bourgeois sales, rather like the royal warrant. It is instructive too that an important, perhaps, the principal market for their work, at both royal and bourgeois ends, was in Britain. . . . American millionaires also seem to have become important purchasers of these paintings. (MacKinney 48)

While the scope of patronage for Orientalist painters began to broaden – in terms of economic and social class, and location - during this period, oil paintings were not yet readily available to the lower-classes. Nonetheless, it was clear that the market was starting to evolve.

The European elite had the means with which to visit colonized lands long before the general public was presented with opportunities to view and to buy products representing the Orient. Many who did travel to the Orient recorded experiences, internalizations, and images of the East in the form of travel journals and paintings. Often artists and writers were appointed to keep official accounts of colonial expeditions or were funded privately by the rich to paint. Such accounts reflected individual artists'

subjective reactions to encounters with Muslim lands, but were also reflections rooted in a well-established discourse on the East. For, as previously noted, Orientalism functions as a system and one must consider the context in which particular works were created in order to understand fully the nature of the representation at hand.

Nineteenth century Orientalist painter Eugène Delacroix, widely known for his painting "Femmes d'Alger," is one such artist who was officially appointed to partake in the colonial mission. Delacroix was privy to a world that was not accessible at the time to lower classes:

> Le comte Charles de Mornay, envoyé par le roi comme ambassadeur au Maroc, lui (Delacroix) demande de l'accompagner dans sa mission (au Maroc). (Sérullaz and Doutriaux 51)
>
> The Count Charles de Mornay, sent by the king as ambassador to Morocco, asked him (Delacroix) to accompany him on his mission (to Morocco). (My translation)

Whether done so deliberately or not, Delacroix's biased depictions of the Muslim world further contributed to Orientalist discourse. During his travels to the Maghreb, Delacroix was troubled by the inability to penetrate female spaces. These sentiments are reflected in his paintings and private journals. In their work outlining the career and experiences of Delacroix, Arlette Sérullaz and Annick Doutriaux note that Delacroix left Morocco feeling frustrated by his limited interaction with the indigenous women:

> En quittant le Maroc, l'esprit et les carnets plein de souvenirs, Delacroix avait ressenti une certaine frustration: les femmes musulmanes ne s'étaient guère laissées admirer. . . . Il n'arrête pas de dessiner, croquant les moindres détails de leurs toilettes, jusqu'aux babouches. (64)
>
> Leaving Morocco, mind and notebooks full of memories, Delacroix felt a certain frustration: the Muslim women had barely let themselves be

> admired upon. . . .He didn't stop drawing, sketching the smallest details of their clothes all the way to their babouches [slippers]. (My translation)

We can, at least in part, attribute Delacroix's reaction to the inaccessibility of the Muslim woman, the unattainable desired object, to the creation of many of his works depicting North African women. What is perhaps even more significant is that the actual act of *painting* North African women not only validated their identity as prescribed in Orientalist discourse, it also rendered them objects that could be *bought* – paving the way for future and more pervasive forms of consumption.

In *Ways of Seeing*, a text based on a BBC television series with English art critic John Berger, a brief genealogy of human perception and sight is presented. Berger notes that the manner in which a person views a particular object is influenced just as much by pre-conceived ideas or pre-existing knowledge that he or she may have about the given object as it is by the actual act of seeing it. In the same breath however, one must admit that seeing things affects what we think we know about them.[10] The consideration of biased perception is paramount when studying the works of Orientalist painters and officially appointed colonial artists: "Some [artists] never visited the East, others travelled extensively; and a few settled for longer periods. Sometimes, oriental subjects were painted before they went; paintings and sketches were made on the spot, but large numbers were worked up after they had returned" (Mackenzie 44). Artists who contributed to colonial missions were attracted to the Orient based on an interest in *invented* ideas about Muslim women and Muslim territories. Artists viewed colonial lands through the lens of Orientalism; and then in turn, re-legitimized the discourse

[10]. See Berger et al. 8.

through paintings and representations of prepossed opinions and observations. Whether painting prior to or post travel to colonial territory, it is clear that the zeal of Orientalists to depict the colonies suggests an influence of preconceived notions concerning occupied lands that indubitably (mis)guided how they *saw* and painted the Orient.

Delacroix's work embodies both of these travel experiences. A number of his Orientalist paintings were created in a Parisian studio, while others were done during his actual journey to the Maghreb. Grisby notes that Delacroix was not satisfied to paint the Orient from Paris: "Delacroix . . . was not content in 1824 simply to imagine that exotic, contested, and redundantly pictured space lost over two decades earlier [Egypt, Syria]: he wanted to go there" (Grigsby 69). While in Morocco, Delacroix painted the "Oriental woman" whom he had hoped to see but could not, whom he thought existed based only on pre-established ideas about the Orient, in order to satisfy his frustrations. Doubly confined to his imagination (first to his Parisian studio and later to his tableau in the Maghreb), the artist had no choice but to paint the desired object. Delacroix could not penetrate the harem himself, but by painting the Muslim woman he was somehow able to lay claim to her existence. Accordingly, one can view Orientalist paintings as a way to consume the Orient, even if this consumption cannot be fully realized in the physical form. "Oil paintings often depict things. Things which in reality are buyable. To have a thing painted and put on canvas is not unlike buying it and putting it in your house. If you buy a painting you buy also the look of the thing it represents" (Berger 83). Based on John Berger's interpretation of oil paintings, painting the harem, as it were, was not only a way for frustrated male, European artists to possess the Oriental woman against her

will, but also a way for the Muslim woman to be made available to all who saw (or "bought") her. Many Orientalist paintings were put on display in museums and salons once they were sent back to Europe. Those who "bought" or at the very least admired paintings of colonial women were in effect buying into Orientalist stereotypes and consuming Muslim women as if they were material objects.

Though Delacroix's intentions as an artist representing Oriental women have been debated by scholars such as Darcy Grimaldo Grigbsy, his work has unquestionably contributed to Orientalist stereotypes about Muslim women. Beth Wright explains that in order to understand Delacroix's *oeuvre*, one must consider how the artist viewed his paintings: "One key is his lifelong insistence that he was painting not objects but thoughts. . . . Figures and objects were eloquent 'hieroglyphs'; they were at once representations of concrete aspects that anyone could see and reflections of emotions, the painter's imaginative realizations" (Wright 1). Assuming that this "insistence" pertained to Delacroix's paintings of harem women, the spectator viewing them is expected to experience a sort of metaphysical connection with Delacroix's imagination - thereby understanding the women not as commodities, but as feelings and sensations. But is this enough? Though Delacroix may not have viewed his harem women as objects or commodities, he could not and cannot control the perceptions of the spectator. Unfortunately, the ideas he inscribed onto his paintings were not strong enough to speak on his behalf.

Why were Delacroix's purportedly inscribed ideas and feelings not enough to save his harem women from being turned into objects of economic exchange? During the

nineteenth century, those who viewed Delacroix's paintings did so through the lens of a well-established discourse on the Orient. Spectators could not *see* Delacroix's feelings because they reinscribed their own feelings on the paintings, along with previous knowledge and fantasies that they may have had about the Orient and the Muslim woman. "As hard as Delacroix had worked to block the predictable and tawdry tales spun by the caricaturists, his tableau would be read and it would be read as a story about the French colonization of Algeria" (Grigsby 84). Grigsby suggests in her article "Orients and Colonies," that despite Delacroix's *positive* intentions for painting the harem, as it were, his work (actually painted in Morocco, not Algeria) represented colonial conquest to those who viewed it, thereby perpetuating Orientalist discourse. But, what if this was not the intention of Delacroix? What if his paintings were somehow less erotic than other harem paintings? What if they were just "feelings" on canvas? As previously discussed, Yegenoglu has posited that "negative and positive connotations" (or intentions) do not suffice as decisive qualifications for what is and is not Orientalist. Delacroix's representation of the harem - however *tasteful* that he may have meant for it to be - perpetuated Orientalist discourse because it reinforced an image of the Muslim woman that was already prevalent in Western discourse. Because the harem woman became an oil painting, she was prey to (mis)interpretation and consumption.

As technology advanced during the nineteenth century, Orientalist paintings became available to an audience much broader than just the aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie:

> With cheaper printing in the later nineteenth century, these works were more widely available than the very expensive books of prints that were

> produced in the first half of the century. Orientalist images also found their way into popular magazines, advertising and eventually into the cinema. Thus the market was both socially and geographically diverse, although the receptiveness of certain classes in Britain and the United States is clearly significant. (MacKenzie 48)

From oil paintings that were available only to an elite audience, images of Muslim women evolved into cheaper objects of consumption accessible to the general public. In many respects during the nineteenth century, Orientalist paintings paved the way for other modes of consumption of the East produced in popular culture forms. The colonizing mission called for artistic colonial expeditions that ushered in the creation of a material and visual culture based on travel and entertainment.

Travel, Photography, and Mass Consumption

With the advent of the French, colonial presence in the Maghreb, one way that the Orient became available for consumption was in the form of travel paraphernalia. Once French forces started colonizing missions in North Africa, the Orient suddenly became a much more *accessible* notion – both physically and conceptually:

> For the Orient is no longer the dreamland. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, it has inched closer. Colonialism makes a grab for it, appropriates it by dint of war, binds it hand and foot with myriad bonds of exploitation, and hands it over to the devouring appetite of the great mother countries, ever hungry for raw materials. (Alloula 3)

This "travel industry" - whether in the form of pleasure or for business - proved to be quite profitable, and thus evolved from the production and consumption of artistic works and journals based on individuals who were actually privy to the travel experience in North Africa to cheapened costs of travel and the production of travel paraphernalia aimed at the general population. Those who wanted to visit colonial lands needed travel

guides to prepare them for their voyages.[11] Travel companies (boats, railways) needed to advertise their services. Finally, travelers in turn were eager to share their experiences in the colonies with friends and family in Europe. Ranging from travel guides and posters to post-cards and advertisements, the Orient was sold to the French public. These products sold because the ideas that they represented were popular. People were eager to gaze at the Orient, and many of the products were utilitarian and most importantly - *accessible*.

Oil paintings start to dwindle in popularity during the latter half of the nineteenth century, while photography, a medium which led to other forms of representation, thrived. Malek Alloula explains the significance of photography in colonial, Orientalist representations of North African women in *The Colonial Harem:*

> It matters little if Orientalist painting begins to run out of wind or falls into mediocrity. Photography steps in to take up the slack and reactivates the phantasm at its lowest level. The postcard does it one better; it becomes the poor man's phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams. The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourist, the soldier, the colonist. (Alloula 4)

While the European obsession with the harem persisted, paintings became less common. Ever popular, the motif of the harem woman lives on through photography and is marketed to the general public in the easily attainable (cheap and mass produced) post-card.

The colonial post-card is noteworthy because it was inexpensive and easily accessible to all class levels and thus was a major contributor to the perpetuation of the image of the harem woman in popular culture. The post-card was the least expensive

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[11]. « En effet, le guide touristique de l'époque ne se limitait pas à de froides descriptions des lieux à visiter ; il fallait aussi préparer le touriste aux contacts qu'il aurait à établir avec un grand nombre d'indigènes.» (Eldem 98)

Orientalist product ever created and was essential to the tourist experience (Eldem 29). Because postcards were so cheap, colonists, travelers, and even soldiers could afford to buy multiple copies of them. Given the large public to which the colonial post-card offered itself, it is no surprise that images of the odalisque and the harem proliferated during the colonial period and remain problematic today. With the growth of the tourism industry, more and more French could afford to visit the colonies. Travelers were able to share easily images of the Orient with family members and friends who could not travel by purchasing and sending post-cards portraying photographs of the Orient and its women.

What is perhaps more alarming than the proliferation of the image of the harem woman within the West is the fact that Europeans were not the only ones who bought the post-cards. Indigenous people of the colonized lands began to use the post-cards themselves:

> Le simple fait que ces cartes postales orientalistes étaient fréquemment utilisées par des locaux dans leur correspondance avec leurs parents et amis constitue un phénomène fascinant. Il illustre la puissance des représentations orientalistes, capables d'imposer une sorte d'acceptation, voire même d'auto-orientalisation par les Orientaux eux-mêmes. (Eldem 29)
>
> The simple fact that these Orientalist post-cards were frequently used by the locals in their correspondence with family and friends constitutes a fascinating phenomenon. It illustrates the power of Orientalist representations, capable of imposing a sort of acceptance, even auto-Orientalization by the Orientals themselves. (My translation)

What is more, today these same post-cards and travel posters that Eldem references remain popular travel objects and "souvenirs" sold in countless tourist stores in the Maghreb. The phantasm lives on. The fact that "Orientals" themselves purchased colonial

post-cards is exemplary of one reason why many Arab countries' resistance movements against colonial powers pivoted around the issue of the veil. While colonial populations were divided on the issue of the veil (wearing the veil as a means to resist occupation, or rejecting the veil in an effort to join modernity), colonization transformed the Islamic veil into a contentious and loaded symbol.

As Malek Alloula demonstrates in his brief, contextual presentation of the colonial post-cards in *The Colonial Harem*, regardless of the accuracy of stereotypes that Orientalist images perpetuated about the colonial Maghreb, the images were (re)produced because they sold. They were popular. "What does it matter if the colonized Orient, the Algeria of the turn of the century, gives more than a glimpse of the otherwise of its scenery, as long as the phantasm of the harem persists, especially since it has become profitable? Orientalism leads to riches and respectability" (3). The obsession with the harem predated French colonial missions in North Africa, and through the consumption of Orientalist images of the Muslim woman, Orientalism was disseminated as truth to the general population during and after the colonial era. The colonial post-cards were promulgated not just as a result of an obsession of the erotic Other, but also in the name of financial interests.

Spectacle and Amusement

By the end of the nineteenth century, one of the most popular inventions of visual culture is born – the comic strip. This artistic medium is quick to mimic the colonies (Eldem 25). The comic strip is particularly interesting because it synthesizes notions of travel, amusement, and spectacle into one artistic form; thus perpetuating Orientalist

discourse and influencing both French and indigenous, colonial populations. Mark McKinney addresses comic strips and their circulation in his study on colonial comics: "Comics helped bridge the physical distance between France and its colonies, in part by circulating in both spaces: they were exported to French colonies, so they were read by both French children and young colonial subjects" (16). Colonial comics were read by French citizens living in the Metropolis as well as in the colonies. Similar to the colonial post-cards, production of comics was also a means to "bring" the colonies home to those who did not travel to them. They had the ability to reach and to influence large numbers of people.

How did colonial comics synthesize notions of travel, spectacle, and amusement? Who were their intended audiences and what can we learn about French society by examining them? Colonial comics, for the most part, were not aimed at elite audiences, but rather assumed an audience consisting of youth and the lower-class.[12] Women were certainly not the topic of all colonial comics, but there was nevertheless an obsession to portray indigenous, colonial populations. The very act of putting the Orient on display for the ultimate purpose of entertainment and jest implies both an infatuation with the Other, a desire to see it, and to somehow control how the Other is portrayed. McKinney notes that games or contests were made out of colonial comic strips: "In "Le petit journal", in which contestants guessed the names of 25 French colonies depicted in cartoons that served up a variety of colonial material, including caricature and otherwise problematic

[12]. "Taken together, these comics and other related material, demonstrate that colonial exhibitions were very strongly anchored in the popular and juvenile areas of French culture at the time." (McKinney 45)

ethnographical information about the colonized (e.g., colonial eroticism about Ouled Nail women, in Algeria) and humor at their expense" (55). In instances such as "Le petit journal" not only were images of the Orient created, they were reinforced and disseminated to readers in a quasi-educational manner, as if readers were being tested on their comprehension of a social studies or geography lesson taught in a school class.

In addition to reinforcing Orientalist images of the colonies, French colonial cartoons referenced another contemporary form of spectacle that gained popularity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – "l'exposition mondiale" or the World's Fair. "At least 29 comic strips, books or series represent, or refer to, a (post)colonial exhibition or human zoo. . . . Of the 29 examples, 16 were originally published before formal decolonization began" (McKinney 44-45). World's Fairs began with the advent of industrialization and while the majority of their exhibitions contained technological inventions and trade, colonies were also put on display in what was often referred to as *human zoos.* The fact that the World's Fair was a reoccurring topic in French, colonial cartoons is indicative of how prevalent the fairs were during the colonial period. The act of portraying them no doubt normalized the atrocity of human zoos in French society. In a way, the general, Frence population was systematically desensitized to the exploitation of colonial peoples and accepted Orientalist stereotypes as truth. Now, I would like to move on to a closer examination of the World's Fair and other instances of spectacle.

The Orient was consumed and became a part of visual culture in France in advertising and venues of entertainment and spectacle as well as through material objects. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the colonies were displayed for everyone to see

at the World Fairs. “In 1889 no entertainment produced more of a sensation than the Rue du Caire – with its Arab cafés, authentic old houses, *souks* (markets), and especially its *danse du ventre*. People of all social levels flocked there” (Rearick 139). Among the many exhibits presenting new technologies and inventions, one of the most popular sites at the World’s Fair were the displays of Oriental peoples, and perhaps most notably – belly dancing. Similar to the post-card, the World’s Fair was accessible to the workingman as well as to the elite. “French workingmen visiting the Paris Universal Exposition in 1889 could find before him an expanse and variety of amusements that no king or noble had ever commanded. . . . New places of entertainment flourished by serving worker as well as bourgeois, particularly the center of Paris” (Rearick 83). Perhaps for the first time in history, European masses had the opportunity to encounter the infamous Other face to face. This ease of access, once again, provided ample opportunity for stereotypes about the Orient to be propagated to the general population.

During the nineteenth century, the industries of amusement and spectacle flourished in France. These industries were not limited to just the World’s Fair, but also included a “pleasure business.” “Montmartre’s rise as an entertainment district was only one of many booms in the late nineteenth-century pleasure business. Another arose with the institutionalization of July 14: a large manufacturing industry sprang up to produce festive paraphernalia, an industry centered in Paris and that employed an estimated eighty thousand workers” (Rearick 75). As a result of not only industrialization, but the development of formalized national traditions (the establishment of state holidays and

celebrations) the entertainment business, located primarily in Montmartre, grew largely during the nineteenth century.

Theaters or the music-café is one such venue where the lower classes could afford to partake in a diverse array of spectacles of diversion. This is significant for this study because oftentimes the Orient was the object put on display in the music-café. In his work on amusement in nineteenth century Paris, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque,* Charles Rearick describes the growing popularity of the music café. "The Folies-Bergère was the most successful and famous of these ["theaters of the poor"]. Its box-office receipts were consistently the highest of any café-concert or music hall, running about a million francs a year around 1880 and increasing to past the 2 million mark in 1913" (83). Among a vast selection of spectacles that could be seen at the Folies-Bergère, were exhibitions of North African women. What is noteworthy about the "poor man's theater" is that, much like the colonial post-card, it was accessible to the working class, and thus offered yet another opportunity for stereotypes about the Muslim woman to be normalized.

Quenching thirsts for the exotic, music cafés, such as the Folies-Bergère, displayed the erotic North African woman. If however, one did not make it to the music hall to see the Oriental woman perform, one still had an opportunity to gawk at her in the street: "Posters promoting entertainment also proliferated in the last decades of the century. . . . Between 1874 and 1893, 58 different posters advertised attractions at the Folies-Bergère" (Rearick 67). Similar to the development of the "affiches de voyage" ("travel posters") for the tourism industry, advertising became popular in the entertainment world of nineteenth century France. Posters such as "La Belle Fatma,"

featuring a North African woman ornately dressed in dancing attire, strategically juxtaposed against drums and a violin and framed by the backdrop of a minaret and palm trees, were produced to draw people into the music-café. Comparable to colonial post-cards, these posters can be found in many tourist shops today in the Maghreb. Thus with a new colonial presence in North Africa and a flourishing industry of amusement and spectacle taking root in France, the Orient becomes accessible as a product to be consumed and conceptualized by the general population.

Significance of the Consumer

I have established ways in which Orientalist images of the Maghreb were disseminated to the general public and how access played a large role in the process. Now, I will consider what the consumption of these products may reveal about the West or specifically about nineteenth century French society. By studying the consumption of Orientalist products, we can learn something about the role of gender and the manner in which nineteenth century France perceived itself vis-à-vis the Muslim world.

As Mohja Kahf has shown in her analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth century literary representations of Muslim women, one must consider all of the discourses that contributed to the creation of the given work in order to understand fully the representation. This same principle applies to the analysis of the consumer of the Orient. Kahf stresses the importance of calculating contemporary, gender-specific social scripts in the West in regards to Orientalist discourse when analyzing a given work. Applying this strategy to my study, how then might gender roles play into the consumption of the Orient? Specifically, why was the nineteenth century French woman interested in

"buying" the Oriental woman, and why was the French male bent on capturing her image?

In order to address briefly these questions, I will return to the example of the World's Fair and spectacle. European women were just as eager as European men to catch a glimpse of the Oriental woman at venues such as the World's Fair. Is it possible that European women had an agenda in doing so? According to Marnie Kessler, the World's Fair was one of the only public spaces where nineteenth century European women had the right to a gaze:

> It is here, at the *expositions universelles*, that the French female gaze was allowed, even encouraged, to exist. At a time when women's vision was somewhat determined by social limitations, the universal exhibitions were unique in that they were powerful sites of licit female gazing, giving the bourgeoise a space sanction and often pleasurable viewing. (95)

While it has been posited that European men propagated the image of the "harem" in order to convince Western women to be grateful for their social status and rights, it seems that within the confines of the World's Fair, European women were active participants in exploiting their female, colonial counterparts. In the midst of a milieu where France's domination and authority over the colonial world resonated in the display of its "colonial goods," the universal exhibitions also offered the Western woman of nineteenth century France a sense of agency. John Berger elaborates on the relationship between sight and agency in *How We See Things:* "Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world. . . . The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue" (9). European women's ability to see, but also to be seen was

legitimized by viewing expositions of the Oriental (female) Other. This is a rare instance where nineteenth-century women became active participants in a public space. By exploiting the North African woman with her gaze, the European woman was able to attain a legitimate sense of power, albeit a limited one.

Representations of the Orient were also indicative of aggravations of the nineteenth-century European male. John MacKenzie argues that Orientalist paintings were a way for artists to express desires and frustrations not only vis-à-vis the East, but within their own culture: "European artists projected on to the East not only the fantasies and fears of the West, but also aspirations, renewed values and wished-for freedoms. Paradoxically, they often sought to portray not the strikingly different, but the oddly familiar" (55). MacKenzie argues that while Orientalist paintings exploited the Oriental woman, they were indicative of sexual frustrations within the context of accepted Western social norms and behaviors. Orientalist artists painted the sexually available women whom they desired to see not only in the colonies, but also at home. We can thus conclude that male and female gazing and "consumption" of colonial women is also indicative of underlying, internal social struggles related to gender, socially acceptable values, and behaviors in eighteenth and nineteenth-century France.

Conclusion

Presently, although the colonial mission has ended and belly dancing specimens from the exotic Maghreb are not readily viewable at discotheques and World Fairs, the representation of Muslim women remains a polemical topic. During the colonial period, images of oppressed - yet eroticized Maghrebian women and savage-like families "in

need of saving" were created to justify the colonial mission in France. Today, however, images of Muslim women - and specifically of the veil - are viewed as a threat to French republican values and society. In 2004, a law was passed in France known as the "*laïcité* (secularity) law," which forbade the wearing of "ostentatious displays of religion" in public buildings and institutions. Although *laïcité*, a concept of secularity and preservation of republican values and liberties, was not a new notion in French society in 2004, the formal banning of religious garb - which consequentially most greatly affected Muslim women wearing the veil - was a new event.[13] Difficult to define and arguably easy to abuse, the secularity law has made the veil a platform to define "otherness," to label that which is islamically fundamental, and to *redefine* republican values (Bowen 127). The veil is regarded as extreme, and with this viewpoint many assume the conclusion that those who wear it are either religiously extreme themselves or are forced to be so out of religious and familial oppression.

In this chapter, I have addressed the importance of recognizing the economy of Orientalism, or of Western, hegemonic discourse, when analyzing Orientalist works as well as in the creation of artistic representations of Muslim women and the veil. I have also considered the importance of a multiplicity of discourses as a technique to "move the debate forward" when addressing the Islamic veil. Finally, by referencing examples of material consumption of Orientalist products, I have discussed how Orientalist stereotypes have been purveyed to popular culture in both the West and in the Maghreb. Using this historical context as a point of departure, this study must therefore seek to

[13]. The concept of laïcité entered French legislation at the end of the nineteenth century. It was not until 1989 that the veil became an issue in schools. For more information, see Bowen.

uncover underlying problems and struggles that dictate if and how the veil is viewed, represented, and accepted in contemporary France and the Maghreb. How have and do discourses such as Orientalism, imperialism, and nationalism affect the ways in which artistic representations of the veil are perceived in France and the Maghreb, and what must artists do in order to disarm destructive binaries? Beginning with an analysis of the photographic works of Moroccan-British artist Hassan Hajjaj, this dissertation will examine these questions.

Chapter 2: Reframing the Odalisque

Introduction

In order to set the tone for a project that will examine if and how emergent artists of cross-cultural backgrounds are successful in offering more productive and nuanced ways to engage in a dialogue about the practice of hijab in both the Maghreb and in France, I will begin my study with Moroccan-born photographer Hassan Hajjaj. Because much of his work is a direct response to prevalent, colonial images of North African women, Hajjaj recalls explicitly the historical context for the work of other artists whom I will study in my dissertation. Additionally, by introducing the notions of capitalism and street culture into his photography Hajjaj sets a paradigm for the significance of "multiple dialogues" (see Fran Lloyd) in contemporary representations of the veil and Muslim women.

I will begin my chapter with a study of a photograph from 2000 entitled *Ilham*. *Ilham*, a work that is part of Hajjaj's "Dakka Marrakesh" (House of Marrakesh)

collection and is housed in the Kamel Lazaar Foundation[14] in Tunis, re-appropriates the well-known Orientalist odalisque motif in an inventive way. In this photograph, Hajjaj combines multiple discourses together in order to challenge Western stereotypes about Arab women. Named after its subject, *Ilham* is a sepia-toned photograph of a woman reclining on a couch situated in a minimally decorated room. Covered with a small, light-colored doily and one pillow, the couch (whose fabric pattern is barely discernible) sits atop black and white checkered tiles. The most detailed aspects of the room are the three walls surrounding the couch, which are composed of Moroccan *zillidj* or ceramic, mosaic tiles. Finally, the photograph itself is encased in a walnut frame containing numerous bottles of eye khol, blue Rani juice cans, and green tins of corned beef. The repetition of these products seems to mirror the motif of repetition found in the design of the ceramic tiles. Although many of the products in the frame are not Moroccan in origin, the text on the packaging of these products is printed in Arabic script.

Like her surroundings (and in contrast to many Orientalist odalisques), Ilham is dressed simply. She is wearing a *djellaba* (a hooded robe worn often in the Maghreb) and sandals. As is the case with the couch, the print of the djellaba is not decipherable. Unlike many Orientalist paintings and photographs of odalisques, this one lacks nudity. Though her hair is uncovered, Ilham is fully clothed and looks directly at the camera with a half grin. With her hips rotated away from the spectator, Ilham reclines on the couch with her feet tightly crossed and hanging casually off of the edge. It is as if she is expecting the

[14]. For more information, consult the museum website: http://www.kamellazaarfoundation.org/about-us/.

spectator to be present at what appears to be her home. Ilham welcomes the spectator into her space with asserted reserve; her gestures along with her surroundings are indicative of a space that is personal, but not intimate.

Figure 1: Ilham

The contrast of the brightly colored frame with the black and white photograph is striking and reminds the spectator that he or she is not looking at a nostalgic, colonial photograph. The frame is a marker of temporality, which situates Ilham in a contemporary context (a guide for the spectator), and thus emphasizes the continued importance of culturally, traditional items. The sepia-toned photograph itself symbolizes not necessarily the past, but that which is linked to the past - featuring both positive and negative aspects of Moroccan traditions and history. The zillij and djellaba are forms of traditional artisan work and dress that are still prevalent in Moroccan culture. And the

pose of the model references the odalisque motif that was so popular in many Orientalist works; although it does not appear that the model in this photograph is being eroticized. On the other hand, the colorful bottles of juice and tins of corned beef that fill the frame surrounding the photograph are newly introduced food items in Moroccan culture. However, because the packagings of items (such as corned beef) that are so obviously foreign are printed in Arabic script, it is clear that these objects are part of Moroccan consumption today.

The repetitive and multi-colored framework contextualizes *Ilham* as being part of a contemporary version of Morocco. She is somehow implicated as an actor in the capitalist consumption of products that are not historically indigenous to her country whilst at the same time she manages to hold on to time-honored cultural practices. What is more, in this photograph the extent to which non-native products are widespread in Morocco is questionable. They may surround *Ilham*, but they have not penetrated into her private space - yet. The very fact that they encircle her seems to suggest that they will become unavoidable to a certain degree. The likelihood that these products will grow to be part of Ilham's household is probable as they are food products; however, it does not seem likely that Rani juce will altogether replace items rooted deeply in Maghrebian culture, such as Moroccan mint tea,[15] anytime soon. More importantly, in this photograph the presence of foreign food products does not prevent the traditional from occupying space in either the exterior or interior spheres. Ilham is wearing sandals, which suggests

[15]. Mint tea is a popular, traditional drink in Morocco. It is served to guests in both public and private spaces and can be found in most restaurants and households. There are also many cultural or folkloristic beliefs associated with mint tea. For example, prospective wives are judged by the prospective groom's family members based on how well she can pour the tea into tea cups when holding the pot high above them.

that she will soon go (or has just returned from) outside – in her djellaba (representative of the traditional). She is not cloistered. In this work, boundaries between the traditional and the modern, between East and West are not clearly distinguishable. Rather they overlap with a certain restraint.

In *Ilham*, Hajjaj has found a way to blend together discourses concerning Maghrebian women, traditional artisan work and clothing, Orientalism, and capitalist consumption. What is more, the issue of the veil is not addressed directly. Presumably sitting in her home, it is ambiguous whether or not Ilham practices hijab. In the presence of so many other conversations, it is – at first - not apparent whether or not the motif of the odalisque is meant to be the focal point of the photograph. What is clear however, is that the subject of this work has been identified and thus has agency. In this photograph, Hajjaj portrays a transcultural vision of Morocco of which Ilham is very much an active participant. The traditional is not irreconcilable with the modern. Addressing past narratives that have influenced contemporary discourse on Muslim women whilst attempting to disarm certain stereotypes found in the discourse, a work like *Ilham* merits thoughtful inquiry for its obvious potential to complicate reductive conversations about the veil as well as the Maghreb in general.

In this chapter, I will continue my analysis of Hajjaj's photographs by examining them as transcultural artistic works. Mary Louise Pratt defines the term "transcultural" as a complex process of exchange between a marginalized and a dominant culture:

> Ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do

> determine to varying extents what they absorb into their, own and what they use it for. (6)

The transcultural refers to an opportunity for reinvention and reappropriation. It is the result of the mixing of two or more cultures, and is a space where the less dominant culture can assert its voice. In the same way that my study seeks to determine how emergent artists may be able to represent Muslim women without perpetuating traditional, political Manichean discourse, Pratt recommends a transcultural approach in colonial travel literature studies in order to avoid perpetuating a binary discourse of "possession and innocence." Marginalized peoples may not be able to control to what their culture is exposed, but they can control how they react to exposure of foreign ideas and concepts that they encounter.

Siobhan Shilton has extended Pratt's definition of the transcultural to her studies on the work of hybrid artists in contemporary France noting that: "'Transcultural' art—whether or not it focuses on the artist—depicts cultural encounter as a two-way (or multidirectional) process of reciprocal, non-hierarchical influence and exchange" (438). Analyzing a work as transcultural permits one to understand better how two different cultures may influence one another in spaces where they are in contact. In this chapter, I will argue that the nature of Hajjaj's dual culture identity becomes a basis for *re-presenting* colonial images of Maghrebian women and Moroccan culture as transcultural and enables him to discuss the veil through a *multiplicity of dialogues* (Lloyd). Using an approach of multiplicity (a consideration for other works – both contemporary and past – representing Arab women as well as a consideration for "sameness and difference" and the negotiation of meaning) is important because it presents the potential to carry out

conversations concerning Arab women that are more nuanced and free from the restrains of traditional, binary discourse.

After giving a brief overview of Hajjaj and his corpus in relation to Moroccan society, contemporary stereotypes about Muslim women, Western popular culture, and colonial discourse, I will analyze his work by comparing his photographs to previous studies on colonial photography in order to understand better the nature of the re-appropriations of Orientalist images in Hajjaj's work. Specifically, I will compare three of Hajjaj's photographs with Malek Alloula's analysis of colonial post-cards in his book *The Colonial Harem.* By comparing Hajjaj's work to Alloula's study of colonial, Algerian post-cards, I will consider first the economy of the Orientalist discourse[16] that has contributed to the creation of colonial photography of Maghrebian women that Hajjaj seeks to mock. How well do both Hajjaj and Alloula recognize the economy of Orientalism in their respective works? Do they perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes by commenting on or responding to them? Then, my study will turn to an analysis of Hajjaj's work in relation to contemporary contexts and stereotypes about Muslims and the Maghreb. Here, I will consider how Hajjaj's photographs become meaningful in light of a post-colonial society. I will explore further the notions of consumption, capitalism, and the transcultural by studying the frames, the issue of exposition, and the question of the veil in contemporary Europe and the Maghreb. In sum, I will show how Hajjaj's transcultural, artistic style offers a way to discuss and to represent Muslim women in a non-binary fashion.

[16]. See Yegenoglu, Sedira, Bal.

Biography

Hassan Hajjaj was born in Morocco in 1961 and moved to London in 1975. He utilizes photography, fashion, and interior design as forms of expression in which he honors both his Moroccan roots and British identity. "His response [to his double-culture] has been to celebrate being what he calls "noss-noss" (half-half/نص نص), by creating a playful, technocolored universe" (Hadidian 5). The nature of Hajjaj's hybrid identity fuels his artistic endeavors. He blends together the qualities that he likes best about both of his cultures into his photography. For example, Hajjaj often tailors the djellabas worn by the models featured in his photography with boldly printed fabrics covered with the names and symbols of Western luxury brands. Hajjaj purchases himself the fabrics he uses in both London and Marrakesh markets.[17] Hajjaj's creative practices permit him to share a vision of Morocco with those who do not belong to Maghrebian culture. "I wanted to show the world what I saw of the country and its people – the energy, the attitude; the inventiveness and glamour of street fashion; the fantastic graphics on everyday objects and products; people's happy outlook and strength of character" (Hajjaj, *By Hassan Hajjaj* 54). As a Maghrebian artist living in England, the overarching goal of Hajjaj's photographic works is to portray the vibrant street culture of Morocco. If the veil is included in his work, it is not because Hajjaj is fixated on the issue, but rather because it is part of Moroccan culture.

In addition to the challenge of immigrating to a new country, one of the most formative events that has shaped Hajjaj's artistic pursuits has been his experience as a

[17]. See Sayej.

Western, fashion photographer. It was during a photo-shoot in the 1990's, in Morocco, that Hajjaj began to question his career: "Hajjaj realized that all those involved, from models to make-up artists, were European, while Morocco was just another exotic locale. He decided then and there to photograph what he terms 'my people'" (Komaroff 14). It was at this juncture in his life that Hajjaj was inspired to capture a more "authentic" -- or truthful and detailed by the nuances of Maghrebi life -- vision of Morocco than the staged fashion photo-shoots that eroticized the country in a manner similar to how colonial photography has eroticized Maghrebian women. The latter types of photography take into account only ways in which images of the Maghreb are appealing to their Western consumers, and thus turn a profit for those in charge. Hajjaj's artistic style is unique and versatile because it is a product of his dual-culture identity as well as his experiences as a western, fashion photographer, clothing designer, and decorator. Hajjaj's work is significant because it offers a counter-narrative to glamorized and stereotypical notions of what it means to be Moroccan and Muslim. His corpus defies reductive discourse by questioning the inherent limits and hierarchies of the very notion of what it means to be *authentic*.

Corpus and Exhibition

Of the "Dakka Marrakesh" and "'Kesh Angels" collections, Hajjaj noted in a 2010 interview that he: "likes to play with the concept [the veil], likes to loosen up people's ideas of what an *Arabic* [my emphasis] woman looks like" (Carmichael 162). While it is true that a number of Hajjaj's photography collections, such as "My Rockstars," do not address Islam specifically and that the artist himself even refers to his

artwork as Arab rather than Islamic,[18] I am going to consider his photographs as signifiers of Islam in main-stream art discourse for the scope of this study. The reasoning for this is three-fold: the "'Kesh Angels" and "Dakka Marrakesh" collections were created with the aim to challenge spectators' ideas about a country that is primarily Muslim; the collections incorporate and even draw attention to garments that are worn by (many, not all) Muslim women; they mock a tradition of studio photography and portraiture that is grounded in colonial discourse about Muslim women specifically. It would thus be inaccurate to conduct an analysis of the photographs without taking into consideration an Islamic, cultural context even though the subject matter of the collections encompasses so much more than just Islam. It is also true that many art museums, such as The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, house exhibits on contemporary Islamic art with the caveat that Islamic societies are not monolithic;[19] their histories and current contexts incorporate Berber, Jewish, Arab, Persian, and South-Asian heritages as well as religions ranging from Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Islam. Although his work may be (for the most part) based in an Islamic context, Hajjaj's photographs are no more monolithic than the term "Islamic."

Because his work addresses such a variety of topics and discourses, Hajjaj's photography has been exhibited in quite an array of different museum collections ranging from contemporary Islamic art, Arab art, gender and the veil, and individual expositions. His photographs and film installations have been displayed in Europe, North America, the Middle East, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa - in museums owned or directed

[18]. Hajjaj was shortlisted for the Jameel Prize for Islamic art in 2009. See Buckle 47.
[19]. See Los Angeles Country Museum of Art.

by Europeans, Americans, Arabs, and North Africans alike. Hajjaj's photography has even been exhibited based on his unique framing techniques. Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs at the Victoria and Albert museum in London notes that this was certainly the case at the 2012 *Light from the Middle East: New Photography* exhibition:

> Hajjaj's work was aptly included in the exhibition's 'reframing' section…By drawing attention to framing, Hajjaj makes the photograph inescapable as a physical object. It is not an impartial image to be read…rather it is a partially-staged confection, derived from reality but ultimately a manipulated and recontextualised viewpoint. (Barnes 7-8)

As Barnes explains, the inclusion of so many props within Hajjaj's photographs themselves, but also around them, recalls the tradition of studio or staged photography that is found in colonial post-cards. The frames compel the spectator to understand the photograph (or at times three-dimensional display) as a *subsequent* reality. His photography reframes works such as *Ilham* – rewriting the image that first inspired their creation. Filling frames with familiar and seemingly mundane objects like soda-pop cans enables Hajjaj to reframe both literally and abstractly, objects that are more polemical – such as the veil. In doing so, he gently guides spectators to reconsider how they conceptualize Muslim women or Islamic cultures.

Hassan Hajjaj is not exactly an emergent artist even though academic analysis of his photography is lacking. He began working with his primary gallery, Rose Issa, in the early 2000's[20] and has caught the attention of global art collectors since the beginning of this collaboration.[21] However, scholars have yet to conduct a detailed study analyzing why Hajjaj's work may be helpful to reframing vehement and dualistic conversations

[20]. See Hadidian 5.
[21]. See Buckle 47.

about the veil and Islam in general. Scholars such as Carol Solomon might attribute this apparent gap in scholarship of Maghrebian artists to politics within the art world and the lack of state resources in Morocco to fund art education. Despite its blossoming artistic community, Morocco offers little – relatively speaking – in terms of professional, artistic training:

> The country has only two professional art schools (Tétouan and Casablanca), and Art History, as a distinct discipline, is not in the university curriculum. . . . There are few state-run museums housing contemporary art and a scarcity of official exhibition spaces. Outstanding collections have been formed by major Moroccan financial institutions, but, with few exceptions, they are out of public view. (Solomon 11)

As Solomon points out, aspiring artists in Morocco have limited opportunities for support and instruction in their own country.[22] Hassan Hajjaj has prospered as an artist, in part, due to experiences and resources that he has been able to access outside of Morocco. The lack of resources, however, is not a reflection of the thriving artistic community and heritage (to which Hajjaj's work pays homage) in Morocco.

Although there are not many opportunities to study art formally or to find exhibition spaces there, Morocco has a long and rich artistic heritage, and today artists are finding new ways to grow as a community. In terms of a grass-roots sort of movement, many Moroccan artists are using social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, to share their work. Others are creating their own websites to advertise, exhibit, and sell artistic pieces. Named after a Berber princess rooted in Algerian folklore, *Kahenas* is an online organization – accessible through its own website as well as through

[22]. It does, however, seem that opportunities for art exposition in Morocco are slowly changing. The first large-scale art museum constructed since the end of the French occupation opened in 2014 – in Rabat. http://www.musee mohammed6.ma/#section/1

social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Vimeo. Websites similar to Kahenas and social media are enabling emergent artists in Morocco to network and to thrive.[23] While his photographs cannot be purchased on the website, Hassan Hajjaj is one of the artists whose work is featured on Kahenas. Along with viewing biographical information about Hajjaj, one can purchase his leather *babouches* (outdoor slippers) and tee-shirts, which are decorated with items representing Moroccan street culture such as brightly colored djellabas. Much like the fusion of the modern with the traditional found in Hajjaj's artwork, the Kahenas organization is dedicated to honoring its country's rich cultural heritage and promoting the ways in which those traditions are interpreted by up and coming artists. Kahenas is passionate about "embracing the *beldi* [Arab/homeland] and the *roumi* [European]," or with embracing their country's rich cultural history as well as its European influences. The Kahenas organization is exemplary of Hajjaj's mission to share and to honor Morocco's vibrant, artistic, and transcultural street culture. This group is significant because it reflects the ability of the age-old artistic community of Morocco to adapt and to flourish in new and changing contexts.

Of course alternate realities of Morocco are present. Gender inequality, which several might reductively attribute to beliefs that Islamic societies are inherently oppressive towards women, is certainly an issue in contemporary Morocco. In many rural villages arranged and forced marriages are still prevalent. There are limited numbers of schools and if they do exist, it is unlikely that girls will have access to them. In such contexts many single mothers, repudiated by their husbands, are forced into prostitution

[23]. For more information on Kahenas, consult: http://www.kahenas.com/eshop/about/

because they have no other recourse to earn a living.[24] Although it has offered several improvements, the 2004 *Moudawana,* or Moroccan Family Code (recent legislation meant to bring about more gender equality in the country), has failed to solve many of the problems concerning gender inequality that it claimed it would. But that is not the only version of Morocco that exists. Hassan Hajjaj's account of Morocco is one full of color. It illustrates a country in the midst of its confrontations with modernity. It honors its traditions through artistic expression. It embraces diversity, while revering its own cultural values. Hajjaj's Morocco does not impose the veil or traditional Islamic dress, but respects those who choose to wear such items. It respects women and their right to contribute to society, to a thriving artistic community, and to cultural representation. Hajjaj's vision of Morocco might not exist in every corner of the country, but it does exist and that is the point. His work is important because it offers an alternative perspective to stereotypical, Western accounts of the Maghreb and other Muslim countries. It explores a "multiplicity of dialogues" (Lloyd) and details, and this enables Hajjaj to "negotiate meanings" and "concepts of sameness and difference" with his spectators.

The topics of Hajjaj's photography and film installations may vary slightly, but the over-arching theme of Moroccan street culture binds them together as a collective counter-narrative to notions of authenticity or legitimacy. Whether spectators are of a Western or non-Western background, Hajjaj's juxtaposition of familiar and seemingly insignificant elements, such as coke bottles, with symbols of Maghrebian culture draws

[24]. See Houdaïfa as well as Chastain.

his viewers' attention, holding them accountable to themselves for re-examining their own opinions about Morocco, Islam, Muslim women, and even music. While his collection "My Rock Stars" (video installation[25] and photographs) features female and male musicians from Morocco as well as other countries, the internationally acclaimed "Dakka Marrakesh" and "'Kesh Angels"[26] collections feature mostly Moroccan women and a few Moroccan men. In all three of the collections, Hajjaj has designed the clothing, backdrop, furniture, and frames. In most cases, the models and musicians are friends of his and mirror Hajjaj's double-cultural background to some extent.

More than his other photographs, the "Dakka Marrakesh" and "'Kesh Angels" collections are important to my study because they were created with the intention to mock and to challenge Orientalist images and Western stereotypes about Muslim women. Hajjaj addresses these stereotypes both directly and indirectly. While on the one hand, the very act of producing an image of an Arab woman recalls a discourse in which women are eroticized and presented as fetishized commodities, a number of Hajjaj's photographs are actual re-appropriations of poses found in colonial photography. As Alloula points out in *The Colonial Harem*, many colonial photographs of North African women – containing props such as hookah pipes that did not even exist in Algerian daily life - say more about the West than they do about Maghrebi culture.[27] That said, one way in which Hajjaj's photographs differ from colonial images of Arab women is that his backdrops and frameworks are actually revelatory of Moroccan daily life. He honors the rich artistic

[25]. See Wexner Center.

[26]. Both collections have been exhibited internationally in solo and group exhibitions such as: The Matisse Gallery in Casablanca and in Marrakesh, Morocco, Galerie de l'INA, 8th Bamako Encounters African Photography Biennial, Mali, Leighton House Museum, London and Rose Issa Projects, London.

[27]. See Alloula 67.

heritage of Morocco (mosaic tile and ceramic work, wood carving, textiles, music) as well as the ethics of recycling and re-using, and traditional, Islamic values.

In these two collections – as illustrated in my discussion of *Ilham* - Hajjaj intuitively incorporates a plethora of discourses and materials as a means to represent Moroccan street culture, acknowledging a legacy of artisan work, and the values of everyday Moroccans. Although the veil is present in most of the photographs, it is not the focal point. And that is important. For example, clothing is one way that Hajjaj is able to deconstruct ideas about Muslim women and to blur the lines between East and West, and traditional and modern. In many of the photographs featured in "Dakka Marrakesh" and "'Kesh Angels," the models are clothed in an array of counterfeit Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Chanel, or even Nike clothing items - brand names that one could easily find in Moroccan outdoor markets, though perhaps not always in the form of a djellaba. The materials are designed by Hajjaj and range from babouches (outdoor slippers), to headscarves, *lithams* (face veils), and djellabas. A few women featured in the photographs are fully covered in the *niqab*, or the face veil, while others do not wear scarves at all.

There is an ambiguous element of jest and irony present in the photographs in that while several women might be wearing hijab or niqab,[28] they are wearing it in an inventive sort of way that never fails to integrate the notions of material and street culture with tradition. For example, the photograph *Nike Rider* features a group of women, standing next to a motorcycle. They are holding a basketball and are clothed in plain,

[28]. In Morocco, usually niqab includes a dark-colored *abaya* (robe) or djellaba with a matching face veil, headscarf, and gloves; although in smaller cities women do wear more colorful versions of niqab.

blue djellabas with Nike swooshes on the hoods, face veils, and babouches. The combination of high and/or Western fashion with tradition contextualizes the hijab as part of modern society as well as part of the "vibrant, technicolored world" (Hadidian) that Hajjaj paints in his photographs – clearly not as a symbol of oppression. The women featured in his photographs seem powerful and fully in control of their surroundings.

The representation of female dress and of hijab (the practice of covering) in Hajjaj's photographs may not be congruent with many people's ideas of how a Muslim woman looks (or should look). This discrepancy often incites a reaction either to reconsider the manner in which one conceives of the veil, or to convince the artist to reconsider his. But it is important to know that Hajjaj does not create the items featured in his photographs to distort how Moroccan women look (as many colonial photographs did). He bases his designs on the clothing worn by many of his friends in Marrakesh. If the fashion in his photography results in any sort of shock, it is more so a reflection of one's not being familiar with the vibrant street culture of Marrakesh rather than any distortion of the "truth" by Hajjaj.

The "'Kesh Angels" collection, which has been displayed globally in exhibitions such as "Au bazar du genre: Féminin-Masculin en Méditerranée" at the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille, The Taymour Grahne Art Gallery in New York, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Rose Issa Projects in London, is particularly interesting because of its incorporation of the Marrakeshi

motorcycle culture.[29] In this collection, Moroccan women are featured on or next to motorbikes. Sometimes they are even presented as small motorbike gangs. Many of the models in this collection are friends of Hajjaj and they do indeed ride motorbikes to work every day. This is true as well for many other men and women living in the old medina and "nouvelle ville" (new city) of Marrakesh.

What is more, Marrakeshi motorcycle culture is also called into question in several of the frameworks of photographs in collections other than "'Kesh Angels," such as *Saida in Green* (below – "Dakka Marrakesh"). Instead of being encased by bottles of soda, *Saida* is surrounded by tires.

Figure 2: Saida

In this photograph, the tires no doubt reference motorcycles, but also the Moroccan ethic of recycling and reusing. The juxtaposition of veiled women and motorcycles mocks Western stereotypes of the oppressed and cloistered Muslim woman whilst paying

[29]. The Marrakeshi motorcycle culture is indeed a real phenomenon and it would not be unexpected to find veiled women riding motorcycles all over the city.

homage to one of the most vibrant aspects of Moroccan street culture. These photographs are a colorful example of how objects that are not necessarily Moroccan in origin (motorbike culture, motorcycle gangs) are re-used and presented in a transcultural fashion. Photographs from the "'Kesh Angels" collection flagrantly call into question what it means to be "authentically Moroccan" as well as what it means to behave and dress like "an authentic Muslim woman." They also challenge views on what constitutes a "Hell's angel!" Unlike many Western countries, motorcycle culture in Morocco is not defined by a costume consisting of blue jeans and leather coats.

Another reason why his works are transcultural is because Hajjaj illustrates how Western, capitalist products are re-used in the Maghreb. As is also the case in "My Rockstars," in "Dakka Marrakesh" and "'Kesh Angels," Hajjaj has created detailed frames filled with items such as: Coke, Pepsi, and Fanta cans (printed in Arabic script), eye kohl, canned tomatoes, canned beef, Arabic letter blocks, and tires. At times, Hajjaj even makes use of packaging materials such as crates, brightly colored cloths, and boxes of Coke products, to create pieces of furniture that are featured in his photography and studio exhibitions.[30] These items might hint at notions of capitalist consumption, but they are also representative of the Moroccan spirit of scavenging and reusing (Personal Interview with Author, Columbus, 8 April 2015). Interestingly, Hajjaj has noted that although it was not intentional, the well-known capitalist products, such as Coca-Cola,

[30]. Hajjaj has created a couple of studio exhibitions where he displays his art. For example, Riad Yima is a house in the old medina of Marrakesh that Hassan has converted into a café-store-gallery fusion where people can view and experience his art. For more information, consult: http://riadyima.blogspot.com/

featured in his photography are often what attract people first to his work. He uses this as a point of departure to "take people on a deeper journey" (Personal interview).

Coca-Cola products are a global commodity. They are consumed in Morocco just as much as they are in the United States. As banal as soda-pop may seem, it is a familiar object to which everyone can relate, and that is an integral element in Hajjaj's corpus. Many spectators refer to Hajjaj as the "guy who works with coca-cola" (Personal Interview). They are originally drawn to his work by symbols of popular culture, which they know well, but afterwards turn to focus on the more complex or polemical issues that his photographs may feature, which is so often the veil. While on the one hand, many Westerners are somehow bothered by the very presence of the hijab, on the other hand several Muslims are offended by the way that the veil is worn in Hajjaj's photographs. Surprisingly, Hajjaj offers a counter-narrative to notions of acceptable behavior for Muslim women on all fronts. For example, during an interview with a well-known European fashion magazine, Hajjaj was asked "why women in his country wear those *masks*?" – obviously referring to the face veil. Hajjaj responded to this biased question by demanding that the editor explain and justify her usage of the word "mask" (Personal Interview). Hajjaj's work forces spectators to view the hijab as compatible modernity and also to accept it as part of *their own,* erotic vision of Morocco.

Regarding an exposition that he gave in Saudi Arabia, Hajjaj noted that a number of the women viewing his photographs were bothered by the manner in which his models were dressed, expressing that "this is not proper Islamic dress – it is *haram* (forbidden)" (Personal Interview). Hajjaj found their comments ironic because even though the women

in question were clothed in the traditional, Saudi dress of a black abaya and veil, they were carrying Louis Vuitton or Gucci hand bags just like the fabrics featured in his photographs. When questioned about his work, Hajjaj asked the female spectators why it was acceptable for them to carry the hand bags, but not for the models to wear Louis Vuitton veils or djellabas – a question to which they were not able to respond. Hajjaj leads not only Westerners to question the manner in which they view the veil, but also compels Muslims to reconsider rules and prejudices on how a woman must dress in order to be a good Muslim – again offering another counter-narrative to a notion of authenticity. The value of Hajjaj's work lies in the fact that upon viewing it, spectators often become the object of their own learning.

Another prominent collection included in Hajjaj's corpus is "My Rock Stars." While this collection does not address directly the representation of Muslim women, it does focus on the notions of double-culture, music, and street culture. In this collection, Hajjaj features an array of his favorite musicians (and friends) from around the world. For example, he has photographed the French-Algerian singer Rachid Taha, the South-African-British singer Mandisa Dumezweni, and an assortment of Moroccan Gnawa artists (Taha's music has also been influenced by Gnawa). Even though its presence is widespread, including Gnawa is significant due to its slightly controversial nature. Since Moroccan independence there has been a duality between Arabo-Andalusian music and Gnawa music in the country. The elite have often preferred Andalusian music to Gnawa and the reason for this is two-fold: French colonial officials used Gnawa to counter Islamists movements in Morocco, and today the politically elite fear that they will be

judged by other Muslim countries due to Gnawa's Sufi, mystical characteristics.[31] By including this musical practice in his corpus, Hajjaj acknowledges Morocco's Gnawa heritage as legitimate and plays with hierarchies between the elite and popular by honoring street culture. Moreover, the fact that "My Rock Stars" pays homage to a diverse mixture of musicians whose cultural roots range from Algeria to Venezuela, mirrors the global breadth that Gnawa music has attained today as well as the musical genre's multi-cultural roots.[32] Finally, it is important to note that unlike the tradition of colonial photography of the Maghreb, Hajjaj does not rely solely upon Moroccan women to represent the country. By incorporating images of Moroccan men - and men who are neither emasculated, nor painted as despots at that – Hajjaj broadens the scope of his project. As Alloula notes, most colonial photographs connoting music consisted of highly erotic images of women; however, in this collection Hajjaj represents a complex and multicultural musical practice that pays homage to the talents of past and present fellow Moroccans.

In "My Rock Stars," Hajjaj has also created a nine video installation of individual musical performances. During the thirty minute installation, all nine musicians are lined up in a row – each on their own screen and in front of backdrops consisting of brightly woven tapestries, some with chairs made out of coke crates that Hajjaj has fabricated himself. Every musician takes a turn to perform while the others watch from their respective screens. The accompanying instruments – ranging from a *kora* (a 21 string

[31]. Gnawa performances or parties can last throughout the night. Many believe that during these performances they can be healed from being possessed by spirits.

[32]. See Aidi.

bridge harp) to a Swiss-made hang drum – reflect the diverse range of talent of the group of artists. Even the audience is invited to become part of the work by sitting on the corresponding couch constructed from recycled products that Hajjaj has prepared!

One of the videos featured in the installation is a duo called "Poetic Pilgrimage." Rashida and Sukina Abdul Noor are members of a British hip-hop duo and both are of Jamaican background. They are converts to Islam and perform in Islamic dress – *abayas* (long robes) and headscarves. As veiled rappers, the duo faces backlash from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The "My Rock Stars" collection demonstrates how multi-cultural trajectories can lead to more nuanced, unique, and colorful artistic creations – how a certain object or genre can be taken out of one context and re-adapted into something unique, though not totally different in a new one. Hajjaj proves that one does not need to wear "a tight, black leather jacket" in order to be a rock star (Personal Interview). In "My Rock Stars," Hajjaj offers once again a counter-narrative to notions of authenticity – as if there were just one way to be a rock or rap star. As with the rest of his corpus, he teaches us that the world is really much less black and white than many are willing to admit.

A Comparative Study: Hajjaj and Alloula

After having mapped Hajjaj's oeuvre, I will now continue with a comparative study between selected works from Hajjaj's corpus and Malek Alloula's 1986 *The Colonial Harem.* In his book, Alloula offers a topic study and analysis of colonial photography and post-cards of Algerian women. Beginning with the outdoors, Alloula's chapters transition from exterior spaces ("Women from the Outside: Obstacle and

Transparency") to the most erotic and vulgar photographs - taken in interior spaces - of the collection ("The Colonial Harem: Images of Suberoticism"). Referencing briefly monetary and political motivations for the French colonial post-card and photography industry, Alloula accredits the shift in photography from exterior to interior spaces by pyschologizing the individual photographer. His study therefore charts a temporal history of Algerian, colonial photography, demonstrating the relationship between the sexual frustration of the photographer and penetration into private space. We learn that it is the depiction of what takes place in private spaces that is appealing to European consumers and sells. Attempting to delegitimize phantasms from Orientalist discourse as well as the justification for the colonizing mission, Alloula underlines the ways in which these "private spaces" (inside homes, "harems," intimate photographs of families) are falsely fabricated.

This notion of delegitimizing the hegemonic, Orientalist discourse that has authenticated eroticizing images of Arab women in the first place is key in Alloula's (or any) analysis of representations of Muslim women. Doing this well entails an outline of the material, social, political, and historical discursive conditions that contributed to the production of Orientalist images and ideas. Understanding these conditions as well as their relationship to the colonial post-cards is integral to the process of disarming Orientalist discourse about Maghrebian women. Alloula's analysis is useful to my study of Hajjaj's photography because it allows me to understand better how successful Hajjaj is in questioning and disarming the discursive conditions or the *narrative dimension* that led to the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes found in colonial photography.

Similar to Lloyd and Yegenoglu's (chapter one) work on analyzing Orientalist discourse, Alloula attempts to explain the Orientalist enterprise of the post-cards in question. The goals of his text are: "uncovering the nature and the meaning of the colonialist gaze; then to subvert the stereotype…to return the postcard to its sender" (5). In doing so, he references briefly a history of Orientalist, artistic representations of Arab women in paintings, literature, and photography. He also considers monetary and political repercussions as motivating factors for the post-card industry. Finally, Alloula analyzes themes and the actual objects featured in each photograph in relation to the individual photographer. More than just a consideration for the physical images of a picture, an ample analysis of the former discursive conditions is needed in order to permit Alloula to uncover artifice in the photographs that he analyzes in his text.

Mieke Bal defines this type of analysis as *narrative dimension,* describing it as a recognition of the entire system of Orientalism:

> I do not mean the narration of events within the scene, but the way the story of reading the image happens. In such a way, the image loses its rigidity and fixity, the viewer his or her safe position outside the scope of the study. The narratological question of the focalizer, the vision that informs and colors the image in time, suggests a processing of a motivation. (43)

Considering narrative dimension requires the critic to demonstrate how images become meaningful in light of other discourses and contexts. This is precisely what Alloula attempts to do in his text, although perhaps not always as thoroughly as needed.

Alloula begins his text well, alluding to the colonial enterprise in his first chapter, "The Orient as Stereotype and Phantasm," where he gives a brief genealogy of the role of artists in colonial expeditions as well as the usage of the post-card in both the past and

present. Alloula notes that originally the post-card supported the colonial mission, whereas today it is viewed nostalgically (3-5). Even more so than paintings (which were costly), Alloula explains that the post-card was successful in "fertilizing the colonial mission" because it was inexpensive and it was everywhere (4). The post-card was accessible to both the rich and the poor and circulated greatly in both the colonial Maghreb and the *metropole*. Besides turning a profit, the motivating factors of post-card production aimed at providing a justification for the colonial mission and feeding erotic fantasies that Europeans had about Arab women.

Another instance where Alloula explains how post-cards justified the colonial mission is in chapter five, "Couples." Here, Alloula outlines disparities between European and Maghrebian family values. He also addresses the representation of Algerian married couples and families in the colonial narrative. Depicting indigenous couples as "savage-like" or "saved and civilized by the French" justified French colonization of the Maghreb:

> For its part, the postcard on p. 43 contributes to the same end [to supplement colonial discourse] but, this time, in a valorized mode. The couple represented here is in the process of mutating; it is miraculously saved; in other words, it is a couple already visited by the blessings of civilization: it has been the recipient of divine grace…to the photographer and his clientele at least, the representation of the couple remains a relatively neutral and harmless subject inasmuch as the ethnographic alibi can be invoked to conceal the hidden meaning. (44)

In this photograph, Alloula presents us with an example of "colonial achievements," or families that have been – or appear to have been - civilized (i.e. lower birth-rates, better clothed, non-polygamous). Afterwards, Alloula insinuates briefly the contradiction that

was the civilizing mission when he notes that the image of the "civilized" family had yet to become a danger to the photographer.

Scenes and types. The Lovers.

43

Figure 3: Alloula 43

However, Alloula does not elucidate why an image such as this - a young, indigenous, and ornamentally dressed married couple, affectionately holding hands - would have posed a threat to the colonial mission. It is because once the indigenous family is civilized, the colonial mission is no longer justified. Instead of explaining the problematic concept of *ambivalence*[33] within Orientalist, colonial discourse (the economy of Orientalism), the text continues by explaining that the desires of the photographer are

[33]. "The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (266). For more information on mimicry and ambivalence, see Bhabha.

first and foremost what fueled the creation of the colonial post-cards.[34] Such a declaration focuses on the micro, rather than the macro of colonial discourse.

Ironically, "civilized," married couples threatened imperialism because they underscored the hypocrisy of the entire civilizing mission. By valorizing it, they also jeopardized it. Once the colonized were civilized, at least one justification for occupying their lands would be lost. Post-cards portraying "mutated," indigenous couples signified that colonization too was evolving, and it was becoming obsolete. What is more, the French themselves classified ethnic groups among native populations. They preferred Berbers to Arabs as they believed that Berbers were not true Muslims (because the Muslim Arabs invaded the Maghreb), and thus would be more easily civilized.[35] Without sufficient explanation of the narrative dimension of the discourse that preceded the fabrication of such photographs, Alloula does not amply map out the narrative dimension of the post-card.

Now that I have discussed a few ways in which Alloula references the narrative dimension of colonial photography, I would like to consider another popular subject in his text: the harem and what Alloula identifies as the most sacred, sought-after part of the harem – the odalisque. Alloula addresses the theme of the odalisque in the chapter entitled "Inside the Harem: The Rituals." In this chapter, Alloula discusses the props and the motivating factors of the photographer in order to explain the harem phantasm in colonial photography. Alloula's study of harem photos is useful as a basis for the analysis of Hajjaj's re-appropriation of the odalisque in his photograph *Ilham.*

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[34]. See Alloula 44.
[35]. See Lazreg 50.

Reframing the Odalisque

In chapter one, Alloula discusses colonial photographs taken in the exterior sphere, citing the photographer's frustrations at not being able to penetrate beyond the veils of Algerian women. He attributes the photographer's frustration as the reason why colonial photography moves from the indoor to outdoor spheres. "The photographer will respond to this quiet and almost natural challenge by means of a double violation: he will unveil the veiled and give figural representation to the forbidden. This is the summary of his only program or, rather, his symbolic revenge upon a society that continues to deny him any access and questions the legitimacy of his desire" (14). Although Alloula acknowledges the presence of the odalisque in previous forms of Orientalist, artistic creations, he mainly relies upon an analysis of the photographer's emotions to explain the presence of the harem, or other private spaces, in French, colonial photography of the Maghreb. He gives the photographer entirely too much credit for being responsible for the enterprise that was colonial photography.

It is true that Alloula hints at the narrative dimension of the odalisque when he brings up the notion of eroticism: "It is unnecessary for the photographer to capture the pleasure that the odalisque evokes. This is a subject with a long, pictorial history which advantages him" (78). What is this history? Alloula acknowledges the fact that a genealogy of representations of the odalisque exists and that it legitimates the photographer's fantasy, but he does not explain how this history of representations may have been a motivating factor for creating and reading colonial photographs. For example, as discussed in chapter one, a number of scholars, such as Sherwell, believe that

Orientalist artists and writers were motivated to capture a vision of erotic femininity that was suppressed at that time in Europe. Erotic representations of Arab women were a way for European males to express their sexual frustration. The Algerian post-cards reveal something about gender relations and social norms in Europe more than anything about Algerian women. Such an explanation would have provided a better historical context for the post-cards.

In comparison to Alloula's presentation of colonial photography and post-cards, Hajjaj addresses narrative dimension more thoroughly in his interpretation of the odalisque. He is mindful of colonial and post-colonial ideas about Muslim women, and he takes these stereotypes to task in his photography. The very act of utilizing the motif of the odalisque as a critique of Orientalism acknowledges at least one aspect of the image's dimension – that of an erotic and submissive portrayal of Arab and Muslim women , one that has been presented as authentic in a great deal of artistic works, and which continues to shape Western ideas about Muslims today.

While focusing for the most part on the individual photographer's desires, obsession, and methods for penetrating the inner spaces of the harem, Alloula does bring to attention the issue of props in the post-cards. "And so, his [the photographer's], voyeurism already altered and degraded by the necessary setup he must arrange, is carried out once removed: it encompasses a product that is degraded as well, the copy of a scene that has had no other existence than a made-up one" (68). Discussing colonial harem photographs, Alloula notes that the harem fantasy and the photographer's voyeurism are betrayed by the very fact that the photographs have been staged. The

photographer must construct each harem scene because the fantasy, as portrayed in Orientalist discourse, never actually existed in the first place. Props are absolutely necessary in order to support the Oriental phantasm.

Subsequently, Alloula goes on to discuss what he deems to be the top three props found in the Algerian post-card harem phantasm: *kaoua (coffee) (قهوة),* hookah, and odalisques: "Just like the coffee from which it is inseparable, the hookah, the second symbol of the inner harem, repeats with even greater insistence the stereotypical reference to the Orient. It clumsily completes it. There is no Orient without the hookah…it matters little that it is rarely used in Algeria" (74). Although he astutely points out that coffee is rooted in a "long metaphor of sweetness" (74), Alloula should go on to explain the origin or history of the association of hookah and coffee with the Orient as well as why they should be automatically associated with Algeria even though they are not often used there. It is interesting to know that these objects are part of the harem fantasy in Orientalist discourse, but Alloula needs to go further. These objects obviously must have played a role in *selling* and authenticating the oriental phantasm to European consumers interested in buying the post-cards. Instead, Alloula concludes a chapter already lacking in text with five page-size odalisques and very little interpretation of specific images. Because there are so many pictures presented consecutively without text, it becomes unclear whether the chapter is to be understood as intellectual analysis or pleasure reading.

To give a specific example, page eighty-two of the chapter "Inside the Harem" presents a photograph entitled: *Scenes and types. Reclining odalisque*. It features a

nameless woman reclining on pillows and carpets thrown on the ground, the five centime French postage stamp still visible in the top, left-hand corner. This odalisque is surrounded by the typical Orientalist utensils – a silver tray holding a coffee pot and cups, a large vase, embellished dress - such as jewelry, and a partially exposed bosom. With her chest and legs oriented towards the camera, the woman holds a small cup of coffee above her waist, not actually drinking it herself. This black and white photograph is part of the series of odalisques that bring this chapter to a conclusion. Without any sort of textual guidance, the message of this (re)presentation is somewhat nostalgic, instead of what it should be, a critical analysis explaining motivating factors for the production of the image.

Inside the Harem: The Rituals

Scenes and types. Reclining odalisque.

82

Figure 4: Alloula 82

In light of the harem props that Alloula mentions in his text, Hajjaj's lack of studio props like the ones found in *Scenes and types* becomes consequential. *Ilham* is an odalisque without the sordid and gaudy accessories of the colonial fantasy. Lounging, in

an upright fashion, across a couch situated in a neat and simply decorated room, Ilham's surroundings lack commonplace harem symbols such hookah pipes, nudity, female companionship, coffee, or kitschy attire. Instead, they are re-written with objects that are actually found and used in the Maghreb and, more specifically, Morocco. Hajjaj has incorporated *zillij*, food objects, eye kohl, and clothing items into his photography and framework to paint a picture of daily life and street culture in Morocco for the rest of the world to see. The flagrant lack of eroticism makes the reductive, Orientalist stereotypes of the former odalisque seem ridiculous. Although his photograph might be staged, it is not untruthful. It brings into question a number of discourses about Maghrebian culture including artisan work, consumption, traditional dress as well as colonial discourse. The focus of this photograph is not on the sexuality of Ilham, nor is there any hint at eroticization. In contrast to their garish settings, the sterility of Hajjaj's photograph mocks colonial odalisques and the post-card photographer, calling them out on their fabricated and pornographic modes.

In contrast to coffee and hookah, one important prop that Hajjaj incorporates into his photograph is the *zillij*. All of the three walls visible in Hajjaj's *Ilham* are fully enameled with elaborate ceramic tiles. The bottom halves of two of the walls feature a more elaborate, floral-like motif, while the top two halves and the entire third wall are composed of a more geometric motif. Zillij and mosaic work is an art-form that has long been practiced in Morocco, and is found throughout the Islamic world. It would not be uncommon to locate a room with zillij--covered walls such as this one in many Moroccan homes and buildings today. On the other hand, the model featured in *Scenes and types*

reclines on a very thin blanket thrown on a stone-covered surface. If she is indoors, the house certainly does not seem to be elaborately constructed, nor is there any reference to Maghrebian artisan work. Her surroundings reflect only a fantasy that is superimposed upon her.

Another reason why the incorporation of zillij is particularly interesting is because, as an example of artisan work, it recalls the fact that Morocco's rich, artistic heritage consists not only of clothing, tapestries, and zillij, but also music and wood work. These art forms have survived throughout colonial occupations, political unrest, and the advent of modernity. It is important to note that while other North African countries fell to the Ottoman Empire, Morocco resisted domination.[36] Also, French colonial rule in North Africa was much more influential in Algeria, whereas Morocco was only a French protectorate. One result of this is that while forms of ceremonial dress have evolved in Algeria, in Morocco ceremonial dress remains the same today as in medieval times (Belkaid 62). Moreover, the 1993 Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca is an immense, contemporary manifestation of Morocco's rich artistic talents. Although its principal architect was French, over 6,000 traditional Moroccan artisans labored on the building during its construction and worked on projects ranging from zillij, wood-carving, and stucco work.[37] And even though French, colonial powers attempted to re-appropriate and dominate zillij fabrication for their own profit, the artistic tradition has survived, still practiced as it was before French colonial influence.[38] *Ilham* reflects this

[36]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morocco%E2%80%93Turkey_relations
[37]. See Islamic-arts.org Team.
[38]. See Housefield 405.

resilient heritage; and thus her resistance to outside forces and Western, hegemonic discourse.

Finally, an even larger prop in Alloula's chapter on the harem is the actual odalisque. Again, Alloula's analysis of the odalisque is centered too much on a study of the individual photographer rather than on the narrative dimension of the photograph or motif of the harem: "Hiding in the deepest recesses of the harem, where she reclines in lascivious self-abandon, the odalisque has become the goal of the photographer. For this obsessive guest of the harem, she is the very personification of the phantasm, its fermata" (Alloula 101). The odalisque is the ultimate site of penetration for the photographer. Entering the harem is not enough. The photographer needs the odalisque in order to realize his fantasy. From this, we understand what the harem may have signified for the photographer, but is that sufficient? What type of political significance and relations of power did and does the odalisque continue to elicit? Alloula's text does draw readers' attention to phallocentric, erotic images, but he fails to explain the nature of their relationship to other, Orientalist representations of Muslim women. For example, Alloula would have done well to address the positioning of the bodies of the odalisque images:

> Certain details of the "Odalisque à la Culotte Rouge" express Matisse's fear of métissage, of the I/eye merging with the Other/object. Matisse centralizes the odalisque's vagina to suggest that libidinal instincts—not intellectual—govern the female/Arab Other. The vagina's centrality is also a demonstration of hegemonic power. Matisse centralizes this mark of difference to assert the totality of male/Western control over its threatening Other. (Stranges 87)

The odalisque in *Scenes and types. Reclining Odalisque* lies on the ground, propped up on her right elbow with her body turned towards the camera. Like the odalisque in

Matisse's[39] painting, Alloula displays photographs of women whose groins become the focal point of the works. Although the groin area is central in many photographs of odalisques, in the chapter *Inside the Harem,* Alloula does not address the significance of the positioning. *Reclining Odalisque* is not only a result of the photographer's obsession with the harem, but it reflects an attempt to establish power over the Other. Addressing an issue such as this and linking it with contemporary ways that post-colonial European society attempts to demonstrate hegemonic power over the East – such as banning the hijab in European countries - would have been a way for Alloula to establish clearly that his work is not meant to be a pleasure reading or to be nostalgic.

On the other hand, unlike the *Reclining Odalisque* and *Odalisque à la Culotte Rouge,* Ilham is positioned differently. Instead of being thrown upon a pile of carpets and pillows on the floor, Ilham sits across a couch neatly topped with a small doily. The usage of actual furniture instead of rugs seems to mock colonial stereotypes of savages needing to be saved and also represents modernity. Her left arm rests on one pillow and while her face and chest face the camera, her torso and groin are not oriented towards the photographer. Ilham's left leg hides her groin from the viewer. Hajjaj has replaced the colonial odalisque with one that does not spell out a relationship of power and control between the East and West. A discourse of phallocentric power is not present. The very act of naming the photograph after its subject demonstrates a sense of self empowerment. Ilham, as the entitled work suggests, is not controlled by libidinal instincts or by the gaze of the male Other. She is autonomous.

[39]. Matisse was a prominent French painter who lived during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

While narrative dimension might be somewhat lacking in Alloula's analysis of the Algerian post-cards, he does clearly explain that one of the biggest burdens of French colonial photographers was that of realism: *"The harem, though opened up by the photographer, must remain symbolically closed.* For the phantasm, a public harem is inconceivable. …What the card brings to light, then, may suffice for purposes of jubilation, but it is by no means all. This *all* is, in any case, out of the frame" (69). Whether it was a question of photographs of couples, harems, or even singers and dancers, the scenes depicted in the colonial photographs needed to appear believable. It was incumbent upon the photographer to keep the Orientalist fantasy intact.

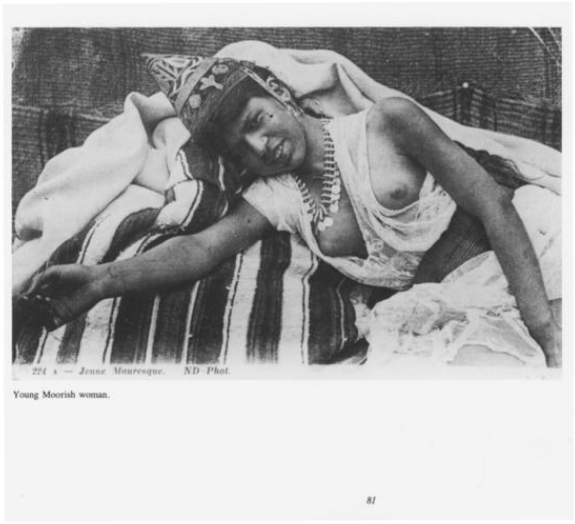

Figure 5: Alloula 81

The challenge, as Alloula notes, was making the fantasy experience believable to the consumer. In addition to including props in harem photographs, the photographer also

had to appear to hide something. This is exemplary in the photograph above entitled *Young Moorish woman.* Here, the photographer focuses in closely on the young woman. The background behind and around her is not visible. Only a partial view of the rugs or tapestries that she lies on is in sight. The spectator does not know where the woman is situated, nor if there are other women in the supposed harem.

The difference between Hajjaj's *Ilham* and colonial models of the harem and the odalisque is that Hajjaj does not have to reinforce any fantasy. Ilham's body language shows us that she has nothing to hide. She has likely just returned home from the outside sphere as she is wearing shoes. Moreover, we can see that the photographer attempts to hide nothing as we have a full view of the room where Ilham is situated. There is no "all," as Alloula suggests, outside of the frame. Finally, in addition to the consideration of space, the simple dress of Ilham downplays any notions of erotic opulence. Unlike the model pictured above, Ilham is not clothed in garish (or any) jewelry – a staple of harem photographs (49), nor is her bosom exposed. The sterility and straightforwardness of Hajjaj's photograph seems to mock the colonial photographer who anxiously scrambled to preserve a reality, which never even existed to begin with.

Alloula notes that many today view the colonial post-cards nostalgically. Ironically on the other hand, Alloula's analysis almost seems wistful itself because the quantity of photographs in relation to the quantity of text is so disproportionate. This is especially problematic in his last chapter, "The Colonial Harem: Images of Suberoticism," where Alloula categorizes the types of colonial photographs that focus on breasts. The chapter contains seventeen (page-sized) photographs of exposed women and

only five and a half pages of text. Alloula explains the obvious reasons why male colonists would have been interested in viewing these post-cards, but a thorough categorization of the many ways in which breasts were portrayed hardly seems necessary to this end. And without ample guidance offered to the reader, the chapter appears to be nostalgic, pleasure reading. However, the usage of framework in Hajjaj's photographs guides the spectator. Juxtaposed to the vibrant framework containing modern food products consumed in Morocco, we are reminded that *Ilham,* despite the fact that it is a black and white photograph, is not meant to be a nostalgic memory of the past as Alloula's presentation tends to give off. The colorful frames contain products of consumption of the present, while the zillij in the black and white photograph represents an historic national tradition. The zillij also represents a form of cross-cultural and economic exchange in Morocco – as many European tourists purchase zillij products - and situates Ilham as an actor in these forms of exchange. Ilham is not sold for her body; rather she sells skills rooted in national tradition.

Encasing *Ilham,* a black and white photograph, inside a wooden frame filled with colorful, modern objects is a marker of temporality and consumption. The framework contains modern items such as aluminum cans of juice, corned beef, and eye khol - objects whose origins are unclear even though their packaging labels are printed in Arabic script. The tins of Roberts corned beef are clearly an imported product. The bottles of eye khol are used for make-up and can also act as an antiseptic for the eye. They are obviously not imported from the West. However, the cans of Rani juice's origins are somewhat ambiguous to the average spectator. As it turns out, Rani juice is a

product of Aujan Industries, a Saudi Arabian company. In 2011 Aujan started up a partnership with Coca-Cola – who now owns approximately half of the equity in Aujan Industries.[40] Interestingly, even though Coca-Cola cans are not included in *Ilham*, the company is still referenced by Hajjaj. The Rani juice cans are indicative of the global breadth of Coca-Cola and capitalist consumption. Because Rani juice is the product of an international partnership it also symbolizes the presence of Middle Eastern capitalist companies and reciprocal exchange.

Though it is not apparent what Hajjaj's motives were, one cannot help but draw attention to the link between the fact that the color of Islam (green) is embodied in juice cans manufactured by a company owned jointly by Saudi Arabia and The United States. Intentional, or not, this sends an indelibly powerful message. Has Islam been corrupted by capitalism and imperialism? Is this a mockery of the fact that the country that houses Islam's most holy sites is driven by capitalist gain? Or, does Hajjaj wish simply to illustrate Islam's ability to be amenable to modern contexts? As it turns out, Hajjaj is categorically reluctant to make any comments pertaining to religion or politics. If his photography incites any sort of religious or political innuendo, it is simply because that happens to be a reality linked with an image or a theme that Hajjaj has depicted in his work rather than any indication of his personal beliefs. If a capitalist joint venture between a Saudi company and Coca-Cola – as featured in *Ilham* - highlights any sort of hypocrisy or corruption of the highly religious Saudi state, it is quite simply because that is the case and not because Hajjaj intended to make a statement (Personal Interview). In

[40]. For more information, consult Coca-Cola.

light of the negative and hypocritical reactions of women and men from the Gulf States to Hajjaj's incorporation of symbols of Western, capitalist products, such as Gucci, on hijabs and abayas, it is difficult not to read the inclusion of Rani juice cans as revelatory of a certain duplicity of the Saudi state.

By introducing all of these products into his photography, Hajjaj discloses realities of consumer culture in Morocco. We can see historical and contemporary relations of exchange between the Maghreb, the Middle East, and the West and also learn something about daily life in Morocco. The hookah pipes, coffee, and erotic odalisques are an invention of the past and are replaced with new items. Ilham is just as likely as a woman in North America or Europe to drink Coca-Cola. She can drink a Coca-Cola or a Rani juice, wear a djellaba, and sit under detailed zillij work simultaneously. Tradition and modernity are not incompatible. The picture communicates the message that Moroccan street culture is infused with an eclectic mix and appreciation of the past and present, modernity and tradition. Through a transcultural means of artistic production, Hajjaj illustrates how the Maghreb has absorbed Western culture whilst holding on to its indigenous traditions and "remained separate."[41] His work depicts an exchange, between the West and the Arab world. *Ilham* challenges the Western notion of an oppressed or erotic image of a Muslim woman as the only one that is valid or authentic. Additionally, Hajjaj shows that the Maghreb is not defined simply by its women. Replacing erotic, Orientalist fetishes such as the harem, *Ilham* rewrites the colonial odalisque with a

[41]. Dadi explains the significance of the concept of "nation" in diasporic post-colonial art. A nation must create its own path to modernity independently from American mass culture; it must find a way to remain separate and to preserve its own culture.

truthful likeness of Muslim women and Moroccan culture. The oppressed, vulnerable, and bawdy odalisque surrounded by items that symbolized the exotic are rewritten with objects that are actually part of Moroccan culture.

Hajjaj's *Ilham* answers to a number of contexts, cautioning those who are hastily judgmental. It recalls simultaneously colonial men who attempted ceaselessly to penetrate imagined inner harems and to undress the indigenous woman as well as modern French legislation that seeks to control the dress of Muslim women. The photograph also indirectly references the manner in which Saudi Arabia - the spiritual capital of Islam - continues to dictate pious dress and behavior for Muslim women despite the questionably greedy and capitalist endeavors of the oil-rich country. The implications of this work are many. The veil is an issue in France, because the West has made it a concern for centuries by obsessing over the Muslim, female body. Encased by certain items that hint at notions of capitalism and possibly corruption within Islam, the work addresses the fact that Western and Muslim, male gazes continue to control the stakes that determine if and how Muslim women are able to assume their identity as Muslim or as Western – or as both. Hajjaj's photograph graciously highlights the possibility that our preconceived notions of what defines an Arab woman as well as a good Muslim are simply too outdated, binary, and self-defeating.

Ilham is photographed in what appears to be her home. She is not wearing a headscarf in the photograph, but it is ambiguous as to whether or not she practices hijab in her daily life. Women practicing hijab are not required to cover their hair when they are at home or in the presence of females only and/or male relatives whom they cannot

marry. Thus, it is possible that Ilham may wear a veil outside of the home. Hajjaj has kept this detail out of the picture and left the interpretation up to his spectators. In so doing, the veil cannot become the focus of the photograph. And rightly so because Ilham's identity should not be fixed upon the point of whether or not she covers her hair with a piece of cloth. By de-emphasizing this question, Hajjaj refuses to let Arab women – or at least this one - be defined by a binary discourse of liberated or oppressed. Ilham is an empowered female who expresses her autonomy by refusing a history of phallocentric, power based relations. If Ilham does indeed practice hijab, it is true that there are some Muslims who would be offended by the fact that she is photographed with her hair uncovered. But again, I would argue that the ambiguity serves a purpose. Some women, who wear the veil, may do so to impress or to please others, to appear to be "better" Muslims. Ilham's spirituality is not addressed in the photograph, nor can spectators judge her based on a practice of hijab. She could be Muslim and not wear the veil just as easily as she could wear the veil and not really practice hijab. There is a point of difference. The question of the veil remains ambiguous. Ilham is defined by so much more.

In light of recent acts against Muslim women in France, *Ilham* offers a compelling message that Muslim women are defined by much more than a headscarf. Hajjaj has transformed the image of the colonial odalisque in order to "move the debate forward."[42] It is precisely because Hajjaj includes various objectives and discourses in his photography that a work such as *Ilham* becomes transcultural. By forging together

[42]. For more information about transforming discourse about Muslim women, see Sedira 63.

multiple dialogues and geographies (Lloyd),[43] Hajjaj is able to complicate modern discourse about Arab women. He uses frameworks as a means to attract and then to guide the spectator, reminding them that his photographs portray his subjects in modern contexts and that there is sometimes more than one way to be *authentic*. *Ilham* references the ways in which images of Arab women have been created and read *both* in the past and in the present, and then it introduces alternative dialogues to complicate readings.

Hassan's Angels?

I have established the importance of a consideration for narrative dimension, or an acknowledgement of "what's at stake," in representations of Muslim women. Hajjaj has considered well the different contexts in which *Ilham* as an artistic work becomes meaningful, and has succeeded in representing Maghrebian women in a manner more complicated than traditional, binary discourse – one in which Orientalist stereotypes are not legitimated. But what happens when the repercussions of certain colonial references are overlooked? I will continue my chapter with an examination of a photograph from Hajjaj's "'Kesh Angels" collection entitled *Hassan's Angels – Khadija,* by addressing how the work relates to colonial discourse, popular culture and tradition, and contemporary discourse on the veil.

Hassan's Angels – Khadija, features a model wearing a red and white "jersey-djellaba" fusion, and a coordinating niqab (face veil) as well as babouches (slippers), all covered with the symbols and the name of a Marrakeshi soccer club (KACM, Kawkab). The photograph is encapsulated in a chartreuse colored frame that is filled with Orange

[43] . See Lloyd 45.

Fanta cans – printed in Arabic script. Fanta, another soda company owned by Coca-Cola, invokes the reach of capitalist consumption. Oddly enough the cans of Fanta also are reminiscent of colonial discourse. "Fanta" is meant to be an abridged version of the word "fantasy," which is evocative of the notion of colonial or Orientalist phantasms.[44] The soccer "jersey" conveys Moroccan passion for "football," and while it represents the traditional, Khadija wears the djellaba in the same way that many men and women would wear soccer (or any other sport for that matter) jerseys representing their favorite sports teams and players.

Against a bright blue and turquoise backdrop, Khadija sits on a black motorcycle with her left leg extended to the ground, exposed to upper-calf level. Her eyes are covered by red, heart-shaped, plastic sunglasses and although it is not entirely clear, she seems to be looking slightly behind herself. Finally, though her head is covered, it is not apparent if Khadija is wearing a head-scarf or a hood because the covering is draping off the back of her head, leaving a good deal of her hair exposed. In any case, Khadija does not seem overly concerned with obeying the rules (of proper hijab) strictly. Much like *Ilham*, *Hassan's Angels – Khadija* weaves together various dialogues such as American popular culture, sports, consumerism, fashion, Marrakeshi motorcycle culture, and the veil. And like *Ilham*, the model's name is included in the title, but not without becoming problematic.

The backdrop of *Khadija* is rather sterile. Besides the motorcycle and blue wall behind her, there are no props in the photograph. Again, this is in contrast to the cluttered

[44]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanta

backdrops of colonial photographs. And unlike *Ilham, Khadija* is located outdoors. Alloula addresses outdoor photographs in the first chapter of his text, noting that when photographed outside, Algerian women are always in herds. The photograph *Moorish women taking a walk* (10) features upward of twenty women – all clothed in white *haiks* (a traditional, white robe worn by Algerian women)- walking across a zig-zaging bridge situated near a wooded setting. Alloula notes that the inability to capture intimate glimpses of individual women was a frustration that the colonial photographer faced in his pictoralization of outdoor settings. "As if to photograph one of them from the outside required the inclusion of *principle of duplication* in the framing. For it is always a group of veiled women that the photographer affixes upon his plate" (11).

Figure 6: Alloula 10

The reason why there are so many women in this image is because at this instance, the colonial photographer was not granted the privilege to photograph personally any one person. The photograph is a stolen image. While Alloula describes the women above as anonymous, all dressed in "one, single uniform" (11), Khadija, an outdoor image, is photographed alone. And her uniform, a jersey djellaba, is quite original. The image of *Khadija* is not a globalizing image, but rather deliberately concentrates on just one person. Instead of being represented as if walking in a herd, Khadija's choice in transportation is her motorcycle. The notion of "duplication" in *Khadija* is found obviously not in the model, but in the soda cans filling the frame. The repetition of cans of Fanta mirror the repetitive motifs found in zillij (Personal Interview). They are also indicative of the Moroccan ethic of scavenging and recycling. Thus the photograph's background may be empty, but the pop cans recall the co-existance of modernity with tradition and the way in which something Western in origin has been adapted into a new context.

What is more, instead of an anonyomous title, the name of Hajjaj's photograph idcntifies the model, Khadija. And this is important. Khadija references not only Moroccan culture, but a rich, Islamic history. Khadija, a rich business woman, was the name of the prophet Muhammed's first wife. Khadija had become a successful merchant prior to her marriage to the Prophet. The recognition of this aspect of Arabo-Islamic history challenges the idea that Musim women are oppressed and confined to interior

spaces.Thus, the model's name provides a historical link and context for the theme of capitalist consumption and trade found in Hajjaj's corpus.[45]

The choice in title can hold a great deal of significance. "'Kesh Angels," no doubt a reference to American, popular culture, includes a sub-group of photos featuring Moroccan women on motorbikes entitled: *Hassan's Angels.* Playing on the American popular culture sensation "Charlie's Angels" or even "Hell's Angels" may be a witty method to blend notions of East and West, tradition and modernity into one tableau, but it is worth contemplating what types of meanings it might connote. Considering the narrative of colonial images of Arab women, the title risks greatly the implication of notions of oppression, sequestration, and eroticization.

Most of the women in the post-cards pictured in *The Colonial Harem* do not have names. With such anonymity, it is difficult not to view the women as anything but eroticized. Furthermore, later in the text Alloula contends that the nameless models are a representation of Algerian women in general. "The Model, in selling the image of her body (dispossession through remuneration), sells at the same time, by virtue of her exemplariness, the image of the body of Algerian women as a whole (extended dispossession)" (118). Alloula's commentary draws immediately a parallel between model/photographer to the prostitute/pimp image. This is problematic because first the parallel denies the individual models agency, and then it labels all Algerian women as

[45]. This model is likely a friend of the artist. Thus, the fact that her name is Khadija is a matter of coincidence. But this does not take away from the historical significance of her name.

prostitutes during French, colonial Algeria – as if the honor of all of Algeria was compromised by the models featured in the post-cards.

Figure 7: Khadija

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Though it may not have been intentional, it is necessary to question what a title such as *Hassan's Angels – Khadija* might imply when compared to colonial representations of Maghrebian woman. Although Khadija is not anonymous, being designated as one of *Hassan's Angels* does not mean that she is altogether autonomous. In light of Alloula's contention that the North African models of the colonial post-cards sold their bodies to the photographer, it is difficult not to associate the parallel of pimp/prostitute and photographer/model with *Khadija.* Moreover in this light, the title also belittles the

reputation of the Prophet's wife, Khadija, as a woman of nobility and power. It seems that Hajjaj did not consider this element of the photograph's narrative dimension.

Furthermore, *Hassan's Angels – Khadija* is also reminiscent of another example of exploitation. During the Algerian Revolution, a group of Algerian women were used as under-cover agents in the resistance movement. They succeeded as bomb carriers by manipulating their dress to look either "European" or "Algerian." In his book, *A Savage War of Peace,* Alistair Horne refers to these women as "Yacef's girls:"

> They [Zohra Drif, Djamila Bouhired, and Samia Lakhdari] had been chosen for the job because, with their feminine allure and European looks, they could pass where a male terrorist could not. …Taking off their veils, the girls tinted their hair and put on the kind of bright, summery dresses and slacks that *pied noir* girls might wear for a day at the beach. (185)

Discarding the veil permitted Zohra, Djamila, and Samia to enter spaces to which they could not have had access if they had been wearing veils. It also allowed them to capitalize on the prejudice of the French. Not only were they permitted to enter new spaces, but they were also treated like "European women." They were sexually harassed by check-point guards as a result of their charming dress. How can we read *Hassan's Angels* in light of "Yacef's girls"? Although Hajjaj may have wished to acknowledge the hypocrisy of Western stereotypes of the oppressed and submissive Muslim woman by calling into question the misogyny of a popular culture sensation such as "Charlie's Angel's," his *Khadija* recalls male hegemony and colonial contexts of female exploitation.

Khadija is a transcultural representation of Moroccan women. The photograph meshes together notions of the modern and the traditional by superimposing soccer onto

customary dress. The fact that Khadija is a veiled woman using a motorcycle immediately questions Western images of Muslim women as powerless and cloistered. The fabric of the djellaba also questions what is considered acceptable dress for a Muslim woman. Hajjaj demonstrates how products from Western (popular) culture have been re-appropriated and reused in Moroccan culture. In this way, the photograph challenges what is "authentic." The photograph presentation also differs from colonial paradigms in that no unrealistic props are needed. The model is neatly situated in a sterile backdrop that is reflective of her lifestyle. But because he does not consider the narrative dimension of his title, the photograph also recalls stereotypes of oppressed, Muslim women. Hajjaj may have simply wished to show how Moroccan women too can be part of a motorcycle culture, but he overlooked certain ways in which past, representations of Arab women may feed into the present.

Dancers and Rap Stars: From the Maghreb to Jamaica

Muneera Rashida and Sukina Abdul Noor, featured in Hajjaj's video installation from *My Rock Stars,* were born to Jamaican parents living in England. They converted to Islam, practice hijab, and have been rapping for over ten years. The topics of their music range from identity struggles and global politics to women's issues. They sing in both English and Arabic, and have performed all over the world, including in: Morocco, South Africa, Europe, and the United States.[46] Challenging boundaries over what is considered proper behavior for rap artists as well as expected, and sometimes acceptable behavior for Muslim women (vis à vis Westerners and other Muslims), Muneera and Sukina embody

[46]. See "About Poetic Pilgrimage."

the spirit of Hajjaj's corpus to question notions of what is considered "authentic." As they work to negotiate their identity and physical appearance as Muslim converts of Jamaican origin living in a Western country, the rap duo also faces the struggle of carving out a position for artistic performance for "Muslim women that is authentically Islam" (*Hip-Hop Hijabis*). In their song "Unlikely Emcee," the duo sings of their experiences as female, Muslim, and covered rappers – noting as the title implies, that many are surprised to see veiled women as rappers: "Unlikely Emcees . . . This is something you weren't expectin – Muslim chick mic and hard rappin . . . No weave or hair extensions, just my hijab or head wrap . . . 'cause I gotta keep my modesty in tact." Muneera and Sukina have reappropriated a musical genre that is dominated by men and that often objectifies women and use it to express themselves as beautifully, empowered female Muslims. Their work transgresses the binary of veiled/unveiled and oppressed/liberated.

Included in Hajjaj's video installation, the rap duo is located in the fourth screen from the left. As we saw in *Ilham* and *Khadija,* Muneera's and Sukina's photograph and video screen break the paradigm of colonial photography of Muslim women in that their background is simple and neat. Although its pattern is intricate, the tapestry is the only other object in the screen. And the video is revelatory of the duo, not of any sort of Orientalist fantasy of Muslim women. The rappers are clothed in vivaciously colored abayas, hijabs, and sunglasses. Fusing together objects from Western popular culture, such as rap music, camouflage, and funky sunglasses, with traditional Muslim dress as well as Moroccan street culture (the tapestry, Islamic dress), this transcultural video installation offers a counter-narrative to what are considered "authentic" behaviors for

both rap stars as well as veiled women. Most importantly, Muneera and Sukina have a literal voice. While the singers have noted that many non-Muslims are surprised to see Muslim women rappers, they have also stated that many Muslims from the older generation find it difficult to conjoin the notions of Islam and hip-hop.

What is more, there are those in the Muslim community who view it haram (forbidden) for a Muslim woman to perform in front of crowds. Public, female vocal expression is viewed by many as the equivalent to exposing intimate body parts (*Hip-Hop Hijabis*). By including Muneera and Rashida in this installation, Hajjaj legitimizes their efforts to counter narratives of accepted behavioral norms for Muslim women.

Figure 8: My Rock Stars Experimental Volume

While Muneera's and Sukina's video installation reflects a real and truthful musical, performative practice, Alloula discusses a not so truthful representation of music

and dance in Maghrebian, colonial photographs. In chapter eight of *The Colonial Harem,* "Song and Dance: Almeh's and Bayaderes," Alloula addresses the theme of dance and song in colonial photography. Alloula notes that in this thematic of the post-cards, the dancers and singers displace the harem. They are "transient guests of the harem because they come from the outside" (86). In this chapter, Alloula explains why the realism of photographs of the dancers and singers, though sought after, is betrayed:

> The enumeration of the various types of dance . . . , the representations of traditional instruments…, the costumes and the props of dance – all of these are subordinated to the necessity of providing folklore, which the postcard cannot escape. This 'realism,' painstakingly constructed around a few models mimicking dancers and musicians, is no more able than that in the other series to rise above trivial reductiveness. These photographs do not express the would-be talent of the performers. (89)

Alloula does well to highlight the fact that the dancers and singers featured in this collection of colonial photography were just props themselves. The collection does not reflect anything about these models, but rather uses them as support to mirror an Orientalist fantasy. For example, in the picture featured below, *Moorish women,* the women remain anonymous (as the title implies) and are accompanied by countless props ranging from coffee to carpets to a tambourine. They wear an array of jewelry and even the bosom is partially exposed on one of the three women. As opposed to Sukina and Muneera, who are both named and who are standing confidently, these three women sit timidly, directly on the floor. What is significant for my study is that from Alloula, we learn the historical importance of the fact that Hajjaj's video installation does not reflect a fantasy, but rather the true talent and cultural dimension of each of the artists featured.

Although references to the desperation to re-create a fantasy are quite useful, there is an additional aspect of "narrative dimension" that needs to be included in Alloula's chapter. The notion of dancers and singers in the Maghreb did have a history to it. There were dancers and singers in the south of Algeria, and *rai*, a trans-cultural musical genre sung by both men and women, developed in Algerian cities, such as Oran, in the early twentieth century.[47] The presence of the French in colonial Algeria irrevocably altered that artistic practice, rendering the singers, once not altogether unrespectable, into prostitutes. There were many successful, female poets and dancers in Algeria and these women generally had more freedom before the French occupation. Many even refused to sing for the French as a means to resist the colonists.[48]

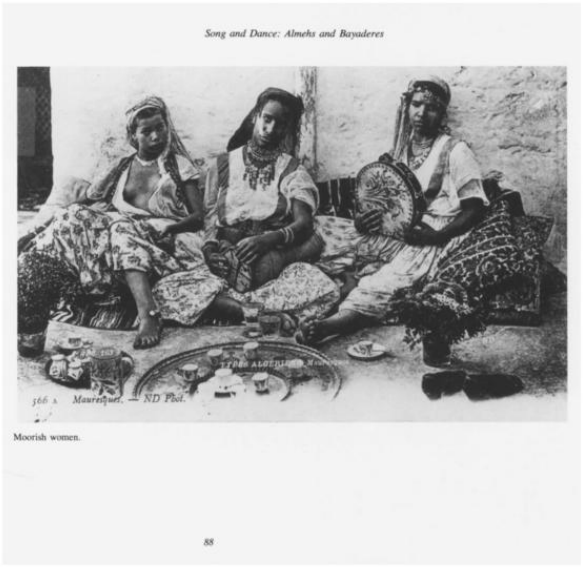

Figure 9: Alloula 88

[47]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ra%C3%AF
[48]. See Lazreg 29-33.

But Alloula does not mention this in his book. In light of this brief historical ellipsis, it is interesting to note that Muneera and Sukina rap to achieve empowerment and liberation. Despite more conservative, Islamic views of voice and performative agency for Muslim women as strictly haram, the rap duo insists bravely that "if they do not speak for themselves, someone else will speak for them" (*Hip-Hop Hijabis*). Fully covered, this modern rap duo challenges the idea that they are somehow inappropriately exposed as performers. Muneera and Rashida view themselves not as entertainers, but rather as agents of social justice.

Technology, obviously much more developed now than that of colonial photography (Alloula 93), does not distort the rap duo's artistic practice but rather enables them to better spread the messages conveyed in their songs and to control how their music is used, distributed, and interpreted. It is quite clear that Muneera and Rashida are not "props." They rap in order to express themselves as artists, as women, as Jamaicans, and as Muslims. It will be interesting to compare Poetic Pilgrimage to Diam's, a French female rapper and the subject of my next chapter, who ended her career as a rapper shortly after her conversion to Islam. Muneera and Sukina rap to articulate themselves as Muslims, while Diam's claims that as a result of her conversion, she no longer has a need to communicate the issues that tormented her prior to embracing Islam. The religion has "given her inner peace." I will further explore the compatibility of rap and Islam in my next chapter.

Conclusion

In consideration of recent events in Europe, and particularly in France, linked with the hijab affair and the burqa ban[49] as well as the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings, the synthesis of modernity, tradition, and cultural exchange that is expressed in Hajjaj's works becomes quite powerful. In the name of *laïcité* (secularity), the French have banned the wearing of any "ostentatious" symbols or displays of religion in public institutions. Because the hijab is more visible than other articles, such as a small cross, that could denote religious affiliation, Muslim women have been affected by this law more than anyone else. While the hijab or veil was banned because it was interpreted as an infringement on the separation between church and state, the niqab or burqa was banned because it was deemed incompatible with French, republican values. Following the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shooting, Nils Muizniek, the Council of Europe Commissioner for human rights, revealed that 80 % of the anti-Muslim acts that occur in France are targeted against women.[50] These acts range from pulling at the hijab or niqab to spitting and people shouting comments such as "Muslim whore."[51] Today, many people believe that the practice of hijab not only symbolizes oppression and backwardness, it is a global marker for Islam, often being read as inherently incompatible with the West. The veil is also frequently interpreted as a marker of radical Islam. While Hajjaj's work represents a context where tradition, Moroccan, and Muslim culture (not all Moroccans are Muslim)

[49]. In 2004 the wearing of the hijab or Islamic headscarf was banned in all State institutions in France – the most problematic of which being public schools. In the summer of 2010 a law was passed banning the burqa, or full face veil in all public spaces in France.

[50]. See Draper.

[51]. ibid.

are not incompatible with the West, markers of Islam in Western countries are tolerated less and less. Hajjaj's work offers a counter-narrative to simplistic discourse.

Hassan Hajjaj is a dual-culture artist who expresses and negotiates his Moroccan and British identities through interior design, fashion, and photography. It is his transcultural identity that empowers him to create representations of Arab women in a more complicated fashion than traditional, binary discourse. The inclusion of a multiplicity of dialogues permits Hajjaj to comment on and challenge stereotypes about Muslim women and then to offer alternative readings.

By comparing Hajjaj's work to Alloula's commentary about colonial post-cards in *The Colonial Harem*, I have shown the importance of explaining the stakes of how photography and images of Arab women are read. While in *Ilham*, Hajjaj re-appropriates the odalisque motif without perpetuating colonial discourse, *Khadija* recalls notions of possession and oppression because it does not address all of the motivating factors for reading the work – including the title. Hajjaj uses ambiguity as a way to break down the simplistic binary of veiled/un-veiled in his photography. Refusing to address directly the issue of the veil, his works prevent spectators from defining the women represented based on whether or not they cover their hair. The multiplicity of discourses present in Hajjaj's works - which at times hint at the veil – lead spectators to become the subjects of their own learning as they are forced to reconsider their own ideas of what may or may not constitute the "authentic." In light of recent events and social unrest in France, Hajjaj offers a compelling message for transforming conversations about Muslim women and the veil.

Chapter 3: Privileged Silence: A Former Rapper's Art of Identity Negotiation

"C'est pas ma France à moi cette France profonde
Celle qui nous font la honte et aimerait que l'on plonge
Ma France à moi ne vit pas dans l'mensonge
avec le cœur et la rage, à la lumière, pas dans l'ombre »
(Diam's)

« This isn't my France, this radical France
The one that makes us feel ashamed and which would like for us to fail
My France doesn't live in lies
It lives with courage and anger visible, not in the shadows" [52]

Introduction

In my last chapter, I concluded with a discussion of the hip-hop duo Poetic Pilgrimage. Poetic Pilgrimage raps despite their conversion to Islam, incorporating themes that are global in nature, such as racism and social justice as well as issues linked to Islam, such as women's voice. Poetic Pilgrimage takes pride in their status as rappers. The duo believes that they have a responsibility to write lyrics that result in pushing their audience to reflect profoundly on the subject matter that their songs address. For Poetic Pilgrimage, music is a vehicle with which they can promote social change. And with

[52]. Quotation from Diam's' "Ma France à Moi," from the album *Dans ma Bulle.* My translation.

backlash from within the Muslim community, this is not an easy feat. Muneera's and Sukina's sincerity as Muslims has been questioned due to their hip-hop ambitions. They have also been accused of orchestrating a phony conversion in order to attract media attention with the goal of bolstering their success (*Hip-Hop Hijabis*). Muneera and Sukina fight fiercely for their position as Muslim, female rappers in a Western context.

In contrast, in this chapter I will examine Mélanie Georgiades, dite Diam's (stage name),[53]a former leading, female French rapper who chose to end her musical career as a result of her conversion to Islam as well as her decision to practice a conservative form of veiling known as the *jilbab*.[54] Like Muneera's and Sukina's, before her conversion Diam's' rap corpus addressed themes linked to social justice and gender equality in marginalized communities. Such is reflected in the lyrics noted above, which are the refrain from Diam's' hit track entitled "Ma France à Moi." In the song, Diam's sings of the version of France that she prefers – one that embraces social diversity and fights to aid, not to oppress, the marginalized. This 2006 hit song received a great deal of both negative and positive attention in the media, inspiring many youth from minority communities (Georgiades, *Diam's* 101). Branded for her empowering lyrics in songs such as "Ma France à moi," Diam's came to be known as a role-model for the youth of France's marginalized communities.

Although she had a large following, shortly after her conversion to Islam Diam's ended her career as a rapper. Diam's expressed to the public that she no longer felt a need

[53]. In this chapter, I will refer to Diam's by both her stage name and her given name depending on the particular life contexts that I address. Since her conversion, she prefers to be called Mélanie.

[54]. The jilbab is worn widely in North African countries such as Morocco.

to rap, and worried that her newly, adopted Islamic dress would not be compatible with performance. Since her conversion, Diam's has opted for the usage of social media as well as a writing career in order to maintain a relationship with her former fans. Comparable to Poetic Pilgrimage's, Diam's' sincerity as a Muslim convert has also been called into question by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. And even though it has been six years since Diam's last performed, the controversial issue of the veil remains the focus of French media representations concerning the former star. It is a topic that the former star addresses with reserve.

In this chapter, I will continue my discussion of the former rap star by analyzing the representation of the veil in her musical corpus, in her memoirs, and in the media. I will examine further why Diam's chose to end her rap career after donning the veil. Because Mélanie has decided to remain strategically and highly guarded in her interactions with the French media since her conversion to Islam, I will consider the notion of silence and agency in my analysis of the veil. In "Resistant Silences," Christine Keating argues that instead of viewing all acts of silence as results of being oppressed, scholars need to be open to a consideration of certain instances of silence as opportunities to engage and to resist. Keating analyzes three particular types of silence: refusal, witness, and deliberative. For my study of Diam's, I am particularly interested in Keating's elaboration of "refusal":

> 'Silent refusal' is a mode of being silent that aims to resist these coercions to speak in the service of power and that seeks to challenge enticements to voice in a hegemonic vein. Among the interventions that silent refusal can make is that it can enable those located in subject positions, who are in some ways privileged, to work against the narratives of self or conversational patterns that support hegemonic discourses. Sometimes

> resisting the pull to domination requires speech (e.g. interrupting racist or sexist jokes) but sometimes this work might also necessitate silence, a rejection of a narrative that celebrates one's insertion in relations of power and/or the speech practices that support that power. (Keating 26-27)

Keating argues that "silent refusal" is a positive form of agency that allows the subject to determine strategically to which conversations he or she wishes to respond or to contribute. One cannot be forced to perpetuate a certain discourse if one chooses silence as opposed to "enforced speaking" as a mode of response or self-expression. Of particular significance, "silent refusal" is a method for those "in a position of privilege" to shape narratives of self found in hegemonic discourse. In my analysis, I will view Diam's' restricted and strategic comments on or pertaining to the veil as products of a privileged silence. Because Diam's has limited herself to one journalist for very infrequent interviews, and otherwise only addresses her conversion and veil in her memoirs, I argue that the rapper has rejected an insertion into hegemonic, political discourse of the French media concerning Islam and the hijab.

After situating briefly Diam's' musical corpus in relation to the rap industry in France, I will focus my attentions on other French, Muslim rappers. In doing so, I will consider the stakes of Diam's' choice to "revert" to Islam in relation to her status as an established, famous, female French rapper.[55] I will also consider the issue of conversion to Islam in France as well as the representation of converts in the media. Finally, I will study the conflicting accounts of the veil in Diam's' music and in her memoirs in relation to that of the media. In sum, I will explain why the French media has reacted so strongly

[55]. Many Muslims refer to converting to Islam as "reverting." This is because it is believed that everyone is born or created as Muslim, and in converting one returns to their original state.

to the former rapper's donning of the veil as well as how this reaction may be revelatory of certain, unresolved identity issues in an evolving and diverse French society.

Biography

Mélanie Georgiades, better known by her fans as *Diam's* (diminutive of "diamants" or "diamonds") was born to a French mother and a Cypriot father in 1980 in Nicosie, Cyprus. After spending time working in numerous Mediterranean countries, Diam's' parents finally settled in Paris. However they divorced when Diam's was still young. Afterwards, the rapper lived with her mother in France. Until the age of ten she spent holidays and school vacations visiting her father's family in Cyprus. Eventually, these visits dwindled in frequency. As a result, the singer passed the majority of her youth longing for the attention of a father who was not present in her life. These feelings of abandonment are expressed throughout the singer's rap corpus.

After the divorce, Diam's' mother spent the bulk of her days and evenings working outside of the family home in order to support her young daughter. Thus during her youth, Diam's was often alone and had to find ways to pass the hours. The adolescent rapper grew up in the un-favored, marginalized area of Paris known as the *banlieue* ("suburb"), where rap was a popular form of entertainment and expression, and Islam was the religion of many of its habitants. These two characteristics of the banlieue would prove to be quite influential during Diam's adolescence.

While her character has evolved greatly, the importance of writing is a passion that connects all of the stages of Diam's' tumultuous life. In her autobiography *Diam's,* the former rapper states that as a young child, she spent her time writing poems and short

stories. As she grew older, she began to author her own rap lyrics (28). Writing was an outlet for the former rapper to express feelings regarding the absence of her father and the lack of communication with her mother – sentiments that she was not able to articulate orally.

As she chased her dreams of becoming a rap sensation, Diam's broke- up with various rap groups and, for a short time, was even taken under the wing of the beloved, French-Moroccan comedian Jamel Debbouze.[56] The rapper released her first solo album, *Brut de Femme*, in 2003. In the album, Diam's addressed themes linked to her *mal-être* or her unhappiness and ongoing struggle to accept abandonment by her father.

Throughout the course of her musical career, Diam's carried out a number of collaborative projects with other, well-known French rappers and singers such as Vitaa and Amel Bent.[57] The former rapper is also known for the political and feminist undertones of her music. In 2004, Diam's was thrown into the spotlight as a result of the wide recognition of her song entitled "Marine." Marine Le Pen is a politician and the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the controversial leader of the French ultra-conservative, right-wing, political party known as the "Front National" ("National Front"). The lyrics of "Marine" criticize the politician and her political party for their disregard as well as condemnation of the conditions of the banlieue and the presence of immigrant communities in France. This song was a turning point for the rapper who was previously unknown in the world of politics; Diam's was invited to dine with Marine Le Pen after the release of this explicitly critical song (Georgiades, *Diam's* 80). "Marine" was a large

[56]. For more information about Debbouze, see Abdel-Jaouad.
[57]. Diam's wrote a number of songs for Amel Bent such as the popular music hit "Ma Philosophie."

bolster to Diam's' career. In 2004, in addition to her sudden presence in political discourse, Diam's went on to win a Victoire (the "Victoires de la musique" are the French equivalent of the Grammy awards) for "best album of the year."

Diam's would go onto to release the albums *Dans ma Bulle* in 2006 and *SOS* in 2009. These albums address the themes of life conditions and struggles in the banlieue, gender inequality, racism and the diversity of French society, and the singer's personal evolution. "Ma France à Moi," the rapper's tribute to the multi-colored France that she embraced as her own, earned Diam's the reputation as "porte-parole de jeunesse sans voix" ("the spokes-person of youth without a voice") (Georgiades, *Diam's* 101). Regardless of whether or not earning this reputation was the explicit goal of the rapper, Diam's' music has undeniably had a large impact on her fan base. Throughout this period, the former star's life goals consisted of feeding her passion for writing and for music as well as her insatiable desire to please her "public."

Despite her widespread success, Diam's was incessantly plagued by inner demons as she sought to deal with sudden fame and the unquenchable need to find acceptance, approval, and meaning in her life. She was hospitalized a number of times, and even tried to commit suicide. Finally, after witnessing some of her Muslim friends pray and after reading a copy of the Qur'an that she had received from a close companion, the rapper decided to embrace Islam as her religion. Diam's' upbringing in the banlieues of Paris continued to influence her life choices as a young adult; when she was an adolescent, the rapper had had friends who taught her the basics of Islam, such as fasting during the holy month of Ramadan and abstaining from eating pork. At a young age, Diam's even

observed these traditions herself (Georgiades, *Diam's 1*93). Thus, to a certain extent Islam had always been present in the rapper's life.

Initially, after her conversion to Islam, Diam's had made the choice to practice hijab, but in an inconspicuous manner that consisted of baseball caps and hooded sweatshirts. This is significant because many of her fans and friends were unaware that the rapper's baggy sweats and hats were an interpretation of Islamic modesty. It was not until early October of 2009, when the French magazine *Paris Match* released a photograph of a veiled Diam's exiting a mosque outside of Paris, that the public learned of her acceptance of Islam. More so than her conversion, the fact that the rapper veiled came as a shock both to her "public" as well as the rest of French society.

In 2009, Diam's chose to end her musical career. She returned to the spotlight three years later with the release of her self-entitled autobiography, *Diam's.* Then, in the spring of 2015 the former rapper returned to the limelight once again in order to promote her second memoir, *Mélanie, française et musulmane.*[58] Although Mélanie's life has dramatically altered since her conversion in 2008 – she has distanced herself from the media - the issue of dress continues to remain controversial and center-stage in the French media's coverage of the former, leading female rapper. Because French media has insisted on obsessing over the notion of Islamic dress and the imagined consequences of a biased discourse on Islam, Mélanie nearly categorically refuses televised interviews, preferring to recount her journey in memoirs.

[58]. After ending her rap career, the former star asked to be hitherto addressed with her given name – Mélanie.

Rap and Islam in France

Owing most of its influence to American rap and hip-hop artists, France has the second largest rap industry in the world. Inspired by artists such as Zulu Nation, the French rap industry began in the Parisian banlieue in the 1980's (Martin 171). Common themes in French rap have and continue to deal with topics such as banlieue life, social diversity, French identity, anti- right-wing politics, and anti-capitalism. Rap is considered by many as a tool of expression and of resistance to systems of oppression. During her career as a rapper, Diam's' corpus reflected themes that have been widespread and fundamental in French rap since its emergence at the end of the twentieth century. As a female performer, not altogether common in the genre of rap, Diam's came to embody the image of young, banlieue women.

Pillars of rap or hip-hop in France include Marseille's IAM and Paris' MC Solar. IAM, a multi-ethnic group from a vibrantly diverse city which was Europe's "Cultural Capital of 2013," has addressed issues ranging from cultural diversity to Marseille's dance and club scene in the 1993 hit "Je danse le Mia." MC Solar, a Chadian-Senegalese French rapper who grew up in the un-favored Parisian suburb Saint-Denis, is known for innovative word play and for rapping about his parents' difficult experiences as immigrants. His music is very much a trans-cultural mixture of African sounds, American jazz, and American rap. The themes of his lyrics are less violent than many other French rappers.[59]

[59]. http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/MC_Solaar

French rap is often linked to Islam. This is mainly because many of the habitants in the banlieue neighborhoods are of Islamic heritage. Abd al Malik, a rapper who grew in popularity in the early 2000's, is one such example. Chiefly raised by his Congolese mother, Abd al Malik grew up in Neuhof, a banlieue of Strasburg. Considered an intellectual by many, Abd al Malik is gifted with a great talent for writing. As a child he excelled in school and went on to receive a bachelor's degree in philosophy and classical literature. As a credit to his literary talents, Abd al Malik is admired by a much broader scope of French society than most rap artists. In light of the non-violent nature of his lyrics and also in consideration of his struggle as a Muslim, musical artist, Abd al Malik is of particular interest to my project. I would like to examine further this Muslim rapper's musical trajectory as a point of comparison in order to understand better the possible repercussions of Diam's' choice to convert to Islam *during* her rap career.

Similar to MC Solar's, Abd al Malik's musical corpus addresses themes less vulgar in nature than the songs of many other rap artists. This has rendered his work more palatable to those who may not normally listen to the musical genre of rap. Addressing themes commonplace in French rap akin to banlieue life, Islam, and, immigration, Abd al Malik's music is unique for its incorporation of high culture and French tradition by referencing philosophers, classic singers, and other musical genres. For example, in his song "Les Autres," the rapper honors the beloved French singer Jacques Brel by reworking "Ces gens là." In Abd al Malik's rendition of the song, the rapper discusses his struggles growing up in the banlieue, converting to Islam, and falling in love with an Arab woman; his wife, Nawell (dite Wallen), is a Moroccan-French singer. The couple

has collaborated together on various musical projects. Unfortunately, despite his unique efforts to challenge oppressive, hegemonic discourse regarding minority populations, Abd al Malik has been highly criticized.

In his article "A 'Picture-Perfect' Banlieue Artist: Abd Al Malik or the Perils of a Conciliatory Rap Discourse," Olivier Bourderionnet elucidates the reception of Abd al Malik's rap corpus in France. Ironically, even though his artistic methods have exposed him to a much broader audience than many other French rap artists, Bourderionnet notes that Abd al Malik's work has also been controversially received on both ends of the social spectrum. For example, Abd al Malik has had a longtime admiration for the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari and he references them in his album *Gibraltar*. In response, certain French intellectuals criticize the rapper's allusion to the philosophers as trite and poorly developed. Professor of philosophy Pierre Tévanian has even gone so far as to assert that Abd al Malik's incorporation of Deleuze and Guattari oversteps the rapper's class boundaries and is an attempt to distinguish himself from other members of banlieue youth (Bourderionnet 157). On the other hand, rap groups such as MAP (Ministère des Affaires Populaires) find fault with Abd al Malik's musical approach. MAP takes issue particularly with Abd al Malik's reputation of being touted as an example of "intellectual integration" in the French media (Bouderionnet 158). Abd Al Malik's innovative and erudite approach to music is viewed as a threat to members of the elite as well as other rappers because it is evades classification. By weaving together notions denoting French tradition and social injustice, the rapper disturbs well-established boundaries between the musical genre of rap and high culture, and thus challenges

hegemonic discourse concerning minority behavioral scripts. Abd al Malik demonstrates how powerful the expression of music can be and the extent to which it is a reflection of a society's values.

As a rapper, Abd al Malik makes the deliberate choice to write poignant, non-vulgar lyrics. His music inspires fans of Islamic, but also Jewish and Christian faiths to improve in the practice of their respective religions, and this is important to him (Abd al Malik 137). Honoring his Islamic faith has been a priority of the rapper since he became Muslim. But finding the way to execute this objective has taken much effort. As his interest in the artistic expression of rap was blossoming, an adolescent Abd al Malik converted to Islam. Comparable to Poetic Pilgrimage, the rapper's choice to pursue his passions in rap whilst remaining a faithful Muslim did not come without great difficulty.

For Abd al Malik, faith has always been linked to rap music. He notes that when he was a youth, the rap of the banlieues made Islam look attractive to young people (Abd al Malik 67). As he grew older, his relationship with music became more complicated. After his conversion, the rapper journeyed through multiple phases of spirituality. At first, Abd al Malik practiced a literal, Manichean interpretation Islam. He joined the conservative Tabligh Islamic movement. The tenets of the Tabligh movement consist of the shahada (attestation of the divinity and unity of God), devotion in prayer, "Dhikr" or 'religious science,' generosity towards other Muslims, and preaching Islam (Abd al Malik 100). Thus, while he was an adherent of the Tabligh movement Abd al Malik also preached about Islam and went on mission trips; however, his interests in rap were challenged by believers who condemned music as unclean. During this period, the rapper

was plagued with what he describes as a time of schizophrenia where he felt divided between Islam and his life as a rapper. He went to lengths to hide his musical activities from those with whom he had religious ties. Eventually, the leader of his spiritual group gave him an ultimatum to end his rapping career. The rapper then sought to determine definitively whether or not music was haram (forbidden) and in doing so, he consulted many people.

According to Abd al Malik's Salafist cousin Aissa, music was potentially dangerous to spiritual development:

> Il fallait s'en détacher progressivement afin de se libérer d'une passion qui pouvait s'avérer destructrice. Son attitude était fortement inspirée des salafis –mouvement piétiste et rigoriste qui se réclame du docteur de loi Ibn Taymiya (mort en 1328) et qui tire son nom des trois premières générations de musulmans, considérées comme un modèle absolu. (127)
>
> It was necessary to detach oneself [from music] progressively in order to be liberated from a passion that could be destructive. His attitude was largely inspired from the Salafis – a pious and strict movement inspired by the legal doctor Ibn Taymiya (deceased in 1328) and it takes its name from the first generations of Muslims, considered as an absolute model. (My translation)

According to members of the Salafist movement,[60] music has the power to tempt believers to act impiously. Only Qur'anic recitation is an acceptable form of music. Aissa suggested that Abd al Malik slowly detach himself from rap in order to secure his faith. Because the Salafi movement is based on the revered, first generations of Muslims, it is evident that challenging the belief that music is haram, within a context of conservative believers, would be a controversial and possibly dangerous move. Despite the potential

[60]. Salafists are known to practice a very conservative and strict interpretation of Islam.

consequences, explanations and ultimatums did not deter Abd al Malik from pursuing his musical ambitions.

As he sought to find a compromise between music and spirituality, Abd al Malik met an *imam* (Islamic preacher, spiritual leader) whom he describes as having an exquisite kindness and obvious sincerity (Abd al Malik 138). The imam taught him that Islam was more than obsessing over *haram* and *hallal* (illicit and licit acts). The rapper was comforted to know that he did not need to be an expert in theology in order to be Muslim. It was then that he adopted a practice of Sufi Islam. Turning to his third interpretation of the faith, Abd al Malik had finally found a way to rap without compromising his religious beliefs.

What is telling about Abd al Malik's path as an innovative as well as Muslim rapper is the extent to which he has had to struggle to legitimize his musical and spiritual interests. While on the one hand he has received criticism for his transcultural approach to rap because it transgresses social scripts, he has also been obligated to negotiate his identity as a Muslim in order to remain (in good conscience) a musical artist. Because he converted as his rap career was blossoming, many of these struggles have been gradual, but constant; however, this has not been the case for Diam's. The most notable difference between the careers of Abd al Malik and Diam's is timing. While the former had not yet attained fame when he converted to Islam, Diam's was at the apex of her career when she became Muslim. Moreover, she also had a reputation as being a strong, feminist role-model to French youth, especially those living in the banlieue. Consequentially, many critics found the female rapper's choice to veil irreconcilable with her reputation as a

feminist (Médioni 3). While Abd al Malik may have faced rejection from his personal spiritual group, the stakes for Diam's' conversion were much more *visible* and arguably more costly.

Once the public learned of her acceptance of Islam, media ridicule regarding Diam's' conversion and her practice of hijab were forefront and highly publicized. Because the veil is a visible symbol of difference, Diam's is "marked" in a way that Abd al Malik is not. Unlike Poetic Pilgrimage and Abd al Malik, Mélanie has never disclosed any statements to the media regarding the belief that music and Islam are incompatible. She has only expressed the fact that she withdrew from the music world because she lacked the fury necessary to fuel a rap career.

Since her childhood, rap had always been a means for Diam's to deal with anger. She discusses this at length in her autobiography as well as her 2012 televised interview:

> Aujourd'hui, je suis revenue à l'essentiel, je suis en train de gagner une vie de sérénité et de paix. Je suis revenue à un discours de paix. J'ai beaucoup écrit de rap en étant en colère. Aujourd'hui, je ne suis plus en colère. (Georgiades, "Diam's," Interview)
>
> Today, I have returned to the essential, I am in the middle of finding a life of serenity and of peace. I have returned to a discourse of peace. I wrote a lot of rap while I was angry. Today, I'm no longer angry. (My translation)

According to what she has disclosed to the media and recorded in her memoirs, Diam's does not define music as haram. She simply felt that her new found peace would be anti-productive to musical creativity. However, Diam's' assertion of anger as a requisite to rap production is a view that has been contested by many.[61] In contrast, Abd al Malik's rap corpus challenges the notion that anger is inherent to the expression of rap.

[61]. For examples, consult Vertaldi.

Possessing zeal for the art of writing comparable to Diam's, the Sufi rapper notes that his interest in rap is born out of his passion for the pen as well as his admiration of the American, Muslim rapper Big Daddy Kane (Abd al Malik 173). Abd al Malik notes that his goal as a musical artist is not to express feelings of anger, but rather to "translate the language of the heart" (Abd al Malik 175). This thematic is evident in Abd al Malik's song of the same phrase "Le Langage du Coeur" ("Language of the Heart") in which he sings of his love for his wife, son, and mother. Abd al Malik also notes that rap has had an invigorating effect on his Islamic faith. Abd al Malik's trajectory as an intellectual and as a Muslim rapper certainly proves that rappers can be inspired by emotions apart from anger and rage. In light of this, one must wonder if Diam's' decision to conclude her rap career was not linked primarily to the issue of the veil and its polemical nature in French identity politics.

After her conversion, Diam's went from being the top female rapper in the country to one of the "personnalités qui agaçent les français" or 'among the key figures who irritate the French' ("Personnalités agaçantes"). This dramatic change in opinion is largely attributed to the issue of the veil. The rapper apprehended public condemnation when she decided to cover:

> Je me disais: comment continuer à être Diam's tout en me couvrant? Sur le coup, j'en ai conclu que ce n'était pas faisable. Autant je pouvais m'emmitoufler dans une écharpe pour prier, autant je ne me voyais pas assurer toute la promotion de mon prochain album, photos, télés, concerts, revêtue d'un voile. Les medias, mon public, allaient forcément me poser des questions. Et loin de moi l'envie de m'expliquer publiquement sur ce qui m'arrivait, sur ma foi, qui me semblait personnelle et profondément intime. (*Diam's* 229)

> I asked myself: how can I continue to be Diam's while covering? Initially, I concluded that it wasn't feasible. As much as I saw myself wrapping up in a scarf in order to pray, I couldn't envision myself carrying out all of the promotion work for my next album, photographs, TV, concerts, dressed in a veil. The media, my public, were surely going to ask me questions. And I had no desire to explain publicly what had happened to me, about my faith, which seemed personal and profoundly private. (My translation)

Indeed, the former rapper's initial apprehensions over her image were accurate. As she has stated herself, it was not so much her conversion that shocked, but her veil (Georgiades, *Diam's* 277). After the public learned of her conversion, Diam's eventually exchanged her baseball hats and hooded sweatshirts for a much more encompassing practice of hijab – the jilbab.[62] Had she decided to continue her musical career as a Muslim, Diam's would have received much more backlash from the non-Muslim, French community than Abd al Malik. Because Abd al Malik is not visibly Muslim, his religious beliefs are not a highly exploited issue in the French media.[63] While much is uncertain, it is clear that had Diam's chosen to *continue* as a veiled rapper, she would have indelibly received criticism from the non-Muslim *and* Muslim communities. Unfortunately, the former rapper was deprived of the opportunity to come to terms with her new identity when *Paris Match* broadcasted photographs of the veiled rapper in October of 2009. After converting, Diam's did not cease to aspire to the same goals and values that generations of other French rap artists have promulgated. However her allegiances to

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[62]. The jilbab is an encompassing and multi-tiered robe with a veil that descends past the waist. It is usually dark in color (black, navy blue, etc.) and exposes only the oval of the face.

[63]. Abd al Malik does address his religious views quite fervently in "12 septembre 2001," a song from the 2006 album, *Gibraltar*. In the song, the rapper expresses his opinion of the need to refrain from mixing up religion and politics.

social justice as well as to France were automatically put into question once she appeared veiled.

"Lili": A Symbolic Conversation with Zebda

Throughout the works of her musical corpus, Diam's addressed the topic of the veil just once in a song entitled "Lili." Released on the 2009 album *SOS*, "Lili" recounts the story of a young, French girl who finds herself isolated from the rest of society by reason of an un-named illness. Because the disease is contagious, Lili is counseled by her doctor to confine herself to her home. This is unfortunate because the sixteen year old, who apparently excelled in numbers and books, had aspirations to become a doctor. At the conclusion of the song, Lili reveals that it is her Islamic veil, not a physical illness, which has transformed her into a "contagion." The *SOS* album was released after Diam's' conversion had been made known to the public. Although the former rap artist has never confirmed the accusations, many suspected that "Lili" was authored as an autobiographical account. In any event, apart from the representation of the Islamic headscarf, specific sub-themes discussed in the song, such as rejection and isolation, mirror trials dealt with in Diam's' memoirs and televised interviews.

In order to make more salient the social implications that Lili's account exhibits, I will compare it to another recent, French song about the veil, "Le Théorème du Châle," ("The Theory of the Veil") by the musical group Zebda. Zebda, a rock band from the city of Toulouse, is widely known for their 1998 hit song "Tomber la chemise" ("Take your shirt off"). "Zebda" ("زبدة"), Arabic for 'butter,' is a play on words or a double-entendre for the word "beur." "Beurre," 'butter' in French, is a homonym for "beur," a slang word

denoting a second generation Arab immigrant in France.[64] Composed of members from a plethora of cultural backgrounds including Kabylie (Berber), the rock band has used music as a platform from which to address a number of political issues including: racism, religion, immigration, right-wing politicians, and most recently, the veil.[65]

In "Le Théorème du Châle," the rock band attempts to re-appropriate the veil debate in France, particularly by drawing attention to common misconceptions and questions pertaining to the subject. The song's lyrics are primarily directed at the niqab (full face veil) which was legally prohibited in French public spaces in 2010. Although they are not in favor of the niqab themselves, Zebda does not believe that women wearing the strict form of Islamic dress should be judged unfairly (Guibert). As a caveat, the rock band is known for being pro-secular. Their support for French conceptions of laïcité seems to be reflected in questions about the veil posited throughout the song. French journalists have recommended the song for Diam's as a form of convalescence (Guibert).

An atypical style for Diam's, "Lili" is a low-key melody accompanied only by piano music. In the song, Lili describes how her life has evolved since her conversion to Islam. She is obliged to study from home because French laïcité, or secularity law, prevents her from attending school while wearing a veil. When she ventures outside of her home, Lili is subject to the stares of others. Despite efforts to explain her story, Lili is unable to impact how others *view* her. As a consequence of her choice to veil, she is

[64]. "Beur or "rebeu" is a form of French back-slang known a Verlan. Verlan is the inverted form of the French word for backwards – l'envers.

[65]. For more information about Zebda, consult Marx-Scouras.

regarded as the enemy, as an invariable Other. Lili is discouraged by the constant rejection that she receives from her own countrymen.

"Lili" (and Diam's) is exemplary of a trend that is progressively becoming more prevalent in Western countries. Reaching over 100,000 in number, France has one of the largest numbers of Muslim converts in Europe.[66] The number of converts to Islam in France has doubled since 1986 (de la Baume). Additionally, there have been a number of French celebrities who have converted in recent years including Nicolas Anelka, a former soccer player for the French national team (de la Baume). Due to this, albeit small, celebrity trend, many have viewed Diam's' acceptance of Islam as contrived rather than as a sincere act of faith. Explanations for the growing numbers of converts in France have pointed to mixed marriages as well as to the desire to blend in with Muslim majority neighborhoods as motivating factors for embracing Islam. There are also significant quantities of men converting to Islam in French prisons (Bousquet 3). As a matter of interest, white converts are known to be amongst the most "extreme" (fervent and at times isolationist) Muslims of the country. French converts often go so far as to condemn and to reject the country of their birth, referring to non-Muslim, French citizens as "foreigners" (Bousquet 3). Abd al Malik discusses this phenomenon in his autobiography *Qu'Allah Bénisse la France*, noting that white converts criticize French society as being "decadent and impious" (157). In light of the reputation that white converts have for deprecating their country of origin, Lili's message of "love and respect" becomes rather telling.

[66]. Conversion to Islam is a trend that is also increasing in many other countries throughout the European continent such as England, Italy, and Spain. For more information, see Bousquet.

Contrary to the behavior of many converts to Islam in French banlieues and elsewhere, Lili does not reject her country, but rather feels that her country has deserted her:

> Ce pays qui m'a vu naître, moi je l'aime et le respecte ! C'est pas de ma faute si j'ai dans l'cœur un virus que lui rejette, C'est pas de m'a faute si je vis en marge, c'est qu'on m'a mise à l'écart….Bleu sont mes yeux, blanche est ma peau, rouge est mon sang, Mais pourtant je me sens seule dans mon camp.
>
> This country which witnessed my birth, I who love and respect it! It is not my fault if I have a virus in my heart that it rejects, it's not my fault if I live in the margins, it's because they pushed me aside. …Blue are my eyes, white is my skin, red is my blood, but even so I feel alone in my world. (My translation)

Rather than condemning opulent, Western values, Lili expresses love for France, thus basing her identity narrative in a French context. This is an important point of difference. She does not wish to reject her past. She simply desires to be able to marry her choice to be Muslim with her Frenchness – a conflict also present in both Abd al Malik's and Diam's' autobiographies. Diam's has even based the title of her second memoir on the struggle to be accepted as French *and* Muslim in *Mélanie, française et musulmane* ("Mélanie, French and Muslim"). Lili begs for the possibility to be French *and* veiled.

Regrettably, today in France women who seek acceptance as *French and veiled* are increasingly contested. Based on their exterior appearance, women who practice hijab are banned from participating in a number of locations of social exchange. Eleven years after the enactment of the first ban against the headscarf, the topic of the veil continues to circulate frequently in the French media. Today, Muslim women feel that because the issue of the hijab is omnipresent in French media and political discourse, rising numbers

of French citizens are becoming less tolerant of the presence of the veil (Daley and Rubin). For example, several French schools have decided to forbid mothers wearing headscarves from picking up their children. In such institutions, veiled mothers have also been forbidden to accompany students on field trips (Daley and Rubin). And while the 2004 law against ostentatious displays of religion pertains to just elementary and secondary schools, politicians, such as the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, have called for a ban on veils in universities.

Notwithstanding the discrepancy between Lili's attitude towards her country of birth and that of many other white converts, she is not able to negotiate more effectively her new identity as a French Muslim. No level of eloquence permits Lili to convince others of her "faithfulness" to the country:

> J'ai beau leur dire que je suis normal, que je suis entière, que je supporte mal que l'on me traite comme si j'étais en guerre, que je suis pudique, que je n'aime pas que l'on m'observe.
>
> I've tried my best to tell them that I am normal, that I am human, that it's difficult when they treat me as if I were at war, that I am modest, and I don't like it when people stare at me. (My translation)

Suggestive of the experiences of many other veiled women in France, Lili's attempts to put in plain words to others that wearing a veil has not changed the essential nature of her person proves to be a fruitless effort. The veil overshadows her Frenchness, her academic potential, and even her humanity. Although she has blue eyes and white skin, Lili's headscarf reigns as the prominent marker of identity, thus canceling out her race and Frenchness. Instead of permitting the possibility for agency or the young girl's logic for

adopting the practice of hijab, Lili is assigned a narrative of the veil that precedes and encompasses her. She is de-historicized.

It seems that agents of dominant, political discourse in France are more "comfortable" with converts who wish to distinguish themselves from non-Muslim France. The white converts who view France through a binary lens of "Muslim and pious" as opposed to "non-Muslim and decadent" pose less of a challenge to political authorities in France because they do not question "authentic" notions of French identity. When certain white converts distinguish non-Muslims as "foreigners," they do not pressure conservative politicians to come to terms with the reality of an increasingly diverse society because they oppose themselves to French (Western) culture. Ironically on the other hand, Islamists profit from French discourse that attacks the Islamic headscarf because they are eager to "drive deeper wedges between Muslims and non-Muslims" (Daley and Rubin). As a result, converts, such as "Lili," become victims, caught between two opposed, but not so different, extremes of the same discourse.

Lili's testament of her inability to communicate effectively is not unusual. Oftentimes when veiled women enter into conversations with others in order to justify their choice to cover, their narratives are overshadowed by a Western, hegemonic discourse that equates the veil with oppression. John Bowen discusses this problem in his analysis of televised interviews with veiled women in *Why the French don't like Headscarves.* Especially in formally organized interviews – an issue to which I will later return – Bowen notes that discussions are regularly crafted to privilege issues that highlight obvious instances of force and the manipulation of Muslim women. Many times

interviews are limited to topics pertaining to communalism, Islamism, and sexism (235). Crafted contexts in the interviews that Bowen analyzes deliberately block out communicative and conceptual space for notions of subjectivity. Naturally, the media – as well as a history of Orientalist discourse - influences greatly French citizens' ideas concerning Muslim women. Zebda acknowledges commonplace clichés and questions that veiled women encounter in their daily lives in their song "Le Théorème du Châle."

While "Lili" recounts the consequences that a young woman endures because she wears the hijab, "Le Théorème du Châle" embodies the position of a person who is slightly vexed by women who wear the *voile*. "Lili" articulates her experiences as the victim of people's stares, while the latter puts in to words the brooding and pregnant curiosity behind the stares. Accompanied by an Arab musical melody, "Le Théorème du Châle" mocks the usual debate concerning the headscarf in France, which is a conversation that rarely focuses on the individual. The lyrics of Zebda's song query why a woman would choose to wear a veil by means of biased questions that reflect the narrator's pre-formed opinion on the subject. By the end of the song, more has been learned about the singer than about veiled women. The questions are a product of dominant discourse regarding the hijab and are not at all revelatory about individual, Muslim women. In the same way that Lili's subjectivity is reduced to "her uniform," the questions posited in Zebda's song reduce their target to an image:

> Je tombe des nues, est-ce Carnaval ? Ces foulards et ces longues capes…C'est le même masque pour toutes ces filles croisées sur ma route. Mais de quoi les a-t-on privé ? Est-ce Zorro qui n'est pas arrivé?

> I'm stunned, is it Carnival? These scarves and long capes…It's the same mask for all of the girls I pass on my way. But what have they been deprived of? Are they waiting for Zorro? (My translation)

The singer limits his questions within the parameters of a discourse that he does not wish to exceed. Rather than expressing a sincere desire to learn more about the veiled women whom he encounters during his daily life, the singer's sarcastic comparisons of female, Islamic dress with masks and carnival[67] costumes imply a decidedly negative interpretation of each woman's experience. Similar to Lili's "costume," each woman wears the same "mask." The individual underneath the mask is never called into question. Because the women's bodies are not visible, they are addressed collectively (reminiscent of the colonial, outdoor photographs of Algerian women discussed by Alloula in chapter two), as if each woman covers for the same reason. The women remain anonymous, fulfilling the "principal of duplicity" (Alloula).

"Le Théorème du Châle" continues with an anthem to common misconceptions concerning the veil. Asking why women need to wear so much fabric when it is not winter, the singer advises Muslim women on how they could practice hijab in a less severe fashion by suggesting that they cover only to their necks. He comments that their look is "really not that cool." He wonders if they are just playing "hide and go seek." The singer begs to understand why women believe that the rest of the world is so corrupt and unclean to the extent that they feel the need to cover. He makes the assumption that veiled women do not have the right to love romantically and that they are forced to

[67]. In this context, "carnaval" refers to the celebration of Mardi Gras.

choose between husbands and lovers. He continues with the refrain, begging to know what in the world women have been promised in return for wearing the veil:

> Est-ce pour être égale à égal ? Ou quelqu'un qui t'a fait du mal ? Dis, est-ce c'est pour le scandale, le théorème du châle.
>
> Is it in order to be equals? Or for someone who hurt you? Tell me, is it to make a scandal? Did it promise you the stars, the theory of the veil. (My translation)

Pleading to learn the terms under which women have agreed to cover, the singer wonders how this "theory" has been able to bribe and to control those who adhere. Hoping to enlighten believers of the "theory," the singer invokes a discourse of "saving." He urges the women to consider why they have decided to veil?

"Saving the Muslim woman" is common to rhetoric in Western, political discourse and was largely used as a justification for the recent war in Afghanistan.[68] It seems that the singer hopes that his questions will provoke a change in thought. "Le Théorème du Châle" does not consider how the factors of socio-economic conditions, identity negotiation, or religiosity play into choices to veil. In her narrative, "Lili" explains that she wears the veil in order to be modest. However, the questions in the refrain of "Le Théorème du Châle" do not leave space for this type of answer. The song's questions pre-suppose the condition of a belief classifying Islamic modesty to be the product of some sort of manipulation (within an inherently misogynist framework). If the veiled interlocutors of the singer of "Théorème" were to respond to the questions with answers similar to "Lili," their efforts would be just as fruitless or unheard.

[68]. For more information, consult Abu-Lughod.

"Le Théorème du Châle," also refers to women who wear the niqab as "phantoms." The women whom the singer addresses are sub-human because their bodies are not visible. In the same light, Diam's (or Mélanie) would go on to address in a 2015 televised interview that people have ridiculed her jilbab by calling her "belphégor" or "ghost" (Georgiades, "Diam's: un Diamant sous le Voile").[69] By studying "Lili" and "Le Théorème du Châle" as a symbolic conversation, I hope that I have illustrated the tendency of French conversations and debates concerning the veil to be circular and unproductive. When questions are formulated by pre-conceived ideas about Muslim women's agency that view the practice of hijab as inherently misogynist, it becomes very difficult for veiled women to express themselves. Their subjectivity is overshadowed by the discourse of the predominant culture. Such conversations reveal little about the individual. In light of this consideration, it becomes clear why Mélanie Georgiades has chosen to limit her televised interviews to just one journalist. In the next section of my chapter, by examining the media portrayal of Diam's subsequent to her conversion to Islam with the manner in which the former rapper describes the veil when she speaks for herself, I will consider further the underlying problems that songs such as "Lili" and "Le Théorème du Châle" evoke.

Media Games and Privileged Silence

In October 2009, the French magazine *Paris Match* published a picture of a veiled Diam's, which would come to frame conversations in the media concerning the rapper.

[69]. "Belphéghor," is a reference to the popular French TV mini-series from the 1960's which recounts the story of the ghost of the Louvre. The mini-series was later re-made into a movie in 2000. http://fr.wikipedia.org/w iki /Belp h %C3%A9gorouleFant%C3%B4me_du_Louvre

After reports of her conversion proliferated throughout media outlets, Diam's was hounded by newspapers, radio, and television to participate in interviews. The rapper rejected the majority of the offers and if she did accept, it was only to perform, but not to speak (Georgiades, *Diam's* 299). Mindful that interviewers would be focusing on the issue of the veil more so than the release of her latest album, the rapper refused to join in the media games. In September 2012, after a three year silence, the former rap star met with journalist Thierry Damaizière to discuss and to promote her newly released autobiography, *Diam's*. Then, in spring 2015 Georgiades released a second book, *Mélanie, française et musulmane.* She agreed to meet with Damaizière for an exclusive interview once again. These two instances have been the only televised interviews to which the former performer has agreed since news of her conversion was leaked in autumn 2009. In this next section, I will examine how Mélanie has used silence as a tool with which to be in command of her image and to combat the reductive discourse of the media. In doing so, I will consider why the issue of Diam's' choice to veil has triggered such polarizing reactions and debates.

The 2009 widely diffused disclosure of Diam's' conversion to Islam came as a shock to the singer. She expressed the event as an infringement on her privacy. "Intrusion, vol. Un moment si intime, si personnel de ma vie se retrouvait étalé dans les journaux.» (Georgiades, *Diam's* 293) «Intrusion, theft. Such an intimate and personal moment of my life had been smeared all over in the papers" (My translation). In the early half 2009, Diam's was still trying to harmonize her newly embraced religious practice, rap career, and personal life. In fact, many among her entourage were not yet privy to her

conversion or to her adoption of the Islamic headscarf. *Paris Match* robbed the rapper of the opportunity to share the news with her family, friends, and fans. Afterwards, Diam's isolated herself because she did not want to share any more of her intimate life with the media. The rapper also refused to let the media reduce her to the image of a veil, a topic that should have been private to begin with. In spite of herself, after *Paris Match,* the rapper had been thrown into a media storm and scandal of which she was the epicenter. It was a storm that she could scarcely avoid.

"Mariée, voilée" ("married, veiled"), such is the manner in which numerous articles published shortly after Diam's' conversion referred to the former rapper.[70] Georgiades states that she was frustrated by these titles because they equated (her) marriage to being veiled. "Selon les medias, j'avais perdu mon sacre caractère et toute once d'autonomie intellectuelle" (Georgiades, *Mélanie* 57). « According to the media, I had lost my sacred character and every ounce of intellectual autonomy" (My translation). She felt that as a female convert to Islam, the media portrayed her choice to accept the religion as one which had been made under duress (Georgiades, *Diam's* 295). In his examination of interviews with French, Muslim women, John Bowen notes that the trajectory of interview discussions and debates is determined from the beginning. "Where you start makes a great deal of difference. If you start from the subjectivity of a woman who wears a headscarf, then you are likely to understand its meaning to be that which she bestows on it as she positions herself with respect to her environment" (230). After it became evident to the public that Diam's had started to practice hijab, very few in the

[70]. See SY.

French media were interested in "starting from the subjectivity" of the rapper. It was evident that the media would not modify their approach to "interrogating" veiled women, especially if the interviewee was a rap star.

The French media asserted a wide range of judgments regarding Diam's and her choices to convert and to veil. She became the target of common clichés associated with white, female converts to Islam. Many assumed that the conversion was the result of a nervous breakdown that medicine could not resolve (Georgiades, *Diams* 279). Anthropologists such as Homa Hoodfar interpreted Diam's' nervous breakdown (she had previously attempted to commit suicide and was hospitalized) as well as her conversion to Islam as symptoms of un-belonging: "Il est probable que dans le contexte actuel de la France, Diam's ne se soit jamais sentie citoyenne à part entire" (St-Jacques 2). "It is probable that in the current context of France, Diam's has never felt entirely French" (My translation). Hoodfar's comments imply a qualification for Frenchness; is one no longer French if one embraces Islam? In addition to assuming that Diam's converted to Islam because it had become a "celebrity trend," there were others who attributed Diam's' decision to convert to her inability to cope with daily life as well as to her recent marriage to a Muslim. After the motivating factors for Diam's's acceptance of Islam had been determined, actors in the media went on to explain why the rapper's choice to veil was ill-made.

As the singer expressed herself, the affair was bigger than her. Days after the pictures of a veiled Diam's surfaced, the entire "scandal" grew to take on significant social and political depth (Georgiades, *Diam's* 294). What had begun as an extremely

personal, intimate choice in the life of a "normal"[71] woman, who happened to be famous, turned into a highly publicized polemic which was more revelatory of underlying problems linked to national identity and unresolved social issues than about the singer. Diam's had become a scapegoat through which France was continuing to play out its unresolved identity crisis. Obviously in accord with current, heated political debates concerning the veil, Diam's' "conversion scandal" has unleashed disputes highlighting the discrepancies and fluidity of French laïcité as well as notions of Frenchness.

Referencing countries where women are forced to veil ("saving the Muslim woman" rhetoric), such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, is a popular rhetorical tactic used in a number of French televised interviews with veiled women (Bowen 233). Framing the choice to veil as an act of disrespect towards women who are forced to cover is a way in which opponents of the Islamic headscarf attempt to delegitimize women's choices to cover. In the same way, many have condemned Diam's' choice to veil because "they claim that it legitimizes countries where women are obligated to wear it" (Médioni 3). Interlocutors who are unable to begin a conversation about Diam's' decision to veil from a subjective, or at least an unbiased perspective, are guided – or willingly choose to validate their arguments - by preconceived notions and stereotypes about the topic. Lacking nuance, such discussions do not result in "moving the debate forward" (Sedira). What is more, respect for Muslim women living in *other countries* is not the only concern that many critics have expressed in reaction to the appearance of a veiled Diam's.

[71]. As a result of the newfound peace that Diam's attained following her conversion, the former rapper states that she became a "normal" woman.

Another common argument echoed by detractors of Diam's has dealt with the former rapper's reputation as a role-model for the youth of the banlieue, particularly young girls. Not insignificantly, Diam's has been labeled by the media as the "emblème des petites nanas de banlieue," or the 'symbol of young banlieue girls' (St-Jacques 2). One of Diam's' harshest critics, Fadela Amara, former president of "Ni Putes, Ni Soumises" ("Neither Whores, nor Submissive"), a French human rights organization, has expressed concern as to how the former rapper's actions have and will continue to influence young girls:

> Elle devient un vrai danger pour les jeunes filles des quartiers populaires, parce qu'elle donne une image de la femme qui est une image négative pour moi. (Vely)[72]
>
> She is becoming a real danger for young girls living un-favored neighborhoods because she gives an image of women that is a negative image for me. (My translation)

Amara fears that Diam's' new and drastic change in appearance has become a threat for young girls. Other critics, such as Sihem Habchi, the current president of « Ni Putes, Ni Soumises, » have postulated that the former rapper's actions are transmitting a negative image to an entire *generation* (Vely). Fadela Amara and Sihem Habchi view the veil through a binary discourse of "veiled and oppressed." As a result of veiling, they worry that Diam's will teach young, banlieue girls to accept relations of power as well as life conditions, which situate women as oppressed and submissive, as credible and ineluctable.

[72]. For more information about "Ni Putes, Ni Soumises," consult Amara.

Throughout her career, Diam's was known as the auto-proclaimed "Boulette" ("Dumpling") and "Petite Banlieusarde" ("Little, Banlieue Girl"). Ironically, the former rapper maintains that she neither wanted to be known as a role-model to young women, nor to be viewed as a feminist (Médioni 3). As previously addressed, in her musical corpus, Diam's' songs often dealt with life conditions of the banlieue. In reaction to her veil, criticism from the press dwelled particularly on songs whose themes addressed gender inequality and sexual harassment. For example, in "Dans ma bulle" from the 2006 album of the same name, Diam's sings of the lack of love and respect in her neighborhood: "Dans ma bulle, on critique les femmes en jupe, mais t'as pas besoin de venir de la ZUP pour te faire traiter de pute. » « In my bubble, women who wear skirts are criticized, but you don't need to come from the ghetto to be treated like a whore" (My translation). In this song, Diam's addresses the gender inequality that women face in un-favored neighborhoods. In order to avoid sexual harassment, one must dress in a way that deters attention. The issue of the sexual harassment of women wearing skirts – especially in urban neighborhoods - is a problem which has been discussed largely in France. It was even the topic of the moving, 2008 French film, "La Journée de la Jupe" ("Skirt Day").[73] Throughout her young life, the former rap-star altered her dress as well. She confesses that her signature baggy sweats and hats were a way to "distance herself from perverts" (Georgiades, *Diam's* 31).

[73]. *Journée da la Jupe* tells the story of a female, banlieue middle school teacher who struggles to teach unmotivated students. She prefers to wear skirts to teach in, but this is problematic in an environment where many students view wearing skirts as an immodest act.

In “La Boulette (‘Génération Nan Nan’),” another song from *Dans ma bulle*, Diam’s describes the plights of young people living in her neighborhood. She discusses the proliferation of rape, alcohol, police, suicide, and discriminatory politics. The music video for “La Boulette” features Diam’s dancing alongside young, adolescents who appear to come from the banlieue. Whether or not she wanted it as such, throughout the course of her rap career, Diam’s had become representative of the youth of un-favored neighborhoods, even of an entire generation as the title of “La Boulette” stipulates. Because she had so often spoke against sexual harassment, rape, and abusive, romantic relationships in the context of the banlieue, Diam’s was viewed by many in the media as a role-model for young women. Once the public learned that Diam’s had decided to veil, many assumed that she no longer stood for the values about which she had once rapped. Those against the veil did not want the rapper’s choices to manipulate young girls from the banlieue - a place where clothing and reputation were already so problematic - to start veiling themselves. Diam’s posed a threat because she had the potential to influence an entire generation.

Women living in banlieues do in fact face a large degree of sexual harassment. As “Ma Boule” implies, a number of banlieue girls are forced to choose between being “whores” and being veiled on a daily basis. A number of young women wear veils due to pressure imposed by their family or Islamists in the neighborhood as well as to avoid sexual harassment. If a woman wears a skirt, she is considered sexually available. If she wears a veil, she is translated as respectable (or off limits). After leaving un-favored neighborhoods, many girls discard their veils and then put them back on when they return

(Amara 48). In sum, women's dress in impoverished French neighborhoods is often dictated by a number of social factors that supersede subjectivity.

Fadela Amara's argument against Diam's is rooted in the phenomenon of what she refers to as "Islam des caves" ("Islam of the Cellers"). Although her position regarding the veil may be viewed as extreme by many, Amara discusses the concern of Islamism of the ghettos in her book *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises.* She explains that un-favored, French neighborhoods with large immigrant populations became largely fundamentalist in the 1990's, and the spread of Islamism has since threatened the liberty of women living under its power. Islamist discourse has given men the theoretical framework with which to threaten or to force women to veil (Amara 75). Because her position as a celebrity was so pivotal, many feared that Diam's would be another form of pressure on banlieue girls.

Paradoxically, Islamist banlieue discourse concerning female dress is the same as the hegemonic discourse of the media, but the inverse. They are two different sides of an identical coin. While on the one hand, dominant, French discourse views the notion of the Islamic headscarf through a "veiled and oppressed" and "unveiled and free" optic, Islamist (or sexually discriminatory) discourse of the banlieue legitimizes women's ability to act freely (without being harassed) in the public sphere if they are covered ("covered and free," vs. "uncovered and harassed"). Similar to the rhetoric of "saving the Muslim woman abroad," critics such as Amara believed that Diam's adoption of the hijab belittled the freedom of many Muslim women living in France. Because Diam's' appearance in a veil unearthed unresolved socio-economic problems, it upset many. But, is it really Diam's' responsibility to help solve these issues?

Islamism, or a fundamentalist approach to Islam, has been prevalent in French banlieues for over twenty years. Because so many socio-economic problems are present in the context of impoverished neighborhoods, including racism as well as the lack of access to good education and jobs, many people turn to religion in order to find justice and meaning in their lives. If people are concerned that Diam's might be a bad influence on young banlieue girls because she veils, they would do well to consider first why Islamism is proliferating. How may economic problems of the banlieue be resolved? If Diam's converted to Islam because "she had always felt isolated from French society," as one anthropologist suggested, then what about the life conditions of Parisian ghettos needs to be altered or ameliorated?

While many have posited concerns about the rights of young banlieue women to wear skirts, no one seems concerned about women's right to veil. Overshadowed by anti-Islamist discourse interpreting veiling as an act of survival, the agency of banlieue women who wear the veil as a result of personal, religious conviction is not a likelihood in many debates about the headscarf in France. Muslim girls from un-favored neighborhoods are trapped between two, conflicting extremes of a similar discourse. If they do not dress conservatively within the banlieue they risk harassment. If they veil in a public sphere, such as schools, Muslim girls may be denied access to public resources and social programs.[74] In any event, no one is considering their subjectivity.

Although I would not argue against (or for) Diam's choice to veil, I would like to examine the discrepancy in consequences that she has suffered for covering with the that

[74]. See El Ouazzani and Szlak.

of the girls from her "boule" about whom the former rapper once sang. French hip-hop artist Doc Gynéco condemned Diam's' decision to convert and to veil as extreme, noting that artists always have a responsibility towards young fans (Sipa 2). Following her conversion, for three years Mélanie isolated herself from the public. She moved to a small, peaceful village outside of Paris and did not have to deal with society unless she chose to interact with others. Her new community respects and has even supported her choice to veil (Georgiades, *Mélanie* 67). What is more, *Mélanie* has been able to take advantage of the hijab in order to escape her past as Diam's (people do not always recognize the former star in her Islamic dress). On the other hand, young banlieue women do not have the resources with which to isolate themselves. They must always choose between "pute" and "opprimée."

While many in the media have ridiculed Diam's, she has had the option of privileged silence – an alternative that many banlieue girls do not possess. After her conversion, Diam's was highly sought after by a variety of newspapers, magazines, and televisions shows. Because of her status as a top, female rap performer, she had the agency to reject interviews if she did not wish to contribute to the discourse or agenda that was going to govern conversations. Unlike banlieue girls who are not able to determine in which discourses they participate, because she speaks from a position of privilege Diam's has been able to carve of a narrative of self which she deems appropriate. By highlighting the socio-economic distinctions between Mélanie and her "public," I am not positing that the former rapper's decisions to cover or to withdraw from society should be judged. I simply aim to lay out the stakes of her actions in a multi-

ethnic France, including why some may have viewed the former star as a "negative image."

Although she refused to participate in "question and answer" interviews directly following the *Paris Match* leak, Diam's agreed to give a rap performance. In November of 2009, the former rapper appeared on France 3: « Dix minutes de rap sans refrain, sans DJ, sans équipe, seule face à la camera, seule face au public…Je n'avais qu'une envie : partager. » (Georgiades, *Diam's* 300) "Ten minutes of rap without a refrain, without a DJ, without a team, alone in front of the camera, alone in front of the audience…I had only one desire: share" (My translation). Diam's felt that by performing, as opposed to trying to debate the accusations that so many had posited against her, the audience would be able to deduce their own opinions regarding her conversion and supposed subjugation. In a media storm where the narrative about the rapper dictated that she was "mariée and voilée," that she had become something of an isolated hermit, Diam's wanted to demonstrate that she was happy, alive, and free. And she wanted to do so on her own terms. Diam's viewed this performance as an opportunity to say good bye to her public. By insisting on rapping and refusing to engage in a debate where she would be forced to defend her own choices (in light of the plights of other Muslim women), this televised appearance revolved around the rapper's music instead of her clothing.

Afterwards, Diam's did not give anymore interviews for three years. When her autobiography came out in 2012, she agreed to speak only with Thierry Damaizière, a little known journalist. During the interview, *Mélanie* was able to discuss what had led up to her conversion, her decision to veil, and manipulation of the press:

> Bien sûr, je n'avais pas eu le droit de connaître les questions à l'avance, pas de droit de regard sur le montage avant la diffusion sur la chaine, mais je pouvais faire savoir si quelque chose me dérangeait durant l'interview. (Georgiades, *Mélanie* 135)
>
> Of course I did not have the right to know the questions ahead of time, or the right to look at the footage before it aired on the channel, but I could let him know if something was bothering me during the interview. (My translation)

As opposed to enduring an interview monopolized by biased questioning of her headscarf, during her interview with Demaizière, Mélanie was able to speak in an environment of respect, where the journalist was interested in listening to her responses, not putting them on trial. If at any point she felt uncomfortable, Mélanie had the option to re-direct the discussion.

As with autobiography, Mélanie chose to discuss the issue of the veil in her interview. And she was able to do so without being forced to justify herself. She did not have to explain why she was not a threat to "an entire generation." The topic of the veil began with the subjectivity of Mélanie, not of banlieue girls, nor women living in Afghanistan. During the discussion, Mélanie shared that no one had ever coaxed her into wearing the veil:

> Ma décision de porter le voile est le fruit d'une réflexion personnelle, intime et murie, le fruit de mes lectures et de mes convictions. Elle va de pair avec une vision de vie. Jamais personne dans mon entourage ne m'a dicté telle ou telle conduit à suivre. Absolument personne. (*Diam's* 296)
>
> My decison to wear the veil is the fruit of a personal, intimate, and a mature reflection, the fruit of my reading and my convictions. It goes hand and hand with my vision life. No one in my entourage has ever imposed on me any type of behavior to follow. Absolutely no one. (My translation)

Mélanie's explanation situates her choice to veil as the product of careful reflection. In spite of this, many have and continue to assert that the Islamic headscarf is an "asservissement de femmes" ("enslavement of women") ("Vu à la télé"). However, by limiting her explanation of the veil to this interview as well has to her autobiography, Mélanie has refused to engage with dominant discourse about the veil's compatibility with French society. She declares unapologetically her Frenchness and her Islamic values as fully compatible, insisting that she has not lost her autonomy.

In 2015, Mélanie's second book, *Mélanie, française et musulmane* was released, and she agreed to another televised interview with the same journalist. They had established a relationship of confidence and she knew that she would be comfortable with the type of image that the interview would present (Georgiades, *Mélanie* 136). Diam's had refused other appearances because she did not want to contribute to dominant discourse about the veil, Islam, and converts that the media and French politicians perpetuated. Like "Lili," she knew that she would not be able to refute them.

Similar to her 2012 interview, in her 2015 interview with Thierry Damaizière, Mélanie discussed topics pertaining to her latest book. And her interview did not come without tactics. Specifically, she wanted to reappear in front of the media in order to promote her book and also to break certain clichés about Muslim women. Since 2012, the rapper had divorced, remarried, and had another child. Previously extremely private about her love life, she chose strategically to disclose information regarding her divorce because she wanted to challenge stereotypes about veiled, Muslim women. Giving a more explicit statement in her latest book, Mélanie declared:

> Mon divorce a aussi été l'occasion de constater que pas mal de personnes croient au mythe de la femme voilée maltraitée, voire battue, malheureuse avec un mari méchant, si ce n'est violent. Alors, je le dis haut et fort: je n'ai rencontré aucune femme battue parmi toutes mes amies voilées et Dieu sait que j'en connais! (Georgiades, *Mélanie* 145)
>
> My divorce was also an opportunity to learn that many people believe in the myth of the mistreated, veiled women, even beat, unhappy with a mean husband, if not violent. So, I'm saying it loud and clear: I have never met a single abused woman among my veiled friends and God knows that I know many! (My translation)

Challenging the questions and clichés of Zebda's "Le Théorème du Châle," Diam's wanted to show the public that veiled women can and do have the right to love, to be loved, and to divorce if they are unhappy. The former rapper controlled carefully this conversation by limiting the boundaries of the topic. She did not disclose the nature of her divorce, or her marital problems and she would not even share the name of her new husband. Perhaps, not unexpectedly, her declaration that Muslim women have the right to divorce did not come without criticism.

The fact is that Mélanie has the means and freedom to divorce and to remarry because she is a wealthy woman living in a Western country and because of this many have criticized her generalization. A common criticism is that: "women in the vast majority of Muslim countries lose the right to keep their children if they divorce" ("Vu à la télé"). With divisive positions on each end of this argument (Muslim women and divorce), I would argue that Mélanie's experience as a French woman convert living in a European country reveals to us the fact that, as a *global assemblage*,[75] practices of Islam are the same, but seperate in new contexts. Shaped by a history of patriarchal, tribal

[75]. For more information and "global assemblages," see Ong and Collier.

culture, one can argue that Muslim women's inability to divorce in certain Muslim countries is more so a reflection of cultural norms than of Islam. The question that critics should be asking is not whether Muslim women have the "right to divorce," but rather whether Muslim women live in a culture that provides women the financial and legal means necessary to divorce. This circumstance may, or may not, be a reflection of (interpretations) of Islam.[76] In any event, Mélanie's declaration of divorce reveals the fecund, yet growing phenomenon of a new type of Islam - one that is practiced by Muslims and Muslim-converts born in Western countries, interpreted by the foundations of Western histories, Western values, and Western politics. This phenomenon, in effect, is exactly what is at stake in the "Diam's scandal." What does it mean to be French and to be Muslim?

Similar to her approach to media games, Mélanie generally avoids responding to racist, hate speech that she encounters in public. « Rentre chez toi » (« Go back to your country/home »), a common remark that strangers have made to her in the street, Mélanie noted in both her 2015 interview and memoir, merits a lengthy debate (Georgiades, *Mélanie* 103). This kind of comment is especially ironic because Mélanie is a French convert to Islam; what, then, does it mean to be French? Can one only dress a certain way? What does it mean to be Muslim? Can one only act (or be treated) a certain way? Diam's' conversion has challenged ideas concerning authentic behavior exhibiting Frenchness as well as being a Muslim woman. In a country where in certain contexts women are assumed to be "whores" if they wear skirts, where women are assumed to be

[76]. For more about re-interpretations of Islamic holy texts and tradition, see Mernissi.

"foreigners" if they wear Islamic dress, and where a boggling trend of targeting and forbidding female, Muslim students from wearing long skirts because they are too modest for Muslims (long skirts challenge French secularity laws because it is *possible* that *their* long skirts may be worn out of religious observance),[77] there seems to be entirely too much emphasis on outward appearance. Once more, the discourse of the banlieue is the inverse of the dominant, French discourse regarding the hijab. Mélanie, a convert who continues to respect and to love her country, is caught in the center of this debate. Likely to the satisfaction of Islamists because criticism of her veil has drawn further a wedge between Islamic practices and French society, Mélanie's religiosity is unacceptable to many French because it is visible.

During her interview with Demaizière, Melanie also discussed the issue of feminism. When Demaizière asked the former rapper if she considered herself a feminist, she responded by noting that one can be a feminist in so many different ways: "If you consider a feminist to be someone who is against a woman getting beat up by her husband, then yes. However, if you consider feminism to be limiting the rights of what someone can wear, then no." This response is revelatory of the discrepancy of women's agency within feminist studies in the West and the Muslim world. Indeed Melanie is correct when she asserts that there are many different types of feminisms; however, Western feminist scholars do not always acknowledge Muslim feminisms or alternative views of female agency.

[77]. See "Laïcité: Le Défi de L'Ecole des Religions »

In her book *The Politics of Piety,* Saba Mahmood discusses the Egyptian Mosque movement, elaborating how acts of outward piety, such as veiling, contribute to Muslim women's inner piety. Veiling is an example of non-libratory agency – the active choice to submit.[78] Women in the mosque movement whom Mahmood observes come to selfhood by aspiring to the "codes and virtues" validated by cultural tradition (Mahmood 32). Mélanie has noted in her books and in televised as well as transcribed interviews that her choice to veil had nothing to do with anyone else but God. Her veil is a reflection of her relationship with Allah. Mélanie now measures her sense of self in relation to her faithfulness to God as well as in relation to virtues dictated by Islamic, holy texts. She does not consider agency to be an act of resistance against, for example, sexual discrimination or gender inequality of the banlieue. Those who have accused Diam's of turning into a bad role-model for young banlieue women do not acknowledge non-libratory agency (as opposed to resistance, for example) as another means to selfhood.

The disregard for alternative readings of female agency is also prominent in dominant, French political discourse, such as that which has governed a number of interviews with veiled women. The same discourse that views veiled girls of the banlieue as an amalgam, which states that banlieue girls are all victims of Islamism and that they

[78]. «The kind of agency I am exploring here does not belong to the women themselves, but is a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located. The women are summoned to recognize themselves in terms of the virtues and codes of these traditions, and they come to measure themselves against the ideals furnished by these traditions; in this important sense, the individual is contingently made possible by the discursive logic of the ethical traditions she enacts." (Mahmood 32)

are all forced to wear the veil against their volition, has shaped media representations of Diam's. The voices of banlieue girls who wear the veil out of their own free will are overshadowed by a discourse that predetermines the act of veiling. The possibility of agency and choice in veiling is not visible. Mélanie has used silence to avoid perpetuating reductive narratives of Muslim women. Despite alternative definitions of agency, some will still argue that the former rapper's choice to veil was made within a system controlled and authored by misogynist men. However, by choosing in which locations to speak – interviews, texts, and social media - the former rapper has controlled the narrative of self that has been presented to the public.

Conclusion

While male Muslim French rappers, such as Abd al Malik, have had thriving musical careers without attracting significant media scrutiny regarding their religious practices, Diam's (Mélanie) could not reveal her conversion without a scandal. Because she wears the veil, Mélanie has been marked as a particular "type" of Muslim. Throughout her rap career, Diam's' lyrics depicted banlieue life and conditions of gender inequality. As such, the rapper was labeled feminist and was believed by many to be a role-model for young banlieue women. However, media coverage of the former rapper subsequent to her conversion has questioned her devotion to the independent and rebellious spirit of the songs that she once sang; citing the new image of Diam's to be incompatible with feminism. In addition to condemning Diam's as a "negative image" for young women, others have asserted that her conversion was an act of desperation. In sum, the polarized reactions to Diam's' conversion and choice to veil are indicative of an

ongoing identity struggle related to France's increasingly diverse population. Because she declares her Frenchness and Muslim identity to be compatible, Mélanie challenges notions of what it means to be "authentically" French as well as Muslim. Eager to share her story, Mélanie has patiently waited for optimal opportunities to speak. Since she is a celebrity, the former rap star holds a position of privilege that has permitted her to "refuse to speak," to remain silent in order to avoid perpetuating a dominant discourse about the veil with which she does not agree. In doing so, Mélanie has shaped the narrative about her conversion and new life.

Chapter 4: Stand-Up (Invisible): The Woman of Many Colors and a Reconsideration of What Is Discreet

Introduction

While Diam's has chosen to end her musical career as a result of her conversion to Islam as well as her decision not only to cover her hair, but to wear the jilbab, Samia Orosemane – a comedian and the subject of my final chapter – says that she performs not only out of pleasure, but also in order to defend her beliefs as well as to deconstruct negative stereotypes about Muslims. It is not anger provoked by social injustice that fuels the passion found in Orosemane's show, but rather the sincere desire to share her world with others. Similar to the photography of Hassan Hajjaj, Orosemane's work complicates both non-Muslim and Muslim notions of what is considered authentic by questioning what it means to be Muslim, to practice hijab, and simply to be a woman. While her work may not be as widespread or well-known as that of Hajjaj or Diam's, Orosemane is significant in that she is exemplary of how marginalized populations in France are finding new ways to obtain agency and to express their voice not only within their own communities, but also within mainstream French society. She may not be part of a

motorcycle gang, but Orosemane shares a spirit of defiance with the riders from "'Kesh Angels."

A Poster Advertisement

The spirit of Orosemane's one-woman comedy show is expressed in a small, brochure advertising her performance at the *Théâtre Popul'air du Reinitas,*[79]a small café and theater located in the twentieth arrondissement of Paris.[80] The twentieth arrondissement is home of Bellville, a cosmopolitan district of Paris known for receiving large waves of immigration as well as for its outdoor market. The diverse nature of this neighborhood is reflective of Orosemane's message of social harmony. Of significance is that, the twentieth arrondissement is also home to the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters,[81] a magazine whose anti-Islam rhetoric Orosemane has spoken against. Surrounded by a black and white cityscape of crowded *HLM* buildings,[82] a burning public bus, uniform sidewalks, and pavement – all menaced by rain filled clouds hovering above - a brightly colored Samia bursts through the gloom of the impoverished neighborhood. The cityscape also includes a woman wearing a black burqa walking down the street, followed by a modernly dressed woman who is jumping and screaming in reaction to the former woman's dress. Unlike the rain-filled roof that contains the city, Orosemane's world is situated under a yellow back-drop, which rather than imprisoning her fills her world full of color. The fragments of the dark cityscape that cross over into her space are animated welcomingly with color, signifying a transition from a binary to a nuanced way

[79]. http://theatrepopulair.over-blog.com/
[80]. Paris is divided up into administrative districts known as "arrondissements."
[81]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_arrondissement_of_Paris
[82]. *HLM* ("habitation à loyer modéré") refers to low-cost, French public housing buildings.

of conceptualizing French society and public space. The sidewalks in Orosemane's world become yellow, the sky blue, the bus a bright red, and even the windows of the buildings are brightly colored – ranging from yellow, blue, green, orange, and fuchsia. The variance of color in each window seems to represent and even embrace the diversity of contemporary French society. Superimposed upon a dreary portrayal of urban space, Orosemane's world is full of color that permeates onto surrounding areas.

Figure 10: Femme de Couleurs

The words: "Femme de Couleurs," the title of Orosemane's chef d'œuvre, crown her like a halo. The name of the show symbolizes Orosemane's mission not only to present a multi-colored interpretation of France, but also of herself. Orosemane is clothed in an olive green turtle neck, a dress made of out a green, brown, and turquoise floral African fabric, a matching turban, and a large green, beaded necklace. As indicated by her dress, the clothing incorporates the comedian's love for Sub-Saharan African culture,

but also her refusal to be defined by binary discourse. Pointing her finger at the audience with a grimace on her face, it is clear that Orosemane has something to say.

It may not be evident at first, but the turtle neck and turban are products of Orosemane's personal interpretation of the Islamic veil. Occasionally, Orosemane wears a traditional headscarf. Many of the negative comments that she receives when she does so are inscribed on the black and white space around her. On the small brochure, Orosemane's "world" represents the artistic space in which she is able to deconstruct and to disarm reductive discourse that she encounters in her daily life. The hurtful and ill-based comments graffitied onto the outside world such as: "Mais pourquoi t'as mis ça sur ta tête?" ("But, why did you put that on your head?), and "Mais, il est noir!" ("But, he is black!")[83] do not exist in Orosemane's space. She is able to deconstruct the power of such statements in her creative and colorful world. However it does not seem that the woman clothed in the black niqab is as successful as Orosemane at negotiating her identity. Although half of her body transcends into the comedian's nuanced space, the other half remains in the dark cityscape of the banlieue. This is most evident in her clothing – the burqa in the outside space remains black, while in Orosemane's area it takes on a red and white floral motif. The woman in question is not fully able to traverse worlds and the half that remains in the Manichean space continues to be taunted by a woman presumed to be Nadine Morano – a right-wing politician from the conservative French UMP (Union pour un mouvement populaire) party.[84]

[83]. This comment refers to her husband, an immigrant from Martinique.
[84]. See Orosemane, « Explication de Mon Affiche. »

The choice to incorporate Nadine Morano – as opposed to other right-wing politicians - into the advertisement for Orosemane's show was a strategic one. In autumn 2014, Morano was featured in French newspapers for having a public confrontation with police officers when she encountered a woman wearing a niqab at the Paris Gare de l'Est.[85] While at the train station, Morano spotted a woman wearing the *voile integral* (full face veil) and demanded that she take it off; the woman refused. Outraged that police had not spotted the woman in the first place, Morano went to their office and tried fruitlessly to convince the officers to react. Finally, she took to *Facebook* to express her indignation, noting that:

> Par ailleurs, je rappelle qu'il s'agit d'un véritable problème de sécurité publique. Qui est sous cette tenue ? Qu'y-a-t-il dans cette valise... la suspicion est permise quand on est dissimulé. J'ajoute qu'au nom des femmes qui se battent pour gagner leurs droits et leurs libertés, nous devons combattre cette violation de la loi. Partagez et commentez.[86]
>
> Moreover, I remind you that it is a veritable public security problem. Who is under that costume? What is in that suitcase [the woman wearing the niqab had a suitcase with her]…suspicion is justified when one hides one's self. I add that in the name of women who are fighting in order to gain their rights and freedom, we have to fight this violation of the law. Share and comment. (My translation)

Morano's frustration is indicative of many problems linked with French identity and immigration struggles as reflected in laws concerning the veil. In this instance, Morano was referring to the 2010 law banning the wearing of the full face veil (niqab) in French public spaces. Morano's aggravation and the lack of intervention by the police officers

[85]. See Libération avec AFP.
[86]. See Morano.

implicated in the incident reveal the difficulty of maintaining and enforcing such a law.[87] Not everyone feels as strongly about this law as Morano, and there are so few women who wear the niqab in France that it may be difficult for police to find and to penalize those who transgress the law.[88] What is more, the latter part of Morano's argument against the niqab is a product of the "saving the Muslim woman" political rhetoric, which I discussed in my analysis of Diam's. The politician does not consider the subjectivity of the woman wearing the niqab, but rather condemns the face veil based on a supposed concern for Muslim women who are forced to cover. Morano's *Facebook* statement also draws attention to the French value of visibility (and disdain for invisibility), which I will later discuss. Finally, her reaction ("what is in that suitcase"?) is problematically reminiscent of the "porteuses de bombes," or 'the female bomb carriers' of the Algerian resistance. Yet these women were ironically successful as bomb carriers because they took advantage of French stereotypes about Muslim women. Instead of wearing veils, by exposing themselves and dressing-up like "European women," in short dresses, make-up, and stylish hand-bags, the bomb-carriers of the Algerian resistance passed as *invisible*.

The reason why conservative politicians such as Morano view the niqab as a threat is triptych: it transgresses the French value of visibility and while it is an image that, in European culture, symbolizes female oppression, paradoxically, it also could be coded as a symbol of violence. Morano feels that the woman whom she encountered in the train station could have had the agency to pose a threat to public security, yet -- in the

[87]. There are so few women who wear the niqab in France that the law has been likened to "using a sledgehammer to swat a fly." (Bitterman)

[88]. See Erlanger.

same breath -- she views her as a symbol of female oppression, which also threatens French Republican values. Coupled with a potentially deadly arm, a suitcase, the woman in niqab becomes a *veritable* menace. If she had been a less-covered Muslim woman, her suitcase would not have posed a threat (similar to Muslim girls who are banned from wearing long skirts to school because they could be results of Islamic modesty). This is an illusion of "security" based on a scripted role that veiled women cannot easily escape in Western society. While Orosemane's multi-dimensional discourse may be helpful in rendering the woman in niqab featured on her poster more colorful and less-menacing, there does not seem to be a way for her first half to escape censure. The woman in niqab is trapped in a liminal space. In sum, Orosemane's poster illustrates the disparities between her world and the hegemonic culture's imaginary of the Maghreb and Muslim women, as well as an increasingly diverse French society.

In this chapter, I will continue my study by analyzing the issue of visibility and invisibility in Samia Orosemane's comedy performance(s). How does the manner in which Orosemane practices hijab affect the way in which she is coded by others? How may the comedian be successful in manipulating her image when performing? In her analysis of visibility and minority presence (specifically gay minorities), Marjorie Garber elucidates the distress that dominant cultures suffer when established markers of difference are disturbed:

> It is as though hegemonic cultural imaginary is saying to itself: if there is a difference (between gay and straight), we want to be able to *see* it, and if we see a difference (a man in women's clothes), we want to be able to *interpret* it. In both cases, the conflation [confusion concerning accepted behaviors or markers of difference between gay and straight men] is fueled by a desire to tell the difference, to guard against a difference that

> might otherwise put the identity of one's own position in question. . . . both the energies of conflation and the energies of clarification and differentiation between transvestism and homosexuality thus mobilize and problematize, under the twin anxieties of *visibility* and *difference*, all of the culture's assumptions about normative sex and gender roles. (130)

Garber spells out reasons why dominant cultures react so strongly to situations where "difference" is no longer easily detectable. Hegemonic culture prescribes roles that the minority groups in question are expected to fulfill. This is a way to control the marginalized, but it is also a protective mechanism. When a member of a minority group transgresses its scripted role, it ceases to be marked as different, and in doing so becomes a threat. If the Other is invisible, how can it be controlled? And if markers that were supposed to indicate the Other are re-appropriated by members of the dominant group, how can they be interpreted? For example, a heterosexual man who, as a hobby, enjoys dressing up as a woman blurs the boundaries of expected behavior and appearance for heterosexual and homosexual men.

In a similar fashion, in contemporary Western culture, the veil is a marker of difference denoting the Other, a threat to (French) republican values, radical Islam, violence, the notion of the oppressed Muslim woman, and even eroticism. Women who cover are expected to behave and act a certain way. They are appointed a narrative that usually attributes their choice to veil either to familial pressure or to being duped by an inherently patriarchal and therefore oppressive religious practice. The cultural imaginary even limits what constitutes the physical appearance of hijab. In my analysis, I will consider the function of the veil as a marker of difference in Orosemane's comedy corpus. I will show how Orosemane's *performance* of hijab allows her to move between

the spaces of visible and invisible, and will also consider how others react to the comedian's refusal to let herself be defined by one, single image. I will argue that because Orosemane's appropriation of the hijab does not always satisfy conventional Western codes describing the physical appearance of the actual veil, she is able to disturb French notions of difference.

After situating Orosemane's "One-Musulmane Show" in relation to other contemporary, Maghrebian comedians, I will consider the significance of her work in relation to the narrative of Muslims and the veil in French discourse as well as in relation to conceptions of the veil in *Beur* and Muslim culture. Subsequently, I will analyze Orosemane's "Femme de Couleurs," by considering subject matter, approach, and narrative. I will examine how she addresses the veil specifically in her stand-up show as well as online skits. Finally, I will conclude my chapter by discussing the significance of Orosemane's usage of social networks as locations of performance.

Biography

Samia Orosemane was born in 1981in the nineteenth arrondissement, or district, of Paris to Tunisian parents. She grew up in the *banlieue* (ghetto, un-favored subarb) of Clichy-sous-Bois. She began studying theater during a workshop in middle school at the age of twelve, and later continued theater studies at the Paris conservatory for two years.[89] At the age of twenty-two Orosemane married her long-time boyfriend, a convert to Islam from Martinique. Beforehand, she had only been culturally Muslim, but it was her husband, she states, who taught her the importance of the love of God – that Islam

[89]. See Bourcet and Di Vincenzo.

was not about fearing Allah (Personal Interview with Author, Paris, 12 March 2014). In turn, this prompted Orosemane to take courses about Islam in order to understand better the religion. Although at first she did not believe that she merited the right to do so, soon after her spiritual transformation Orosemane decided to wear the veil. Previously, it seemed to her that women who wore the veil were either uptight or had to achieve exceptional levels of spirituality before they could practice hijab. Subsequent to her marriage, she realized that this was not the case, that anyone could wear the veil regardless of their degree of spirituality. For Orosemane, the choice to cover is a way for her to preserve her beauty for her husband and to decide and to control who has the right to see her (Personal Interview).

Adopting the hijab did not come without consequences, and convinced that she had no chance at becoming successful as a veiled comedian in France, Orosemane renounced her career as a performer and became a nanny. However, in 2006 she attended a comedy show which featured a veiled Muslim woman and she was inspired to return to the stage. Mindful of the difficulties that she might face wearing the hijab, Orosemane discovered that what had prevented her from performing were "the boundaries that she had created in her head" (Personal Interview).

Inspired by life experiences such as dealing with judgmental family members and neighborhood gossip, interracial marriage, body image, and the veil, Orosemane decided to create a show with the aim to "play down" frustrating and trying situations encountered in daily life, ranging from the banal to the taboo. As a practicing Muslim, Orosemane also saw the need to create a show "sans vulgarités," or without dirty

language, to which general spectators and members of her community could bring their children. For the first few years of her professional career, Orosemane performed with other French comedians, such as Vérino and Baptiste Lecaplain. During this time, she was able to solidify the narrative of her show, "Femme de Couleurs."[90] Today, Orosemane continues to perfect "Femme de Couleurs" and has performed widely in France as well as in Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Cameroon, Gabon, The Ivory Coast, and Lebanon. Orosemane has even been featured on *Le Grand Journal*, a popular talk show on the French cable television channel Canal +, where she addressed her widely diffused reaction to the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack.[91] Most recently, Orosemane has broadened the scope of her audience by creating and posting comedy sketches on her self-entitled *YouTube* channel. She also uses *Facebook* as a means in which to communicate with her fan base and to share sketches. Orosemane's use of social networks to disseminate her work is paramount in that it has enabled her to share a message of multiculturalism and respect, to increase locations of performance, and to attract non-Muslim followers. Without social media, it is very unlikely that Orosemane would have been invited onto a show as well-known as *Le Grand Journal.*

Having recently donned the hijab, Orosemane has also been obliged to find inventive ways to control the manner in which others perceive her. With this in mind, one of her goals as a performer is to be a "pont entre deux cultures," ("to be a bridge between two cultures"). Orosemane loves making people laugh – regardless of their skin color– by

[90]. Ibid.
[91]. See Orosemane, "Explication de Mon Affiche. »

sharing her world. And her world – as illustrated by the poster advertisement discussed above - is so much more than a mere head-covering. In terms of the scope of my project, Orosemane's work is of great interest because it incorporates a "multiplicity of dialogues." Discussing the veil is not the sole aim of the "Femme de Couleurs" show anymore than it is the sole image by which the comedian lets herself be defined. Orosemane has noted that there is "something for everyone" at her performances. Whether it be body image, family issues, marital troubles, or living in the margins -- everyone can find at least one thing to which they can relate during her comedy show (Personal Interview). If Orosemane incorporates into her show real-life situations where she has been pigeonholed into a veiled/oppressed and unveiled/liberated binary, it is simply because that happened…along with many other things.

In light of the large Maghrebian population in France and recent, turbulent debates concerning race and national identity, "serving as a bridge between two cultures," is a common goal in the work of many *Beur* comedians, artists, and writers. However, Orosemane is unique in that she is among the few female, veiled Muslim comedians. And while other Franco-Maghrebian comedians such as Rachida Khalil mock the burqa in their performances, Orosemane refuses to debase, she says, her Tunisian roots, religion, or her own values in order to succeed, noting that: "Faire des blagues sur les Arabes pour les Arabes, ça ne m'intéresse pas!" ("Making fun of Arabs on behalf of Arabs does not interest me.").[92] Although deconstructing common, racist stereotypes may be one of Orosemane's goals, she believes that disrespectful rhetoric would be counter-productive

[92]. See Bourcet and Di Vincenzo.

to the aspiration of bridging the gap between marginalized and dominant cultures in France.

Comedy and the Veil in Contemporary France

In a recent article published in the French media magazine and online journal, *Télérama,* Orosemane's "Femme de Couleurs" was listed as one of the top thirteen comedy shows to see during the month of April, 2015.[93] The comedians on the list were chosen based on their talent, but more specifically on their capability of speaking effectively and with humor about polemical or culturally sensitive subjects. The artists hailed by the article included seven men, four women, and two comedy troops, and their topics were diverse. Although not all of the ethnic backgrounds of the comedians were listed, one was of Chinese background and another of Sub-Saharan African descent. The list is also indicative of the increasingly important role that social media plays in contemporary society, serving as a platform from which to launch social movements, careers, and public debate. One of the comedians noted, Norman Thavaud, has become an overnight success as a credit to his self-created *YouTube* channel, which has millions of followers. As they address topics ranging from sex, alcohol, new technologies, racism, pedophilia, religion, capital punishment, homophobia, and the Dominic Strauss-Kahn affair to Slam and poetry, the stand-up artists were selected based on their ability to take on taboo subjects provocatively, but with ease. Orosemane was included in this list because of her multi-discursive and honest, but defiant approach to addressing the veil -

[93]. Ibid.

as well as other taboo subjects such as race - in such a way that the topics are rendered quasi-innocuous and banal.

Orosemane's corpus addresses a variety of subjects. At certain points during "Femme de Couleurs," she discusses prevalent or typical struggles located within immigrant communities in France (racism, the generation gap, etc.) while at other times the issues that she addresses are more global (body image, marriage, death). However in many of her online sketches, the audience is more targeted. For example, on her *YouTube* channel Orosemane often makes short videos mocking struggles common to Muslim culture. In one video, she uses humor as a trope with which she offers commentary regarding appropriate behavior during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. In another series, "Geneviève and Aïcha," Orosemane discusses an array of issues ranging from the veil, the use of smart phones, and *Charlie Hebdo*. The common theme linking all of these performances is the desire to use humor as a method to teach and to challenge certain beliefs or behaviors. Orosemane's work is didactic in nature. What is more, using comedy as a rhetorical device allows Orosemane to confront polemical or taboo issues in a manner that done otherwise might be viewed as highly offensive.

In his article "Beur Hybrid Humour," Hédi Abdel-Jaouad discusses the approaches by which *Beur* artists define their identity and combat stereotypes about Maghrebian culture by examining Farid Boudjellal (cartoonist), Rachida Khalil (comedian), Jamel Debbouze (comedian), Zebda (musical group), Carte de Séjour (musical group), and Azouz Begag (author). From re-appropriating and mimicking stereotypes to self-deprecation, *Beur* artists strive to control, define, and defend their

identity through performance. Abdel-Jaouad defines *Beur* humor as intrinsically counteractive and hybrid noting that:

> In this regard, hybrid is most often seen only in opposition to the Metropolitan canon and never as an addition to, or an enrichment of this canon. Because it questions established rules and values, hybrid Beur humour is naturally iconoclastic and 'transgressive;'. . . brand of humour, however, that eschews 'aestheticization,' for 'functionalism,' and one that also draws on and resonates with the humour of other minorities. (Abdel-Jaouad 118)

Beur humour negotiates conceptions of French national identity as well as social scripts and codes denoting difference for Maghrebians living in France. The goal of *Beur* artists is never just to amuse, but to facilitate a change in the French cultural imaginary. In her work, Orosemane questions the logic of dominant discourses that have shaped opinions concerning dress, religion, body size, or ethnicity by utilizing the mode of mimesis. She also deconstructs stereotypes by recounting and complicating experiences where she has been the target of reductive comments. For example, in response to someone who asked her how she is able to wear a veil when it is hot outside, Orosemane highlighted cleverly the fact that "Berbers living in the deserts of Africa do not walk around in shorts!" Like many other *Beur* comedians, Orosemane's performance is *functional*. It is meant to teach, and to disarm that which is considered taboo of its ability to shock and to offend.

As Abdel-Jaouad points out, it is often the case that *Beur* humorists align themselves with other minorities. Orosemane's "One Musulmane Show" reflects this trend by referencing Maghrebian as well as Sub-Saharan African culture. Besides the obvious fact that performing as a Muslim invokes a larger audience than just Maghrebian or Arab spectators (not all Muslims are Arab), Orosemane's expression of

her admiration for Sub-Saharan African culture is woven throughout the chapters of her performance. At one point during the show, she mimics a variety of Maghrebian and Sub-Saharan French accents. Later, Orosemane addresses what she considers the larger than life presence and grace of African women. Orosemane's attempt at aligning her humor with both North-African and Sub-Saharan African immigrant communities in France, regardless of faith, is indisputable. The African community has played a large role in supporting the comedian's career by attending and advertising her performances (Personal Interview). She has also been invited to participate in comedy festivals in numerous African countries, such as Gabon and Cameroon. While Abdel-Jaouad defines *Beur* humor as inherently in opposition to the French canon, in light of classifications such as that of the "Top Thirteen Comedians to see in April," it also seems possible that the French canon may be expanding its limits to accept taboo discourses discussed by well-established and up-and-coming artist. Although perhaps not possible in all spaces of discourse, this implies a certain opening of spirit harbored by the artistic genre of comedy.

Concerning specific techniques, at times Orosemane's work is similar to that of the well-known French-Algerian comedian, Smaïn. Orosemane begins her show by embodying the quintessential Western idea of the menacing, yet oppressed Muslim woman – covered in black Islamic garb. She even hypes up the stereotype somewhat by the embellishment of ominous music and dimmed lighting. In this instance, Orosemane is attempting to fulfill the Western stereotype of the conservative, backwards Muslim woman. Similarly, Smaïn begins one of his shows with an off-putting "double mimesis,"

by mimicking the broken French accent of a first generation, male Maghrebian immigrant. In doing so, Smaïn parodies faithfully the French stereotype of the backwards, North African immigrant (Rosello 41-42). Instead of representing themselves as themselves, or instead of being true to their own nature, Orosemane and Smaïn imitate French stereotypes of Maghrebians living in France. As Mireille Rosello spells out in her book *Declining the Stereotype,* many Maghrebian artists "steal stereotypes" as a way of fighting back. This consists of reappropriating the stereotype, as a reversal or an overbidding – either fight the way the image is constructed (how do you define the veil? – oppressed or monstrous? Catholic nun? Tuareg?), or steal the negative image and put it to different use – you can repeat stereotypes and decide who meets it and who doesn't? (47). For example, which behaviors are agitating enough to describe a young, Arab boy? How ignorant must one be in order to qualify as a first generation immigrant? Rosello deems the latter approaches much more effective than simply denouncing a stereotype as untruthful.[94]

Following her grand entrance, Orosemane's approach becomes more subtle. After disrobing, throwing the black burqa on the floor, and then moving on to new topics it seems as though Orosemane is finished addressing the veil. But she is not. She attempts to make spectators feel uncomfortable through her mimicry of a Western stereotype, and then offers them a false assurance of non-adherence by demonstrating to them that she is not "that" when she discards the garment. Later, as Orosemane reveals that her African-

[94]. "I do not think it is very useful to argue with stereotypes, to try and confound them, to attack their lack of logic or common sense. …I suggest that stereotypes are more usefully confronted as a contestable way of speaking, of using language, as an objectionable style, rather than as an opinion whose content we disagree with." (Rosello 16)

inspired dress is actually her interpretation of Islamic modesty, she gives her audience the responsibility to decide whether or not she "fits the stereotype." Orosemane's approach is not so much based on rhetoric, but on a carefully constructed narrative through which she creates situations that force spectators to confront their ideas about Muslim women. This is an example of how her work becomes didactic in nature.

The title of Orosemane's main show, "Femme de Couleurs," reflects the manner in which she views herself – colorful and multi-dimensional. Even in high-school Orosemane would change her style from day to day in order to resist fashion labels. One day she would dress as preppy, the next in a relaxed style (Orosemane). In the same spirit, Orosemane refuses to be labeled as the French conception of "Maghrébine." Her identity is complex and multi-layered; she expresses her individuality through personal style as well as the plethora of topics taken on in her performances. While Orosemane's attempt to control self-image is more subtle, some *Beur* artists use aggressive language to assert their identity to others. Such is the case with French-Moroccan comic Rachida Khalil: "Rather than be labeled Beur, she prefers to be called, unapologetically and unabashedly, Arab: 'Beurette? Maghrebine? Mais c'est detestable. C'est trouillard. C'est l'hypocrisie de la peur. Je suis arabe.' » (Abdel-Jaouad 124). What Orosemane aims to express through dress and comedy expression, Khalil states explicitly. The French concept of "Beur," "Beurette," or even "Maghrébine," is not enough. It is reductive and implies a social-script that is based on stereotypes that efface individuality. While *Beur* comedians and artists have different ways of addressing and responding to their experiences as Maghrebians living in France, they all seem to share the common

ambition of taking power over the way in which their identities are shaped. They desire to control how others view them as individuals, but also as French members of Arab or Muslim culture.

The discomfort that many French feel when confronted with difference is reflected by the nation's inability to come to a consensus regarding how to address second-generation immigrants. Orosemane has been referred to as "Franco-Tunisienne," "Française d'origine Maghrébine," "humoriste d'origine Tunisienne" and "humoriste Franco-Tunisienne musulmane." Orosemane has stated that the discrepancy in epithets does not trouble her. She is all of these things and is quite proud of her Tunisian roots (Personal Interview). It is not Orosemane who must come to terms with her identity, but rather those who are unwilling to accept the fact that the topography of French society has changed.

What Orosemane does find problematic however, is being labeled simply as a "humoriste musulmane," or a 'Muslim woman comedian.'[95] What does it mean to be defined as a Muslim woman in contemporary France? Indeed Orosemane is correct in being distrustful of such an appellation. In the introduction to *Women, Immigration and Identities in France,* Jane Freedman and Carrie Tarr note that:

> French responses to the 'Islamic headscarf affair' are as much an indicator of a society that has not yet come to terms with its own multi-ethnic reality. In effect, media coverage of the affair, and of other issues such as the trials of women accused of excision, has demonstrated that dominant representations of women of immigrant origin and women of different 'race' have changed little since the colonial era. (5)

[95]. See "Samia Orosemane: Le Combat d'une Femme Musulmane. »

The majority of representations of Muslim women in French media remain limited to the same Orientalist discourse that has served as a justification for the colonizing missions of North Africa. In these terms, the "Muslim woman" is in need of saving and remains trapped in a veiled/unveiled and oppressed/liberated binary. What is more, while images of the "savage Maghrebian family" (young parents, polygamy, excessive numbers of children, arranged marriage) were used by the French as a means to justify the need for colonization, today images of the Maghrebian family are used as a means to demonize the immigrant community in France[96] and to breed angst amongst right-wing French citizens. Women of Muslim-immigrant origin, for example, are to be feared because they will contribute to the rising population in minority communities through child-birth. This image becomes rather tragic when one considers the issue of pregnancy as addressed in Orosemane's performance. She discusses that she has been married for over twelve years and has not been able to conceive. I would not go so far as to say that Orosemane *defies* this stereotype, but her personal experience does evade classification. Orosemane is so much more than what Western culture codes as being "Musulmane." Similar to the models in Hajjaj's photography, Orosemane finds creative ways to mesh the past with the present, to pay homage to her Tunisian roots, but also to embrace her French identity. By defying the belief that it might be incompatible to be a practicing hijabi and a comedian, Orosemane challenges Western and Muslim behavioral codes for Muslim women.

[96]. "On the one hand, racist stereotyping, typical of extreme-Right discourse, but not by any means the sole preserve of the Front National, highlights women's roles in the biological reproduction of ethnic communities in France, creating fears of an 'immigrant invasion' boosted by the supposedly high birth rate amongst communities of immigrant origin." (Tarr-Freedman 14)

Although it was first the Muslim and Sub-Saharan African communities (both Muslim and non-Muslim) in France who supported Orosemane as a comedian, she is slowly starting to be recognized by mainstream French society. It was not until the posting of her reaction to the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack that Orosemane started to garner considerably more attention from the French media. In an attempt to defend her religious beliefs and to protect the image of Islam, Orosemane recorded a twenty-five second statement asking would-be djihadists searching for a way to justify their own evil deeds to choose another religion before they kill in the name of Islam:[97]

> Hello, this is just a little message for all the crazies, crackpots and the mentally ill who have decided to declare themselves Islamist(s), fundamentalist(s), djihadist(s), pianist(s), cyclist(s) and all that in order to commit their wrongdoings. Be nice now, leave us alone, OK? We're tired; it's already complicated to live here in Europe. If on top of everything you start to bring all the hatred towards us, it starts to get a little bit too tiring, you know? So please choose another religion. Thanks.[98]

In this statement, Orosemane wears a blue headscarf, expressing her frustration with the fact that many terrorists are new converts who barely know Islam, that they use the religion simply to justify killing. As it is, being brown in France is a challenge. The comedian uses humor as a means to talk seriously about a tragic event, through which she expresses her opinion effectively. Orosemane does not believe that Islamists or fundamentalists are truly Muslim and tires of being implicated, as a Muslim woman, in their acts. Obviously, the response is tongue in cheek. Orosemane is not actually suggesting that terrorists effectivel kill in the name of Islam or any other religion. However she is undoubtedly addressing a polemical subject, and it is questionable that

[97]. See "Message aux Djihadistes."
[98]. See Buckley.

she would have been able to speak so frankly without the trope of humor; not to mention the fact that the standards for political correctness and formality on social networks are not as high as they may be in other locations, such as official news channels. Orosemane's *Youtube* channel, as well as *Facebook* page are part of her "world," and while the social networks have created the opportunity for her to share her voice to an extensive audience and to offer counter-responses to well-known political figures (for example, Nadine Morano), the media platforms come with a certain responsibility.

Following the video, Orosemane was featured in newspapers and online journals such as *Huffington Post* and *Aljazeera* and was invited onto two talk shows on Canal+ (*Le Grand Journal, Nouvelle Edition*) to discuss her reaction to the terrorist attack. The French media has taken an interest in the unique way in which Orosemane has responded to Islamist, terrorist acts and as a result has begun to examine her larger corpus as a professional comedian. On January 28, 2015, shortly after the *Charlie Hebdo* tragedy, Orosemane was invited on *Le Grand Journal* to participate in a panel entitled: "Humor, Provoc,' et Religion." The theme of the program was "freedom of speech," and it began with Orosemane walking onto the stage, hand in hand, with Eloïse Bouton - a former member of the nudist-Feminist group FEMEN.[99] The show's juxtaposition of a veiled, Muslim woman and an ex-member of FEMEN was certainly interesting and undoubtedly strategic. And Orosemane has noted that although it saddens her that it was her personal reaction to a terrorist attack that triggered interest in her work, she is thankful to be able

[99]. http://femen.org/

to reach more people with her message of tolerance and respect.[100] However, the juxtaposition does beg the question – is Orosemane simply playing the role of the "good Muslim" for the French media?

As it may not be surprising, reactions to Orosemane's *Charlie Hebdo* response video[101] have not all been positive. The video has received more than 700,000 views on Orosemane's *Facebook* page alone (it has also received over 200,000 views on Orosemane's *Youtube* page), and indeed both Muslims and non-Muslims alike have been divided over the brief, yet potent statement. On *Le Grand Journal*, Orosemane noted that a number of responders have commented that if she finds it so difficult to live in Europe, then she should leave. Orosemane also noted that she has been accused by fellow Muslims of being an apostate because she believes that djihadists or terrorists are not Muslim.[102] The young comedian's response to the terrorist attack is significant in that it has triggered reactions on both ends of the social spectrum. It challenges ideas about what it means to be Muslim as well as what it means to be French. While many French were intrigued by Orosemane's opinion that terrorists are not actually Muslim (killing others in the name of Islam is incompatible with the religion), Orosemane also received death threats from within the Islamic community for posting the video (many felt that true Muslims must embrace a certain djihadism). On the other hand, there were those who clearly had no sympathy for the plights of moderate Muslims living in Europe. Even if Orosemane has come to embody the notion of the "good, tamed Muslim" for the

[100]. See "Samia Orosemane: Le Combat d'une Femme Musulmane. »

[101]. The video in question was actually first posted online in 2014 in response to a terrorist attack in Ottawa. After the "Charlie Hedbo" terrorist attack in 2015, Orosemane reposted the video in order to express her anger over the tragedy and this is when it started to receive attention by French media.

[102]. See "Humor, Provoc', et Religion."

French media, her message still aggravates. By acknowledging the fact that it is difficult for many Muslims to live in Europe, she highlights the reality that French society has evolved and by asserting her opinion that djihadists are not Muslim, she underscores the need to think critically before embracing Islam and before interpreting holy texts. Both of these views are indisputably divisive topics. Despite criticism, Orosemane remains faithful to her values and beliefs, ready to accept the consequences of defending them. What is more, this is not the only example of when Orosemane has offended simultaneously both non-Muslim and Muslim communities over the same issue.

The veil has indisputably been a key subject in France since the 2004 headscarf affair. The headscarf is a visible marker of Islam, of the Other. By demarcating difference, the veil is a reminder that French society is evolving, and by denoting religion when worn in public spaces, it transgresses the French republican value of *laïcité* or 'secularity.' Similar to her high school style, as a *hijabi* Orosemane prefers variation in her daily dress. One moment Orosemane may choose to wear a traditional headscarf and the next a hat or a turban. Such is also the case in her one-woman show and comedy sketches, during which Orosemane references moments when she has been the victim of racist stereotypes, particularly – but not limited to – experiences linked to the hijab. In her performance, Orosemane also manipulates the concept of hijab. Nevertheless, in the same way that wearing a traditional headscarf attracts a great deal of negative attention from non-Muslims in France, Orosemane has also received backlash from within the Muslim community for the imaginative manner in which she practices hijab with hats or bandanas. Some feel that wearing a turban with a turtle neck is not an appropriate way for

a Muslim woman to dress. Ironically, by attempting to negotiate her identity and to control her self-image, Orosemane may in fact be closer to interpreting the spirit of hijab in Islam than those more conservative who condemn her usage of the turban.

As Bruno Nassim Aboudrar explains in *Comment le voile est devenu musulman*, the veil is meant to deter, not to attract attention:

> Or le voile dont se couvrent les musulmanes aujourd'hui fait d'elles des images. La logique religieuse et culturelle qui les porte voudrait que les femmes se rendent le moins visibles possibles et, pour y parvenir, en Occident, ne se voilent pas. En se voilant, les musulmanes d'Occident assument à un double titre une fonction d'image en contradiction profonde avec les convictions au nom desquelles elles se voilent. D'abord comme des images vivantes et en mouvement, elles attirent sur elles regards et discours, dès lors que le système dont le voile est extrait vient à manquer…..Autrement dit, ces musulmanes d'Occident se comportent comme des images et imitent ces images » (Aboudrar, 19).
>
> At present, the veil with which Muslim women cover themselves today renders them symbols. The religious and cultural rationale behind the veil demands that women make themselves the least visible possible, and in order to do so, in the West, this means not veiling. By covering themselves, Muslim women in the West assume two symbols of the veil, which are in profound contradiction with the convictions for which they wear the veil. First as living symbols in movement, they attract looks and comments, as soon as the veil is extracted from the system in which it was created. …in other words, these Muslims of the West behave like images mimicking images. (My translation)

The irony of veiling in France today is that the practice becomes contrary to the spirit of hijab in Islam. Covering renders the wearer more *visible* (as opposed to more discreet or less visible). However, by wearing hats or turbans instead of the headscarf, Orosemane has found a way to become less conspicuous and to avoid being defined by a stereotype. She is not fruitlessly imitating the way that veiling is practiced in a Muslim "system." Orosemane's attempt at negotiating her identity shows that there is something for

everyone implicated in the veil debate to learn. She is not just negotiating the way in which others define her, she is negotiating the way in which Islam can be practiced most effectively and faithfully in a new context. Yet in doing so, she does not compromise her values of modesty. There is not just one way to code behavior or appearance for (veiled) Muslim women. Perhaps, as we saw in the chapter on Hassan Hajjaj, there is no "authentic" hijab. While the French are in the midst of negotiating their identity as a nation, the Muslim community in France must also come to terms with the fact that in a predominantly non-Muslim culture, the veil becomes a global assemblage. The original system which dictated the need and the function of the veil no longer exists in this context, or at least not outside of immigrant enclaves. By reconsidering the practice of veiling in relation to her daily life in a Western country as well as in relation to her personal style, Orosemane shows us that identities, definitions, and boundaries are not finite. She also finds a way to move past the liminal threshold by reappropriating the veil for herself.

A Multiple, One-Musulmane Show

During her one-woman show, Orosemane addresses a number of events and struggles that have been formative in her life. She includes personal anecdotes in her comedy routines because she finds that being able to laugh at difficult moments is both empowering and healing. As stated above, Orosemane begins "Femme de Couleurs" shrouded in a black cape. She enters onto a dark stage accompanied by the crescendoing music of the theme song from the American film *Jaws*. Crouched over and hovering back and forth as she walks towards the audience, dim and narrowly focused stage lights shine

solely on the oval of Orosemane's face, the audience wondering attentively what the purpose of the overly-dramatic entrance may be. Suddenly, the music stops, lights reveal the stage as well as its bright, yellow background, and Orosemane greets the audience with a cheerful "bonsoir." She then asks the audience if her black jilbab is what had scared them and proceeds to take off the garment. In response, the audience laughs. Orosemane has just faithfully mimicked the Western stereotype of the covered, unattainable, and *veritably* menacing veiled, Muslim woman.

Underneath, Orosemane is clothed in a tunic made from a yellow, orange, and black floral African fabric, a black turtle neck, and an orange turban. She uses her African-inspired clothing to transition into a talk about her passion for Sub-Saharan African culture and how she has always "rêvé d'être noir," or has always 'dreamed of being black.' Initially, Orosemane used her grand entrance as a point of departure that introduced the topic of the veil into her comedy show. She discussed her experiences as a veiled woman directly afterwards. However upon realizing that it would be best if the audience had more time to become acquainted with her before delving fully into the polemical topic, Orosemane came to the conclusion that it would be best to re-strategize the narrative of the performance (Personal Interview). Orosemane did not want her entire show to be prefaced by the fact that she wears an Islamic headscarf.

Making jokes out of topics ranging from the feat of convincing her Arab mother to let her marry a "noir," to family snooping and gossip, to pregnancy and body image, Orosemane welcomes the audience into her multicolored world. The comedian jokes that it took four years of relentless persuasion before her mother would accept her daughter's

desire to marry a black-convert from Martinique. She also laughs that in order to make herself more attractive for her Martiniquan husband, she tried to grow a larger backside; but, unfortunately "everything else grew as well." She mocks the voice of the woman in the metro who mistakenly took Orosemane's portly stature for that of a pregnant woman and who asked Orosemane when she was "due to give birth." The comedian complains of annoying family members who hound her ceaselessly as to when she and her husband are finally going to have children. Recounting situations to which most everyone can relate, Orosemane prepares her audience to return to an issue that may put many ill at ease, to return back to the proverbial monster under the (Islamic) veil.

It is not until the end of her performance that Orosemane revisits the issue of the veil. And this is strategic. During chapter five (of six) of "Femme de Couleurs," Orosemane concludes her imitations of African accents and nervously confesses to her audience that she has something to tell them. The bandana on her head is actually a "foulard Islamique," or an 'Islamic headscarf!' Thankful that the audience has not attacked her, Orosemane shares her experience working as a "nounou," or a 'nanny' for a French family. Day after day, she wore a bandana on her head while caring for the children. It was not until after a considerable length of time that the parents who had hired Orosemane realized that it was actually a hijab. And they were visibly uncomfortable. As she tells the story, a number of the spectators in the audience may be experiencing similar sentiments. The contrast orchestrated at the beginning of the show between the black, sweeping jilbab and Orosemane's floral, bandana attire is jilting. Because her grand entrance is followed by a monologue where she explains that she is

"not dressed for Carnival, but rather has always dreamed of being black," the nature of Orosemane's dress remains rather ambiguous. As with Orosemane's employers, it also may not have been clear to certain members of the audience that what is on her head is in fact a "foulard Islamique."

Orosemane's personal style is not linked solely to her adoration of African culture. The comedian has long desired to govern the manner in which people view and define her by negotiating her identity through dress. Because she is aware of stereotypes that Westerners have regarding the Islamic headscarf, Orosemane is capable of challenging them.[103] Garber has explained that the hegemonic cultural imaginary feels the need to be able to see and to interpret signs denoting difference (130). Orosemane is mindful of how Muslim women, particularly veiled, Muslim women, are coded within French culture. They are most often expected to wear either a traditional headscarf with modern, but loose-fitting clothing, or some interpretation of a voluminous robe such as a jilbab or an abaya paired with a veil. By wearing African inspired prints and bandanas (or hats), Orosemane has disturbed French notions of difference concerning the Islamic headscarf in both her daily life and her comedy performances. Her clothing becomes transcultural, similar to the clothing featured in Hassan Hajjaj's photographs and video installations.

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[103]. "The theft of stereotypes, like stereotypes themselves, respects no community limits, no essence. The comic lesson in complicity offered by these texts suggests that the Beur heroes have learned two things: on the one hand, it is impossible not to be traversed by the flow of stereotypes that the dominant culture teaches us . . . on the other hand, the knowledge of how such stereotypes work is the precondition of reappropriative activities."(Rosello 64)

When she was a nanny, the parents for whom Orosemane worked had not initially interpreted her bandana "correctly." Orosemane's marker of difference (as a veiled woman) was invisible, and once the family realized that they had misinterpreted the bandana, they became upset. This is the same case with Orosemane's audience. What many audience members may not have realized at the beginning of the comedian's performance is that during the grand entrance, THEY were in fact the joke. Orosemane's imitation of the threatening woman in the burqa was accurately played out. Empathizing with the audience, the comedian acknowledges the fact that her attire was offensive before she takes it off. However once Orosemane later reveals that she actually practices hijab, those who had not been able to interpret the bandana as a marker of Islam may become offended. They realize that they had been duped during the grand entrance of "Femme de Couleurs," and in turn are forced to question the manner in which they conceive markers of difference and social scripts concerning Muslim women. As Orosemane continues with her chapter on the veil, recounting events such as the moment when a French lady was stunned that "elle sait même se servir d'une carte bancaire!" ("She even knows how to use a bank card!"), these audience members realize that they too are implicated in Orosemane's anecdotes. If they had first coded the comedian as liberated under the belief that the bandana was just a fashion statement, how can they come to terms with the fact that the Islamic headscarf is coded as non-liberated? If certain audience members were relieved by the fact that Orosemane discarded the black, encompassing jilbab for a colorful and non-Islamic dress, then they suffered from a false

sense of security. Orosemane has found a way to practice hijab that is less conspicuous because her bandana does not always register as a "sign."

Ironically, while Nadine Morano was offended by the sight of a woman in a niqab (a conspicuous marker of difference) at the train station, Orosemane's employers were alarmed because her marker of difference (in this case the Islamic headscarf) had been *invisible.* It seems that French society wants it both ways - they want markers of difference to be concurrently visible and invisible. In a society where interpretations of *laïcité* have gone so far as to forbid female students of Maghrebian descent to wear skirts that are judged "too long" to public schools because they are considered ostentatious markers of religion,[104] it is rather paradoxical that it is even aggravating when the markers are not present. Muslim women who are able to pass as un-veiled risk the potential of threatening "public security" because they go unmarked. This is what put the family for whom Orosemane worked ill-at ease. Ironically, hegemonic French culture prefers an Other that is minimally visible (but not completely) and easy to control or to monitor. When markers of difference are jeopardized, this effort becomes more complicated.

Orosemane re-structured the narrative of her performance in order to establish a stronger rapport with her audience before confessing that she practices hijab. By sharing personal anecdotes of a global nature first, the comedian believes that her audience will define her not by what sits on top of her head, but by her zest for speaking to new acquaintances as well as by the stories that she recounts. In a similar manner, Orosemane

[104]. See AFP.

concludes her one woman show by returning to the topics of pregnancy and the loss of her mother – highly sensitive subjects for the performer, but also highly relatable. Weaving a multiplicity of discourses throughout "Femme de Couleurs" demonstrates the fact that Orosemane is more complicated than the distinction between "bandana and hijab." Because the Islamic headscarf, as a marker of difference, may have been invisible to many in the audience throughout the majority of the comedy show, Orosemane is able to manipulate the aspects by which spectators define her. Positive as this may be for Orosemane, I would argue nonetheless that this type of identity negotiation (even if successful) remains a problematic indicator that social problems and issues of inequality in France are still unresolved.

In her article, *How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are,* Lisa Walker problematizes notions of visibility and invisibility in ethnic minority lesbians. "I have been arguing that privileging the visible . . . is a way in taking part in the discourses that naturalize socially constructed categories of racial difference and that this privileging elides other identities that are not constructed as visible, with a result that these identities remain unexamined" (874). Walker's basic premise is that because racial markers of difference are more noticeable than markers of sexuality, lesbians who are of an ethnic minority background are defined by the color of their skin and not by their sexual preference. The fact that their skin is not white overshadows their sexuality, which remains *invisible.* I believe that the cultural politics revolving around Muslim women who veil in the West is a similar predicament to that which Walker discusses in her article. While it may be an advantage for Orosemane to control the way

in which others view her by manipulating her clothes, and that becoming less-visible (as a woman who covers) may even be in accordance with the spirit of hijab that Aboudrar defines in his text, what about women who do not adhere to this interpretation of the practice of covering in Islam?

The woman wearing the burqa featured on Orosemane's poster does not become more visibly nuanced until she enters Orosemane's world, until her dress becomes colorful. What about her agency? What if Orosemane had not preferred to integrate themes of African dress into her practice of hijab? What about women who prefer to wear more traditional, Islamic headscarves rather than stylish hats or turbans with turtle necks? In the same way that Orosemane's identity as a woman who practices hijab becomes invisible (at least to a certain extent) when she wears hats or bandanas, Western social scripts for women who wear headscarves in France diminish greatly the possibility for the women in question to have nuanced identities. The "excessively long" skirt of a young student in France, for example, was automatically translated as an "ostentatious symbol of Islam," simply because school administrators were aware of the fact that the girl is Muslim and that she wears a veil outside of school. It matters little that the skirt was purchased at a popular French fashion chain for young women. Because it was worn by a Muslim student, it was labeled as a sign denoting religion. Orosemane shows us that women who practice the veil in France have limited recourse besides becoming invisible as hijabis if they wish to be visible in other ways, if they wish not to be defined by the outside. While the comedian may have found a style of hijab that incorporates her passions and personal beliefs and while she may even have found a way of effectively

demonstrating to spectators the need to question preconceived notions about veiled women (to represent the veil in non-binary terms), other aspects of the debate remain unresolved. Orosemane does not offer a solution to the global problem, but she forces others to acknowledge that it exists.

Locations of Performance: The Importance of Social Networks

In addition to her one woman stand-up show, Orosemane also profits from the growing popularity of social networks as locations of performance where she shares comedy sketches, personal statements, and communicates show dates and events with her fans. On her personal *Youtube* channel, Orosemane has created a series of sketches entitled: "Geneviève et Aïcha," "Télé-Aïcha," "Samia," and "Messages." The series "Geneviève et Aïcha" features two friends; Aïcha (Orosemane) is a veiled Muslim woman of Maghrebian descent and Geneviève is a bourgeois, Catholic grandmother. The two women meet often for tea and discuss a variety of topics ranging from the veil, prayer, Charlie Hebdo, and smart phones. During the episode "Pourquoi tu te couvres la tête» ("Why do you cover your head?"), Orosemane references debates concerning the headscarf in France.[105] The three-minute sketch begins with Geneviève reluctantly turning to her friend to ask a question. After finally working up the courage to speak, Geneviève – who is dressed in a black hat, a white blouse and multiple beads of pearls – asks Aïcha why she covers her hair. Aïcha, who is clothed in a mint green headscarf and coordinating jellaba, is visibly troubled by Geneviève's question. Geneviève insists that just because one adheres to a certain faith does not mean that they need to display it. She

[105]. See "Genvière & Aïcha."

also adds that it is a shame that Aïcha ruins her pretty hair. For three minutes the conversation continues, duplicating all too familiar responses and rebuttals concerning the topic: “But at least we (Christians) have been able to evolve a little.” “But, what about nuns . . . they cover their hair?” “We (women) have fought hard for our rights! You are oppressed.” “I decided to wear the veil. It wasn’t my husband. I guard my beauty for him, not for everyone else.” Similar to Orosemane’s entrance in “Femme de Couleurs,” Geneviève and Aïcha mimic the debates par excellence concerning difference and Islam in France, which are heard in television talk shows, political discourse, personal conversations, and newspapers. Aïcha insists that no one else forced her to wear a veil and that doing so is not the equivalent of being oppressed. Geneviève makes a direct comparison between Islam and Catholicism, and seems to insinuate that Western feminisms apply to all women, that Muslim women’s “right” not to cover was incorporated into Western women’s liberatory efforts. The sketch concludes with an awkward silence between the two friends, both unsettled by the conversation. Nothing seems resolved.

Afterwards, the exchange continues. Even the comments left under the video by *YouTube* subscribers mimic the all-too familiar debate about the veil:

> Je suis française convertie depuis 23ans . . . le foulard ce n’est ni une mode ni une soumission c notre religion et chacun et libre de le porter ou pas donc respecter le choix de chacun. (sic)
>
> I am French and I converted twenty-three years ago . . . the headscarf is neither a style, nor submission [sic] it’s our religion and each person is free to wear it or not so respect each person’s choice. (My translation)
>
> Tout d'abord, le foulard n’est pas un " apparat qui veut dire "je suis vierge et bonne à marier " . . . Il s'agit de se protéger et se préserver, afin de

> montrer sa beauté qu'a son mari, sa famille, ses copines ou autre. Et surtout . . . il s'agit d'être discrète afin de ne pas trop attirer les regards. (sic)
>
> First of all, the headscarf is not an instrument that signifies that 'I am a virgin and I am ready to marry' . . . It is about protecting and preserving oneself, as a way to show one's beauty only to one's husband, family and friends (etc.). And above all . . . it's about being discreet in order not to draw too much attention to one's self. (My translation)

These two respondents, evidently practicing, female Muslims themselves, are trapped by the same rhetoric that the sketch mimics. They insist that the headscarf is not a sign of submission, nor a marker of virginity. Similar to Aïcha's defense of the veil, they maintain that covering is a way to preserve one's beauty for one's husband and that veiling is their own, personal choice. Instead of finding another way to "decline the stereotype," the two women repeat ineffectively the same justifications for the headscarf as have been given by many others. For example, in *Why the French don't like Headscarves,* John Bowen maps out the stakes of talk-show debates concerning the veil on French television. He addresses in detail a television interview with Lila and Alma Lévy,[106] French Muslim sisters who wear the veil: "The Lévy's efforts to focus on their real motives and choices in the specific French context are parried at each instance by claims about the voile's objectively sexist and Islamist meaning, best seen through the struggle of "sisters" in Muslim-majority countries, and the doubtless naiveté of the girls, objects of manipulation" (Bowen 239). Comparable to the Lévy sisters, Aïcha and the two subscribers here-referenced, repeat fruitlessly a discourse of truth which implicates

[106]. The Lévy sisters, whose parents are of Jewish and Kabyle background, converted to Islam and wear the veil. In 2003 they were kicked out of school for refusing to take off their headscarves. This event contributed greatly to an intense national debate about *laïcité* (and the veil) that had been becoming more and more heated since 1989.

them as contributors in a circular debate that is entrapped in a binary discourse. Because Islam is believed to be an inherently misogynist religion, even the claim that they veil of their own free will is discarded as an illegitimate assertion. They may be freely choosing to veil because they want to follow their religion, but ultimately Islam is believed to be a religion that has been dictated by male prejudice, and this cancels out their claims of free-choice. The *Youtube* subscribers are not able to move forward any more productively than Alma and Lila and are mimicked by interlocutors who are decidedly un-persuaded by their arguments.

Interestingly, the second respondent here-listed even acknowledges the fact that the objective of veiling is "to be discreet;" however, she goes no further than mentioning this term (discreet). What are the stakes for being discreet in a non-Muslim majority country? What if the manner in which one may practice hijab in a Muslim majority-country, such as Algeria or Tunisia, renders one less "discreet" in a Western country, such as France? In replaying indistinguishable explanations and defenses for the veil that have been heard many times before in both public and private spaces, Orosemane's sketch highlights the futility of such conversations. The respondents who were not clever enough to gather that the sketch was a farce fall into the same trap. Deliberately altering her image (a green headscarf and djellaba as opposed to a brightly colored bandana), Orosemane takes on the interpretation of the "traditional" marker of the veil, re-enacting a far-too commonplace conversation about the headscarf in order to demonstrate that a much more complex discussion is needed. This video reveals that Orosemane's narrative

approach to her multidiscursive stand-up show is far more effective in presenting the veil in a fashion that does not perpetuate binary discourse.

How to be a Good Muslim: Ramadan

Lastly, I would like to end my chapter by discussing a couple of sketches that Orosemane has posted on her self-entitled series, "Samia." "M'importe quoi, M'importe quoi" ("Whatever, Whatever") are short, three minute sketches where, appearing as herself, Orosemane discusses pet peeves that she has concerning the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.[107] Obviously, these sketches are oriented towards a Muslim audience and in doing so Orosemane wears a traditional headscarf and a djellaba. It is likely that the reason why the comedian decided to exchange her turban for a veil and djellaba is twofold: during Ramadan, many women wear more conservative dress than outside of the month and Orosemane may also want viewers to focus less on her clothing than on the potentially controversial topic – criticism of behavior within the Muslim community- which she addresses in the videos.

Each sketch begins with Orosemane clothed in a sparkly black and red djellaba and a corresponding headscarf. The title of the program is painted on the screen in red Latin letters, which are designed to resemble Arabic script. Orosemane dances across the screen accompanied by a techno-Oriental fusion of music, pausing briefly as she gives the audience her trademark grimace, shaking her finger. Following the brief introduction, the dialogue of the sketch starts with Orosemane standing in her tidy kitchen, explaining that the reason why she has cleaned is to talk to spectators about Ramadan. She greets the

[107]. See "M'importequoi, m'importequoi!".

audience with a hearty "Salam Alaykum," (سلام عليكم), a Muslim greeting denoting peace, which is obviously audience oriented. She continues by using jokes as a trope by which she offers advice about what one should not do during Ramadan and why the given acts may be counter-productive to the purpose of the holy month. The sketch is prefaced with the notion of good deeds in Islam; Orosemane explains that during Ramadan, each good deed counts double – "C'est les soldes de bonnes actions" ("It's a good deed bargain"). Making fun of the overstuffed grocery carts, which she always sees in supermarkets during Ramadan, Orosemane moves on to explain that one should remember there is a purpose to fasting during Ramadan: "Manger moins, pour prier plus!" ("Eat less in order to pray more!"). Later, the comedian addresses the issue of gossiping during the holy month by referencing a religious saying: "speaking ill of someone is comparable to eating their flesh." She jokes that there would be no point to fast from food during the day if you become a cannibal instead!

By turning criticisms into trite jokes, Orosemane offers three general pieces of advice to fellow Muslims explaining how they can best observe Ramadan. What is noteworthy about the sketch is Orosemane's strategic use of the veil. While with a non-Muslim majority audience, Orosemane may choose to wear a less ostentatious veil, she decides to wear more traditional dress in this series because the customary garments will go barely noticed by her audience. Moreover, it is not a commonplace act that Muslim women offer spiritual advice to an entire Muslim community. By wearing a more conventional veil, Muslim spectators watching the video will not be tempted to question Orosemane's interpretation of the hijab. Certainly the sketch is not meant to be taken

very seriously, but the choice in dress could possibly earn the comedian more credibility in terms of religious expression and commentary.

Another interesting aspect of the video is the juxtaposition of secular music and religious discourse. Many Muslims, particularly more conservative adherents of the faith or Salafis, believe that non-religious music is haram or forbidden. However, Orosemane begins and ends her sketch with non-religious music. Subscribers to the video have even commented that: "Music is forbidden in Islam." By using comedy as a means to give counsel concerning religious practices as well as by integrating music into the sketch, Orosemane challenges notions about what it means to be Muslim, and more particularly a female Muslim. In her multi-dimensional world, music is not incompatible with Islam and women can shape conversations that advise spirituality within the religion. This "world" is possible because Orosemane utilizes social networks as locations of performance wherein she can target her audience in order to speak about polemical or possibly sensitive topics without any considerable penalization.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the comedy works of Samia Orosemane. I have addressed the manner in which Orosemane challenges both Western and Muslim notions of what it means to be a Muslim woman. By considering technique and locations of performance as well as the notions of visibility and invisibility, I have shown how the comedian is able to challenge discourse and stereotypes concerning the veil in France. Orosemane negotiates her identity through personal style – whilst honoring her religious values – in order to control how others define her. Similar to Hassan Hajjaj's

photography, by incorporating the dimension of personal style into a strategically designed narrative, Orosemane's stand-up performance implicates audience members as objects of their own learning. She mimics faithfully stereotypes about oppressed, yet menacing veiled women, only later to reveal that her African bandana is actually an Islamic headscarf. By utilizing the trope of mimesis, the comedian highlights the conflicting logic in the Western binary of veiled/unveiled and oppressed/liberated. What is more, Orosemane is emblematic of the importance of social networks in helping the marginalized assert their voice. By utilizing social networks, the comic artist has been able to target her spectators and to broaden the scope of her audience base. Orosemane's interpretation of the hijab and the portrayal thereof in her artistic works highlight the need to reconsider scripts for women who veil as well as the possible advantage of reconsidering the notion of covering in a non-Muslim majority context.

Conclusion

Due to the prominence of the Orientalist narrative of Muslim women within Western discourse, many modern, Arab and Muslim artists face the challenge of finding a way to represent their subjectivity without perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes. Colonial narratives of Muslim women also continue to shape debates and legislation concerning the veil in France as well as many other European countries. Frequently, the discourses dictating conversations about the Islamic headscarf in France revolve around topics such as secularity, communalism, Islamism, and the rhetoric of "saving the Muslim woman" (Abu-Lughod). Limited to issues like these, the subjectivity of individual, veiled women is rarely the focus of the circular debates that so often govern political discourse about Muslim women in France. Accordingly, this dissertation has aimed to determine if it is possible to represent the veil in more nuanced terms that might be provided by the practice of artistic expression. Moreover, it has sought to determine if the representation of the veil has resulted in a certain transformation of the artistic genres in question. What may reactions to the artistic productions examined reveal about French identity struggles? In the works of the three artists examined – Hassan Hajjaj, Mélanie Georgiades, and

Samia Orosemane – artistic expression has provided a position of privilege, wherein artists assume an exclusive agency to assert their voice, in which the image of the veil has become more complex than in traditional, political Manichean discourse. As as result of their mastery of photography, writing, and comedy performance these artists have been able to painstakingly carve out narratives of self (or of their culture) that deconstruct the limitations of dominant, cultural discourse about Muslim women.

For each of the artists examined, notions of the "authentic" have been challenged through carefully crafted performances. The consideration for a "multiplicity of dialogues" (Lloyd) has proven to be integral in complicating behavioral scripts for veiled women. Finally, each artist is passionately committed to governing narratives of self, or of their culture. In the photography, fashion and interior design, and short films of Hassan Hajjaj, the desires to express his dual-cultural identity and admiration of Moroccan street culture as well as to mock Orientalist stereotypes about Arab women have been treated as a priority. By honoring all of these ambitions, Hajjaj's work has resulted in vibrant, transcultural productions that deal with the subject of the veil, along with topics pertaining to fashion, capitalist consumption, Marrakeshi street culture, and Moroccan traditions - for example handicrafts. Photographs like *Ilham* re-appropriate Orientalist images of Arab women, such as the odalisque, by contextualizing the flagrant gaps in (hi)stories pertaining to Muslim culture, which agents of Orientalist discourse had deliberately effaced. *Ilham*, for example, re-writes "non-truths" with "truths" by replacing imagined items, such as hookah and coffee, with items that are actually indicative of Maghrebian culture, like zillidj. The fashion items featured throughout

Hajjaj's corpus, which are staples of Moroccan street culture, such as Louis Vuitton scarves and colorful abayas, all at once represent and question notions of authentic Muslim women as well as capitalist consumption. It is for this reason that I argue that through his double-cultural background, Hajjaj is empowered to represent the veil in a transcultural fashion that challenges reductive ideas about Muslim women.

Since the recent media leak of her conversion, former rapper Mélanie Georgiades has also been dedicated to carving out a narrative of self that challenges hegemonic, cultural discourse about the veil, Muslim women, Western converts to Islam, and even the very notion of Frenchness. Adamant that she would not permit her career as a rapper, or her new life as a writer, to be limited to a narrative stating that she had converted out of desperation and that she had donned the veil under duress, Georgiades has chosen – basing my analysis on Christine Keating's explanation of instances of "silent acts of resistance" – a response of "silent refusal" (Keating). As a former leading rapper, she occupies a position of privilege through which she possesses the ability to refuse to be "forced into speaking." Georgiades has only consented to address the veil through writing and one, single journalist (in televised interviews). She has been able to control the trajectory of interviews in a way that ensures that responses linked to the hijab are recounted focusing on *her* subjectivity, not on other women's. It is for this reason that I contend that Georgiades has resisted contribution to hegemonic discourse about the veil through a privileged silence, which has allowed her to shape a narrative of self based on her own experiences.

Finally, in her "One Musulmane Show," Samia Orosemane has been equally devoted to shaping the way in which others view her – as a Muslim woman, as a comedian, and as a human being - fiercely defending the fact that her veil is *not* what defines her. Orosemane demonstrates that neither Muslims, nor non-Muslims can limit the practice of hijab to one appearance or behavioral script. By playing with conceptions of visibility and invisibility, Orosemane guides her audience to reconsider preconceived notions that they might have pertaining to veiled, Muslim women. Mocking the stereotype of the oppressed, yet menacing burqa clad woman, Orosemane's performance queries which type of veil qualifies as a threat. As a result of her admiration for African culture as well as her unique sense of style, Orosemane often "passes" un-marked as a veiled woman. Addressing topics ranging from infertility to racism, Orosemane's comedy show deals with a number of life experiences that she chooses to share with others. The comedian strategically structures the narrative of her stand-up performance so that her audience can become better acquainted with her before they make judgments about her unique interpretation of hijab. As a result, I argue that Orosemane has the potential to be defined by a "multiplicity of dialogues," one of which *happens* to be the veil.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, after discussing stakes in analysis of Orientalist works, I moved on to give a brief summary of the history of European mass material consumption of the Orient. Although at first material products like oil paintings were only available to members of the elite, they slowly transformed into more affordable objects. Ranging from photographs, post-cards, and comics, to travel literature and music cafés, Orientalist representations of Muslim culture pervaded the Western, cultural

imaginary of the East. Throughout this dissertation, I have examined artists who have re-appropriated some of the artistic genres through which Orientalist representations of Muslim women were once perpetuated. Hajjaj's re-appropriation of Orientalist post-cards and photography is a prime example of how certain artistic genres have expanded, allowing artists to mock or question past representations of Arab culture. By re-appropriating images of the Maghreb - as portrayed in both colonial as well as modern, popular culture images of Morocco, such as Western fashion magazines - Hajjaj's photographs challenge notions of the "authentic." In effect, he has historicized French post-cards of the colonial Maghreb, mocking photographers – and all who contributed to their production – for their contrived and outlandish fantasies. Using objects of capitalist consumption as well as that which represents Moroccan street culture and traditions, Hajjaj has shown how Arab women can be represented without perpetuating Orientalist discourse of the highly sexualized and cloistered veiled woman. Drawing in an audience with highly salient markers of mass consumption, capitalist production such as the post-card, but also in more contemporary forms, like Coca-Cola cans, Hajjaj guides his spectators to reconsider their ideas about Muslim women.

As a result of the multiplicity of dialogues that Hajjaj's corpus embodies, he has also demonstrated the remarkable ability that music has to nurture and to encourage multi-cultural performance. In his short video installment, "My Rock Stars," Hajjaj displays a number of musicians; among them, the rap duo Poetic Pilgrimage. Legitimated as rap performers through inclusion in Hajjaj's installation, Poetic Pilgrimage transcends boundaries determining who can qualify as a rapper as well as what types of behavior

qualify as appropriate for Muslim women. In the same light, Diam's' conversion to Islam engendered extensive debate regarding public figures' responsibility to young fans and pre-requisites necessary for rap production. It was not the subject matter of Diam's' rap corpus that proved scandalous, but rather the physical appearance of the rapper, veiled. While the careers of other Muslim rappers in France have flourished, Diam's' conversion generated a great deal of negative criticism because, as a result of the veil, the former rapper's religious beliefs became highly visible. It is not possible to give a definitive response as to whether or not Diam's would have remained a successful rapper had she not ended her career– especially wearing the jilbab – but it is certain that she would have faced backlash from within both the non-Muslim and Muslim communities. The rap industry in France is acquiescent to a number of male, Muslim rappers, like Abd al Malik, who has expressed his religious identity in songs such as "Le 12 septembre 2001" and "Gibralter;" yet, it does not appear that the rap industry is prepared to embrace the "jilbab." It is because Diam's sang of issues pertaining to social diversity and anti-racism that she, after adopting the practice of hijab, was viewed by many as a threat to young, banlieue women. It is a widespread belief in France that the Islamic headscarf transgresses French, republican values and that it symbolizes female oppression and extremism. Thus as a result of adopting a conservative interpretation of hijab, Georgiades' appearance was judged as incompatible with the themes and values of French rap music. While images of semi-nude, Maghrebian, women musicians and dancers circulated greatly during the colonial occupation of the Maghreb, many people in

contemporary France reject veiled, female Muslim musicians as "negative images of women."

In her one-woman show, "Femme de Couleurs," Samia Orosemane has claimed the genre of comedy – a historical as well as current location of the caricature of Islamic cultures – as a form of expression in which to recount her experiences as a veiled, Muslim, French woman. While Georgiades fully assumed her choice to veil in a highly visible jilbab, Orosemane profits from the genre of comedy to mock those who stereotype veiled women by disguising herself. The artistic expression of comedy allows Orosemane to make provocative comments about a number of topics, such as terrorism, proper Islamic behavior, and the veil, which are highly sensitive and polemical. I would argue that it is not so much the genre of comedy that has become more inclusive of Muslim artists, but rather that the genre is more amenable to the discussion of taboo subjects, in general. As a comedian, Orosemane plays with dress – wearing black abayas or burqas as costumes or props and at other times African-inspired outfits. By imitating French stereotypes of Muslim women, Orosemane performs to mixed audiences, inviting many to laugh before they become aware that *they* are in fact the butt of the joke.

Finally, the artistic works of Hajjaj, Georgiades, and Orosemane have also been revelatory of social struggles within Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. They show us that artistic expression can provide a privileged position in which to represent Muslim women in a more nuanced fashion than reductive discourse of the dominant culture. However this privilege does come with a certain responsibility. It is incumbent upon artists representing Arab women to acknowledge the narrative dimension of the

images that they are creating. Although Hajjaj has done this well in most instances, he has failed to consider the possible consequences of the title "Hassan's Angels." In so doing, this particular collection of photographs recalls the photographer/model, pimp/prostitute paradigm. Although the biker girls featured as "Hassan's Angels" challenge many stereotypes of Muslim women, the series' title perpetuates a theme of Arab women's imprisonment. Even so, Hajjaj's artistic works have challenged notions of the "authentic" within Western and Eastern audiences. Reactions to his corpus prove that conceptions of Muslim women are highly reductive in both of these communities. Whereas many non-Arabs are surprised to learn of the Marrakeshi motorcycle culture – inclusive of males and females alike – a number of Muslim spectators find the Louis Vuitton or Gucci hijabs and abayas reprehensible. Hajjaj's transcultural photographs push his audience to re-define their conceptions of Muslim women.

While Diam's chose to react to media criticism of her hijab with silence, many argued that she abandoned her young and impressionable fans. It is true that though Georgiades had the means with which to escape the media storm, young banlieue girls continue to be stuck between "pute" ("whore") and "opprimée" ("oppressed"). What is more, insomuch as her declaration that Muslim women have the right to love, to be loved, and even to divorce is true for herself (and her friends), Georgiades' comment may not be reflective of the life conditions of all Muslim women. This is not to say that her choices should be condemned; however, they do not consider socio-economic or cultural conditions of other Muslim women. And this is not Georgiades' responsibility. A media backlash was, however, a consequence of her privileged silence. Reactions to Diam's'

conversion, her memoirs, and her limited televised interviews have uncovered French, identity struggles that continue to be hashed out through debates about the former rapper.

Finally, as the "Femme de Couleurs," Orosemane constructs a world that is more colorful and nuanced than the black and white "space" that demands that veiled women be marked, but not too visible, or conspicuous. Because her African turbans and bandanas transgress behavioral scripts for veiled, Muslim women, Orosemane is often able to pass as invisible (as a hijabi). Reactions, from other Muslims, to Orosemane's hijab are also indicative of a certain evolution in the French, Muslim community. She has found a way to practice hijab, in a less conspicuous fashion, which scholars like Bruno Nassim Aboudrar would argue is closer to the spirit of hijab in Islam. But other women, such as the woman wearing the niqab on her show advertisement or even Georgiades, do not have this option; and, they may not agree with Orosemane's interpretation of Islamic modesty. These women must find their own ways to control their image and to avoid being defined by a "marker of difference."

In conclusion, artistic expression has the potential to represent the veil in more nuanced terms than traditional, political discourse. The artists examined have done so through carefully crafted artistic productions. Through the works of Hajjaj, Georgiades, and Orosemane, the veil has been presented in a multiplicity of dialogues, complicating common stereotypes. These artists may not be able to resolve identity struggles for "Lili" or for France's banlieue girls and women, but their double-cultural productions offer an alternative perspective of the hijab, one which is slowly filtering into dominant discourse about the veil.

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