Näyttämö ja tutkimus 7

Anna Thuring, Anu Koskinen
ja Tuija Kokkonen (toim.)

Esitys ja toiseus

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RANIA LEE KHALIL

Political Family Photos as Performance: *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya, The Pan-African Asian Women's Organization, 1960–1965*

Abstract

Using family photographs as a point of departure for artistic research, this essay chronicles the work of *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya*, The Pan-African Asian Women's Organization, with headquarters in Cairo, Egypt and Conakry, Guinea, between 1960–1965. Reflecting on the erasure of histories of colonial resistance, African socialism and Third World feminism through loss of personal memories, it considers the imagination and artistic research as a means of addressing histories forgotten or excluded from official record, and the ways in which family photographs are used by communities of color to counter misrepresentation by dominant cultures.

> The word *remember (re-member)* evokes the coming together of severed parts, fragments, becoming a whole. Photography has been, and is, central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and renew life-affirming bonds. Using these images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye.
>
> bell hooks "In Our Glory", 1992[1]

Introduction

In this essay, I discuss my artistic research project *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya, The Pan-African Asian Women's Organization, 1960–1965*. This project (henceforth referred to as '*Gamaayat el Mara'a*') is a lecture performance

[1] Willis (1994) p. 50.

crafted from family photographs and realized through ongoing research. These photographs document my maternal grandmother Aida Hamdi's involvement in a woman's rights organization which she co-founded with a Guinean colleague between Cairo, Egypt and Conakry, Guinea in 1960. This set of twenty four images chronicle meetings of the Egyptian, Thai and Guinean delegations of the Pan-African Asian Women's Organization in various settings. The images include formal and informal group portraits, including a meeting in which the celebrated Algerian resistance fighter Djamilla Bouhired traveled to Cairo to speak with the organization in 1962. The performance juxtaposes these archival images with less formal gatherings of my family and brief texts (on slides) interspersed among the images. I perform this work through a 35 mm slide projector, speaking alongside the photographs and click of the projector, in such a way that both the projector and I am also visible to the audience.

Given to me by my mother (Aida's oldest daughter), my images of the *Gamaayat el Mara'a* exist without captions, nor the newspapers within which some were likely to have appeared. They are in many cases, images without reference points. The project is thus concerned with *re-membering*, an action toward piecing together a lost familial and national history – as one might rejoin limbs (members) severed from a body; and the very impossibility of doing so. It is about creating an artwork to recall particular histories in the face of their systemic erasure.

Process, Methodology and Lecture Performance

In researching this project, I was grateful to encounter the work of photographer Hitoshi Toyoda[2]. Toyoda exhibits his photographs only for live audiences, using a slide projector. Juxtaposing banal images of everyday life-insects, his backyard in Brooklyn, people one might assume are family members, with short poems, Toyoda inserts a haiku like sensibility into his performative photography practice. Where my background in ephemeral performance is concerned, I was moved to learn that Toyoda never presents the same performance twice. He is always shifting slides within the tray.

The work of *Gamaayat el Mara'a* too, remains unfixed. Just as I complete this essay, and a perform early drafts of the performance, I get new ideas and remain open to things shifting. The process of creating and completing a performance for me can sometimes appear as many different iterations of the same performance over a long duration of time; or, of making, stopping, re-evaluating, and starting again.

[2] More information is available on the artists website: hitoshitoyoda.com (last accessed 12/08/18).

In previous writing[3] I have discussed my use of the 'iterative cyclic web', a concept devised by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, wherein an artwork is shaped by a cycle of repetition. In the case of my artistic research, cycles of making, reading and sharing often take place over years for the work to take shape. Drawing on my background in postmodern dance, my research emerges from a wordless, haptic and kinesthetic curiosity in images. This was certainly the case for this project, who's images I found fascinating long before I could articulate just why. In-process performance sharings, essay revisions and peer reviews populate these cycles.

The use of lecture performance in artistic research is well documented (Hubner, Cerezo, Rainer). Finnish artistic research professor Jan Kaila once remarked that the lecture performance is a natural outcome of artistic research[4]. The frame of lecture performance has a fluidity through which I've been able to incorporate my historical research, essays and conference presentations into artworks, while retaining both the poetic and spacious feeling I wish for my performances and the intellectual labor of my research.

This project is the second of three performances created in the context of my doctoral artistic research into embodied and postcolonial aspects of memory at the University of Arts Helsinki Theatre Academy. Like the larger material of my doctorate, this project is drawn from a large and untapped personal archive of still and moving images made in Egypt from 2007 to 2013. I acquired these specific images from my mother in Cairo in 2009.

Readings

Reflecting on the implications of photography surrounding the decolonial moment of *Gamaayat el Mara'a* in Africa (in the early to mid 1960's), the writing of contemporary African American and Arab intellectuals on photographic practice helped me better understand the ways in which personal photographic archives have been employed throughout the inception of (accessible) photography by people of color. Display of family life and the curation of personal archives within (and beyond) the home has been used as an intervention against otherwise prevalent degrading and stereotypical images of one's own people. I am grateful to Deborah Willis' anthology *Picturing Us*, and Nicole Fleetwoods' *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness* for broadening my understanding of the performative aspect of this practice in the U.S. Writings by Jalal Toufic, Walid Raad, and the work of the Arab Image

[3] See Khalil, Rania. (2016) "Palestinian Wildlife: embodiment in images and critical abstraction" *Journal for Artistic Research*, issue 10.

[4] Author in conversation with Jan Kaila, Helsinki, February 2012.

Foundation contextualized this practice in the Middle East, among its colonized and formerly colonized peoples.

As the daughter of Egyptian immigrants to the United States, I wish to acknowledge the ways in which my understanding of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, U.S. imperialism, settler colonialism, and subsequent civil rights movements have informed my understanding of colonial struggle in Africa and the Middle East, however disparate these struggles have been (or seem). Parallels between the simultaneous African and the Middle Eastern independence movements, and black led civil rights movements in the United States in the nineteen sixties are beyond the scope of this essay – as are the ways in which Pan-African movements in Africa and the United States in the early half of the twentieth century influenced one another.[5] Yet these parallels, and specifically the work of third world feminists and their diaspora in the U.S.[6] on these intersecting issues, speaks to why I've found writing by African American feminists so vital to this project. Writing by queer black women, with its experiential clarity about the intersections of oppression (such as that of activist-poet June Jordan, working on Harlem and Palestine) has been a model for me to understand the feminist, socialist, decolonial activism that my grandmother was involved in. North African feminist and postcolonial histories of the Middle East, particularly Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, and Franz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* (despite Fanon's perhaps uncritical celebration of the veil and overly optimistic perspective on the triumph of the Algerian resistance/end to colonialism) helped me to contextualize this project with perspectives from the continent.

[5] See Esedebe (1982).

[6] Of her own work as a pioneer of intersectionality, Angela Davis (2016) writes: 'I see my work as reflecting not an individual analysis, but rather a sense within movements and collectives that it was not possible to separate issues of race from issues of class and issues of gender [- -] I do think it is important to acknowledge an organization which existed in New York in the late sixties and seventies called the Third World Women's Alliance. That organization published a newsletter entitled *Triple Jeopardy*. Triple jeopardy was racism, sexism and imperialism. Of course, imperialism reflected an international awareness of class issues.' She continues, 'I think it's important to prevent the term 'intersectionality' from erasing essential histories of activism. There were those of us who by virtue of our experience, not so much by virtue of academic analyses, recognized that we had to figure out a way to bring these issues together. They weren't separate in our bodies, but also they are separate in terms of struggles.'

Narrative and Narrative Inquiry as Method

In the making of this project, I conducted a series of interviews with my extended family in Cairo. Drawing on Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden's *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and Public* and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, I conducted these informal interviews over tea and sometimes Turkish television soap operas (dubbed into Syrian), listening for patterns in telling, without directions or intervention from me. Drawing on feminist, post-structural and postcolonial research models, I became interested in narrative inquiry as a counter to traditional models performed at experiential distances from their subjects. These encounters and the words generated within them became the textual (raw) material for my performance.

I also learned how narrative inquiry can be used as a method by which to analyze photographs. Quite simply, verbally *describing* a photograph- as one would describe an experience – is a tool I noted in much of Willis' anthology. This process of creating 'thick descriptions' of images became one way for me to understand and interact with my material. When faced with the heaping multitude of choices in the early days of an artistic project, this process gave direction to my interests and desires for the work.

In doing so, I would 'storyboard' texts with images, arranging them not so much to narrate the story of the image on view, but to create juxtapositions and moods. I worked to allow stories and images to reveal a history of collectivity and (fleeting) social justice enacted by third world women. In her essay "Radical Black Women: Making Ourselves Subjects" bell hooks considers the importance of personal writing as critical research:

> Though autobiography or any type of confessional narrative is often devalued in North American letters, this genre has always had a privileged place in African American literary history. As a literature of resistance, confessional narratives by black folks were didactic. More than any other genre of writing, the production of honest confessional narratives by black women who are struggling to be self-actualized and to become radical subjects are needed as guides, as texts which affirm our fellowship with one another [- -] Radical black women need to tell our stories. We cannot document our experience enough.[7]

I believe the significance and history of *Gamayat El Mara'a* is no less urgent today.

[7] hooks (1992) p. 59.

Questions

My larger doctoral research into postcolonial and embodied memory has wondered How to Make Artworks That Are Poetic and Political Without Being Didactic. (At times I have allowed myself to be very didactic, most importantly within the contexts of essays like this.) I began *Gamayat El Mara'a* with another question: How can personal narratives and family photos be employed to challenge western-centric discourse regarding Third world cultures, third world feminism, and Islam in artistic research?

Loss in the archive, losses of history

> [- -] it is important for many postcolonial and exile filmmakers not to attempt to represent their culture in a (mythical) former state of wholeness, for that would be speaking in the language of the colonizers who have untroubled access to these artifacts.
>
> Laura U. Marks[8]

The most significant challenge I faced in making this project was a lack of concrete information about (the specific contexts of) the photographs in my possession. I do know that the photographs detail meetings of *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya* between the years 1960–1965. The images had been found in a small box within an old leather valise on a glass enclosed balcony of my grandparents' home, long after both had passed away. A small house fire had consumed much of their belongings, including several boxes of my grandmother's files and memory objects. Given the remarkable nature of this organization, we wondered how these boxes could have been left so vulnerable in the care of my youngest aunt. Where were newspaper articles and documents telling the story of these images, produced when my mother was a girl? And why was the work of *Gamaayat el Mara'a* so otherwise obscure in Egypt?

In *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Laura U. Marks discusses the work of "the colonized, whose archives are much slimmer"[9]. Marks argues that intercultural artists (of color) are often the last to have access to our own images and histories.

[8] Marks (2000) p. 56.

[9] ibid p. 57.

FIGURE 1: Performance still. Meeting of Pan-African Asian Women's Organization, Egyptian and Thai delegations, Cairo Egypt. Date unknown (estimated 1963), photographer unknown. My great-aunt, Amal Hussein, whom I interviewed for this project, is first on the left. Saneya Riffat, the mother of my mother's close friend Ahmed Riffat is second from left. My grandmother, Aida Hamdi appears fifth from left in black dress and pearls holding handbag. All other persons unknown.

> Many of the films I have discussed [- -] are constructed around the setbacks that block their production – the canceled interviews, the amnesiac interviewees, the censored images, the destruction of real archives. All of the events that prevent the production of images [- -].[10]

Within the confines of former colonial and neo-colonial rule, artists of color are often considered 'suspect' when researching our own histories, a suspicion not always extended to Western institutions and researchers collecting information on similar topics. Where my artistic research project was concerned, I faced what Edward Said once referred to as the absurdity of attempting to conduct archival research in Cairo[11]. The dust, disarray, neglect and general lack of preservation have become a feature of so many aspects of Egyptian cultural artifacts, ancient and modern. A succession of dictatorial military governments (colluding with Western governments) for four decades, has been intent on burying contemporary Egyptian histories of resistance and liberation, underlying this problem of archive and preservation.

[10] ibid. p. 65.

[11] Said (2000) Chapters 30 and 31.

Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya was co-founded by my grandmother and a Guinean colleague in 1960, with headquarters in Cairo, Egypt and Conakry, Guinea. The countries of these headquarters are notable, as they are among the very first countries in Africa to gain independence from colonial rule. The North and Sub-Saharan women of *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya* did not seek to emulate European models, nor to receive validation from European consultants, but instead worked to gather a feminist constituency grounded in issues of the 'third world'. This position departed from that of Egypt's most celebrated and well-known feminist, Hoda Shaarawi (1879–1947)[12] , for whom European feminist models were central.[13] In the spirit of the day, the *Gamaayat* embraced a decolonial philosophy focused on women of East and South, and African socialism. Yet unlike Egypt and the region today, these philosophies and practices were to some extent supported and state sanctioned[14].

During the years I lived in Cairo, 2007–2016, I witnessed an important break in Egypt's succession of dictatorial military governments. The 25 January revolution in 2011, which ended Hosni Mubarak's thirty year 'presidency' offered spaces of collective recollection of earlier revolutionary moments. The 2013 military coup (and counter-revolution) has targeted women activists specifically. President Abdel Fattah el Sisi's government works to erase important histories of resistance, including in the removal of the 2011 Egyptian revolution from all school curriculums in 2015[15]. Those of us who remember the depth and vitality of this opening are often relying on memories and now contraband personal audio-video archives.

[12] Egypt's most famed feminist. Hoda Sharaawi came to the attention of feminists internationally in 1923 for a dramatic performance in which she and two colleagues cast off their veils in Cairo's Ramses train station after returning from a women's conference in Italy. Sharaawi's nationalist, anti-imperialist and pro-Palestinian work, in which she was invested to the time of her death, is often under-emphasized beyond the Middle East.

[13] For a greater account of Hoda Sharaawi and Egyptian feminism in the twentieth century see Sharaawi (1987), Ahmed (1992), and Lanfranchi (2015).

[14] For more information on women's rights and pro-women institutions in the Nasser era see Ahmed (1992).

[15] Raghavan, Sudarasan. 23.4.2016 "In new Egyptian textbooks it's like the revolution didn't happen." *Washington Post.* Last accessed 11.8.2018.

Complicating Facticity in Postcolonial Artistic Research

My mother, Alia Fahim, remembers little of *Gamayat El Mara'a*. She was fourteen years old at the time of the groups' formation, and sixteen years old, when her beloved father died from a heart attack. Moustapha Fahim (Alia's father, Aida's husband) was an architect, who's own feminist mother, Nabuwaya Gazara, was my grandmother Aida's mentor. Nabuwaya was a close friend and confidant of feminist Hoda Sharaawi, and a member of what my mother called Sharaawi's 'group'. The sudden loss of her father however eclipsed any memories my mother might have had about *Gamayat El Mara'a*. What remains are more like memories of memories, fragmented. Stories told to her by my grandmother and great aunts form a tenuous, fleeting oral memory scape.

One way of navigating lack and loss of official information in postcolonial archives is to consider the malleability of 'facts' themselves. Making performances within an artistic research context, I have needed to relearn my right as an artist to veer from the sort of scientific data we associate with 'research'. Writing about the work of the Arab Image Foundation, Jalal Touffic, discusses their use of 'imaginary photographs' and 'screen memories'[16] as included among their vast collection of photographs of eccentric everyday life in the Middle East.

The use of imagination in the service of our projects, is of course to be expected of artists. Yet it can feel a bit more complicated when starting from a place of what is actually 'true' or 'factual'. Making art on the Lebanese civil war, Walid Raad's *Atlas Group* questions the ontology of facts:

> The truth of the documents we archive/ collect does not depend for us on their factual accuracy [- -] We are not concerned with facts if facts are considered to be self-evident objects always already present in the world. Furthermore, we hold that this common-sense definition of facts, this theoretical primacy of facts, must be challenged. Facts have to be treated as processes. One of the questions we find ourselves asking is: How do we approach facts not in their crude facticity but through the complicated mediums by which facts acquire their immediacy?[17]

Making the case for 'fiction', imagination, imaginary photos, is a necessary strategy in postcolonial artistic research for several reasons. First, where colonialism and the institution of slavery tragically interrupted whatever futures

[16] Touffic (2004) p. 4.

[17] The Atlas Group (2003) p. 179.

we and our ancestors may have otherwise forged for ourselves, it is imperative that we use our imaginations not only to create different futures, yet also different pasts. Second, where access to archives, persons and resources are complicated by the researchers' ethnicity – including and especially within our native countries, the imagination becomes a tool to compensate for these prohibitions. Third, where dominant cultures deny or dismiss our realities- from our daily to historical struggles – it is our duty to question, and seek alternatives to its claims to truth as well.

In the end, I chose not to create new facts for this project, yet to rather to highlight loss in the archive itself. I make clear the lack of date, location, photographer – all the things which discursively lend 'authority' to images. My insistence that these images be considered extant in the face of such lack, befits postcolonial artistic research.

Non-iconicity and the unspectacular image

At this point I'd like to shift gears and discuss a concept which has guided my thinking in the making of this project. In her book *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness* Nicole Fleetwood outlines differences between spectacular and everyday images. She argues that iconic images, with their loaded signifiers, have performed a disservice to black activist histories by reducing their complexity to a visual shorthand. This reduction then stands in for information, or lack thereof, on the subject at hand.

In Deborah Willis' *Picturing Us*, black power icon Angela Davis writes about a well-known photograph of herself, which she argues, reduces not only her revolutionary struggle, but that of an entire movement, to an 'Afro' [hairstyle]. Quoting John Berger's *On Looking* she writes: "Particularly in relation to African American historical images, we need to find ways of incorporating them into 'social and political memory', instead of using [them] as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of memory."

Expanding Leigh Raiford's concept of the 'hyper icon' Fleetwood writes,

> [- -] it [the icon] can be transplanted to new arenas that both displace its historicity and abstract certain values, feelings, or ideas associated with its historical context to new audiences and settings. Its specificity is now an abstraction that can circulate throughout public culture, carrying both the weight of historical narrative and a decontextualized vague strain of its pastness.[18]

[18] Fleetwood (2011) p. 36.

FIGURE 2: Iconic Image (public commons, found on wikipedia). Caption reads: Samia Lakhdari, Zohra Dif, Djamila Bouhired, Hassiba Bent-Bouali. Photographer unknown, circa 1956.

Non-iconic images on the other hand are, "an aesthetic that resists singularity and completeness in narrative; one that exposes the limitations of its framing and the temporality and specificity of the moment documented. A non-iconic image cannot stand in for historical process [- -]"[19].

I came to consider Fleetwood's thoughts on iconicity in relation to my choices of images for the performance. In early performances of *Gamayaat el Mara'a* I'd juxtaposed an 'iconic' image of the Algerian resistance leader Djamilla Bouhired with two images from our family archive. Born in 1935, Bouhired became a *cause celebre* after being sentenced to death by the French for smuggling weapons to the resistance under her veil in the Algerian war of Independence (1954–1962). She is the subject of countless documentaries and feature films including *Jamila the Algerian* (1958) by Youssef Chahine and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) by Gillo Pontecorvo.

In the iconic image I am referring to, widely available on the internet, Bouhired and three young women stand side by side in a row. Each playfully point a weapon toward the camera. Bouhired holds a grenade. Two of the women are laughing. The photograph contrasts the contemporary Western dress of the four dark haired young women with their weapons.

[19] ibid, p. 64.

FIGURE 3: Meeting of Pan-African Asian Women's Organization with guest Djamila Bouhired, Cairo Egypt. Date unknown (estimated 1962), photographer unknown. Djamila Bouhired is seated center right in plaid dress, holding flowers. My grandmother Aida Hamdi stands behind her, wearing black, smiling. All other persons unknown.

FIGURE 4: Unused collage experiment. Djamilla Bouhired visiting a girls high school in Cairo with iconic image of herself in the background. Artist, Rania Khalil. Photographer unknown, date unknown (estimated 1962). Aida Hamdi is seated, top row, first from left, Djamila Bouhired is seated, third from left. All other persons unknown.

Images of Bouhired within *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya* convey a very different feeling. Bouhired, tortured by the French *pied a noir* some years before, appears placid and very gentle. Her face and the dark circles which surround her eyes, bespeak a tiredness, if not worldliness. In her plaid dress at twenty seven years of age, Bouhired appears very young.

In the second photo Bouhired appears as a guest of the *Gamayaat*, holding a bouquet of flowers, surrounded by women. In a third image, she sits smiling with three school girls, at the high school my grandmother was the principal of[20]. Here we see the celebrated activist in a casual teaching setting. Bouhired's humanity and vulnerability, erased by colonialism and iconicity, is restored in these non-iconic images. In early experiments with these images, I place the 'iconic' image of Bouhired and her group of women with weapons in a small frame in the backdrop of the image of Bouhired's visit to the girls at school.

Images in the Service of Colonial Fantasy, Colonial Feminism

Of Bouhired's Algeria a generation before, the book *The Colonial Harem* by Malek Alloula presents 'erotic' images for postcards from a French photography studio in Algiers, created in the early twentieth century. Algerian women and girls are presented in contrived poses. Many wear head or face veils with their breasts exposed and perform mundane tasks like drinking tea, carrying jugs on their shoulders, speaking (topless) with male neighbors through barred windows. One image entitled *SCENES et TYPES – Femme Arabe avec le Yachmak*[21] (Arabian woman with Yachmak) depicts a woman in full burka with only her dark eyes and bare breasts in view. She stares flatly into the camera. One such postcard depicts a young Algerian woman leaning against an iron gated window. Her dark face is serious and unsmiling as she holds a hand on one hip, a tambourine overhead with the other, a veil on her head, her shirt open and breasts exposed. A note on this postcard, written in French, reads: "I am sending you a package to be picked up at the railway station. The babies are doing well; they have just taken a walk by the beach. I shall write you shortly at greater length. Warm kisses to all of you. Martha"[22]

[20] My grandmother had begun her career as a teacher, and then principal in a French high school. Prior to the 1952 revolution, there were few Egyptian schools. My mother told me that my grandmother always said that under colonialism "the French wanted to make you French, yet the British wanted to humiliate you and teach you that you are inferior". My mother tells of an image from her childhood: my grandmother sitting at a large table, surrounded by books in Arabic, determined to become as learned in Arabic as she was in French.

[21] Alloula (1986) p. 126.

[22] ibid. p. 26.

Engaging with these images, I wondered about power and the paid relationships between photographer and subjects, and the ways in which patriarchal power is reproduced in colonial power. I wondered about the subjects of these portraits, some visibly melancholy, as in the image upon whose borders Martha wrote her note, others less obviously so. I wondered what subjects in such circumstances (open knowledge of posing for these portraits would have alienated them from society) might believe possible for themselves, and how the frame of anthropological subject impacts one's own self-image. I think about combinations of personal and political motivations for these images by those who create and consume them, of the distances both pornography and propaganda can create between subjects and viewers. I think of the relativity of the term 'woman', and the distances between the French Martha and this unnamed Algerian girl.

Colonial Feminism

In *Women, Gender and Islam* Leila Ahmed discusses the ways in which the view of Arab women as 'oppressed' (and Arab men, by proxy, brutal) has been garnered to justify military acts of 'liberation' by the West. This 'freeing' of the veiled woman has taken the form of colonial occupation by the French of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, and Egypt; of Palestine and Egypt by the British; and more recently of Palestine by Israel and Iraq and Afghanistan, by the United States[23]. Ahmed refers to 'colonial feminism' as a rhetoric on the rights of women, often declared by men, which may or may not be applied to women in their European contexts[24]. This practice declares Western cultural normative of 'freedom' universal for all peoples, punishing non-Western religious observance[25] , and laying the infrastructure of oppression for women and men of color on their own soil and abroad.

[23] In *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* by Jack Shaheen discusses the interlocking of negative images of Arabs in Hollywood with American political projects in the Middle East. His list of defining military endeavors shaping media are: U.S. support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine (1948, 1967 to the present); the U.S. oil embargo (1973–1974); the Iranian hostage crisis (1979–1981), the Persian Gulf War (1990–1991) and the Afghan and Iraq wars (2001, 2003 to the present). Shaheen argues that the U.S. has endured public support for these wars and retaliation by dehumanizing peoples Middle Easterners in ways that support antipathy, for their struggles and or destruction.

[24] Of this hypocrisy Ahmed cites that Lord Cromer, the famed and brutal colonial consul-general in Egypt was 'this champion of the unveiling of Egyptian women was, in England founding member and sometimes president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage'. Ahmed (1992) p. 153.

[25] A contemporary example can be found in the case of the French police officers who forced a veiled woman to remove her clothes and veil while sitting on the beach with her family in Nice in 2016. The officers did not ask the woman to leave the beach nor escort her away, yet rather chose to stage a public violation and humiliation. Quinn (2016).

Writing about the Algerian war of independence, Franz Fanon discusses modes of viewing Arab women central to this project: "[For the European man] unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure [- -] The European faced with the Algerian woman wants to see. He reacts in an aggressive way before this limitation of his perception. Frustration and aggressiveness, here too, evolve apace."[26]

Where colonial power seeks to strip the woman, and Eastern patriarchy to cover her, the dignity of Algerian women, and Eastern women in general, was for the women of the *Gamaayat*, something different entirely.

Knowledge and lived experience of this occupying 'feminism' would have formed a backdrop to the life and times of the activist women of *Gamaayat el Mara'a Africaya Asiawaya*. The European powers who colonized their countries (in who's trace my grandmother and her Guinean colleague were left to speak French with one another) viewed African cultures, North and sub-Saharan, as fields for anthropological inquiry. Fantasies related to the Harem, the veil and sexual licentiousness of the ethnic Other, marked the territory my grandmother and her North African contemporaries occupied in the Colonial imagination.

Imaginary photographs from my archive

Conducting artistic research with these photographs has entailed a series (of not yet complete) experiments. Some fall into the realm of imaginary photographs for the ways in which I have visually manipulated them, and others for the ways in which they exist as photos only within my imagination. Of the first category, the aforementioned photograph of Bouhired's visit to the high school where my grandmother taught (figure 4), with the image of her and her comrades as a small photo on the wall, was for me an imaginary photograph of a space which does not exist: an average school for girls, where images of revolutionary women are as commonplace for display as portraits of the president or founding fathers.

The second concerns a story, for which no image exists. When my grandfather died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of fifty one, my grandmother was forty seven years old and the mother of five children. Women travelled from near and far to gather around her in mourning. One of these women was her close friend and co-founder of the Pan-African Asian women's rights organization. Her husband was the Guinean ambassador to Egypt. She arrived by chauffeured car, entered the apartment and shed her long overcoat. Beneath her woolen coat, she wore a sheer white dress, revealing her dark bare skin

[26] Fanon (1965) pp. 43–44.

FIGURE 5: Meeting of Pan-African Asian Women's Organization, Conakry and Cairo delegations. Date and location unknown (estimated 1960), photographer unknown.

FIGURE 6: Pan-African Asian Women's Organization, Conakry and Cairo delegations in street, Guinean woman with hand on hip, as blond haired children look on. Date and location unknown (estimated Germany 1960), photographer unknown.

FIGURE 7: Image detail. My Grandparents Playing Cards, Alexandria Egypt, 1958.
My grandfather Moustapha Fahim appears in the circle top left, my grandmother appears bottom left, back to camera. My mother said: "My parents were very relaxed people. They always talked about politics while playing cards".

underneath. Her hair was spiked and stood on end. Out of sincere feeling for my grandmother, she had arrived in the traditional appearance of mourning in her culture. This gesture however proved scandalous for the conservative Egyptian women in attendance who began to giggle. Admonishing them with a glance, my grandmother crossed the room and held her friend in warm embrace.

Since my youth, my mother has told me this story many times. I have imagined this woman, tall and dark and elegant in her translucent cloth. I look for her in photographs of the *Gamayaat*, yet do not know who she is. This story is an 'imaginary photograph' for me. I share it over illegible images in my performance.

Conclusion

By their personal and subjective nature, and their ability to complicate what official discourse makes into 'fact', archival family photos and narratives can be used to challenge western-centric discourse on third world cultures, third world feminism, gender and Islam in artistic research. The non-spectacularity

and specificity of family photographs challenge the ways in which iconic images work render their subjects, and the broader activist movements they were involved in, abstract and invisible. In making this performance, I re-member a (nearly) lost feminist history in my family and country of origin. In so doing, I aim to re-invoke the power of this socialist, Pan-African and Asian decolonizing moment into a present which urgently requires radical third world feminist (histories of) resistance.

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