

basis of nation and nation-state building, Karaca subverts the notion that culture is a byproduct of the times. Rather, culture produces and furthers the problems of national frameworks. As such, the book places culture on equal footing with the frameworks that produce it and, in turn, it reproduces. This is perhaps best exemplified in the book's final chapter, "Instead of a Conclusion," that treats the 2005 Berlin exhibition at the Martin-Gropius-Bau organized by Christopher Tannert of Künstlerhaus Bethanien, and his cocurator Peter Lang, *Urban Realities—Focus Istanbul*, which presented disparities of support for the artists included in the exhibition, as artists from Turkey were not financially or technically supported while artists from outside of Turkey were. Equally problematic, the exhibition's clichés about the East and the West offered culturalist sentiments, which viewed cultural production from Turkey as an opportunity to confirm perceived notions of Turkish culture, rather than as aesthetic and cultural works of specific and layered merit. Tannert and Lang tried to confront the issue by including the letter of complaint that the artist wrote alongside his response to them in the exhibition catalog, as well as a panel discussion. However, these discussions did not yield a resolution and this exhibition became a cautionary tale for both sides, exposing the perils of such frameworks in the absence of an established shared language.

The title of Karaca's book points to links that are often shied away from between art and state violence, as well as a non-dichotomous reading of Turkey and Germany, highlighting concept- and method-driven connections that transcend borders, national and otherwise. The "asymmetry of perception" that she refers to in relation to the "slippage between culture as aesthetics of production and culture as demarcating communal difference" (p. 211) can indeed be considered a proposal for a method with which we can begin to step out of (national) frames. Cultural production produces and reproduces asymmetries of perception that cannot be made symmetric as these perceptions are deeply rooted in histories of violence. Karaca proposes a method of considering artworks alongside the very concepts and ideas they serve, thus unraveling their relationship to reveal reciprocity rather than causality. This replicable method can be utilized to consider other contexts and modes of cultural production that afford a specific and rigorous interpretation.

Karaca's book is a must-read for cultural practitioners from Turkey and Germany as well as anyone who is seeking to comprehend the dynamics in and through which art is produced. Her precise analysis of the language used around looking at and exhibiting art illuminates the shortcomings of what we considered to be shared languages, while her incisive examination of specific works anchors the study in the production of culture.

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Reading Marie al-Khazen's Photographs: Gender, Photography, Mandate Lebanon. Yasmine Nachabe Taan (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021). Pp. 185, 53 illustrations. \$28.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781788314800

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Since the 1986 publication in English translation of Malek Alloula's seminal book *The Colonial Harem*, a growing cadre of visual studies scholars have critically examined images of Middle Eastern women in photography and painting, and have elaborated the ways European and, occasionally, local artists eroticized, exoticized, and objectified them, in ways both sexist



and demeaning. And yet, surprisingly little scholarship has been devoted to the role of Middle Eastern women as artists and agents of representation. This glaring oversight is particularly conspicuous in scholarship on the history of photography in the Middle East, a neglect that has too often been assumed by art historians to arise from an absence of female photographers in the region during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Yasmine Nachabe Taan's *Reading Marie al-Khazen's Photographs: Gender, Photography, Mandate Lebanon* is a welcome effort to dislodge this misconception, while filling the critical lacuna in art historical scholarship regarding Middle Eastern women photographers. Consider al-Khazen, who in 1899 was born into a prominent Maronite family that had ruled the northeastern region of Keserwan in Lebanon since the mid-sixteenth century. Given her wealthy background, and having been educated at the Collège de la Sainte Famille Française, al-Khazen was able to travel extensively and cultivate a wide range of pursuits, including photography. Ahead of her time according to her family, she never married and lived an independent life that furnished her with ample time to photograph her relatives, as well as the sharecroppers and peasants who worked their land. Through interviews with the photographer's family members and archival research conducted at the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, where Mohsen Yammine's collection of al-Khazen's photographs (mostly of women) is housed, Nachabe Taan thoughtfully "undertakes a recovery effort by writing about forgotten and unnoticed early female photographers" (p. 131). The work of an avid amateur photographer, the eclectic images in the Yammine collection include intriguing photographs of women cross-dressing as men, visits to archaeological and historical sites, family gatherings, and humorous playacting scenes. The varied nature of the collection speaks at once to al-Khazen's interest in photography as a luxury pastime and to her desire for experimentation as an amateur photographer.

Located at the intersection of art history and gender studies, and drawing on a wide range of theoretical constructs and historical works, Nachabe Taan's book aims to understand what it means for women to be at once the subjects and objects of photographic representation during the French Mandate period in Lebanon. The author considers how we can "tell if a photograph was taken by a woman" and whether this knowledge would "change the framing of the photograph" or "allow the viewer to see a different perspective" (p. 7). While answers to these questions remain tentative in the book, Nachabe Taan does insist that al-Khazen's photographs serve as documentary evidence upon which to compose a social narrative of gender politics in Mandate Lebanon. Specifically, Nachabe Taan endows this amateur photographer with the agency "to place herself as a modern subject" (p. 8). Because al-Khazen's photographs are undated and untitled, Nachabe Taan attempts to extract meaning from their content by grouping them according to subject, and then analyzing them using a disparate array of conceptual frameworks, ranging from the theoretical insights of Roland Barthes, Alan Sekula, and Susan Sontag to historical accounts of gender and modernity in the Middle East by Suad Joseph, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Beth Baron. Deploying a broadly feminist approach, Nachabe Taan makes a valuable contribution to "the limited stories about *Al-Maraa al-Jadidah* or the New Women by examining the social and cultural content in al-Khazen's photographs" (p. 130).

While admirably well-researched, this book unfortunately falls short of offering a rigorous art historical analysis of al-Khazen's photography. Too often, Nachabe Taan sets up "straw man" cases against which she distinguishes the photographer's images as anti-orientalist, oppositional, and feminist. For example, in Chapter 2, Nachabe Taan reads al-Khazen's Kodak photographs of her visit to Baalbek against Girault de Prangey's 1843–44 daguerreotypes of the historical site to argue that al-Khazen's amateur photography "destabilizes the conventions of the colonial gaze, such as de Prangey's, in ways that afford the possibility for the viewer to rethink notions of affect, identity, and locality" (p. 22). Setting aside the obvious divergences between such vastly different visual genres, the comparison of early European expeditionary photography with the amateur photographs of a family trip to a local historical site founders on simple anachronism. A better comparison

might be between al-Khazen's images and European touristic photographs of the Middle East during the same period, which would have revealed a more mimetic relationship between her images and those of Western travelers in the region. Similarly, in Chapter 6, Nachabe Taan reads a series of al-Khazen's snapshots of social gatherings against Ottoman cartes de visite featuring high-ranking officials in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt to "articulate an ideology of the new woman as imprinted onto a visual narrative of urbanization and progress" (p. 104). Overlooking the completely different functions of these vastly different forms of iconography, one public and mass-produced and the other private and intended as single prints, Nachabe Taan concludes her discussion with the hardly novel observation that women in al-Khazen's photographs "stand as symbols of progress on the one hand, and of continuity with the cultural past on the other" (p. 116).

Moreover, instead of "reading" al-Khazen's images as she sets out to do, Nachabe Taan ends up reading *into* them the theoretical and historical insights of an array of contemporary critics. This is most evident in Chapter 4, where Nachabe Taan considers the predicament of social hierarchy in al-Khazen's photographs. Here, rather than attending to how the photographer's iconographic choices perpetuate bourgeois norms of masculinity and femininity, Nachabe Taan summons, with exceedingly broad strokes, Suad Joseph's historical discussion of patriarchy in the Middle East, concluding that al-Khazen's images "at times empowered [women] and at times subordinated them" (p. 69). Finally, Nachabe Taan's readings sometimes rest on *over-readings* of certain "glitches," or amateurish mistakes, suggesting that these emanate from the photographer's intentional attempts to endow her images with aesthetic qualities or political messages (p. 119). This is the case, for example, with Nachabe Taan's claim that the appearance of the photographer's shadow in three images taken of ordinary outdoor family gatherings was an intentional "aesthetic and a political decision" made not only to claim authorship of representation but also to defy "the idea of women being tied to their place as bearer of the gaze" (pp. 63, 64). In the same vein, Nachabe Taan declares a blurry, double-exposed photograph of small children to be an artistic manipulation that "forces a double reading upon the viewer" (p. 120). The author does not provide any evidence to support her claim that the presence of the photographer's shadow or the double exposure was an intentional act of artistic experimentation. Indeed, in light of Nachabe Taan's own observation that "Glitches often occur in amateur photographs," it appears that the superimposed negative might have been caused accidentally by al-Khazen's double-clicking the shutter-release button, just as she may very well have not realized that the bright sunlight behind her while she was photographing a family gathering would create her shadow in the image (p. 119).

These hesitations aside, Nachabe Taan is to be commended for endeavoring to shed light on al-Khazen's practice of amateur photography—understood both as a tool of documentation and as a feminist project—as well as for the effort to understand the role of women in photography and as social agents who shaped Lebanon's social and political history. At times the book's unsubstantiated claims and heavy-handed projection into the images cast doubt on the conclusions drawn from this unquestionably worthy undertaking. Still, there is much to be commended here, and certainly more than enough to expect that this worthy project "will stimulate curiosity about other women's photographic archives and will pave the way to writings on women photographers and women's accounts in photography that will in turn contribute to scholarship in gender and visual culture" (p. 130).

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