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IDENTITIES IN FLUX: A CARTOGRAPHY OF FEMINIST ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A Master's Thesis

by

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Ankara

June 2023

To my mother,
whose artistic journey continues to inspire me.

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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

OĞUZ KAAN KAYIR

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ANKARA

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IDENTITIES IN FLUX: A CARTOGRAPHY OF FEMINIST ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST
By Oğuz Kaan Kayır

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITIES IN FLUX:
A CARTOGRAPHY OF FEMINIST ARTISTIC
PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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M.A. in Media and Visual Studies
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June 2023

This thesis explores the fluid and relational forms of body and subjectivity in the feminist contemporary art practice of selected Middle Eastern women artists – Sama Alshaibi, Nezaket Ekici, Mona Hatoum, Amal Kenawy, Shirin Neshat, and Lamia Joreige. As interdisciplinary practitioners whose works traverse between different media such as film, video, performance, and installation, these women's artistic praxes render a mobile, changeable, and interconnected account of identity via a complex and dynamic interplay between the dualisms of self/other, mind/body, nature/culture, East/West, and human/nonhuman. Since these artists engage in non-fixed and non-dualistic forms of female existence, this thesis employs Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming and the Deleuzian-inflected new materialist feminisms of Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, and Stacy Alaimo as its theoretical scope. Interweaving the process-oriented, durational, and relational vocabulary of the notion of becoming with Braidotti's nomadism, Grosz's corporeality, and Alaimo's transcorporeality, this study discusses the ways in which these Middle Eastern women artists envisage female subjectivity

as an open-ended, plural, and transitory composition that is always on the move, through its relational bonds and linkages with divergent bodies, entities, and geographies. Influenced by the cartographic potential of the theories in question, this thesis concludes by presenting a cartographic imagination of the selected artistic canon as a supplementary method for understanding the malleability and rhizomatic interconnectivity of feminist contemporary art in the Middle East.

Keywords: Identity, body, Middle East, interdisciplinary visual arts, Deleuze and Guattari, new materialist feminisms, cartography.

ÖZET

AKIŞKAN KİMLİKLER:
ORTA DOĞU'DAKİ FEMİNİST SANAT
PRATİĞİNİN BİR KARTOGRAFİSİ

Kayır, Oğuz Kaan
Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar
Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Burcu Baykan

Haziran 2023

Bu tez, Sama Alshaibi, Nezaket Ekici, Mona Hatoum, Amal Kenawy, Shirin Neshat ve Lamia Joreige gibi altı Orta Doğulu kadın sanatçının işlerini yakından inceleyerek feminist çağdaş sanat pratiğindeki akışkan ve ilişkisel beden ve kimlik biçimlerini araştırıyor. Çalışmaları film, video, performans ve enstalasyon gibi farklı medyalar arasında gidip gelen bu disiplinlerarası kadın sanatçıların pratikleri, benlik/öteki, zihin/beden, doğa/kültür, Doğu/Batı ve insan/insan-olmayan gibi ikilemlerin arasındaki karmaşık ve dinamik etkileşim aracılığıyla kimliğin hareketli, değişken ve bağlantılı bir açıklamasını sunuyor. Bu kadın sanatçılar dişil varoluşun akışkan ve ikilemlerin ötesindeki biçimleriyle meşgul olduklarından, bu tez teorik kapsamı olarak Gilles Deleuze ve Felix Guattari'nin oluş ontolojisinin yanı sıra Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz ve Stacy Alaimo'nun Deleuze'den etkilenmiş yeni materyalist ve feminist teorilerini odak noktasını alıyor. Oluş kavramının süreç odaklı ve ilişkisel söz dağarcığını Braidotti'nin "göçebelik", Grosz'un "bedensellik" ve Alaimo'nun "bedenötesi" kavramlarıyla iç içe geçiren bu çalışma, söz konusu Orta Doğulu sanatçıların kadın kimliğini

içinde bulundukları coğrafyalar kapsamında nasıl da açık uçlu, devimsel ve muhtelif bir kavram olarak tasavvur ettiğini öne sürüyor. İrdelediği felsefi teorilerin kartografik potansiyelinden etkilenen bu tez, Orta Doğu'daki feminist çağdaş sanatın hem işlenebilir oluşunu hem de rizomatik bir şekilde birbirine bağlılığını göstermek için seçilen sanatsal külliyatın bir kartografisini sunarak sona eriyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, beden, Orta Doğu, disiplinlerarası görsel sanat, Deleuze ve Guattari, yeni materyalist feminizm, kartografi.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

1.1 Aims and Objectives

Identity has long been conceived as a stable, inert, and anchored phenomenon in the Western philosophical tradition which tends to designate human subjects according to a fixed and representational image of thought. Often thought in parallel with the figure of the *man* as the measure of all things and the man as the central locus by which a variety of *others* are defined, this conceptualization of identity has been subjected to criticism on all fronts for its problematic centralization of one particular form of being – a human who happens to be male, White, straight, able-bodied, master of nature. Contesting these age-old accounts of identity in Western thought, philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, for instance, developed a new and more dynamic image of thought, radically rethinking the ontological distinctions and the outward hierarchies pervading them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Deleuze, 1995). Embracing fluidity instead of fixity, and temporality rather than permanency, what these novel engagements

with subjectivity present are a new mode of existence: one that reworks the conception of identity as a non-identitarian and non-representational process, in a ceaseless flux[1].

Swept away by these fluid contemplations on identities, especially by Deleuze and Guattari, this thesis scrutinizes how Middle Eastern women artists conceptualize the female body and subjectivity in a flowing, transitory, and relational state from a feminist framework. Since the notion of fluidity, as Elizabeth Stephens contends, "always remains a potentiality whose outcome, by its very nature, can never be determined in advance" (2014, p. 199), it opens up a conducive vantage point to study the contemporary art of Middle Eastern women artists: women who, according to Kelly Baum, practice "deterritorialization of identity in the wake of feminism" (2012, p. 36). Hence, closely exploring the selected works from Sama Alshaibi, Nezaket Ekici, Mona Hatoum, Amal Kenawy, Shirin Neshat, and Lamia Joreige—all of whom envision female identity as a non-sedentary, interconnected, and mutating self—this study discusses the various ways these women artists capture a transient mode of female existence that establishes relational associations with divergent bodies, entities, and geographies.

Bringing together the work of Middle Eastern women around the concept of a fluid and changing identity, what this thesis aims to accomplish is twofold. First, it wishes to provide a counter account of the conventional and male-centric

[1] The notions of identity and subjectivity are not being used interchangeably. Rather, I take identity as a fixed construct that stables entities in a sedentary position and use it to refer when artists are thwarting such "fixed states". Whereas subjectivity refers to the self as caught up in a multitude of dynamic fluxes that avoid immobilization or identification and is used as such.

subjectivity predicated on stability and unchangeability via theorizing women's ever-changing, volatile, and open-ended subjectivities-in-process. Instead of the rigidly demarcated boundaries or ontological categories of the former account, I discuss the ways in which these women artists continuously oscillate between different domains and orders, underscoring how their identities are shifting, mutable, and malleable. Secondly, this thesis hopes to contribute to the growing literature on Middle Eastern women's contemporary art practice, with special interest to foster critical, theoretical, and philosophical frameworks that are non-identitarian, non-representational, and immensely fluid – scholarly perspectives that are yet to be associated with many Middle Eastern women artists since a vast majority of the previous research has shown the tendency to keenly reflect on their artistic productions through fixed, identitarian, and representational paradigms.

Furthermore, this thesis shines a light on the interdisciplinary outlook of the feminist contemporary art scene of Middle Eastern women. Whether through exiles, migrations, displacements, or wars that entail their identities to unfold, or the sheer patriarchal order of their geographic milieus, I contend that these women artists render an ever-shifting account of subjectivity whereby one is characterized less in a fixed state of being than in a continual state of change, transformation, or a "becoming-other" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This transitory account of subjectivity, in that sense, is facilitated through the fluid exchange between many different artistic expressions. As interdisciplinary artists whose works traverse between film, video, performance, installation, or animation, these artists engage with female subjectivity through a diverse set of mechanisms,

allowing a dynamic interplay across all registers. Instead of solely operating in the artworks themselves, flowing conceptions of selves, bodies, and other forms of entities leap across the creative media that these women experiment with. Delving more into why these female practitioners are coming together in this thesis, what follows is a contextualization of the feminist and interdisciplinary practices in women's contemporary art, with an emphasis on the selected artists from the Middle Eastern visual culture.

1.2 Situating Feminist Artistic Practice in the Middle East

Artworks by women artists have often been prejudicially categorized as gender-related due to the sole reason of the presupposed gender identity of their creators. Even the redundancy of phrases such as women's art or women artists has been a site of contestation since male artists are neither given their assumed gender identity as an adjective nor are specifically introduced as *male* artists. Probing the reasonings behind such masculinist myths of artistic genius and women's rather paradoxical predicament in claiming themselves as feminist artists, art historian Ahu Antmen indicates that placing an emphasis on sexual difference inevitably suggests a nexus between women's art and "a gender-based mode of production" (2017, p. i). However, by addressing the question of whether artistic productions can be considered "a sphere which we may fully isolate from a component of our life experience that is as fundamental as gender identity" (2017, p. i), Antmen eventually gestures toward a relational dimension operating in the works of women. In a similar vein, rather than injudiciously claiming the selected artistic productions by the Middle Eastern artists in this thesis as feminist just because

they are produced by women, I lean towards an analysis that considers the many sociocultural and political components through which these artworks are created – concerns related to feminism being one of them.

Since this thesis unearths the infinite ways in which fluidity and relationality of female subjectivity linger around the interdisciplinary works of artists in the Middle East, it is likewise crucial to situate and discuss the elusive nature of interdisciplinarity in contemporary visual arts, particularly with regard to its potential alliances with feminism. Amelia Jones, exploring the canon of body art in which artists reenact their racialized, sexualized, or gendered body/self through the means of their fleshy corporeality, states that such radical tendencies in contemporary art explode "the myth of disinterestedness and universality" that permeate the conventional modes of engagement with artistic praxes (1998, p. 5). Although, at first, explaining these body art practices within the frame of live performance art, Jones expands this phenomenon further under the notion of "body-oriented art" in which the technological enhancements enable artists to "deploy multimedia, installation, and photographic technologies" and eschew "live performance altogether" (1998, p. 199). Accentuating how alternative, unconventional, or nonnormative forms of subjectivities emerge from such interdisciplinarity, Jones notes that these body-oriented art practices:

> tend to explore the body/self as technologized, specifically *un*natural, and fundamentally unfixable in identity or subjective/objective meaning in the world: indeed, they articulate the body/self as what some have called "posthuman". This "posthuman" body/self is thoroughly particularized, its gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class and other identifications insistently enunciated within intersubjective structures established by the body-oriented practice (1998, p. 199).

On that account, when considered within the field of body-oriented art, the selected corpus of Middle Eastern artists employ interdisciplinarity as a modus operandi to carve out a materially embedded, in-between, and posthuman form of female existence in the world. Experimenting with film, video, performance, animation, and installation as well as the cross-cutting entanglements between these media, Middle Eastern women artists under scrutiny in this thesis forge alternative ways of inhabiting the world that thwarts the foundational dichotomies of the Western philosophy – self/other, male/female, mind/body, nature/culture, East/West, human/nonhuman, and so forth. Hence, similar to these dualistic formulations that they seek to subvert, the interdisciplinary artistic trajectories of Alshaibi, Ekici, Hatoum, Kenawy, Neshat, and Joreige are culminating in a reference system that radically rethinks the concept of identity as a transient and interconnected phenomenon via a multitude of artistic media. To seek systematic answers and untangle these statements further, in what follows, I streamline the theoretical framework and the methodology chosen for this thesis.

1.3 Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

In order to contextualize its argumentation in a relational, durational, and non-dualistic strand of thought, this thesis employs the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of becoming and the Deleuzian-inflected new materialist feminisms as its critical and theoretical scope. Starting with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) writings on the multifaceted notion of becoming—and its interrelated vocabularies such as body

without organs, assemblage, intermezzo, and rhizome—this study approaches all identities emerging in the selected Middle Eastern women's visual art practice as dynamic and open-ended modes of existence – a state that never reaches a finalized form, completed formula, or a fixed endpoint. Since Deleuze and Guattari's becoming is predicated on a relational and durational process which "suggests that subjects of territorial and despotic social formations understood who they were through networks of relations negotiated in concrete interactions that were directly plugged into the varied flows of specific durations" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 79), this ontological conception draws parallels with the heterogenous, non-dichotomous, as well as the nonfixed modes of subsistence explored by the women artists in this thesis. Regardless of how the structural opposites between human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, or animate and inanimate are seemingly conceived as incontrovertible in Western philosophy, the ontology of becoming affirms in-between states, nonhuman agencies, and transitory accounts of subjectivity, thereby laying the ground for the emergent new materialisms in feminist philosophy.

Aligning with these process-oriented and relational qualities of becoming, new materialist feminisms emerged as a philosophical framework that interrogates "interrelations between technological, biological, environmental, and social processes and human action" (Fernandez, 2019, p. 300). Often following the steps of Deleuze and Guattari, these brand-new ways of conducting feminist inquiry, as Maria Fernandez notes, "reject traditional notions of subjectivity, unilinear models of causation, human mastery over nature and other nonhuman entities and detach intentionality from agency" (2019, p. 300). Illustrating how new

materialist feminisms propose a novel standpoint to evaluate the events, entities, and elements that compose the human and more-than-human world, Marsha Meskimmon also notes that they often indicate "a deeply ethical and political entanglement with/in the world, arguing that forms of thinking/making that advance towards as-yet-unrealised possibilities can only emerge through material intra-actions" (2019, p. 357).

In that respect, in order to comprehend how the female body and subjectivity are reconceived through a flowing and intersected lens in Middle Eastern women's interdisciplinary art practice, this thesis utilizes three foundational thinkers from this Deleuzian-inflected strand of thought: Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity (1994), Elizabeth Grosz's corporeal feminism (1994), and Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeality (2008). While Braidotti's nomadic theory presents a conducive approach to analyzing the oscillating movements between different boundaries and ontological categories performed by Alshaibi and Ekici, Grosz's corporeality comes in handy to explore the work of Hatoum and Kenawy, both of whom treat female corporeality as a site of production and accumulation. Finding relational linkages between human corporeality and the nonhuman environment, Alaimo's transcorporeality also enlightens the works of Neshat and Joreige – artists who demonstrate a multitude of female bodies enmeshed with their social ecologies. Entwining these theoretical concepts with the ontology of becoming, this thesis presents an eclectic framework to apprehend how the aforementioned women artists are interpreting the fluidity and the transitory character of the female body and subjectivity as interconnected with other entities, bodies, and environments.

In the concluding chapter, influenced by the cartographic potential of the theories in question, this thesis offers a cartographic imagination as a supplementary method of analysis, displaying the malleability and rhizomatic interconnectivity of feminist contemporary art in the Middle East. Ruth Watson states that contemporary philosophy "is providing a basis" for a cartographic turn in visual culture, in that, it entails a guiding force "not only in the deconstruction or declassification of old epistemological edifices but in the construction of new methods of working and acting, in relation to each other and to objects and meanings" (2009, p. 303). Following the rhizomatic line of thought envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari and weaving it together with other cartographic concepts such as Simonetta Moro's "poetic cartography" (2022), I thus visualize a poetic and non-hierarchical map that reveals the relationality of feminist contemporary art practice in the Middle East. While this experimental cartographic imagination functions to exhibit the artistic practices explored throughout this thesis, it also serves as a threshold between the current research and an upcoming one that may branch out in the future.

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis has six chapters that are divided according to their thematic concerns. While this chapter introduces the aims, theories, and outlines, the second chapter presents a detailed overview of the theoretical framework and methodology of the study. Carried out in three sections, it explicates the ontology of becoming, new materialist feminisms that are built around becoming, and the cartographic potentials of these theoretical scopes, respectively. The third chapter, *Nomadic*

Visions explores the works of Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici primarily from Braidotti's nomadic philosophy and discusses the ways these artists are swinging between different identities, cultures, and ontological distinctions. *Corporeal Topographies*, as the fourth chapter, looks at the productions of Mona Hatoum and Amal Kenawy through the lens of Grosz's corporeal feminism. Bringing forth how female corporeality is delineated as carnal forces and porous surfaces, this chapter gestures towards a fluid and malleable topography of the body. As the last analysis part, the fifth chapter *Transcorporeal Alliances* focuses on the works of Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige to understand how female bodies are altered by and entangled with the exile or wars that take place in their geographical environments. The sixth and final chapter, concludes this thesis by recapping what has been argued throughout these chapters and offering a cartographic imagination as a bridge between the current research and future studies.

CHAPTER II

New Materialist Feminisms

2.1 Introduction

Consisting of three major sections, this chapter provides a theoretical overview of the new materialist feminisms to be utilized in the upcoming analytical chapters that explore the philosophies of artistic praxis by a selection of Middle Eastern female artists. The first section introduces the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of becoming, which is the preliminary ground of the new materialist and feminist theories that this thesis is theoretically built upon. Presenting Deleuze and Guattari's key concepts and their process-oriented philosophy, this section illustrates the vocabulary that is necessary to understand the in-between, fluid, and non-fixed conceptualizations of identity in women's interdisciplinary art practices in the Middle East.

Second section explores the Deleuzian-inflected new materialist and feminist philosophies of contemporary theorists Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, and Stacy Alaimo since their philosophical concepts resonate with the nomadic, mobile, and non-sedentary processes in Middle Eastern women's art. In this section, new materialist and feminist theory's emphasis on the materiality, corporeality, and

transcorporeality of the female subjectivity and the body is considered as a fertile ground to evaluate and contextualize feminist artistic practice, especially in non-Western contexts. Since the contemporary feminists' impulse to theoretically situate the female subject in a perpetual state of transition aligns with the Middle Eastern women's aesthetics concerns; new materialist feminism proposes a beneficial framework to rethink these new formations of body and subjectivity in visual arts.

Finally, the third section investigates the cartographic potential of new materialist and feminist philosophies to draw an ontological map of power relations that formulate contemporary female subjectivities in Middle Eastern conjunctures. Further expanding Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, alongside Simonetta Moro's Deleuzian-informed poetic cartography; I argue that a non-linear and non-hierarchical cartography of fluid female subjectivities can be philosophically illustrated by closely examining the artistic productions of Middle Eastern women.

2.2 Ontology of Becoming

When speaking about the fluxes and flows of subjectivity in Middle Eastern women's contemporary art practice, the relational and durational ontology of becoming—primarily developed by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987)—introduces a useful conceptual framework. Accordingly, this sub-section studies the vocabulary of their philosophy such as becoming, intermezzo, body without organs, assemblage, and rhizome.

Becoming, for Deleuze and Guattari, "is not an evolution by descent or filiation" (1987, p. 239); it does not gesture towards a fixed, finalized, or sedentary state. Rather, the concept of becoming "is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events" (Stagoll in Parr, 2010, p. 26). Setting the ground for their process-oriented philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari state that:

> Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, "appearing," "being," "equaling," or "producing." (1987, p. 239).

In that matter, it refers to a state of ceaseless mutations in which humans and more-than-human entities go through a range of variations and transformations. Underscoring how this concept employs change as its source of operation, Deleuze and Guattari state that: "Becoming produces nothing other than itself. (...) What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (1987, p. 238). Thus, their mobile, processual, and cross-contaminating conceptualization encapsulates a philosophical account of the contemporary subjectivity that transgresses the conventional dualisms of the Western reason which historically privileged *being* over *becoming*, overemphasizing the centrality and the essence of the static subject. Radically challenging the dichotomous infrastructure of the Western philosophy (Buchanan & Colebrook, 2000), Deleuze and Guattari present an in-between locus that allows for a decentered subjectivity to flourish:

> A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. Becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming

> is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both (1987, p. 293).

This state of in-betweenness, this non-sedentary aspect of becoming, then, "conceptualises human beings within a wider frame of relational ecology and a temporal process of change" (Baykan, 2015, p. 24), hereby opening a critical vantage point to investigate how contemporary subject-formations in women's art come to represent this processual and ontological in-betweenness. For instance, in Chapter 3, the mobile nature of Deleuze-Guattarian becoming will help me unravel the artistic philosophies of Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici — artists who produce work in diaspora by foregrounding the nomadic attributes of Middle Eastern women's subjectivities in the 21st century.

In their endeavors to dismantle the hegemonic Western understanding that deems *Man* as the measure of all things (Colebrook, 2002), as the ground on which dualisms are forged (Braidotti, 2016), Deleuze and Guattari further develop their theory of becoming. Deriving from a more-than-human view, the ontology of becoming affirms the others of man, in that it moves beyond the traditional essentialism of the White, rational, male, and all-knowing human subject to welcome various posthuman and more-than-human subjectivities. Deleuze and Guattari define the man as "the majoritarian par excellence" (1987, p. 292), a molar being that is associated with the normative conceptualizations of identity. Whereas "becomings are molecular" (1987, p. 275), say Deleuze and Guattari: "the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit" (1987, p. 275). The key point of

becoming is to deterritorialize oneself through finding lines of flight from the molar identity and incubate molecular and alternative forms of being in the world: *becomings* that foster "continual unfolding that has no telos and will never reach some final end" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 77).

Albeit efficient on paper to thwart hegemonic binary oppositions and fixed claims of identity, the logistics of how becomings are conceptualized in the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology is perhaps the most contested ground of their work, particularly in feminist criticism (Jardine, 1984; Irigaray, 1985; Grosz, 1994). Deleuze and Guattari state that there can be no becoming-man, since men constitutes "a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority" (1987, p. 291), herewith blocking any potential association with the minoritarian position. Being a majority, for Deleuze and Guattari, is about having a precise power and ability to define oneself as the norm in a given hegemonic structure, such as men do in contemporary patriarchal societies. Whereas "minoritarian" is the becoming itself (1987, p. 291), the ultimate act committed by minoritarian subjects to enable social transformation. In order to have a terminological clearance, Deleuze and Guattari make a useful distinction between the "minoritarian" and "minority":

> It is important not to confuse "minoritarian," as a becoming or process, with a "minority", as an aggregate or a state. Jews, Gypsies, etc., may constitute minorities under certain conditions, but that in itself does not make them becomings. One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized (1987, p. 291).

Consequently, what they argue is that becomings are done via subjects in opposition with the "man-standard" (1987, p. 291), the infinite others of the

canonized male subject in the Western reason. This does not necessarily have to be actual minorities but there's a significant overlap as many minorities take part in the process of becoming-minoritarian and getting deterritorialized from the central point of subjectivity.

Further claiming that "all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman (1987, p. 277), Deleuze and Guattari elucidate that every minoritarian must become-woman since "it is the key to all the other becomings" (1987, p. 277). In other words, as the binary opposite of the man-standard, the woman holds a privileged position in the act of deterritorialization. That's why, even women, along with minoritarians, must first become-woman to lay themselves outside of the hegemonic and normative locus of being, and recognize their sexed identity as a molar entity, as this process ensures "the world is not characterised as a closed totality, but remains what Deleuze calls, an open whole that guarantees transformation, creation and difference" (Olkowski, 2000, p. 103).

Among the feminist theorists whose reception of becoming is critical, Rosi Braidotti argues that "the process of becoming, far from being the dissolution of all identities in a flux where different forms and connections will emerge, may itself be sex-specific, sexually differentiated, and consequently take different forms according to different gendered positions" (1994, p. 121). It's politically dangerous, for Braidotti, to lecture women to sacrifice the only thing they have, "the only agency they possess, in the struggle against discrimination: their femininity" (Martin-Jones & Sutton, 2008, p. 47). Thus, moving with caution and drawing particular attention to feminist concerns regarding the concept of becoming and its multiple variations such as becoming-woman, imperceptible,

animal, or minoritarian; I animate this foundational notion of Deleuze-Guattarian ontology to address how Middle Eastern female artists treat their own subjectivity as a continuum and perpetual state of transformation. Specifically, in Chapter 3, the works of Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici demonstrate how this process-oriented and dichotomy-thwarting account of subjectivities can be instrumentalized in exilic, migratory, or diasporic states; in a constant line of change, where the artist lingers around a minoritarian subjectivity.

Intermezzo is another concept related to the ontology of becoming which comes in handy in the analytical chapters. Conducive to think with the disruptive temporalities of becomings, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of intermezzo refers to a moment in which a particular linearity of events are interrupted, disrupting the fixed positionalities or ontological orders of a given domain. Noting its radical potentialities for a new mode of existence beyond dichotomies, they claim that "the only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). As this conceptualization entails an interval space to inhabit between the ontological categories such as human and nonhuman or man and the machine, it affirms the intermediary spaces of existing. Assembling "even the most discrete forms, milieus and bodies into a dialogue with each other", intermezzos ensure "the construction of mobile, non-binary, heterogeneous, blurred arrangements among seemingly divergent elements and distinct forms of life" (Baykan, 2018, p. 54). Hence, in Chapter 3, Nezaket Ekici's oscillations between distinct boundaries or ontological categories bring forth the notion of intermezzo as a convenient frame of reference.

When it comes to understanding how the materiality of the body is configured, destratified as well as restratified in women's artistic productions in the Middle East, "Body without Organs" emerges as one of the most elusive and yet useful concepts of Deleuze-Guattarian ontology. Abbreviated by Deleuze and Guattari as the BwO, Body without Organs is their attempt to reject any rigid boundaries and definitions of the unitary structure of the body. Rather than alluding to an actual *body* without *organs*, the BwO, for Deleuze and Guattari, opposes "less to organs as such than to the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism" (1987, p. 30). Resisting any fixed, encoded, and biologically essentialist conception of the body, Deleuze and Guattari envisage BwO as a "body populated with multiplicities" (1987, p. 30): it is a "glacial reality where the alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an organism—and also a signification and a subject—occur (1987, p. 159). As the space that dismantles conjugated organisms, BwO alludes to "the potential source of qualitative transformations, continual metamorphoses and processual becomings, rather than an actualised, quantified and finalised state" (Baykan, 2020, p. 160). Consisting of "speeds" and "intensities" (Kennedy, 2000, p. 98), it is the process of experimentation in which the body enters a state of perpetual change and is transformed "into a means of exploration, a veritable production, and a body without organs" (Harper, 2012, p. 66).

Referring to the radical potentialities of the Body without Organs to engineer a non-hegemonic type of female subjectivity, Tamsin Lorraine states that BwO is "imageless and organless because any image of the body and any configuration of the body into organs presupposes a specific configuration of desiring-

machines" (1999, p. 121), and the BwO strictly opposes organizations structured in such fashion. In a similar vein, for Elizabeth Grosz, BwO has feminist resonances as she explicates that Deleuze and Guattari attempt to "denaturalize human bodies and to place them in direct relations with the flows or particles of other bodies or things" (1994, p. 168), thereby opening a realm in which the patriarchally infused discernments of the body as a negating realm can be surpassed. Defining BwO as "a life of movement and rest, speed and slowness in relation to the dimensions it cuts across" (2000, p. 107), Dorothea Olkowski further explicates that the epitome of this kind of theory is "the assemblage of a multiplicity of sexual forces, a multiplicity of behaviours for all the becomings that pass between the powerful, fixed bodies" (2000, p. 107). In Olkowski's account, Deleuzian becomings render "a logic and language of fluidity" by which feminists can reaffirm "the uteral, the vulvar, the clitoral, the vaginal, the placental, or woman's luminous body itself" as a site of knowledge (2000, p. 107).

Hence, for feminist appropriations in which one can "engage in a continuous process toward becoming a Body without Organs and transgress the boundaries of molar femininity" (Markula, 2006, p. 25), BwO offers a conceptual framework to conceive female bodies as sites of multiple anchoring points – as a locus of various becomings and metamorphoses that foreground female corporeality as an affirmative surface. In that regard, given the treatment of the female body as a disorganized stratum and as an affective space in Mona Hatoum and Amal Kenawy's performance and video projects, Chapter 4 approaches these artistic works within the concept of BwO, as they rework the core principles of this dynamic, ever-changing, and rupturing process.

Considering the multiplicities of subjects, environments, and spaces in the visual practices by the selected Middle Eastern artists, Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the assemblage offers a space for the in-depth analysis of how entities, bodies, and various other becomings amalgamate with one another in the ecology of the artistic domain. In the ontology of becoming, an assemblage "is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 69). Having been coined as a leaky sphere of multiple fluxes, assemblage refers to "the complex arrangement of divergent fragments, flows, and particles that combine their affective capacities to function and interact with one another in a becoming" (Baykan, 2021, p. 201). In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari describe assemblage alongside two lines of thought: "horizontal" and "vertical" (1987, p. 88). On the horizontal axis:

> ...an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies (1987, p. 88).

Meaning that assemblages break the rigid and compartmentalized patterns of groups and collectives, coalescing them into entwined and nuanced ecologies. Whereas, on the vertical side, assemblage "has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away" (1987, p. 88). Therefore, assemblage refers to the oscillating movement between separate entities, "that always unmakes and remakes territories" (Baykan, 2021, p. 200); it is structured on a particular form of movement that brings forth Deleuze and Guattari's notions of deterritorialization

and reterritorialization into play. Hence, the assemblage's impetus to shake the unifying principles of an order and its endeavors to overcome privileging "being" over "becoming" (de Assis, 2018, p. 100) frames itself as a dynamic and heterogenous process "subject to transformations" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 82). In that regard, assemblage, with its multiplicities and mobilities, will be enrichening the discussion of social environments in Chapter 5, where the video ecologies of Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige form transcorporeal alliances and assemblages to reconfigure Middle Eastern female subjectivity in relation to the environment each artist yearns to inhabit.

Finally, any discussion concerning the ontology of becoming without mentioning the concept of rhizome is bound to be incomplete. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome marks the uncharted notion that enlarges the theoretical foundations of this research, particularly regarding the non-hierarchical map that can be drawn from the relational nature of the Middle Eastern artistic praxes. Rhizome, "can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Presenting a plane of consistency where becomings interconnect and form assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari note that "a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (1987, p. 7).

Cartographic potentials of the rhizome presents perhaps the most useful aspect of Deleuze-Guattarian thinking: the act of making maps. Deleuze and Guattari strictly oppose the tree-like logic of *tracing*, where one "describes a de facto state" (1987, p. 12) and fixes it in a linear, hierarchized, and over coded structure. The

map-like structure of the rhizome, on the other hand, "is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (1987, p. 12). Unlike tracing's linguistic determination of "to be", drawing lines of constant interconnection, rhizome offers the conjunction of "and. . . and.. . and. . ." (1987, p. 25) which ensures a map that is non-hierarchical with multiple points of entry and unique lines of flight. This concept will be expanded in the section "A Cartographic Potential" to illuminate further discussions on how to develop an ontological map of feminist artistic practice in the Middle East.

2.3 New Materialisms in Feminist Philosophy

As a response to the domineering presence of social constructivism in cultural analysis, new materialisms emerged as a theoretical bifurcation that aims to give "materiality its due" (Coole & Frost, 2010 p. 27), all the while recognizing the linguistic and discursive-oriented contributions made by constructivism. Inflected by the relationality of the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of becoming, new materialisms fabricate a critical domain that is deeply rooted in "de-centralizing knowledge production, cutting across pre-established dichotomies, and focusing on processes transversing hierarchies of power relations that organize diverse forms of life" (Revelles-Benavente, Ernst, & Rogowska-Stangret 2019, p. 297); thereby bringing forth the notion of materiality as well as agency into the realm of critical theory. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost put it:

> ...materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in

> far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency (2010, p. 9).

Therefore, the revitalization of agency caters to a locus of interference for feminist theory to align itself with the principles of new materialisms. In order to emphasize the materiality of agency, Elizabeth Grosz stresses that one should look beyond the traditional ways of thinking that Western reason vehemently imposed on us: an agency that is achieved only by having "reason, rights, and recognition" (2010, p. 140). Since the foundations of representational paradigms in Western philosophy "preserve the binaries of nature and culture, body and mind, and animality and humanness" (Pitts-Taylor, 2016, p. 2), they pose the threat of dichotomous structures that bear harmful consequences for women's path to attain subjectivity. Although recognizing the fact that the contemporary subjects are situated amid a complex interstice of "natural and artificial objects" and "well-honed micropowers of governmentality" (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 28), new materialist feminists also recognize this subject as a material entity with biological needs to survive as well as an active agent, open to change and various becomings of life.

Regarding new materialism's implications for artistic practices, Barbara Bolt notes that "visual arts engage all manner of material processes in making and assembling art" (2013, p. 5), positing itself in the middle of the material turn where the activities of filming, performing, curating, or in broader terms, producing or assembling artistic creation is rendered as an embodied practice that mobilizes the theory. Estelle Barrett, referring to how aesthetic image is realized as a ceaseless continuum, argues that the creative production blurs the

oppositional understanding of inside and outside, in which "consciousness and materiality" are perceived as "mutually constitutive, enfolded and emergent" (2013, p. 72). Thus, the combination of new materialist and feminist theories provides a ground in which we can move beyond the cultural constructivist approaches that fix everything in a structural schema and help us include discussions about the agency of the artist into the picture. Hence, a theory of such fashion is of great use for this thesis as I foreground the diverse ways Middle Eastern women's contemporary art practice touches upon incarnating the female subjectivity and the body from nomadic, corporeal, or transcorporeal angles. Consequently, in what follows, I shall study these varying strands of new materialist feminisms.

2.3.1 Nomadic Subjects and Posthuman Variations

In Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, the non-identitarian concept of the nomad pertains to multiplicities; it is clustered around various fluxes and flows of life, all the while tracing "becomings, rises and falls, migrations and displacements" (1983, p. 84). Embarking on a mission to accentuate the plurality and affectivity of identities, nomads compose "qualitative multiplicities" that foreground metamorphosis and establish rhizomes that are built upon the interwoven relationships with other entities (Bogue, 2007, p. 127). For these reasons, this conceptualization of the nomad has been appropriated by many scholars working in new materialisms and feminist posthumanities to inscribe women with a transitional, embedded, and embodied political subjectivity.

Rosi Braidotti, as a Deleuzian scholar who both appropriates and contests Deleuze's concepts for her feminist projects, leads the way in this scholarly field of new materialisms. In *Nomadic Subjects*, she defines nomadic consciousness as the act of disengaging oneself from the "phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking" (1994, p. 30) and disobeying the confining dichotomies, fixations, and configurations of the Western reason. Presenting a mobile conception of subjectivity, Braidotti's nomad does not equate to homelessness or uprooting, but rather to a subject who operates through "seasonal patterns of movement" (1994, p. 22); a concept that greets posthuman and more-than-human subjectivities.

Similar to Deleuze and Guattari who define nomadic subject "on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, defined by the states through which it passes" (1983, p. 20), Braidotti's nomadic subject does not take "any identity as permanent" (1994, p. 33), but only passes, from one habitat to another. Emphasizing its embedded nature, Braidotti notes that nomadic thinking is "not the fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing" (1994, p. 36). In other words, it refers to an intellectual status where the subject enters the psyche of constant transformations. Rejecting the fixed state of the subject and perhaps paradoxically providing an account of the contemporary subjectivity that continually alters in response to the global flows of migration, Braidotti's writings reverberate with the artistic philosophies of Alshaibi and Ekici that depict their identities in flux—identities "made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity" (1994, p. 22).

In Chapter 3, Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity particularly displays its intricate formulations in the works of Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici since each artist commences on a journey in themselves as well as through different artistic media and ever-changing geographies. Then, nomadism, as coined by Braidotti, is the "intransitive becoming" (2002, p. 86) that includes dynamism, multiplicity, and relationality. Since it refers to a sedentary predicament, "you can never be a nomad", notes Braidotti, "you can only go on trying to *become nomadic*" (2002, p. 86, emphasis by me). Similar to what Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici envisage, instead of having a finalized state or reaching to a destination, the nomadic subject embraces the route, the threshold, and the ultimate process of the vicissitude itself.

Braidotti claims that the process of becoming-nomad is different for subjects in minority status because they first go through "the phase of identity politics" (2002, p. 84) in which they reclaim their essentialized selfhood that was not available to them prior to the social discrimination (i.e., racism, sexism, homophobia). Braidotti is aware of the important stage of identity politics for minorities as it gives them a "fixed location" to initially claim upon (2002, p. 84), yet what she ultimately campaigns for is to move beyond these molar and essentialist conceptualizations of identity toward a dissolution of the unitary subject; a movement from the center to the margins, as she notes that "the centre is void, all the action is on the margins" (2002, p. 84). Becoming-nomad, therefore, "marks the process of positive transformation of the pain of loss into the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex allegiances" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 84). Constructing a bridge between her nomadic philosophy and

displaced subjects' experiences, she claims that "what is lost, in the sense of fixed origins, is gained in an increased desire to belong, in a multiple rhizomic manner which transcends the classical bilateralism of binary identity formations" (2006, p. 84). Hence, what Braidotti suggests about becoming-nomad enrichens this research as the selected artists from the Middle East echo the stages of this process by resisting any fixation on a settled origin or stable identity.

As a strategy to overcome theoretical impasses about nomadism, Braidotti puts major emphasis on "the politics of location" (1994, p. 21). In her account, the politics of location are cartographies of power relations that reflect one's location and situatedness and, therefore, enable an ethical viewpoint to reconsider one's privileged position. For instance, Braidotti gives the example of Black women's writings and how they reveal the shortcomings and the fallacious generalizations of White women's writings that overlook differences among female subjects (2002, p. 12). Such accounts of exposure to external perspectives, Braidotti argues, guide privileged women through seeing the limitations as well as the objectionable truths they collectively try to claim (2002, p. 12).

Incubated as a critical praxis, then, Braidotti's grasp of nomadism provides a creative ground that "transforms the negative conditions of the present into productive preconditions for affirmative practice" (2013, p. 343). In that sense, such affirmative nomadic politics can be traced in the artistic productions of Middle Eastern artists as they engage in "qualitative transformation" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 345) that disturbs the dialectics of Majority/Minority and East/West, meanwhile composing artistic creation nurtured by their present predicament of diaspora, exile, migration, or war.

2.3.2 Corporeal Turn and Rethinking the Body

Unlike the traditional Western thought that associated the body with the feminine and the mind with the masculine and thereby barring women from intellectual advancement, the corporeal turn in feminist philosophy adopts a monistic ontology and reinstitutes the body, specifically the female body, as a site of affirmation, constitution, and knowledge production, transgressing the most foundational structure of the Western philosophy: the dualistic logic. Convoluted in the new materialist thought, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) emerges as one of the most prominent theorists in this branch who both criticized and appropriated the ontology of becoming for a feminine theorization of the body.

Rather than treating the body as an "ahistorical, biologically given, acultural object" (1994, p. 17), Grosz calls for a return to corporeality, undermining the domineering presence of social constructionism that perceived gender as a socially constructed phenomenon and, thus, perpetuating the dichotomy of sex/gender. In Grosz's materialist understanding that defies any form of dualistic thinking, including the mind/body split of the Cartesian dualism, the body is not "a neutral screen, a biological tabula rasa onto which masculine or feminine could be indifferently projected" (1994, p. 18), but it is the "site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution" (1994, p. 23) where the corporeal specificity entails the body "amenable to wide historical vicissitudes and transformations" (1994, p. 190). This Deleuzian-inflected theorization of the body is further explored in relation to the body's sexual specificity. Regarding how the notion of the sexual difference comes into the picture in corporeal feminism, Grosz states that:

> The framework or terrain of sexual difference entails not the concept of a continuum, a wholeness, a predivisional world as plenum, but the simultaneous recognition and effacement of the spacings, the intervals, the irreducible if unspecifiable positioning, the fissures and ruptures, that bind each 'thing' to every other and to the whole of existence without, however, linking them into an organic or metaphysical wholeness or unity (1994, p. 209).

In that respect, it becomes apparent in Grosz's writings that her tendency to emphasize sexual difference does not stem from an essentialist axis, but from a feminist impulse that accentuates the non-unitary materiality and corporeality of the female specificity which has been ignored in the male-dominant history of Western philosophy. A dominating act committed so that the women could be posited as the sole projections of men; as the concealed, stable entities without any permeable subjectivity (Grosz, 2005). With corporeal feminism's productive and transformative force at hand, one can embroider a subjectivity that lies outside the phallocentric locus and map a sexually differentiated, corporeally specific body that lingers around the hegemonic realms of the culture. One can, as Grosz's Deleuzian-inflected line of thought, explore the dimensions of what a (female) body can do, "the things it can perform, the linkages it establishes, the transformations and becoming it undergoes, and the machinic connections it forms with other bodies" (1994, p. 165).

Besides corporeality's alignments with the sexual difference, Grosz also draws attention to the fluidity of the body. Bodies, for Grosz, "are not fixed, inert, purely genetically or biologically programmed entities" (1994, p. 190) that move independently of their socio-historical context. As noted previously, drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming, Grosz rethinks any material thing or entity such as the body as a "series of flows, energies, movements, strata,

segments, organs, intensities-fragments capable of being linked together or severed in potentially infinite ways other than those which congeal them into identities" (1994, p. 167). Reminiscent of a pliable flesh, the body is the material surface of "social inscription that produces subjects as subjects of a particular kind" (Grosz, 1995, p. 32). Consequently, Grosz's account of corporeality provides a theoretical ground in which the body is perceived as a leaky entity, without and against essentialism. Resembling the destratified and disorganized bodies of Mona Hatoum and Amal Kenawy's works in Chapter 4, Grosz's fluid, volatile bodies do not "serve a single system of historical or cultural meaning" (Fensham, 2005, p. 288); they are heterogenous, multiple, and anti-Cartesian processes, devoid of any unity, cohesion, or binary formation.

2.3.3 Transcorporeality and Affirming Nature

In traditional Western thought, women were perceived as the bearer of children, the nurturer of home, and the pleasurers of men; a preconception deriving from the common contention that sees women as "inferior by nature" (Alaimo, 2000, p. 4). This excessive masculinist association of women with nature, which posits femininity in accordance with irrationality, inferiority, and primitiveness (Kirby, 2008), led many social constructionist feminists into disassociating the woman from the domain of nature to the more rational, capable, and intellectual realm of culture, a sphere where men hegemonically inhabited. Consequently, nature, as a space of biology, materiality, and corporeal specificity, has been strategically

disregarded and deemed as a persona non grata in feminist theory[2]. However, the recent material turn is keen on revitalizing nature as a feminist space, affirming its negative connotations for women's femininity.

Stacy Alaimo, a Deleuzian-inflected new materialist philosopher who forged connections between nature and feminism, is one of the main theorists of this theoretical synthesis that affirms nature, its materiality, and corporeality as well as its potential alliances with feminist and environmental change. According to Alaimo, feminism's "flight from the nature" (2000, p. 4) has caused theoretical impasses in which many social constructionists that approached nature as "static" and culture as "dynamic" phenomena found themselves amid a dualistic thinking that merely serves the dominant identities (2000, p. 5). For Alaimo, one must "transform the gendered concepts -nature, culture, body, mind, object, subject, resource, agent, and others- that have been cultivated to denigrate and silence certain groups of humans as well as nonhuman life" (2000, p. 13). Neither encouraging to leave dichotomies behind nor proposing an overbearing affiliation with nature, Alaimo argues that nature can be a feminist ally, an undomesticated ground in which one can imagine "a space apart from the domestic" and a place "that it is untamed" (2000, p. 16), serving the necessary infrastructure for female emancipation.

Instead of reconfiguring nature as a passive surface that only bears human interference, Alaimo's non-anthropocentric conceptualization situates nature as an active agent that acts back to (and upon) humans. The notion of agency, thus,

[2] This statement applies more to the Second Wave and Third Wave feminisms as feminist phenomenology preceding them was keen on exploring the potentiality of female body.

reveals itself when affirming nature's role in the subject-formation of humans and nonhuman entities. Rather than grasping nature as a "pliable resource for industrial production or social construction" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 4), this new materialist understanding reorients nature as an agentic force and accentuates how it talks back to humans. Drawing upon Karen Barad's concept of "intra-actions" (1998, p. 96) and Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges" (1988, p. 581), theoretical concepts that rethink materiality and "the very 'stuff' of bodies and natures" (Alaimo, 2008, p. 242); Alaimo's material feminism stress the importance of reconsidering the interactions among different phenomena such as technology, culture, biology, and nature, "without privileging any one of these elements" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 7). For this reason, she introduces the term *transcorporeality*:

> Trans-corporeality means that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them. While trans-corporeality as an ontology does not exclude any living creature, it does begin with the human, in order – paradoxically perhaps – to disrupt Western human exceptionalism (Alaimo in Braidotti and Hlavajova, 2018, p. 435).

Resembling to how Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige envision their agentic ecologies, Alaimo's transcorporeality provides a "contact zone" that brings together "human corporeality and the more-than-human" in an interval where they transform and traverse each other (2008, p. 238). In other words, Alaimo reconceives the traditional division between the body and nature and puts them into a relational stratum, where the corporeal human is always enmeshed with his/her natural habitat, exchanging forces, intensities, bodily fluids, and even chemical substances in a transversal loop of change and mutation.

As a theoretical space of intermingling entities, transcorporeality, thus, presents a vantage point for us to reconsider ethical and political standpoints "that can contend with numerous late twentieth and early twenty-first-century realities "in which 'human' and 'environment' can by no means be considered as separate" (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2). For instance, the material reality of cultural phenomena such as migration, exile, or diaspora—as experienced by many Middle Eastern female artists in this corpus—illustrates this transcorporeal relation among entities. In Chapter 5, I argue that the artists Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige recount the ways in which a woman's subjectivity is altered by her environment in the 21st century. Whether it is the war that changes one's relationship to the land or the exile in which a woman is kept from an environment to feel belonging, these artists sketch out their subjectivities in a transcorporeal fashion, affecting and be affected by their ecologies.

2.4 A Cartographic Potential

Thus far, I have provided a theoretical overview of the ontology of becoming and new materialist feminisms. In this sub-section, what I aim to do is to synthesize several philosophical frameworks on making maps to animate the eclectic concepts of new materialist feminisms, and to gesture toward their cartographic potentials. Since the notion of relationality holds particular importance in both new materialist feminisms and the ontology of becoming, a map displaying the relations among entities and things has the potential to expose power dynamics operating in contemporary culture. Therefore, bringing together the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of rhizome with the Deleuzian-informed cartographic

frameworks in Continental thought, I argue that illustrating a map of feminist artistic practice in the Middle East is not just a conceptual possibility to reveal how certain power structures mold female subjectivities, but also a political necessity, a methodological tool to account for one's location and situatedness.

One should also note that what this cartographic potential promise is less to solve problems related to how power operates in the culture, than to bring them in relation with each other, in a rhizomatic assemblage. Map-like structures deny the hierarchical, static apprehensions, and endpoints that the conventional Western reason is strictly built upon. Accordingly, when defining the principles of rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari state that one should "make a map, not a tracing" (1987, p. 12), since tracings refer to a linear and arboreal structure about the process of knowledge production. Whereas maps, ensuring an open slate, are always "detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable", and have multiple "entryways and exits" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). As Simon O'Sullivan notes, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome establishes a map made of diagonal, transversal relations between various heterogeneous spheres and entities; it fosters "anti-hierarchical" and "a-centered" connections to rethink the entwined dynamics of the social field (2002, p. 84). Opening a cartographic potential to pursue "worlds-in-progress" and "subjectivities to come" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 35), rhizomatic maps are concerned less with offering finalized solutions or fixed outcomes (formulas) than enabling one to see the open-ended relationalities and linkages in a given milieu – in the context of this thesis, it facilitates one to see linkages of the contemporary art practice of this group of Middle Eastern artists.

Informed by the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of rhizome and drawing upon the cartographic turn in visual culture, Simonetta Moro further coins the term "poetic cartography" (2022, p. 2): a concept that encapsulates both the aesthetic and political qualities of mapping practices in contemporary art. Rather than approaching the term *poetic* as an "antithesis to political" (2022, p. 138), Moro reconceptualizes the term by amalgamating it with the political cartographic aesthetics in contemporary visual culture. She states that the recent geopolitical events occurring in the cultural milieu such as ecological ruin, dispossession, and migration bring forth a new poetic aesthetic paradigm to interpret place-making: "an aesthetics characterized by liminality and in-betweenness, by nomadism and unlocalizability" (Moro, 2022, p. 4). Hence, in Moro's theorization, poetic cartography provides a counter-hegemonic account of the world, positioning itself in opposition with the singular world picture of the dominant cartographic imagination. These cartographies rely on "the mythical, affective, and topological as opposed to a geometric concept of space" (Moro, 2022, p. 5) in which the artists become the interpreters of geographical knowledge in accordance with their artistic practice. As a methodology to imagine alternative worlds, poetic cartography, thus, forms rhizomes within the world, where one configures "new ways of thinking, new structures of thought and new images" (Moro, 2022, p. 151).

In that regard, the ways in which the selected artists in this thesis delineate their subjectivities, bodies, and social environments in a relational ecology, and the specific modalities through which they experiment these concerns, summon a need to make a map – a poetic cartography of women's art practice that is made

with the rhizomatic connections of the Deleuzian thought. Consequently, what follows is a series of chapters that approach these artists' philosophical concerns in a cartographic manner, mapping the various modes of artistic expressions and female subject formations on a rhizomatic plane, while considering their relational socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, in the conclusion chapter, taking Deleuze and Guattari's suggestions on making maps literally and perhaps too *materially*, I offer a rhizomatic map that demonstrates Middle Eastern women's contemporary artistic practice aligned with fluid geographical locations. Illustrating the affinities between different artistic modalities, exilic journeys, and subjectivities of these women artists in a non-linear, heuristic manner, this map aims to reveal how power is distributed, reworked, and surpassed in favor of formulating alternative forms of female subjects, in the process of becoming-other-than-the-man-standard.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter presents a theoretical pedigree of the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of becoming, and its feminist appropriations with regards to new materialisms. Primarily focusing on Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subjects, Elizabeth Grosz's corporeal feminism, and Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeality, it argues that the eclectic nature of material feminisms proposes a theoretical ground in which one can evaluate the non-sedentary aspects of nomadic subjectivity, corporeal specificity of the female body, as well as the transcorporeal relations among entities and their ecologies. Considering the productive forces and relationality of new materialist feminisms, this chapter argues that one can map the nomadic,

corporeal, and transcorporeal connections of Middle Eastern female artists and their boundary-crossing artistic productions. Incorporating these new materialist feminisms, the next chapter delves into the nomadic visions of the artists Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici.

CHAPTER III

Nomadic Visions

The nomad's relationship to the earth is one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation; the antithesis of the farmer, the nomad gathers, reaps, and exchanges but does not exploit.

(Rosi Braidotti, 1994).

3.1 Introduction

The intensity of being displaced, whether forced or voluntarily, finds its repercussions in the Middle Eastern visual culture as a negative form of mobility, one that fixes the subject's identity in a state of anguish. Yet, in this chapter, what I want to do is to develop a counter-theorization of the visual art practice of two exilic and migrant Middle Eastern women artists, Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici, for whom the act of mobility bestowed with artistic creativity, nomadic imagination, and feminist political agency. Pointing at the productive forces of mobility in their artistic works, I argue that their aesthetic concerns can be reframed as *nomadic visions*.

Following Braidotti's affirmative theorizations on the nomad, in which she distinctly separates nomadism from migration or exile by emphasizing the nomad's philosophical exercise of disengaging herself from the fixed states of

enunciation; I re-read Alshaibi and Ekici's artistic vestiges as nomadic attempts, in which they move beyond the static definitions of the exilic or migrant subject, towards a nomadic identity "made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 22). I do not, however, claim that these artists disregard the sociocultural disadvantages of mobility, to work towards a post-migration or post-exilic state where the suffering, loss, or alienation is eliminated. Rather, what I contend is that, in a nomadic fashion, they defy any rigid definition of exilic or migrant subjectivity. Living at the peripheries of communities, they navigate through different identities, yet never fully conform to "the limits of one national, fixed identity" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 33).

To encapsulate the entanglements of mobility's cultural components, akin to Braidotti's nomadic consciousness (1994), I argue that one shall trace the intricacies of the self as a moving and fluid entity. In that regard, Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici, as Middle Eastern artists who experienced cultural mobility, employ these affirmative forms of nomadic aesthetics. While enacting a portrait of themselves, or the women who inhabit the same geographies, Alshaibi and Ekici cultivate a nomadic philosophy that lingers around "transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 25). As artistic nomads, they are simultaneously still and mobile; mooring in an origin to reflect on the power dynamics operating in their culture, and also continuously moving, toward newer intellectual and artistic routes, disengaging themselves from taking any preconceived identity as too permanent.

3.2 Sama Alshaibi and Metamorphoses of the Heroine

Informed by the artist's own exilic mobilities, the works of Arab-American artist Sama Alshaibi introduce this thesis as gateway to recontextualize the displaced artistic productions in the Middle East through a nomadic framework. This sub-section, hereby, examines Alshaibi's multimedia project *Silsila,* to theorize how the artist treats displaced female subjectivity as an open-ended process; as a continuum that escapes any rigid definitions or power structures. By re-reading Alshaibi's video-based works in tandem with Braidotti's nomadic theory, the analyses emerging from this section explores both the textual qualities of her work that situate female identities in constant flux, as well as the boundary-crossing, interdisciplinary, and self-reflexive aesthetics that pushes the artist herself, toward a nomadic state of becoming.

Alshaibi's artistic philosophy seeks new ways of engaging with the self and innovates new approaches to experiment with artistic media. In *Artists in Exile,* Frauke Josenhans notes that "separation from the familiar" can both trigger the exilic artist to expand her visions with brand new techniques and "provoke a personal and artistic metamorphosis" (2017, p. 15) in her creative agenda. Thus, reminiscent of the artist's own experience with conflicting borders and frontiers, and the tension between her newly found habitat on Northern American soil and her previous homelands in the Middle East, Alshaibi's works blur the distinct boundaries between video, performance, and installation, disclosing a fluid and in-between alternative. Entrenched upon a nomadic aesthetic, the issues of self, identity, and mobility, therefore, become eminently explored themes in her artistic oeuvre, guiding Alshaibi through her own metamorphosis as an artist.

In *We Are Iraqis,* Sama Alshaibi notes that her exiles from Palestine and Iraq resulted in "a double negation" of her cultural identity, which eventually emerged as a catalyzing force that activated her artistic impulses (2013, p. 172). Following the lead of a female protagonist, Alshaibi's works thereby investigate the displaced subject's inner and external journeys through the self and the fluid geographies surrounding her. The multimedia project *Silsila* (2009-2017), consisting of 42 photographs and 8 videos, depicts these years-long journeys of the artist through the deserts and water lands of the Middle East, North Africa, and other regions. Over the course of her eight videos in *Silsila*, of which my analysis primarily circles around, Alshaibi constructs a poetic visual language that takes her viewers through the endangered terrains of her home: the environments under the threat of permanent displacement and ecological ruin.

Translated from Arabic to English as 'link', *Silsila* embarks on a journey through different but somehow connected geographical terrains in the Middle East and North Africa. While there are no voiceovers or dialogues throughout the narrative, Alshaibi's project is accompanied by the engulfing sounds of a traditional piece of music, unfolding like an audio-visual poetry for a geography that was once known. Over the panoramic images of landscapes that almost form a series of postcards, Alshaibi integrates human figures with the environment, thereby displaying entities harmonized with the seamless flows of the changing scenery. Since the human figures are entangled with the more-than-human ecology, Alshaibi's project simultaneously underscores the interdependency and the mutual fate that awaits humanity and the natural environment as well as the relational affiliations Arab people devise with their geographies.



Fig. 1: The artist in Siwa lake, watching the landscapes passing by, implying a change in the ecology of the Middle East. © Sama Alshaibi. (2009-2017). *Wasl* in *Silsila* [video in multimedia series]. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2: Two figures holding white textiles in reference to the desert culture of the Bedouins and the symbolic interconnectedness of the Arab nationhood. © Sama Alshaibi. (2009-2017). *Wasl* in *Silsila* [video in multimedia series]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Referencing the 14th-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta, the visual landscape of *Silsila* is haunted by the magnetic presence of the deserts and of Arabic figures, for whom the sand dunes appear as sites of exploration. Since the desert imagery in *Silsila* is simultaneously orchestrated around the search for a sense of self practiced by the artist herself and a social environment to feel belonging in a time of ecological disaster (Figs. 1-2), Salwa Mikdadi notes that Alshaibi's aesthetic juxtaposition situates "the desert as an allegory" for the mutual loss of "eco-refugees and political refugees" (2015, p. 7). Yet, strategically leaving out these environmental concerns for the scope of this chapter, I argue that Alshaibi's staging of the desert functions as a mediative force in her reconnection with Arab history and culture, to work towards a nomadic vision of the Arab identity, in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Meaning 'union' in Arabic, *Wasl* is the main video of the *Silsila* series that amalgamates the many facets of Alshaibi's journeys, from the Tunisian desert to the Maldives or to the Dead Sea. Conveying the incessantly altering ecological landscape of the Middle Eastern and North African region and beyond, Alshaibi emphasizes the importance of forging a connection with the past to better grasp the present reality and weigh what's awaiting humanity and the planet in the future (Alshaibi, 2019). Whether it is climate change or the transcontinental flows of migration, in Alshaibi's project, one's relationship with the past has the potential to evoke a political awareness of the present predicament of a decaying world. In the case of her nomadic journeys in *Silsila*, the way to achieve this very awareness lies within the revisitations of one's land of origin.

Laura U. Marks, in *Hanan al-Cinema,* argues that the contemporary Arab cinematic imagination in the 20th century—fabricated around a pan-Arab sense of nationalism—is concerned with "leaving the desert behind" (2015, p. 148), that is, surpassing the early tribal lifestyle of Arab Bedouins, and replacing it with urbanization and migratory exchanges. Resulting in a shift in the cinematic ecology of Arab visual culture, this tendency to move beyond deserts paved the way for what Marks theorizes as "asphalt nomadism", a mobility experienced in the motorways made from ballasts and pebbles (2015, p. 147). Unlike these artistic orientations of Arab artists, Alshaibi's *Silsila* intentionally returns to the desert, to rework the desert's self-organizing principles for the sake of battling ecological change, and to resurge the pre-Islamic Arab history with nomadic Bedouins of the desert, reorienting the route of the contemporary Arab identity towards a mobile form of inhabitation. Even though Marks attests that "the self-organizing character of sand dunes might be only a metaphor for the self-organizing character of nomadic life" (2015, p. 149), in Alshaibi's nomadic vision, these self-organizing tenets of the desert become material entities, capable of producing contingent and relational forms of existence, in the Arab geography and beyond.

In *Wasl*, Alshaibi stages multiple figures, many of which are performed by herself, at the peripheries of the deserted lands reenacting a somewhat mournful yet liberating routine. For instance, in one sequence, two women wearing white dresses hold a white piece of textile, visually signifying a linkage between the two Arab subjects (Fig. 2). It elicits, at the surface, an interconnected bond among two distinct entities, and, on a more profound layer, an Arab connectivity at the thresholds of what appears to be a Middle Eastern desert. Salwa Mikdadi

elucidates that, for many modern Arab poets, the desert invokes "war, isolation, forced exile, absence of homeland, and political and social ruin" (2015, p. 7). Yet, on the other side of the coin, Mikdadi continues, the desert presents an unlimited space of freedom for the Bedouins, the nomadic tribes of pre-Islamic Arab culture (2015). Hence, through such visual mediations embellished by these desert symbolisms, I argue that Alshaibi's nomadic work questions the sustainability of a social order based on fixity and rigid boundaries. In line with the fluidity of the borders in the desert, Alshaibi scrutinizes the immutable boundaries between foreign/familiar, national/transnational, and perhaps, most important of them all, mobility/stillness.

Silsila, as an encompassing piece of art reclaiming the artist's origins, further marks Alshaibi's attempts at creating a memory work for the Arab history and culture. It is composed of scattered imagery of the artist's nomadic revisitation of varying geographical sites in the MENA region[3]. Manufacturing a rhizomatic map of memories set in a web of constant interconnections, it compromises the places where the nomadic artist has been and is heading. In *Transpositions,* Braidotti contends that "memory is fluid and flowing; it opens up unexpected or virtual possibilities" (2006, p. 168). Drawing upon how Deleuze links memory to imagination, Braidotti further states that, as an "imaginative, affective force of remembrance", the act of memory-making opens up "spaces of movement and of deterritorialization which actualize virtual possibilities which had been frozen in the image of the past" (2006, p. 168). Hence, when considering Alshaibi as a

[3] Albeit *Silsila* features images from other parts of the world such as Maldives, I primarily focus on the scenes from Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) regions, to better serve the overarching questions of this thesis.

"subject-in-becoming" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 168), her creative memory-making in *Silsila,* alters her artistic self on a continual basis meanwhile mobilizing the fixed images of her homeland's cultural geography through her metamorphosis. Instead of stabilizing the outlook of the Middle East in a monotone plight of despair, Alshaibi's body acts as "the motherland", serving as "both a container of memory and a resistance" to the erasure and disposal of Arab identity and cultural history (Alshaibi, 2013, p. 177).

This strategic intervention conducted by Alshaibi, as Alfredo Cramerotti (2015) argues, discloses a movement toward the margin from the center, a decentralized vision of subjectivity at odds with the unitary vision of the subject in Western philosophical tradition. In *Between Banat,* Mejdulene Bernard Shomali theorizes that Arab identity is "a relational quality or subject position rather than a fixed, essential definition open to authentication" (2023, p. 6). Braidotti, too, in *Nomadic Subjects,* calls for a nomadic form of subjectivity practiced by selves who engage in "a creative sort of becoming: a performative metaphor" (1994, p. 6). Accordingly, by proceeding to the margins and inhabiting the cramped spaces of the world, Alshaibi's body endorses a relational and fluid Arab existence laying outside the hegemonic economy of knowledge, an identity contingent upon "geography, national affiliation, cultural practices, and the Arabic language" (Shomali, 2023, p. 7). Recalling Deleuze and Guattari, Alshaibi's artistic self is "on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, defined by the states through which it passes" (1983, p. 20).

To ensure a politically accountable form of subjectivity, in *Transpositions,* Rosi Braidotti (2006) provides a locus of intervention for nomadism to enter the

domain of ethics. Rather than alluding to morality, rights, or the law in a traditional sense, Braidotti's poststructuralist nomadic ethics is a "discourse about forces, desires and values that act as empowering modes of becoming" (2013, p. 343). Primarily focusing on how power is distributed and how the notion of 'Otherness' operates in society, nomadic ethics "rejects moral universalism and works towards a different idea of ethical accountability in the sense of a fundamental reconfiguration of our being" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 15). In other words, nomadic ethics follows "no moral imperatives" yet maintains political accountability to regenerate itself in a dynamic ecology (Braidotti, 2006, p. 4); it adjusts to the globally mediated economy of knowledge and presents sustainable alternatives for the emergence of a responsible subject in the status quo.



Fig. 3: A cluster of look-alike female silhouettes, in reference to the dispersed subjectivity of the artist. © Sama Alshaibi. (2009-2017). *Wasl* in *Silsila* [video in multimedia series]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Correspondingly, Alshaibi's *Silsila* presents a cluster of nomadic subjects, in pursuit of such ethical accountability. In many instances throughout *Silsila,* Alshaibi choreographs her own performative body as multiplied entities (Fig. 3), dispersed across the barren wilderness of the desert and the water resources. This deliberate gesture performed by Alshaibi is an ethical strategy that shakes the conventional unity and wholeness of the subject, to demonstrate how a single, unified vision fails to account for the political condition of a given geography. Braidotti claims that non-unitary subjectivity rests on a "nomadic, dispersed, fragmented vision", that is, "functional, coherent and accountable, mostly because it is embedded and embodied" (2006, pp. 4-5). For this reason, through disseminating her vision across the multiple corners of the Middle Eastern and North African regions, Alshaibi performs an embodied ritual that constantly averts the currents and flows of power at work in her homelands. Whether it is the environmental disasters accelerated by human interventions or the sudden displacements of masses caused by war and globalization, Alshaibi's multiplied selves in *Silsila* draw a portrait of the Middle East, oscillating between competing political forces and ideologies.

To avoid taking an exploitative stance when representing the suffering of her people, Alshaibi utilizes her own body, claiming that she cannot "be the spokesperson for all Palestinians and Iraqis" (2013, p. 179) as she gained American citizenship and is located in the privileged zone of the Global North. This ethical standpoint practiced by Alshaibi further insinuates what Braidotti theorized as "the politics of location" (2002, p. 12); an ethico-political position held at the margins in which the nomadic subject acknowledges her own

prerogatives, impediments, and situatedness. On that account, navigating at the peripheries, instead of centers, Alshaibi's nomadic artistic practice relocates her identity, along with other identities, "on new grounds that account for multiple belongings" as opposed to "sameness and one-way thinking" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 69). To quote Alfredo Cramerotti, Alshaibi's politics of location, her movement from the center to the margins not only evokes a "shift in the paradigm" to alter how we perceive a place or a group of people, but also "involves the avoidance of a stance of supremacy, neutrality, and/or immunity; the acceptance of being called into question" (2015, p. 97). It is in this ethical accountability lingering around Alshaibi's inscriptions of her multiple selves in *Silsila* that gravitates her identity towards an artistic form of nomadic becoming; a becoming that resists "the grain of the dominant representations of subjectivity" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 29).



Fig. 4: Placed on a map of the Middle East and North Africa drawn on a sandy surface, candles are lit by a pair of hands. © Sama Alshaibi. (2009-2017). *Noor* in *Silsila* [video in multimedia series]. Image courtesy of the artist.

In *Metamorphosis,* Braidotti stresses that implementing the politics of location is a necessary action in feminist thinking that one should take to dislodge power asymmetries in the culture, at the same time remaining cognizant of one's own situated and, perhaps, constricted point of view (2002). Defining this critical praxis in line with cartographic imagination, Braidotti notes that politics of location rely upon "a form of self-criticism, a critical, genealogical self narrative" (2002, p. 12) that the subject adopts to reveal how power operates in her geography. These forms of "embodied accounts", for Braidotti, unleashes the nomadic subject to garner knowledge of herself and of the world she inhabits (2002, p. 12). Hence, these cartographies of power manifest themselves in Sama Alshaibi's *Silsila* project, particularly in the video *Noor* (Illumination) where the artist lights the candles placed on the borders of the MENA region.

Drawn on a sandy surface, in *Noor*, Alshaibi delineates a map of Middle East and North Africa onto which she places a set of candles. In the frontiers of these region, we are being shown a pair of hands lighting the candles patiently. In a slow and lurking ambience, bird feathers are poured onto the map, followed by an abstract sequence of circular patterns and mosaics. As an artist operating between the cultural capital of North America and her invaded home region, I contend that Alshaibi executes a performance that illuminates and changes the borders of an occupied territory, in a constant state of transformation and uncertainty (Fig. 4). As the bird feathers are slowly scattered on the map of Middle East and North Africa, which eventually formulates a circular pattern of continuity that implies the ceaseless outbursts of war, famine, and ecological crises taking place in these lands, Alshaibi lights the candles around the borders,

over and over again, to unyieldingly reorganize her homeland's frontiers and resist vigorous coalitions of power on all fronts. As a nomad fluctuating at the intervals of her newly acquired cultural identity and her place of origin, she demonstrates fluency in reading "invisible maps, or maps written in the wind, on the sand and stones, in the flora" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 17). The bird feathers, the seeds of pomegranates, and the sand dunes, thus, become the tools of operation to reimagine her homeland as a conceptual space of alternative worlds.



Fig. 5: The artist walking on a water land as the dualistic imagery slowly morphs into a singular, unified vision. © Sama Alshaibi. (2009-2017). *Tariqah* in *Silsila* [video in multimedia series]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Speaking of the artist's search for possible worlds beyond hegemonic power arrangements, in another video named *Tariqah* (The Path), while walking on a sandy surface in the desert, Alshaibi enmeshes her double exilic identities into a single, unified ground of vicissitude, devoid of any dualistic configuration (Fig. 5). Braidotti underlines that the key thing for nomadism, "is undoing the

oppositional dualism of majority/minority and arousing an affirmative passion for and desire for the transformative flows that destabilize all identities" (2002, p. 84). For Braidotti, becoming-nomadic indicates that "one learns to re-invent oneself and one desires the self as a process of transformation" (2002, p. 84), to circumvent being trapped in the sedentary predicament of essentialist identity politics. Thereupon, Alshaibi negotiates her manifold identities in a state of fluid transformations, without the dichotomies of self/other and familiar/foreigner, thereby conceiving her displaced artistic self within the "flows of transformation without ultimate destination" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 86). Integrating critical praxis with creativity to portray her metamorphosis as a nomadic subject-in-becoming, Alshaibi unearths "the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 116).

As the heroine of *Silsila*, Alshaibi thus enters a state of perpetual change in close proximity to an artistic and personal metamorphosis. Her existence as a woman in the Arab peninsula is ontologically challenged, disrupted, and continuously reworked, to accentuate how a nomadic form of identity is capable of thwarting the fixed conceptualizations of subjectivity as well as contravening the power dynamics that entrap Arab femininity such as male oppression, exclusionary aspects of religion, or misogynistic social norms. Located at the interstices and apertures of multiple cultural ambiances, Alshaibi's nomadic self "is a steam without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). She vyies against the flow of mainstream power structures and never confines herself to the anchored definitions of the displaced subject.

In conclusion, rather than naively affirming a utopian ideal yet to come, a world without legislative and consolidating borders or stable and fixed identities; Alshaibi's artistic philosophy accounts for and is compatible with the mobility-oriented exigencies of the 21st century globalization (Cramerotti, 2015). Recalling Braidotti's theorizations, Alshaibi's nomadic subjectivity in the *Silsila* series "has no passport-or has too many of them" (1994, p. 33). She proposes emancipation by being philosophically on the move, decentering our perceptions, and traversing the established historical paradigms to foreground how Arab femininity as well as Arab nationhood is a metamorphosing process that is de facto relational, embedded, and interconnected, across borders and regions.

3.3 Nezaket Ekici and Performing at the Intermezzo

Following the analysis of Alshaibi's nomadic art, selected works from the artistic oeuvre of Berlin-based Turkish performance artist Nezaket Ekici compound the remaining part of this chapter on nomadic visions. Born in Turkey, Ekici and her family moved to Germany in the early '70s, amid the mass migration of Turkish workers. During her upbringing in Germany, she was able to observe the modern lifestyle of Europeans and the relatively moderate ways of living practiced by Turkish immigrants. This in-between state of the migratory artist eventually led her to attain what Tuğçe Arslan Arafa argues as a "double-foreignness" (2022, p. 95), a social status stemming from her dual identities as a foreigner in Germany and an expatriate of Turkey. As a vagabond, Ekici was moving back and forth between the two sides of the spectrum, in search of a middle ground to reside in the social fabric of Germany. These deterritorializing and reterritorializing

movements of the migrant performer, thus, not only negated her acceptance to both communities, but also cornered her subjectivity at the margins, and perhaps, most ostensibly, carved her cultural identity as an outsider on each account. Hence, this section approaches Ekici's interdisciplinary performances entitled *National Anthems* (2005), *Veiling and Reveiling* (2009), *But All That Glitters Is Not Gold* (2014), and *Work in Progress – Personal Map* (2020) to trace the overarching concerns of the artist.

Beral Madra argues that live performance, due to its close links with the artist's body as the major locus of expression, is an eminently convenient practice within the "nomad contemporary art practice" (2005, p. 3), eventually granting artists like Ekici the privilege of mobility to travel across different geographies and perform their corporeal selves. Remaining in compliance, and yet, moving beyond these convenient aspects of performance art, Ekici incorporates video, installation, or other computer-generated technologies to diffuse the boundaries between artistic expression and situates her own body in a new domain that refuses stability or devotion to a single form of artistic modality. Akin to the cultural mobility of the artist herself, Ekici's performances avoid being associated with a stagnant or singular mode of expression and work towards a nomadic artistic vision.

In *National Anthems,* a two-channel video installation whereby the artist appears in a seemingly naked posture (Fig. 6), Ekici sings the national anthems of both Germany and Turkey in a loop, using the distinct melodies of each anthem interchangeably, without losing the "original pathos" of both (Herford, 2011, p. 185). Through such a radical and cross-contaminating mediation on the *sacred*

national values, the artist situates herself at the "intermezzo" of each culture and oscillates between the grandiose rhythms of both national anthems (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25), thereby allowing the emergence of a new form of fluid subjectivity freed from the confinements of the sacredness of national identities. This deliberate attempt at deterritorializing her migrant identity and affirming the in-between space of both cultures resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) definitions of the nomad. Functioning at the intermezzo in which "the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them", Deleuze and Guattari state that "the nomad is not at all the same as the migrant" (1987, p. 380). While migrants emigrate from one point to another as a principle even if their destination is "uncertain" or "unforeseen", nomads go from one point to another only as a "factual necessity" in which the points for them "are relays along a trajectory" (1987, p. 380).



Fig. 6: The artist weaves together the melodies of German and Turkish national anthems in two video projections. © Nezaket Ekici. (2005). *National Anthems* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Hence, even though Ekici is a migrant artist in the cultural context of Germany, her intellectual movements toward the in-between spaces of the culture where she intentionally weaves together the melodies of national anthems, display themselves as relays alongside her nomadic trajectory. Disrupting the foundational eminence of these anthems by evoking an uncanny yet a familiar rhythm, she continuously shifts, splinters, and reworks her dual national identities, in order to disseminate them in an open-ended space, "without borders or enclosure" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 380). Like Sama Alshaibi's itineraries between Arab and American identities—by transversing across dual national ontologies—Ekici's *National Anthems* is "shifting, partial, complex and multiple", existing "in the shifts and the patterns of repetitions" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 86). This nomadic vision, thus, transposes her subjectivity in a locus of engagements in which Ekici is "endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 36) to thwart any sedentary form of national identity.

National Anthems is also a prime example of Ekici's nomadic vision as she employs video, performance, and installation as her medium of expression. Re-theorizing visual arts in Europe from a migratory frame, Nilgün Bayraktar notes that migrant artists who handle moving image-based media such as video art and video installation decenter the "monolithic conception of Europeanness" (2016, p. 9), meanwhile defining their artistic selves as transitional, polyvocal, and heterogeneous. In a similar fashion, Monica Toledo Silva stresses that migrant narratives in contemporary art deterritorialize the commanding infrastructures of the West and enter "a territory where each body has its own dramaturgy" (2021, p. 41). Furthermore, for Silva, these artistic creations that reimagine the

nomadic subjects as embodied entities "demand a performance of a moving self that continuously negotiates a renewed territory", in order to display the "performativity of migration" (2021, p. 41). On that account, Nezaket Ekici's ventures at bringing performance, video, and installation together in a singular artwork not only discloses her artistic nomadism but also proves her tendencies at carving herself an in-between territory that is "always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25); a space located at "the edges of any identity's limits" (Grosz, 2001, p. 92). Affirming this in-between space through her multifaceted art practice, Ekici leaves behind the performative and stationary ratio of migrant identity towards an unfolding form of nomadic becoming.

Just as the artist searches for seeping surfaces to inhabit at the intermezzo of her dual national identities, in her next video performance *Veiling and Reveiling*, Ekici investigates perhaps the uttermost dualism prevalent in the culture of her origin: the secular/religious dichotomy. Wrapped up in a chador from head to toe, she starts wearing makeup, lingerie, a wig, and high heels on top of a veil, enacting a bizarre and yet a profound metamorphosis for women's predicament in Turkey (Figs. 7-10). In the context of Turkish cultural politics, Fulden İbrahimhakkıoğlu states that "the veil has acquired the status of being the antithesis of modernity, a threat to the secular nation, and an obstacle to the nationalist project of modernization" (2013, p. 145). Hence, performed during a time in which Turkey was going through a political turmoil about women's right to wear headscarves in public spaces, Ekici's video performance encapsulates a zeitgeist in which religious women's bodily autonomies were subjected to nationwide disputes.



Fig. 7: Looking at her veiled reflection. © Nezaket Ekici. (2009). *Veiling and Reveiling* [video performance]. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 8: Wearing lingerie on top of a chador. © Nezaket Ekici. (2009). *Veiling and Reveiling* [video performance]. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 9: The artist with wigs and high heels. © Nezaket Ekici. (2009). *Veiling and Reveiling* [video performance]. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 10: Transformation reaching an end. © Nezaket Ekici. (2009). *Veiling and Reveiling* [video performance]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Beyond its implications for the Turkish culture, *Veiling and Reveiling* also bear resonances for the European conjuncture in which Ekici is situated as a migrant artist. As Christian Joppke notes, since a Muslim female schoolteacher's headscarf in Germany stirred controversies across the nation for breaching the "required non-partisanship of the state" in religious matters (2009, p. 23), German society also took a stance opposite the Islamic headscarf for proposing a threat to neutrality, and quite paradoxically, to the liberal values of the state. Thus, obtaining a minoritarian position on both accounts, Ekici's video performance in chador foregrounds the logistics of Braidotti's nomadic subject that "signifies the potential becoming, the opening out – the transformative power of all the exploited, marginalized, oppressed minorities" (2002, p. 83). However, as Braidotti further warns us, obtaining a minority status is not enough, as the crucial movement towards becoming-nomadic lies within "undoing the oppositional dualism of majority/minority" (2002, p. 84) and exercising an affirmative creative praxis to overhaul all identities in a non-hierarchical plane. In other words, this nomadic subject-in-becoming must continuously transgress the dichotomies inherent in the system and embrace the vicissitude itself, aligning with the pluralistic and contradictory nature of all identities.

Hence, in this work, Ekici starts questioning her self-image beyond the veil and slowly performs an act of change in which the artist enmeshes the stereotypes of the modern woman with the conservative woman by dressing herself in a mixture of contrasting garments. Approaching female identities "in an open-ended and contested manner" and "in keeping with the cognitive and figural 'style' of philosophical nomadism" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 55), Ekici's performance

illustrates a paradoxical duration in which the notions of veiling, free will, and exhibitionism are disseminated across a space of non-dualistic interaction, whereby the artist continuously plays with these systems of authority that fix women's identities in an enclosed aggregate. Similar to Alshaibi's take of female Arab identity as a relational, embedded, and open-ended entity in its respective social milieu, Ekici incubates a nomadic female subject at the hiatuses of German and Turkish cultures, ontologically existing in a hybrid morphology (Figs. 9-10).

Besides the processes of becoming-nomad/minor/woman, I argue that *Veiling and Reveiling* brings a vital critique to the "caricature of global power relations" that is predominantly "postulated and fought out on women's bodies" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 46). Regarding such gender politics in neoliberal discourses, Braidotti illustrates that there is an ongoing colonial tendency to perceive Western women as liberated from the incarcerations of religion and primitive traditions, whereas non-Western women in need of urgent "emancipatory social actions" (2006, p. 46) to be saved from the constricting rituals of religion. For Braidotti, however, the grey areas and "the in-between degrees of complexity" are crucial tools of operation to salvage feminist politics from positioning women's bodies "as indicators of the stage of development of their respective civilizational fault-lines" (2006, p. 46). Accordingly, on the one hand, entertaining secular values by dressing up in a modernized piece of clothing and on the other hand maintaining the Islamic chador underneath and covering her body, Ekici concludes her video performance not only by parodying these dualistic discourses on women's femininity but also synchronously carrying the symbolic customs of both sides, insinuating an in-between space of coexistence across differences.

Analogous to the artist's ceaseless search for an ontological in-betweenness, in her live performance entitled *But All That Glitters Is Not Gold*, Ekici untangles the boundaries between humanity and animality, namely the one between the birds and humans, by putting herself at the thresholds and liminal states of these ontological orders. In this work, having been entrapped in a golden cage, Ekici slowly but surely unlocks herself out of the confinements of the cage (Figs. 11-12). Evocative of the ancient symbols of the golden cage as an emblematic locus of self-imprisonment and suppression, Ekici forges allegorical innuendos with the ways in which human subjectivity is being restrained by the glittery and glamorous golden cages of civilization. Yet, on a more profound veneer, on which my interpretation is primarily based, her performance probes the fundamental demarcations between the human and the animal, incorporating what some scholars and practitioners suggested as "interspecies collaboration" (Jevbratt, 2009; Cull, 2015). According to artist Lisa Jevbratt, this notion can be exercised by adopting an animal's perspective, in a zoomorphic fashion, "to imagine other senses and the creative realms of those senses" (2009, p. 17).

Expanding the meaning of interspecies collaboration, performance theorist Laura Cull (2015) states that this concept refers more to an emotive and intellectual collaboration than a physically present one where the artist actually collaborates with the animal. Parallel to this conceptualization, Deleuze and Guattari state that "becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real (...) it is clear that the human being does not 'really' become an animal any more than the animal 'really' becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself" (1987, p. 238). Thus, akin to becoming-animal, Cull's theorization of

interspecies collaboration in performance art alludes to a state in which a cross-contaminating loop of mutation is rendered between the human and the animal, enabling both parties to experience a mutual transfiguration (2015, p. 33). In a similar vein, I argue that Ekici's movements from homo sapiens to a birdlike organism activate interspecies collaboration, in which the artist wields her space at the cracks and fissures of different ontological orders, meanwhile practicing the becoming-bird of the human as well as the becoming-human of the bird.



Fig. 11: The artist as a human/bird entity. © Nezaket Ekici. (2014). *But All That Glitters Is Not Gold* [live performance]. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 12: Fatigued by the physicality of the act, she unlocks herself. © Nezaket Ekici. (2014). *But All That Glitters Is Not Gold* [live performance]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Braidotti argues that nomadism "rests on the practice of estrangement as a way to free the process of subject formation", in the interim engaging with the multiple others of the conventional 'Man' of the Western reason, to disclose the "open-ended, interrelational, multisexed, and transspecies flows of becoming" (2011, p. 83). In her account, destabilizing the normative structures in the culture, that is, the mastering presence of patriarchy, Eurocentrism, and human exceptionalism, is a crucial counter-practice that "supports the process of becoming-animal/woman/minoritarian/nomadic" (2011, p. 84). Ekici, too, in

many instances over the course of her performance, personifies a birdlike figure, relentlessly trying to free herself from the confinements of the cage, making the viewer question the relationship humans initiate with non-human entities surrounding their ecologies. In that respect, I read Ekici's performance as an act of becoming-animal, in which she both rearticulates her "sense of attachment and connection to a shared world" and also simultaneously transforms the audience's "sensorial and perceptual coordinates in order to acknowledge the collective nature" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 94) populated by humans and non-humans alike.

Braidotti further notes that since animals have long been perceived as the "boundary makers between fundamental categories" human imagination started using them as metaphoric precursors for "values, norms, and morals" (2011, p. 84). Accentuating Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal as an affirmative "qualitative shift" from speciesism to more-than-human ecology, Braidotti states that the animal, in Deleuze-Guattarian ontology, is not treated metaphorically (2011, p. 85); on the contrary, the animal is perceived "as a body that can do a great deal, as a field of forces, a quantity of speed and intensity and as a cluster of capabilities" (2011, p. 85). Likewise, in this work, Ekici dodges mere animal allegories and instead embodies the bird as a field of forces to explore the neglected realms of the human/animal kinships, particularly with regard to the concurrent dominations of women and the non-human animals.

For instance, near the end of the performance, after the artist finds the right key among many and unleashes herself out of the golden cage (Fig. 12), Ekici is visibly seen out of breath, worn out, and yet relieved, as though a bird's numerous attempts at escaping from a cage has resulted in success. Precisely for this

embodied confinement and the hard-earned liberation that follows, I underline that Ekici's performance aligns itself with "the structural analogy between the exploitation of women and that of animals", foregrounding the entwined forms of subjugation where "overlapping variables trace transversal connections between sexual, social, racial, and species inequalities" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 91). Ceaselessly seeking a way out of the restricting golden cage, and of the anthropocentric patriarchal society on a larger scope, Ekici's nomadic and feminine human/bird entity resides at the intermezzo of different ontological orders where the flows of mutual exchange and mutation meet, to conjointly liberate women and animals from the seemingly glittery cages of society.

Shifting her focus from the leaky boundaries between humanity and animality to those between the artwork and the audience, Ekici's recent performance installation *Work in Progress – Personal Map* (2020) is a retrospective project that looks back at the various performances of the artist. Unlike the previously analyzed works, this project is the longest in duration and perhaps the most interactive of the artist's career as Ekici invites the viewers, for eight days, to enact fragments from her performances or to put a nail in the artist's handmade map, located on a white plane (Fig. 13). Through these participatory attributes of her performance, Ekici simultaneously opens two points of discussion: one is about deterritorializing the austere line between the artwork and the spectator, to work towards a decentered and non-hierarchical vision between the two, while the other is about the praxis of making rhizomatic maps to foreground the relational and nomadic dimensions of her artistic oeuvre.

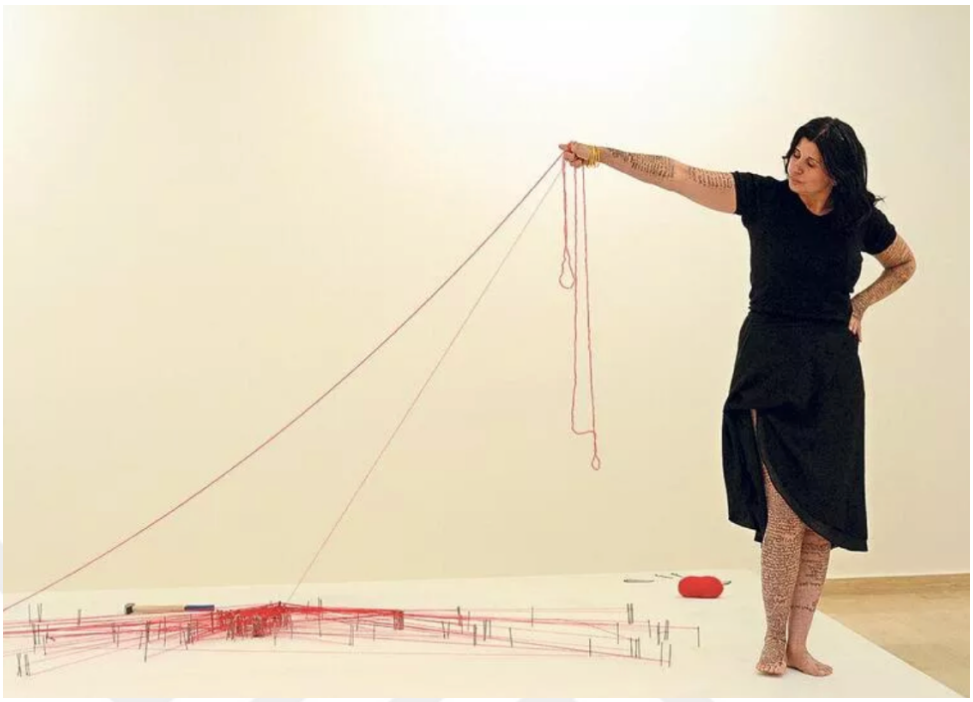


Fig. 13: While engaging with the audience, the artist maps her own artistic journeys on a white plane, using hammers, nails, and red wools. © Nezaket Ekici. (2020). *Work in Progress – Personal Map* [performance installation]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Regarding the first point, Jacqueline Millner and Caitriona Moore argue that performances by women artists in which the artwork is created collectively at the venue with a diverse set of participants "is one way to conceive of performance beyond identities" (2022, p. 65). Drawing upon how new materialisms dislodged the agency from being the stable property of a single entity, namely a centralized human subject, Millner and Moore generate the concept of "distributed performance" in which the "presence, embodiment and identity are set in motion by way of a network of people, places and ideas" (2022, p. 67). In this concept, interactive performance is reconceived as "an enactment of agency as flows and forces rather than as the property of an individual" (2022, p. 68). In a similar manner, by encouraging her audience to participate themselves in the performance by contributing to the map-making, dancing alongside her, sharing

moments of intimacy, or collectively chanting one-liners about taboos in life, Ekici's project renders a distributed agency that destabilizes the conventional hierarchy between the artwork and the audience. As the audience becomes attached to the art-making process through the practices of "foregrounding and modelling distributed, affective labour and flows" (Millner & Moore, 2022, p. 75), Ekici as the once autonomous subject with the artistic agency, is clustered anew at the intermezzo, but this time, between the fluctuating line between the artwork and the spectator.

When it comes to the second aspect of her project, I argue that Ekici's personal map of her artistic journeys brings forth a relational and nomadic vision. Constructed part collectively, and part individually during the performance, this biographical map demonstrates the various geographical locations the artist has performed over the years. In a Deleuzian line of thought, Simonetta Moro states that "mapping of places is a form of mapping one's self—not a self that is self-contained, defined along Cartesian axis, but rather a self that is defined by its relationship to others" (2020, p. 301). Imagining the emerging cartographic aesthetics in visual culture as rhizomatic connections within the world, Moro further notes that map-making practices reaffirm the idea that "it is not our origins that define us as subjects, but where those points of origin take us, the kind of rhizomatic trajectory they draw on the map" (2022, p. 177). Similarly, as previously noted in the discussion of Sama Alshaibi's cartographies, Braidotti's politics of locations, understood as cartographies of power relations, provide "the grounding for political accountability" whereby the subject endures "dialogical confrontations with others, in a mixture of affectivity/involvement and

objectivity/distance" (2006, p. 93). In that regard, Ekici's map, far from rendering a personal, linear, or centered vision, traces a nomadic trajectory in which the artist's self is outward-bounded, decentered, and dependent on its relationship with other people and places. To put it differently, this map-making practice reveals both the artist's fluid sense of self as a nomadic performer and the relational affiliations she forms with her audience.

All in all, Ekici's performances – experimenting with a variety of media – showcase a nomadic vision that activates the artist to oscillate between different domains and orders. No matter how rigid the lines that separate and define the distinctions between citizen/migrant, secular/conservative, human/animal, or artwork/audience seemingly appear, Ekici's nomadic performance philosophy nonetheless thwarts them, to situate the artistic self at the intermezzo.

3.4 Conclusion

Primarily focusing on Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici while also analyzing their artistic productions in tandem with each other, this chapter theorizes the nomadic visions at work in their interdisciplinary practices. Given the real-life trajectories of Alshaibi as an exilic Arab-American artist and Ekici as a Turkish immigrant artist in Germany, I have been carefully stressing that what makes their art seem to align with Braidotti's nomadic theory is their overarching, paralleling, and even unifying artistic philosophies, rather than their sociopolitical conditions in their respective environments. Thus, I argue that these two women's artistic practices evoke a nomadic vision through which either the subjects being filmed

or the artists themselves fluctuate between nationalities, cultures, or different orders in a constant state of flux. Moving on from nomadic subjects to bodily territories, the next chapter investigates the corporeal topographies of Mona Hatoum and Amal Kenawy.

CHAPTER IV

Corporeal Topographies

The body is not simply a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with.

(Elizabeth Grosz, 1994).

4.1 Introduction

Over the course of history, the female body is perceived to be an enigmatic locus that oozes carnal sides of human corporeality. Whether it is the conundrums of reproduction or the intricacies of female desire, in both the Western and Arabic philosophy, women's bodies were negated either as lack or as sites of inferiority as opposed to the norm of the man-standard. Having had their sexual agencies suppressed, women across East and West were keen on instigating a resistance to overhaul the male hegemony, in order to recuperate the productive forces of their embodiment. While Western philosophy saw a strand of feminist theory that affirmed the female corporeality as a site of production and constitution of knowledge and desire, the Arab world had women writers and artists whose work was registering across different locations in the Arab geography, steering women to creatively utilize female corporeality for feminist resistance.

In visual culture, artistic attempts at reaffirming female corporeality were first understood to be a reaction to "the Modernist regime of meaning and value" which systematically veiled the artist's body in order to privilege "a certain 'disinterested' and thus resolutely disembodied subject – usually the white, Western male: the allegedly universal or transcendent, disembodied cogito of Descartes' philosophy of being" (Jones, 2000, p. 20). However, as noted before in Chapter 1, these initial treatments of the body as an artistic site of resistance were expanded further with the technological enhancements in the 20th century. Rather than merely engaging with the body as a resistant force to the powers outside of it, artists employed video, installation, or other media to return inwards, exploring the powers within the body and reminding the audience of their "ever-changing position in the web of intersubjective couplings and disengagements that constitute the social" (Jones, 2000, p. 43). Disrupting the inherent dualisms of mind/body, self/other, and external/interior, these body-oriented art practices were laying outside of the Cartesian thought and scrutinizing the "multiplicitous, dispersed, nonnormative subjectivities" (Jones, 1998, p. 215).

Hence, what this chapter sets out to do is to investigate the body-oriented artistic praxes of the Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum and the Egyptian artist Amal Kenawy. In doing so, I aim to unearth the corresponding philosophies of these Arab women that radically render female corporeality as fluid, malleable, and unstable processes, in contrast to the unitary and unchangeable perceptions of the body in the conventional male-centric reason. While the previous chapter was by and large drawing upon Rosi Braidotti's nomadic theory to understand the nomadic visions at work in Middle Eastern women's grip of subjectivity, this

chapter utilizes Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian-inflected corporeal feminism to elicit how these artists formulate a corporeal topography through either their own or other women's bodies. Inspired by Jennifer McWeeney's term "topography of flesh" in which she gestures toward "a three-dimensional landscape of the social, material, and economic relationships present in a given locale at a particular point in time" (2014, p. 271), I aim to develop the term *corporeal topography* as a further entangled phenomenon to understand how women's corporeal selves and their geographic spaces can be mutually constitutive in terms of producing knowledge regarding their fluid identities. On that account, I take these two women's body-oriented art practices as embodied, material, and interconnected processes in comprehending the changing nature of female existence in the Middle East.

4.2 Carnal Anatomies of Mona Hatoum

Perhaps the most well-known and thoroughly studied contemporary artist from the Middle East, Mona Hatoum's artistic opus poses a vast array of creative output that surveys what it means to be an exiled subject and how to accumulate carnal knowledge on female corporeality. Born in Beirut to Palestinian parents, Hatoum initially travelled to the UK for educational purposes but she was unable to return to her family's estate due to the wars taking place in Lebanon during the 70s, thereby involuntarily being clustered as an exilic subject in Europe. This exilic life trajectory of Hatoum haunts almost her entire body of work in which the artist "performs a critical engagement with the destructive violence of occupation and containment" (Tzelepis, 2016, p. 146).

From performance pieces to videos and installations, her wide-ranging praxis "challenge viewers' senses of corporeal and ontological autonomy" (Tembeck, 2005, p. 57) as she continuously undermines the borders between geographical locations and self/other relations. As Edward W. Said further puts it, Hatoum's art transverses "the idea of a single homeland" (2012, p. 141) and constantly strips the fixed conception of identity, to practice a dissolving state of continuity and fluidity. In that respect, this section approaches three of her works entitled *Variations in Discord and Divisions* (live performance, 1984), *Measures of Distance* (video installation, 1988), and *Corps Étranger* (video installation, 1994) to examine how her artistic philosophy foregrounds female corporeality as a productive flow of forces and becomings in surmounting the unitary and sedentary conceptions of identity, origin, and body.

In one of her earliest performances *Variations on Discord and Divisions*, Hatoum slowly crawls amidst the audience seats toward the floor covered with newspaper prints. Dressed up in a jumpsuit and a black balaclava, she initially poses her body as an anonymous figure, performing a series of odd gestures. From painting the floors with blood-red paint to cutting the black fabric with a knife operating very close to her eyes or attempting to sit properly on a chair only to fall back immediately, Hatoum's staged grotesqueness and performative failures set the ground for a creeping atmosphere yet to come. Because in what might be the pinnacle of the entire act, Hatoum chops portions of raw kidneys coming inside of her body and put them on plates to serve the audience (Figs. 14-17). This movement of disentombing the interior surfaces of the body—later accompanied by vibrant and absorbing sonic pulses—culminates in a visual and

aural composition that repeatedly grows in volume until the lights are shut. In the end, while a projection shows archival newsreels about wars and protests in the Middle East, an audible segment from a report utters: "35000 people have been the victims of death squads since 1980. 1500 people have been butchered in cold blood in Nazi-like fashion…Twin refugee camps, one vast devastated morgue…Vicious immorale…Oppressed people…Famine, worse than ever" (Western Front, 1984).



Fig. 14: Covering the floor with red paint. © Mona Hatoum. (1984). *Variations on Discord and Divisions* [live performance]. Image courtesy of the Western Front.



Fig. 15: Cutting the balaclava. © Mona Hatoum. (1984). *Variations on Discord and Divisions* [live performance]. Image courtesy of the Western Front.



Fig. 16: Organs and plates. © Mona Hatoum. (1984). *Variations on Discord and Divisions* [live performance]. Image courtesy of the Western Front.



Fig. 17: The artist serving her organs. © Mona Hatoum. (1984). *Variations on Discord and Divisions* [live performance]. Image courtesy of the Western Front.

Evidently, in this work, Hatoum's artistic impulse climbs to the surface in response to the wars, occupations, or other social crises storming across her homeland region – a cluster of events that are predominantly instigated by the Israeli forces or other Western powers. Nevertheless, I argue that there is a more profound concern lingering around this performance. Through a series of border-crossing actions conducted with and upon her body such as the precise movements with the knife that almost slashes the human skin or the blood-red paint scattered all around the artist's body, Hatoum's performance evokes "the body's tangibility, its matter, its (quasi) nature" (Grosz, 1994, p. 24), meanwhile connecting "her exploration of the corporeal limits dividing inside and out to territory informing the body's specificity" (Mansoor, 2010, p. 58). Presenting an up-close intervention into the wholeness of the body, Hatoum radically reworks her own Palestinian body as a pliable flesh, "as a point of departure and a locus of incision, a point of 'reality' or 'nature' understood (fictionally) as prior to, and as the raw material of, social practices" (Grosz, 1994, p. 118). Making her Western audience confront the atrocities committed against Palestinian people, she serves her organs as edible crops, and thus, simultaneously exposes the very social practices that dislocate non-Western bodies and thwart the seemingly indivisible and inviolable structure of the body.

Instead of operating from a fixed stance, war and exile's traumatic effects on the corporeal self are handled with fluidity and variability in this performance. Gesturing toward how the idea of fluid corporeality manifests in performance art, Rachel Fensham notes that "bodies are creatively generative but they also produce knowledges about sexual difference and, beyond that, what bodies can

do within culture", meaning that they "both carry and create signification but they are not themselves fixed or codified in any finite sense by the logic of representation" (2005, p. 289). In that matter, initially performing anonymously in a balaclava to make the audience question the cultural context of this violence, Hatoum strategically avoids being merely defined by the acts committed against Palestinians: her artistic body navigates at "the nexus of sectarian, geo-political violence and its effects on the body with specific reference to crises in the Middle East, but with broader socio-political and gender implications" (Poggi, 2022, p. 35). While she unearths the detrimental impacts of exile, displacement, or war on the Palestinian body, she is also generating a non-fixed corporeal body that disrupts the rigid orders of identity – a body that "can be understood as a series of surfaces, energies, and forces, a mode of linkage, a discontinuous series of processes, organs, flows, and matter" (Grosz, 1994, p. 120).

This non-fixed corporeal entity envisaged by Hatoum has resonances with the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of the Body without Organs. As previously studied in Chapter 2, the concept of BwO is concerned less with opposing the organs that assemble an organism than dismantling "the organic organization of the organs" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 158). Reworking the notion of BwO in a feminist vein, Grosz states that bodies and entities in a Deleuzian frame "are theorized in terms of the microprocesses, a myriad of intensities and flows, with unaligned or unalignable components which refuse to conform to the requirements of order and organization" (1994, p. 181). In that respect, Hatoum's performance invokes a BwO, not because she incubates an actual body without its functional organs, but because she reconfigures her artistic self as "a platform or an intensive

spatium which engenders a qualitative change" (Žukauskaitė, 2014, p. 80). Demonstrating a processual and metamorphosing body/subject synchronously freed from the biological orders of the human organism, Hatoum contests the sociopolitical conceptions about what constitutes an exilic woman's body.

While the disloyalty to the organic order of internal organs can be read as an attempt to animate BwO in morphological terms, Hatoum's engagements with her cultural background can be also construed as an attempt to affiliate her Palestinian identity with the notion of BwO. As Deleuze and Guattari state, BwO is "what remains when you take everything away" (1987, p. 151) from an organism: it refers to a non-identitarian and non-subjective state in which "only intensities pass and circulate" (1987, p. 153). In other words, by "dismantling the traditional biological construction of the self and disarticulating the strata that constitute humans", one enters into a BwO, "a state of continual transition, passage and becoming" (Baykan, 2020, p. 160). Through her artistic practice, Hatoum passes into the zone of BwO, by which she continuously destratifies and restratifies Palestinian identity. Hence, the newsreels stating Palestinians' ceaseless displacements caused by war and political turmoil prove that the artist delineates Palestinian identity as a continuum: as a "body before and in excess of the coalescence of its intensities and their sedimentation into meaningful, organized, transcendent totalities" (Grosz, 1994, p. 170). In this work, the rigid formations of national identities are deterritorialized and reterritorialized on a continual basis. Having been forced to reside away from the boundaries of Palestine and thus, stripped of a national organism to conform to, Hatoum's body operates freely from a locus of affirmative, perpetual, and qualitative change.

Similar to *Variations on Discord and Divisions* in which Hatoum forms a corporeal topography through her own body, her next project *Measures of Distance* is a video art that portrays her mother's body as a locus of inscriptions. In this infamous work, Hatoum orchestrates the photographs of her mother's naked body—taken by the artist during a visit to Beirut—underneath the Arabic text of her mother's letters (Fig. 18). While a series of taped conversations held in Arabic between women play in the background, the artist reads aloud her mother's letters in English, conveying her intimate feelings, her relationship with sexuality, and Hatoum's father's objections to see his wife being filmed in such obscene ways. Enveloped with the intimacy between a mother and her daughter in exile, *Measures of Distance* illustrates "female body as a 'vessel' of collective memory inscribed with the scars of traumatic diasporic experience" (Ball, 2012, p. 144).

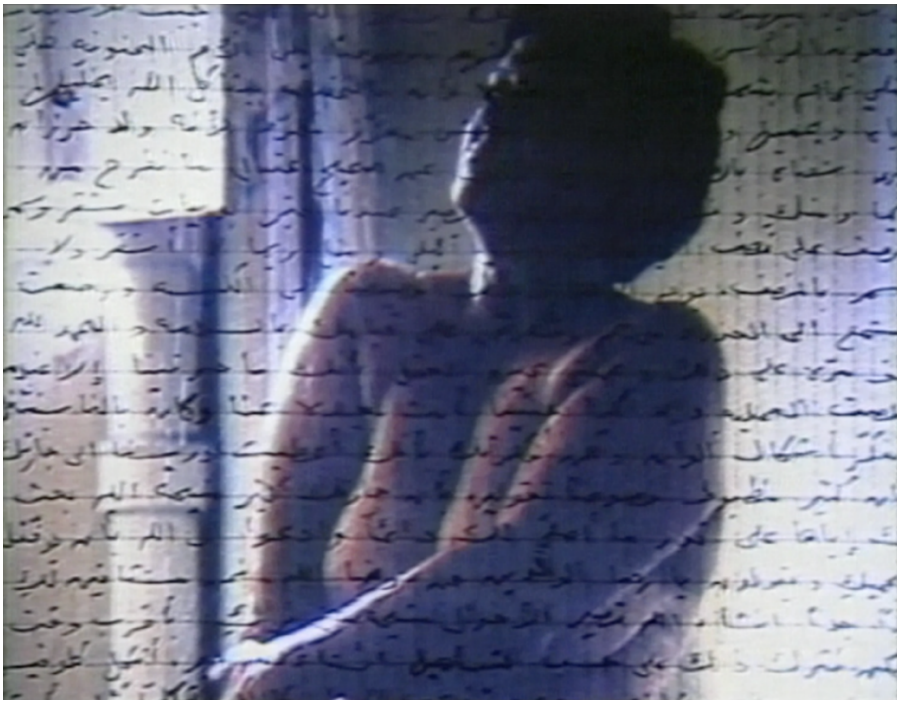


Fig. 18: Arabic letters inscribed onto the body of the artist's mother. © Mona Hatoum. (1988). *Measures of Distance* [video]. Image courtesy of Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Much has been written about this piece, and yet very little touched upon its connotations for corporeal feminism[4]. In broad strokes, previous research ranged from situating the haptic visualities of the work (Marks, 2000) to excavating its phenomenological potentials (Hezekiah, 2020), or from the artistic engagements with postmemory (Lionis, 2014) to its implications for postcolonial feminism (Ball, 2012). Slightly drifting away from these analyses, I focus on how the female body is rendered as an inscriptive corporeal surface: as "an assemblage of organs, processes, pleasures, passions" (Grosz, 1994, p. 120). Hence, in *Measures of Distance,* I argue that Hatoum practices corporeality in a fluid stream – one that explores the carnal flows of women's sexuality and brings forth a dynamic vision of Arab femininity.

In the context of corporeal inscription, Grosz underscores that the "modes of materiality of the 'page'/body must be taken into account" because ignoring the sexual specificity of inscribed bodies may lead to misleading outcomes (1994, p. 156). As she emphasizes, "one and the same message, inscribed on a male or a female body, does not always or even usually mean the same thing or result in the same text (Grosz, 1994, p. 156). Accordingly, I stress that Hatoum's inscription of her mother's body with an Arabic text discloses a double entendre. First, instead of treating the female body as a dormant surface to be engraved upon—using her mother's own texts about her carnal desires—Hatoum bestows her mother as an active agent with a sexual appetite. Second, through the layered positioning of personal conversations regarding exile on her mother's bare body,

[4] There has been research that brings together corporeal feminism and Mona Hatoum's artistic works but they primarily focused on her video installation *Corps Étranger* (1993). During the discussion of *Corps Étranger* in the following pages, I give references to those articles.

Hatoum's video substantiates "the Palestinian national narrative" (Lionis, 2014, p. 80) in which the feminine body operates as an emblematic locus of Palestinian displacement, thereby proving Grosz's point that sexual specificity of inscriptive surfaces entails different meanings.

Regarding the first nuance, I argue that Hatoum's staging of her mother's fluid sexual desires derives from an impetus to inscribe Arab women's sexuality on the screen. Referring to the raw presence of her mother, Hatoum herself states that she wanted to move beyond "the fixed identity that is usually implied in the stereotype of Arab woman as passive, mother as non-sexual being" (1997, p. 140). To her credit, she succeeds in unveiling every cusp of her mother's upper body and divulging her latent desires in a fervent manner. As her mother writes: "I enjoyed very much all those intimate conversations we had about women's things and all that" (Hatoum, 1988). When asked about her relationship with her sexuality, she says that "women enjoy sex as much as men if not more" (ibid). She even reveals that her husband is critical of her daughter breaking into the taboo territories of his wife's body as if she's "trespassing his property" (ibid). *Measures of Distance*, thus, transgresses the rigid borders of the patriarchal siege and affirms the female body "as a kind of hinge or threshold" placing it between "a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface" (Grosz, 1995, p. 33).

In terms of the second hint, weaving together the images of her mother's body with her own voiceover reading the letters on exile, Hatoum sketches out a corporeal topography from her mother's body – a body that embodies the political and historical indicators of the Palestinian displacement, namely the

Nakba. Otherwise known as the Palestinian Catastrophe, Nakba refers to the collective displacement of many Palestinian Arabs from their lands, following the events of 1948 (Webman, 2009). In that respect, her mother's corporeal self in *Measures of Distance* registers across different historical stages of the Palestinian experience. Enunciating how "all of her loved ones are scattered around the world" (Hatoum, 1988), the naked maternal figure is at once a "nexus between Hatoum and the Palestinian homeland" (2014, p. 80), and also, as Lionis further notes, "a conduit to the experience of the Nakba and historical Palestine" (2014, p. 80). Employing her mother's corporeality, Hatoum carves out a topographic map that captures the volumes of calamities Palestinian people endure over the years.

Unlike the hitherto analyzed works that explore the exteriors of the female body, in her most famous work *Corps Étranger*, Hatoum shifts her focus towards interior surfaces and embarks on a journey through her own body. Meaning "foreign body" in English, this body-oriented artistic piece denotes how Hatoum treats her corporeal self as a foreign entity endowed with porous surfaces, viscous fluids, and seeping orifices. Having captured the carnal qualities of female corporeality with the lingering movements of endoscopy and colonoscopy cameras, *Corps Étranger* demonstrates the permeable bits and fragments of the artist's interiors in a thirty-five-minute loop (Fig. 19). Designing this work as an immersive video installation in which the viewers enter a dark room, Hatoum takes the audience through a voyage across the epidermis and the circulatory system of her own body, only to display how the interiors of herself "is no more 'revealing' than the ambiguously toned flesh of the exterior" (Jones, 2006, p. 157).



Fig. 19: The interiors of the artist's body, captured with endoscope and colonoscope. © Mona Hatoum. (1994). *Corps Étranger* [video installation]. Image courtesy of Tate Modern.

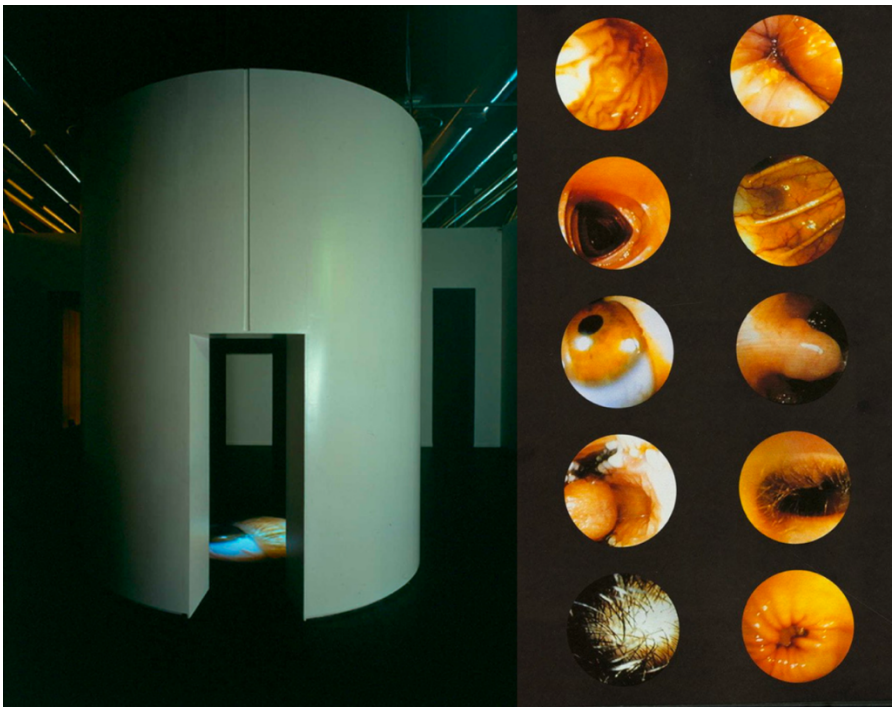


Fig. 20: The immersive design of the installation whereby the viewer enters a dark room. © Mona Hatoum. (1994). *Corps Étranger* [video installation]. Image courtesy of Tate Modern.

The penetrating encounter with the foreign terrains of the body has led some scholars to read this work from a self/other dimension. Christine Ross, for one, stresses that *Corps Étranger* is "a work about the 'other' as it starts to threaten 'me' (the Westerner) because this 'other' is out of place" (1997, p. 152). Situating Hatoum's visceral body in a fluid surface whereby the Western subjects could not construct their identities by this Oriental "other", Ross notes that "the 'difference' or the 'distance' between the I and the other, the mind and the body, the healthy and the ill, is not so clear or predictable anymore" (1997, p. 152). Even though I find her engagement with *Corps Étranger* useful to grasp the pressing issue of otherness in Hatoum's oeuvre, I lean towards an analysis by which the artist's interior body is reconfigured as a corporeal topography.

Extracting the macabre portions of human interiority, Hatoum compiles a topographic map out of her own body: an atlas made from slender veins, uneven zones, and bristly skins, accompanied by the waving sensations of ultrasound noises. Tamar Tembeck argues that "if the body were to be regarded as a topographical map, one would find that its nation or selfhood is delineated by the parameters of its epidermis" (2005, p. 58). Alluding to the token boundaries propagated to divide countries, for Tembeck, "the epidermis is the normative delineation of the end of one's self" (2005, p. 58). However, I would argue that the identity lying underneath this epidermis is not a stable or inert entity. Far from it, the body's malleable mechanisms and its flowing liquids rejuvenate one's identity in a ceaseless loop. Its fluids, as Grosz notes, "attest to the permeability of the body" meanwhile eroding the "subject's aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity" (1994, pp. 193-194). Hence, reversing the epidermis and exhibiting

the permeable viscera floating effortlessly in the body, Hatoum's work renders a fluid account of corporeal topography in which the indelible lines of the epidermis that separate the inside and outside are attenuated.

This fluid corpo-topographic imagination does not merely stop operating in the artwork itself but leaps along to the reception arena of *Corps Étranger*. Created as a video installation with white cylinder outers and dark interiors whereby the audience's feet touch the screen (Fig. 20), Hatoum utilizes the embodied presence of installation art to invoke a tactile encounter for the viewers. Art historian Claire Bishop indicates that "installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision" (2005, p. 6, emphasis original). Referring to how installations in the mid-1990s were intrinsically corporeal, Deborah Cherry further notes that installations "offer a complex and simultaneous address to the senses, familiar dualities of mind/body, artist/viewer, inner/outer precipitate into ruin through sensory and somatic incitations" (1998, p. 23). Hence, the instrumentalization of installation art not only enables the viewers to physically touch the organs unfolding on screen but also disorients their views to map themselves in the piece. Similar to the fluid topographic lines that blur the outer and interior spaces of the artist's body, Hatoum's installation decenters the subject positions of the viewers in which they experience endoscopy and colonoscopy exams as if the tools are operating inside their bodies.

Therefore, far from merely commenting on the dichotomy of self/other in the Western conjuncture, *Corps Étranger* recapitulates women's corporeality "as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping,

secreting" (Grosz, 1994, p. 203). In doing so, it employs the medium of video installation to practice the dissolution of identities, regardless of gender or nationality. Referring to how the immersive design of this installation is a reversal of performance in which the audience is activated, Ross states that *Corps Étranger* produces "a body that is both living and dying, present and absent, recessive and enraptured, a body whose contours follow the vicissitudes of its disorganization and reorganization" (2003, p. 519). If I were to add, the inter-corporeal engagement of the work, ensuring neither a climax nor a closure, generates a transformative encounter for the artist and the viewer to pose ontological questions about what constitutes the foreign in the body, or what formulates a corporeal topography.

Ultimately, exercising fluid corporeality, Hatoum's artistic philosophy "defiantly resist fixed identities and compliant cartographies, insisting on a more nuanced, contradictory, and elusive view of the world and human experience" (Tawadros, 2012, p. 57). Her body-oriented art practice draws corporeal topographies out of her own or other women's bodies, "to make visible the myriad perspectives—fleshes—that constitute a world, despite our personal investments in concealing them" (McWeeny, 2014, p. 278). In Hatoum's oeuvre, Arab women's bodies engender an assemblage of carnal forces that collectively constitute a map.

4.3 Amal Kenawy and the Porous Bodies

As the second artist under scrutiny in this chapter, Amal Kenawy's body-oriented interdisciplinary art practice which tackles bodies as vulnerable, fractured, and leaky entities furthers my understanding of corporeal topography. Born and

lived in Egypt, Kenawy produced work until her untimely death in 2012, caused by leukemia. Relatively lesser known than Hatoum, Kenawy's oeuvre garnered notability for its ability to express abstraction, especially when dealing with body and memory (Wilson-Goldie, 2013). Yet, apart from few instances, her works that oscillate among video, installation, and animation have not been a subject of scholarly attention. Thus, it is my aim to foreground her artistic practice in relation to Hatoum's art, to designate the mutual entanglements of body, identity, and space in a fluid and porous corporeal topography. For these reasons, this section investigates a selection of Kenawy's works titled *The Room* (video art and installation, 2004), *Booby-Trapped Heaven* (video art, 2006), and *You Will Be Killed* (video animation, 2006).

Starting with the former, in its ten-minute duration[5], *The Room* presents a series of entwined images such as a bride in a shower (Fig. 21), a bridal figure hanging in front of a tree in a cagey petticoat (Fig. 22), another bride laying in a bed decorated with candles and wools, and perhaps, most strikingly, a beating heart onto which the artist stitches bridal ornaments. According to the artist, these emblems reflect her inner self, whereby she collates a convoluted set of visual metaphors and metonymies about marriage and motherhood that "bring the unseen into visual space" (2007, p. 66). Interrogating how these notions and her inner self interact through different artistic media, Kenawy conceives "the existence of a metaphorical room that lies within the physical body, a room similar to the much bigger one that lies outside of the body, one that represents

[5] Created as a video art at first, *The Room* (2004) is later utilized as a video installation that plays in the background as Kenawy enacts a performance about setting a bridal gown on fire in 2007. However, I solely focus on the video art itself, as it yields enough material to unpack.

society, with all the customs, traditions, conventions and factors that condition it" (2007, p. 65). Thus, *The Room* at best can be described as a work in which the artist engages with expressionist methods to excavate the deep cavities of corporeal subjectivity: a subjectivity that is in relation to its surroundings.

The bride, as a recurring motif, leads one to probe if there is an underlying feminist concern of the artist. Even though Kenawy herself stated that her art is not directly derived from a feminist impulse, but from an impetus to deal with "the influence of society on humans" (2007, p. 51), she acknowledges that gender may "play a merely indirect and unconscious role in it" (2007, p. 51). In the Muslim Arab conjuncture, Yvonne Haddad attests that Islamic societies have always believed "female sexuality is potent with a predilection to create havoc and chaos in the male" and so that it should be controlled to "preserve order and well-being in society" (1998, p. 17). In that regard, the patriarchal social milieu in which Kenawy operated as an artist affected her conception of identity, body, and sexuality to a certain degree. The bridal patterns, thus, come to the surface as expressions of the social context of Egypt whereby Muslim women have to navigate different forms of patriarchy-infused rituals such as forced marriages, honor killings, or female genital mutilation. Hence, serving both as a conceptual expression of the artist's inner self and a broader symbol for female oppression, bridal motifs gesture toward a body that "is subject to an ongoing process of signification in a fluid interplay between interior or psychic consciousness and exterior forces of power" (Fensham, 2005, p. 288). This body percolates at once as an aesthetic rendition that arouses the artist's inner turmoil and a herald of change for the women's movement in contemporary Egypt.



Fig. 21: A bride holding her bouquet while the water splashes her gown in a shower. © Amal Kenawy. (2004). *The Room* [video art]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

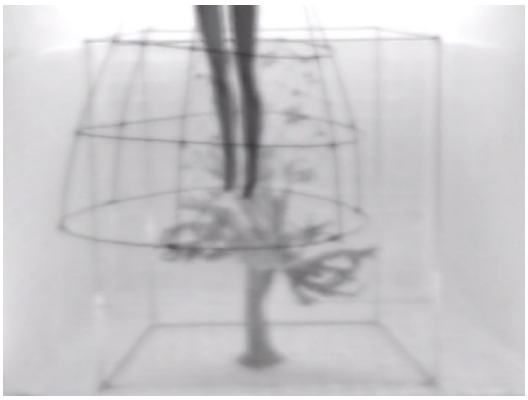


Fig. 22: The bridal motif hanging in front of a tree in a white cube. © Amal Kenawy. (2004). *The Room* [video art]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

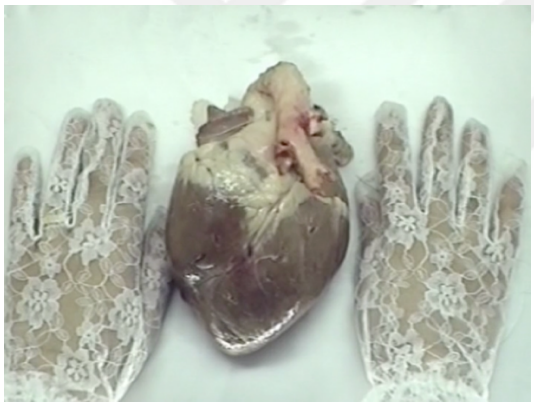


Fig. 23: The artist's hands before decorating the heart. © Amal Kenawy. (2004). *The Room* [video art]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.



Fig. 24: After the artist stitched ornaments onto the heart. © Amal Kenawy. (2004). *The Room* [video art]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

Aligning with the running theme of the bridal imagery, *The Room* demonstrates a beating heart onto which Kenawy stitches a snippet of bridal ornaments (Figs. 23-24). Seemingly functioning with its blood vessels and porous surfaces, this heart becomes a vibrant canvas for the artist's lace-gloved hands. In her artistic statement, referring to how the governing mechanism inside her body fails to capture the "true nature" of herself, Kenawy notes that "I may have a heart that

beats...a heart that carries out its functions...but I cannot confirm that I am alive" (2007, p. 39). Grosz states that "bodies are not fixed, inert, purely genetically or biologically programmed entities that function in their particular ways and in their determinate forms independent of their cultural milieu and value" (1994, p. 190). Thus, just like the biological organism that regulates her bodily functions, the sociocultural domain in which Kenawy is located inevitably affects how her body and identity flourish. Yet, through modifying this heart with bridal decorations, Kenawy delineates her corporeal self as a series of processes. Navigating through and outside the rigid stratum of an organizing structure—namely the marital institution—Kenawy situates the body as a porous entity: malleable, unfixed, and subject to constant change.

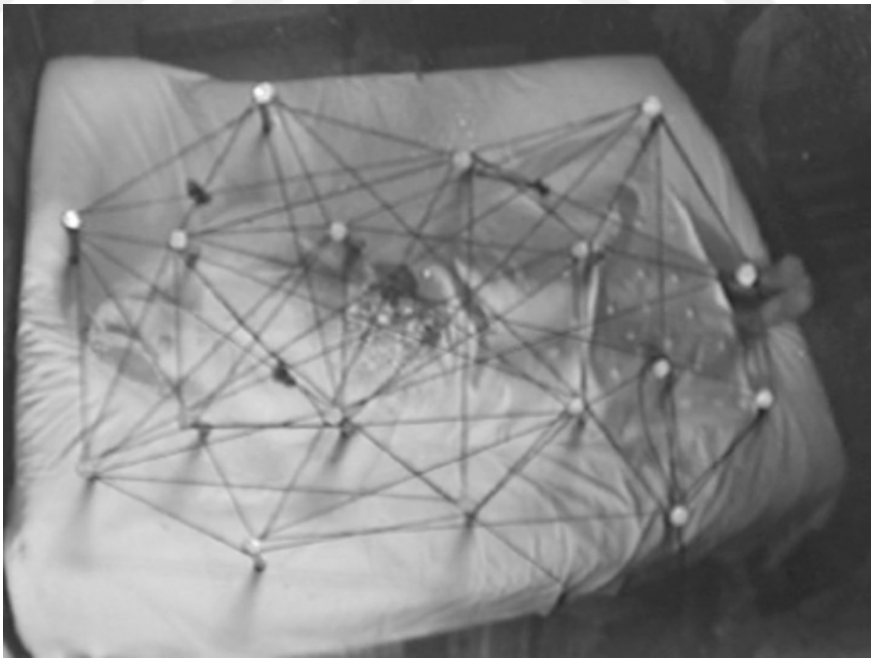


Fig. 25: The bridal figure slowly getting surrounded by rhizomatic wools. © Amal Kenawy. (2004). *The Room* [video art]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

Beyond the fluid porosity of the body, Kenawy also elucidates the bride in the middle of a web-like connection. Clustered around the bride's body, candles appear as points that tie all the wools together, in a rhizomatic fashion (Fig. 25). As noted in Chapter 2, the map-like structure of the rhizome defies any centrality or hierarchy. Implying its potential for feminism, Grosz defines Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome as a "network of multiple branching roots and shoots, with no central axis, no unified point of origin, and no given direction of growth—a proliferating, somewhat chaotic, and diversified system of growths" (1993, p. 199). Hence, built on the corporeal surface of a female body, these rhizomatic connections allude to an ontological nexus: one that exposes how women's bodies across Egypt, regardless of ethnic, religious, or class-based differences, are relational and interconnected against the destructive forces of male hegemony.

Drifting away from the bridal anxieties, Kenawy's corpo-topographic sketches continue in her video art *Booby-Trapped Heaven* (2006). Unlike *The Room* in which Kenawy employed vivid allegories for the feminine condition in Egypt, a naked body of an unknown female figure is delineated as a plane route in *Booby-Trapped Heaven.* In this two-channel video whereby the audience sees the events through a moving vision on the road, Kenawy presents two seemingly separate journeys unfolding on the screen. While the first frame shows a paper plane lingering on top of a naked woman's back as she's enmeshed with the landscape imagery (Fig. 26), the other presents almost exactly the same landscape passing by, without the female figure and with a few small changes in the scenery. According to the artist, *Booby-Trapped Heaven* is "a double journey, a journey to the inside of the self and a journey through the real, physical world" (2007, p. 65).



Fig. 26: A plane route on the body of a woman. © Amal Kenawy. (2006). *Booby-Trapped Heaven* [video art]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

Like the double screens and the dual journeys of *Booby-Trapped Heaven*, my analysis of this video is twofold. Firstly, the plane route on the corporeal surface of an Arab subject brings forth a connection with an extremely polarizing event in recent cultural memory: 9/11 and the War on Terror. Roland Bleiker notes that the political reactions to 9/11 "generated a patriotic movement that led to a considerable amount of cultural and racial stereotyping, particularly vis-à-vis people of Arabic origin" (2006, p. 87). Likewise in visual arts, Maymanah Farhat stresses that the terrorist attacks have resulted in further marginalization of Arab art whereby the Arab artists had to operate in a "far more hostile" environment (2009, p. 1224). Thus, when considering the global social fabric in the aftermath of 9/11, Kenawy's video in which a plane moves through the epidermis of a woman alludes to the intertwined linkages between rising Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, and misogyny towards Arab women in the wake of War on

Terror during the early 2000s. In that manner, reinstituting Arab women's corporeality "as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution" (Grosz, 1994, p. 23), the artist delineates a topography out of an Arab woman's body – a map that features "neither a defined landscape nor a skyline" (Kenawy, 2007, p. 65) but a body that oscillates between exterior power structures that try to define its borders.

A second meaning can be excavated from one of the dual journeys that the artist is referring to. By installing the naked female body on one side of the frame, she conceives female corporeality as a blank canvas by which transformations or aviated journeys into the self occurs, eventually displacing the totality of bodies. Kenawy states that the notion of displacement, for her, "is not the physical displacement caused by the boundaries that separate societies, but rather the schisms endured by the human entity that moves about with all its contradictions, dreams, emotions and sentiments" (2007, p. 65). Treating the displacement as a form of transformation in which human entities experience continual alterations, Kenawy's artistic practice introduces the body as "a point of intersection and transformation, a fragile, fracturable that is semi-permeable to intimacy and mutual understanding" (Jakubowski, 2016, p. 469). In that respect, the journey to the self, as illuminated on a naked woman's body, situates the female corporeality as a porous locus of transfiguration, whereby the artist explores "the infinite pliability of the body" (Grosz, 1994, p. 210). While the paper plane slithers around the skin of the woman's posteriors and forms "lines of dots as it moves from one city to another" (Kenawy, 2007, p. 65), the artist searches for the unknown surfaces of the body, aiming to grasp what constitutes the self.

The framing of the female body as an open slate onto which Kenawy registers a plane route ineluctably recalls the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of BwO. Like Hatoum's performance *Variations on Discord and Divisions* in which she engenders a disorganized stratum to deterritorialize and reterritorialize organic structures of national identity, Kenawy's *Booby-Trapped Heaven* animates BwO by gesturing toward how the female body can be treated as "a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order" (Grosz, 1994, p. 203). Deleuze and Guattari note that BwO is "nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0; but there is nothing negative about that zero, there are no negative or opposite intensities. Matter equals energy" (1987, p. 153). In their account, this provisional state of the BwO is an unmediated and unorganized field whereby "the body becomes pure potential: an open, formless, virtual matter prior to its stratification or coagulation into a developed form with fully differentiated organs" (Baykan, 2020, p. 160). Thence, whether the artist appoints a 9/11 undertone or a parable to inner journeys, the female corporeality in *Booby-Trapped Heaven* resonates with a BwO-like state in which the woman's body exists as a pure potentiality: a state prior to getting contoured, stratified, or coagulated in a totalized entity.

In Kenawy's oeuvre, the vulnerability of human bodies manifests itself perhaps most persistently in her video animation *You Will Be Killed* (2006). Built upon her own previous drawings and sketches, this video starts inside an old hospital: a place that was built decades ago as a military hospital for the British colonies in Egypt. Instigating memories of war and violence, Kenawy claims that this hospital led her to create a piece in which she explores "the effect of violence on

man, on his relation to himself, and on his memories" (2007, p. 29). Accordingly, the artist used a cadaverous photograph of her face and interlaced it with the hospital walls and various drawings such as purple liquids seeping from the artist's mouth, a rat biting a woman's genitalia, and sketched walls moving dynamically (Figs. 27-28). While the walls constantly change in shape and size, the subject stands still in a fixed position, as an omniscient observer. For the artist, "violence is the prime mover in this work; it is the force that delineates the essence of the relationship between man and his surroundings" (2007, p. 29). Exposing the body's vulnerability to outside forces, as Sarah Sharp notes, Kenawy critiques "the long-term effect of violence and oppression on people and places, and of the psychological consequences of extreme suppression" (2017, p. 597).

Working with diverse artistic media such as video, animation, and painting to register the abstract memories of violence, *You Will Be Killed* presents a fluid interplay between different forms of expression, meanwhile providing "a way to reform artistic definitions and characteristics, facilitating artistic innovation" (Sharp, 2017, p. 595). Even though the artist choreographs dynamic oscillations of the walls in binary opposition to the static and observing subject, she also notes that "throughout the animation, the person and his surroundings exchange their roles, eventually leading to a fading away of the line that separates the original functions" (2007, p. 29). Like Hatoum's *Corps Étranger* whereby the artist employs interdisciplinarity as a motor to ensure an embodied experience for the viewer and the artistic subject, Kenawy's *You Will Be Killed* combines video and animation to utilize "rapidly paced and consumptive imagery" to forge her work as "obsessively dynamic, rendering the viewer motionless" (Sharp, 2017, p. 597).

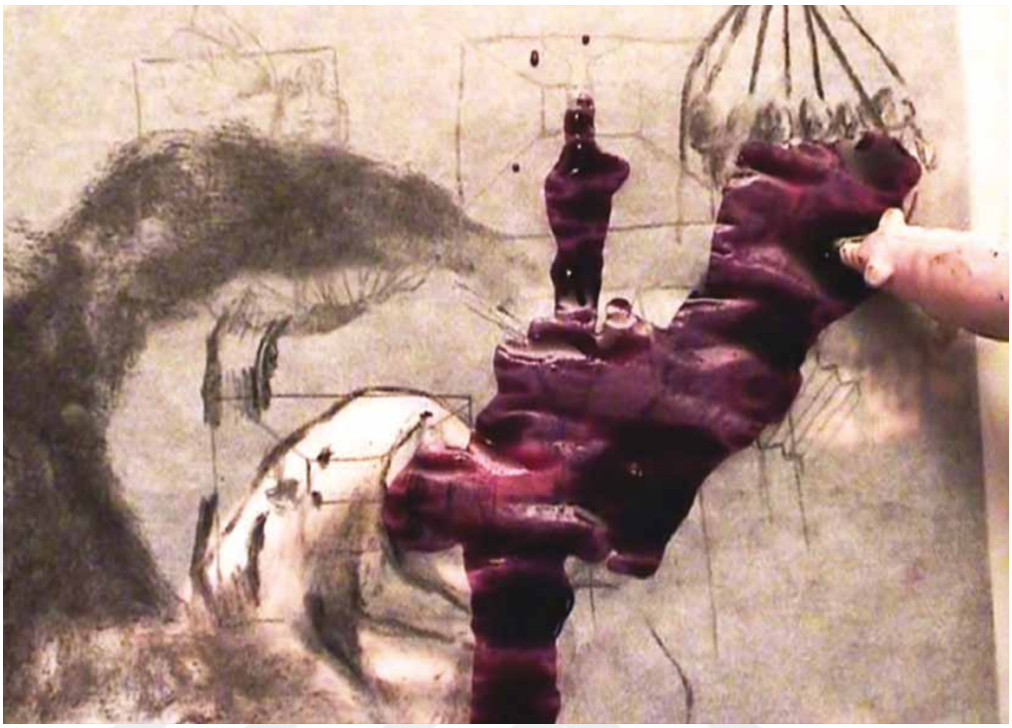


Fig. 27: The purple liquid paint seeping out of the artist's mouth. © Amal Kenawy. (2006). *You Will Be Killed* [video animation]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

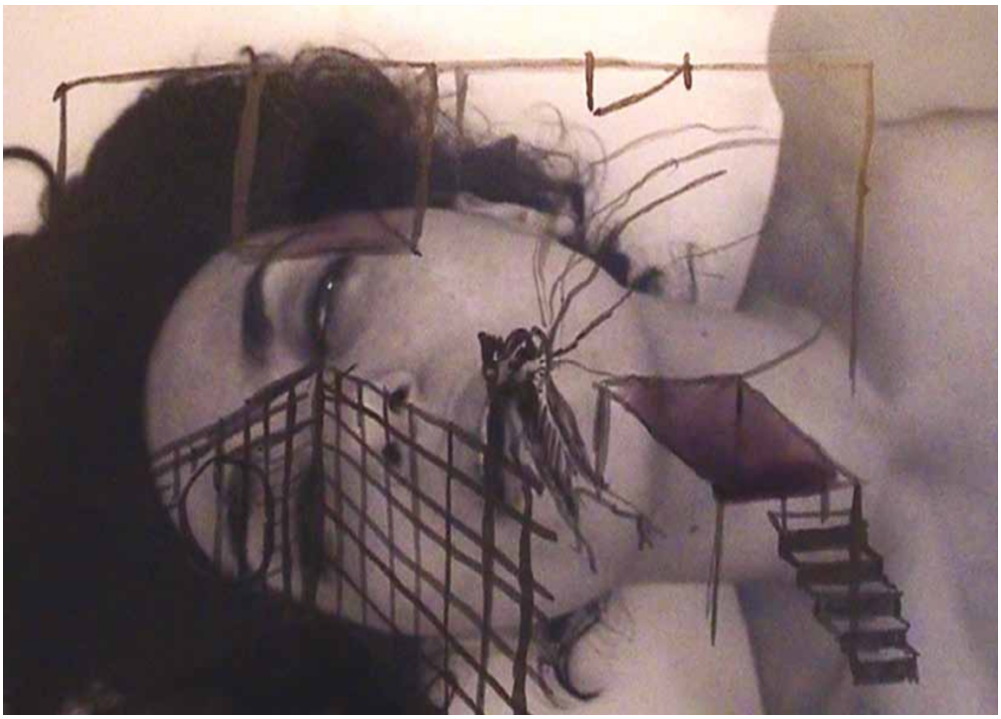


Fig. 28: Drawings and sketches overlapping with the artist's face. © Amal Kenawy. (2006). *You Will Be Killed* [video animation]. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun.

While the instrumentalization of different media entails an embodied account for the viewer, the inscription of the artistic self into the video emanates a corporeal engagement for Kenawy. Beyond the salient themes of war and cultural memory, *You Will Be Killed* is a work about a body in perpetual transformation, often decaying and, at times, prospering. Drawing sketches about several animals feeding on the woman's body or a purple oedema coming out of the artist's mouth, Kenawy captures an operatic encounter with the effusive changes occurring at the surface of the body. The artist notes that her utilization of such visceral imagery stems from an urge to delineate "the fragility of humans" (2007, p. 54) with regard to their social, cultural, and political environments. In that respect, the dynamic gestures of the animal emblems feeding on the decaying body and the seeping liquids that leak out of the artist's lips formulate a fluid account of corporeality, suggesting that "what are regarded as purely fixed and unchangeable elements of facticity, biologically given factors, are amenable to wide historical vicissitudes and transformations" (Grosz, 1994, p. 190).

In *Volatile Bodies,* when emphasizing how bodily fluids prove the permeability of the body, Grosz asserts that "they attest to a certain irreducible 'dirt' or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body" (1994, p. 194). In her understanding, body fluids "are engulfing, difficult to be rid of" as they seep and infiltrate under the skin through the porous surfaces (Grosz, 1994, p. 194). Kenawy's video, in many instances, simultaneously demonstrates such fluids as penetrative and exuding forces that affirm the permeability and ephemerality of her corporeal self. They dwell around the microscopic cracks and fissures of the artist's face, signaling a

corporeal decomposition soon to arrive. Almost informed by the artist's own incoming fatality, *You Will Be Killed* acknowledges the materiality of bodies and their vulnerability to external forces. Consequently, as Kaelen Wilson-Goldie rightly put it, Kenawy's video unfolds "like eerie chronicles of a death foretold" (2013, para. 5).

In broad terms, the body-oriented art of Amal Kenawy engages with female corporeality in a transitory mode, recognizing the porous materiality of bodies, and at the same time, drafting a corporeal topography out of them. Despite the fact that she abstains from framing her art as solely feminist in origins, her heavy elaborations on women's bodies necessarily lead one to a feminist perusal. While Hatoum was engaging with female corporeality to reconcile her exile, Palestinian identity, or carnality, the works of Kenawy primarily foreground female bodies as porous, malleable, and indefinite entities, informed partly by her own battle with cancer and partly by the collective struggles of women in Egypt. Operating outside the "prism of nationalism and identity" which, as Nadine Atallah argues, has confined the productions of many Egyptian women artists (2020, p. 25), Kenawy moves beyond any fixation on national identity to envision a fluid form of female corporeality.

4.4 Conclusion

Circling around the artistic productions of Mona Hatoum and Amal Kenawy, this chapter puts forward corporeal topography as an interwoven concept to figure out how women artists from the Middle East situate the female body as an open-ended, flowing, and pliable surface. Drawing upon Grosz's Deleuzian-inflected

corporeal feminism, I argue that in each woman's work—whether they explore carnal desires or lurking maladies—the body is reconfigured as a locus of affirmative, productive, and on some occasions, material changes that navigate the vibrant interactions of interior and exterior forces. Slightly moving away from the corporeal topographies, the next chapter probes the transcorporeal alliances of artists Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige.

CHAPTER V

Transcorporeal Alliances

Writing a feminist nature, in fact, is often akin to lifting the lid on Pandora's box —many evils rush out and cannot be recontained.

(Stacy Alaimo, 2000).

5.1 Introduction

Since Western reason's misogynistic associations between femininity and nature were seemingly too overbearing to get rid of, nature has long been regarded as a negated space for women's emancipation in the early strands of feminist theory. For this reason, new materialist philosophers such as Stacy Alaimo revitalize the forces of nature for feminist pursuits, meanwhile paying attention to avoid being biologically essentialist in any sense. Moving nature beyond its dichotomous opposite of culture, Alaimo's material feminism brings forth transcorporeality as a concept in which "human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment'" (2008, p. 238). Here, perhaps in an unorthodox fashion, I slightly pivot from the notion of nature in its literal sense. Unlike Alaimo, who takes nature—for the most part—as in the events and elements that compose the natural world, I rethink transcorporeality in a wider frame of ecology: one that is more attuned to the social environment.

On that account, taking Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality further from the realm of the natural environment to the social environment—namely the material objects and architectural spaces or cities and landscapes that one inhabits—I aim to grasp how Iranian artist Shirin Neshat and Lebanese artist Lamia Joreige envision their ecologies as agentic forces that participate in mutually constitutive processes and becomings. While previous chapters were foregrounding nomadic visions and corporeal topographies as entangled phenomena to respectively understand women's fluid subjectivity and body in the Middle Eastern visual culture, this chapter introduces *transcorporeal alliances* as a notion to reflect on how the selected women artists form relational affiliations with their social ecologies. Untangling how exile or war can shape women's relationships with their social environments and vice versa, I contend that the crises occurring in their ecologies led Neshat and Joreige to fabricate transcorporeal alliances in which both female bodies and social environments enter into a transversal loop of change whereby each entity affects one another in an enmeshed sphere.

5.2 Feminine Ecologies of Shirin Neshat

Located in between two worlds, Iranian-American artist Shirin Neshat's body of work touches upon Muslim women's identities in a manner that puts the artist as the mediator between two distinct cultures. As Iftikhar Dadi notes, Neshat has often been recognized among the international art circuits as "the singular privileged translator who is able to mediate the image of Muslim womanhood in the West by means of her powerful aesthetic representations" (2008, p. 128). Through experimentations in films, photographs, and video installations, her

works draw influence from women's predicament in post-revolutionary Iran and the artist's own exile from her homeland. The experimental quality of her work, as Jenny Chamarette argues, "is concerned with the conjoining of structural opposites: male and female, the real and the magical, formal stillness and choreography, political concreteness and poetic abstraction" (2015, p. 129). Even though Neshat's experimentations oscillate between these different binary opposites, perhaps the most ostensible duality she mediates is the one between East and West, in which she remains "ambivalent about being fixed in place by either" (Navab, 2007, p. 44), thereby strolling beyond orientalist imaginary.

Henceforth, this in-between and post-orientalist aesthetics envisaged by the artist points out a feminine ecology in which Neshat herself, along with other Iranian women in her works, negotiate the dynamic interplay between the dichotomies of nature/culture, male/female, and East/West. As Farzaneh Milani aptly put it, Neshat's works incubate "a liminal space where us and them, here and there, local and global are juxtaposed seamlessly, and from their stark contrast and confluence a new landscape is produced" (2019, p. 173). Through these feminine ecologies, I argue that Neshat and the women she films execute an entanglement with their social environments in a transcorporeal fashion. Far from being stuck as isolate entities, the female bodies in Neshat's works are enmeshed with the social ecology, co-constituting "a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions" (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2). To decipher these claims further, I now closely look at Neshat's video installation series *Rapture*, *Soliloquy*, and *Tooba* through which the artist plays with the dualisms intrinsic to Western thought, to gesture toward an affirmative feminine space.

Neshat's two-channel video installation *Rapture* is built upon contrasts as she instantaneously displays a neatly ordered, city-like town on one side and a barren wilderness on the other. While men in sleek white shirts pervade the first frame, women in black chadors gather around in the second frame of the desolate badlands. Playfully constructed as a mediation on the foundational associations of men with culture and women with nature, Neshat delineates men as producing work in an embroiled environment whereas women as standing still, harmonized with the serene nature of the panoramic landscape. Even though men are initially portrayed as active agents who constantly grind and move around, their routine is abruptly convulsed as women collectively start chanting and tongue-lashing, thereby disrupting the masculine economy of their order. Towards the end, while men stay put and gaze across the town, a group of women on the coastline get on a boat, sailing through the waves of the ocean (Figs. 29-30).

Quite obvious from the outset, the division of these two frames in this installation characterizes the sexual difference between men and women, particularly in Neshat's culture of origin, Iran. Scott MacDonald notes that this split structure is an artistic attempt to focus "on the separation of the sexes in Islamic culture and on the various ways in which this traditional separation is articulated" (2004, p. 622). Paralleling these claims, the video unravels as though men and women persistently wage war against each other to preserve the space of their own. Instead of leaning towards one side of these binary opposites, however, *Rapture* operates within a transitory and in-between state, opening up "a third arena of action and experience" (Navab, 2007, p. 44) for both the artist and the subjects filmed.



Fig. 29: Women at the beach, through which the artist plays with the links between women and nature. © Shirin Neshat. (1999). *Rapture* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the Gladstone Gallery, New York.

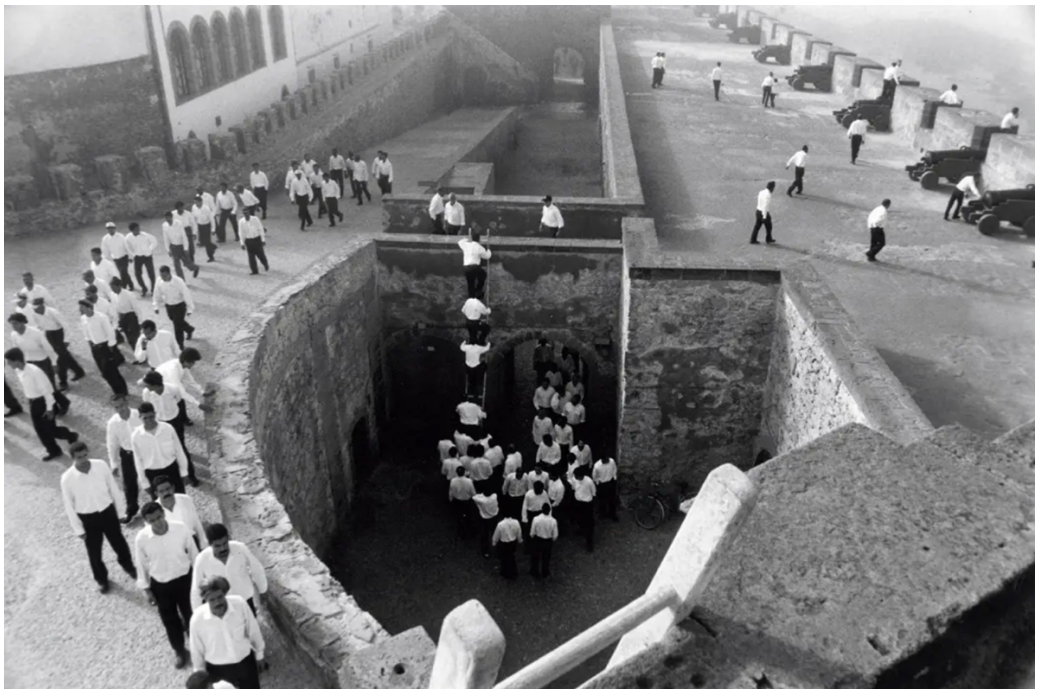


Fig. 30: Men working in a city-like town, by which Neshat symbolizes men's association with culture. © Shirin Neshat. (1999). *Rapture* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the Gladstone Gallery, New York.

This precise attempt at operating from a non-dualistic ground stems from a feminist compulsion in which the artist cautiously observes the prejudicial and damaging outcomes of dichotomous thinking, especially for women. As many feminist theorists point out, the association of men with culture and women with nature unequivocally marked women and nature as inferior and passive facades: as a "terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 4). Nevertheless, unlike these common contentions that gird the Western thought, as Grosz underscores, "natural is not the inert, passive, unchanging element against which culture elaborates itself but the matter of the cultural, that which enables and actively facilitates cultural variation and change" (2005, p. 47). Subsequently, Neshat's video art strives for an affirmative account of nature in which women, far from being reduced to motionless bodies with no agency, appear as subjects with vitality that actively foster and even disturb the men's purported cultural order.

Interweaved with their social and natural milieus, women in *Rapture* communally display a transcorporeal alliance formulated within the ecological sphere they were made to inhabit. After the shift transpires in the narrative and women starts disrupting men's order and leave behind their stillness, Neshat exhibits them in the middle of actions, from praying on the land to launching a boat to the oceanic sea for some women to outflow, thereby shown as intertwined and affiliated with their ecologies. Regarding how the concept of transcorporeality proposes relational forms of existence in the world, Alaimo stresses that "by emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and

interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human" (2008, p. 238). In that matter, these women engender a cross-contaminating allegiance with their environment by which both parties undertake a process of change and enmeshment. Comparable to Deleuze and Guattari's infamous writings on the wasp and the orchid in which a reciprocal exchange takes place between these two entities and enables "a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp" (1987, p. 10), women in Neshat's video collectively forge a "shared deterritorialization" with their social ecologies whereby a symbiotic relationship comes to the surface (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238). Women, taking the role of the active wasps, deterritorialize the sedentary and uncontaminated plane of their environments for their own quests of emancipation, meanwhile the environment—embodying the passive role of the orchid—is reterritorialized into a feminine ecology through which it is then activated to facilitate women in transgressing boundaries. Hence, altering its own purview, the environment distances itself from being the disadvantageous locus of inertia, towards an energetic sphere of movement.

Unlike *Rapture* in which the split structure of the installation serves for the sexual division of men and women, in Neshat's next video installation *Soliloquy*, it takes on the duty of illustrating the artist's exile. Divided, once again, as a two-channel video installation, *Soliloquy* demonstrates the artist in a black chador, roaming aimlessly in the two seemingly different cityscapes (Figs. 31-32). While one screen shows a modern architectural scenery that resembles the American urban atmosphere where Neshat resides in exile, the other chooses a more traditional and noticeably Islamic background as its setting, indicative of the artist's home

in Iran. From running around in the city subways to dwelling in the gardens of mosques or coming across a group of Christian people at the church, we are shown a female figure wavering amid two cultures and yet never feeling welcomed by both sides. Primarily pondered around an East/West dichotomy, this is thus a work in which the artist feels belonging neither to East nor to West but rather chooses to "continue traveling in between" (Navab, 2007, p. 44) as an alienated body in exile, without an assigned territory. Reminiscent of Nezaket Ekici's movements between German and Turkish identities in Chapter 3, Neshat operates at the intermezzo – a state which "constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's-land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293).



Fig. 31: Covered in a black chador from head to toe, the artist standing in front of a modern building in a Western metropolis. © Shirin Neshat. (1999). *Soliloquy* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the Gladstone Gallery, New York.



Fig. 32: Neshat preparing herself for prayer in a religious setting in Mardin, Turkey, an Islamic architectural location that resembles the artist's home. © Shirin Neshat. (1999). *Soliloquy* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the Gladstone Gallery, New York.

Furthermore, on a more transcorporeal angle, I argue that the material self of the artist—entangled in a network of social, cultural, and political turmoil happening in her ecology—"finds herself in a swirling landscape of uncertainty" where her exile becomes "the very stuff of the crises at hand" (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 20). As noted in Chapter 2, Alaimo's transcorporeality opens a path to contemplate the ethical and political realities "in which 'human' and 'environment' can by no means be considered as separate" (2008, p. 239). Even though she circles around environmental health, air pollution, genetic engineering, and climate change as results of such entanglements with the environment, it will be my argument here to foreground sociopolitical crises such as exile or war as material realities occurring in the world that changes one's relational affiliations with his or her social environment.

As Marks stresses, many Middle Eastern artists working in the Euro-American conjunctures are often wrapped up in a "thick intercultural fabric spanning home and diaspora" (2003, p. 54). Since these displaced artists are convoluted in a multitude of economic, political, and cultural forces operating in their newly found environments, their subjectivities are carried into an ever-shifting ground that goes back and forth between the land that they yearn back home and the land that they try to adopt in exile. Neshat, as an Iranian artist in exile, is no exception to this pattern. In *Soliloquy*, as well as in her other video installations, "national and political borders are found to be porous and pliable" (Schad, 2019, p. 13), waving towards a state of in-betweenness. Therefore, through the imageries of unresolved conflicts, estrangements, and perplexities, *Soliloquy* appears as the centerpiece project that marks the artist's inner and external journeys of exile.

While exile is often accompanied by undesirable outcomes or as I have argued thus far, an in-between state of existence; in *Reflections on Exile,* Said presents a rather affirmative account in which the exilic subject, unlike other people, "is aware of at least two cultures" via which he or she attains a "plurality of vision" (2000, p. 222). Remaining careful not to sound disdainful or disregarding the pain of displacement, Said contends that "a life of exile moves according to a different calendar" by which the displaced subject lives his/her life "outside habitual order" in a "nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal" fashion (2000, p. 222). When elaborated through this vantage point, one can uphold that Neshat practices this plurality of vision through the dual screens of *Soliloquy* as she explores the components of the home in a divergent set of social environments. Modernized North American cityscape on the one hand, and the folkloric panorama of the Middle East on the other, Neshat embraces the fragmented, plural, and heterogenous nature of her existence in exile. Instead of conceiving a "home that is static—that is the home as property, as a solid line of defense", Neshat delineates the idea of home "as a place of becoming" (Alaimo, 2016, p. 34) whereby her exilic subjectivity attunes with the flowing space of the in-between, trying to map the frontiers of both sides.

Speaking of mapping, *Soliloquy* also presents the artist's body as entangled with the picturesque landscape of the modern and traditional architectural sites. In *Atlas of Emotion*, Giuliana Bruno attests that "if the landscape becomes a body, the body conversely becomes a site of mapping" (2002, p. 233). Underscoring how such mapping can be conducive to feminist ventures, Bruno additionally notes that "when the site of exploration is a body map, one can travel physiologically

through the depths of bodily passages" and discover the potentials of "epidermic cartographic knowledge" (2002, p. 233). Emphasizing the entwinement of the human body and the nonhuman nature, Alaimo argues in a similar vein that "the maps of transit between human corporeality and nonhuman nature are infinite" through which diverse forms of social, political, and cultural realities which are often perceived to be detached are in fact "inextricably linked by the substantial transit across bodies and natures" (2008, p. 259). In that respect, the body maps that Neshat conveys through the twofold duration of *Soliloquy* confirm the relational linkage between the exiled self and the social environment, especially for women. Whether the artist in a black chador standing inertly in the maddening crowd of the New York City subway or blending in with a cluster of other veiled Muslim women in a mosque in Mardin, Turkey, Neshat's video installation displays landscapes imbued with the corporeal self of the artist, alluding to the fact that exile befalling in the social sphere immediately affects the corporeal territories.

In her next two-channel video installation *Tooba,* the artist delineates anew a female figure entangling with the environment, but this time through a religious innuendo. This video installation starts with the face of a woman, standing still in harmony with an isolated tree in the barren wilderness of an unnamed location (Fig. 33). As the camera angle broadens, Neshat displays a human crowd of mostly male figures approaching the tree, while in the interim, another group of men in a different location is seen practicing a Sufi ritual. Unveiled as a religious pilgrimage at the end, the woman figure disappears once the crowd arrives nearby the tree and temporarily completes its journey (Fig. 34).



Fig. 33: A female figure shown enmeshed with the tree. © Shirin Neshat. (2002). *Tooba* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the Gladstone Gallery, New York.



Fig. 34: Crowd gathering around the woman-tree. © Shirin Neshat. (2002). *Tooba* [two-channel video installation]. Image courtesy of the Gladstone Gallery, New York.

Even though *Tooba* differs from the last two video installations, as it is shot in Mexico instead of regions close to the artist's homeland, it still carries cultural resonances for Neshat's origins, particularly concerning the broader historical and cultural significance of Persia. In her own words, *Tooba* is "an examination of the symbolic significance of the garden in the mystical traditions of Persian and Islamic cultures, to which it represents the space of spiritual transcendence, freedom, exile, and refuge" (Neshat in Schad, 2019, p. 25). Beyond its symbolic values for her cultural heritage, Neshat further affiliates *Tooba* with Mexico's central icon, the Virgin of Guadalupe, in which she indicates an affinity between this figure and the mythical tree in the Qur'an, "a tree whose branches extend over the world, keeping all Muslims in the welcoming shade of its canopy" (Schad, 2019, p. 25). Unlike its manifold allegories of the tree above the surface, however, I argue that *Tooba* has an array of rhizomatic connections proliferating underneath the surface.

The temporal presence of the woman-tree on the one frame, and the ceaseless spiritual journeys of the men on the other, for instance, alludes to the durational characteristics of becomings. Accentuating their endless movement and change, Deleuze and Guattari define the process of becomings alongside "the Bergsonian idea of a coexistence of very different 'durations'" (1987, p. 238). For them, this cohabitation of different temporalities "is a reality specific to becoming" in that, it entails a heterogenous sphere of interaction (1987, p. 238). For this reason in *Tooba*, Sufi men's unceasing rituals and the continual expeditions of the crowd as well as the transient appearance of the female figure by the tree collectively exist in a state of becoming, formulating its multifarious durations in different axes.

Literal enmeshment with the tree, on the other hand, gestures toward a reciprocal convergence taking place between the two divergent entities in a feminine ecology. In imagining transcorporeality as a "contact zone" between human corporeality and the more-than-human world, Alaimo notes that such an entangled form of theorizing bodies and natures "makes it difficult to pose nature as a mere background for the exploits of the human, since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin" (2008, p. 238). Indeed, in *Tooba,* the interweaved outlook of the woman and tree figure signals a circumventing process arising to dismantle human exceptionalism and mastery over nature. Instead of operating from a dualistic or hierarchical stance, Neshat portrays the fractures in the tree's surface seamlessly blending with the skin of the female figure, and hence, rearing a horizontal ecology in which human corporeality and nonhuman nature are merged into a singular entity.

In conclusion, selected video installations from Neshat's oeuvre showcase a constant encounter with the dualisms fundamental in Western thought. Whether it is male/female, nature/culture, or East/West, the artist negotiates an in-between territory by a frequent oscillation between these categories. While her double frames—perhaps paradoxically—constitute a binary vision, her artistic praxis concentrates on an alternative space beyond dualisms. As Milani notes, "hers is the epitome of an artistic trajectory with an on-the-road mentality, one that refuses to stagnate in a familiar space" (2019, p. 173). Stimulated by her own exile, along with Iranian women's struggles, Neshat seeks feminine ecologies through which she can imagine an in-between sphere of movement as well as a continuous entanglement of female corporeality with the environment.

5.3 Lamia Joreige's Videoscapes of War

Carrying on exploring women's transcorporeal alliances in the Middle Eastern visual culture, Lebanese artist Lamia Joreige's works that traverse between film, video, and installation constitute the remaining uncharted territory of this chapter. In her works on the aftermath of the Lebanese Wars, Joreige often employs an artistic method that tries to render *truth* in her own terms. Either collecting testimonies from other Lebanese citizens or projecting her artistic self in the middle of her works, Joreige confronts the seemingly singular account of war by bringing forth the peculiar histories of each person, including her own. Mark Westmoreland asserts that many Lebanese video artists who engage with the remnants of war in such subversive modes do not attempt "to replace one 'false' history with another 'true' one, but to go against the grain of sanctioned forgetfulness, commonly referred to as 'official amnesia'" (2010, p. 176). Equally, the video-based works of Joreige weave together an assemblage of memory whereby the material objects, human subjects, and urban landscapes of Lebanon are accumulated into a domain of conjunction. Aiming to map these entangled videoscapes of war, I now closely investigate a selection of works from Joreige's oeuvre – *Objects of War* (multimedia installation, 1999-ongoing), *Nights and Days* (video, 2007), and *The River* (video, 2013).

As Joreige's ongoing project that resists the finality of artistic productions, *Objects of War* is a series of video interviews conducted over the different decades of recent Lebanese history. In this project, participants from various generations are called up to reminisce about their memories of war, especially with regard to an object of their choice. A Miss Piggy bag, family photographs, guitar, curtain, or

an ID card without a picture constitute some of the objects that the Lebanese people associate with war (Figs. 35-36). Since these objects are only taken as a starting point for each person's story, *Objects of War* operates as fragments of a dispersed cultural memory. One by one, Joreige traces the plural, multifarious, and ever-changing implications of war in each person's individual and subjective history, thereby refuting the idea of a singular memory that the fixed mainstream national narratives are engrained upon.



Fig. 35: Zeina, as one of the testimonies, explains why the bag reminds her of the war. © Lamia Joreige. *Objects of War* [multimedia series]. (1999-ongoing). Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 36: A close-up shot of Zeina's Miss Piggy bag, full of card games and other toys. © Lamia Joreige. *Objects of War* [multimedia series]. (1999-ongoing). Image courtesy of the artist.

While the interviewees recount their personal memories attached to these objects, we are being shown that their items function either as harmless nostalgic symbols for the past or as potentially disruptive entities that can radically render the present tense a "volatile" state (Marks, 2007, p. 22). Since these material objects carry a certain history of atrocity within them, as Marks attests, "they show us that the present is the fingertip of the past and the past is reaching to pull us into the earth" (2007, p. 22). Underscoring the "dangerous" potentials embedded in

them, Marks further notes that these objects can be regarded as "fetishes that establish a material contact whereby the past can leak into the present" (2007, p. 22). Although agreeing with Marks on the idea that the past might easily lurk through the materiality of these objects, I further argue that through this cluster of material entities, Joreige formulates an assemblage in which subjects-in-becomings emerge and unfold – ceaselessly fluctuating Lebanese subjects that are caught between the complex interplay of past, present, and future.

Designating the concept of assemblage along the axis of "a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms", Deleuze proclaims that assemblage "establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 69). Since its heterogenic attributes entail the coming together of different forms of entities, bodies, or substances, an assemblage often refers to a "constellation that disturbs and unsettles the rigid categorisations of groups" (Baykan, 2021, p. 201). As a dynamic network of relations through which becomings unfold, assemblage gathers "man and nature, the organic and inorganic, the mechanical and non-mechanical, in a single sphere of interaction" (Bogue, 1989, p. 129).

What Joreige achieves in *Objects of War* resonates with the concept of assemblage, in that, she brings together a group of distinct and yet connected objects and delineates Lebanese subjects in a continual state of change through their temporal linkages with these material objects. For instance, during the testimony of Nesrine in which she chooses playing cards as her object of war, we realize that the cards that once reminded her of the war are no longer affiliated with that memory. After a certain period of time spent in a state of crisis, Nesrine tells us,

one simply refuses "to coexist with the war", through which she radically reorders the importance of objects (Joreige, 1999). As more and more stories of interviewees unravel, we are shown that their perceptions toward their own pasts, presents, and futures are altered in the processual time-space of postwar Lebanon. In that respect, since the subjects enter a metamorphosing episode, the assemblage composed of their interconnected objects too undergoes a "constant variation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 82), changing the meanings attached to these inanimate entities.

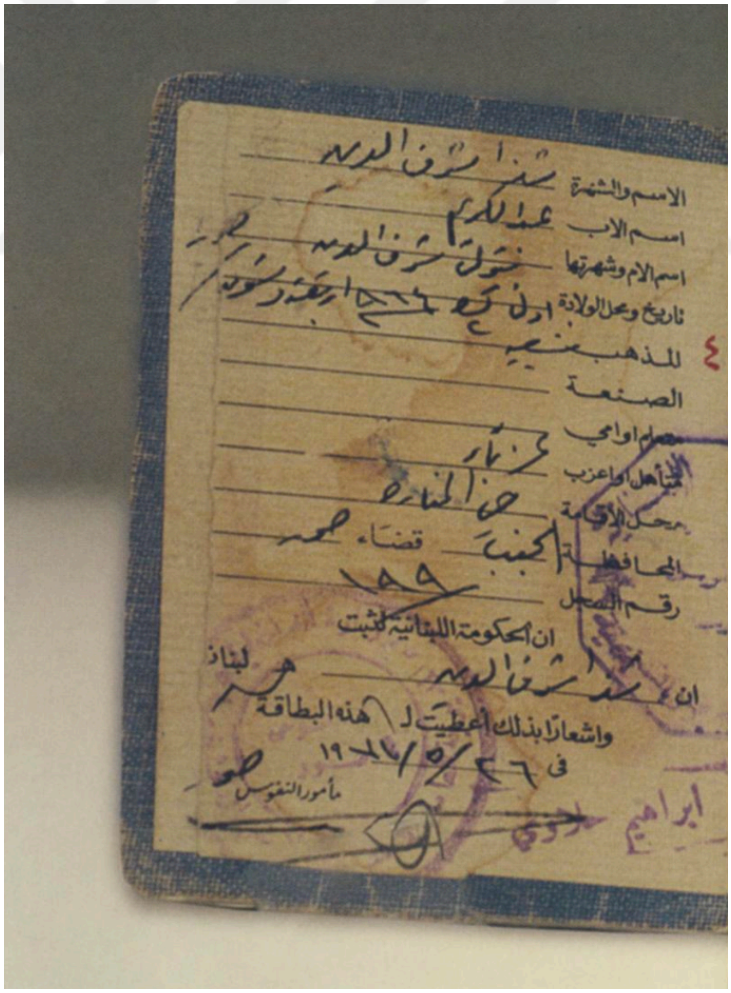


Fig. 37: Identity card with a lost photograph. © Lamia Joreige. *Objects of War* [multimedia series]. (1999-ongoing). Image courtesy of the artist.

In *The Migrant Image,* T. J. Demos stresses that Joreige's *Objects of War*, through its diverse set of archival testimonies, "reveals the violence of the war's sectarian divisions without privileging any single viewpoint" and hence, registering an ever-shifting and collective account of the civil war (2013, p. 184). This fluid and plural chronicle of witnessing orchestrated by Joreige parallels the transitory, relational, and heterogenous state of female subjectivity in postwar Lebanon. Because in one of the testimonies, a Lebanese woman named Chaza remembers the time when she lost her identity card during an attack by the Israeli forces, an event Chaza recalls, she felt strong hatred towards the intruding forces (Fig. 37). However, after coming across a young Israeli soldier with fear in his eyes and seeing the human person behind this armed conflict, Chaza explains, the feeling of hatred is enmeshed with the feeling of understanding, "all at once, both born at the same instant, during this assault" (Joreige, 2003). Corresponding to the material act of losing an ID card, then, Chaza's turbulent encounter with the soldier rendered her fixed identity ever so fluid, ungraspable, and easy to elude.

Convoluted into a spiral of sociopolitical crisis, namely the remnants of this civil war that lasted for more than a decade, Joreige carefully resumes sketching out Lebanese bodies entangled with their environment in *Objects of War*. While thinking through transcorporeality, Alaimo often uses the equally symbolic and real notion of "toxic bodies" to "reimagine human corporeality, and materiality itself, not as a utopian or romantic substance existing prior to social inscription", but as an embroiled phenomenon that carries "the trace of history, social position, region, and the uneven distribution of risk" (2008, p. 260). When the material effects of war on human corporeality are rethought within this frame of reference,

I contend that Joreige illustrates the interviewees in *Objects of War* as toxic bodies – bodies that are impinged and inscribed by the reciprocal contact with the warfare state of their ecologies. Like the testimony of Rudy Khalil, who demonstrates a family photograph of his parents in their old house—a house that was destroyed during the war—the many subjects of Joreige's project are laid-out as infected by the catastrophic forces of the civil war unfolding in their environment. Hence, as "volatile, emergent, and continually evolving" corporeal entities (Alaimo, 2008, p. 262), the bodies of Lebanese people are contaminated by the unforeseen and unpredictable dynamism of the war. Affecting human and nonhuman entities adjacent to it, this civil war rendered their ecology as a pliable and defenseless organism, prone to vicissitudes.

Since the Lebanese Civil War has spanned over fifteen years, the social, cultural, and architectural fabric of Beirut—and of Lebanon in a greater measure—was permanently altered as a consequence. In the aftermath of the civil war, as Sarah Rogers designates, "the country splintered long political and sectarian lines, and in its wake, a myth of origin has been invoked that naturalizes the violence within a cycle of destruction and rebirth" (2007, p. 19). While such "violent ruptures" often result in turning points in other national narratives, as Rogers continues, "the ontological status of Beirut, according to this national myth, is constituted through a series of ruins and resurgences" (2007, p. 19). This cultural myth of rebirth through destruction, in that regard, is carried out palpably visible in Joreige's next project *Nights and Days,* which takes place in the aftermath of another war in 2006.



Fig. 38: A shot from the first part showing the growing smoke of a bombing. © Lamia Joreige. *Nights and Days* [video]. (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 39: A shot from the second part showing the destruction in the landscape. © Lamia Joreige. *Nights and Days* [video]. (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.

Nights and Days is a twofold story. In the first part of the video, while the artist reads excerpts from her journals or other personal writings on the war, she intercuts the images of her town – embellished with the smoke of bombings, military tanks, sounds of drones, and other such vocabularies she relates to war (Fig. 38). During the second act, she travels to the South Lebanon where the central conflict of the war took place. Remarking that "the landscape of war became a genre with its own specificities and significant details" (Joreige, 2007, p. 61), the artist shows panoramic imagery of the Southern region in which roads, bridges, apartments, and schools are all demolished by the bombings (Fig. 39). Instead of a calmly read monologue voiced by the artist, the second part is accompanied by an evocative composition of Israeli drone sounds, as the artist underlines that words could not register the devastation she endured in the warzone (Joreige, 2018). While an atmosphere of despair envelopes *Nights and Days*, alluding to the aforementioned national parable of the relentless rebirth that pervades the Lebanese cultural milieu, Joreige nevertheless reflects "on the passage of time, the awaiting, the fears as well as the transformations forced by this war" (2007, p. 59).

Aligning with the dynamic contact between female corporeality and the more-than-human world, *Nights and Days* encapsulates a gendered account of social division emerging in the contemporary conjuncture of Lebanon. In her writings in the years following the civil war, the Lebanese poet and painter Etel Adnan elucidates that "there's no more Nature, I tell myself, in the near metaphysical, ecstatic sense of the word. And if there's no "Nature", there is no "Woman" (1993, p. 16). Commenting on how the urban atmosphere of Beirut has distorted over

the war, Adnan further articulates that "a woman alone in the streets has nowhere to stop" since the cityscape of Beirut, which was once specifically welcoming for women dwellers and flaneuses, "has become the exclusive domain of men" (1993, p. 80). Likewise, a generation later, in the aftermath of another war, we see that Joreige's self is being deterritorialized and reterritorialized by the variations taking place in her environment. Reminiscent of Neshat's shifting subjectivity in exile, which is echoed in *Soliloquy*, Joreige's identity as a woman is rendered in an unceasing flux initiated by the wars in Lebanon. From displaying how she grew afraid of staying at her house by herself to stating that "I cannot remember what I was doing before it all began" (Joreige, 2007), the artist is shown as a female figure wound up in the waves of change, virtually delineating in a transcorporeal mode, "a sense of fleshy vulnerability" (Alaimo, 2010b, p. 24).

Apart from the feminine entanglement with the environment that permeates a vast majority of Joreige's works, the scattered video passages of ravaged and derelict landscapes in *Nights and Days* insinuate an assemblage of videoscapes, captured en masse in times of war. Deleuze and Guattari state that assemblage "has neither base nor superstructure" but a "single plane of consistency upon which reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions play themselves out" (1987, p. 90). This relational and ceaseless interplay between the heterogenous entities that constitute the assemblage, as Paulo de Assis notes, renders it "a fluid entity, moving from one state to another, from one phase to another" (2018, p. 100). Following this line of thought and considering the video excerpts of the destroyed landscapes of Beirut as forming an assemblage, Joreige's project draws the city as a constantly evolving set of couplings. Resembling the non-fixed and

non-finalized nature of assemblage that avoids "an identitarian conclusion or an end product" (Baykan, 2021, p. 201), the constituents of videoscapes demonstrate Beirut as an ever-shifting and open-ended entity that, far from remaining settled, embraces the change itself.

The River, as the last video project selected from Joreige's artistic opus, is perhaps a work in which the most steadfast convergence between human corporeality and nonhuman nature takes place. Shot on a moving vehicle, Joreige films a dried-up riverside that seemingly divides the city of Beirut (Fig. 40). Interweaving the river imagery with a monologue read by the artist, the video unfolds as an eruptive expedition of the inner turmoil for Joreige. The essay that the artist reads aloud, for that matter, has manifold layers. For one, it bears the profound loss of an unnamed feeling that the artist yearns for. Articulating her need to seek refuge in nature, Joreige states that she searches for an elsewhere in which she would stop thinking about herself and about Beirut. Despite her best efforts in trying to conceive this alternative world, Joreige ends the video with an avowedly existential note, asking "Am I waiting for a resolution or an end? Am I waiting for the end of this country, and of the experience that we had of it" (Joreige, 2013).

Even if the video seemingly reaches a conclusion without being able to materialize this sphere of existence, it nonetheless affirms the transcorporeal alliances that one can forge with nature. Ellen K. Levy, suggesting new ways of reconceiving the relationship between feminist contemporary art and nature, contends that "art, whether engaging the organism, species, or ecosystem, gives rise to a collective complexity that provocatively challenges several prominent shibboleths held about nature" (2020, p. 3). Proving just that, *The River* reinstates

nature as an affirmative site of knowledge, sanctuary, and feminine existence. Incubating the space of the natural environment as an escape from the chaotic backdrop of war and its aftermath in Lebanon, Joreige vocalizes her underlying need "to travel as far as possible", to a serene space "where only a few humans lived, where nature takes over" (Joreige, 2013).



Fig. 40: The dried-up riverway that separates Beirut, through which the artist flows like a liquid entity and reads aloud a piece of writing. © Lamia Joreige. *The River* [video]. (2013). Image courtesy of the artist.

For such convergences between human corporeality and nature in literature, architecture, or visual arts, Alaimo uses the term "biological architecture"[6] in which "walls come to life as an interface, a zone of the intermingling of nature and culture" (2016, p. 23). In her account, "pleasures of encounter, contact, and

[6] Alaimo recycles Allison Carruth's term "living architecture" through a new materialist scope to broaden her discussion on transcorporeality. For a detailed information on Carruth's term, please refer to "The City Refigured: Environmental Vision in a Transgenic Age" (2012). In S. LeMenager, T. Shewry, and K. Hiltner (eds.). *Environmental Criticism for the 21st Century* (pp. 85-104). New York: Routledge.

intimacy" may help one to resist the tempting urge to wall herself off "within a narrowly human sphere" (2016, p. 23), thereby allowing oneself to be open to a flowing network of nonhuman affiliations and kinships. Hence, desiring such a place "where nature would be so vast that it could swallow her" (Joreige, 2013), the artist distances herself from the distinct demarcations between human and nonhuman nature, towards an interweaved ecology of biological architecture: a place where forests, rivers, mountains, and oceanic seas would be enmeshed with her body and thus entails "a diverse range of symbiotic relations and interwoven pleasures" (Alaimo, 2016, p. 34).

Regarding the inherent anthropocentric hierarchy between humanity and the more-than-human world, Alaimo stresses that a transcorporeal understanding of the world may entail "an epistemological time-space" in which "human bodies and nonhuman natures transform, unfold, and thereby resist categorization, complete knowledge, and mastery" (2008, p. 253). Similar to this conception, what Joreige addresses in *The River* calls for a non-hierarchical reordering of the world. Built around a scarcity of human population or the complete lack of it, the nature that the artist craves is a domain of tranquility where "humans were missing and so was their violence" (Joreige, 2013). Manifestly, aligning with Alaimo's transcorporeal subjects that relinquish human mastery over nature, *The River* operates as a channel of escape in which Joreige finds herself "inextricably part of the flux and flow of the world that others would presume to master" (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 17).

In terms of fluxes and flows of female subjectivity, the aesthetic preference to be on a moving vehicle in *The River* further points towards a liquid and watery entity

that flows over the contoured line separating Beirut. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, while explaining the transitory and relational mode of becomings, Deleuze and Guattari explicate that "becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance" (1987, p. 238). In other words, the processes of becomings never take place in isolation, but rather always in conjunction with other entities, bodies, or spheres in a transcorporeal bond. Accordingly, enmeshed with her ecology in a transcorporeal alliance, the more Joreige reads aloud the essay on the moving vehicle—an essay on her longing to blend in with an alternative nature other than her current one—the more she flows like a liquid in the river canal of Beirut, rendering a mutually constitutive becoming for both the artist and the environment.

Hence, the works of Lamia Joreige draw their core influences from the plural, heterogenous, and interconnected stories of Lebanese people who grapple with the devastating relics of wars. Probing the relational affiliations foreseen between human and nonhuman, or animate and inanimate spheres, Joreige undermines the boundaries between these ontological categories. Parallel to Neshat's oeuvre in which she was rifling for an in-between feminine ecology to inhabit, Joreige dwells around the material objects and landscapes that collectively constitute videoscapes of war. Affirming the potential alliances that can be forged with nature and aligning with the other contemporary Lebanese video artists that infiltrate the social landscape of postwar Beirut, she maintains "a tyranny of uncertainty about the future" (Westmoreland, 2010, p. 177).

5.4 Conclusion

Closely examining the selected praxes of the artists Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige, this chapter considers transcorporeal alliances as a conducive and entangled phenomenon to understand how women artists in the Middle East reflect female bodies and subjectivities as intricately enmeshed in their social environments. When integrated with the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of becoming, I argue that Alaimo's transcorporeality presents a sophisticated account to encapsulate how bodies and environments share a dynamic exchange with one another in the contemporary art practice of Middle Eastern women. As the conclusion of the thesis, the next chapter recapitulates what has been argued thus far, offers a cartographic imagination of the selected corpus, and moves on to discuss potential directions this research can take in the future.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

This thesis explores how the selected Middle Eastern women artists map out temporal, changeable, and outward-bonded compositions of female subjectivity through interdisciplinary contemporary art practice. Looking at the works of Sama Alshaibi, Nezaket Ekici, Mona Hatoum, Amal Kenawy, Shirin Neshat, and Lamia Joreige, it argues that the artistic productions by these women collectively indicate an alternative mode of female existence – one that aligns with the fluidity, changeability, and interconnectivity of an ever-shifting ontology. Thus, interweaving Deleuze and Guattari's process-oriented ontology of becoming with the Deleuzian-inspired philosophy of new materialist feminists such as Braidotti, Grosz, and Alaimo, this study examines the ways these six female practitioners engage with the body and self as transient and relational processes that challenge any form of stagnation, binarization, or homogenization. Through the incorporation of Braidotti's nomadism, Grosz's corporeality, and Alaimo's transcorporeality, this thesis focuses on how these women artists delineate female subjectivity as wound up in a complex interplay between a multitude of relational affiliations.

As the section where theoretical and methodological foundations are laid-out in detail, Chapter 2 builds an extensive framework that consists of the ontology of becoming by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), new materialist feminisms of Braidotti (1994), Grosz (1994), and Alaimo (2008) as well as the cartographic potentials of these theories under scrutiny. Running parallels with the durational and interconnected nature of becomings, this chapter argues that the emerging strands of new materialist feminisms offer an in-depth source of knowledge and inquiry where one can approach the body and self as ever-shifting and unfixed entities within nomadic, corporeal, and transcorporeal perspectives. Beyond exploring this intermingling locus of ontological becomings and new materialist feminisms, this chapter also opens an experimental parenthesis by which I get to explore the cartographic potentiality of these theories. Drawing upon how Deleuze and Guattari understand the concept of the map along the lines of rhizomatic structures whereby it "can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation" (1987, p. 13), this theoretical chapter prepares the necessary ground to offer a cartographic imagination of the selected artistic practices in this concluding chapter.

Nomadic Visions, as the third chapter of this thesis, brings the ontology of becoming with the Deleuzian-inflected nomadic philosophy of Braidotti in dialogue with each other, around the artistic works of Sama Alshaibi and Nezaket Ekici. Since the creative productions of these women thematically align with the processes of nomadism by "not taking any kind of identity as permanent" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 33), philosophical nomadism developed by Braidotti becomes an efficient frame of reference in this section. Closely analyzing the works of

Alshaibi and Ekici, this chapter foregrounds the ways in which these women are moving back and forth between the inherent dichotomies such as East/West, categorical distinctions like artwork/audience, or ontological orders such as human/nonhuman.

Composing the fourth chapter of this thesis, *Corporeal Topographies* melds together Grosz's corporeal feminism with the interrelated vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming, especially the body without organs. Mainly examining a selection from the oeuvres of Mona Hatoum and Amal Kenawy – artists who tackle female bodies as sites of forces, modifications, and constant variations – this chapter makes use of Grosz's corporeality that regards the female body as "a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution" (1994, p. 23). Reading Hatoum and Kenawy's artistic productions, this chapter elucidates how these Arab women render female corporeality as a topographical map that encapsulates the volumes of carnality, impeding maladies, and national narratives. Utilizing the notion of BwO in relation to Grosz's corporeality, it also discusses how Hatoum and Kenawy envision their own or other women's bodies as BwOs – as entities before being sedimented or coagulated into a totalized form, thereby remaining open to ceaseless changes.

Transcorporeal Alliances, as the fifth and final analysis chapter, explores Alaimo's transcorporeality in tandem with, once again, the ontology of becoming. This time, however, the notion of the body/self is discussed in its entangled relations with the environment. Looking at the works of Shirin Neshat and Lamia Joreige, this chapter analyzes how human bodies are co-constituted in a transformative

interplay between their social environments. Since Neshat is an exilic artist detached from the environment of her homeland, and Joreige endures many wars that eventually alter the ecology of her country and its inhabitants, this chapter points out the relational affiliations taking place in these women's works. Closely exploring the transcorporeal feminisms of these artists, this section carries out a discussion on the 21st-century realities "in which 'human' and 'environment' can by no means be considered as separate" (Alaimo, 2008, p. 239).

In conclusion, drawn upon the Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of becoming and its theoretical bifurcations of new materialist feminisms, this thesis contributes both to the philosophical and artistic research on women's interdisciplinary practices in the Middle East. Reworking the extensive theoretical concepts of feminist thinkers such as Braidotti, Grosz, and Alaimo through aligning them with the principles of Deleuze-Guattarian becomings, it offers non-representational, non-identitarian, and ontologically fluid frameworks in visual arts research, especially in non-Western contexts. As Meskimmon puts it, new materialist feminisms present "modes of thought that link bodies and matter to the production of knowledge" and entail an aesthetics that "challenges conventional concepts of subjectivity, moves away from representation and helps to rethink agency, potentially beyond the limits of a human-centred system" (2019, p. 353). In that respect, what this study foregrounds is a new mode of engagement with the notions of female self and body. Drifting away from representational theories that pervade most of the analyses conducted in feminist cultural criticism, this thesis orients itself according to the variable, ever-shifting, and relational forms of analysis advocated by the new materialist feminisms.

When it comes to the broader cultural implications, this thesis presents manifold layers in understanding the geography and culture in the Middle East. First, since the selected corpus of women artists explore the fluid modes of female existence, overarching conclusions drawn from this thesis subvert the orientalist vision that stabilizes Middle Eastern women in an exotic, submissive, or enigmatic state. Far from being passive or inert objects, this study argues that selected women artists render female subjectivity in the Middle East as an ever-changing, agentic, and relational state of becoming that precedes the outdated conceptualizations of womanhood in this geography. Secondly, the dichotomy of the East/West is called into question. Since Western reason has oriented its civilization according to mind, culture, and masculinity, this simultaneously steered Westerners to dangerously associate their *others*, Eastern civilizations with body, nature, and femininity. While the notions of mind, culture, and masculinity were valued due to their seeming affiliations with reason, sophistication, and power, their binary opposites were deemed inferior and created a hierarchical division. Surpassing these interrelated dualisms emerging from the East/West dichotomy, these women artists acknowledge the dynamic interplay amongst the seemingly two opposite points in the spectrum and affirms an in-between space of existence.

All in all, what this thesis offers is a panoramic and yet deeply entangled way of theorizing how female bodies and subjectivities are cultivated as fluctuating and conjugative modes of existence in the works of six Middle Eastern women artists. As promised in prior chapters, I now present a cartographic imagination that captures these fluid borders, relational affiliations, as well as the interdisciplinary landscape of feminist contemporary art in the Middle East.

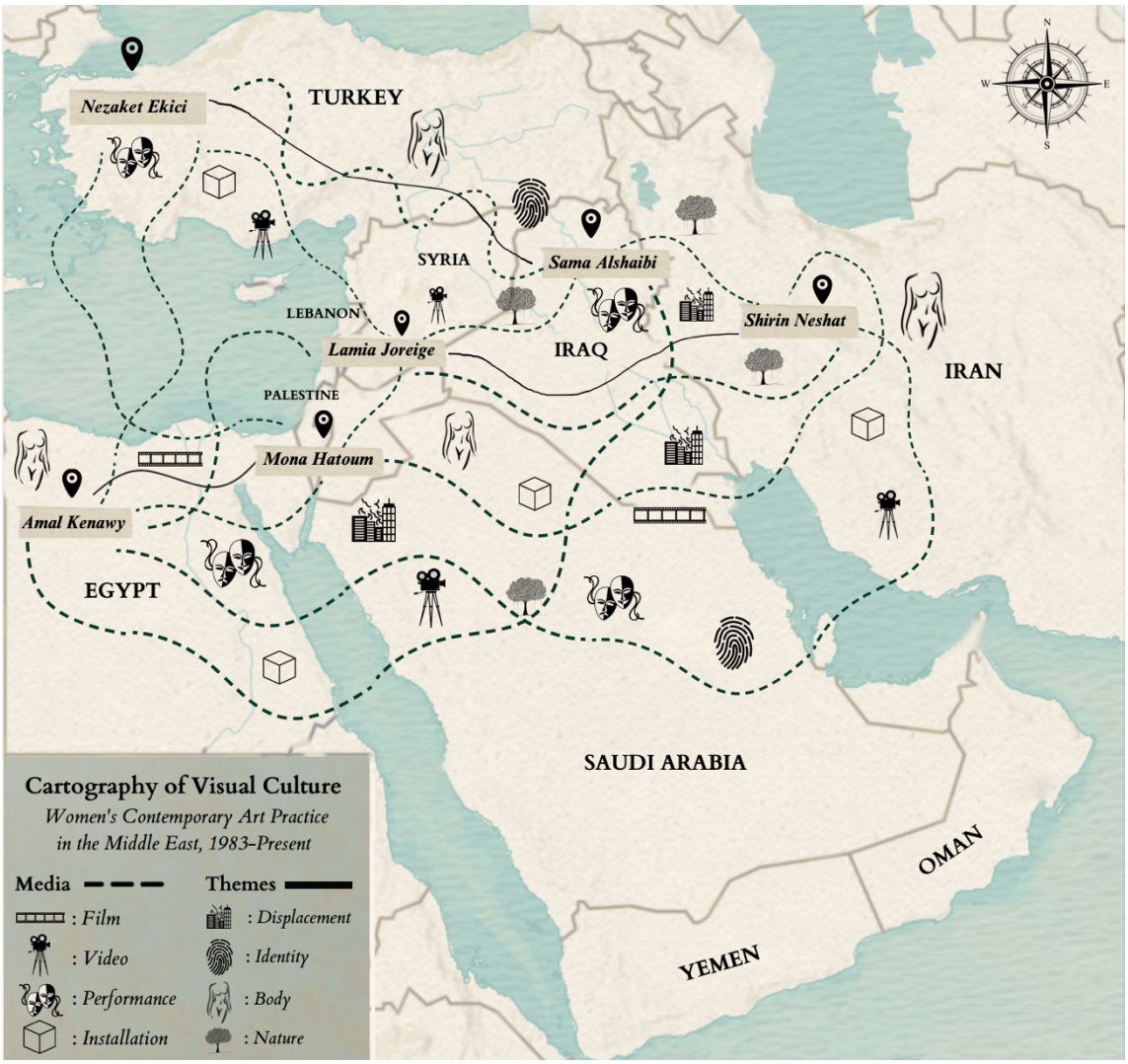


Fig. 41: A cartographic imagination. The iconography, rhizomatic lines, and legend are designed separately on top of an unmediated base map created on ArcGIS. *Cartography of Visual Culture* [map]. © Oğuz Kayır. (2023).

Since these new materialist strands of thought put a major emphasis on the politics of location entailed by cartographic analyses, this map demonstrates the profound interconnectivity of feminist artistic practice in the Middle East. Operating as a threshold between the current study at hand and a future one yet to come, it is constructed around the rhizomatic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Moro's notion of "poetic cartography" (2022) and offers a glimpse regarding the non-linear and non-hierarchical forms of knowledge production

and interpretations of the world. Encapsulating various patterns, it displays how women's artistic praxes and aesthetics are relationally connected in the peculiar atmosphere of the Middle East. Hence, what this cartographic exercise pledges is less to do with resolving the puzzling questions of identity, displacement, or power that pervade this geography, but more to do with letting these matters emerge to our presence, in order to sustain "a vision of the future while retaining the ambivalence and ambiguity of the unknown" (Moro, 2022, p. 177).

Directions for future studies can proliferate from this point. Taking this cartographic imagination with multiple points of entry as a start, future research can expand and grow on the geographical scope. While this thesis was limited to six countries, further research may look for more artists from other countries in the Middle East and incorporate more particularized maps. Moreover, following the iconography and lines, future studies can include different artistic media such as sculpture, bio art, new media art, or AI-generated art. Since there is a growing mass of experimental media practices occurring in contemporary art, the map can foster its artistic inventory by making room for more creative productions. On a more non-representational note, future research may extend the theoretical framework. New materialisms are a broad field, registering across environmental humanities, blue humanities, or other areas of research in which the notions of agency or subjectivity seep to the surface. Concisely, what may be done in the future is to return to this map over and over again, detect its shortcomings, and draw more entryways to encapsulate the ceaseless flows of subjectivity – more lines to delineate the identities in flux.

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APPENDIX

Divided into five sections, this is the spreadsheet prepared prior to visualizing the artistic practices on the map. It has served the purpose of a preliminary roadmap before the act of mapping (See *Figure 41*).

Title of the Work	Artist Name	Country	Artistic Media	Year
Wasl in *Silsila*	Sama Alshaibi	Iraq, Palestine, USA	Video, Photography	2009-2017
Noor in *Silsila*	Sama Alshaibi	Iraq, Palestine, USA	Video, Photography	2009-2017
Tariqah in *Silsila*	Sama Alshaibi	Iraq, Palestine, USA	Video, Photography	2009-2017
National Anthems	Nezaket Ekici	Turkey, Germany	Video Installation	2005
Veiling and Reveiling	Nezaket Ekici	Turkey, Germany	Video Performance	2009
But All That Glitters Is Not Gold	Nezaket Ekici	Turkey, Germany	Live Performance	2014
Work in Progress - Personal Map	Nezaket Ekici	Turkey, Germany	Performance Installation	2020
Variations in Discord and Divisions	Mona Hatoum	Palestine, UK	Live Performance	1984
Measures of Distance	Mona Hatoum	Palestine, UK	Video, Print	1988
Corps Etranger	Mona Hatoum	Palestine, UK	Video Installation	1994
The Room	Amal Kenawy	Egypt	Video Installation	2004
Booby Trapped Heaven	Amal Kenawy	Egypt	Video, Photography	2006
You Will Be Killed	Amal Kenawy	Egypt	Video Animation	2006
Rapture	Shirin Neshat	Iran, USA	Video Installation	1999
Soliloquy	Shirin Neshat	Iran, USA	Video Installation	1999
Tooba	Shirin Neshat	Iran, USA	Video Installation	2002
Objects of War	Lamia Joreige	Lebanon	Video, Objects	1999-ongoing
Nights and Days	Lamia Joreige	Lebanon	Video, Print	2007
The River	Lamia Joreige	Lebanon	Video	2013