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**From the Selected Works of Dore Bowen**

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# This Bridge Called Imagination: On Reading the Arab Image Foundation

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# This bridge called imagination

On reading the Arab Image Foundation and its collection

*So here we are in Egypt "land of the Pharaohs, land of the Ptolemies, land of Cleopatra". . . . Here we are and here we are living, our heads more hairless than our knees, smoking long pipes and drinking coffee on divans. What can I say about it all? What can I write you?*

—Gustave Flaubert, 1850<sup>1</sup>

By Dore Bowen

## The journey out

In the civil and criminal archives of Paris, one can study written notes found in the pockets of eighteenth-century illiterates who drowned in the Seine. Why would farmers, barge operators, and nomadic souls with no knowledge of written language have carried scribbled notes on their person? French historian Arlette Farge ponders this enigma, suggesting that these notes may have been part of a verbal process whereby thoughts were whispered to a member of the literate public who then transcribed them; these missives were then carried by travelers with other symbols such as good luck charms and memorabilia. Consequently, rather than being a form of self-expression, Farge suggests that this variety of written language ought to be considered an expression of the social and political currents of the time and, like the travelers and ferrymen and ferrywomen who used the river as their mode of transport, "these written words also made the route and the voyage."<sup>2</sup>

Like any respectable historian, Farge accounts for what is known of this population and of the eighteenth century in general, yet her associative process also suggests that the minor figures who haunt the margins of the historical mise-en-scène cannot be detected within the surviving documents without the historian's imagination. In another text, Farge employs a variation of this associative pro-

cess. Rather than giving historical events autonomy, she does precisely the opposite by turning to examine her own working habits—and this includes investigating the sensuality of the marked documents she holds in her hands—as well as the maneuvering that goes on in the research library for the best table, thereby refuting the notion that her historical subject is distinct from herself. Through this interweaving of past and present, document and researcher, the subject becomes more relevant to "us" while the lives and events that constitute history (for example, the figures who speak as a community from the chilly waters of the past) remain open to speculation.<sup>3</sup>

Imagination works with discontinuity by leaping over obstacles and lacunae in order to form a picture of the past in relation to seemingly unrelated events. When history is written this way, the reader is encouraged to make mental associations rather than follow the linear path constructed by historical narratives. In a sense, then, imagination acknowledges the ruptures, crises, and traumas that constitute the ebb and flow of temporality. At the same time, this gesture, this "leaping over," while acknowledging the complexity of History, bears its own sense of smug certainty. The historian recuperates a moment past by using her imagination to flesh out the possibilities that documents merely suggest.

0137mi00148

Studio Portrait.

Egypt/Cairo, 1945

Alban - Professional photographer

Mikaelian, Georges Family Collection

Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Leaning back on; Man; Woman;  
Multiple exposure

Genre: Photomontage; Studio photography

Photographic process:

Negatif/black & white/support

en verre/plaque au GBAG

Size: 24 \* 18 cm

Aspect Ratio: 0.75

Condition:





“The divisive sky, taken with the partitioning tree, separates the frame into quadrants, echoing the four figures. All of these formal elements make up the picture. Yet, ultimately, it is the absence of youth’s unease that I sense, the absence of summer and, since the photograph is dated before my birth, the world before my presence.”





0088kh00087

Outing around Chekka

Lebanon/Chekka, 1960

Anonymous photographer

Khazen, Fayza Salim el Collection

Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Glance; Young man; Young woman; Plain

Genre: Snapshot

Photographic process:

Positif/black & white/support papier

DOP-Papier a developpement à la gelatine

Size: 6.50 \* 9.30 cm

Aspect Ratio: 1.43

Condition:

And this is precisely the danger; this bridge called imagination leads the reader here and there and back again, providing her with the sense of being an adventurer who crosses a divide while the ensuing story comes to take the form of a travelogue. Those figures imagined by the historian come to have a face, a body, and a context, and thus the "other" appears with a purpose that is provided by the historian's consciousness and informed by his or her cultural attitudes.<sup>4</sup> Given this bias, imagination seems an inappropriate tool for me, an American scholar, to use when working with the Arab Image Foundation—an archive that responds to the domination of Western imagination by collecting photographs of the Arab world from the Arab world.<sup>5</sup> In addition, this particular moment—when conflicts threaten to engulf the region and the United Nations is busily drawing up an accord for a buffer zone between Lebanon and Israel—seems an inauspicious one to take up the Western imagination of the Middle East. And yet imagination is precisely what is at stake, what is harnessed, what is taken for granted, when I, or another, read across time and geography to consider the collection at the Arab Image Foundation.

What is imagination? In Jean-Paul Sartre's 1940 *L'imaginaire* (published in English as *The Psychology of Imagination*) he explains that imagination is a form of consciousness that produces a mental image. For Sartre, this mental image is not "in" consciousness, nor is it an illusion or trick played upon the perceptual faculties. Rather, imagination is distinct from perception, with its own manner of relating to objects and people.<sup>6</sup> For example, while the act of perception involves grasping a three-dimensional object in a particular time and space—and with all the variety of shadow and distortion this implies—Sartre notes that the act of imagination produces an image from something that is not present to perception. Whereas in perception an object is available for investigation (the viewer might, for instance, walk around the object and touch its contours), when the object is absent imagination steps in to produce a mental image. While the object that the mental image refers to may be dubious (like a unicorn), nonpresent (like a lost watch), or departed (like a deceased friend), it still exists in imagination. In this sense it is not illusory; imagination is a manner, though diminished, of relating to objects and people in the world. Sartre goes so far as to state that the imagined person is necessarily absent and this absence affords the fullness of

imagination. "Were Peter to appear in person the image would disappear."<sup>7</sup>

As the word *imagination* suggests, this process revolves around images—be they concrete or phantasmatic. Since, in imagination, it is decidedly difficult to distinguish a picture from its corresponding mental image, Sartre uses the term *image-consciousness* to clarify the interdependence of these components. It is helpful to think of image-consciousness as two sides of the same coin; the term *image* falls on the side of the picture and *consciousness* on the side of the viewer. Consequently image-consciousness, or imagination, refers to a picture when it becomes enmeshed in a viewer's consciousness. Which sorts of pictures prompt this process of entanglement? While different sorts of pictures prompt different kinds of imagination, analogic pictures, particularly photographs, encourage the viewer to form a mental image of an absent person. For example, when I look at photographs from the Arab Image Foundation, my looking and musing on the figures animates them. I sense them as sentient beings; I imagine the people and the situation to which the image refers.

## Photographic and digital imagination

Looking at a Foundation photograph of two women and a man in the countryside, I observe from the title that they were on an outing around the coastal town of Chekka, Lebanon, in the summer of 1960. Since the formal clothes and comportment suggest an arranged date among couples, I assume the photographer to be the second gentleman in this quartet. When I slip into the site of this absent photographer, I notice that the woman nearest the viewing plane is looking either away or toward me—I am not sure. Is she shy? Flirtatious? While the similarly dressed woman behind her peeks at me with an austere and somewhat icy gaze, I am clearly in cahoots with the young man on the edge of the left frame; we have a plan and hence he acknowledges my look. My critical eye notices a tree trunk nearly dead center in the frame divides the man from the women, producing a clumsy composition that is crowned by the man's cropped elbow on the left. Still, the black-and-white tones are interesting: the tanned, white-clothed figures stand out from the dark gray tones of the background. The blank page of the sky divides the frame into top and bottom, nearly decapitating the figures while throwing their



faces into relief. The divisive sky, taken with the partitioning tree, separates the frame into quadrants, echoing the four figures. All of these formal elements make up the picture. Yet, ultimately, it is the absence of youth's unease that I sense, the absence of summer and, since the photograph is dated before my birth, the world before my presence. (The starched white dresses of the women and the rolled sleeves of the man strike me as period details.) Although my mental image is inspired by photographic detail, it is also rooted in the seeming presence of these absent figures and, finally, what I take from this partial encounter when I turn away from the photograph. With this reductive process, does not the mental image veer perilously close to stereotype?

Youth, summer, Lebanon, countryside outing, 1960. All of these rest in my imagination as if caricatures and call forth new caricatures as well. And the danger of imagination is that, indeed, it generalizes. As Sartre writes of the mental image, it "teaches nothing."<sup>8</sup> Since we already know what we will find in imagination (since nothing new is discovered), it is the exact opposite of an encounter with objects and people in the variable world of perception. And yet we begin a journey with an image already in mind, and we return home with pictures in hand. Imagination and perception are intertwined and act upon each other. Vilém Flusser describes this looping structure thus: "Images signify—mainly—something 'out there' in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions (as reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions). The specific ability to abstract out of space and time and project them back into space is what is known as imagination."<sup>9</sup> This is why mental images have the power to alter perception and the material world, while pictures, particularly those that prompt imagination, are considered dangerous or desirable.

While difficult photographs—those that stray from the norms of composition, tonality, subject matter, and so on—challenge the viewer's *a priori* mental images and thus threaten to alter perception, conventional photographs do precisely the opposite: they abstract the four dimensions of time and space in forms that viewers already anticipate. For instance, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of Arab women (by photographers from both Europe and the Middle East) often depict the figures in a pose similar to that found in Orientalist painting. In the photograph above, the woman closest to me is pictured holding an urn in a reclining position, which reminds me of Eugène Delacroix's famous painting *Algerian Women in Their Apartments* (1834).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, due to the particularity of the photograph, the image depicts a moment past—a moment when a photographer stood before a group of women in 1902 and snapped the shutter of an elaborate camera. As opposed to painting, the photograph necessarily depicts someone that existed.

(Opposite page)

0001ph00022

First from the left: Yvette Pharaon.

Lebanon/Zahleh, 1940 - 1945

Anonymous photographer

Pharaon, Alfred Collection

Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Painted set up; Boat; Man; Woman; Girl; Sea

Genre: Studio photography

Photographic process: Positif/black

& whitesupport papier/DOP-Papier a

developpement à la gelatine

Size: 6.80 \* 10.30 cm

Aspect Ratio: 1.51

Condition:



0008ab00027

Lutfiyah Abu Izzeddin, Tafidah and friends.

Egypt/Cairo, 1902

Abu Izzeddin, Selim - Amateur photographer

Abu Izzeddin, Faysal Collection

Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Backdrop of exterior scene; Lyre; Woman; Jar; Oriental clothing

Genre: Group portrait

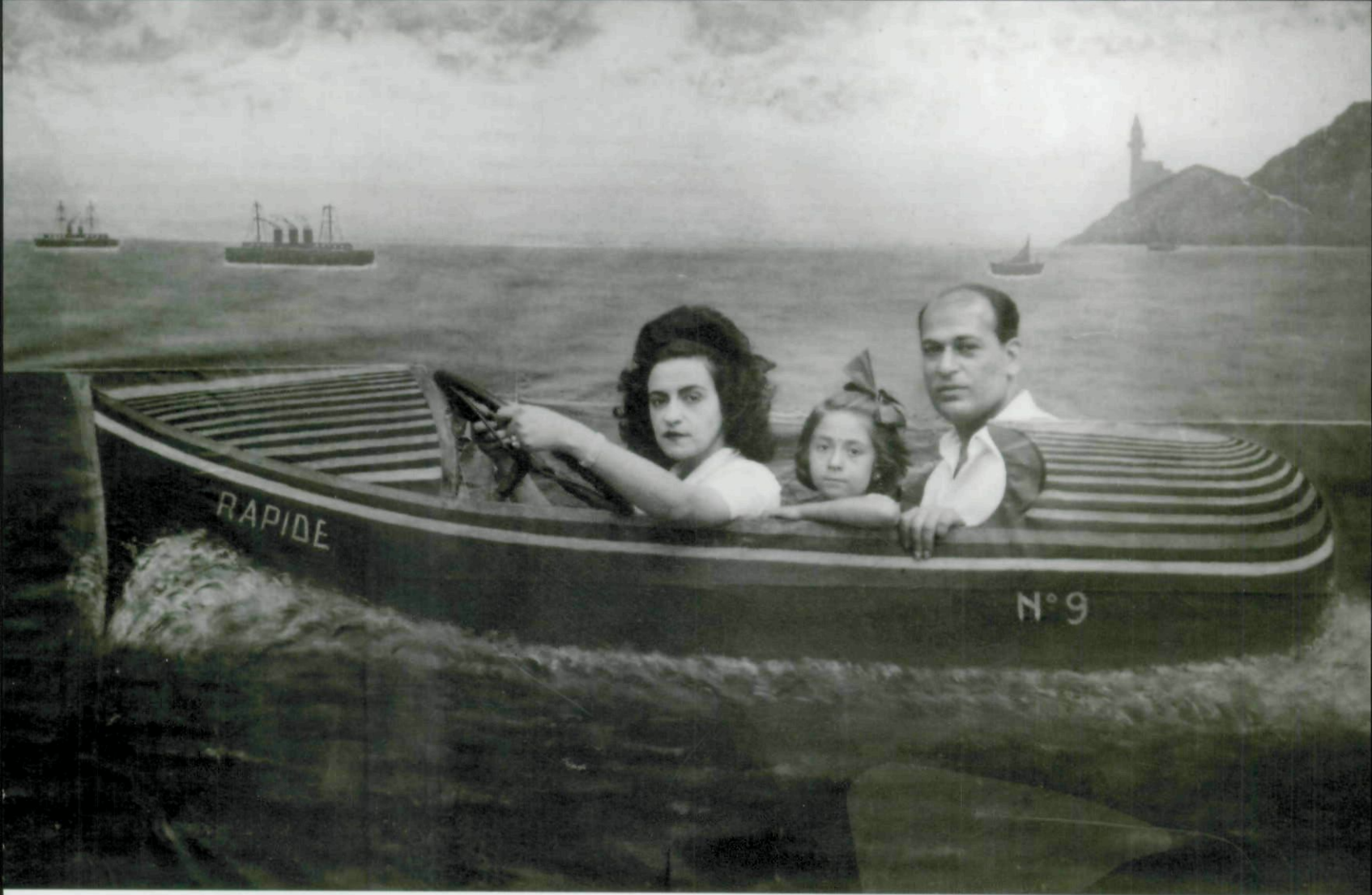
Photographic process: Negatif/black & white/support en verre/plaque au GBAG

Size: 17.80 \* 13 cm

Aspect Ratio: 0.73

Condition:





Technically speaking, light bounces off an object or person, is channeled through an aperture, and is fixed on a light-sensitive surface. This is often described as the photographic index; the photograph captures a moment of light's reflection on a substrate surface. Thus, as derivative or Orientalist or normative as they may be, photographs indicate a slice of time. When a photograph is taken up as a mental image—when it enters the viewer's consciousness—it carries along with it the absent presence of objects and people

Finally, the absent presence of the photographer is inscribed within the photograph. It is taken from a particular point of view, in relationship to a body that stands *behind* the camera. This cultural structure informs the photograph without announcing itself and acts similarly to what Roland Barthes calls the photographic *studium*.<sup>11</sup> This is why the Foundation can boast of being "from" the Arab world; it matters who took the picture, where, and within what context.

“For instance, late 19th and early 20th century photographs of Arab women (by photographers from both Europe and the Middle East) often depict the figures in a pose similar to that found in Orientalist painting. In the photograph across the woman closest to me is pictured holding an urn in a reclining position which reminds me of Eugène Delacroix's famous painting *Algerian Women in their Apartments* (1834).”

that once existed. While it indicates a moment past, a photograph also refers to the absence of this moment in the present. Thus we often say that photographs are haunted, and surely they are. The photograph encourages a particular type of imagination—an imagination inhabited by specters that, nevertheless, tell us little about the world from which the photograph was taken.

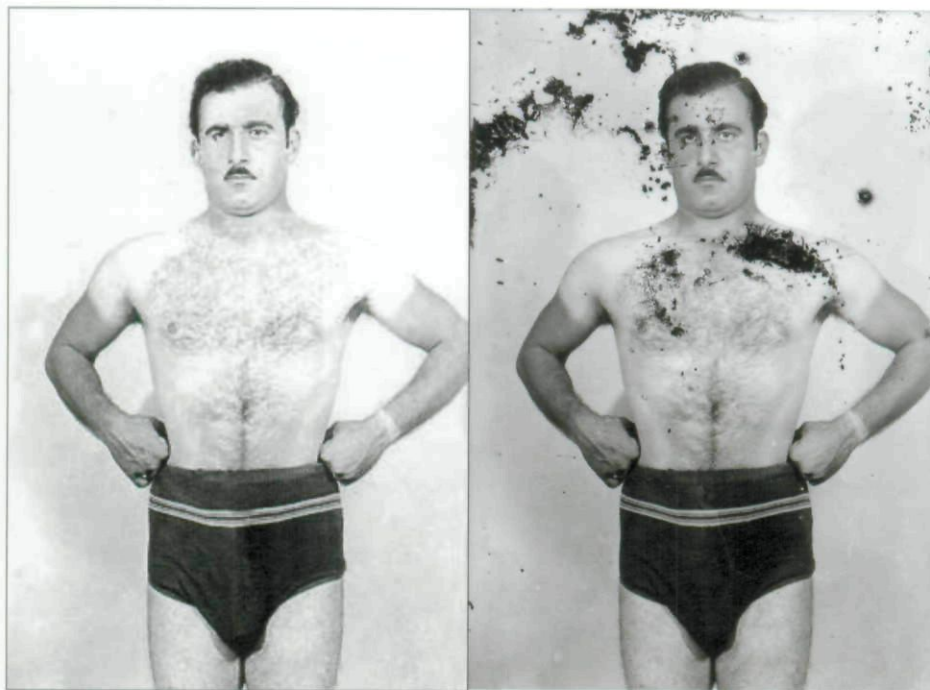
Interestingly, the indexical traces that unwittingly sign the photograph often seem to be at odds with the impression the photographer had hoped to convey. For example, many of the Foundation's studio photographs bespeak their own desperate attempt to outrun the indexical limits of the medium. This is particularly true with the photographs that fall under the keyword *backdrop of exterior scene* in the database.





Van Leo  
CAIRO-1968





In the photograph on page 22 the exterior scene is clearly a backdrop and its edge is exposed in the lower right corner. Such "errors" bring us back to the moment and circumstance of the photograph's taking—for instance, in a studio and not in a site of pristine nature as the backdrop suggests—and remind us that the photographer was forced to contend with a limited repertoire of studio objects to create the picture. This ten-

is available to anyone with a computer and Internet connection. What is a digital image as opposed to a photograph, and what sort of imagination does it inspire? Something so obvious as to be overlooked is that in the transformation of an image from photographic to digital form the image becomes mathematical data.<sup>12</sup> In this transformation the image no longer marks the photographic relationship to time, for the digital image circulates endlessly and has no origin. The aura of presence that was displaced by photography is erased or, more accurately, has ceased to exist. With the digital image we are no closer to or further from a moment in time. Consequently, new questions other than those generally asked of the photograph, such as, Is it an original or copy? When was it taken? Who is it of? must be asked of the digital image—questions such as, What is the compression of the image? What is the website address, and is it still active?

The imagination that results when engaging with a digitized photograph alters accordingly. No longer deliberating on what, who, and when, theorists, journalists, and artists alike turn to address dead links and conspiracy theories. The digital image rests within a network of images, and yet the

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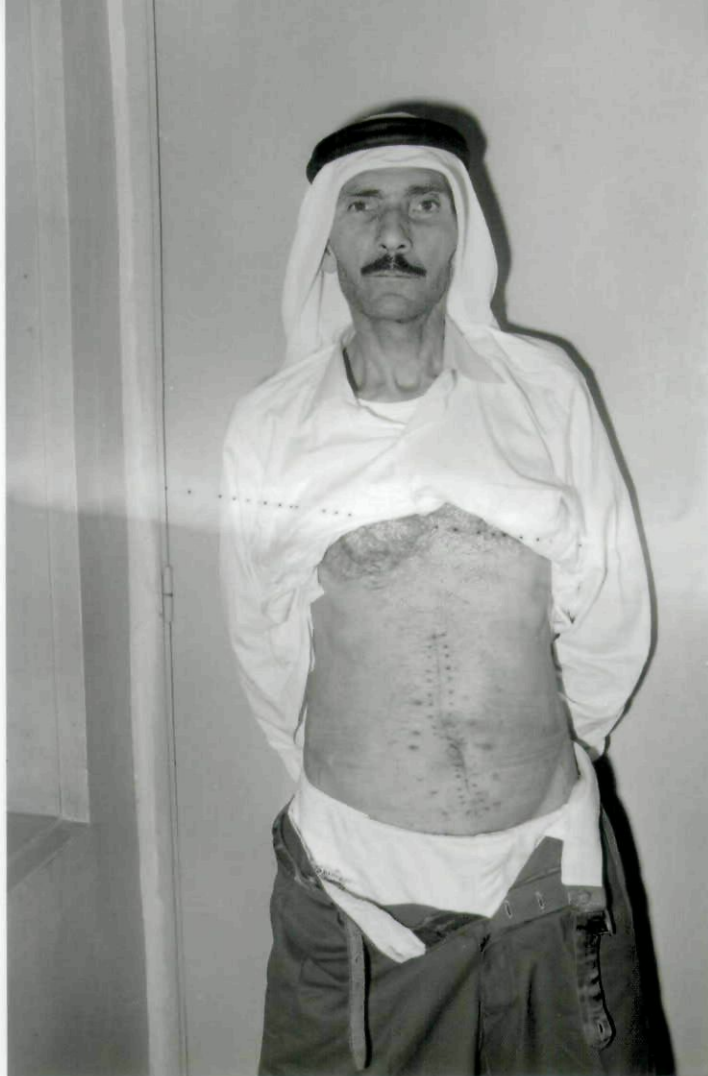
sion can make such photographs comical. (Paintings are not comical in the same way.) This is the crux of the photographs that fall under the keyword *painted setup*. These unusual group portraits are not meant to convince us of their veracity but, instead, the desire for and the impossibility of the scenario they picture.

What results when such photographs are digitized? The Arab Image Foundation is in the process of scanning, digitizing, and archiving its collection, and I am responding to (and reproducing) the digital images here. The original photographs are now protected—as are many photographs—in a temperature-controlled environment and thus are not easily accessible. On the other hand, the digital image, scanned from the photograph at various levels of resolution and placed on the Foundation website

digital image does not reside within an entirely seamless web of information. There are seams. For instance, at one point many of the photographs at the Foundation were reworked in order to erase the marks and aging spots that transfer from print to scan to file. While the reworked images seem timeless, the first scan—with blemishes and all—betrays the process of translation with its photographic accent. Consequently, although digital information produces a new kind of image that demands to be understood on its own terms, what is perhaps less obvious is the way in which digital images are conjoined to previous systems of ordering and imaging, and hence imagination.<sup>13</sup>

[www.fai.org.lb](http://www.fai.org.lb) <





also the Ford Foundation and grants from the European Union—is *in medias res*. This archive has not yet erased the marks and stains that bespeak the process of translation and consolidation.

The images from the Foundation are available on the website and can be accessed by keywords (among other categories). Having borrowed its system of classification from *Le Patrimoine Photographique* in Paris, the Foundation has begun the work of altering the keywords to fit its altogether different cultural context with a taxonomy that reflects the values of French patrimony, and this misfit is an essential element of the installation *Not Given: Talking of and Around Photographs of Arab Women*. By exhibiting the Foundation's images with their corresponding keywords, *Not Given* exposes the logic that undergirds the classification system—a system the Foundation is itself struggling to redefine through the addition and deletion of terms. *Activité Culturelle, Activité Productrice, Genre Humain, Milieu de Vie, Milieu Naturel, Termes Generaux, Vie Quotidien, Vie Sociale*. In English: *Cultural Activity, Trade and Industry, Human Elements, The Living Environment, Natural Environment, General Terms, Everyday Life, Social Life*. This set of terms was used by *Le Patrimoine Photographique* to classify itself and its Others. *African person* and *asian person* are the only classifiable "persons," and *religion* is a subcategory of *Social Life*. Clearly this system reflects the collection it once housed—photographs of twentieth-century Paris with its pigeons, squares, benches. Indeed, the bulk of the keywords seem to date from the post-WWII period with terms such as *industry* but also *poverty, prisoner, and ruins*—evoking the modernization of city-life but also urban devastation. *Animals* and *countryside* are a subcategory of *Natural Environment*, as if exceptions to the rule. Looking outward from Paris, the system of classification divides the world up according to an Occidental vision: there is no Middle East (nor is there a Maghreb or Levant region) listed under regions and the computer has not yet entered its lexicon. In order to update and account for cultural differences, which words will the Foundation keep? Which must go?

The terms added and deleted by the Foundation indicate the slant of the Foundation itself. The woman in charge of this project alters this system bit by bit as she sees fit. When a photograph defies description a new term is added. When a term is not useful it is deleted. In the installation of *Not Given*

## Archival imagination

The term *archive*, notes Jacques Derrida, is derived from the Greek *arkhé*. This term refers to the both the site—the container that houses the materials and where the archiving will commence—and the authority, the command, the law that the archive exercises. To this he adds *arkheion*, the name for the domicile, the magistrates, and the *archons*—those guardians of the container whose authority lends the archive its prestige and weight.<sup>14</sup> This process of archival authority, its "patriarchic function," is at odds with the fluidity of the digital image, which slips covertly under the archons' patrolling eyes to flirt with interested viewers who lack the proper permission to enter this hallowed site. However, the question Derrida ultimately asks of the archive is more and more relevant in the digital age: Given the changes in the archive, what will be remembered, impressed upon consciousness, and what necessarily forgotten? Who is allowed to view the archive now that the boundary between public and private has shifted? The Arab Image Foundation—a young foundation whose collection is already the largest online image database from the Arab world, whose staff and members speak Arabic, French, and English equally well, and whose funding is derived from its founding members in Lebanon but



0081 va00010

Portfolios □ A □ B □ C □ D



0081 va00011

Portfolios □ A □ B □ C □ D



0081 va00012

Portfolios □ A □ B □ C □ D

0038so00402

Patient after a surgical operation  
performed by Dr. Labib Abou Dahr.  
Lebanon/Saida, 1962  
Chafic el Soussi,  
Professional photographer  
Soussi, Chafic el Collection  
Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Stomach; Man; Igaal; Undressed; Hospital;  
Patient; Wounded  
Genre: Photojournalism  
Photographic process:  
Negatif/black & white/support souple  
transparent/support polyester  
Size: 9 \* 6 cm  
Aspect Ratio: 0.67  
Condition:



these images are projected on two adjacent screens. In the second projection room, images that fall under keywords that express emotion or gesture are doubly accessed with either the keyword *man* or *woman*, and these gendered groupings are projected on opposing screens. The most striking examples are terms that yield nothing. For example, *caressing* + *man* yields no images, and *grimace* + *woman* likewise. Under *undressed* + *man* only one image emerges—a man holds up his shirt to reveal a scar to the camera—while the opposite screen features numerous images, many of scantily clad women from the studio of Van Leo, a Cairo studio photographer whose luscious retouched images depict women as if Hollywood stars with the appropriate lighting, backdrop, and effects. Following the logic of this system, it seems that women do not grimace and men do not caress. Do men undress? Only to reveal their wounds, apparently.

Under the combination *undressed* + *woman*, among the many images of Hollywoodesque women, one image shows up with both the keywords *undressed* and *veil* attached. The image is of a nude male child atop a veiled woman's shoulder. Here, a certain archival humor results when a fully clothed woman comes up under the term *undressed*, and an undressed child under the term *veil*. Furthermore, there is visual humor in juxtaposing the child (who is fully exposed to us) against a woman (who is hiding herself from us). Notice that the child's and the mother's hands meet atop her veiled head. In a sense, then, the veiled woman acts as a backdrop that allows the undressed child (which is not the same as a *nude* child) to show up. These dynamic oppositions—veiled/undressed, exposed/hidden—are grounded by the woman's right ringed hand, which is implanted firmly in the child's right breast. The keywords attached to this image are a valiant attempt to express the complexity of the image in six succeeding words—*woman*, *baby*, *oriental clothing*, *yashmak*,<sup>15</sup> *veil*, *undressed*. To further complicate this story, the term *veil* is used by the Foundation to signify much more than that of the French *voile*. Eighteen pages of images come up under the term on the Foundation's website, and these include fashion and marriage veils, Christian and Muslim veils, full-length veils as well as short headgear. When the word *veil* is seen in relation to these columns of photographs, the heteroglossia of the term is evident and fractures any simplistic notion of "the veil."

Added keywords that I find interesting: *air hostess*, *rifle*, *camel*, *obesity*, *orange*, *pistol*, and *camp* (indicating a refugee camp). In the process of adding and reinterpreting keywords the photographs become a contested terrain in which notions of gender, the individual, the collective, the family, and cultural value are negotiated via the words used to describe them. The keywords introduce these cultural abstractions into the system by which the photographs are ordered and accessed while also acting like weighty fruits added to the slim genealogical branch provided by the French classification system. Fashion, for instance, trembles now under the burden of *aabaya*, *dishdasha*, *yashmak*, *tarbouche*, *kuffiyah*, *igal*, *ghoutra*, *veil*. And *daughter* has been added to the *family* branch. Suitable as this may seem, subtle questions emerge: How, for instance, can "daughter" be read off the image of a young woman? Does this involve reading the proximity of a young woman to a father and/or mother figure in the same picture? This added keyword, thought in relation to the fact that *communism*, *buddhism*, *hippie*, and *fascism* have been deleted by the Foundation, suggests that familial affiliation can be read off an image, while political and religious affiliation cannot. How contrary to Western viewing practices!



0045sa00004

Portfolios 000000



0045sa00005

Portfolios 000000



0069fa00927

Portfolios 000000

0010sa00063

Fellah woman and child.  
Egypt/Cairo, 1870 - 1880  
Zangaki, Constantin and Georges  
Professional photographer  
Salam, Nawaf Collection  
Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Woman; Baby; Oriental clothing; Yashmak;  
Veil; Undressed  
Genre: Portrait; Studio photography  
Photographic process: Positif/black & white/  
support Papier/papier albuminé  
Size: 28 \* 22 cm  
Aspect Ratio: 0.79  
Condition:



## For translation

If imagination references an absent presence, surely the Arab Image Foundation imagines with the ghostly presence of *Le Patrimoine Photographique*—an archive that encourages a certain regard, a mode of consciousness. The Arab Image Foundation also imagines with the absent presence of the original photographs, which are stored off-site. My imagination informs my reading of the photographs discussed here as well, and so we add to this list of absences the people and objects that I carry with me as mental images. Indeed, like the French and British explorers who sought the Orient, and using what Edward Said calls "traveling theory," I have smuggled "my theorists"—Sartre, Said, Flusser, Farge, and Derrida—across borders, taken pictures, written notes, and returned home to receive my own postcard.<sup>16</sup> Despite this obvious bias, I find this journey out, intimately related to the history of photography, to be productive. This quasi-fictional journey, on which many philosophers of the photograph—including Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and John Berger, as well as Foundation artists Walid Ra'ad and Akram Zaatari—have embarked, recasts the viewer's relationship to the Other by turning his or her attention toward what is not given to be seen in the image.

Finally, every journey references the location of the traveler: This is why Farge looks toward and away from a historical event in order to understand it. She anticipates her own miscomprehension when she, a contemporary historian, looks back two centuries. My looking at photographs from the Arab Image Foundation is not so different. In the photograph from Chekka (pp. 18-19), I find that the figure closest to me in the photograph mirrors my own position. She does not seem to be in collusion with the photographer like the young man to the left, but neither is she defiantly returning the photographer's gaze, as is the woman behind her. She is caught with her eyes in the process of closing or opening. "She blinked," we say. Many of us are caught this way in photographs (although such photographs rarely make it through the first round of selections)—caught between being a posed figure for the camera and a viewer ourselves. The figure seems to be blurred because she is both looking, as the woman behind her is, and being seen, as the man to her left is. She is a translator between these two positions.

She is useful, this translator; for with this figure in mind it becomes apparent that the photographs housed at the Arab Image Foundation are translated many times over and that this text is just one more manifestation of this process. The photographs are transferred from family souvenir to historical artifact, from analogue photograph to digital image, from digital image to database citation (which is itself a hybrid system), from database citation to mental image, from mental image to written language, and so on. She is here between these pages, in a temperature-controlled environment in Beirut, and she is indexed in a classification system that is now available online. In each of these transformations a different sort of absent presence is offered up, and thus a different sort of imagination of the Arab woman.

Finally, this topic of translation forces me to reconsider my own identification with this phantom woman who, in a roundabout fashion, leads me to consider the difficulty of translation. Thus, I end with a phenomenological exercise (which I invite you to take) that speaks to the paradox of imagination by putting my identification with this figure under examination. First, I stare at the spots and colors my vision throws upon an empty screen or wall; I see myself seeing as I observe the distortion that vision necessarily involves. Now I look at the picture of the outing in Chekka, and back again to the empty wall. Again, back and forth from photograph to wall. Flipping between these two I realize that although I scrutinized this image at length, what looks like a woman in the foreground—a woman I somehow felt I knew—now appears as a stain, a reverse-image seen against the backdrop of the text, activated by my own desire and projected onto my current landscape. Gradually, I understand that although she was there in Chekka in 1960, this woman, this figure (I am not sure which), was never there for me. She makes an impression, surely, but as Sartre notes, "I can produce at will—or almost at will—the unreal object I want but I cannot make of it what I want."<sup>17</sup>

*Thanks to Tamara Sawaya at the Arab Image Foundation.*

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## NOTES:

1. Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 79. This quote is from a letter by Flaubert to Dr. Jules Cloquet, written while Flaubert was in Cairo with Maxime du Camp in 1850.
2. Arlette Farge, *La chambre à deux lits et le cordonnier de Tel-Aviv* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 32.
3. A. Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989).
4. Edward Said notes that Orientalist culture was not merely a product of colonialism but predated and informed the economic and military domination of the Orient. He writes: "I am interested in showing how modern Orientalism...embodies a systemic discipline of accumulation. And far from this being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systemic accumulation of human beings and territories." Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 123.
5. Lynn Love writes that "The Arab Image Foundation...is the first attempt in the Arab world to change this external [Western] viewpoint. The method is to collect, conserve and exhibit work by Arab photographers who photographed locally, either as amateurs or professionals, and thus build an alternative to the visual history defined by the West." Lynn Love, "The Picture Between," *The Saudi Aramco World* 52, 1, January/February 2001.
6. The Foundation states that "The Arab Image Foundation is a non-profit foundation that was established in Lebanon in 1996" and that the collection "includes photographs produced by professional, amateur, and anonymous residents of the region, now boasts more than 75,000 photographs from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, and from the Lebanese diaspora in Argentina, Mexico and Senegal." [www.fai.org.lb](http://www.fai.org.lb) (July 2006).
7. Sartre states that in the imagination, "the objects become affected with the character of unreality. This means that our attitude in the face of the image is radically different from our attitude in the face of objects. Love, hate, desire, will, are quasi-love, quasi-hate, etc., since the observation of the unreal object is a quasi-observation." Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), 174.
8. Sartre, *Psychology of Imagination*, 33.
9. Ibid., 148.
10. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion, 2000), 8.
11. For an excellent history of this topic see Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
12. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). Barthes writes that the studium is a "kind of education (knowledge and civility; politeness) which allows me to discover the Operator; to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them 'in reverse,' according to my will as a Spectator" (28).
13. See Lev Manovich, "The Shape of Information," [www.manovich.com](http://www.manovich.com) (November 2006).
14. Bernard Stiegler calls this hybrid image the "analogico-digital image" and notes that it "may contribute to the emergence of new forms of 'objective analysis' and of 'subjective synthesis' of the visible—and to the emergence, by the same token, of another kind of belief and disbelief with respect to what is shown and what happens." Bernard Stiegler, "The Discrete Image," in *Echographies of Television* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 152.
15. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-2.
16. Yashmak: a long, narrow face screen or veil traditionally worn in public by Muslim women. For more see Encyclopædia Britannica Online, [www.britannica.com/eb/article-9077856](http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9077856) (November 2006).
17. Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
18. Sartre, *Psychology of Imagination*, 192.



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