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Coming Out a l'Oriental: Diasporic Art and Colonial Wounds

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The curves of my lips rewrite the history of Islam
2Fik¹

Introduction

What does it mean to “come out *à l'oriental*”? Coming out can be seen as an epistemology for gay individuals living open and free lives, and the concept is well theorized within Western queer theory.² But who is entitled to, and included within, the safety of living “out and proud”? The gatekeepers of Western modernity and Western gay identity regulate the parameters of what it means to live a truly gay life. For this reason, current literature engaging with Middle Eastern³ homosexuality focuses on issues of modernity, multiple modernities, and the West’s claim to modernity. Traditionally, modernity as a time period signals social, political, and historic conditions at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ However, numerous scholars now question this definition as an imperial structure of power that masks how modernity colonizes social and cultural practices in the name of Western advancement. For example, the literature on Arab sexualities contends that the West created a discourse around sexuality that the Middle East never had, leading to the notion of homocolonialism or imperialist ideologies in the name of sexual tolerance. I use homocolonialism to mean the deployment of LGBTQI rights and visibility to stigmatize non-Western cultures all the while reasserting the supremacy of Western values, politics, and principles for a modern civilization.⁵

According to historian Khaled El-Rouayheb, the term *homosexualität* was coined in the late 1860s by the Austro-Hungarian writer Karl Maria Kertbeny, and the English equivalent first appeared in print some twenty years later.⁶ At the turn of the century, colonial governing bodies imposed Victorian and Euro-American sexual discourses on Middle Eastern cultures. As a push against colonial forces and imperialism, homosexuality in the Middle East was then made an illegal identity category, one that many argue did not exist prior to increased contact with Western explorers and travellers.

In an effort to appeal to these travellers and lay claim to modernity, Middle Eastern governing bodies self-regulated the sexuality of their citizens along heterosexual lines in keeping with Western modernity.⁷ As El-Rouayheb notes, between the middle of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth the prevailing tolerance of same-sex desire was declining, likely in part due to the adoption of European and Victorian attitudes by the new, modern, educated, and Westernized elite.⁸

Queer theorist Momin Rahman argues that we must accept that the Muslim experience of sexual diversity politics is significantly different from the Western one and that this reality undermines any assumption that the processes of Muslim modernization will inevitably lead to the same outcomes around sexuality as those experienced in the West. Middle Eastern homosexuality will never look the same as Western homosexuality.⁹ He posits that the queer Muslim, intersectional in identity, challenges the monolithic, monocultural versions of queer Western identity politics. Here, the sheer existence of queer diasporic Muslims destabilizes Western queer discourse.¹⁰ This assertion of the Muslim queer subject lying outside of normative Western queer politics (and even the encouragement to be outside this Western queer politics) points to issues of genuine difference and incommensurability.¹¹ As I have traced elsewhere,¹² these ideas are steeped in issues of colonialism and imperialism, and are the hangovers of precolonial sexual scripts that make the Islamicate queer subject an outlier.

Throughout this essay, I argue that there exists a strong relationship between the historical construction of colonial sexualities and contemporary expressions of diasporic sexualities. I use histories of gender, sexuality, colonialism, and their triangulation in the Middle East as a foundation for outlining a cause-and-affect dynamic that reverberates in contemporary queer diasporic subjects. In order to link late-nineteenth century colonialism to the contemporary diaspora, I focus on contemporary art that uses these historic moments as inspiration. Specifically, I investigate the performance art and photography of Montreal-based Moroccan artist 2Fik (Toufique). A French-born Moroccan who migrated to the francophone province of Quebec in Canada, 2Fik uses his own diasporic identity as a subject in his work to explore the dichotomies of his Moroccan Canadian culture and his lived experience as a queer Arab.¹³ Using performance and photography as primary modes of art production, 2Fik invents multifaceted characters that transform and translate the different aspects of his cultural and sexual identity, performing each character in complex narratives within his photography. Oftentimes languages – Arabic, French, and English – work together in 2Fik's artwork to bring semiotic and etymological dimension to his visual art.¹⁴ His performance art becomes an integral and inseparable part of his photography, for his characters provide a level of depth in investigating the process of cultural transformation that allows him to navigate geographic borders, geopolitics, and decolonial aesthetics.

I do not wish to speak ahistorically of settler colonial contexts, as the global North certainly also criminalized homosexuality in the past. What is important here, how-

ever, are the ways in which white settler puritanism has been used as a measuring stick to label the Other as backward and outside of modernity. This labelling was applied in the Middle East (and, it should be noted, in settler colonial contexts that labelled Indigenous peoples guilty of primitivism) first for perceived gender fluidity and then, as sexual tolerance became the new marker of Western modernity, for the very heterosexism the region had adopted in order to become modern. Thus, sexual discourses about the Middle East remain a reason the West generally excludes the region from achieving modernity. This vicious cycle of control by the West is inherently a colonial construct meant to control the very outcome it produces.

In this paper, I analyze 2Fik's contemporary art in order to illustrate the complexities of Islamicate sexualities in the diaspora.¹⁵ I use 2Fik's visual art as a case study to investigate the historical links between queer diasporic identities, modernity, and Western imperialism. To do so, I begin by outlining epistemologies of coming out as a way of illustrating transnational queer identity¹⁶ and, in this case, coming out *à l'oriental*. Next, I turn to modern art to question the ways in which premodern Islamicate sexual scripts colonized by modernity might still exist within diasporic subjects today. Finally, I analyze the fictional characters that 2Fik has created in his artistic practice as a way of understanding the tensions between different dichotomies within his own diasporic identity – East versus West, traditional versus modern, and transnational versus hybrid. Throughout this discussion I draw links between settler colonialism and its intersection with the queer diaspora. Issues of modernity and progress in Canada (as well as the larger Euro-American context) are intrinsically tied to queer rights, liberal tolerance, and how these uphold whiteness and naturalize settler colonialism. This discussion illustrates the ways in which contemporary art can be used to queer kinship models as well as the ways in which queer identity can nuance theories of transnationalism and diaspora, especially how sexuality is performed in transnational contexts. I contend that queer contemporary Arab artists, not just 2Fik, provide a necessary link bridging art history and modernity and contemporary queer identity.

Coming Out à l'Oriental

2Fik speaks about his self-discovery concerning his sexuality in terms of coming out *à l'oriental* or a Middle Eastern style of coming out. In an interview, 2Fik defined coming out *à l'oriental* as an

expression that makes reference to the use of eastern and Arab-Muslim cultural references in order to explain the disregard for social obligations related to heterosexuality (marriage, reproduction, etc.). The goal of this type of *coming out* is to take up the arguments of the culture of origin (Morocco) and not use those in the host culture (France) of the person in front of you (papa)

hence reinforcing the thesis, encouraging comprehension of the message and avoiding any interpretation such as “victim-of-the-western-system-that-made-you-homosexual.”¹⁷

Coming out à *l'oriental* calls upon local language and signifiers that 2Fik's father and any Moroccan listener can understand. It is a method of queer self-expression that provincializes global signifiers of gay identity, such as the rainbow flag or the pride parade, to centre on a culturally local understanding of same-sex desire, kinship, and cultural practices.

In the work titled *Arabesque* (2006) (fig. 10.1), a gender-fluid subject wearing a black two-piece bikini and a pink hijab is digitally collaged to appear numerous times in the frame. The slender figure holds a baton with a pink ribbon tied to the end of it, mirroring the pink hijab that masks their identity.

In playful movements of dance and *joi de vivre*, the figure frolics in an open field twirling the baton so that the pink ribbon creates arabesque designs in the air. The movements of the pink ribbon resemble Arabic script, and the pink veil, its modesty juxtaposed to the black bikini, creates recognizable feminine signifiers as 2Fik situates himself within his own cultural context. As scholar Denis Provencher recounts, this image visually reinforces 2Fik's argument that any sort of communication with his parents has to occur *on* and *in* their own terms.¹⁸ *Arabesque* then becomes a coming out of sorts, but the pink arabesque designs only *mimic* Arabic script. They create no real language and no real meaning, forming only a symbolic language that is visually recognizable but has no words. In expressing the inability of the rainbow flag to communicate his own coming out to his parents, 2Fik states, “you cannot communicate with people using your own lingo. Communication is a message that is sent and a message that comes back. You have to take into account your listener.”¹⁹ In this case, the global and arguably Western signifier of the rainbow flag becomes provincialized,²⁰ and 2Fik insists on reverting back to a visual language that his parents can understand. The gender fluidity, the culturally arabesque performance, and the religious signifiers of Islam present in this work all point to another way of expressing one's sexual identity in a local and culturally specific way.²¹

To better illustrate what the incommensurability between Western and non-Western signifiers look like, queer theorist Martin Mansalang writes in his seminal study on the queer Filipino diaspora that visibility and identity models based on individual proclamations of the self are historically and geographically specific to Western centres.²² Reconceptualizing narratives such as coming out points to possibilities of negotiating and reconciling transnational diasporic sensibilities with transnational queer identification. For the *bakla*, a homosexual or effeminate person, undisclosed homosexuality is not synonymous with being “in hiding” or “inside the closet.” Many Filipino gay men believe that silence is a part of the discourse of sexuality. This difference in identity formation relates to an individual identifying with a family unit

and community in the Philippines versus the individualistic model of identity in North America. The process of coming out and the notion of the “closet” are not constituted for Filipino gay men in the same way as they are for the mainstream gay community in North America, where they are crucial to gay self-formation. Therefore, coming out does not translate to a meaningful category of identity formation for *bakla*, showing how queer identity is constructed differently outside the West.

2Fik’s refashioning of queer subjectivity as coming out *à l’oriental* demonstrates the “Queers’ struggle towards finding, building, remembering, and settling into a home to create the sphere called diasporic intimacy.”²³ This refashioning of what gay identity and coming out can mean for a racialized postcolonial queer shows the incommensurability between how a diasporic subject may be socialized as a queer subject in the



10.1
2Fik, *Arabesque*, 2006. Digital collage and photograph.

West and the values and understandings of their own sexual desires from a cultural perspective.²⁴ Within the context of the diaspora, it is important to question the truism of Canada as a gay-friendly nation, which tends to render racist discourses invisible within queer organizing and ignores past and ongoing processes of colonialism. The works of Indigenous, queer, feminist, and Two-Spirit activists and scholars demonstrate the ways in which gender and sexuality are centred in colonial processes.²⁵ Just as the *bakla* becomes both identity and linguistic tool, the non-Western sexuality scripts colonized by Western gay identity shape and transform how the diasporic subject *becomes* queer or learns to be a queer person of colour.

The metaphor of “coming out” present in *Arabesque* poses certain incommensurable differences with the Western notion of freeing one’s self from the confines of the closet. The work represents the myriad ways Middle Eastern subjects in the diaspora express and live their sexual identities in meaningful ways. Psychologist Sekneh Ham-moud-Beckett offers the notion of “letting in” as an alternative to normative models of “coming out.” This term refers to the conscious and selective invitation of people into one’s “club of life.”²⁶ “Letting in” is a process that is highly relevant to the diaspora because it provides an alternative to the Western need to become more visible in order to be complete and thus alters perceptions of what it means to live a “truly” gay life. In its visual ambiguity and cultural specificity, 2Fik’s *Arabesque* can be seen as a letting in and, I argue, a crucial part of what it means to come out *à l’oriental*. These methods and visual strategies link the experiences of gay subjects in the Middle East to those of members of the diaspora and complicate narratives of superiority and queer acceptance upheld in the global North. The link between cultural differences and sexual discourses is important and is reiterated in the writing of diaspora scholar Nadine Naber. In her book *Arab America*, Naber argues that the diaspora can intensify its culture in North America, becoming even more culturally and religiously strict than in the homeland.²⁷ The result is a very complicated space for diasporic sexuality because, while the judicial system may support queer subjects in the West, the cultural community and family unit can be the site of abuse, trauma, disownment, and danger.

The process of subjectification for the diasporic individual, and the complexities of becoming a queer subject, are in part related to the pressures that Western discourse puts on other cultures to reproduce a queer identity that is often times hegemonic in and incommensurable with local settings. Theorist Joseph Massad’s “Gay International” framework explains this process as an incitement to discourse, creating a mission of homocolonialism and Western exceptionalism that seeks to export Western models of homosexuality to places where it did not previously exist, effectively erasing local sexual identity scripts.²⁸ The imposition of a seemingly universal “gay” identity that is inherently Western is, according to Massad, fundamentally linked to colonialism and colonizing discourses. Most non-Western civilizations, including Muslim and Arab civilizations, have not historically subscribed to binary categories of gender and sexuality, and their imposition produces harmful effects. Neither did such binaries exist in the Indigenous Americas prior to colonization and slavery as reflected in gen-

der variant or Two-Spirited individuals within Indigenous cultures and ceremonies.²⁹ This incitement to discourse, I argue, is illustrated in 2Fik's own navigation of language and cultural specificity as a way of rejecting the colonial notion of homosexuality as existing in the global North (and the white settler state context of North America in particular) and instead creating an alternative existence based on his own lived experience, showing the ways in which diasporic subjects can exist outside of such rigid parameters of identity formation.

Identification Photography and Performing Diaspora

How does a diasporic subject perform Islamicate sexuality? What does the performance of sexuality say about the historical construction of race and its relationship to colonialism? To explore these questions, I analyze a series of photographs by 2Fik, all of which resemble passport or identification photographs, asking how diasporic subjects construct and negotiate their individual identities within the inherited structures of modern sexuality. This section highlights several of 2Fik's performed characters (fig. 10.2), which demonstrate his alternative kinship model of affiliation and belonging.

To date, 2Fik has created fifteen characters that comprise his imagined family unit, and he performs and masquerades as each family member in his photographs. With backstories for each character, including migration or diasporic connections to either Morocco, France, or Canada, 2Fik's performative photography reimagines familial kinship and notions of national identity. Some characters centre tradition, strong ties to homeland, and strict cultural values. These characters are linked to modernity as a colonial and modernizing project in the Middle East. Other characters that evoke a notion of cultural hybridity are linked to diaspora as a contemporary, Westernized subject.³⁰ I analyze the characters and their headshots as photographic identities in their own right. These characters appear as subjects within every one of 2Fik's photographs, regardless of series, comprising the world he has created for himself in his art.³¹ The interactions between the characters and their development in storylines is seen throughout the entirety of his photographic oeuvre and not within just one particular series.

Traditional characters like Abdel, a Moroccan-born man who is solely committed to his wife and to following Islam, contrast with more liberal characters like Soufian, Abdel's younger brother, who prides himself on rejecting religiosity as he works in the hip hop scene in Tiohtià:ke|Montreal, Quebec. In Abdel's identification photograph (fig. 10.3), which has the aesthetic and composition of a traditional passport photo, the subject sits up straight and is dressed simply but maturely in a red jacket over a plain white button-up shirt. He wears a serious expression, gazing directly at the viewer with his fully-grown beard and a black prayer cap sitting firmly atop his head. His younger brother, Soufian, however, presents himself very differently (fig. 10.4).



10.2
2Fik, family portraits. Digital collage and photograph.

Soufian's body language is more casual in this youthful snapshot as he sits with his shoulder and head tilted to one side, gives a half smile to the viewer with his mouth open, and sticks out his tongue. Unlike the more honourable older brother, Soufian is photographed with no markers of Islam or signs of religiosity. His beard is both trimmed down and heavily shaved on the sides in a trendy, youthful style rather than in the style of a cultural signifier of an observant Muslim. He wears a bright yellow T-shirt and a red sweatshirt both embossed with the logo of his favourite soccer team, and a graffitied baseball cap sits defiantly in place of his brother's prayer cap. As both Abdel and Soufian were born and raised in Casablanca, these identification photographs provide a glimpse of the ways in which culture and heritage are not heterogeneous or reducible to geography. In this case, the brothers' shared birthplace and upbringing contrast with their nearly opposite personalities, and their own cultural and religious identities do not mirror each other despite belonging to the same diasporic community and even family.

Similar passport photographs provide background stories for all of 2Fik's characters. 2Fik's solo exhibition, *2Fik: His and Other Stories*, at the Koffler Gallery (spring 2017), provides a glimpse of how central these characters, family, and kinship are to 2Fik's art practice. Upon entering the exhibition, these photographs and biographies line the wall so viewers can get to know his constructed family before viewing his other photographs.³² The tensions between the two Moroccan-born brothers currently living in Montreal speak to ideas of tradition/modern and local/diaspora and the ways in which navigating cultural tradition within the parameters of Western modernity creates both isolation and seemingly incompatible values. White settler colonialism was



10.3
Abdel.



10.4
Soufian.

and still is intricately and intimately connected to the advance of gender binaries and imperial sexual discourses, and these logics further add to the complexities of a queered, racialized, and religious diaspora.³³

Visualizing Diasporic Sexuality

The ostensibly oppositional traits that are a constant tension between the two characters of Abdel and Soufian are also seen in other members of the family.³⁴ Characters like Ludmilla-Mary (fig. 10.5) complicate reductive readings of such binaries by embodying these contrasts and contradictions. Her passport photograph shows a fully bearded Muslim man wearing a woman's head covering and lists her origins as unknown. Her characteristic traits include "her big beard, her veil and her huge personality." While the artist uses female pronouns in her biography, the wide-eyed figure is sexually ambiguous as her large black beard and brown skin are intensified by her white hijab and white backdrop. The contrast between the veil and the large beard compromise her stable identity. Simultaneously presenting as both an observant Muslim man and a modest Muslim woman, Ludmilla-Mary directly addresses Islamophobia and homophobia through a complex portrayal of gender nonconformity and cultural hybridity. She embodies the fear and discomfort that the brown-Middle-Eastern-Arab-Other instills,³⁵ manifesting these qualities visually. Personifying the racialized Other, this gender-queer representation is absent of all identifying traits such as origin story, occupation, love status, ambitions, and personality – all qualities that are



10.5
Ludmilla-Mary.



10.6
Kathryn.



10.7
Marco.

present for the majority of the other family members. This absence of identifying traits coupled with the undisclosed gender identity of this racialized character together reveal the very process of racial and sexual identity formation of diasporic subjects. Following Islamophobic rhetoric that marks her body as Other and illegible, perceived aggressive masculinity and subservient and victimized femininity are tested when combined in a non-binary character whose sexual desire cannot be deciphered. As Provencher states, “creating these characters and taking pictures of them allows [2Fik]

to critique stable identities and also to establish a critical distance from himself where he can conduct an analysis of himself and his family.”³⁶ Furthermore, I argue, Ludmilla-Mary’s visually unreadable gender and undetermined sexual identity are a part of the incommensurability between Arab-local and Western sexual desires that 2Fik alludes to in his photography, pointing to histories of conflict between Arab sexual discourses and modern Western notions of gay identity.

Between the hyper-masculine Abdel and a hyper-feminine character like Kathryn (fig. 10.6), gender nonconforming characters like Ludmilla-Mary destabilize binaries that have become normalized within discussions of modernity and tradition. Some characters are immigrants from Morocco while others were born in Canada. The notions of cultural hybridity and authenticity are put to the test in characters like Marco (fig. 10.7), who was born in Rome but spent several years in Marrakech and lived in Paris before moving to Canada.

As a closeted gay man, Marco is quite macho and according to the artist he is “straight-acting.” His background in Rome and Paris creates inconsistencies with Western concepts of freedom and sexual liberation as he demonstrates a lack of freedom and openness despite living in liberal Europe. Being European, Maghrebi, and also diasporic, he does not allow for questions of tradition versus modernity to be easily deduced from the experiences of his brown body. Instead, this racialized figure holds the tensions of transnational sexual identity within his diasporic identity, tensions that resist any easy reduction of sexuality to a binary between queer progress in the West and the lack thereof in the Middle East.

Queering Modernity

In his practice, 2Fik also restages and recreates historical paintings that often correspond to time periods of Western modernity in order to locate contemporary racialization and contemporary sexual identity. Links to a colonial past are present within his reinventions of art history and, oftentimes, modern art as he subverts the racialized subjectification of the diasporic body. His pastiche of canonical artworks includes *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* (1862) by Édouard Manet (fig. 10.8); *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) by Rembrandt van Rijn (fig. 10.9); *Les Ménines* (1656) by Diego Velázquez; *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* (1854) by Daniel Maclise (fig. 10.10); and *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770) by Benjamin West (fig. 10.11).³⁷

French artist Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres painted *La Grande Odalisque* in 1814 (fig. 10.12) at a time when France was expanding its colonial empire. This oil painting depicts an odalisque or concubine in a style heralded for its exotic romanticism. In this scene a fair-skinned nude woman reclines with her back facing the viewer and her face slightly turned to meet our gaze. The orientalism of this painting is inescapable; due to the setting of rich silk, jewels, and a hookah pipe the viewer is meant to believe that this scene takes place in the “Near East.”



10.8
2Fik, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 2010 (based on Édouard Manet,
Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, 1863).



10.9

2Fik, *La leçon de folie de Ludmilla-Mary*, 2012 (based on Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632).

The fair-skinned woman is racialized by her attributes, and French viewers would have presumed her to be a sexual slave to an Arab man. Since odalisques were not actually courtesans or slaves, the woman depicted here is a French sexual myth that suited the colonial myth of sexual deviance and Arab barbarism. In the mind of an early nineteenth-century French male viewer, the sort of person for whom this image was made, the odalisque would have conjured up not just a harem slave – itself a misconception – but a set of fears and desires linked to the long history of aggression between Christian Europe and Islamic Asia and North Africa.³⁸

2Fik's photograph, *La Grande Intendante* (2012) (fig. 10.13), provides a subversive intervention into Ingres's painting that confronts cultural privilege and links colonial history to diasporic identity. In this work, 2Fik's gender non-binary character Ludilla-Mary poses as the odalisque, but her jewels and pearls have been replaced with Windex and rubber gloves. Though she is still adorned with a turban, many markers of the Orient are replaced with household cleaning supplies, like a vacuum cleaner and washrags.



10.10

2Fik, *The Marriage of Abdel and Fatima*, 2014 (based on Daniel Maclise, *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife*, 1854).

While this work can be read as a feminist critique of domestic labour and the misogyny that still exerts control over women's bodies,³⁹ it also speaks to modernity and diaspora. 2Fik has replaced the odalisque – a woman meant to satisfy the carnal pleasures of the sultan – with his own brown, diasporic, and queer body. His large beard, traditionally associated with Islam,⁴⁰ is juxtaposed with the feminine pose of the odalisque, a pose historically saved for women in Western artistic tradition. His painted red lips add to the gender ambiguity, queering his sexual identity but also his role as concubine. Who is 2Fik in service to in this image?

Domestic labour is connected to migrant women who often come to Canada through temporary foreign worker programs such as the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP).⁴¹ The image therefore depicts a colonially gendered history of labour and enslavement that is tied to racialized migrant women, indentured labour, and enslaved women. Moreover, the settler colonial state historically uses racialized bodies to maintain and support white settler domestic spaces, with immigrants inadvertently par-

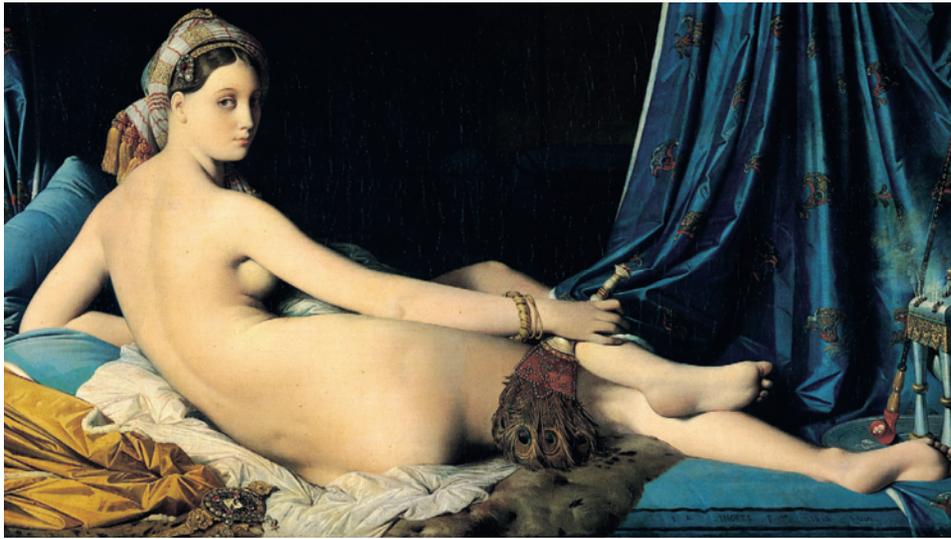
icipating in active Indigenous elimination and erasure. As literary scholar Lisa Lowe explains, “these distinct yet connected racial logics constitute parts of what was in the nineteenth century an emergent Anglo-American settler imperial imaginary, which continues to be elaborated today.”⁴² The connection between labour and migration creates an undeniably diasporic reading of this image, as transnational migrant labour is oftentimes associated with a loss of homeland and separation of families.

Given France’s colonial empire in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and much of North Africa when Ingres painted the original image, orientalism adds another dimension of coloniality that 2Fik reclaims from the scene. The original painting was in fact commissioned by Caroline Murat, Napoleon’s sister and the Queen of Naples, and it is clear that colonial politics played a role in the myth of the barbarian, a myth that served the French who could then claim a moral imperative as they colonized and conquered Africa and the Near East. 2Fik’s brown, sexualized, but also ambiguously gendered body plays the role of the colonized body. Illustrating the absurdity of orientalist traditions depicting the Middle East as backward and unmodern, 2Fik satirizes an aesthetic tradition that renders his own body as unmodern and deficient.⁴³ With deficiency comes a lack, accounting for the incommensurability of Islam with homosexuality. This is unlike the West and its progressive, modern relationship to queer



10.11

2Fik, *The Death of Dishonest Abdel*, 2017 (based on Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1770).



10.12

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*. Oil on canvas, 1814.

identity. In *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity*, queer theorist Momin Rahman critiques the assumed mutual exclusivity between queerness and Middle Eastern and/or Asian cultures.⁴⁴ Rahman aims to illuminate the intersections and complexities of current binaries within Muslim communities and families, gay communities and culture, and wider Western political culture and discourses. His central argument is that the West has created a discourse of Islamic otherness that positions Islam against homosexuality, meaning homosexuality is deployed as a marker of the superiority of Western modernity. In this way, a queer culture always existed in the Middle East, even if it was not termed as such, but the West attempted to criminalize it, confine it, define it, and ultimately suppress it.

Even though homosexuality is not accepted universally in the West, when sexual diversity arises in civilizational debates it is cast as a defining feature of Western exceptionalism and superiority, thus drawing queerness into the core of definitions of Muslim incompatibility with modernity. Using queer subjectivity as a defining feature of modern nation-states is what feminist theorist Jasbir Puar calls homonationalism, “an analytic to apprehend state formation and a structure of modernity ... an assemblage of geopolitical and historical forces, neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation both cultural and material, biopolitical state practices of population control, and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation, and rights.”⁴⁵ Building on the idea that homonationalism has become one of the key logics of modernity, postcolonial scholar Nishant Upadhyay argues that race must be seen as central to processes of homonationalism because within the homona-



10.13

2Fik, *La Grande Intendante*, 2012 (based on Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814).

tionalist project non-Indigenous queers of colour who were historically colonized and marginalized over time can be included within the settler state by claiming heteronormative sexual citizenship.⁴⁶

In 2Fik's *La Grande Intendante*, the viewer is meant to confront the absurdity not only of orientalist depictions of the Other but also of the long history of sexuality and gender norms in Europe that contributed to the making of the original painting by Ingres. The red lips of the bearded Muslim subject in the photograph are not only gender-bending but also call on a long history of colonial tradition that created the very conception of homosexuality in the European settler colonial context (and throughout the global North) and its assumed non-progressive counterparts in the

global South.⁴⁷ These East/West, modern/unmodern binaries are historically unstable and have always been reliant on one another. European visual tropes of Romantic Orientalism enabled Euro-American same-sex desire and provided a safe space for colonial Europeans to behave homosocially in the Middle East. For instance, historian Luke Gartlan examines the significance of outdoor photography in Cairo by Austro-Hungarian Orientalists as expressive of male bonding within the traveller-artist circle. Gartlan argues for the importance of same-sex intimacy in the travels of Orientalist artists and photographers. The perceived tension between prudish Victorian sexual discourse and “sexually litigious” behaviours in the Middle East in the nineteenth century naturally allowed for European travellers to explore a greater range of acceptable codes of behaviour. Thus, these generally male colonial tourists raised questions about a perceived Ottoman homosociality and a Euro-American heterosexuality; namely, why was there not a two-way exchange between colonial morality and colonial fantasy? In this artistic intervention by 2Fik, tradition and modernity are interrogated and the fixity of their binary construction is destabilized.⁴⁸

Provincializing Modernity and Colonial Rule

What does it mean to provincialize Western modernity? What could identity narratives in the Middle East, and their sexual scripts, look like outside the purview of Western modernity? Taking a step backward in order to better evaluate the role of race and empire in premodern contexts, Italian artist Gentile Bellini’s painting, *The Sultan Mehmet II* (1480) (fig. 10.14), provides another rich source for 2Fik to explore themes of Islam, masculinity, and transnational encounter. The subject of the painting, Mehmet II (the Conqueror), brought an end to the Eastern Christian world of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 when he seized Constantinople. Mehmet marked the conquest by turning the greatest Byzantine church, Hagia Sophia, into a mosque. According to Tursun Beg, a historian of the fifteenth century, Mehmet built a great mosque, “which not only encompassed all the arts of Haghia Sophia, but modern features constituting a fresh new idiom unequalled in beauty.”⁴⁹ At the time Bellini painted his work, the Turks posed a major threat to European powers, particularly in Italy. Poised on the threshold between East and West, Venice especially not only benefited financially from trade with Islamic leaders but also found itself facing incursions by ambitious Ottoman leaders. For sixteen years, Venice was able to hold its own in a war with the Turks but ultimately was forced to conclude peace in 1479. As a part of this peace settlement, Bellini worked in Constantinople primarily for Mehmet II (r. 1444–46; 1451–81), painting the sultan’s portrait and producing bronze medals bearing his likeness, which made the image of the Ottoman ruler increasingly famous in Europe.⁵⁰ In fact, Bellini’s portraiture of Sultan Mehmet II “has become emblematic of cultural exchange between Venice and the Ottomans”⁵¹ – and a general argument can be made that Mehmet is painted as a representative of Islamic power. The sultan wears a deep



10.14
Gentile Bellini, *The Sultan Mehmet II*.
Oil on canvas, 1480.



10.15
2Fik, *Le Sultan Abdel*, 2012. Digital photograph.

red caftan and a luxurious brown fur mantle, donning a wrapped turban over a red *taj*, a headdress indicative of his rank as well as his identity as a Muslim. In a way, this portrait associates Mehmet the Conqueror and Islam with progress and power. This late medieval context of global colonialism, which will compound and lead to early Western modernity, shows the complex ways in which empire and colonization overlap, and for the diasporic experience it is noteworthy to evaluate the ways in which sexual discourses are a part of and often central to entangled colonialisms.

2Fik's reimagining of *The Sultan Mehmet II* in his photograph *Le Sultan Abdel* (2012) (fig. 10.15) provides an interesting commentary on colonialism, power, and diasporic representation in the twenty-first century. In this work, 2Fik's culturally conservative and highly religious character Abdel plays the role of Sultan Mehmet.

Abdel sits in a conventional three-quarter portrait pose wearing a modern red dress-shirt and black tie. More traditionally, and as in the Bellini painting, Abdel also wears a brown fur mantle over his shoulders and a white turban on his head with a yellow prayer hat showing underneath. Playing the role of sultan, Abdel is a fully sovereign leader and has no dependence on a higher ruler. The title of sultan carries with it

meanings restricted to Muslim countries and a religious significance in contrast to the more secular “king,” which is used in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

In this photograph, 2Fik reimagines himself as a sovereign ruler not governed by any colonial power and reimagines kinship relations as he queers his own family history. While Bellini painted six golden crowns hovering over Mehmet’s head, 2Fik’s photographic portrayal instead has six glowing portraits of his own face. The significance of the crowns in Bellini’s portrait is unclear.⁵² Art historians Paul Wood and Carol M. Richardson have suggested that they represent the six previous Ottoman sultans, “with Mehmet himself symbolized by the seventh crown made of pearls at the bottom centre of the jewelled textile at the front of the painting.”⁵³ 2Fik’s portrait, however, has little opulence and no jewelled marker representing the subject’s own importance. Instead, the viewer looks at the proud and prominent Abdel as he sits in solitude surrounded by the heads of his ancestors (or even current family members), each face looking down upon him. 2Fik uses his fictional characters as a way of queering kinship dynamics by reimagining familial relations across various diasporic imaginaries and also by performing each character himself. He sits at the nucleus of this familial unit, depicting the religious and Islamic figure wearing modern Western clothing surrounded by the symbols of his cultural past. Here, the miniature portraits allow the viewer to move between both time and place, as the diasporic figure is not only linked to his cultural geography but also to temporal framings of modernity and tradition. In the vein of José Esteban Muñoz, this work provides a futurity for queer belonging, and, I argue, 2Fik also rethinks a queer present. As Muñoz powerfully states, “the present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and ‘rational’ expectations.”⁵⁴ In this way, the diasporic and culturally hybrid character of Abdel “is not enough.” I argue that 2Fik queers and reimagines the present of one of his more culturally conservative family members by nostalgically locating him within a history of power and dominance but also reimagines and reinvents his own past as he shapes Abdel’s own subject position.⁵⁵ This rethinking of the present for queer diasporic subjects exposes the mythology of liberal tolerance for queer belonging in settler states in order to push queer politics into a local imaginary that resonates with 2Fik’s own experiences and beyond the privilege of heteronormative Western gay citizenship that is predicated on recognizing same-sex marriages, permitting legal adoption for queer citizens, and allowing gays to serve in the military. This work imagines a past and present fraught with colonial domination in order to contextualize the diasporic present. It is through the formation of the diasporic character Abdel, and 2Fik’s own identity, that the artwork provides a reading of queer futurity, a queer present, and another way of reimagining identity formation in the Middle East.

How then does 2Fik’s reimagining of Western modernity speak to queering the past and, more importantly, the queering of Arab modernity? How does the portrayal and subversion of racialized subjects in colonial spaces, as in racist and orientalist paintings, speak to sexual constructs at the time and modern understanding of sex-

uality as experienced by diasporic subjects today? To better think about these queries, I draw on the ways in which Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein conceive of decolonization as a process of both becoming and unravelling beyond just moving past or healing historical violence. Decolonization has to move past the possibility of an endpoint, or a historical or finished process (whether achieved already or at some future date), to productively grapple with practice.⁵⁶ For example, thinking of anticolonial survival and resistance as a visual and artistic practice allows for the inclusion of the study of historic sexual discourses in the Middle East in relation to contemporary diasporic artists, which provides a way of bridging the disciplinary gap between queer theory and visual culture in order to more productively link a colonial past to a diasporic present.

Colonial Trauma and Contemporary Art

I would like to conclude by coming back to 2Fik's own character (fig. 10.16) created in his photographic body of work. In his passport photograph, the self-named, black shell of a figure has absolutely no visual identity. Described as having no origins, his occupation is to play different characters and his ambition is to be a blank canvas that does its best to portray those characters. Under personality traits, 2Fik's character is said to have none, and he only exists through the other characters he enacts. I argue that the absence of a visual identity, mirrored in the lack of identifying characteristics, represents what 2Fik nihilistically illustrates as his own queer diasporic identity.

As I have traced throughout this analysis, Islamicate sexualities in the diaspora are fraught with tensions of coloniality, visibility, and citizenship. I began by outlining how Western epistemologies of queerness are not always conducive to understanding queer, diasporic, and transnational sexual identities, and 2Fik's notion of coming out *à l'oriental* provides a reprieve from, and an alternative form of, sexual and artistic expression. From here, I analyzed 2Fik's passport photos as a way of zeroing in on diasporic subjectivity and the formation of diasporic identity. I then framed these sexual discourses historically, questioning the types of colonial relationships present within discourses of sexuality. Especially important are the imperial connections that have existed between the West and Islamicate regions, which have created a framework of difference that defines Arab sexualities as perpetually unmodern. Here, the colonial traumas that I identified at the start of this analysis are seen as repercussions of, and linked to, contemporary ways of being both diasporic and queer. That is, past colonial trauma is closely linked to the diasporic present and informs visual tropes like coming out *à l'oriental* in methods of artistic creation that involve queering kinship and imagining visual processes that involve rewriting history in order to offer powerful reclamations of colonial domination and culturally impacted sexual discourses experienced in the Middle East. Diasporic artists such as 2Fik use tropes such as performance, character creation, humour, pastiche, and satire productively and affirmatively as a way of



10.16
2Fik.

laying bare colonial traumas that are often buried and rendered invisible through normative Western queer discourses and the civilizing missions of modernity, which always favour the West. The traumas that the diasporic subject carries are intrinsically tied to settler colonial histories as immigration is a component of Canada's national imaginary and can be used by the state to reproduce colonial amnesia through the active denial of present-day colonial projects.⁵⁷ Overall, in creating a visual description of colonial trauma, contemporary diasporic art exists outside of its own contemporaneity and is removed from a present moment of subjectivity. Instead, the queer diasporic individual both creates and develops methods to mediate their own relationships to the local and the global, the traditional and the modern, and most importantly, the self and the other.



10.17
2Fik, *Huitte Facette*, 2009. Digital collage and photograph.

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, 105.
- 2 See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*; Somerville, "Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Racial Closet," 191–200; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Eribon and Lucey, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*; Edelman *No Future*; and Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?*
- 3 I define the Middle East loosely as the geopolitical designation of western Asia and northeast Africa that includes the nations on the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. Even though some of these regions, like Iran and Turkey, are not technically a part of the Middle East, a historiographical emphasis makes it integral to include regions that were connected by empire, culture, and language.
- 4 Modernity is not to be confused with modernism, which points to the cultural trends that responded to the conditions of modernity in myriad ways, such as modern art.
- 5 In Rahman Momin's core argument homocolonialism is an actor in the specific understanding of modernity that underpins the sources of oppression between Muslim cultures and sexual diversity. See Rahman, *Homosexualities*.
- 6 El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 5.
- 7 Premodern same-sex desire is well documented in the Middle East. El-Rouayheb outlines numerous biographic accounts, poetic anthologies, and belletristic writings openly dedicated to same-sex relations, such as poems about a man's passion for a teenage boy. See *Before Homosexuality*, 1–42. Historians also cite the travel journals of Europeans who visited various regions of the Ottoman Empire, noting their astonishment and disgust with same-sex tradition and local men openly flaunting their relations with other men and adolescent boys. It should be noted that these travel journals were often translated into Arabic and local languages in order to be circulated to cause shame and embarrassment, thus making them a part of irreparable acts of repression and sexual imperialism. See Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*; and Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*.
- 8 El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 156.
- 9 Rahman, *Homosexualities*.
- 10 Intersectionality is a framework designed to explore the dynamic between co-existing identities (e.g., woman, Black) and connected systems of oppression (e.g., patriarchy, white supremacy). The term was coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to challenge the assumption that continues to undermine the feminist movement: that women are a homogeneous group, equally positioned by structures of power. In a feminist context, it allows for a fully developed understanding of how factors such as race and class shape women's lived experiences; how they interact with gender. See Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1241–300.
- 11 Instead of using the term "incompatibility" to discuss these genuine differences, I turn to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's thinking about decolonization for more precise language. In their text "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," Tuck and Yang outline an "ethic of incommensurability, which recognizes what is distinct [and] what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization in relation to human and civil rights based social justice projects ("Decolonization," 28). Their use of "incommensurability" instead of "incompatibility" draws on Frantz Fanon who argued

- that incommensurability is an acknowledgment that decolonization will require a change in the order of the world. See *The Wretched of the Earth*, 69.
- 12 See Gayed, "Queering Middle Eastern Contemporary Art," 140–55; Gayed, "Islamicate Sexualities."
 - 13 It should be noted that in his interviews with Denis Provencher, 2Fik used the term Arab to refer to his own cultural experience and also to identify his own performative characters. Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*.
 - 14 See Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, for an in-depth analysis of the languages used by queer Maghrebi-French artists, writers, and filmmakers.
 - 15 In 1974, Marshall Hodgson coined the term Islamicate as a way of opening up the borders of modern scholarship. Hodgson objects to using the terms "Islam" and "Islamic" in unspecific ways, arguing that the more we speak of Islamic art, Islamic literature, or Islamic sexuality, the less we are actually speaking about Islam as a faith. Islamicate does not refer directly to the religion of Islam but to the social and cultural complexities historically associated with Islam. It is therefore inclusive of non-Muslims living within majority Muslim regions. Geographically, the term opens up the limits of studying places such as "Middle East" to encompass other geographic regions where Islam is dominant both religiously and culturally, such as Iran and parts of Asia. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 57–9.
 - 16 I use "transnational queer identity" to speak of a non-Western way of being a queer subject, most often referring to sexual norms of the global South. A transnational queer identity is necessarily diasporic and involves different global, local, and multinational negotiations in order to form queer subjectivity in the diaspora.
 - 17 Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, 57.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 81.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 80.
 - 20 Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* points to Eurocentrism within the study of historical modernity and the centrality that Europe takes in histories of civilization, industrialization, and progress. Chakrabarty begins by outlining how conventional theoretical models have been based on European history, with key themes like the development of capitalism and modernity being central to these narratives. He argues that Europe provides the template of modernity and a body of scholarship that defines how academics view the world and not just a geographic region. Provincializing Europe entails returning Europe to its rightful place as *one* world region amongst many, decentred as a way of thinking through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations.
 - 21 Islamicate gender fluidity is seen in surviving Middle Eastern and later Islamic literature from the fourth to thirteenth centuries, which narrates examples of homosocial relations and gay desire but not "gay" as a stable identity. For instance, homoerotic relationships between the Mamluk elite in late-medieval Egypt and Syria show that the public expression of homoeroticism (especially in poetry) was fully permitted by Islamic societies both before and during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. See Rowson, "Two Homoerotic Narratives from Mamluk Literature," 158–91. Likewise, premodern Arab-Islamic texts speak frequently of the androgy-

- nous beauty of beardless boys, and poetry and other texts are explicit about anal intercourse and fellatio. Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, 24.
- 22 Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*.
- 23 Ibid., 91.
- 24 It is important to note the medium specificity and circulation of 2Fik's photographic oeuvre. How does the choice to use photography and/or performance change the viewer's relationship to these images, their audience, and temporality? Photography's transnational, virtually disseminated, and easily circulated nature at times echoes the transregional narratives within 2Fik's artwork. The photograph *Arabesque* (2006) for instance was made just two years after France passed "the veil law" (or law 2004-28 of 15 March 2004) banning the use of religious garments and symbols such as the Muslim hijab. Born in Paris to a Moroccan Muslim family, 2Fik moved to Montreal in 2003, finding himself in an environment that inspired him to examine identity and its socio-political ramifications. Quebec, however, has had a similar history of attempting to impose racist laws that remove freedom and civil liberties to Quebec's Muslim population, especially Muslim women. In 2013 the xenophobic Charter of Quebec Values, or Bill 60, was introduced to likewise ban the use of religious garments like the hijab before the bill died the following year. Later, in 2019, Quebec passed Bill 21, a ban on religious symbols such as the hijab that mandates having one's face uncovered to give or receive specific public services. While some of these laws and provisions came after *Arabesque* was made, it is safe to say that these issues have been public discussion in France and Quebec during 2Fik's immigration to Canada and coinciding with the year he produced the artwork. 2Fik's photograph *Arabesque* within this context is simultaneously entangled with his French homeland, his immigration to Quebec, and his experience of his Moroccan heritage in Canada. In this way, 2Fik's *Arabesque* resonates with audiences transnationally, and the easily disseminated photograph becomes an act of resistance and protest to a decades-long struggle to fight racism and xenophobia in the diaspora.
- 25 See for example Smith, *Conquest*; Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," 43–65; Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism," 105–32; Morgensen, "Queer Settler Colonialism," 167–90.
- 26 Hammound-Beckett, "Azima Ila Hayati," 29–39.
- 27 Naber, *Arab America*. See also, Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber, *Arab and Arab American Feminisms*.
- 28 Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 188.
- 29 For scholarship on queer settler colonialism see Morgensen, "The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism," 52–76; Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism"; Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," 41–68; Greensmith and Giwa, "Challenging Settler Colonialism," 129–48.
- 30 2Fik's *Huitte Facette* (fig. 10.17) portrays the characters in a way that highlights their national identity. In a clockwise order starting in the top left-hand corner: Marco (Italian Moroccan); Alice (French Lebanese); Soufian (Moroccan); Fatima (Moroccan); Benjamin (Arab Quebecker); Manon (100 per cent Quebecois); Abdel (Morrocan); and Francine (Anglo-Canadian).
- 31 Like in the *Marriage of Abdel and Fatima* (fig. 10.10).
- 32 See exhibition shot: Filip, "2Fik: His and Other Stories," <http://kofflerarts.org/publication/2017/07/17/2fik-his-and-other-stories-2/>.

- 33 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*.
- 34 2Fik's character Alice (French Lebanese), for example, could act as a bridge between his characters Fatima (Morrocan) and Manon (born in Quebec). According to the artist, Alice stands in as a sort of transition from the East to the West on all levels: religious, cultural, social, educational, etc. Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, 63.
- 35 This term is inspired by the work of critical race theorist Sherene Razack who cites the term "Muslim-looking" as part of a resurgence of old Orientalism that "provides the scaffold for the making of an empire dominated by the United States and the white nations who are its allies." Razack, *Casting Out*, 5. Furthermore, this term is part of what Razack identifies as "race thinking," which she defines as the denial of a common bond of humanity between people of European descent and those who are not. Race thinking is the belief that there are two levels of humanity and two corresponding legal regimes. It is a structure of thought that divides up the world between the deserving and the undeserving according to descent, developing into racism through its use as a political weapon (6, 8, 179).
- 36 Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, 66.
- 37 Other artists like Yasumasa Morimura and Mickalene Thomas have found this act of restaging and reinterpreting images from the European canon to be a productive method of decolonizing visual representation. Japanese contemporary photographer Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951) appropriates Western imagery from art history, film, and media, recreating iconic scenes by inserting his own male Asian body into them. Ambiguously representing his gender as fluid and queer, in his photographs Morimura alternates between playing female characters such as da Vinci's Mona Lisa to assuming the masculine roles of historical figures such as Mao Zedong and Vladimir Lenin. Mickalene Thomas on the other hand uses painting and collage to create monumental pictures that explore and challenge the representation and objectification of Black women. Drawing inspiration from images of iconic African American women and emblems of the Black Power Movement, Thomas restages canonical imagery to create an updated version of established sexist and racist visual archetypes found within Western art history.
- 38 Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, "Painting Colonial Culture: Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*," Khan Academy, 2018, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/late-europe-and-americas/enlightenment-revolution/a/ingres-la-grand-odalisque>.
- 39 Mona Filip, "2Fik: His and Other Stories," Koffler Centre of the Arts, Toronto, Canada, 2017, <http://kofflerarts.org/publication/2017/07/17/2fik-his-and-other-stories-2/>.
- 40 Muslims learn about the Prophet's views on facial hair not from the Koran but through hadith or sayings attributed to Muhammad. One such hadith, in a collection compiled centuries ago by Muslim scholar Muhammad al-Bukhari, stipulates, "Cut the moustaches short and leave the beard." The Prophet Muhammad is believed to have had a beard, and those who insist that devout Muslims grow beards argue that they are doing no more than asking the faithful to emulate the Prophet's actions. There are schools of Islamic law – Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi – which, among many other things, hold strong positions on beard length and the act of shaving. For more see Farmanfarmanian, "Fear of the Beard," 48–69; Delaney, "Untangling the Meanings of Hair in Turkish Society," 159–72; and BBC News, "Are Beards Obligatory for De-

- vout Muslim Men?," *bbc.com*, 27 June 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/10369726>. Shaving one's beard could thus be a sign of modernity. Feminist theorist Afsenah Najmabadi outlines the importance of facial hair in her book *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*.
- 41 The Live-In Caregiver program was established in order to support middle and upper-class families in Canada as adults balance work and care for family members including children and elderly parents. The LCP makes available the opportunity for nannies and domestics to become permanent residents and citizens of Canada and facilitates the immigration of spouses and children and the reconsolidation of families in the diaspora. See Diaz, Largo, and Pino, *Diasporic Intimacies*, 15. For more on nonnormative and queer intimacies in transnational feminist writing about gender and labour within the LCP see Catungal, "Toward Queer(er) Futures," 23–40.
- 42 Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 8.
- 43 Orientalism is defined as the West's patronizing representations of "The East" and the overall exoticization of the societies and peoples who inhabit countries in Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. According to Edward Said, orientalism is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies who produced it, which makes much Orientalist work inherently political and central to power (Said, *Orientalism*).
- 44 Rahman, *Homosexualities*.
- 45 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 337.
- 46 Nishant Upadhyay argues that homonationalism has become one of the key logics of modernity, whereby certain queer bodies are reconstituted as worthy of recognition and protection by nation-states. These queer subjects become indispensable to the maintenance and continuance of the nation-state, while others are excluded through logics of white supremacy, racism, Islamophobia, heteropatriarchy, neoliberalism, and settler colonialism. See Jackman and Upadhyay, "Pinkwatching Israel, Whitewashing Canada," 201.
- 47 For Gatlan's study see Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*.
- 48 Colonial fantasies often lie at the crux of these binaries. While European tourists shamed the Middle East for displays of same-sex intimacy, Romantic Orientalist European paintings, such as portraits of poet Lord Byron (1788–1824) in fancy Oriental dress, expressed a homoeroticism and can be read as clearly flamboyant.
- 49 Bey and Inalcık, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*; Jonathan Jones, "The Sultan Mehmet II, Attributed to Gentile Bellini (1480)," *The Guardian*, 26 April 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/apr/26/art>.
- 50 Alan Chong, "The Sultan Mehmet II," *Learner.org*, 2017, <https://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/80/index.html> (accessed 11 December 2018).
- 51 Antonia Gatward Cevizli, "Bellini, Bronze and Bombards."
- 52 The crowns also appear in a banner depicted in the *Saint Ursula* cycle of paintings by Carpaccio. Historian Mary L. Pixley writes, "The series of three crowns refers to the three kingdoms of Asia, Greece and Trebizond which were controlled by the Ottoman Turkish empire." "Islamic Artifacts and Cultural Currents in the Art of Carpaccio," 9. Art historian Paul Wood has also noted, "On the reverse of Bellini's portrait medal there are three of them, usually taken to refer to the three components of the Ottoman Empire: the original territories in Asia, Greece (in-

cluding Constantinople), and Trebizond (the Black Sea port and gateway to the Silk Route into central Asia, captured by Mehmet from Venetian control within a decade of the end of Byzantium, in 1461).” “Art in Renaissance Venice: A Portrait,” OpenLearn Course at The Open University, <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/visual-art/art-renaissance-venice/content-section-1.4> (accessed 11 December 2018).

- 53 Pedani Fabris, cited by Bagci, “Catalogue Entry no. 226,” 434. Also, Wood, “Art in Renaissance Venice.”
- 54 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27.
- 55 I use the term “conservative” in relation to the narrative and backstory the artist has given the character of Abdel. The artist developed a group of recurring, full-fledged characters stemming from his own life experiences and inner tensions. According to the artist, “Abdel was born in a middle-class neighbourhood of Casablanca and later moved to Montréal where he now works as a low-paid property manager. The love of his good wife, Fatima, helps his self-esteem, though they married under family pressure and he was never attracted to her. Turning to religion for a sense of belonging, his practice of Islam became strict yet deeply hypocritical. He allows Fatima to work for Alice so they can make ends meet.” (See Filip, “2Fik: His and Other Stories.”)
- 56 Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein, “On Colonial Unknowing.”
- 57 Jackman and Upadhyay, “Pinkwatching Israel, Whitewashing Canada,” 201.