Spring June 7th, 2016

Relocating Pictures: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Transnational Islamic Images

Mary S.W. Campbell
Seattle Pacific University

RELOCATING PICTURES:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC IMAGES

by

MARY CAMPBELL

FACULTY ADVISOR, KIMBERLY SEGALL
SECOND READER, ZACK BENT

A project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the University Scholars Program

Seattle Pacific University

2016

Approved Jeff Keuss

Date

Abstract

This paper and accompanying photo series analyze and discuss Western images of Islamic migration. Incorporating a variety of disciplines, they evaluate the emotional responses of Americans towards images of Muslim migrants and transnational issues. Through surveying and literary analysis, they demonstrate the need for new images of the Muslim migrant that allow for greater emotional engagement that leads to action. My photographs, taken in Spain and Morocco, are a first step at discovering what is needed in these new images.

I. Introduction - Maria

I first saw the well-known image of the little Syrian boy with the red shirt when I studied abroad in Granada, Spain. He lay face down in the sand, soaked and still, as waves lapped against his body. As an anchorwoman spoke rapid Spanish on the television to explain the terrible scene, my host mother, Maria, stood up from the dinner table and changed the channel. She sat back down, covering her eyes and murmuring, “No quiero ver,” meaning “I do not want to see.”

A few days later, the news broadcasted footage of Syrian refugees trapped at the Hungarian border, and once again, Maria quickly switched the television to a Spanish talent show. In a moment of protest I asked her to change the channel back to the refugees, but she shook her head and motioned non-existent tears running down her face. I was fascinated and perplexed by this reaction; brought upon by the very images being used to try to raise awareness for the Syrian refugee crisis. Why did these images

make Maria want to turn the television off instead of pay attention, when clearly they evoked an emotional response? Why did these emotional images lead to distance instead of engagement?

With this question at the forefront of my mind, we journeyed from Spain to Morocco, crossing the Straight of Gibraltar and thousands of years of history. Although I had previously studied Islam and Northern Africa, I had never traveled outside of the Western world and had no idea what to expect from Morocco. This experience transformed my understanding of the Islamic world and exposed me to the complexities of Muslim identities not represented in Western media.

Most striking of these complexities was the incredible hospitality of Moroccans. We met Moroccan college students who quickly became our friends, ate in the homes with their families, spent an afternoon feasting and frolicking on a family's farm, and were invited into a local imam's home for tea and conversation. Morocco quickly began to not feel frighteningly foreign to me, and as I walked through the streets of medinas during my last days, I felt humble confidence in my broken Darija and ability to bargain with stubborn salesmen. I no longer had to hide behind the face of a tourist, because I no longer felt like an outsider. I wasn't afraid to be an outsider, because I had been welcomed and empowered to engage with Morocco *by Moroccans.*

This warmth and hospitality was never communicated in Western news media or entertainment. I thought back to Spain and watching Maria turn off the television. What would her reaction look like if news coverage of the tragedy were accompanied with hope and welcome? What if the negative images of refugees were shown alongside

images of their families and professions, giving these people context outside of their tragic situation? Would recognizing the humanity of refugees give them the credibility that Western media has stolen from them for decades?

Throughout the process of capturing and curating the photographs I took on the trip, I reflected upon how my processes of documentation led to a relocation of gaze upon the Islamic world. I was angry at the West's inhumanity of dehumanizing and objectifying Muslims in order to create an enemy out of the exotic "other." I found myself deeply saddened by how quickly Moroccans welcomed me into their homes, while most Americans would quickly turn them away. Sifting through my photographs, I discovered a new lens that picked up the Western image of Islam and placed it within the frameworks of honesty, humility, and curiosity. This new gaze, this relocation of the American imagination, felt constructive and communicative. It, and the images it created, intrigued me.

This project is an interdisciplinary examination of the crisis of images of the Islamic migrant, examining the need for new images through multiple mediums. First, through a survey conducted online that gathered the emotional responses of Americans to classic images of the Syrian refugee crisis. Second, through a questionnaire given to viewers of my photography show at Seattle Pacific University, which offered alternative narratives to the story of transnational Islam. Third, through an examination of Laila Lalami's fictional novel, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, which offers readers an alternate image of dislocation, immigration, and Muslims in exile. Lastly, through the

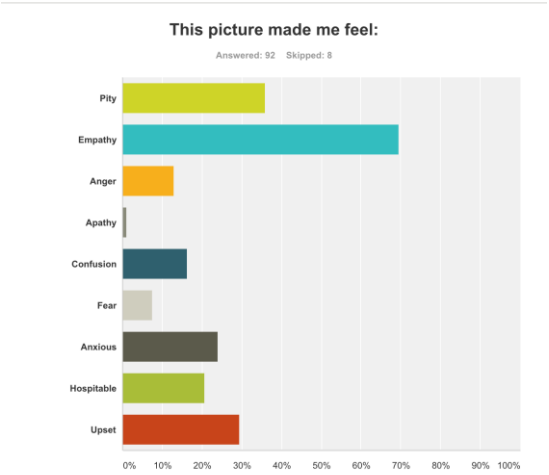
analysis of the images I captured in Spain and Morocco, and how they give power to their subjects through story, context, and ideas.

The American imagination is flooded with images of Northern Africans and Middle Easterners in turmoil, violence, and loss. The image of the Islamic migrant in distress gets dismissed and ignored as soon as it is seen. We need new images that simultaneously communicate the complexity of transnational travel and give story back to the refugees who too often become just another lost soul on a boat.

II. Islamic Migrant Images Survey

To better understand how images of Islamic migration manifest themselves within the American imagination, I created an online survey where participants anonymously reported their emotional responses towards different images of the Syrian refugee crisis. All of the images used in this survey were within the first fifteen images seen when I searched the Internet for "Syrian Refugee Crisis." The survey allowed participants to choose one or more emotions for each photograph, as well as write in any other emotional responses they experienced. The emotional options participants could choose were: pity, empathy, anger, apathy, confusion, fear, anxious, hospitable, and upset. Below are the images and their corresponding emotional response results, based on one hundred responses:

Image One:

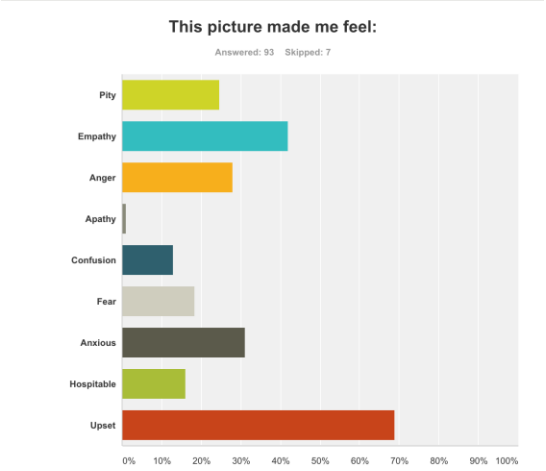


Answer Choices	Responses	
Pity	35.87%	33
Empathy	69.57%	64
Anger	13.04%	12
Apathy	1.09%	1
Confusion	16.30%	15
Fear	7.61%	7
Anxious	23.91%	22
Hospitable	20.65%	19
Upset	29.35%	27

Total Respondents: 92

The image of the refugees in the boat is not strikingly traumatic; the look on the boy's face seems full of expectation and wonder. A boy in the back is even smiling, probably at the sight of their journey's end. Everyone in the boat is ready for a new life, and their expressions show it. This is probably why empathy was the most chosen emotion that corresponded with the image, with 69.57% of respondents selecting this emotion. Nothing in the picture is immediately upsetting, however, the underlying context is probably what created feeling of pity (35.87%), anxiety (23.91%), and upsetness (29.35%).

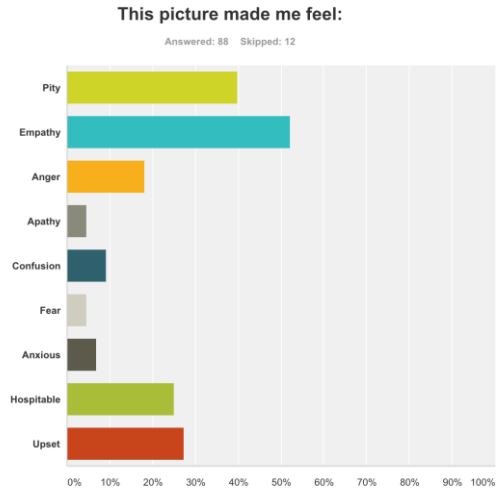
Image Two:



Answer Choices	Responses	
Pity	24.73%	23
Empathy	41.94%	39
Anger	27.96%	26
Apathy	1.08%	1
Confusion	12.90%	12
Fear	18.28%	17
Anxious	31.18%	29
Hospitable	16.13%	15
Upset	68.82%	64
Total Respondents: 93		

In contrast to image one, image two shows refugees on a boat in a very different situation. Instead of a peaceful arrival, the little boy is clearly in distress, and the splashes in the background create a scene of chaos. There is no sense of redemption in this image, and instead of leaving the viewer with hope, we are left with dread. This is probably why most people felt upset upon seeing the image (68.82%), with empathy (41.94%), anxiety (31.18%), anger (27.96%), and pity (24.73%) all highly represented as well.

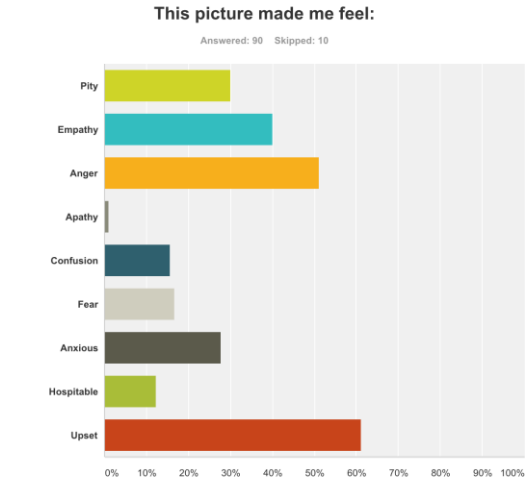
Image Three:



Answer Choices	Responses	
Pity	39.77%	35
Empathy	52.27%	46
Anger	18.18%	16
Apathy	4.55%	4
Confusion	9.09%	8
Fear	4.55%	4
Anxious	6.82%	6
Hospitable	25.00%	22
Upset	27.27%	24
Total Respondents: 88		

Unlike the other images, image three is the only picture that shows any kind of shelter. However, it also shows the reality that refugees have to face, where shelter is always temporary and home does not exist. Although these women and children are theoretically safe within the refugee camp and the tents they live in, nothing about their situation is stable or hopeful. The expressions on the women and children's faces, the unstable and temporary nature of the refugee camp, and the overall sadness in the image probably prompted the emotional reactions of empathy (52.27%) and pity (39.77%) from participants.

Image Four:

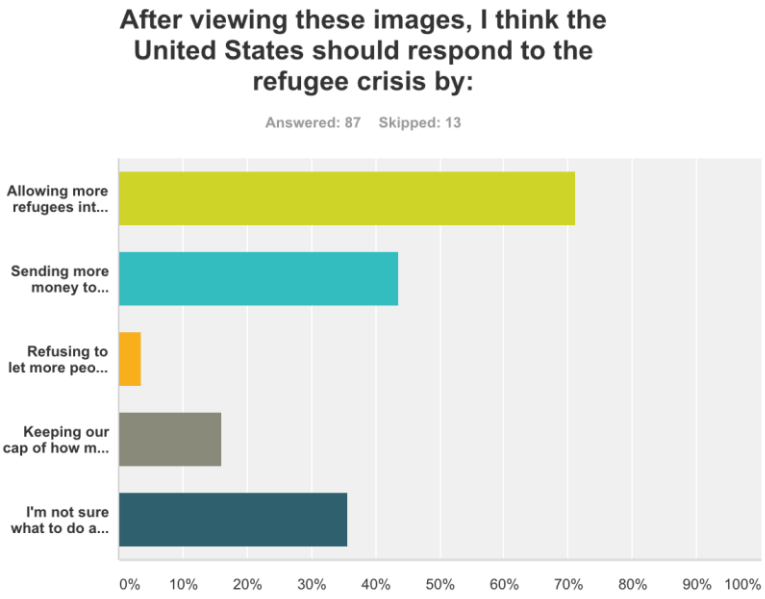


Answer Choices	Responses	
Pity	30.00%	27
Empathy	40.00%	36
Anger	51.11%	46
Apathy	1.11%	1
Confusion	15.56%	14
Fear	16.67%	15
Anxious	27.78%	25
Hospitable	12.22%	11
Upset	61.11%	55
Total Respondents: 90		

The last image that participants viewed is purposefully the most emotionally intense of all four pictures. Image one and image two represent transition, hope, loss, and hardship of the journey to Europe, and image three shows the aftermath of arrival. However, image four tells the fate of too many refugees trapped at borders with nowhere to go. The woman holding her child immediately makes viewers upset (61.11%) and angry (51.11%) that this is the reality of many refugees, and these two emotions cultivated the most responses from participants.

After viewing the images, I asked participants to say how they felt the United States should respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. The options provided by the survey were: “allowing more refugees into the United States, sending more money to refugee camps”, “refusing to let more people in and let Europe take care of the crisis”, “keeping

our cap of how many refugees we let in but increase our involvement Europe to help resettle people", and "I'm not sure what to do and I'm overwhelmed". Just like the first questions, participants also had the option to write in other reactions and opinions about how to respond to the refugee crisis.



Answer Choices	Responses
Allowing more refugees into the United States	71.26% 62
Sending more money to refugee camps	43.68% 38
Refusing to let more people in and let Europe take care of the crisis	3.45% 3
Keeping our cap of how many refugees we let in, but increase our involvement in Europe to help resettle people	16.09% 14
I'm not sure what to do and I'm overwhelmed	35.63% 31
Total Respondents: 87	

The responses that the survey generated demonstrate that the majority of emotional reactions that people experience after viewing images of Islamic migration and the Syrian refugee crisis affirms a desire for a response that leads to further involvement, with 71.26% and 43.68% of participants selecting answers 1 and 2, respectively. However, there is a great difference between desire and action. In her

book *Performing Democracy in Iraq and South Africa*, Kimberly Segall asserts that "after the mediated depictions of the Islamic and African world after 9/11," it can be difficult for Westerners to understand non-Western images (xxiv). This lack of understanding of the story and context of these images often leads to short-term emotions that end in a lack of action. The survey responses are multi-faceted: confusion, pity, and a desire to feel deeply for the trauma and loss that Syrian refugees have experienced. However, these reactions move away from action, and end in cultivating negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and pity. Negative emotions such as these cause viewers to quickly disengage to avoid such feelings. Because of this, refugees and migrants become objects instead of subjects. On the other hand, "hospitality," the only positive action word in the set provided by the survey, was selected by less than 25% of respondents on each question, with a low of 12.22% on Image Four.

In order for a huge circulation of images within the media to occur, images of Islamic migration have to create emotions that stick. Sarah Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* discusses the "stickiness" of emotion attached to images and how emotion is "social" and "relational" (8). Audiences need to feel an emotional response to circulate images, and these emotional responses have to be intense enough for people to immediately share pictures without second guessing their reactions. This leads to the circulation of images that create feelings of pity, empathy, and sorrow, yet ultimately do not result in action. Once people have felt the stick of emotion that a certain image gives them, they share the image and move on. These negative emotions are seen as a positive response that creates awareness of tragedy, yet no positive action

of response occurs that actually creates societal and cultural change. If one drowns in emotion, one does not act. Although feelings of pity and empathy are cultivated, the most that people often feel they can do is share an image. Instead of becoming part of the story themselves, they cast emotional judgments upon the objectified people in photographs.

Emotional judgments made in response to the images in my survey are the result of emotional "social and cultural practices" that do not come from "the individual body," but are instead "what holds or binds the social body together" (9). The movement of circulating images that creates a stick of negative emotions and does not lead to action is the result of a communal lack of action and idea of what the "right" response to these images is. Islamic migrants become circulating objects of emotion instead of people whom one can develop relationships with and extend hospitality unto. The relational, emotional, and circulatory nature of images separates us from tragedy within images of Islamic migration and leads to unintentional apathy, to the creation of pity that separates viewers from the subject of the photo, and to a lack of impactful action.

What kind of images can revert this power displacement and relocate our response to one that inspires us instead of overwhelming us? Is there a way to create images that educate and turn our gaze towards action instead of passive pity? Is it possible for an image to reject its role as a vehicle for objectification?

My own photographs of Islam, discussed in the following sections, attempt to grapple with these questions created by the survey.

III. Photography Show Questionnaire and Responses

From May 23rd to May 27th, 2016, I displayed photographs taken during my time in Spain and Morocco in Seattle Pacific University's Alexander Hall chapel (see attached "Figures", 2.1-2.20). The photography show allowed viewers to interact with and reflect upon the images with the questionnaire provided:

1) How does it feel to see Islamic images in a Christian chapel?

2) Do you think that viewing these images as a set contributes to their impact? What would you think if you saw them individually?

3) How do these images vary from other images of the Islamic world that you have seen?

4) After viewing these images, do you believe we should allow more Syrian refugees to enter the United States? Are refugees a problem or a possibility?

Eleven people filled out the provided questionnaires. In response to Question One, most people described their experience as surprising and positive. Although "initially a little uncomfortable" and "distant," viewers came to see the interaction of Islam and Christianity within the chapel as "redemptive," "beautiful," and "unifying" (1.2, 1.4, 1.1, 1.3, 1.11). As a small first step in reminding audiences that Christians and Muslims "are all under the same God," and therefore beginning to bridge the gap between East and West, my show was a success (1.9).

The "progression" of my images helped "take the viewer on a journey that [the individual images] could not" (1.1). Question Two allowed my audience to look at my photos as a series and reflect upon their impact when seen as a whole. One participant noted that seeing the images collectively "is important to the narrative, and individually, [the photos] might separate and split up the narrative and be more stereotypical"

(1.11). The “beautiful architecture gave good context” for viewers and “seeing the environment and culture beyond veils and other traditional garments allowed [the viewer] to be more open” to the message of the photographs (1.3, 1.6). As single pictures, “these images would just be photos, not stories” (1.9). The context given by each of the photographs allowed for all of the other images to have more impact on their audience.

All participants answered Question Three with responses that alluded to the violence, anger, and darkness often times portrayed in Western images of Islam. Unlike “the images in mainstream media,” my pictures are “full of color, soft, and welcoming” (1.3). The people in my photos are “not inhuman,” “intimidating,” or “dirty” like “the images in media show” (1.5, 1.8, 1.9). My photos were successful in offering an alternative story of Muslims for viewers, and because of this, their responses to Question Four were all positive.

Since my photographs open viewers’ gazes to the humanity of Muslims, Question Four was met with a comprehensive response of yes. Participants believe that refugees are “a possibility for growth, relationship, and mutual love,” and the United States is “not doing [its share] when it comes to the refugee crisis” (1.1, 1.8). With an Islamic context, the warmth and welcome in my images inspires viewers to extend that same hospitality towards Muslim migrants and refugees. One participant wrote that they “always believe[d] that [the United States]” should allow refugees to enter the country, but after viewing my photographs, they believe so “even more” (1.6).

I intended for my images to be an alternate narrative to Western perceptions of Islam and Muslim migrants. They do not tell an angry story of vast deserts and violence – instead, they offer a warm welcome to enter into the daily life of Moroccans. As a series, my photographs give context, have cultural personality, and are intentionally more relatable because they include images of Westerners engaging with Moroccans. In contrast with the images in my survey, they invite the viewer to participate instead of unintentionally causing them to "turn off" emotionally; they stop the "circulation" of images, and instead, inspire a circulation of *engagement*.

IV. Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* – The Image of Exile

If one searches for "transnationalism" online, one of the first definitions that appears is from the CIA website, which reads: *Transnational issues are threats that do not respect national borders and which often arise from non-state actors, such as terrorists and criminal organizations. They threaten US interests, values and citizens in the United States and abroad.* It is no wonder then that the Western imagination of the Islamic migrant as those who exist between two worlds and embody these "transnational issues," is soaked in fear, negativity, and prejudice. Americans often fail to recognize that although "there are Muslim extremists who kill women in the streets of Afghanistan and Algeria," it is "because they are extremists, not because they are Muslim" (Mernissi 21). In reality, transnationalism describes the interconnectivity of people across borders and the social significance of crossing between nation states and cultures. In her fictional novel, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits,* Laila Lalami uses the

stories of her four Moroccan characters to relocate the American gaze of transnationalism and imagination of the Muslim migrant. This relocation points to an image of the Islamic migrant as a complex, transnational entity that cannot be confined to a single narrative or identity. Lalami offers an alternative image of dislocation, immigration, and Muslims in exile through the narrative of each of her four characters.

The characters develop identities that are "divided between the dehumanizing unemployment and the allure of promising futures across the Straight of Gibraltar" (Elboubekri 254). Each of the characters faces a separate form of exile while "being continuously adrift [and] unsure about their tomorrows in their homeland" (254). Similarly, Rima Abunasser asserts that "none of the migrants inhabits a stable, static, easily defined 'home' after the Mediterranean crossing; rather, they construct transnational diasporic communities characterized by constant movement, transit, and mutation" (12-13). The anxiety created by identities within cultural limbo leads the characters to embody "unstable [and] fractured selves" (12-13). Abdellah Elboubekri explains, "*Hope* can be read as a postcolonial text that touches upon issues of identity, immigration, and cultures" (253). Ultimately, the characters lives are "lives that challenge the generic features of the migrant and diasporic narrative that expand the now-liberating spaces of the Hispano-Moroccan divide" (Abunasser 257). This challenge invites and demands its audience to imagine the Muslim migrant as a complex, ever-shifting identity, no longer defined by an insistent, limiting Western gaze.

This gaze is immediately confronted within the first twenty pages of the story. Lalami crafts the scene of Moroccans aboard a "six-meter Zodiac inflatable [boat that] is

meant to accommodate eight people" and "thirty [are forced to] huddle in it" as they cross the Straight of Gibraltar (2). Her Western audience is forced to confront their stereotypical image of the Islamic migrant, one who sits on an overcrowded boat in the middle of the sea with an unknown destiny. The crossing is seen through the eyes of Murad, a young man who has "a degree in English" and "speaks Spanish fluently," which he believes gives him a greater chance of finding a new job in Spain (3). Murad is an educated, determined, and kind tourist guide. When a Guinean woman throws up on the boat, Murad stands up for her while others scorn her, and when Faten, a young Moroccan woman, lets out a fearful whimper that she is ridiculed for, Murad angrily counters these shameful comments (6,8). Lalami directly counters the West's expected narrative of a migrant man through Murad. He is not an illiterate, dangerous man who travels with an intention of destroying Western culture – he is smart, stands up for women who are being mistreated by others, and crosses in order to find better work and join society in a new way. The system and cycle of joblessness in Morocco has left him with little choice but to attempt the dangerous crossing; in 2005, when *Hope* was published, "urban unemployment" in Morocco was at 20% (Davis 88). Lalami puts into perspective that those who cross do so because they *must*, not because they want to. If Murad stays in Morocco, he'll "never make a living" off of his work as a tourist guide (Lalami 109). Desperation for an identity that isn't defined by being a low-income guide drives Murad's departure. Because he cannot make enough money to sustain his mother and sister, he feels "invisible" to them, creating anxiety around his masculine identity (107). In Murad's mind, Spain promises a fresh start and the opportunity to

prove to himself and his family that he is the man that he imagines himself to be. Murad's image of exile stands contrary to the threatening, migrant Muslim man of the West.

Similar to Murad, Faten's story rejects Western images of female migrants. In Western images, Islamic women are forced to either be "veiled and safe, or unveiled and assaulted" (Mernissi 90). Lalami plays with this belief in Faten's story, shocking her audience with Faten's transnational transformation. Corruption within the Moroccan government transforms the life of Faten and forces her to leave Islam behind when she flees to Spain and becomes a prostitute to make a living. Before she takes the journey to Spain, Faten is a devout Muslim who follows the teachings of the Qur'an and wears a "headscarf," "angle-length denim skirt," "pilled sweater," and dresses modestly all the time (26). She has a passion for Morocco and the country's need for good teachers, and instead of looking overseas to gain a better life like many of her colleagues, she preaches Islam to her friends and tries to revive the classic teachings of the Quran in society. Many people within Morocco want to travel abroad to work and study, but Faten passionately believes that "keeping" Morocco's "brightest" within the county is essential for Morocco's growth (47). Faten's plans before her journey across the Straight are to eventually become a teacher and empower other Moroccans. However, after she makes "a derogatory comment about King Hassan within earshot of a snitch", she is advised to flee to Spain by her imam (134). Her veil does not keep her safe – it forces her into exile. Nor is Faten complacent and oppressed; she dismantles the West's idea of the helpless Muslim woman who is forced to veil. Faten is passionate, intelligent, and

chooses to wear the veil a statement of her religion and desire for change within Morocco. Eventually, it is her veil that forces her to attempt to cross into Spain.

The transnational journey from Morocco to Spain forces Faten to change her identity and take off her veil. After being caught by the Coast Guard, Faten has no way to get a job and nowhere safe to begin a new and promising life. Her only option is to become a prostitute, selling her body on the streets and jumping into cars with strange men. Faten has to completely abandon her faith in order to sustain herself, and her dreams of helping Morocco grow and flourish can no longer exist. She no longer wishes to think about her life in Morocco, "when the world still seemed full of promise and possibility" (133). After her encounter with Martin, a client who she believed was genuinely interested in her but is instead only fascinated in his idea of her, Faten recalls when she was younger and "discovered that the silkworm she'd raised in a shoebox and lovingly fed mulberry leaves had died, despite all her care" (140). No matter how passionate Faten had once been about Islam and Morocco's future, she could not keep it alive, much like the silkworm. Corruption with the Moroccan government forces her to leave her home, and Spain becomes a land where her dreams and identity within Islam die. Faten has no choice but to take on the new identity of a prostitute in order to survive.

When Faten unveils and turns to prostitution, she is not assaulted; however, she has lost her choice in how to display and use her body. While living in Morocco and wearing the veil, Faten has the freedom to wear whatever she likes, and she chooses to veil. In Spain, she must wear "heels" and "short skirts" (135). Faten becomes trapped

within the West's expectations of her role as a prostitute. The Western imagination of the female Islamic migrant who is liberated through the "freedom" of Western society is proven to not fit Faten. Also contrary to Western discourse, after making the journey, Faten is not a powerless woman waiting for help; she takes her destiny into her own hands. She retains her autonomy and is not at the mercy of Western politicians who decide what happens to her now that she has crossed. In its tragedy, Faten's story disrupts any Western assumption about her, from her identity as a woman, as a Muslim, and as a migrant. The image of the Islamic woman migrant that Lalami's audience is left with is unsettling, and judgment cannot be cast upon her. However, Faten offers the beginning of alternative narratives that allow for Westerners to begin the digestion of new ideas about migrant women.

Aziz's story continues to provide an alternate image of the migrant. Unlike Faten, the transnational identity transformation that Aziz undergoes is not directly the result of Morocco's corrupt government; rather, Aziz's "joblessness," even with an English degree, and his resulting masculine identity crisis inspire him to leave Morocco (80). Before crossing the Straight of Gibraltar, Aziz believes that he can find a job in Spain to support his family and wife. He plans to send money back for "two or three years" and then return to Morocco to fulfill his identity as a hard working Moroccan man (81). For Aziz, it is better to travel to Spain, a place of "hard work and ghurba and loneliness" and "make a living" than stay in Morocco and remain unemployed (80). Although part of Aziz's identity is founded in his love and care for his family, his confidence in his masculinity is dependent upon whether or not he is employed; if he is able to find work

in Spain, he will finally be fulfilled. Aziz offers a counter-image to the Western idea of the transnational migrant who does "not respect national borders" and "threaten[s] US interests". He is ambitious, educated, and is dedicated to providing for his family, no matter what he must do. Aziz is not a threat – he is trying to find purpose and prosperity, and in his mind, this is only accessible through a transnational crossing.

However, transnational crossing does not bring the kind of wealth and fulfillment that Aziz believes will exist for him. When Aziz returns to Morocco, he has changed. Spain has not offered the life of joy and promise that he imagined. Aziz worked manual labor, eventually finding a job in a "restaurant", but these jobs only provide him money (155). They do not give Aziz a sense of self worth or promise of a future that he is proud of, and the masculinity that he has been searching for always seems to be one promotion away. When he returns to Morocco, he anticipates leaving as soon as he arrives. The people who he has returned to seem to be disappointed in him, especially his wife, Zohra, who now looks "thin and small" (159). Aziz is a shell of himself, and when he leaves Zohra to return to Spain, he feels that his suitcase is "lighter than when he had arrived" (175). This suitcase, which was once full of Aziz's pride in his family and desire to serve them as a man is now empty. Aziz's transnational crossing has hardened him, and in his desire to fulfill the destiny that he believes belongs to him, he has lost all that is truly important. Aziz embodies transnational anxiety; he no longer belongs in Morocco, yet he will never find personal peace and fulfillment in Spain.

Aziz's diasporic condition, the result of being trapped between two worlds, provides an alternative narrative of the Islamic migrant, as well as a challenge to the

Western imagination of transnationalism. Instead of being a threat to the Western country he enters, Aziz becomes a threat to himself and all that he cares about after his crossing. The image of Aziz's character offers an unsettling alternative to the misconceptions of Westerners about migrants. It is not Aziz who is a threat - it is the West. Lalami uses the image of Aziz to provide her audience with a new narrative: it is the migrants seeking a transnational journey who suffer, not the Westerners who accommodate for them. Those who choose the transnational journey are incredibly courageous and strong, yet the world that they imagine does not exist. Often, the West strips migrants of everything that was once dear to them. This is Lalami's new image.

With this image, Lalami does not cultivate sympathy and pity. She forces her audience to recognize the complexity and humanity of migrants; there is not one story that applies to every person who chooses a dramatic transnational shift. *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* does not provide an answer to the challenge of immigration. However, it does insist that we need new images and understandings of Islamic migrants. Lalami's characters are alternate images that offer the beginning of a conversation about how to tell the stories of those who choose the suffering of illegal, transnational journeys. The shocking identity transformations that her characters undergo demonstrate the hardship of their lives in their home country as well as the freedom that they lose once they cross into Spain. While providing new images, Lalami humanizes the unknown Islamic migrant who climbs into an inflatable boat, with only hope to rely on. This hope, however, is not enough to survive as they once did. This

hope, this dangerous pursuit, becomes as false of an image as the West's perception of the migrant.

V. The Photographs

The West's inaccurate perception of Islamic migration leads to emotional connections that do not fairly respond to the difficult experiences and lives of migrants. Based on the emotional responses recorded in my survey, when Americans are exposed to images of Islamic migration, a central gaze of overwhelming pity and attempted empathy emerges. Images that are meant to remind their audience of the humanity of migrants and refugees can sometimes end up objectifying and furthering unintentional dehumanization.

Attempting to break the cycle of dehumanization of the Islamic migrant, I took photographs (referenced in Section III) in Spain and Morocco during September of 2015. They destabilize the central gaze of pity that distances the viewer from the "object" of migrants and refugees, create a story that contextualizes migration and transnational travel, and ultimately, revert the objectified people in images back to relatable subjects. As alternative images, they are a political challenge to the narrative that the media has provided about Islamic migrants. They focus on the awkward in-betweens of travel, cultural literacy, and intentional engagement with what is unknown and foreign. They are meant to be uncomfortable as they break the barrier between image and viewer and encourage their audience to enter into the story.

This is my personal observation and expression of being in transnational transition and emotional in-betweens. It is my own examination and wrestling with how we create objects out of people and place. It is an attempt to create a story that takes the person who becomes an object, put them within a greater context and story, and give them power again. I attempt to widen my gaze by admitting now narrow it is, and in realizing its limits, I may begin to step out of it. Although these images are meant to be seen as a whole piece outside of one perspective, they are inherently subjective. However, in their subjectivity, and through injecting myself into the story, they gain power, and in admitting their gaze, they gain context and story. Within their story, they destabilize and relocate our gaze, emotions, and hopefully, our actions.

I imagine these images as a visual crescendo. With an upward gaze towards the sky in a courtyard, the first image (2.1) points to introductory questions: Where are we? How do we envision ourselves within the story of Islamic migration? Where do these images take place? It is meant to be unclear whether it was taken in Spain or Morocco, as well as to admit the narrow gaze within which I experienced my transnational journey. Dark pathways leading to unopened doors line the visual pathway towards the sky, upward and onward, constrained by what we do not know and have not experienced. It beckons us to enter into the story.

Once we have entered, we encounter the second image (2.2) of a young girl in a pink shirt walking into a quiet courtyard. While touring Asilah, a beach town about an hour south of Tangier, a quaint alleyway caught my eye. As I lifted my camera to take a photograph, a girl strode into the frame as I clicked the shutter. Her look of surprise and

disturbance has stayed with me: an organic expression of confusion as I transformed her home into my perception and idea of it. For the rest of that day I had a hard time taking pictures. It felt like every time I lifted the camera I was stealing something precious and sacred from Asilah as I created objects out of my surroundings. This was the beginning of confronting my transnational anxiety.

The image La Alhambra, which crowns the city of Granada, Spain, continues to examine this transnational anxiety. As a far away shot of the fortress at night, my third image (2.3) gives a sense of looming power in the contrast of light and dark. Knowing the history of La Alhambra, with its roots as an Islamic palace overtaken by Christianity in 1492, gives the image a deeper sense of the struggle of transnationalism and the collision of East and West. Walking in the shadow of La Alhambra felt like a constant reminder of the entangled history of Islam in Spain and contextualized my time in Granada. I was a stranger here, just as the Spanish were strangers to the great castle on the hill six hundred years ago. I felt a new, uncomfortable dimension of my transnational anxiety begin to emerge. The West has taken and transformed Islamic identities to fit comfortably into the Western ego for centuries, and here stood a monument that was proof of that conquest.

Walking through the narrow alleyways of the old medina of Tangier, I felt uncomfortably aware of my own Western ego. My image of an old woman glaring down into an alley (2.4), as American girls pass beneath her window, is a snapshot of coming to terms with this ego. I remember being watched and knowing that I didn't belong as I walked through the medina alley, as eyes, both young and old, followed my white skin

and faux-red hair. Picking up my camera, I tried to participate with my out-of-place anxiety, yet realized that in doing so, I was pushing my own perspective onto the places I was experiencing. As an outsider, landing in Morocco for the first time, all I could do was capture what I expected to capture. I felt trapped within my own perspective and didn't know how to do justice to the transcultural anxiety and curiosity I was experiencing.

It was only after traveling through Morocco for a week that I began to sit more comfortably in my curiosity, anxiety, awkwardness, and ignorance. My fifth image (2.5), which looks down into a fish market in Meknes, gives a new perspective and way of being. The intimacy of watching the salesman bargain with a customer from above in a setting so different than what I was used to was striking to me. It felt like the beginning of my willingness to look for and see intimate, beautiful places and interactions that humbled me and allowed for me to begin to engage in a deeper, more intentional way.

This engagement is represented in my image of a flamenco dancer's shoes preparing to step onto the dance floor (2.6), my seventh image (2.7), which peers through an opening in a wall to see Tangier in the distance, and my image of a female flamenco dancer striding into the light (2.8). These photographs are meant flow together as a story. They represent the preparation to enter into what is unknown, witnessing what is possible if one is willing to enter into a new space emotionally and physically, and the action of purposefully choosing a new way of being and understanding. While doing so, they continue to depict and acknowledge that what is

being experienced is exotic and different from the culture in my daily life; they are the beginning of an attempt to find balance between engagement and humility.

I began to discover that balance was a continuous effort. Although my image of a wooden door bordered with blue and two men sitting off to the right side (2.9), was taken earlier during my time in Morocco, as I went through my photos after the trip, it stood out to me as an image that represented the quest for understanding after a transnational crossing. After crossing physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries, we become aware of how little we know, and doors that we never knew existed suddenly become open to us. Upon witnessing the other side, we are invited to engage together and delve deeper into connection and crossing, all the while remaining grounded in how little we know. As the man in the image points towards something out of the frame, we are reminded to continue fostering our curiosity for transnational empathy.

My image of a man riding a horse in the middle of the ocean (2.10) continues to explore the need for a new willingness to engage with transnationalism. The tenth photograph is one of my favorite images in the series, and is placed in the middle of the photos purposefully. It tells the story of being fully in the midst of transnational transition, of crossing waters and cultures towards whatever is next, even if there is no telling what that may be. During my time in Morocco, I found that the best way to process my experience was by staying present and capturing what felt present to me as I immersed myself in the unknown. It was only by including myself in the story that I could stay present and engage with my time in Morocco constructively and personally.

Being present to my experience meant acknowledging my tendency to create objects out of the people and places I came in contact with. My images of an old woman peering at me from behind a pillar (2.11) and of a little boy playing with a yoyo in an alley (2.12), admit my gaze of cultural expectation, and in doing so, actively try to move through it and out of it. By capturing what I expected to see, I made room for the unexpected beauty and hospitality of Morocco and its people.

This hospitality is represented in the photograph of a Moroccan man extending his hand full of beans (2.13), whose shells are edible and reminiscent of the flavor of chocolate. The image of me crossing the Straight of Gibraltar (2.14) represents a crossing of engagement and willingness to allow myself to be part of the story and not remain emotionally distant. Allowing myself to become an image is a fierce rebuttal against the potential objectification within my photographs of all that I experienced in Spain and Morocco.

My experiences are encapsulated in my fifteenth image, which looks down upon a Marrakesh street (2.15), and my sixteenth image (2.16), of a Moroccan vase on a windowsill, which contrast each other. The chaos of the street, with cars parked at awkward angles, a fruit stand with juices splattered beneath it, and an empty lot scattered with trash, represent the confusion that initial transnational crossing and exchange cause. However, the vase counters this chaos with calmness, acceptance, and newfound confidence from out of the commotion. They represent the constant work of finding balance between anxiety and peace in transnational crossings, as well as the process of learning to renounce the objectification of people in photographs.

The tension between emotional chaos, acceptance, and rejecting the objectification process is summarized in my image of a man sitting on a chain in front of a three hundred year old gate in Meknes, Morocco (2.17). Stairs frame the sides of the image and are newly painted red and white to alert pedestrians and tourists of an upcoming step. In front of the stairs and gate, the old man looks to his left, appearing to be in deep thought. Here we find the conflict of new and old, East and West, and the temptation to capture this man as an oriental object. By admitting to this temptation, however, he remains the subject, and by placing him within a series of images, he retains his own unknown story instead of falling victim to the Western gaze.

My eighteenth and nineteenth images (2.18, 2.19), of my fellow classmates wearing the hijab in an imam's home and of the two imams we were visiting pouring us tea, are final notes of my photos' crescendo. They are the story of being welcomed in and accepting the invitation. Whilst crossing the threshold of an open door, we entered into a new dimension of humility, putting on the hijab and drinking mint tea with the leaders of nearby mosques. We were the outsiders being welcomed, and as the afternoon progressed, I didn't feel any hesitation to pick up my camera and document the experience. For one of the first times during my stay in Morocco, photography didn't feel like a tool for exploitation. Instead, it felt like a way to connect and tell the story of my travel truthfully, with all of its awkwardness, discomfort, resolution, and joy. When I photographed the imams, it felt as though I was documenting my life, not stealing from my environment. My image of the imams remains to be one of my favorite pictures

from the series, partially because its subjects unknowingly helped change my perspective of photographing the trip.

The series concludes with a shot of Madrid's city hall with a banner hung that reads "REFUGEES WELCOME" (2.20). Blatant in meaning, this image is a call to action. One can feel distant pity for those who suffer, but to take true action is to use that pity and move towards the suffering. Telling refugees that they are welcome, that they are human and that they are subjects worth caring about, rejects Western rhetoric and images of passive pity and empathy towards refugees. After traveling through Morocco for two weeks, I was deeply moved by Madrid's open proclamation of welcome. I knew what hospitality and welcome felt like in a land completely different than my home, and I imagined what it could mean to Syrian refugees fleeing their war torn country. It gives me hope for a shift of Western attitudes and perspectives toward Islamic migrants.

As a story and framework, my pictures continue to pursue this shift, wrestle with cultural objectification, and attempt to allow their subjects to remain whole and undamaged by the camera that captures them. They present more questions than answers, but through asking new questions, we can become more purposeful, considerate, and powerful storytellers that bring our audiences toward the subjects of images, not away from them. How do photographers avoid exploitation of the people and places they attempt to represent through art? Can photographers accurately document cultures that are not their own? Can artists tell honest stories of tragedy without causing audiences to turn away from those in need?

These images are an alternate narrative to the Western depiction of Islamic migration. Instead of settling into stereotypes, they grapple with transnational anxiety, context, identities, and what it means to cross cultures and continents. They move towards the "other" with intention and deliberation, learning and questioning each step of the way. Perhaps they can be a starting point for conversation where we too can learn to move towards each other with open hands of hospitality.

VI. Conclusion – Faith and Forward

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds

Hebrews 10:24

Jesus does not call us to pity. In the face of suffering and injustice, we are commanded to love one another as Jesus loves us. This love asks for sacrifice and participation. My Christian faith directs me towards a life inspired by this command. We are called to extend hospitality to one another, welcoming those in need with open arms. This project is my first step in pursuing this lifelong purpose.

Photography is one of my forms of participation in the Kingdom of God. I feel called to create photographs that inspire others, challenge ignorance, and spread the light of Christ. These unexpected, uncomfortable images ask people to engage with topics that they otherwise would never grapple with. Through the process of creating these photographs, my own ability to process and wrestle with these issues has expanded. Grace works through it all.

Without my faith, this project would not be what it is. The radical nature of Christ's life stands as my torch. My way of emulating this was displaying images of Islam in a Christian chapel. For some, this was a shocking challenge to the framework of their faith – and I am glad. Perhaps if Jesus were a photographer he would've done something similar. Let us dismantle the prejudices and assumptions that continually separate us. Let us come together, learn from one another, and reimagine each other. God holds us here.

These images and this paper exist as the starting point. I have built a launchpad out of the intersection of my faith and creativity. My faith commands me to take action when witnessing injustice, and my creativity compels me to document powerful experiences and emotions. Combined, they lead to work that aims to be evocative and impactful. Throughout my life, I hope my face will be flushed and my hands will be dirty from this work.

This project has humbled me. I am a more thoughtful and considerate photographer after wrestling with these ideas and images. God has surprised me and provoked me and been constantly faithful. My understanding about how to document issues like transnationalism and humanitarian crises has been challenged since traveling to Morocco. However, I have discovered a path through the smoke that is just beginning to become clear. Perhaps that's where faith comes in.

One day, I hope to return to Spain and visit Maria. She'll kiss my cheeks and hurry me into her living room, where her television sits. She'll pour me fresh cold soup

and hand me half of a baguette. We'll laugh and eat, and half way through our meal, she'll turn on the television.

Perhaps refugees will appear on the screen. Perhaps Maria will change the channel.

Or maybe she'll turn up the volume.

References

Abunasser, Rima. 2016. “The Deterritorialised Self in Lailia Lalami’s ‘Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits.’” *The Journal of North African Studies* 21 (2): 1-13.

Ahmed, Sarah. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.

Davis, Diana K. 2006. “Neoliberalism, Environmentalism, and Agricultural Restructuring in Morocco.” *The Geographical Journal* 172 (2): 88-105.

Elboubekri, Abdellah. 2014. “The Dislocation of ‘Home’ in the Writings of Laila Lalami.” *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 9 (3): 251-264.

Lalami, Laila. 2005. *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits.* New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

Mernissi, Fatema. 2001. *Scheherazade Goes West*. New York: Pocket Books.

Segall, Kimberly Wedeven. 2013. *Performing Democracy in Iraq and South Africa*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Special thanks to Dr. Kimberly Segall for directing me to the work of Sarah Ahmed for this project.