An Alternative Representation of Femininity in 1920s Lebanon: Through the *Mise-en-Abîme* of a Masculine Space

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NEW MIDDLE EASTERN QUICK STUDIES

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Plate no. 1, *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits*. Marie al-Khazen Lebanon/Zgharta, circa 1920, Collection Mohsen Yammine. ©Arab Image Foundation.[‡]

In the 1920s, during the early French mandate in Lebanon (1920-1943), a period of major social, political and economic changes and a rising women's movement in Syria and Lebanon, a young woman in her mid-twenties was recording her everyday life with a photographic camera in the village of Zgharta in the north of Lebanon. The imported lightweight and user-friendly Eastman Kodak attracted the woman's interest. Clicking the

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[‡] For high resolution images of the photos, see the NMES website at: www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/219.

button to capture whatever shot she deemed worth the effort, Marie al-Khazen (1899-1983) left behind more than two hundred six-by-nine centimeter negative plates. In a number of these photographs al-Khazen and her friends and family appear as if they were using the apparatus to stage themselves and their lifestyles in the way they would have wanted them to appear.

In this paper, I focus on one of al-Khazen's photographs, *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits* (c. 1920), in which she has staged herself and her sister as men in order to express her desire to be looked at as a woman who shares equal power with men of her society. Al-Khazen was not alone in this endeavor. Within a climate of a rising intelligentsia of women in Lebanon, activist writers such as ʿAnbara Salam (1906-1986), Salma Sayegh (1889-1953) and ʿAdila Beyhum (1902-1975), to name just a few, voiced concerns about the image of a changing woman.[1] Their agenda, as reflected in the rising women's press in the 1920s, focused on the construction of the new woman, *al-marʾa al-jadida*.[2] *Al-Marʾa al-Jadida* was also the title of a woman's journal launched by Julia Dimashqiyya (1882-1954). An increased number of the local women's journals started circulating in 1920s Lebanon and Syria, including Salima Abu Rashid's magazine *Fatat Lubnan* (Girl of Lebanon) (Beirut, 1914-1915), Mary ʿAjami's *Al-ʿArus* (The Bride) (Damascus, 1910-1926) and Mary Yanni's *Minerva* (Beirut, 1923-1927). These periodicals followed an earlier trend that had started in Egypt with the publishing of Qasim Amin's books, *Tahrir al-Marʾa* (The Emancipation of Women) (1899) and *Al-Marʾa al-Jadida* (The New Woman) (1900). Women's magazines started in Egypt as early as the 1890s and have been considered valuable sources for the study of gender politics by recent scholars.[3] Later, the movement expanded when Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals such as Mayy Ziyada (1886-1941) moved from Beirut to Cairo. She was the first Arab woman to write biographies in Arabic of other Arab women.[4]

Through their writings in the women's press, authors were actively promoting an image of the new woman either through the image of the educated mother or of the ideal housewife who supports her husband. But al-Khazen was neither a mother nor a wife; as her photographs demonstrate, she had other concerns. In many of these, she is seen driving cars, hunting and traveling around Lebanon's tourist landmarks. In her construction of her image of 'the new woman,' she went further than Salam, Sayegh, and Beyhum. She has constructed the image of the new woman as a separate individual refusing to recede into domestic duties and cater to the needs of the man of the house.

Al-Khazen has chosen to identify herself with masculine symbols, particularly in plate no. 1 where she is dressed up like a man. Perhaps masculinity seemed more attractive to her than femininity because it connotes power, liberty and independence. She has chosen to abandon the notions of femininity constructed in the women's press, which emphasized

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[1] For more on the rising women's movement in 1920s Lebanon see: Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: republican rights, paternal privilege, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Emily Fares Ibrahim, *Al-Harakat al-Nisaʾiyyat al-Lubnaniyyat* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, c.1970); Jean Maqdisi (editor) *Al-Nisaʾ al-ʿArabiyat fi al-ʿIshrinat Hudur wa Hawiyyat* (Beirut: Women Researchers Association, 2001); Hanifa al-Khatib, *Tarikh Tatawwur al-Harakat al-Nisaʾiyyat fi Lubnan* (Beirut: al-Hadatha, 1984); Georges Kallas, *Al-Harakat al-Fikriyyat al-Nasawiyyat fi ʿAsr al-Nahda: 1849-1928* (Beirut: Dar al-Jeel, 1996); Leyla Dakhli, *Une Génération d'intellectuels arabes: Syrie et Liban, 1908-1940* (Paris: Karthala, 2009); and Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

[2] For more sources on the rising women's press in the 1920s Lebanon and Syria see Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*; anonymous author, 'Al-Sahafat al-Nisaʾiyyat fi Misr wa Surya,' *Minerva* (1923), pp. 103-108; and Souad Slim et al. 'La vie intellectuelle des femmes à Beyrouth dans les années 1920 à travers la revue Minerva' (2002), n.p.

[3] B. Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.60.

[4] M. Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001), p.XVI.

beauty and marriage through the titles of the journals such as, *Al-Hasnaʾ* (Beirut, 1909-1912) (The Beautiful Woman) and *Al-ʿArus* (The Bride). In most of the women's periodicals, gender equality meant recognizing the social role of the mother. The journals were perpetuating the discourse, initiated three decades earlier by Qasim Amin's *Al-Marʾa al-Jadida*, in which the understanding of femininity is based on being a good wife and mother. In one of his articles published in *Minerva*, Lebanese-American writer Amin al-Rihani (1876-1940) argues that women's liberation is in neither political nor financial independence, but rather in wisdom and maternity. For Rihani, a liberated woman is limited to the roles of wife and mother and she carries out her maternal and other domestic tasks in the service of the well-being of her family.[5]

Marie al-Khazen, in her photographs, appears as if she was performing another kind of femininity. Unlike the ways in which women were depicted in the women's press - primarily concerned with raising children and pleasing their husbands - her feminine expression reflects her presence and that of other women in her photographs as independent women sharing their interests in driving, fishing and smoking as a way of spending their leisure time. They are neither exchanging recipes nor striving to excel in raising their children properly. Al-Khazen's construction of femininity was different from the general approach of the women's press to femininity. Women in al-Khazen's photographs seem more self-centered; concerned with demonstrating their individual skills and enriching their knowledge, i.e. in playing the piano as well as in visiting tourist sites around Lebanon.

The challenge for a project such as this, which deals with photographs more than 90 years old, is in the attempt to understand the work in the absence of its producer. Other than Sara Graham Brown's *Images of Women: the portrayal of women in photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (1988), there is currently no study that deals with photography practiced by a woman in the Middle East either as a practice or as documents. This means that there is no specific method adapted to the study of this particular practice. I am therefore developing a method drawn from scholars that used photography as ethnographic as well as anthropological documents to analyze social relations in particular contexts.

My feminist reading of *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits* uses the social approach and methods developed by Pierre Bourdieu as well as other critical theorists of social photography, including Christopher Pinney in his recent essay 'The prosthetic eye: photography as cure and poison' and Philippe Bonnin in his *Images habitées: photographie et spatialité*.[6] The social aspect of the medium is useful in examining issues relevant to how women's experiences were represented in the photograph. I draw on the above-mentioned scholars in looking at photographs while addressing the following questions: What is to be seen in the photograph? How do we see it? With what prior knowledge?

Pinney's anthropological method of seeing photography in a dynamic relationship with a 'colonial habitus' in India demonstrates how photography can be a threatening tool to colonial authorities because it provides evidence of their coercion.[7] Pinney reveals photography's dangerous ability to store juridical evidence. We can look at al-Khazen's photographs as evidence of Marie al-Khazen's particular practice of photography. Bourdieu's ethnographical perspective is interesting here because he describes a particular practice of photography 'associated with urban ways and an innovation suspect of manifesting the will to distinguish oneself and to rise above one's rank, which doubly violates the ethos of the

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[5] S. Slim et al., 'La vie intellectuelle', n.p.

[6] P. Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, translated by S. Whiteside (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); Christopher Pinney, 'The Prosthetic Eye: photography as cure and poison', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14 (2008), pp. 33-46; P. Bonnin, *Images habitées: photographie et spatialité* (Paris: Creaphis 2006).

[7] Pinney, 'The Prosthetic Eye', p. 33.

group'.[8] Both Bourdieu and Bonnin agree that photography functions as an extension of the subject's ethic of honor. In other words, the subject's posture as well as his/her frontality in the photograph is an extension of his/her social rank. Social relations are fostered by a hierarchical society in which the lineage has more reality than the particular individuals who compose them. So, irrespective of what the photographer may be wishing to convey, photographs cannot help but become historical documents of a sort. The notion of the photographs as documents registering voluntary or involuntary aspects of social relations reinforces the epistemological nature of the photographic image. This notion is helpful in looking at al-Khazen's photographs because it allows the reader to derive new meanings from the photographs through the analysis of 1920s social relations.

The photograph thickens because every time we look at it, we examine a new layer of meaning.[9] If the photographs are inhabited, as Bonnin argues, then the question addressed by this essay is how are they inhabited? I suggest that we look at the photographs as a palimpsest, as layers of meanings. Often, we expect photographs to display a clear message, yet the messages that emerge from the photographs, as demonstrated by Roland Barthes, are partial and waiting to be interpreted depending on their reader's knowledge.[10] Bonnin's method in observing the photograph uses social sciences and visual semiology methods, comparing photographs with other photographs of the same author, and examining the framing, the lighting and the choice of the subject matter. I will interrogate the reconstruction of space as well as the ways subjects are present in the photograph's interior space, their pose and their behavior. Their presence raises questions about the relation of appearances/signification and representation/interpretation. The primary concern with representation/interpretation is epistemological: the relation of the reading of the photograph to its analysis and how the practice of photography can be translated into social theories.

Studies of social relations through the photographs can help us understand the way the photograph contributes to the assertion of gender roles. I use deconstructionist theory to locate the ways in which a photograph can reinforce the patriarchal ideology it criticizes. The photograph, for example, can be read as an intention articulated through the critique of social divisions constitutive of patriarchal social relations. *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits* is a picture that produces an alternative social space. Al-Khazen's photographs destabilize fixed images of womanhood. In this study I am exploring how femininity is redefined through the photograph in textual interpretation through which gender identity differences collapse in the setting, costume, position and pose of the represented subjects. I am also examining the *mise-en-abîme* of her father's portrait within the photograph, a passage from a patriarchal space to a space dominated by women.

There is a broad literature on the ways Middle Eastern women are represented in literature, the arts and the media,[11] but little material is available on the way women

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[8] Bourdieu et al., 'The Peasant and Photography', *Ethnography* 5:4 (2004), p. 601.

[9] Bonnin, *Images habitées*, p.33.

[10] R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981), p. 76.

[11] J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); L. Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999); F. Bonner, 'Towards a better way of being', in *Imagining Women* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992); B. Berch, *The Woman Behind the Lens: The Life and Work of Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1864-1952* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); M. Hatem, 'Through Each Other's Eyes: Egyptian, Levantine-Egyptian and European Women's Images of Themselves and of Each Other (1900-1962)', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 12:2 (1989), pp. 183-198; K. Scheid, 'Necessary Nudes: Hadatha and Mu'asira in the Lives of Modern Lebanese', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 42 (2010), pp.203-230.

constructed their image through the production of portraits in early photography.[12] From all the literature on local photography in Lebanon and its surroundings at the turn of the last century starting from the mid-1980s,[13] only one book focuses on women in the photographs of the Middle East.[14] Marie al-Khazen's photographs are worth examining as they offer an insight into the cultural space of 1920s North Lebanon through a woman's lens.

Photography arrived in the Middle East in 1839, the same year that Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre produced his first daguerreotype in France.[15] One of the first studios in the region was established by Felix Bonfils, a French printer who migrated from France to Beirut along with his family in 1867. Very little is known about women photographers in the region. Lydie Bonfils, Felix's wife, can be considered the first professional woman photographer in the region together with Octavia Kova who owned a studio in Beirut, as seen in one image from Fouad Debbas's fin-de-siècle Beirut postcard collection published in his *Beirut, Memory*.[16] Little is known about Kova's studio practice as none of her photographs survived. It was the afterlife of Marie al-Khazen that provided evidence for her existence as a photographer. Perhaps her photographs would have vanished if they were not in the form of negatives. Negatives, if preserved at an adequate temperature, have a longer life span than paper prints. If it were not for the collector's interest in Marie al-Khazen's photographs and the Arab Image Foundation's initiative to digitize and have the one hundred and nine photographs circulate online through their website, Marie al-Khazen would not exist today.

Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits shows two women sitting on two separate armchairs surrounded by a heavily decorated space in the salon, or reception room, of the al-Khazen family house in Tallet al-Khazen (al-Khazen hill in Arabic) in the village of Zgharta.[17] Looking at the photograph more closely we realize that both women are holding cigarettes, one in the left hand, the other in the right hand. On the side table in front of them, they have carefully placed two white ashtrays in the form of flat seashells. Both women are wearing European-style men's suits, neckties and *tarābīsh* on their heads. The *tarbūsh* (plural: *tarābīsh*), better known in European sources as the fez, is a red cap shaped like a

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[12] Berch, *The Woman Behind the Lens*; J. Van Haaften, *Berenice Abbott* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1988); J. Lukitsh, *Julia Margaret Cameron* (London: Phaidon, 2006).

[13] P. Acra-Raad, *Une montagne et des hommes: la vie rurale du Mont-Liban au fil des cartes postales 1898-1930* (Beirut, 1997); S. Agha-Kassab et al., *Beyrouth et le sultan: 200 photographies des albums de Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909)* (Beirut: Terre du Liban, 2002); F. Debbas, *Beirut, our memory: a guided tour illustrated with postcards from the collection of Fouad Debbas* (Beirut: Naufal, 1986); F. Debbas, *Mount Lebanon: early photographs* (London: Folios, 1996); F. Debbas, *Des photographes à Beyrouth, 1840-1918* (Paris: Marval, 2001); M. Fani, *Liban, 1880-1914: l'atelier photographique de Ghazir* (Beirut: Editions de l'Escalier, 1995); M. Fani, *Une histoire de la photographie au Liban: 1840 – 1944* (Beirut: Editions de l'Escalier, 2005); I. Nassar, *Lakatat Mughayyiarat: al-Tasweer al-Mahali al-Mubakkar fi Filastin 1850-1947* (London: Abdel Mohsen al-Kattan foundation, 2005); S. Sheehi, 'A Social History of Early Arab Photography or a Prolegomenon to an Archeology of the Lebanese Imago', *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 39 (2007), pp. 177–208; S. Toubia, *Sarrafian: Liban 1900-1930* (Mansourieh: Aleph, 2008); M. Yammine, *Histoires intimes* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1998); B. al-Hage, *Damascus Images From the Past 1840-1918* (London: Folios Limited, 2001).

[14] S. Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: the portrayal of women in photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (London: Quartet, 1988).

[15] Michel Fani attributes the first daguerreotype of Beirut, dated 1839, to Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey (1804-1892). Fani, *Une histoire de la photographie*, p.10. Debbas, *Beirut, our memory*, p.6.

[16] Debbas, *Beirut, our memory*, p.11.

[17] The al-Khazen family, part of a large well-established Maronite community, is an aristocratic family of *muqāṭaʿjī* (landowners of hereditary tax farms) of Kesruan. It is said that Shaykh Fandi, al-Khazen's grandfather, migrated from Kesruan to Zgharta at the turn of the century to escape conflicts in Kesruan and to marry Sultana Daher, a descendant from a prominent family of notables in Zgharta (interview with Salim Tabet, March 2010). For more on the role of the al-Khazen family in Lebanon see Simon ʿAwwad, *Daur al Usar fi Tarikh Lubnan: al-khaziniyyun* (Antelias, Lebanon: Dar 'Awwad, c. 1970), and Richard Van Leeuwen, *Notables and Clergy in Mount Lebanon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

truncated cone, the symbol of the modernized Ottoman elite. It signifies masculinity as well as a higher social status amongst the Western-educated members of the elite during the Ottoman Empire.[18] Both women in the photograph have tied back their hair and carefully tucked it under the *tarābīsh* in order to reinforce signs of masculinity in the photograph. Were it not for the caption, we would have thought that the two seated people were men. The one wearing the dark suit and shiny dark shoes is the photographer. She has set the timer after having carefully placed the camera in front of the scene represented in the photograph.

The woman on the right, wearing the lighter suit and white pointed shoes is Marie al-Khazen's sister, Alice.[19] She is looking straight into the camera with a confident attitude. Both women are cross-legged, the one on the left has awkwardly put her hand in her pocket as if she decided to do so at the last minute before the shutter erupted. The photograph is taken from a low vantage point in order to include the pattern of the 'Ajami carpet. What is Marie al-Khazen's reason for insisting on including the carpet's pattern in the frame of her photograph? One of the reasons why photography has flourished among the bourgeois was in order to display their wealth as well as to communicate their social status.[20] The practice of photography reveals the logic implicit in the al-Khazen bourgeois family milieu to use photography primarily as a means to differentiate between the bourgeois interiors that display their wealth in their family house on Tallet-al-Khazen and the surrounding milieu of the Zghartawi villagers. The emphasis on the ʿAjami carpet in the foreground of plate no. 1 projects the al-Khazen as upper class wealthy travelers who can afford to travel and purchase or import expensive, luxury furniture. In addition, the 'Ajami carpet is reflective of the fin de siècle Lebanese bourgeois taste.

Looking closer into the image, the viewer can count eight portraits inhabiting the photograph, of which seven are photographs and one is a painted portrait. In bourgeois homes, according to Bourdieu, it is common to enlarge and frame portraits and photographs that commemorate social events such as weddings and other religious ceremonies.[21] These salient moments in people's lives adorn the walls of bourgeois living rooms. The seven photographs are scattered around the living room; some are framed while others lie vertically on the objects behind them. On the right there is a triptych framing three photographs, signed by Bonfils on the back.[22] This may represent Marie al-Khazen's grandparents, Shaykh Saʿid Fandi al-Khazen and Sultana Daher. In the center, right under the painted portrait, a beautiful arabesque frame, possibly imported from Damascus, portrays a wedded couple, perhaps the shaykh and his wife. On the extreme right edge, on the first shelf of the jardinière, one can see a corner of a frame with a photograph in it. Another photograph is lying on the second shelf behind what appears to be a dark bronze statuette, and the seventh photograph is lying on the bust in the upper left corner of the photograph.[23] The eighth is the huge portrait of the patriarch, the great Shaykh Saʿid. This portrait is carefully executed by an artist who was commissioned to produce several paintings including a number of portraits for the al-Khazen

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[18] E. R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 160-162.

[19] I thank Martha Langford for drawing my attention on how to identify the photographer in the photograph. It is unlikely that Alice set the timer for the photograph because of the table placed in front of her.

[20] Bourdieu, *Photography*, pp. 145-146.

[21] Bourdieu, *Photography*, p.29.

[22] For more on the Bonfils photographic practice see C. E. S. Gavin, *The Image of the East.*

[23] I was able to trace most of the objects and furniture in the photographs. They are part of Nuha al-Khazen's collection preserved in Zgharta.

family.[24] It is framed with an arabesque encrusted with rich geometric marquetry and Arabic inscriptions.

Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits challenges a gendered discourse by interrogating naturalized assumptions about gender and identity. In reading this photograph, I am not thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, but as a production, an interstice: neither European nor Middle Eastern, neither masculine nor feminine. The subjects are somewhere in between. The colonized/women disguised themselves in the colonizer/man's clothing in order to enjoy the dominant position of the colonizer/man for the brief moment of the photograph. In this view, identity is not a stable signified that a single signifier passively represents. The photograph can be seen as a complex dialogue between women as objects of patriarchy and women as agents of their own future. It suggests a different way to enact gender, a different way to be a female in the bourgeois context of early mandate Lebanon.[25]

Bourdieu describes the photograph as a sign of status, through which the photographic practice is seen as 'expressing an effort to rise above one's rank'.[26] Thus this is not a photograph merely representing two sisters smoking cigarettes in their salon at their house on Tallet al-Khazen but a photograph fraught with symbols through which social connotations, and especially gendered connotations, collapse. I suggest reading the photograph as a social construct produced through the lens of a woman. The corner depicted in the photograph was carefully chosen. The whole setting was well thought out by the photographer. The two subjects dressed up in European attire against the oriental setting create an anachronistic effect; they appear as if they were copy-pasted from a different era into the ancient, traditional, Middle Eastern setting.

Marie al-Khazen's alternative representation of femininity is further linked to her *mise-en-abîme* of the patriarchal space. Looking at the upper edge of the photograph, one can see the *tarbūsh* of the patriarch in the painted portrait that is almost touching the edge of the photograph. It seems that the photographer, while placing the camera in front of her site, was keen to include the patriarch's *tarbūsh* in her photographic scene. Looking closer into the picture, there seems to be a representation within a representation in the space of this photograph. The first representation, the one in which Shaykh Saʿid al-Khazen is posing for the Lebanese painter Asʿad Ghosn in 1901 projects a predominant patriarchy through the imposing presence of the shaykh in his painted portrait. I argue that this predominant patriarchy is dissolved in the second layer of this image. The second layer is Marie al-Khazen's photograph, *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits*, taken three decades later, representing the shaykh's daughters Marie and Alice al-Khazen sitting underneath the first representation, the shaykh's portrait.

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[24] The portrait is signed by Asʿad Ghosn, 1901. Another portrait was painted by the same artist during the same year, that of the shaykh's wife, Wardeh Torbey (1871-1938). Mrs. Torbey's portrait must have been hanging on the far right outside the photograph.

[25] Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*; Booth, *May Her Likes be Multiplied*; Sheehi, *A Social History*.

[26] Bourdieu, *The Peasant*, p.608.

Plate no. 2, *Khazen al-Khazen Greeting the Photographer*. Marie al-Khazen, Lebanon/Zgharta, circa 1920, Collection Mohsen Yammine. ©Arab Image Foundation.[‡]

Plate no. 3, *Untitled*. Marie el Khazen,
Lebanon/Zgharta, circa 1920, Collection Mohsen Yammine. ©Arab Image Foundation.[‡]

In many other cases the male figure occupies the center of Marie's photographs. For instance, in plate number 2, the position of Khazen al-Khazen, Marie al-Khazen's older brother, is in the center, at the highest point in the photograph. He has removed his *tarbūsh* in a gesture to greet the photographer. The same applies to a younger shaykh, Salim, Marie al-

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[‡] For a higher resolution image, see the NMES website at: www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/219.

Khazen's nephew (see plate numbers 3 and 4). In the latter three representations the male is the central theme of the photograph whereas in the *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits*, although the male figure, seen in Shaykh Saʿid's portrait hanging on the wall, is also positioned in the upper center of the photograph, the focus is on the two women in the foreground. The central male figure in this photograph is absent yet present through his painted portrait; this complicates the social relations depicted in the photograph.
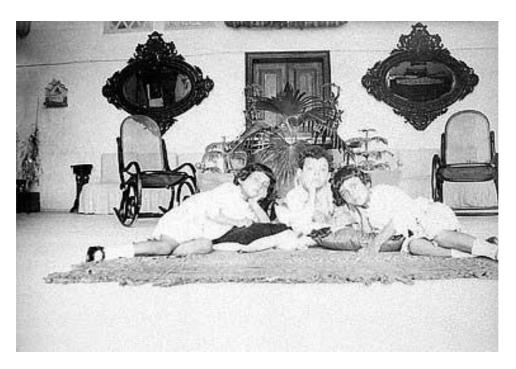

Plate no. 4, *Untitled*. Marie el Khazen,
Lebanon/Zgharta, circa 1920, Collection Mohsen Yammine. ©Arab Image Foundation.   ‡

Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits consists of two layers representing two different temporal spaces. The first, painted in 1901, represents the masculine space seen within the painted portrait which eternalizes the subject's presence, the shaykh's dominance and the way he is supposed to be remembered. The shaykh in the portrait imposes his visibility and asserts his control. He is gazing from the top down to whoever visits the al-Khazen family. Powerful men try to be viewed from below to assert their authority.[27]

Why have the two women not chosen to be photographed under their mother's portrait? Shaykh Saʿid al-Khazen's portrait was painted during the same year as another portrait, that of his wife Wardeh Torbey. The mother's portrait is most probably hanging on the other side of the jardinière. At the turn of the century, as a customary ritual among the local elites, women of noble rank would have themselves painted in their roles as mothers and wives. The mother in this portrait symbolizes love and giving as the unifying drive for the family well-being. In a three-quarter sitting position, she looks pretty, modest and slightly blushing. As the traditional bourgeois wife, her happiness consists in making her husband happy and in serving the needs of her children. Alice and Marie al-Khazen have chosen the opposite corner as a setting for their picture, the one in which their father's portrait was hanging. Their mother's portrait was obviously not a source of pride. Being good mothers and submissive

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‡ For a higher resolution image, see the NMES website at: www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/219.

27 M. Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in the Arab Society* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p.4.

wives were not on their agenda at the time. Their father's portrait fits better the theme expressed through their composition.

Three decades before this photograph was taken, Ghosn painted both portraits following the portraiture convention of the bourgeois Ottoman communities: the man, Shaykh Saʿid, is drawn, as is customary, in a frontal position whereas the woman, Mrs. Torbey, is drawn in a three-quarter position, a less imposing presence. Similar to the masculine pose in the bourgeois portraiture convention, al-Khazen has depicted her sister in a frontal position whereas she is sitting in a three-quarter position, the same position as her mother in the painted portrait, gazing into the shutter speed. According to Bourdieu, frontality or *faire-front* generally presents the subjects as honorable, dignified and responsible.[28]

By enacting her father's pose Alice al-Khazen is appropriating his attributes. The assertive masculine frontality that dominates the space of the painted portrait is disrupted by Alice al-Khazen's frontality that dominates the second space, that of the photograph. How the subjects are represented in the photograph correspond to their locations within societal hierarchies of gender and family roles. The photograph embodies social functions, it abides by the patriarchal norms of the time and place.[29] The pose is telling about the social status of the person in the photograph.[30] Within the space of the photograph, Marie al-Khazen has placed herself and her sister under her father's portrait, following the social hierarchy deployed within the social patriarchal convention: women as lower than men. Yet if the *tarbūsh* is a sign of authority, the presence of three *tarābīsh* in the photograph, two of them worn by women, blurs this sign by collapsing the social hierarchy and transcribing the masculine attributes represented in the patriarch's portrait – strength, dignity, pride, dominance – to the women in the foreground. In this photographic setting, Marie al-Khazen seems to actively re-invent her subjects' personae by inviting the observer to interrogate and reconstitute social differences by questioning the narrative of masculine superiority.

In *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits,* Marie al-Khazen has used the medium of photography to imagine an alternative feminine identity by raising questions concerning cultural assumptions about gender roles, and by contesting the local 1920's women's press assumptions of the female figure as naturally 'feminine'. In her *Two Women Dressed up in Men's Suits*, she has offered the possibility of a masculine femininity. For the early twentieth-century bourgeois, paternal authority was absolute, the father was a severe figure. He ruled his wife and children and decided their fate. Masculinity was represented as authority and control whereas femininity was represented through obedience, love and affection. In this context Marie al-Khazen's photographs are perceived as disrupting commonly accepted ideals by giving expression to a new gender concept that challenges long established attitudes and customs towards gender differences.

The photographs convey the beginning of the twentieth century gender role transition in the transformation of gender role from mothers to women in control of their own fate. In doing so, al-Khazen has subverted the mainstream understandings of femininity. By reflecting a notion of femininity as being in control she has asserted her presence in the photograph as an individual in her own right. Marie al-Khazen's photographs can be considered premature photographs. Notwithstanding the fact that a masculine femininity was (and still is) perceived as negative as well as threatening, most of her photographs focus on women's individual happiness and interests, concepts that we learn from the women's press of the turn of the century in North Africa and the Middle East were not available at that time.

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28 Bourdieu, *The Peasant,* p.610.
29 Bonnin, *Images habitées*, p.199.
30 Pinney, *The Prosthetic Eye*; Bourdieu, *The Peasant*; Bonnin, *Images habitées*.

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