PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE IMAGINARY: TRANSLATING FREUD IN POSTCOLONIAL EGYPT

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Attending to the work of translation inherent within psychoanalytic practice – whether from Sigmund Freud's own German writings into French or Arabic, or from clinical practice into theoretical discourse – helps us understand the global afterlife of Freudian psychoanalysis not as the relationship of an original to a bad copy, but rather as the 'transformation and renewal of something living' in which 'the original undergoes a change' (Benjamin, 1968, p. 73). Exploring psychoanalytic knowledge production in the postcolony, I ask what if we imagine the non-West as a site for the production and critique of knowledge about the unconscious and the imaginary, rather than merely a site for its consumption and circulation? Such a framing would no longer maintain that 'geopolitics provides the exemplars, but rarely the epistemologies' (Arondekar & Patel, 2016, p. 152) for thinking about psychoanalysis.

This article imagines psychoanalysis geopolitically by way of an exploratory foray into the *oeuvre* of Sami-Ali, the Arabic translator of Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, author of a large body of original psychoanalytic writings, and translator of the poetry of Sufi masters such as Mansur al-Hallaj and Ibn ᶜArabi. Taken together, his writings enable a critical rethinking of the role of the imaginary, the mechanisms of projection, and the epistemology of non-knowledge in the workings of the unconscious. Significantly, such a rethinking of key psychoanalytic concepts drew upon the metaphysics of the imagination of Ibn ᶜArabi. Yet such theoretical work cannot be understood outside of its wider clinical context and the conditions of (im)possibility that structure psychoanalysis within the postcolony. Reconstituting Sami-Ali's early theoretical writings alongside his work with the long-forgotten figures he

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observed, incarcerated female prostitutes in 1950s Cairo, I argue that his clinical encounters formed the ground of his theorization of the imaginary within the embodied subject.

The approach taken here is not cumulative; I do not aim to augment the literature on psychoanalysis by contributing yet another reading of Freud (only to be added to the American, Argentinian, or Indian Freud), nor do I simply argue that psychoanalysis as a discipline was itself constituted by the Other (and, as such, always already inflected by histories of colonialism and of the non-West). Instead, I stage a scene of reading in which psychoanalysis takes place *otherwise* in a geopolitical elsewhere, at the intersection of multiple epistemological and ethical traditions. Such 'irreducible work of translation, not from language to language, but from body to ethical semiosis' (Spivak, 2003, p. 13) cannot resort to the resolutely secular framings within which a knowledge formation such as psychoanalysis has traditionally been understood.

Translating Freud

Sami Mahmud Ali (1925–) trained in Alexandria under Mustafa Radwan Ziywar, one of the main proponents of the psychoanalytic tradition in Egypt, graduating from Faruq (later Alexandria) University in 1946, receiving his PhD in psychology in 1959 from the Sorbonne, and becoming a member of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society and the International Psychoanalytic Association.[1] Upon his return to Egypt, he taught psychology at Alexandria University and, from 1958 to 1960, he participated in a broad social survey and multidisciplinary study of *Prostitution in Cairo* sponsored by the newly founded Nasserist National Center for Sociological and Criminological Research (NCSCR), which included clinical case studies with imprisoned prostitutes (Saʿati *et al.*, 1961). Once established in metropolitan France as a professor at l'Université de Paris VII, Sami-Ali would return to these case studies again and again in his work, illustrating that his clinical encounters with prostitutes formed the very condition of possibility of his theoretical writings.

In 1963, prior to leaving again for France, Sami-Ali did a masterful Arabic translation and critical edition of Sigmund Freud's *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (*Thalath Maqalat fi Nazariyyat al-Jinsiyya*), intended for research and teaching.[2] Basing his translation on the German text published in the 1942

1. In his Arabic writings his name appears as Sami Mahmud Ali, in his subsequent French writings as Sami-Ali. I retain the latter to avoid confusion. For biographical data on Sami-Ali, see Sami-Ali (1963, p. 25); Mittermaier (2011, p. 177). On Ziywar, see Taha (1993, pp. 372–7).

2. In Egypt and the wider Arab world Freudians came well before Freud translations (see El Shakry, 2017). Although the publication of the translation of the *Three Essays* into Arabic appears late in comparison with its translation into Hungarian by Sándor Ferenczi in 1915 or into Spanish by Luis López-Ballesteros in 1922, it is important to recall that Freud's final and 6th edition was not published until 1925, and as part of the *Gesammelte Werke* only in 1942. Similarly, the critical James Strachey English edition did not take place until 1949, and as part of

Gesammelte Werke, Sami-Ali supplemented that text with Strachey's 1953 critical edition, which differed from all previous German and English editions as it indicated 'with dates, every alteration of substance that has been introduced into the work since its first issue' (Freud, 1905, p. 126). Accordingly, the Arabic edition combined the benefits of translating the text directly from the original German, while supplementing it with Strachey's English footnotes and Sami-Ali's expository notes, as well as an extensive glossary of key psychoanalytic terms (Fruyd, 1963, pp. 163–94).

Freud's work, Sami-Ali explained, elucidated the innate (*fitrayan*) nature of the sexual instinct present in *everyone* (*fi kul al-nas*), in the perversions and in 'what is known as normal sexual life' alike (Freud, 1905, pp. 171–2; Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 23). Such an instinct 'will only be demonstrable in *children*' and thus, he noted, Freud provides us with a notion of the sexual, 'al-jinsi,' that is distinct from the concept of reproductive or genital sexuality, and wider in meaning – what Laplanche will later term an enlarged sexuality (Freud, 1905, p. 172; Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 23; Laplanche, 2011, p. 19).

In introducing his audience to the observations on sexuality (*al-jinsiyya*) in the *Three Essays*, Sami-Ali pointed out that Freud's greatest breakthrough related to the dual discovery of the meaning of dreams and the existence of an infantile or pregenital sexuality; both were domains in which the unconscious manifested or presenced itself (Sami-Ali, 1963, pp. 11–12). Such presencing and disclosure, however, was enveloped in the work of the negative (*Verneinung*), expressing the unconscious ability to repress, deny, camouflage, and take refuge in self-deception, forgetting, and the like (Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 13).[3] Moreover, it was through an analysis of hysterical forgetting and infantile amnesia, as well as the attendant dubiety between reality and fantasy, that Freud happened upon his discovery of childhood sexuality (Sami-Ali, 1963, pp. 15–17). The task of the analyst, resembling that of the archeologist, was to *construct* unconscious and early impressions that appear to have vanished from the remnants of debris and 'from the fragments of memories, from the associations and from the behaviour of the subject of the analysis' (Freud, 1937, p. 259; Sami-Ali, 1963, pp. 18–19). Crucially, then, the problem of truth within psychoanalysis was linked not to the empirical verification of experiences of childhood, but rather to the constitutive nature of the patient's *imagination* of their childhood. Such a line of thinking

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the *Standard Edition* in 1953, despite earlier editions appearing from 1910 to 1938. While much needed, a detailed discussion of the history of the Arabic translations of Freud, as well as the global history of the translation of the *Three Essays*, is outside the scope of the present article.

3. 'Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed,' thus 'a recognition of the unconscious on the part of the ego is expressed in a negative formula' (Freud, 1925, pp. 235–6, 239; Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 13).

would lead Sami-Ali directly to a discussion of the epistemology of non-knowledge.

The Epistemology of Non-Knowledge and Hallucinatory Wish-Fulfillment

In his 'Translator's Introduction' to the *Three Essays*, Sami-Ali begins to construct a notion of the imaginary that is based on the hallucinatory non-knowledge (*non-savoir*) connected to the (non-)satisfaction of infantile needs. He notes that the infantile sexual aim seeks to attain pleasure 'independently of the objective conditions which have been specified' (Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 24), for example 'in some kind of manipulation that is analogous to the sucking' of the mother's breast (Freud, 1905, p. 184).

At the same time, '[t]his satisfaction must have been previously experienced in order to have left behind a need for its repetition' (Freud, 1905, p. 184; Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 24). This repetition of an 'experience of satisfaction' is, of course, reminiscent of the discussion in the *Interpretation of Dreams* in which a wish is defined as an impulse to 're-establish the situation of the original satisfaction' (Freud, 1900–1, p. 566). But Freud goes further, stating:

> Nothing prevents us from assuming that there was a primitive state of the psychical apparatus in which this path was actually traversed, that is, in which wishing ended in hallucinating. Thus the aim of the first psychical activity was to produce a 'perceptual identity' [*ʿayniyya idrakiyya*] – a repetition of the perception [*ʿayn al-idrak*] which was linked with the satisfaction of the need. (Freud, 1900–1, p. 566; Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 24; see also Freud, 1905, pp. 184–5, n.3)

Infantile oral satisfaction, Sami-Ali concludes, is clearly an imaginary (*mutakhayyil*) activity linked to the perception of the satisfaction of a need through a hallucinatory repetition (Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 24).

Several years later, Sami-Ali builds upon these insights on the imaginary and revisits the identity between projection and the hallucinatory mode of satisfaction peculiar to the dreamwork (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 176).[4] In the act of projection, the perceptive process is put at the service of the satisfaction of an unconscious desire, functioning in the exact same manner as hallucination (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 196; cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945], pp. 349–60). The disjuncture experienced by the child between a hallucinatory satisfaction of desire and the non-presence (and non-satisfaction) of a real object (such as the mother's breast) enables the child to perceive the non-object, or the void.

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4. Sami-Ali continues to elaborate on the notion of the imaginary in his later work; however, in this essay I confine myself to his work on the *Prostitution* study, his 1963 translation of the *Three Essays*, and his theoretical texts from the early 1970s.

In other words, the first type of object that will be apprehended is *what is not*. The child does not perceive what is; he perceives what is not. Sami-Ali terms this the epistemology of non-knowledge (*non-savoir*) in which non-being is an imaginary object that has become sensible or sensuous (Sami-Ali, 1970, pp. 197–8). This was graphically and inadvertently demonstrated, he notes, by an illustration in René Spitz's *The First Year of Life*, in which the caption of a photograph states: 'The infant does not perceive the nipple in his mouth when he is crying with hunger!' (Spitz, cited in Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 198, n.1). Spitz himself never introduces the dimension of the imaginary, but Sami-Ali affirms, 'it is only when this game is useless that the child looks elsewhere. This elsewhere is the real' (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 198).

Projection functions as the fulcrum through which an inner and outer world come together and is inextricably linked to perception, itself a creative mode of apprehending reality (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. x). Projection, then, is part and parcel of a dialectic between the real and the imaginary in which the imaginary precedes the real, such that the real constitutes a partial subset of the imaginary (Sami-Ali, 1974, p. 55). Such a view of projection, Sami-Ali asserted, circumvents the false dichotomies between perception and projection, reality and unreality and explicitly departs from the later Freud, for whom projection was increasingly viewed as a defensive mechanism within an understanding of the drives (Sami-Ali, 1970, pp. xii–xiv, 43–68). By contrast, Sami-Ali emphasizes the non-defensive nature of projection, as Freud himself did in his earlier writings.

This modality of projection was further conceptualized by Sami-Ali as the creation of an unconscious bodily image. This bodily image was the first realization of the imaginary as an expression of the egohood (*ana-iyyat*) of the individual – the first I, as Freud says, is the body (Freud, 1923, p. 26; Sami-Ali, 1963, pp. 24–5). The infant's imaginary relation to the world implies that the body is the first imaginal, out of which projection emanates and out of which a schema of representation emerges that encompasses subject and object, time and space (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. xv). 'The body thus reveals itself as an original power of projection,' an elusive yet permeating force that discloses itself through its effects, for example through images of one's own body at the level of perception or of the imaginary (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 216; 1974, p. 121; cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945], p. 74).[5]

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5. Sami-Ali's critique of Lacan's notion of the mirror stage is relevant here: 'Contrary to what Lacan thinks, the experience of self-recognition in the mirror, far from being for the incarnated subject an absolute point of departure, marks, rather, the culmination of the early identifications of the child with the maternal figure' (Sami-Ali, 1974, p. 56).When the subject (mis-)recognizes itself and its bodily integrity in the mirror, such a recognition is made possible by the child's initial self-recognition as an eroticized body, simultaneously subject and object. The child attempts to resolve the enigma of its differentiation from the maternal body in terms of absence and presence, partly through the mirage of an imaginary space. The emphasis on presence rather than the specular image explains why Sami-Ali's discussion of the mirror stage is nestled within a

One's own body, then, provides an unconscious schema of representation of the world, which reflects the corporeal (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945], pp. 100–5).[6] This corporeal synthesis of one's own unconscious image of the body is linked to memory and the unconscious history of events, as well as to what Freud refers to as 'phylogenetically inherited schemata,' which entail the Oedipus and castration complexes as illustrated in primal fantasies (Freud, 1918, p. 119; Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 218). Consequently, sexuality enters into the imaginary through phylogenesis as much as through ontogenesis and expresses the imaginary of *eros*.[7] Thus, Sami-Ali remarks, may we better understand the profundity behind Freud's simple conception of sexuality within erotogenic zones (*al-manatiq al-shahwiyya*) (Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 25). Reconceptualized in this manner, Freud's theory of infantile sexuality is in reality a description of the *extended imaginary* of human existence (Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 24).

The Barzakh of the Imaginal

The notion of the imaginary or the imaginal world was therefore key to understanding the modes of perception and projection characteristic of infantile sexuality. This was in keeping with a longer-standing philosophical tradition, including the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that reduced the distance between perception and imagination, and emphasized the 'productive and reproductive' nature of imagination as well as the '"imaginary texture of the real," the imagination at work in the everyday world which we perceive, the world

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larger elucidation of *fort-da* (1974, pp. 42–64). Lacanian theory, Sami-Ali continues, neglects this aspect of presence as it merely describes 'the *experience* of the mirror as an experience of the *mirror*' (1974, p. 57). 'Being simultaneously itself and the other, familiar and nevertheless strange, the subject is that which has no face and whose face exists from the point of view of the other' (Sami-Ali, cited in Vidler, 1992, p. 223).

6. As will become increasingly evident, Maurice Merleau-Ponty is an important point of reference for Sami-Ali, although Sami-Ali places far greater emphasis on the unconscious dimensions of 'one's own body.'

7. For a contemporaneous discussion of the foundational role of fantasy in the constitution of infantile sexuality, see Laplanche & Pontalis (1968). In undoing the opposition between objective and subjective, real and imaginary, Sami-Ali's approach is similar to theirs. There are crucial differences, however. Sami-Ali's emphasis upon the metaphysics of imagination and the non-pathological nature of projection and fantasy, as I argue in the next section, draws on an entirely different philosophical tradition, that of Ibn ᶜArabi. Further, Sami-Ali does not reduce 'phylogenetically inherited schemata' to a biologistic inheritance but views it rather as a speculative primal scene of fantasy imprinted within culture itself, a pre-originary space, in direct contrast to Laplanche & Pontalis, for whom phylogenesis was a 'pseudo-scientific mask' that could be understood instead as a 'pre-structure which is actualized and transmitted by the parental fantasies' (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968, pp. 10, 17).

as it is for us' (Lennon, 2017, p. 50).[8] We would be gravely misled, however, if we attributed Sami-Ali's understanding of the imaginary solely to Western metaphysics, and indeed a much older and richer tradition of the imaginary exists within the spiritual ontology of the medieval Islamic mystic Ibn ᶜArabi (1165–1240), whose poems Sami-Ali would eventually translate.

For Sami-Ali the imaginary was coextensive with subjectivity itself and was more complex than phenomenological theories and more expansive than Lacan's restricted category of the Imaginary within his three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.[9] Within Sami-Ali's thought, the imaginary, as the embodiment of psychic life, centers on the dream world (believed to be at the core of human existence) as well as the equivalents of dreaming in waking life – phantasm, reverie, illusion, delirium, hallucination, play, belief, magical thinking, and so on (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. xvi). The dream world operates through projection, and is itself the template for reality; 'reality seems to prolong a dream that is, in turn, a reflection' (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 211).

This deeply resonates with Ibn ᶜArabi's contention that earthly existence is but 'a dream within a dream' (Ibn ᶜArabi, cited in Izutsu, 1983, p. 9). As Toshihiko Izutsu observes, this notion reveals 'the very starting-point of Ibn ᶜArabī's ontological thinking, namely, that so-called "reality" is but a dream … an unreality' (Izutsu, 1983, p. 11). But this does not mean that it is a subjective fantasy; rather, we can view it as 'an "objective" illusion' (Izutsu, 1983, p. 11). According to Ibn ᶜArabi, the 'vast majority of people experience the reality of the imagination most directly in dreams' (Chittick, 1988, p. 54).

Briefly, for Ibn ᶜArabi the 'ontology of imagination' holds an exalted place and is marked by an intermediate reality, an ambiguity, and a conjoining of opposites ('al-jamaᶜ bayn al-addad') – it is both 'vast and narrow' (Chittick, 1988, pp. 53, 59; 1989, pp. 115–18). As Ibn ᶜArabi states, 'Imagination is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither known nor unknown, neither negated nor affirmed' (Ibn ᶜArabi, cited in Chittick, 1989, p. 118). Ontologically, the imagination exists in a liminal space, in the *barzakh* or isthmus 'between the spiritual and corporeal, possessing characteristics of both sides'; at the same time, it is an isthmus between Being and nonexistence (Chittick, 1988, pp. 53–4). Imagination, in the macrocosm, stands between the luminous disembodied world of spirits and corporeal bodies; in the microcosm it 'corresponds to the animate soul

8. Lennon continues: 'The imaginary on this account is not the realm of fantasy and negation' (2017, p. 50), but here she ignores the constitutive and productive role of fantasy and negation within the psychoanalytic tradition, equating these terms, instead, with non-reality.

9. Sami-Ali registered several disagreements with Lacan (see note 5 for his critique of the mirror stage). For example, he critiqued Lacan's thesis that 'the unconscious is structured like a language.' Citing Freud, he argued instead that the unconscious is best thought of as an irreducible X or a 'phenomenon of energetic expenditure opening access to an unknown world governed by laws other than those of non-contradiction.' Lacan's use of a linguistic model, he continued, suggested logical discourse (Sami-Ali, 1970, pp. 174–5, n.2).

(*al-nafs al-hayāwnī*), which acts as an intermediary between the body and the disengaged spirit which was breathed into the human reality by God' (Chittick, 1988, pp. 53–4).

Of direct relevance to Sami-Ali's work is the relationship between imagination and embodiment. As Ibn ᶜArabi states, 'the reality of imagination is to embody that which is not properly a body' (cited in Chittick, 1988, p. 54). According to William Chittick, 'the characteristic activity of the imagination is to embody (*tajsīd*) that which is disembodied and to spiritualize (*tarawḥun*) or sublimate (*talṭīf*) that which is corporeal' and it is made most manifest in the dream world, an imaginal realm of being known as the lesser death (Chittick, 1988, p. 54; 1989, pp. 118–21; Morris, 2002, pp. 93–124).

To enable us to conceptualize the ontological and epistemological ambiguity of the imaginary, Ibn ᶜArabi provides an example well known to all psychoanalysts: the individual's reflection in a mirror. What is the ontological status of the reflected form in the mirror? Like the imaginary, it is both existent and nonexistent; the individual:

> knows for certain that he has perceived his form in one respect and he knows for certain that he has not perceived his form in another respect … Hence he is neither a truth teller nor a liar in his words, 'I saw my form, I did not see my form.' (Ibn ᶜArabi, cited in Chittick, 1989, p. 118)

The conception of the imaginary as conjoining opposites, or what is known in Arabic as *addad* (auto-antonyms), helps us better understand Sami-Ali's conception of psychic reality as a series of dynamic polarities conjoining the real and the imaginary, subjective and objective, inside and outside, existence and essence, perception and projection, past and present.[10] Indeed, Sami-Ali discusses *addad* as a structure of reciprocal inclusions that constitute the general dimension of the imaginary, similarly to the dream world in which a ≠ a, or to the Divine who is both the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Nonmanifest (Sami-Ali, 1980, pp. 187–93; Qurʾan, 57:3).

Crucially, then, Sami-Ali's notion of the imaginary was structured by Sufi understandings and his originality lay, in part, in his ability to draw on non-Western metaphysics and non-Enlightenment traditions and in particular on an apophatic theology which valued the valence of the negative, as well as the identity and non-identity of dualities. This supersession of more rationalist notions of the imagination – whether of Freud's attachment to the reality principle, Sartre's deference to the Cartesian cogito, or Merleau-Ponty's overreliance on consciousness, highlighted instead the importance of *non-savoir* and the creative forces of imagination that exceeded the boundaries of the human subject.

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10. Freud discusses the remarkable 'way in which dreams treat the category of contraries and contradictions' and their similarity to auto-antonyms 'in the most ancient languages' (Freud, 1900, p. 318).

The Drive to Knowledge

Sami-Ali thus accorded the imaginary a principal role in his scholarly translations and his later theoretical writings. Rather than conceive of this as a purely metapsychological innovation, however, I turn now to Sami-Ali's clinical encounters with prostitutes in postwar Cairo as forming the ground of his understanding of the workings of the unconscious. These clinical encounters enlivened the Freudian conception of an 'enlarged' pregenital sexuality linked to the primordial family drama of infantile Oedipus, but they also did far more. They directly generated a theory of an embodied sexual imaginary that relied upon the work of the negative in the construction of an unconscious image of the body.

Between November of 1958 and December of 1960, Sami-Ali participated as a psychological expert in a study commissioned by the NCSCR on *Prostitution in Cairo*. The larger study, which took place between 1957 and 1960, was overseen by sociologist Hasan al-Sa^{c}ati, and was meant to shed light on prostitution as a complex societal phenomenon, and to mitigate its effects in the wake of its 1951 ban.[11] The project was composed of two parts: a wide-scale social survey and a clinical study; Sami-Ali was responsible for the analytical presentation of individual case studies and the preparation of the clinical report for final presentation. The clinical in-depth component of the study focused on 18 prostitutes, whittled down from a much larger sample, and included a social interview or case history, physical examination, psychiatric examination, and a psychological examination comprised of two intelligence tests and three personality tests: an association of ideas test, a Rorschach, and a drawing test (Sa^{c}ati *et al*., 1961, pp. 88–91). Notably, all interlocutors were female prisoners at al-Qanatir prison located on the outskirts and to the north of Cairo, the majority of whom were between 15 and 24 and had been charged for a variety of legal offenses including prostitution, incitement to debauchery, vagabondage, drunkenness, and illicit sexual intercourse (Sa^{c}ati *et al.*, 1961, p. 94).

The clinical study aimed to know prostitutes in their Cairo setting, describing their social and psychological characteristics and the factors responsible for their experience, in order to provide a general picture of sexual behaviors (Sa^{c}ati *et al*., 1961, p. 87). The enormous discursive weight of the survey, with its legion of social workers, sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, bears the mark of the postcolonial state and its attendant figure of the expert, who renders 'the prostitute' transparent in the name of the postcolonial good. And yet the subaltern female remains doubly exploited, persisting as an object of knowledge in the shuttling from empire to nation, and yet again in the shuttling from the text of the survey to metropolitan theory. The survey lingers '*in decolonized terrain*' as an exemplar of

11. The 'prostitute' is an overdetermined figure, of course. On the struggle between colonial administrators and Egyptian nationalist reformers over prostitution, see Hammad (2014); on the centrality of prostitution to the history of modern Egypt, see Biancani (2018); and on the wider context of prostitution in the Middle East, see Kozma (2017).

postcolonial reason, complicating any notion of decolonization as a simple reversal of colonial exploitation (Spivak, 1989–90, pp. 105–6).

Together with Sami-Ali, the clinical study included other notable psychologists, such as Abd al-Minaᶜm al-Miliji, a co-translator of Freud's autobiography, who had analyzed the Rorschach tests that had been administered to 30 prostitutes. Al-Miliji interpreted the responses to the ink blots as follows: the prostitutes were unable to represent the human body as normally constituted and capable of moving without hindrance; mechanical movements prevailed over spontaneous ones; and discussions of fragmented, scattered, or shredded bodies were frequent, as well as bodies whose parts were abnormally coalesced or mixed. In the place of the typically anodyne interpretations of the ink blots – a woman dancing, two men shaking hands – one found instead a decapitated body, a woman without limbs, a bleeding body, two men fighting, and so on. This al-Miliji took to indicate the morbid interest the prostitutes manifested in the place of their own body, a place of disturbance, a sexuality that disturbed normative visions of the human body – an observation that he found confirmed in Sami-Ali's drawing test (al-Miliji, 1958, pp. 102–3).

Like the ink blots, Sami-Ali's drawing test shifted registers from the large-scale prism of the sociological to the subjective and intersubjective register of the psychoanalytic (Saᶜati *et al*., 1961, p. 91). Sami-Ali created, administered, and interpreted the drawing test, which entailed the drawing of four items, each with symbolic weight: a plant, an animal, a human, and a building. The test was based in large part on Françoise Dolto's psychoanalytic work with children, in which drawing and modeling constituted the 'royal road to a child's unconscious' (Sami-Ali, 1958, p. 107; Hall, 2009, p. 118).[12]

For Dolto, drawings provided access to *l'image inconsciente du corps*, the unconscious image of the body, which is 'not just a representation of sensations, but is affected by language and desire, by satisfaction and frustration, by losses and ghosts' (Morgan, 2009, p. 80). It is 'the symbolic incarnation in the unconscious of the desiring subject' (Dolto, cited in Morgan, 2009, p. 81). The unconscious image of the body refers here not to the body's proprioceptive relation to the world, but rather to the psychic history of the desiring subject. 'It is the living synthesis of the emotional experiences of the desiring subject, the unconscious memory of lived relational experiences, both narcissistic and interrelational,' and thus is in keeping with Freud's discussion in the *Three Essays* (Boukobza, 2009, p. 140). In the interaction between the analyst and the analysand and in the practice of drawing and speaking about it, a transferential relationship is established, one in which 'the unconscious image of the body can be recognized' (Hall, 2009, p. 121).

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12. Françoise Dolto (1908–88) was a French physician, psychoanalyst, and member of Jacques Lacan's circle. Her work and writing focused on child-rearing and education and emphasized the unconscious image of the body, linked to psychic history rather than material physicality. On Dolto, see Hall *et al.* (2009).

Following this method, Sami-Ali allowed each subject the freedom to draw, and to spontaneously explain each drawing, which was then interpreted according to psychoanalytic principles. Unlike Dolto's work, Sami-Ali's could be categorized as analytical rather than curative. While his in-depth analysis was not included in the final report, a summary of his findings was published in a 1958 article on 'Prostitutes' Drawings.' Taking the ink blots as his point of departure, Sami-Ali noted that they referenced the human body, and the body of the prostitute in particular, and that one might hypothesize that the psychosocial behavior of the prostitute relied upon a disturbed (*mudtarab*) image (*tasawwur*) of one's own body (Sami-Ali, 1958, p. 104). The drawings, then, were meant to test this hypothesis.

The Imaginary: Drawing and the Embodied Subject

What can Sami-Ali teach us, and what can we learn from his subjects, who after all were not his analysands? Significantly, what can we learn while at the same time acknowledging that within Sami-Ali's *oeuvre* the extraction of surplus value from incarcerated third world prostitutes was located in the production of metropolitan theory? And yet, the case studies retain an abundance, a symbolic excess that cannot be contained, certainly not by the form of the survey, nor by the so-called free drawings and interview in prison, nor even by our own analytical reconstructions.

In what follows, I attempt to reconstitute Sami-Ali's clinical work *alongside* the neglected figures he observed, in particular, populations that psychoanalysis seldom addresses – illiterate individuals, prostitutes, and incarcerated subjects. In so doing, I ask: What if, following Donald Winnicott, we attempted to restore the simple fact that 'patients teach us these things,' despite the distressing convention that one must 'give these views as if they were [one's] own' (Winnicott, 1963, p. 182)? What if, in other words, we no longer understood the prostitutes as merely objects of knowledge, but rather as co-creators of psychoanalytic theory within the clinical encounter itself?

Conceptually, the drawings were meant to uncover the relation the body holds to the psyche and to the world, in order to elaborate how one lives one's body and the world ('vivre son corps,' 'vivre le monde'), such that a transformation or deformation in the image of the body appears as a transformation or deformation in the image of the world (Sami-Ali, 1958, p. 107). But here, Sami-Ali encountered his first resistance; in many instances, the prostitutes refused to draw human forms, using their difficulty as a pretext. In yet other instances, the drawings combined incongruous elements or changed the proportions of objects or body parts. Initially interpreting this as indexical of the fact that the body had become for these women a symbol of psychic struggle and of fragile and contradictory human relations with the other, Sami-Ali nevertheless concludes by asking whether the distortions and omissions in the drawings are in effect unique to the prostitutes themselves (Sami-Ali, 1958, pp. 106–8).

We should linger upon this question, which is in reality a disturbance, an intuition that these fragmented, disorganized, shredded bodily imagos were both unique to the prostitutes, and at the same time indexical of the ways in which primitive infantile experience, emotional histories, and archaic objects all come together in the unconscious image of the human body – what Lacan terms 'imagos of the fragmented body' that characterize 'a specific relationship between … man and his body' (Lacan, 1948, p. 13). Later, in his theoretical works on *De la projection* (1970) and *L'Espace imaginaire* (1974), Sami-Ali will explore the relationship between the embodied subject, space, and the unconscious by returning to these case studies.

What Sami-Ali refers to as the space of fantasy or a *réalité fantasmatique* emerges out of the blankness of the rectangular sheet of paper. The drawings function as a latent projection of what Merleau-Ponty terms 'one's own body' (*le corps propre*), defined as the lived body, not the body as an object, but 'the body that is necessarily lived *as* mine,' 'the body that I live as my own' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945], pp. xlviii–xlix, 74, 512, n.6). One's own body does not face the rectangle, in the same way that 'I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body' ('je suis mon corps,' Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945], pp. 151, 527, n.10). Sami-Ali synthesizes the phenomenological and the psychoanalytic, incorporating Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'one's own body' and Dolto's 'unconscious image of the body,' as well as Ibn ᶜArabi's ontological claim that the 'reality of imagination is to embody that which is not properly a body …' and to 'sublimate that which is corporeal' (cited in Chittick, 1988, p. 54). The drawings function as the imaginary embodiment of psychic life and provide avenues to the unconscious.

What, then, are the modalities that structure the space of fantasy and the embodiment of the subject in the encounter with the rectangular sheet? Sami-Ali categorizes the case studies in terms of several, at times overlapping, approaches. In the most familiar, the sheet functions in the same manner as the dreamwork and the drawing '*is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish*' (Freud, 1900, p. 160). The sheet is a medium (in the spiritualist sense) through which desire may be expressed, but not in a straightforward fashion. Rather, in the act of drawing a blockage may occur which will interrupt or arrest the associative process, leaving some drawings unfinished or with peculiarities otherwise difficult to explain.

For example, a subject draws a human face with a large mouth and then crosses it out; the redaction is replaced at first by a star and then a fruit cart (see Figure 1). In a somewhat archetypal fashion Sami-Ali interprets the crossed-out face and its redaction into an inanimate object (a cart–forbidden fruit) as expressing the negation of an incestuous desire (Sami-Ali, 1974, pp. 89–90). Another example demonstrates an imaginary space in which the dynamic polarity between the inside and the outside (a central feature of projection, according to Sami-Ali) is expressed through a series of similitudes radiating from an original tree motif – bananas, a miscarriage, a woman devouring her husband (see Figure 2).

All, according to Sami-Ali, are projections emanating from a primordial body, an eroticized lived body (Sami-Ali, 1974, pp. 90–4). Importantly, this is not a *Vorstellung*, a mental representation that is then projected outwards; rather it is more akin to a bodily schema that is unconsciously embodied through the medium of the page.[13]

In what may be the most intriguing examples, projection takes place through what André Green will later term the work of the negative, and absence becomes a generative space where something can emerge (Green, 1999).[14] Rather than a projection that summons the visible to arise where it does not exist, the projection summons an emptiness or a void (Sami-Ali, 1974, p. 96), through the familiar tactics of condensation and displacement. To take several examples, a sketch of a man is turned upside down and becomes a pot of flowers; the absence of the human form is a negation which enables the visible to exist as such (see Figure 3); a human form is emptied out of its insides (see Figure 4); a child is discussed as an angel that cannot be represented, a spectral absence, a transmogrified absent presence (see Figure 5) (Sami-Ali, 1974, pp. 97–107). Sami-Ali reads virtually all of these examples through the primal structuring of incest fantasies: the prostitute's angel-child incarnates the desire for paternal incest, which is spiritualized through a *haj* painting and a reference to her father's pilgrimages in order to abolish sexual and aggressive Oedipal impulses (see Figure 5) (Sami-Ali, 1974, p. 107).

In one case study, which Sami-Ali discusses in two separate texts, a prostitute provides what he terms an associative case history, recounting her carefree childhood in the countryside, games with her younger sister, the early death of her mother, and the subsequent devotion of her father. She relates a dream she had shortly before her arrest: she is sitting on her father's lap and he penetrates her sexually, then offers her a cake that he makes her promise to keep. Her comrade tells her the dream portends a pregnancy or a coming misfortune (which she interprets as her subsequent arrest). Her drawings are likewise dramatic. She stages a scene: a fellow prisoner is disguised as a ghost, her face covered in soot, playing the tambourine. But the manner in which the figure is rendered is noteworthy: the thick contoured lines, the green coloring, all evoke woody vines that uniformly enclose an empty body surrounded by a collar (see Figure 4). The dream, Sami-Ali notes, helps decode the drawing as the effacement of a sexuality intimately linked to incestuous desire (Sami-Ali, 1970, pp. 78–80; 1974, pp. 103–5). He interprets her drawing in which not just her sexual organs, but also her entire body is replaced by a plant as: 'My face is horrible, I am not desirable. Besides, I do not feel

13. For a discussion of 'non-representational approaches to the unconscious,' see Kozyreva (2016).

14. Due to constraints of space, I cannot elaborate upon the other modalities discussed by Sami-Ali for structuring fantasies – mirroring, superimposition, and geometrical projection. See Sami-Ali (1974, pp. 107–20).

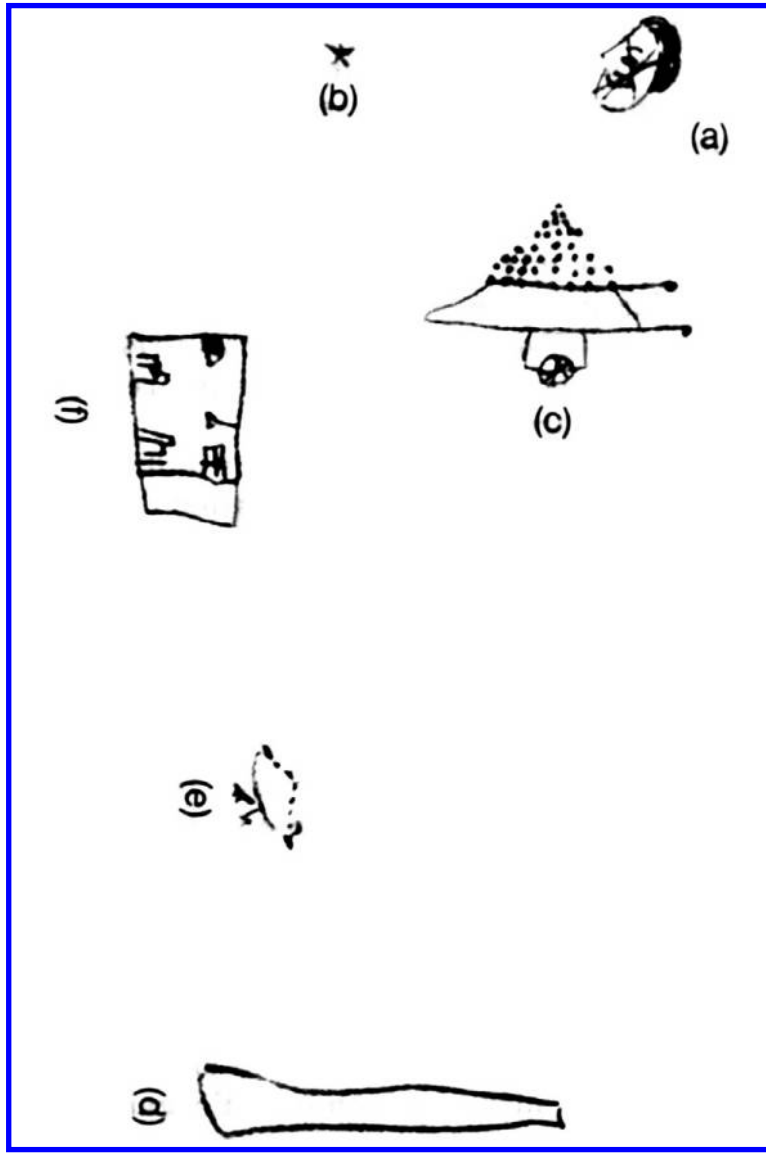

Figure 1. **Originally Figure 1 in Sami-Ali, *L'Espace imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 88. © Éditions Gallimard. All copyrights reserved. Unless authorized, any use of *L'Espace imaginaire* other than for individual and private consultation is prohibited. www.gallimard.fr**

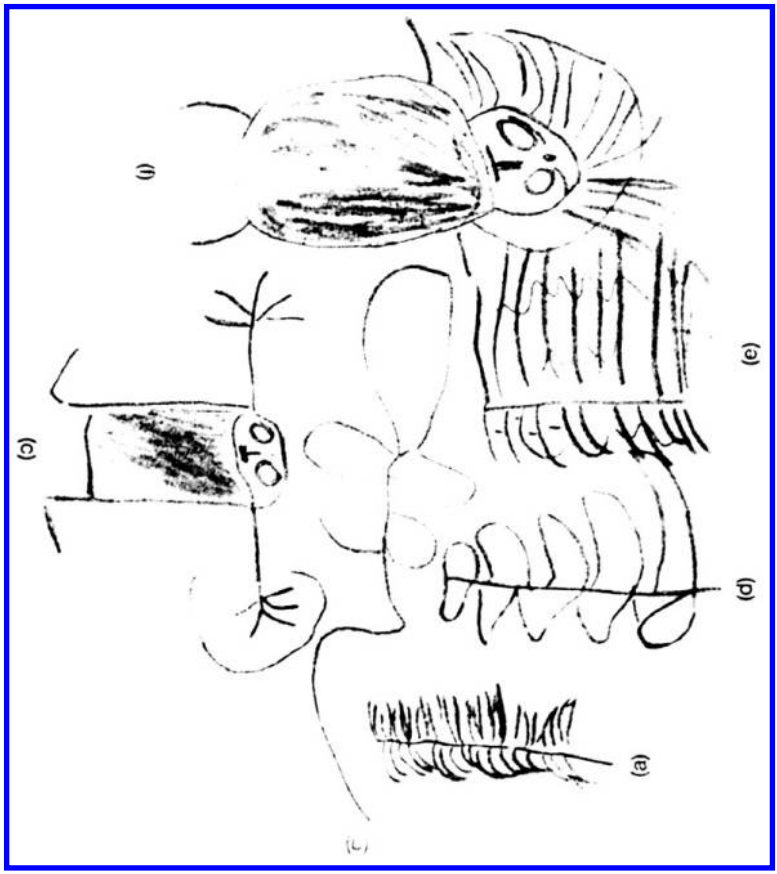

Figure 2. **Originally Figure 2 in Sami-Ali, *L'Espace imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 91. © Éditions Gallimard. All copyrights reserved. Unless authorized, any use of *L'Espace imaginaire* other than for individual and private consultation is prohibited. www.gallimard.fr**

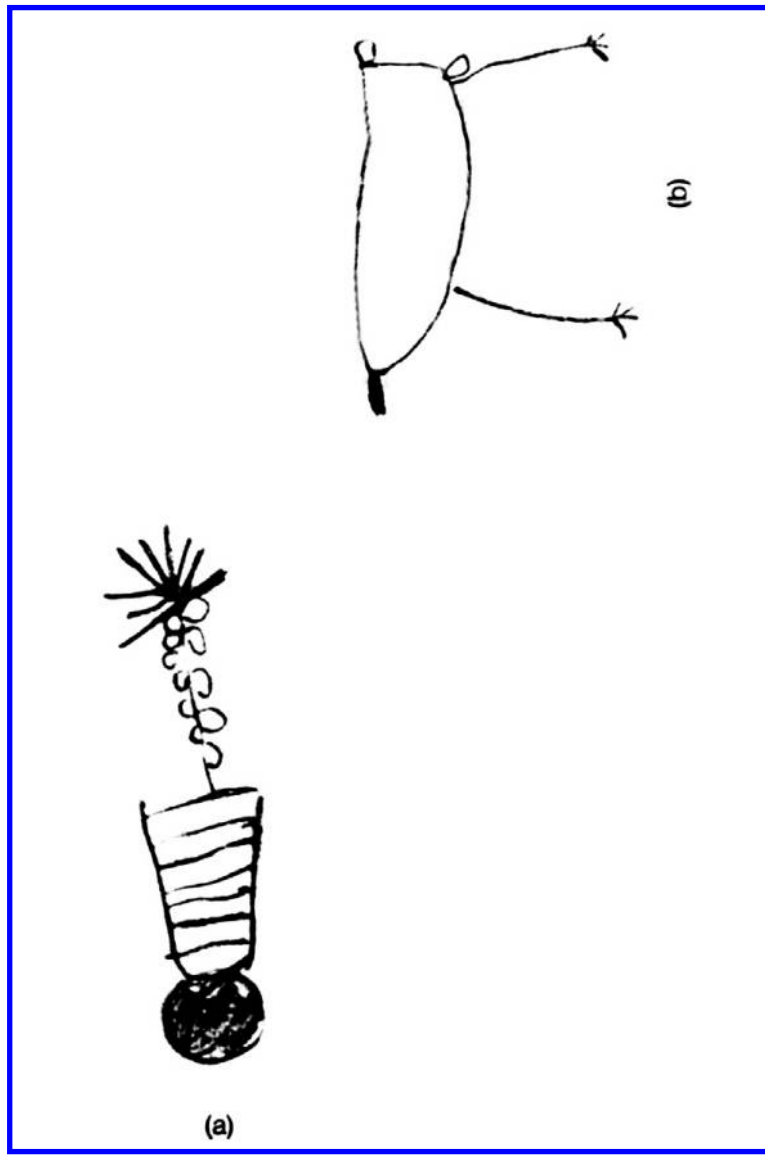

Figure 3. **Originally Figure 4 in Sami-Ali, *L'Espace imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 97. © Éditions Gallimard. All copyrights reserved. Unless authorized, any use of *L'Espace imaginaire* other than for individual and private consultation is prohibited. www.gallimard.fr**

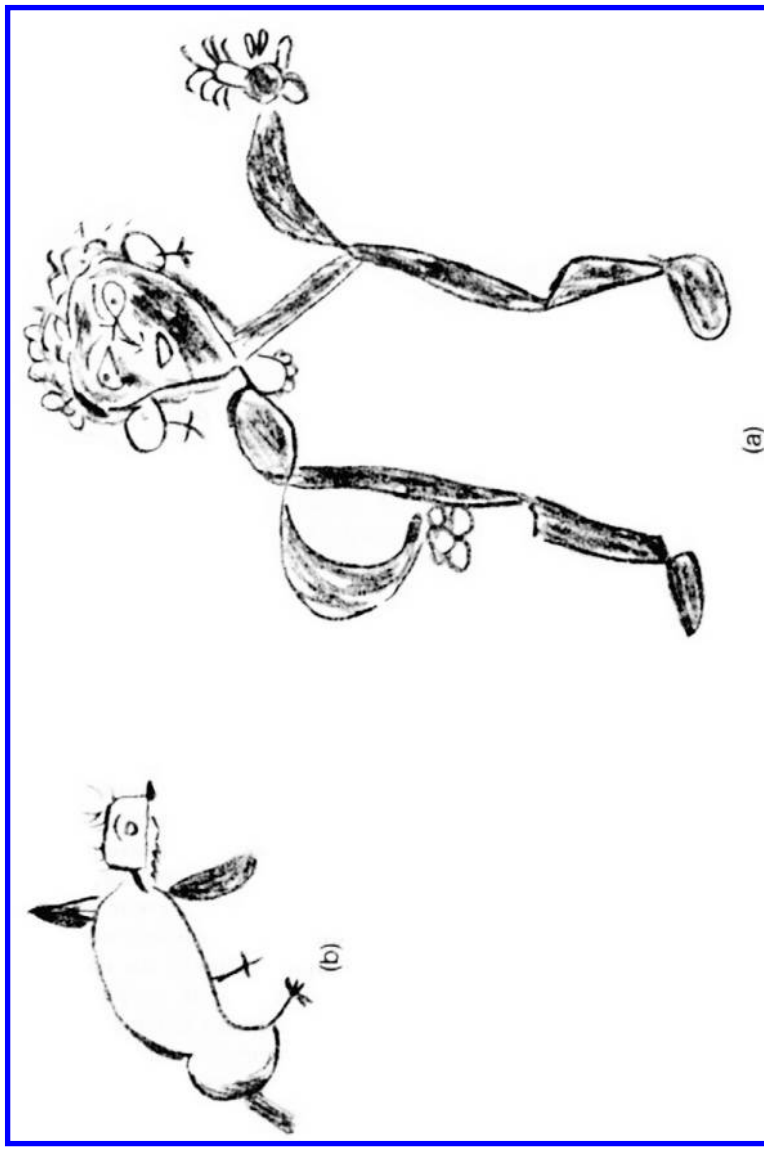

Figure 4. **Originally Figure 7 in Sami-Ali, *L'Espace imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 104. © Éditions Gallimard. All copyrights reserved. Unless authorized, any use of *L'Espace imaginaire* other than for individual and private consultation is prohibited. www.gallimard.fr**

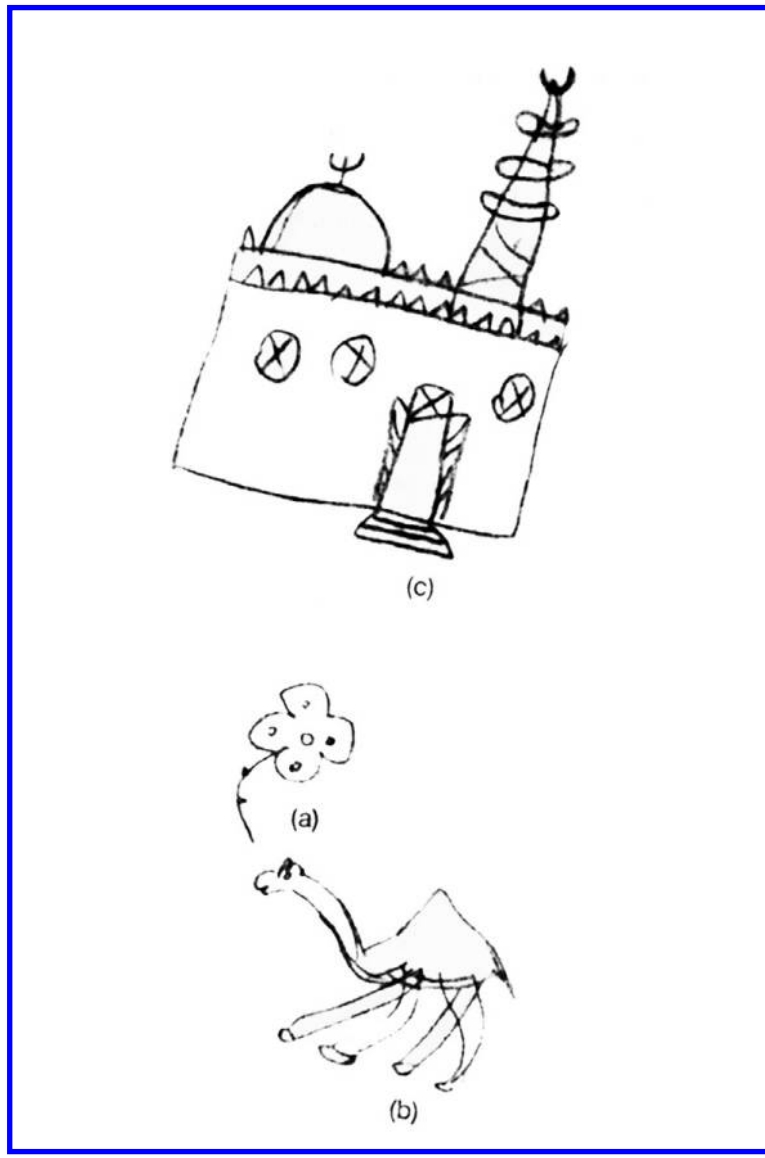

Figure 5. **Originally Figure 8 in Sami-Ali, *L'Espace imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 106. © Éditions Gallimard. All copyrights reserved. Unless authorized, any use of *L'Espace imaginaire* other than for individual and private consultation is prohibited. www.gallimard.fr**

anything, I'm not even a woman' (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 80). This is ultimately, he argues, what she strives to signify by the image of the vegetal body.

If the subject's vine woman indicates, for Sami-Ali, a negation of a guilty sexuality, her second image of a kite (bird) which hovers over the prison, and the raptors with which she wishes to identify herself, represent the negation of the body – what we might term a becoming-non-body or a becoming-vegetal of the prostitute or simply the difficulty of having or being a body (see Figure 4). For Sami-Ali, the vine woman expresses a guilty sexuality and the kite a fantasy of escaping from the flesh. The unconscious fantasies of childhood were repeated in the drawing sessions. It was, Sami-Ali later explained, in the transference between analyst and analysand, in which the patient unknowingly repeated with the analyst an element repressed from her childhood, that the forgotten past intruded into the present of the individual. And, thus, it is practices and comportments (e.g. crossing out a drawing, garrulous speech), rather than memories, that become the locus of a repressed past (Sami-Ali, 1970, pp. 78–80; 1974, pp. 103–5; cf. 1963, pp. 18–19).

Sami-Ali postulates that these modalities of drawing (repressing, voiding, mirroring, mapping onto) constitute latent projections of one's own body, a process of construction 'that merges with the very fabric of vision' (Sami-Ali, 1974, p. 121). Within the drawings, form and content derive from lived bodily experience and the gesture of drawing now has the dual function of manifesting the visible and of suggesting what is beyond the visible (Sami-Ali, 1974, p. 120). The very form of corporeal life is conjoined to the representation of the world – right and left, top and bottom, front and rear, inside and outside – as in the reproduction of bodily hexis within the drawings of the prostitutes (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 217; 1974, p. 87). If 'the space of fantasy is wholly delivered to desire' within the transference of drawing, 'the fulfillment of desire is not confined to creating an image' (Sami-Ali, 1974, pp. 120–1). As we have seen, it may entail erasures in whole or in part.

The Caesura of Interpretation

In thinking about the visual representation of unconscious desire as a void, lacuna, gap, or emptiness, the prostitutes' drawings return us to Freud's discussion of the hallucinatory mode of satisfaction peculiar to both infancy and the dreamwork (Sami-Ali, 1963, p. 24; 1970, p. 176). Yet in place of reading such gaps and redactions as the symbolic representations of unconscious incestuous desires, I suggest a conceptual shift.

What if we were to depart from the *content* of Sami-Ali's interpretations and our own epistemophilic impulses to render these subjects transparent? What if we focused instead on the *form* of the spatio-temporal cut initiated by the gaps (the hesitations, silent gestures, and phantasmatic reveries) that took place while drawing? By focusing on the gaps and empty spaces of the drawings, the cut and caesura of self-disclosure and splitting are no longer exclusively the sign of an infantile Oedipus, nor of a secret that hides the absolute truth of the desiring

subject, but rather of something *other*, something that opens up onto a constitutive ontological gap through which the desire of the subject as a lack is expressed.

I am interested here in how the *act* of drawing suggests new ways of thinking about the imaginary, the unconscious, and the body while offering theoretical insights into the relationship between reality and imagination, all through the prism of sexuality. In many of these examples, it is the body, through its *gestures*, which provides interpretive clues: hesitation ('I can't draw,' an unsure hand); changing the orientation of the paper by turning the page horizontally or vertically to complete a new drawing; bursting into tears and turning the paper upside down (neutralizing an affect that might otherwise overwhelm); drawing in an act of reverie; a ludic interlude – all demonstrate the phantasmatic nature of drawing in the embodied subject.

The silent gestures, corporeal hesitations, and movements of the subjects in question, may of course be viewed as individual acts of refusal. However, rather than a liberal feminist signal that would reclaim these gestures as the agentive acts of refusal of an undivided subject, I parse these gestures and hesitations alongside Winnicott's claim that the subject has the 'right not to communicate … a protest … to the frightening fantasy of being infinitely exploited. In another language this would be the fantasy of being eaten or swallowed up' (Winnicott, 1963, p. 179).

Stated more directly, Sami-Ali represents and speaks for the prostitutes while claiming to render visible and transparent the operations not only of consciousness but also of unconsciousness. By contrast, if we linger in the silent gestures, empty spaces, and aporias of interpretation, we acknowledge the sexed subaltern subject as 'irretrievably heterogeneous,' while endeavoring to encircle 'an inaccessible blankness, circumscribed by an interpretable text' in which 'the woman's body is the last instance, it is elsewhere' (Spivak, 1988, pp. 285, 294; 1989–90, p. 111). To do so is not to fill absence with the plenitude of an agent of desire, nor to access the unconscious of a purportedly undivided subject within the fullness of speech. Rather, it is to dwell in the archival and esthetic artifacts that reveal the condition of (im)possibility that structured psychoanalysis in the postcolony and that fracture the space of encounter – between the metropolitan postcolonial intellectual and the sexed subaltern female and between the analyst and the analysand.

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ABSTRACT

This article imagines psychoanalysis geopolitically by way of an exploratory foray into the *oeuvre* of Sami-Ali, the Arabic translator of Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, author of a large body of original psychoanalytic writings, and translator of the poetry of Sufi masters. Taken together, his writings enable a critical rethinking of the role of the imaginary, the mechanisms of projection, and the epistemology of non-knowledge in the workings of the unconscious. Significantly, such a rethinking of key psychoanalytic concepts drew upon the Sufi metaphysics of the imagination of Ibn ᶜArabi. Yet such theoretical work cannot be understood outside of its wider clinical context and the conditions of (im)possibility that structure psychoanalysis within the postcolony. Reconstituting Sami-Ali's early theoretical writings alongside his work with the long-forgotten figures he observed, incarcerated female prostitutes in 1950s Cairo, I argue that his clinical encounters constituted the ground of his theorization of the imaginary within the

embodied subject. Attending to the work of translation inherent within psychoanalytic practice – whether from Sigmund Freud's own German writings into French or Arabic, or from clinical practice into theoretical discourse – helps us conceptualize psychoanalysis as taking place *otherwise* at the intersection of multiple epistemological and ethical traditions.

Keywords: imaginary, projection, non-knowledge, embodied subject, Sami-Ali, Freud, Ibn ᶜArabi, unconscious image of the body, clinical encounter