“The Harem Revealed” and the Islamic-French Family: Aline de Lens and a French Woman’s Orient in Lyautey’s Morocco

Ellen Amster

Abstract Aline Réveillaud de Lens (1881–1925) became a celebrated novelist, painter, patroness of native arts, and ethnographer during the French Protectorate in Morocco. The wife of a colonial officer, de Lens adopted Moroccan children and used them as ethnographic material for her orientalist novels. Her biography illustrates the culture of sociability between French colonials and Moroccans created by Resident General Hubert Lyautey’s military protectorate government (1912–25) and the paradox of Lyautey’s “respect” for Muslim culture. Unlike other women visitors to the harem (Edith Wharton, Lady Drummond Hay, Mary Wortley Montague, et al.), de Lens claimed to be a demi-musulmane herself and attempted to create a Franco-Muslim female social world and family. The simultaneity of her private journal and public art reveals the relationship between a woman’s lived reality in French North Africa and the production of orientalist fantasy. De Lens may have created a “woman’s Orient,” but it was one particular to herself.

The Frenchwoman Aline Réveillaud de Lens created several careers for herself in French Protectorate Morocco between 1913 and 1925. She was a celebrated novelist, painter of the harems, patroness of the native arts, and woman ethnographer, adopting as well several Moroccan children and transforming their lives into orientalist novels, Derrière les vieux murs en ruines (1922), L'étrange aventure d'Aguida (1925), and Le harem entr'ouvert (1920). In these novels written as “personal journals,” de Lens represents herself as a “demi-musulmane” living the magic of The Thousand and One Nights. Unlike the travel accounts by female Anglophone visitors to the harem (Edith Wharton, Lady Drummond Hay, Mary Wortley Montague, et al.), de Lens claimed to enter harem society and become a Franco-Islamic composite herself. So “infinitely real” was the Morocco of her writing that Marcel Prévost speculated


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that “A. de Lens” must be a Moroccan “lady” become French by edu-
cation.1 De Lens created herself as a character in her orientalist fantasies, an
attempt to construct her subjectivity through orientalist discourse.

De Lens’s career reflects the unique opportunities created for
women by the policies of Resident General Hubert Lyautey (1912–
25). In colonial Algeria, which became three départements of the French
Republic after 1871, the law segregated French citizens from Muslims.2
Jeanne Bowlan has argued that this legal apartheid translated to a
social hierarchy of French and Muslim womanhood.3 As Ann Laura
Stoler has demonstrated, European women often constituted a bound-
ary between colonizer and colonized. In colonial Indochina, European
women functioned as barriers in miscegenation laws, urban segrega-
tion, styles of dress, and the household economy.4 By contrast, the
French Residence in Morocco (Résidence de la République Française
au Maroc) was a protectorate government; Lyautey thus depended on
informal relationships with Moroccan elites to formulate policy. He
encouraged a culture of Franco-Moroccan sociability; colonial officers
dined with Moroccan officials as their wives entertained the women of
the harems. The home of Aline Réveillaud de Lens and André Réveill-
laud was an intercultural salon of Moroccan ministers, Young Fassi
nationalists, and French artists and dignitaries. In French Morocco the
home served as a meeting place of French and native elites and as an
incubator of French colonial policy.

The style of rule in French Morocco opened a greater field of
action for European women than that available to them in British
India or French Algeria. As Hamid Irbouh has argued, the Protecto-
rate executed native beaux arts and education policies through French
women.5 Lyautey enlisted French women as informal agents to circum-
vent the legal limits of the Protectorate, for women could enter Mus-
lim homes officially forbidden to the colonial state.6 Franciscan nuns

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1 Marcel Prévost, preface to L’étrange aventure d’Aguida, by Aline de Lens (Paris, 1925), i-viii.
See also Prévost, “La vraie romancière du Maroc: Aline de Lens,” La revue de France, June 15, 1925,
706–9.

2 E.g., David Prochaska, Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870–1920 (Cambridge,
1990). See also Patricia M. E. Lorcin, Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial
Algeria (London, 1995).

3 Jeanne M. Bowlan, “Civilizing Gender Relations in Algeria: The Paradoxical Case of Marie
Bugéja, 1919–1939,” in Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Col-

4 Ann Laura Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule
(Berkeley, CA, 2002).

5 Hamid Irbouh, “Women’s Vocational Schools: The French Organise the Feminine Milieu,” in Art in

6 Ellen Amster, Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco,
1877–1956 (Austin, TX, forthcoming).
served as nurses in colonial hospitals, single women directed embroidery workshops for native girls, and Lyautey opened a call for female physicians at the Ecole de Médecine in 1913. By contrast, European women in India and Algeria lived segregated from the native population and excluded from the colonial state; as Antoinette Burton has demonstrated, British feminists asserted their place in the empire by claiming the secluded native woman as the “white woman’s burden.”

French feminists in Algeria demanded human rights for the “oppressed” Muslim woman on behalf of all women in the French Republic. Yet as Julia Clancy-Smith shows, such advocacy was rooted neither in female solidarity nor in respect for Islam. The French feminists Hubertine Auclert and Marie Bugéja believed that Muslim women’s “liberation” was possible only by adopting French language, the rule of secular law, and Western civilization. As Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon wrote of Algerian girls at a French school, “Such was the human material which Mme. Luce dared to conceive of as capable of being raised to something approaching the condition of her European sister.” Feminists like Bodichon, Auclert, and Bugéja did not speak Arabic and did not have Muslim women friends.

By contrast, Aline de Lens suggests the possibility of a true Franco-Islamic female community in Lyautey’s Morocco. De Lens lived in the native Arab madina (city) among Arab neighbors and adopted orphaned Moroccan children. She spoke Arabic fluently, dressed in Moroccan clothes, and socialized in Moroccan harem society. Like Resident General Lyautey, de Lens respected the traditional forms of Islamic society and opposed French education for Muslim women. Unlike the male orientalist writers Pierre Loti and Richard Burton, who entered North Africa as a temporary theatrical field, de Lens abandoned her social identity as a bourgeois woman in France to reinvent herself in French Morocco. She sought to merge her art with lived experience, a vision to which she devoted her life and fortune. She willed her diaries to the Protectorate library, and her body lies buried in a Meknes cemetery.

But can the European female subject establish a voice independent...
of male orientalist hegemony? Mary Louise Roberts has argued that fin de siècle French women played with multiple discourses in performative “disruptive acts,” deploying a vocabulary of liberal, feminist, and medical discourses without being trapped by them. Mary Louise Pratt has suggested that the British traveler Mary Kingsley cobbled together male colonial discourses to make her own female “meaning-making apparatus,” thus reconfiguring her gender in African travel writing. But as Judith Butler has written, gender does not exist independently of society; the individual reproduces social discourses in a constant, evolving performance that defines private and public selves. Furthermore, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg cautions that dehumanizing discourse can never function as the basis of true human subjectivity. Orientalism, the European trope of the irrational, depraved, and childlike native “other,” served both to justify colonial conquest and to circumscribe the subjectivity of colonized peoples in Asia and North Africa. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has suggested that colonialism defined Europeans as well as natives, for European feminist individualism developed largely against the irrational “native female”: “What is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and interpellation of the subject not only as individual but as ‘individualist.’”

De Léns leaves behind a complex body of personal and public texts: journals, letters, short stories, paintings, and novels. Her private diaries offer a ragged journey through desire, power, racism, self-loathing, homoeroticism, depression, and illness. Her life suggests the constraints orientalism imposed on female subjectivity, for both colonizer and colonized.

Gender and the Limits of a Woman’s Artistic Career in France

De Léns was born as one of five children on March 2, 1881, to the wealthy Parisian bourgeois de Léns family. Her social world provided the officers for the French colonial service; her cousin Jean de Longchamps-

13 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York, 1992), 213–16.
17 Quoted in Cherry, Beyond the Frame, 60–61.
Deville served as consul in Shanghai, Bangkok, and Barcelona, and her parents’ friends lived from investments in the Antilles. The daughter and granddaughter of physicians, she grew up with servants in a Paris apartment, summers at the country home in Criqueboeuf, and a villa in Versailles. As a shy, intense girl of sixteen, she learned the importance of taste to a woman’s social power: “Climbing the stairs at Madame Valtat’s, I recognized Germaine Soufflot marvelously beautiful in her toilette of the latest fashion, and I understood immediately the great distance that separated her ease and elegance from my timidity and simple little girl’s dress.”

But her physician father and Catholic mother had little appreciation for aesthetics. They laughed at her “imagination,” and she fled in tears from the dinner table. De Lens found refuge in a personal diary, a literary outlet she developed from the keeping of Catholic homily books. These early journals (1902–9) are as stiff and self-conscious as the frowning faces in the photographs pasted to their pages. A raw desire for self-knowledge shows between the socially acceptable observations, “I want what I write here to be true, to be me.” De Lens struggled all her life between a search for authenticity and a crippling self-criticism. She internalized the judgment of French society and applied it ruthlessly to herself: “I reread some pages that I wrote a few months ago, and I am crushed by their banal stupidity. . . . I am more afraid of myself than others; I care more about my own opinion than theirs, because I am more severe toward my words and deeds. . . . I have an exaggerated self-love; I fear criticism and mockery in general, but I fear myself in particular.”

She studied painting at the Académie Julien in the Rue Fontaine in Paris (fig. 1), exhibited at the École des Beaux-Arts, and frequented the Salle des Artistes Françaises. Her photographic eye for detail won modest praise, and she sold a few watercolors and embossed leathers. With her first earnings she reflected giddily, “When I am a real artist. . . . I will have a position like a man.” But she was disappointed by Marcelle Zynaire, a feminist novelist who insisted to Le Figaro that she was “a woman, not a writer.” De Lens’s professors themselves dismissed women as serious artists. She channeled her fury into art: “Every day from eight to noon and one to five, I shall take the veil, cloister myself, marry myself to drawing and painting. What joy!”

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18 Archives of the Bibliothèque Générale de Rabat, Morocco (hereafter BGR), Aline de Lens Private Journal, May 22, 1902. The journal and all cited correspondence are found in the De Lens Papers unless otherwise noted.
20 Ibid., Feb. 20, 1908.
21 Ibid., Oct. 10, 1902.
De Lens thus developed a unique attitude to marriage, family, and spirituality. As a girl she attended convent school, which she experienced as a prison. She wrestled with Catholic dogma when she fell in love with an awkward female classmate and emerged from a two-year existential crisis embittered and agnostic. Without God, she sought a new path to spiritual transcendence through the love of another human being: “Today I dream . . . [of] love, the most intense and splendid aspiration of the soul toward perfection and beauty. . . . It is the union of two souls that complete each other; the absolute understanding of two imperfect beings who find in each other the will and exaltation necessary to try and attain perfection for the other.” From Catholicism, de Lens idealized a platonic love divorced from physical sexuality. But as her friends married, she found herself increasingly alienated and alone: “Isn’t it necessary to leave palette and brush for cooking and sewing? . . . Why can’t I understand that, why does the calm happiness of family fill me with intolerable despair?”

22 Ibid., June 29, 1909.
De Lens found an escape in foreign travel. When she visited her diplomat cousin in Spain in 1908, the vibrant countryside “ripped her from her lugubrious thoughts.” In a tower of the Alhambra, she floated above magical fountains like being of pure spirit, “a soul that admires, senses, vibrates, drinks of joy and light!” She painted bright tableaux of Gypsy girls, and her diary lingers over the “coquettish black eyelashes, tiny white teeth, and rounded bronze flesh” of the fourteen-year-old “delicious little savage” who posed for her. In Spain, she discovered the erotic pleasure of painting exotic young girls: “Unconsciously I let myself be enchanted to the core of my being by the charm of a country that is not my own. . . . And now it’s France that astounds and deceives me, it’s my country that seems a land of exile.”

De Lens’s real escape came through her marriage to André Réveillaud, a man six years her junior and the son of a Parisian député. Destined for the colonial service, Réveillaud was a suitable match and shared her extravagant sensibilities. He read her intimate journal and surprised her by embracing her true self: “I feel myself [become] better, simply from having read whole pages without thinking of myself. . . . One feels you vibrate, understand, and live.” Réveillaud was willing to realize her ideal platonic love and agreed to a celibate marriage. At her request, he promised “to kill her if ever he felt himself at the point of death.”

Their marriage on April 18, 1911, made de Lens a bride of thirty and Réveillaud a husband of twenty-four. In May 1911, the couple moved to Tunis, where Réveillaud was posted as a stagiaire commissioner of the native tribunals. The couple relocated to Morocco in 1914 when Réveillaud was made inspector at the courts in Rabat, then moved to Meknes when he became the contrôleur civil of the city (1915) and retired from state service to become a private lawyer (1921–25).

It would be difficult to argue that de Lens was typical or representative of French women; she developed nonconformist ideas of art, religion, sex, and work at odds with the conventions of the French bourgeoisie. She fled French metropolitan gender constraints for individual freedom in North Africa. Through orientalism she sought to blend art, career, spiritual purity, and exotic aesthetics to create a unique identity for herself, one transcending the definitions of the French bourgeoisie. Yet by inventing a woman’s Orient, de Lens was ultimately contained by

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23 Ibid., Mar. 1, 1909.
24 Ibid., June 11, 1909.
its colonial contradictions, in her private relationships and in her own identity.

**Art and Life in North Africa: Tunisia, 1911–1913**

Feminist scholars have suggested that women experienced and produced the Islamic world differently than did men. There are “Women’s Orients” and “Workers’ Orients” depending on the identity of the writer. Billie Melman has argued that European women approached the Middle East “outside the main location of metropolitan knowledge and power,” opening the possibility for “women’s worlds.” De Lens circulated in a mainly female world of family, sexuality, children, and the household economy. But she did not evaluate the harem through idioms of French bourgeois womanhood: Catholic faith, procreation, ladies’ charity, and the family home. Nor did she appropriate a universalist language of feminism or women’s liberation. Rather, she selectively adopted male orientalist stereotypes to redefine herself and to escape the confines of metropolitan bourgeois gender.

When the Réveillaulds moved to Tunis in 1911, the couple spurned the European-built *ville nouvelle* in favor of residence in a former vizier’s palace in the Arab *madina*. De Lens had her Arab servants pose as models for her paintings; Baba Tahir, his jowial wife Shadliyya, and their eleven-year-old daughter Ḥabiba dressed in costumes to become a Tunisian bride, a sorceress preparing a love potion, and lovers in a secret rendezvous. Shadliyya cooked for the Réveillaulds and translated for de Lens in the harems. In the neighboring household of the bourgeois Muslim notable ʿUthmān sharif, the women invited her to weddings, taught her Arabic, took her to the *hammām* (public bath), and entertained her with sweets, clothes, and gossip. Laughing, they dressed her in a bride’s trousseau: bright pink sweater, lace white blouse, a bolero with gold coins, a pink coat with puffed sleeves, and a green satin pantaloons.

De Lens used her Tunisian experiences in 1911–13 to write *Le harem entr’ouvert* (1918), a series of discreet stories with clumsy orientalist stereotypes. She transforms her respectable neighbor into a sexual

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28 Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*.

29 Although I have been unable to locate her paintings, one of her works, *Dans la midah des ancêtres*, was displayed at a Parisian orientalist exhibition in Feb. 1913.

beast whose “habit” of arresting beautiful women at the hammâm and raping them was ended by the French. Now he frequents a French dancing girl at the casino and offers her the jewels of his noble Arab wife. The ‘Uthmân women are transformed into delicious prisoners with full pouting lips and moonlike faces; de Lens’s text dwells on voluptuous descriptions of their sexual violation. In most stories, Muslim women are so amoral, petty, sexual, and greedy that the harem is a war of all against all. The fictitious “Lella Zeina” is a noblewoman sent to the women’s prison Dar el Joued after a squabble with her cowife.\footnote{Her name, Zeina, may be a literary joke. Zine is colloquial Arabic in Tunisia for “beautiful,” but zina is classical Arabic for “adultery.”} She finishes a happy prostitute in a French brothel. After all, she says, “They or a husband, isn’t it always the same thing?” The themes of rape, lesbian orgy, and perversion suggest de Lens found an outlet for the unconscious desire that surfaces in her journals: “Arab women spoil very quickly; girls, they are often delicious. Ḥāhiba is a little goddess in bronze. . . . [Another girl] is a blond with large black eyes, a childish expression, a remarkable beauty.”\footnote{A. R. de Lens, “La dame de la rue Sidi ben Naím,” in \textit{Le harem entr’ouvert} (Paris, 1919), 124–32; BGR, Aline de Lens Private Journal, July 23, 1911.}

Though de Lens uses many stock images in her novels, she provides an alternate voice to male orientalists by presenting a woman’s perspective. De Lens attended weddings, all-female exorcism séances, funerals, and circumcisions and rode veiled to weddings on mule back dressed in caftan, bawābīj (slippers), and a traditional cloak, or ḥāik. The ethnography and material-culture details she collected add verisimilitude to her stories. While Eugène Delacroix’s 1839 painting \textit{Jewish Wedding in Morocco} offered native nuptials from an outsider’s vantage point, one of de Lens’s narrative portraits enters the bride’s own experiences of a Moroccan wedding. The reader feels the bride’s anxieties, the heavy makeup and headdress, the haggling with the in-laws, and the display of one’s virginity on a bloody pantaloons. De Lens lifted details for her stories directly from her private journal, giving them the vivid quality of paintings. Her April 1913 journal entry, describing a visit to the hammâm with the bridal party for ‘Āzīza, a daughter of the ‘Uthmân family, became the verbatim text for a story in \textit{Le harem}:

I had the time to see the strangest spectacle: in the middle of a thick fog . . . sixty naked women circulate, move, and speak. . . . Fat ones, thin ones, small, big, white, yellow, black. . . . Without doubt there must be pretty girls, but they disappear in the horrible mass. A phenomenal matron with an obesity worthy of exhibition in a carnival next to fleshless skeletons. . . . In truth, it was a spectacle of hell as
Gustave Doré might have imagined, rather than a vision of Muslim paradise.\textsuperscript{33}

Also in contrast to male orientalists, de Lens has the Muslim women in her fiction speak, and they speak for themselves. In his 1849 travelogue Gustave Flaubert uses the muteness of the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem to reduce her to a body and a machine.\textsuperscript{34} Yet in de Lens’s stories, Muslim women explain their worlds to the reader; De Lens collected actual women’s expressions to compose dialogue for her characters. She uses this literary device to transform Shaykh Si Abu ‘Alag, the Réveillauds’ gracious host in the Tunisian desert, into the title character of the story “Les quatres femmes de Baba Youssef.”\textsuperscript{35} On a trip to Jarid, Qarawan, and Tozur, the Réveillauds stayed two months with Abu ‘Alag, a graduate of the ‘Alawi college in Tunis. Sensitive to French customs, he gallantly offered de Lens his best rooms, an iron bed, and a bottle of perfume. His sisters, cousins, and wives worked tirelessly to prepare food for the Réveillauds, and his niece Nafissa modeled for de Lens’s sketches. In her short story, the shaykh is a libertine who whips his wives like donkeys and greedily takes the girl “Nefissa” as a child bride. De Lens places this story as gossip in the mouth of her servant Shadliyya, whom she writes in as a character:

Because, if it’s a boy, he’ll keep him, if not he’ll send away the mother and child. He already repudiated Fathma, a little while ago, and in eight days he replaces her. He will marry the little Nefissa bent Ali. . . . She is twelve years old. . . . What do you want? It’s the custom here. God is great! . . . But do you know the funny thing? Baba Youssef has only one room for himself and his four wives . . . and he passes from one to the other like a rooster!\textsuperscript{36}

The story “Baba Youssef” illustrates how de Lens arranged her lived reality in North Africa—actual people, objects, and words—into orientalist tableaux. She invented Muslim characters from ethnological fragments and made them articulate racist orientalist tropes: the oppressed Muslim woman, the raped child, the bestial Muslim husband.

De Lens also imagined Muslim “New Women,” a type of female character absent in male orientalist writing. In two stories she invents the “Dali Bach” sisters, Turkish women married to Tunisian Muslims who speak flawless French, wear narrow dresses, and rave about “this delicious Loti who loves the Turks so much . . . You have read Les dés-

\textsuperscript{34} Said, \textit{Orientalism}, 186–87.
\textsuperscript{35} BGR, Aline de Lens Private Journal, Sept. 24, 1914. The real M. Abu ‘Alag continued to address de Lens in letters as “My Little Sister.”
\textsuperscript{36} Aline de Lens, “Les quatre femmes de Baba Youssef,” in \textit{Le harem entr’ouvert}, 94.
enchantées? Oh it’s beautiful!” These imaginary friends travel to Italy, master Parisian fashions, and share de Lens’s smug superiority to vulgar provincial French women. The Dali Bach sisters politely humor Mesdames B and G, imaginary French ladies “born near Carpentras or Gueret, but because they wear draped dresses and 30 cm lapels, they imagine they pass for Parisiennes.” There were indeed Turkish New Women; Halide Elip and her Organization for the Improvement of the Status of Women (OISW, founded 1913) demanded a revolution in women’s legal rights in Turkey. But de Lens never met real Muslim feminists, and her Dali Bach sisters are driven to a tragic if inevitable suicide. Muslim women cannot be autonomous subjects in de Lens’s Orient because they exist only for her, to reflect and validate her persona. As Meyda Yegenoglu has argued, “It is by entering into the harem/Orient/womb that [the Western woman] can reproduce herself and constitute her own identity . . . [the] attempt to rip off the veil is one that starts and ends with the question of herself and her identity.”

The Dali Bach sisters populate and illustrate de Lens’s Franco-Islamic world yet remain “mimic women,” “an Other whose slippage from self-hood is defined by the colonizer at his leisure.”

Did European women writers depict the harem more realistically than did men? Mary Roberts, Reina Lewis, and Melman have argued that women understood the harem somewhat more accurately as a female space of work and family reproduction. Yegenoglu argues that European women’s accounts merely reproduced and supplemented the male orientalist gaze. Comparisons across time and nationality suggest that women understood the harem through their own times and drew upon contemporary cultural referents. De Lens’s novels differ from the eighteenth-century letters of Mary Wortley Montague, wife to the British ambassador at the Ottoman court, and from the late-nineteenth-century writings of the British-French painter Bodichon. Montague highlights the civility of Ottoman Turkish women, a useful strategy for claiming voice in the British Enlightenment literary world.

38 Aline de Lens, “Jeunes-Tunisiennes,” in Le harem entr’ouvert, 118. The Dali Bach sisters are likely based on Zeyneb and Melek Hanoum, Turkish sisters who visited Pierre Loti in Paris in 1906. See Zeyneb Hanoum, A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions (Piscataway, NJ, 2004).
40 The OISW sponsored the first Turkish woman to fly an airplane to protest laws requiring male permission for wives to travel. For a marvelous discussion of Ottoman anxieties over the Turkish “New Woman,” see Palmira Brummett, Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908–1911 (Albany, NY, 2000).
41 Yegenoglu, Colonial Fantasies, 93.
42 This notion is a gender adaptation of Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in The Location of Culture (New York, 1994), 85–92.
43 Yegenoglu, Colonial Fantasies, 68–94.
of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Bodichon’s *Women and Work* is a feminist version of Rudyard Kipling’s white man’s burden; feminists must teach “dirty, ignorant” native Algerian girls to “conceive of their own sex as rational and responsible beings.” By contrast, de Lens used the tools of early-twentieth-century French colonialism: orientalism, ethnography, and a textual realism in the style of photography. But realism was not reality, as Patricia M. E. Lorcin shows in her discussion of oriental “authenticity” in the works of the writers Lucienne Favre and Elissa Rhai̇s.

**Living the Thousand and One Nights: De Lens and the Production of Morocco**

Edward Said has argued that European knowledge of the Middle East is a set of interlocking discourses that represent, contain, and thus create the Orient. But Said has been critiqued for a Foucauldian lack of agency; how is discourse drawn from lived experience and how does it relate to history? De Lens’s diary illustrates the social processes that generate orientalist knowledge. She used her own lived realities as fodder for her *Thousand and One Nights* fantasy and wrote herself as a character. The Réveillards also shaped Meknes physically by “restoring” Muslim architecture with the Service des Beaux-Arts to reflect a French vision of the medieval Islamic city. Spivak has argued that imperialism inscribed conquered geographies and presented them as new worlds: “Now this worlding actually is also a texting, textualising, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood.” De Lens indeed “worlded” Morocco for the French public, but Morocco was not...

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44 *Letters of the Right Honorable Mary Wortley Montague, Written during Her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters, &c. in Different Parts of Europe* (London, 1763). Montague describes Ottoman ladies mostly in their gracious costumes, but she does sometimes describe them naked in the baths. These descriptions are entirely free of the salacious sexuality, rape fantasies, and lesbianism found in de Lens’s work.

45 Quoted in Cherry, *Beyond the Frame*, 9–10, 71.


50 Quoted in Cherry, *Beyond the Frame*, 77.
her only construct. She also inscribed her own reality into text in order
to enter her Moroccan world as a character herself.

When Réveillaud was transferred to the Rabat courts in 1914, de Lens
described Lyautey’s new colonial capital: “Half-Moorish homes of
an idiotic style,” yellowing laundry limp on clotheslines, roving dogs,
dirty white children, “large stupid roads that lead nowhere,” piles of
garbage, soaking rains, typhus, flies, malaria, dysentery.51 Réveillaud
revised Muslim law codes while de Lens set up housekeeping in a dark
house with a syphilitic Muslim cook and a sometimes drunk Moroc-
can maid. The French couple caught dysentery, and the First World
War called most of the French men to Europe. Household expenses
reflected war shortages, and shrewd native businessmen charged two
francs for a cabbage. De Lens wrote derisively of Rabat’s European
population, “a ferocious petty bourgeoisie,” who “desire to arrive by
any means.”52

But as members of Lyautey’s Protectorate, the Réveillauds entered
the sumptuous and dazzling world of the Moroccan elite. They dined
at the grand vizier’s magnificent palace with the consul de France, Henri
Gaillard. They were invited by M. Ibn Shaqrûn, the representative of
the Debt in Tangier, M. Abu Shâ‘îb, the minister of justice, and ʿAbd
ar-Rahman Bargash, the pasha of Rabat. In Fes, the grand vizier put
his palace and servants at the Réveillauds’ disposal; there they dined
with the sultan’s representative (naʿîb), Si ʿAbdallah al-Fâsî, the pasha
of Meknes, Si Ḥamu ibn ʿIssa, and the millionaire Haj Bannâni. They
toured the Fes electric works of Si Tayyib Moqri, the son of the former
grand vizier, and dined at his Dar al-Bathâ palace. De Lens compared
the exquisite Moroccan palaces to those described in The Thousand and
One Nights. With their noble bloodlines, massive jewels, refined cuisine,
and crystal chandeliers from Paris and Milan, Moroccan elite women
seemed to promise de Lens the Franco-Muslim world of her dreams.

As contrôleur civil of the city of Meknes in 1915, Réveillaud ruled
commerce, law, finance, and public works for the city.53 Scholars have
argued that Europeans viewed the Islamic world through the lens of
The Thousand and One Nights, but the Réveillauds used real Moroccan
people to live this literary fantasy. They resided in a former vizier’s
palace in Meknes (fig. 2), which de Lens filled with Moroccan antiques,
ceramics, live peacocks, gardens, servants, and adoptive Muslim chil-

51 In short, Rabat was not yet the jewel of urban planning described by Gwendolyn Wright,
52 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Apr. 12, 1922.
53 On the contrôleur civil in Morocco, see Roger Gruner, Du Maroc traditionnel au Maroc
moderne: Le contrôleur civil au Maroc, 1912–1956 (Paris, 1984); and André Hardy, Sidi el Hakim: Mémoires
d’un contrôleur civil au Maroc (Rabat, 2003).
Figure 2  Aline de Lens in her Meknes home in the madina. Reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque Générale de Rabat
dren. She circumvented antislavery laws to buy the slave girl Yakut for six hundred francs. She further acquired two Berber slave girls, Aguida and Yamina, when Réveillaud broke up a slave-trading ring. She found Ma’ruf, a blind boy, begging for alms at the portal of the city. In 1921 she took in Lahia, “a little negress of four or five, very black, cute like a little duck or a little cat,” whom French authorities had discovered in the street beside her mother’s corpse. De Lens dressed the children in Moroccan clothes and staged the Orient experience for herself and her guests:

Imagine the impressive procession for tea: (1) Sbai, our moghzani [makhzāni, soldier in the sultan’s service], carries an immense copper platter with cups; (2) Dada Fatima, the Negress, in a caftan of embroidered yellow satin, carries the cakes on a smaller platter; (3) Fatima, who is six or seven, in a caftan of sky blue brocade, with a platter of cakes at her size; (4) Mohammed, five or six, the little Negro son of Dada the Negress, in an emerald green burnoose and with a copper platter bearing the teapot; (5) the minuscule Lahia, in an orange caftan and headscarf, carrying a tiny copper platter with the sugar bowl. When she appears, very dignified, everyone bursts into laughter.54

The Réveillauds built the city of Meknes to mirror The Thousand and One Nights: they constructed a “Moorish” public garden,55 restored ancient palaces, published an album of photography of Meknes and Fes architecture with the orientalist Alfred Bel,56 opened a school of traditional embroidery for native girls, and constructed a traditional Moroccan mosaic public fountain at the Place al Hadim (fig. 3).

After 1915 de Lens blurred all distinctions between art and life. She wrote the autobiographies of each of her adoptive Moroccan children as a story; Aguida became a novel (L’étrange aventure d’Aguida), and she wrote Ma’ruf as a short story (“Ma’ruf le clairvoyant”). De Lens constantly translated her life into representation. She wrote her neighbor Mina’s wedding as ethnography,57 she transformed her Arts indigènes work into tourist advertising,58 she even wrote her war experiences as

54 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Mar. 1, 1921.
55 In her diary de Lens was delighted that Moroccans seemed to accept her garden as authentic: “At sunset, the jardin maure is full of natives. They are everywhere on all the little walls, along all the basins. They see and enjoy the garden, created for them, responding to their conception of beauty. That’s what I wanted, and I feel a satisfaction in it.” Henri Prost of the Service d’Architecture praised the garden, which she also marketed to the metropolitan public in articles (“Jardins maures,” La revue de Paris, Oct. 1, 1932, 633–46).
56 André Réveillaud and Alfred Bel, Le Maroc pittoresque—Fes, Meknes et région: Album de photographies du Commandant Larive (Marseille, 1917).
journalism for *La revue de Paris*. In her second book, *Derrière les vieux murs en ruines* (1922), she merged her private journal with fiction, presenting her life as a single flowing narrative of dated entries with herself as a character. She drew the Meknes elites with such accuracy that the representative of the ‘Alawi *shurarafā*’ (plural of *sharīf*, descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad) held up her book and remarked, “I have my portrait here. Everyone has spoken to me of it, in Marrakech, in Mogador, in Essouaira.” Of her conversations with the wives of the Meknes elites, de Lens wrote, “Here I felt I could take up again my half-Muslim existence. Invisible female friends await me in their homes, behind the ruined walls.”

In *Derrière les vieux murs en ruines*, de Lens represents herself as an integral member of harem society. The Réveillauds follow a tiny black boy through the alleys of “a mysterious and dead city” to the palace of the *sharīf* Mawlay Ḥasan. The Réveillauds are intimate friends: crowds of slaves serve them mint tea from silver platters, the *sharīf* reclines

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60 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, July 29, 1922. She also uses his actual name in the passage “March 28,” in Aline de Lens, *Derrière les vieux murs en ruines* (Paris, 1922), 100–104.
among cushions and directs with a sign of the hand or eye, “He rivals the Sultan, his cousin, whom he surpasses by the generosity of his hospitality.” The Réveillauds consume platters of mutton, chicken, and couscous, “rolling, in a movement of the palm, the round and gleaming balls of couscous that one carries to the mouth.” As the sharifa welcomes her to a candlelit chamber, de Lens greets her hostess with the appropriate Arabic formulas, “May the benediction of Allah be upon you!” De Lens changes her Moroccan toilettes for the wedding feast, and her Muslim daughters cry “O my mother! Do you know how these women wear the tjina? . . . Their custom is strange!” When de Lens enters the Moroccan harem, she leaves France behind:

Again, Lalla Fatima Zohra has transformed me into an idol. I left enveloped in white veils, one can scarcely see my eyes. . . . My bur-noose of fine cashmere floats in the night air, it sometimes reveals my slippers embroidered with silver in the massive stirrups. Kad-dour leads my mule by the bridle; a little slave of Moulay Hasan leads us with an enormous lantern. . . . we cross Europeans, a group of officers. They turn and contemplate me. . . . Look! A sultana en balade! . . . I have taken on a bit of the Muslim woman’s soul in wearing these draperies; I would blush to be seen by a man. . . . Yet I have kept my own soul, for I enjoy the spectacle of my cortège. . . . Beauty of the Orient which I feel so intensely, and of which I am a part!

If, as Yegenoglu has argued, orientalism seeks the truth of the Orient beneath the veils of the Muslim woman, then de Lens achieves its ultimate victory. By creating herself as a demi-musulmane, de Lens experiences the Orient from within the Muslim veil, situating herself inside its heart yet seeing its truths through a “colonial Eye/I.”

De Lens claimed to describe the harem, but her novels did not actually portray Muslim women’s reality. Harems were communal extended families, as Fatima Mernissi demonstrates in her Fes autobiography. Women’s status in Muslim countries was changing rapidly between 1900 and 1920; Muslim women and Islamic modernists after the Egyptian intellectual Qasim Amin championed unveiling and women’s education across the Middle East and North Africa. These extensive literature, a few key studies include Margot Badran, Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt (Princeton, NJ, 1995); Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing (Bloomington, IN, 1990); Ellen Fleischmann, The Nation and Its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women’s Movement, 1920–1948 (Berkeley, CA, 2003); and Camron Amin, The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865–1946 (Gainesville, FL, 2002).
alists founded a “free school” for girls in Tetouan in 1922.\textsuperscript{68} But the French literary world preferred de Lens’s fantasy to Muslim women’s realities, depicted more accurately by the Frenchwoman Eugénie Le Brun, the wife of Egyptian prime minister Husayn Rushdi Pasha. Le Brun opened the first literary salon for Egyptian women in Cairo in the 1890s and befriended the future feminist and nationalist Hûda Sha’rawi.\textsuperscript{59} Le Brun attended Islamic law courts, wrote an exposé of marital abuses of Muslim women (\textit{Les répudiées}, 1908) and defended the Egyptian family against the criticisms of the Duc d’Harcourt (\textit{Harems et musulmanes d’Egypte: Lettres}, 1902). In her memoirs Sha’rawi wrote, “I had come to rely heavily on her good counsel, but even after her death I felt her spirit light the way before me.”\textsuperscript{70} However, the Comité des Conférences Chateaubriand chose de Lens to present lectures on the status of the Muslim woman in the 1922–23 meeting.\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Le harem entr’ouvert} was published in twelve editions and several languages, including Serbian. Maximilien Antoine Cyprien Henri Poisson de la Martinière, André Chevrillon, the brothers Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, Lyautéy, and André Gide declared de Lens’s books the most accurate depiction of Moroccan society. Sénateur Guillaume Chastenet petitioned the Académie Française to grant her a prize, for she excelled “even the divine Loti.”\textsuperscript{72}

De Lens’s Morocco was so popular that French diplomats, journalists, explorers, scientists, literary men, tourists, physicians, and politicians flooded her Meknes home to experience it for themselves. Visits from the Sorbonne and the Collège de France began every spring, as de Lens wrote her mother-in-law:

\begin{quote}
It is the season of tourists, and we receive constantly. The other day Violette (the former minister and député) was coming through Meknes. . . . We received him two years ago. Then I took his wife and some ladies (other important tourists sent by the general) through the city and the harems. Some days before we had a scientific mission—twenty gentlemen—to whom we offered champagne and dancing girls.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Gide, the writer and painter Louis-Nicolas Ménard, Louis Massignon, Paul Desjardins, and the Tharauds came after reading \textit{Le harem entr’ouvert}, as did the Comte and Comtesse Kerchôve, the Duchesse de


\textsuperscript{69} Huda Sha’rawi, \textit{Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist} (New York, 1986), 76–82.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 82.

\textsuperscript{71} BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Sept. 22, 1922.

\textsuperscript{72} BGR, Aline de Lens Private Journal, Apr. 17, 1920.

\textsuperscript{73} BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Apr. 4, 1921.
Vendôme, the Princesse Geneviève d’Orléans, the Duchesse de Guise, the Duchesse d’Aoste, the Princesse de la Tour d’Auvergne, the Marquise de Brantes, Sénateur Chastenet, and the Baron de Rothschild. The Réveillauds hosted the director of the Banque des Pay-Bas, the director of Le Creuzot, and the carpet buyer for Bon Marché. De Lens’s home display of Moroccan art so captivated a professor of the Paris École des Beaux-Arts that he contracted for her Meknes artisans to supply the ceramics, carpentry, painting, and ironwork for his new project: the Mosquée de Paris complex in the Rue de Saint-Hilaire in Paris. The Réveillauds were offered the palace of the former vizier Ibn Sulayman by a European fan of de Lens’s novels. But her most influential reader was Lyautey himself.

**The Unofficial Colonial Agent:**

**De Lens in Lyautey’s Morocco**

De Lens did not seek an official position in the colonial administration or the French *mission civilisatrice*; she produced art for herself. Nevertheless, her fiction, her love of native arts, and her home became instruments of French rule in Morocco. To a France exhausted by World War I, de Lens’s novels offered fountains, heavy orange blossoms, and the clinking jewels of harem beauties. The reader could follow her metamorphosis into a Muslim woman, “from the color which enlivened my too-pale cheeks, to the tiny brown designs between my eyebrows, my eyes lengthened with kohl. My face appears minuscule in the middle of the jewels, under the silken roll of the turban.” Her expositions of Moroccan arts presented Morocco as a material *Thousand and One Nights* fantasy for the French public to experience and purchase. Her life shows the interpenetration of individual subjectivity and colonial hegemony; colonialism made de Lens’s career possible, and her career supported the French Protectorate.

The Réveillauds’ Franco-Muslim household exemplified Lyautey’s system: government through an informal social network of French technocrats and native elites. French citizens and Moroccans devel-

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74 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Nov. 2, 1922.
75 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, July 29, 1922.
76 De Lens, *Derrière les vieux murs*, 95.
oped unique hybrid rituals for their intercultural socializing, creating an amalgam of French and Moroccan hospitality. De Lens wrote of a dinner party in 1914: “The minister of justice, Si Bou Chaib, thinks he has become more civilized since the last time he hosted us. He had us seated around a table covered with Indian cloth, and each one has a fork and knife, plate. . . . We ate meats, fish, fruits successively. . . . The vizier hasn’t yet mastered forks . . . and he loses all dignity and prestige at table. His hands, disgusting with sauce, repel me.” 78 Meknes’s indigenous authorities invited Réveillaud to lead horsemen in a 1918 fantasia and to mete out Islamic justice with *fuqahā’* (Islamic jurists). 79 De Lens borrowed the jewels of the wife of the representative of the *shurafa’* when she was invited to Muslim wedding feasts. Lalla Malika, the wife of the grand *sharif* of the imperial family, sent her a turkey for Christmas day. 80 This Franco-Moroccan network extended even to France, where the Fes bourgeois Si L’arbi Tāzi was the personal guest of Réveillaud’s father, Sénateur Eugène Réveillaud, in Paris. The *sénateur* founded the Société des Habitations à Bon Marché du Quartier des Gares de Meknes to fund his son’s housing projects in Morocco. 81 But socializing was not fraternizing; de Lens and her Moroccan women friends disapproved of French women who “went native” and married Muslim men. 82

Franco-Moroccan elite cooperation was so developed that Réveillaud could resign from the colonial service and set up a private law practice for native clients in 1921. His clientele included ‘Abd al-Haq al-Fāsi, the leader of the Young Fassi Party, and ‘Abd al-Hay al-Kattānī, a critic of Moroccan sultan ‘Abd al-’Aziz. The future nationalist ‘Abd al-Kabir al-Fāsi was a friend of the family as a young man of twenty-one. ‘Abd al-Kabir’s father intended him to join Réveillaud’s practice after his law studies in France. 83 In one case, Réveillaud sued the Residence on behalf of three thousand Muslim clients for violation of their property rights in Fes. 84 The Residence felt that Réveillaud’s advocacy of

79 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Dec. 18, 1918. Réveillaud was invited to take the place of the pasha of Meknes, who was arrested for collaborating with the Germans. The invitation may well have been a strategic decision by the Muslim notables of Meknes.
81 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Feb. 19, 1919.
82 Lalla Malika gossiped to de Lens about “Camouna,” a French schoolteacher who married an Algerian Muslim man. De Lens found her shocking and too familiar with native women, like a “spoiled slave.” Camouna insisted that the man’s first wife be hidden from public view, and she insisted that her husband instruct the children to tell visitors that their mother had died. BGR, Aline de Lens Private Journal, July 29, 1922.
83 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Oct. 2, 1922.
84 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Oct. 10, 1923.
Moroccans went a bit too far, but these relationships also meant that Moroccan political activities were known within a framework of French colonial authority. De Lens wrote to her mother-in-law:

Like the Young Algerians, Young Egyptians, etc., the Young Fassis have ideas of independence, but these are still early, and they see it very far in the future. For now, their greatest concern is to reform the religion. . . . You see, they have interesting ideas, about education, about improving women's status. . . . I am able to study them and get to know them. I think that if we influence them, we could render the greatest service to France by preventing them from turning against her.  

De Lens’s access to the Moroccan harems also led the Protectorate to recruit her as an ethnographic researcher. Dr. Lepinay, the editor of the medical journal for Morocco, *Maroc médical*, complained that the Muslim matron pressured patients “to turn from our orders to her own remedies—leg of frog or earth from the cemetery.” To discover female Muslim methods, the good doctors commissioned de Lens to document women’s medical practices in the harems. De Lens’s work appeared as a series of articles in *Maroc médical*, as well as in a monograph, *Pratiques des harems marocains: Sorcellerie, médecine, beauté* (1925). De Lens reveals a women’s world of Galenic physiology, midwifery, and magic. “Women’s remedies” employ cedar tar, herbs, fat, cautery, saint visitation, and the ingestion of unclean substances like dirty bath water, entrails, and live baby mice. For “the illness that comes to children at the time of flowers,” de Lens records: “The matron makes two incisions behind the right ear of the child and rubs them with tar, then coats the inside of the nose and mouth with tar. She then kills a serpent, cuts off its head, encloses it in a hollow reed . . . and suspends it from the caftan of the little patient.” The ethnographers Maurice Delafosse, J. Desparmet, and André Basset marveled at data “only a woman could obtain,” and in their introduction to *Les pratiques* Lepinay and Émile

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85 De Lens found their mail arrived tampered with, and friends suggested finding Réveil laud a position in Tunisia. BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Dec. 7, 1923.
86 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Oct. 2, 1922.
Speder enthused, “Mme. A. R. de Lens knows how to make old women speak, and it is their secrets, collected with a thousand difficulties, that she brings to [our] readers.”

De Lens translated her love of art to a patronage of Moroccan native crafts. Lyautey created the *arts indigènes* of the Protectorate Service des Beaux-Arts after 1912 to defend native guilds from the flood of cheap Japanese goods. De Lens directed the *arts indigènes* for Meknes and petitioned the municipality to sponsor native apprenticeships in carpentry, ironworking, jewelry making, and embroidery. She had six thousand dirhams spent on two master potters from Fes to revive the defunct Meknes pottery industry (fig. 4). Meknes ceramics were soon used in public buildings, train stations, private homes, and the Mosquée de Paris complex in Paris. De Lens exhibited Moroccan crafts to stimulate French buyers and rented exhibition space with her own money: “An exposition is the only way for the public to know the works of native artisans, who only work on commission and never keep

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92 The Residence was concerned primarily about the labor unrest brought by unemploy-
93 BGR, de Lens, Service des Beaux-Arts, Surveillance des Arts Indigènes, to M. le Capita-
taine Marchand Chef des Services Municipaux, Jan. 19, 1917.
94 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, June 2, 1922.
95 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, June 4, 1923.
samples in their workshops.” She displayed Meknes crafts at the Foire de Fes, the 1917 Pavillon de Marsan in Rabat, the 1917 foire in Lyon, the 1922 Marseilles Colonial Exhibition, and the Salon des Artistes Français in 1922. Geoffrey St. Hilaire and the import house France Coloniale ordered large shipments of Meknes jewelry, embroidery, and furniture after seeing her Marsan exhibition (fig. 5). De Lens was so successful that the Compagnie Grale du Maroc made her director of ceramics production, Faure Frères recruited her as a representative, and the Musée de Rabat bought objects she obtained from the shrine of Ibn ‘Issa (the patron saint of the ‘Issawa) in Meknes.

De Lens staged Morocco as a material experience for the French consumer and a woman’s intimate universe of jewels and luxury. In articles like “Bijoux des mille et une nuits” in Vogue, France-Maroc, La revue de France, La revue de Paris, and L’Afrique du Nord illustrée the reader could imagine herself into the harem through Moroccan artifacts and then purchase them in shops on the Rue de Rivoli:

Behind the sad crumbling walls are hidden rooms of mosaic with golden ceilings ... [the women’s] arms are heavy with chiseled gold bracelets, strings of pearls and emeralds. ... Some have a supple band of pearls around their heads from which streams of rubies fall. The black braids sparkle with agate and amethyst. ... The jewels of Moroccan women, true joys of The Thousand and One Nights, are heavy and sumptuous.

In “Une femme peintre marocaine,” Khdija Temtam, the poor daughter of renowned artisans, paints with a donkey-hair brush, pulverizes colored minerals, and places metallic fragments in intricate inlay. De Lens’s text features photographs of “Khdija’s” Golden Sun geometric ceiling, inlaid chests, and bridal chairs, available for sale at France Coloniale in Paris. This marketing strategy worked in the United States as well. There, a Mrs. E. Billy contracted with de Lens to purchase Meknes necklaces, bracelets, and rings of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, tiger’s eyes, pearls, lapis, and amethysts for 30,895 francs. Mrs. Billy translated de Lens’s articles into English for American women. As Patricia Morton has argued, native artifacts engaged the French metropolitan public through the “real,” a physical experience of native people,

97 BGR, de Lens, France Coloniale, produits d’Afrique du Nord et colonies françaises, spécialités exotiques de marque française, to Mme. Réveillaud, Apr. 19 and July 26, 1917.
98 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Nov. 25, 1921.
99 BGR, receipt to de Lens, Feb. 1917.
102 BGR, contract between A. Réveillaud and Mme. E. Billy, Nov. 18, 1919.
Figure 5  The Service des Beaux-Arts staged exhibition rooms of Moroccan crafts in major Moroccan cities, like this one created in 1916 at the Musée des Industries Modernes de Fes et de la Région. From Réveillaud and Bel, *Maroc pittoresque*
De Lens’s fiction not only sold Morocco; it also hid ugly realities that could undermine metropolitan support for colonial rule. The Meknes of de Lens’s novel *Derrière les vieux murs* is a crumbling, peaceful medieval ruin, but the real Meknes was an industrializing city. As *contrôleur civil*, Réveilloud negotiated European street protests, malaria-infested European housing, and angry Muslim city council members. De Lens also used her writing to conceal the violence against women in French-regulated native prostitution. In French North Africa, native women were snatched in French police raids as “clandestine” prostitutes and imprisoned indefinitely in walled brothel compounds. Forced to accept clients in what Christelle Taraud has called a “taylorization” of sexual slavery, these women could escape only through a form of legal manumission. In *Le harem*, de Lens depicts prostitution as women’s empowerment. The Muslim prostitute “Lella Zeina” assures de Lens that her life is charming; she fills her Louis XVI armoires with money, visits the Bardo museum, and enjoys lemonades with young suitors.

De Lens’s fiction also disguised the evils of female domestic slavery, about which the Frenchwoman learned firsthand from her adoptive children. The sociologist Edouard Michaux-Bellaire believed that the Moroccan slave trade expanded as a result of French occupation. When French troops cut supplies of enslaved women to Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa, slave raiders turned on Berber families in the Sûs region to steal young girls. The Residence turned a blind eye to this “veritable business” flourishing in the political anarchy of southern Morocco.

De Lens’s children Fatima, Yakut, and Aguida told her of the brigands who had abducted and raped them and had murdered their families:

104 Ibid., 86–87.
105 Ibid., 73.
We lived in a country of fear. People were always trembling. . . . parents feared constantly for their children. They told us never to leave the house. . . . For there were brigands who stole girls and boys, who burned villages. . . . [One night] my sister noticed a hole in the wall of our garden, and men who were working to enlarge it. . . . Suddenly the door was broken, they entered. They had guns, knives, and they were numerous. “Where are the children?” they demanded. “There aren’t any!” My aunt and my mother replied crying, “Our sons are grown. . . .” They set fire to the house, and we came out. My mother and aunt threw themselves on the men and begged. . . . But the men kicked them in the belly, they fell on the earth, and they hit them with the butts of their guns until they didn’t move any more. They killed the little boy but took me away. . . . They beat me, and we arrived in Marrakech, in the house of Ben Zakour. He had many stolen little girls like me.110

Yet in her novels de Lens changed the life stories of her children to hide the weaknesses of French rule from the reading public. In L’étrange aventure d’Aguida, de Lens has a greedy Berber woman sell Aguida into slavery; there are no brigands, no anarchy, and no French responsibility. When a kind Christian French couple comes to rescue her, Aguida cries, “May God be pleased, my own father forgot me. . . . only you are my father!”111 De Lens’s stories illustrate Said’s contention that orientalist fantasies were inextricably bound to the material, cultural, and political mechanics of colonial rule.112

The life of Aline de Lens demonstrates that the personal is political. Although she never explicitly advocated the French colonial empire, the politics of Lyautey’s administration shaped her opportunities and her personal life, which in turn served colonial propaganda and material-culture interests. French domination influenced even the mundane details of the social world the Réveillauds frequented. Moroccan elites had to receive de Lens in lavish style and remain silent about her books, which presented their private lives as pornography—Muḥammad al-Wazzāni’s wives “copulate with slaves,” the women of the merchant Ben Maliḥ conduct “a thousand and one orgies.” Although France controlled the literary presentation, material exposition, and political rituals of Morocco, what James Scott has called the “official transcript” of colonial rule,113 Moroccans resisted in the informal social world. M. Bargash of Rabat remarked to de Lens, “You make our women out to be sinners! . . . And what if we wrote books about everything that French women do . . . ?!”114

110 BGR, Aline de Lens Private Journal, Nov. 15, 1922.

111 De Lens, Etrange aventure, 74.

112 Said, Orientalism, 6.

113 James Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, CT, 1990), xii.

114 BGR, Aline de Lens Private Journal, Sept. 16, 1921.
The Franco-Islamic Family and the 
Demi-Musulmane

“It is not possible to establish one’s life on more purity, more principles, more beautiful chimeras than I did. . . . At the same time I know that nothing exists outside of us, that there is no truth, no justice, no duty, no morality other than that which we conceive,” de Lens wrote in her private journal.115 For male orientalists, the Islamic world was masquerade. Richard Burton disguised himself as an Afghan physician to enter Mecca, Louis Gentil passed as a Moroccan majnūn,116 Loti posed as a sultan in his “Turkish Salon.” But after the adventure, men put the disguises away and returned to identities in the French metropole. French women like Isabelle Eberhardt and de Lens abandoned Europe forever to invent themselves anew in the Orient.117 De Lens attempted to create a new self in Morocco, but she drew on colonial discourses that proved spiritually empty. Lyautey’s “association policy” and orientalism opened a chasm between de Lens’s world of representation and a neglected inner reality. Colonial studies of the intimate have considered sexual relationships,118 but there are other intimacies, such as the love between women or the love and care of a mother for her child.119 James Smith Allen has argued that French women understood the “other” because they were “other” themselves; women’s writing constituted a dialogic “art of consciousness.”120 Hélène Cixous sees writing as life construction, “working . . . undoing death’s work by will-

115 Ibid., Jan. 18, 1922.
116 The majnūn is a person possessed by jinn, beings described by the Qur’an who live in parallel with man on earth. The majnūn was often characterized by French observers as a “madman,” a holy saint, or a charlatan. See Richard Keller, Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa (Chicago, 2007).
118 Stoler argues that the “intimate” signifies the familiar, the essential, and the sex relation (Carnal Knowledge, 9). Stoler has been expanding this notion: see Ann Laura Stoler, ed., Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History (Durham, NC, 2006).
120 Allen, Poignant Relations, 1–4.
ing the togetherness of one-another.” De Lens sought transcendence through the pure marriage of souls, but orientalist racism impeded her ability to love or achieve true intimacy. As Martin Buber has written, “Through the Thou a man becomes I”; one becomes subject by recognizing the humanity of others.

De Lens gave Moroccan children shelter, but she could not give them love—one of the contradictions of the colonizer as mother. De Lens took in beggars, slaves, and orphans, native children without protection in Moroccan society. When she bought the eleven-year-old Yakut, the girl hung her shaved head in silence. De Lens dressed her in slippers and caftans and enrolled her in a native school of girls’ embroidery. Over time, Yakut began to relax and play like a normal child:

She is losing the look of a hunted animal, especially with me, and tells me things in a singing language that does not have the local accent. . . . Little by little she seems to open up; she laughs, she dares to sing, she’s starting to understand that her life has changed: now she has clothes, jewelry, a doll. I bought the doll on condition that she make her dresses. She doesn’t know how to use a needle, but she works hard at it. Yakut sits crouched on the patio under the sunny arcades; the light makes her silver jewelry sparkle.

De Lens coaxed the girl to reveal her life story: “I was bought at least twenty times and resold at the time of festivals for money. No one has ever loved me. In the houses I always cried.” But de Lens did not accept Yakut as a daughter; she experienced her primarily as an aesthetic object, “bronze skin, black eyes, small mouth, and straight nose in a regular, oval face,” “above all, she must become a good [sketching] model.”

De Lens’s Franco-Islamic family personified Lyautey’s colonial mission: to infiltrate Islamic domesticity without altering native gender or family relations. De Lens refused to teach the children French or Christianity. She sent one of the girls to visit her mother-in-law in France in 1921 but cautioned her against French education:

I see Fatima amuses and interests you, and that you pity her future. What you don’t see is this fate is the only one she desires, the only one which can make her happy, and that any other, which seems preferable to you, will only bring her suffering. Imagine how cus-

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121 Quoted ibid., 1.
125 Ibid., May 1, 1915.
126 Ibid., Feb. 20, 1915.
toms, beliefs, and the milieu shape the individual. . . . You could not tolerate the life of an Arab woman, but she could not tolerate yours. . . . I will certainly have the feminists against me and others who want a rapid transformation of customs, unaware of the disasters this could bring. . . . Now, if she stays in France, as you hope, I believe she will be equally unhappy, unable to have the life for which she is made.127

De Lens believed that she preserved Muslim womanhood as she had preserved “authentic” Moroccan arts. She explained her philosophy in *L’étrange aventure*: “If you were daughters of my flesh, I would have raised you according to [French] customs; but you are daughters of my heart, and I don’t want to change that which Allah made of you.”128

De Lens understood the children as racial types, not as full human beings. Lahia, whose parents had been killed in a French bombardment, arrived so malnourished she lay in a heap by the kitchen chimney. With food she became a laughing four-year-old running through the house. Before bed she shouted “Good night, papa! Good night, mama!” As a tiny child, Lahia appealed to de Lens, “a brilliant little black doll, well polished, like an Indian chestnut,”129 and she enjoyed her antics: “Once we were eating tongue, and Lahia asked, ‘is it tongue of the Son of Adam or of a cow?’”130 Lahia dictated letters to De Lens’s sister in France, “Oh, my other mother! How are you? . . . My mother did two portraits of me.”131 De Lens read “Thumbelina” and “Little Red Riding Hood” to the children and charged her sister Marie-Thérèse with their care in the event of her own death. But she always saw Lahia as a slave with the physiognomy of an inferior race, “Lahia is close to the baby donkey that trots and capers since her birth to become none other than a donkey. Later she will become a vigorous beast.”132

The children reached out to de Lens for maternal love. Lahia called her “mama” and crushed her tiny face against de Lens’s feet. Yakut cried that the Réveillauds were the only parents she knew. But de Lens referred to the children as “our collection,” not as “our children.” She left the “mothering” to Moroccan servants and the teacher (*mu'allima*) at the embroidery school for Muslim girls. When Yakut asked not to be resold, de Lens replied that if she worked hard, she would be kept. It is difficult to uncover the children’s experience of this upbringing because de Lens’s diaries are the only record of their lives.133 After

127 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Nov. 13, 1921.
128 De Lens, *Étrange aventure*, 77.
129 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Feb. 24, 1921.
130 BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Nov. 18, 1922.
133 The children suffered what Shula Marks has called a triple alienation: growing up with-
passing liqueurs and sugar to European guests, Lahia asked, “These people, did they like me? Did they say I am pretty?”134 Aguida tried to poison de Lens and attempted to run away. After her parents came from the Sûs to reclaim her, Aguida cut ties of communication to the Réveillauds.135 Yet de Lens’s diary reveals her longing for love relationships with the girls. In 1920 she wrote bitterly, “Aguida and Yakut show us nothing but ingratitude. Thanks to us who pulled them from their miserable condition and raised them, they have a normal existence as Moroccan women.”136 De Lens realizes her frustrated desires in the fictional world; she makes Aguida weep in the novel L’étrange aventure, “What will I do in my house of Sous, where my mother never embraces me! It’s you alone who is my mother and who I carry in my heart. . . . I will find death if one separates me from you!”137

De Lens’s diary reveals games of subtle manipulation in her relationships with Moroccan women. She modeled a character in Derrière les vieux murs on Lalla ‘Aisha, “the most charming, the most frivolous, the most needy of my Muslim friends.”138 But she seems unaware that Muslim women also used her—to leave the house, to acquire consumer goods, and to present images of themselves to the French reading public. The “brainless” Lalla ‘Aisha pouted until de Lens bought her new satins and a hat from the Bon Marché catalog. Muslim elite women used dress, ritual, and wealth to show de Lens their power. When she dined with the wives of the grand vizier, they descended one by one, stately, silent, and bejeweled. De Lens wrote, “The conversation is slow. . . . because it is bon ton among the Arabs not to speak like magpies and to remain silent for long periods.”

Yet a few Muslim women reached out to her with genuine sentiment and kindness. The ‘Uthmân ladies in Tunis saw her as a lonely newcomer and invited her to all-female social events. Mina, the sixteen-year-old wife of the intendant of the grand vizier, spoke frankly: “Would I like to walk through the city? Of course. Do you think it’s gay to be closed in?” She answered de Lens’s questions: many girls die young because they marry too early, and yes, wives and concubines fight with each other, “The husband tries to make peace; to the wife he says, ‘You are my wife,’ to the slave he says, ‘you are my darling.’ All of that is bad, it’s better in your country.”139 De Lens placed these confidences within

out a mother, in a sexually repressed environment, separated from their blood kin (Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women [Bloomington, IN, 1987], 12).

135 However, the Réveillauds paid for her medical treatment until Aguida died of tuberculosis in 1923. BGR, de Lens to Mme. Réveillaud, Mar. 7, 1923.
137 De Lens, Etrange aventure, 44.
139 Ibid., Nov. 6, 1914.
orientalist tales of orgy, rape, and lesbian trysts. She bragged of her intimacy with Muslim women, “I gradually became their confidante; they told me all their sadness, even the most intimate.”140

In Morocco she transcended the career limits of a woman in metropolitan France. She achieved recognition from the scientific community, the French literary world, and from Protectorate officialdom. Gender was no impediment. As one French official commented, “Mme. Réveillaud is not a superior woman; she is a superior man.”141

But none of this satisfied de Lens. She experienced the merging of her life and fiction as a personal violation and wrote in her diary in 1922, “Now any imbecile can buy this book for 6F75, and read it after his meal surrounded by ugly furniture. Many chapters are pages of my journal. . . . Extracting from oneself such intimate and profound things and expressing them is death.”142 She felt crushed by the effort of maintaining a fictional public self against a true self: “My true face. . . . Yes, it is that, I believe, which is part of my torment; that is, never to have been able to, never have dared, to show it to others . . . [but] to André I said everything, showed everything, for love. And through love, he understood all, admired all, felt all.”143

In the last three years of her life (1922–25), de Lens suffered painful physical illness and existential despair: “Anguish crushes me, I feel a malaise of living, a despair for the future.” Her last wish, to reconcile an authentic interior reality with her artistic production, was realized in May 2007 when La Cause des Livres published the first printed edition of her intimate journals in Paris.144

**Conclusion**

The biography of Aline de Lens illustrates the complex role of French women in Lyautey’s Morocco. Lyautey depended on a culture of sociability between French officers and Moroccan elites, a government of drawing rooms rather than of parliaments and laws. Private homes and the domestic sphere were thus constituted as spaces of political rule and Moroccan resistance. Lyautey enlisted French women as unofficial colonial agents to circumvent the legal limits of the 1912 Protectorate

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140 De Lens, Derrière les vieux murs, 49.
142 Ibid., Apr.–May 1922.
143 Ibid., Aug. 18, 1921.
144 Yet there may be another layer of representation, because the manuscript is a typed, partial copy of her handwritten journals, which is conserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. This is the version that Editions de France was preparing for publication in 1925 under the title *Le journal intime de A. R. deLens*. Aline de Lens, *Journal, 1902–1924: L’amour, je le supplie de m’épargner . . .* (Paris, 2007). The present article is based on her complete handwritten diaries, conserved at the BGR in Rabat.
agreement, which prevented the colonial state from entering Muslim homes. French women consequently enjoyed a larger field of action in Lyautey’s Morocco than in colonial Algeria and played important roles as harem diplomats, ethnographers, and colonial propagandists. Tunisia will provide an important point of comparison, both as an older French protectorate (1881) and as a former Ottoman territory.145

In French Morocco, de Lens used her position as the wife of a French colonial officer to pursue a career in art. She preserved indigenous Moroccan crafts, adopted several Moroccan children, and translated her daily realities into a magical Thousand and One Nights literary fantasy. Yet de Lens’s individual efforts served the larger propaganda goals of French colonialism, for art was deeply implicated in colonial power.146 Her writing and native art exhibits attracted French metropolitan tourism, buyers, and political support for French rule in Morocco. Her Moroccan-French world demonstrates that “the personal is highly political” in colonial contexts, even in intimate relationships.147 De Lens’s family life and home reproduced the flaws of Lyautey’s colonial “preservation policy.” Lyautey’s architect, Henri Prost, produced aesthetic Franco-Islamic buildings that failed to address the basic housing needs of Moroccans.148 De Lens’s home faithfully reproduced the material artifacts of Moroccan domesticity but not the loving relationships of a Moroccan family. Indeed, her French-Islamic “family” was no family at all.

Like other women writers of the orientalist canon—Jane Dieulafoy, Marc Elys, Myriam Harry, Clotilde Chivas-Baron, Lucienne Favre, L. M. Enfrey, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, Henriette Célaré, and Alice La Mazière—de Lens has fallen into obscurity. But in the Paris of the 1920s, the French “acted out” oriental worlds through the writings of de Lens, Eberhardt, and Rhaïs, in the plays, operas, ballets, cabarets, and music-hall shows of Cléopâtre, Salomé, Thaïs, Schéhérazade, and by buying North African textiles, ceramics, and jewelry.149 The French public demanded the harem and de Lens gave it to them, staging

145 Julia Clancy-Smith has begun explorations of French-Muslim sociability in Tunisia (Mediterranean Passages: Migrants and Mobilities in Nineteenth-Century North Africa [Berkeley, CA, forthcoming]).
146 Irbouh, Art in the Service of Colonialism; Lewis, Gendering Orientalism; and Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, eds., Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography (Durham, NC, 2002).
148 Wright and Janet Abu-Lughod have shown that Lyautey neither eliminated corruption from the old political system nor provided the urban development and welfare state needed for newly industrializing Morocco. See Wright, Politics of Design; and Abu-Lughod, Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco (Princeton, NJ, 1980).
the European fantasy with real native peoples, architecture, artifacts, and language.\textsuperscript{150} This “woman’s Orient” did not give voice to Muslim women, however. Even metropolitan French feminists preferred the clichés of the oriental harem to the real voices of Arab feminists, as Emily Apter has suggested.\textsuperscript{151} French feminists were not interested in Sabiha Gökçen, the first Turkish woman pilot, Hūda Sha’rawi, the founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Bāmdād Baḍr al-Mulūk, a crusader for Iranian women’s education,\textsuperscript{152} the Lebanese writer May Ziyadeh, or the Arab feminist journals published in French.\textsuperscript{153} The works of Le Brun, who created the first women’s salon in Egypt and inspired the Egyptian feminist Sha’rawi, were ignored.

De Lens opens the question of female subjectivity in French orientalism. She dedicated her life to oriental beauty (fig. 6) and used her

\textsuperscript{150} This French “staging of the real” took place in French colonial photography as well. See Malek Alloula, \textit{The Colonial Harem} (Minneapolis, 1986).
\textsuperscript{151} Apter argues that Colette and others adopted clichés of harem Sapphism to explore female sexuality (“Ethnographic Travesties,” 316).
home, family, body, and private diary to realize her vision. She created herself through her writing; her *demi-musulmane* was a gender performance both for the French public and for the intimacy of her own consciousness. But rather than achieving Cixous’s “togetherness of one-another,” de Lens’s writing tore her consciousness between a desire to identify with Muslim women and a rejection of the native “other”:

I wrote some pages, pages outside myself and my thought, psychology of a Moroccan woman, adventure of Lella Khaddouj in the milieu of the harems, so close and so far from me in this moment. And I was able to see it live, as I know it, to feel it, to describe it, to forget my torment. . . . I feel physically and morally bruised. . . . I read my journal and I cry. The contrast is too great between the lightness of then and my oppressive anguish of today.\(^ {154}\)

De Lens refracted her self in multiple textual layers—personal journals, fiction, commercial articles, painting—but rather than building integrity, orientalist writing fractured her subjectivity in contradictory directions. Homi Bhabha, Said, and Frantz Fanon have argued that the colonized cannot construct his or her subjectivity from racist colonial discourse.\(^ {155}\) De Lens demonstrates the limits orientalism imposes on the colonizer as well.

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