

# Reframing the Colonial Gaze: Photography, Ownership, and Feminist Resistance



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The act of representing others almost always involves violence to the subject of representation.

Edward Said, "In the Shadow of the West"

To challenge the regimes of representation that govern a society is to conceive of how a politics can transform reality. As this creative struggle moves onward, it is bound to recompose subjectivity and praxis. More often than not, it requires that one leave the realms of the known, and take oneself there where one does not expect, is not expected to be.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*

The "native" is not the defiled image, and not *not* the defiled image. And she stares indifferently, mocking our imprisonment within imagistic resemblance.

Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*

## **I. Introduction: Owning images**

Photography's invention in the mid-nineteenth century as a "revolutionary means of reproduction" provoked a crisis of authorship in

both law and art.<sup>1</sup> Especially in France, Britain, and the United States, photography raised a host of seemingly intractable problems for copyright law. If the invention of photography heralded a golden age of technological innovation and mass replication, it also prompted scrutiny regarding the precise meanings of creation and ownership. Given the interdependent roles of the camera, photographer, and photographed subject in the process of photographic composition, who could be rightly designated as the “author” of an image? Were photographs—like novels and scientific inventions—sufficiently “original” to warrant copyright protection, or did they merely record a preexisting reality? How important was the mark of human agency, or authorial trace, to a photograph?

Anxieties about how to establish the proper ownership of photographs dominated Western copyright law in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. By 1880, the photograph had evolved into a highly contested legal object. Initially, design executives at large printing presses and lithographic companies regarded photography as the product of mechanical intervention rather than artistic creation. Consequently, they reproduced images *en masse* without obtaining photographers’ permission. Shifting conceptions of authorship and creativity gradually challenged this practice, most notably in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Burrow-Giles Lithographic Company v. Sarony* (1883).

In *Burrow*, a New York-based photographer named N. Sarony sued a local lithograph company for copyright infringement, based on the company’s unauthorized reproduction of his portrait of Oscar Wilde. In accordance with prevailing legal custom, the respondent claimed that the photograph in question was an exact reproduction of Wilde’s person, and thus did not constitute a copyrightable work of art. In its ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the two legally protected classes or beneficiaries recognized by existing copyright law—“authors” and “inventors”—should be more broadly construed to include photographers. Provided that the originality of a photograph could be established, photography constituted an “art” involving labors of “original mental conception,” intellectual invention, and creativity. Accordingly, the Court found that the plaintiff in this case—who had created his image by posing the subject; eliciting a

<sup>1</sup> See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 224.

particular facial expression; arranging the costume, accessories, and backdrop; and manipulating available light to expose the image—should indeed receive copyright protection for his photograph.<sup>2</sup>

At issue in the legal debate surrounding photographic authorship was the question of how to properly define, classify, and attribute artistic creation, originality, and ownership. Also at stake was legal protection for the right to reproduce an image. As evident from the erratic weave of federal case law, most courts approached the camera as an industrial machine that significantly complicated traditional distinctions between the “subject” and “object” of artistic production.

The anxieties characterizing legal debates at the turn of the century reemerged in cultural and literary studies in the mid-twentieth century, when Roland Barthes initiated a “theory uprising”<sup>3</sup> that introduced one of the central preoccupations of postmodernism: the “death of the author.”<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault expanded on these themes of originality and authorship in his essay, “What Is an Author?”<sup>5</sup> while Andy Warhol raised similar questions in the American art world of the seventies regarding the role of the artist in an age of mass production. For Walter Benjamin, the ambiguities of authorship in the mechanical age implied that exhibition sites and practices would supplant artistic “origins” as the most powerful shapers of aesthetic and political meaning.<sup>6</sup>

By the eighties, minority studies scholars and feminist theorists began to question the political implications of the putative death of the author. What did it mean to proclaim this death—or the impossibility of unified subjectivity and authorship as such—just as the artistic works of previously marginalized groups, including women and minorities, were gaining visibility within the academy? On the other hand, how might a rejection of the traditional model of authorship complicate the static notions of creative agency and passive compliance (e.g. feminine muse and masculine source, seed, or origin) that had previously seemed to govern all transactions between the producer and consumer of the image? These questions

<sup>2</sup> *111 U.S. 53*, decided March 17, 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Chela Sandoval coins this term in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> See Michel Foucault, “What Is An Author?” in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 101-20.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin 224-26.

highlight exactly what the turn-of-the-century legal rush to establish proper photographic ownership seems to obscure: an understanding of the image as the product not only of mechanical reproduction, but also of a dynamic field of aesthetic and social relations and contestations.<sup>7</sup>

Postcolonial feminist literature often concerns itself with precisely this question of what it means to own or author an image, and how one might exist in creative and critical relationship to the other's gaze. Taking as a point of departure the notion that "reading and [remaking] pictures can be seen as forms of feminist resistance,"<sup>8</sup> I will study Leïla Sebbar's reconfiguration of the relations between image and identity in her novel *Sherazade*. By so doing, I hope to illuminate a broader spectrum of women's experiences as consumers, creators, and manipulators of images.

In the following discussion, I will assess wartime identity card portraits composed by the French photographer Marc Garanger, and their resurfacing in Leïla Sebbar's novel *Sherazade: Missing: Aged 17, Dark Curly Hair, Green Eyes*. I have chosen to focus on Garanger's photography primarily because Sebbar explicitly evokes it in her novel. Yet I also believe that Garanger's work as a war photographer yields fertile ground for debate regarding how colonial fantasies of "otherness" are photographically conceived, and how their orchestration depends upon a certain ambivalence that might permit creative forms of decomposition from within the photographic field.

Foregrounding the oppositional looks that abound in *Sherazade*, I will argue that Sebbar stages ambivalent yet highly productive encounters between women's "looks" and the photographic gaze. Instead of renouncing stereotypical imagery or reinforcing colonial desire, *Sherazade* asks the more compelling question of how Algerian-French women both participate in and misrecognize the melancholic racial and sexual fantasies at play within nationalist and colonial imaginaries.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, her work moves beyond Edward Said's paradigm of Orientalism to reimagine the relation between image and identity as one of creative negotiation.

<sup>7</sup> See Silverman 136.

<sup>8</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 215.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the notion of stereotypes as melancholic racializations, see Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 106.

My essay will develop an alternative framework for analyzing colonial photography by exploring how subaltern women “occupy” imagery in order to contest symbolic erasures and violations of difference. Within *Sherazade*, women’s oppositional looks reconfigure hegemonic relations between power, sexuality, culture, and representation. Seizing on the ambivalence of colonial imagery, Sebbar creates powerful counter-fictions of female sexuality and national identity.

Photographs are best understood as “collective assemblages”<sup>10</sup> of photographer, viewer, and photographed subject. Due to the parallax that typically accompanies photographic inscription, I will conceive of misrecognition as a complex response to the nationalist and colonialist politics of representation. By subversively engaging with parallax, postcolonial writers creatively decompose seemingly fixed identities.

For Lacan, *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) is an imagined relation between image and identity that mediates ego-formation.<sup>11</sup> In his formulation of the mirror phase, Lacan ignores how subjects are differentially constituted along axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality. Yet this formative aspect of difference renders problematic—notably for minority subjects—visual economies premised on specularity and reflection. Like Lacan, I will consider misrecognition as an Imaginary relation to an image that constitutes an illusory effect of self-identity. It is in this sense that Fanon understands the colonial image to “fix” and fracture the colonized subject.<sup>12</sup> But I will also explore misrecognition as a disavowal of socially sanctioned identity, or a strategic dis-identification. I am especially interested in the latter aspect of misrecognition, and want to ask what can happen when someone confronts an unrecognizable image with the disclaimer, “that’s not me!” This moment of misrecognition might constitute not a distancing from the false, but rather an attempt to provocatively employ fantasy, as an inevitable element of history, memory, and identity, in one’s own becoming.

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, tr. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 22. Originally published as *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953–1954*, trans. John Forrester (London: Cambridge UP, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, tr. Charles Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

My analysis of *Sherazade* will employ literary critic Marianne Hirsch's definition of the "feminist reader and creator of images":

She is not just the collection of pieces of glossy paper on the floor, she is also the photographer who has subversively disassembled herself in them. As photographer and subject, she [locates identity] both in the collection of contradictory, incongruous, and discontinuous images, and in the act of reframing and rearranging them to trace a personal and collective history against their grain.<sup>13</sup>

As Hirsch emphasizes, the feminist reader of images does not just deconstruct representations of the feminine. She also invents an alternative aesthetic by appropriating the "powerful fantasies and anxieties that keep those images circulating"<sup>14</sup>—and that might be used to authorize other narratives and histories.

Unlike the charge of misrepresentation, an emphasis on fantasy and misrecognition acknowledges the represented subject not as frozen or fixed by the camera's eye, but as a playful and shifting composition able to scrutinize, to contest, and ultimately to position herself as "too much" for the lens. This concept of misrecognition also allows for the possibility that a photographer may be disarmed by unintended elements of his or her own images. Next I will discuss wartime photographer Marc Garanger, whose work attests to this potential.

## II. Marc Garanger: Photographing "identity"

During the Algerian revolution, Algerians were required to carry identity cards that would render them "visible and 'legible'"<sup>15</sup> to French colonial authorities. Soldiers rounded up entire communities of Algerians, and forcibly unveiled Algerian women, to take their ID card portraits. Although the French practice of unveiling sought to render Algerian women identifiable to colonial authorities, it also violated local custom and religious practice.<sup>16</sup>

Identity cards formalized the French fantasy of empire, and functioned within a broader discursive network to deny citizenship rights

<sup>13</sup> Hirsch 213-14.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch 211.

<sup>15</sup> Silverman 147.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this see Frantz Fanon, trans. Haakon Chevalier, "Algeria Unveiled," *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

to colonial Algerians who were not of French descent. As a final attempt at French signature or authorship within the receding colony, Algerian identity cards marked an effort to both defer and compensate for impending national loss on the dawn of a traumatic rupture within *l'empire français*.

Within this context, the Algerian identity portraits composed by French army photographer Marc Garanger can be read as ambivalent performances of national fantasy. Photography enlists Garanger and his subjects in arduous negotiations with popular narratives of racial, sexual, and national identity. In a sense, their fraught subject positions bear out the Freudian psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity as an ongoing struggle to negotiate ambivalent identifications—or as the history of those shifting affiliations.<sup>17</sup> Yet the asymmetric positions occupied by Garanger and his photographic subjects highlight the need for a critical vocabulary with which to address a broad range of national traumatic experience. Colonial representation and identification, in particular, need to be rethought in terms of the negotiations between fantasy and identity that they may permit relative to visual stagings of race, gender, and ethnicity.

In the context of forced unveiling, Algerian women's identity card photographs can be understood as uniquely staged. Although they are military rather than studio photographs, they bear some resemblance to the posed images exhibited in Malek Alloula's study of French colonial postcards entitled *The Colonial Harem*. Both sets of photographs manifest a history of colonialist intervention into the image or self-presentation of women, especially efforts to refashion or redress Algerian women's bodies according to divergent political objectives. Aesthetic investments in the fantasy of the unveiled Algerian woman—and in the veil itself as the primary trope for the "Oriental feminine"—impact colonial postcards and identity photographs alike.

Marc Garanger, a Frenchman born in Normandy, helped to orchestrate women's images during the revolution. Garanger served as a photographer in the French army from 1960–1962, where he composed Algerian *cartes d'identité*. His photographic experiences converted Garanger to a staunch critic of colonial policy and practice. He especially opposed the campaigns of torture conducted by the French

<sup>17</sup> For a succinct discussion of Freud's position see Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 34.

*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (OAS), and the forced unveiling of Algerian women prior to their portraiture.

An evolving consciousness spurred Garanger to work feverishly during his two-year tenure to create a portfolio of images that would memorialize colonial injustice. Although photography constituted Garanger's official duty relative to the French nation, it also offered a tool with which to record his opposition to colonial practice:

To express myself with my eye, I took up my camera. To shout my disagreement. For twenty-four months I never stopped, sure that one day I would be able to testify, to tell stories with these images. . . . All of this I did with more force than the dominant military ideology of the era that surrounded me with hatred and violence. My spirit's revolt was proportionate to the horrors that I witnessed.<sup>18</sup>

Driven by this spirit of revolt, Garanger exploited photography's capacity to shape the national imaginary. He tried to create images that would question the authoring (and authorizing) functions of the colonial gaze. Given his ambivalent position *vis-à-vis la mission civilatrice*, Garanger opens up a space for dis-identification with the racial and sexual politics embedded in colonial imagery.

Garanger's photography foregrounds tense encounters between colonial desire and the disarming looks of photographed subjects. During his tour of duty in Algeria, Garanger was repeatedly struck by the violence in Algerian women's eyes as they met his camera's gaze. His work registers profound ambivalence about the objectifying function of colonial photography—ambivalence that frequently haunts or disturbs the surface of his images. Garanger's most provocative images record not only the violence of colonial representation, but also the destabilizing potential of Algerian women's looks.

But how exactly might we explain the disruptive potentials that, as I have argued, haunt the surface of Garanger's photographs? On one hand, the gazes of Garanger's photographed subjects can only be understood within the context of the plurality of gazes that intersect in each image.<sup>19</sup> For example, women's looks cannot be completely disentangled from the photographer's eye, or from the varied lenses of viewers. Nor can women's looks be interpreted without reference

<sup>18</sup> Marc Garanger, *La Guerre d'Algérie vue par un appelé du contingent* (Paris: Seuil, 1984) 13, my translation.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this, see Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1993), esp. Ch. 7.



to the social and historical context of Garanger's images. As I have noted, Garanger's photography records particularly loaded moments of colonial encounter—moments orchestrated to produce identity card portraits for purposes of classification, control, and surveillance. In this sense, the historical and social context of Granger's photographs must be understood as one of the many gazes that converge on their troubling surfaces. Collectively, these gazes are:

the source of many photographic contradictions, highlighting the gaps and multiple perspectives of each person involved in the complex scene. [They] are the root of much of the photograph's dynamism as a cultural object, and the place where the analyst can perhaps most productively begin to trace the photograph's connections to the wider social world of which it is a part.<sup>20</sup>

For readers of Garanger's images, it is crucial to attend to the colonial and voyeuristic encounters at issue within the photographic frame.

Yet as I have argued, it is equally important to note the resistant potentials of what Homi Bhabha has referred to as “the threatened return of the look.”<sup>21</sup> As Roland Barthes notes, a photograph often creates unintended effects, including misrecognition on the part of the photographed subject, and viewer identification with the subject by way of eerily familiar details. These unauthorized readings flow from the internal ambivalence of representation, and radically unsettle the boundary between self and other that Orientalist imagery works to preserve. The women photographed by Garanger unambiguously return his gaze. But exactly how and where do they look, and how do their looks gesture toward resistance? The “threatening” potentials of Garanger's images are most productively analyzed in relation to the photographed women's posture and gesture, facial expression, and eyes.

Before engaging in a closer reading of Garanger's wartime photographs, it is worth noting the specific constraints of his medium. In his work as a military identity card photographer, Garanger enjoyed less creative license, on the average, than a fine art portraitist. Furthermore, since identity portraits had to conform to standard specifications governing size, angle, and content, Garanger's aesthetic

<sup>20</sup> Lutz and Collins 216.

<sup>21</sup> See Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in Bhabha, ed., *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

techniques do not necessarily correspond to personal sociopolitical objectives. With these constraints in mind, traditional photographic design principles—including lighting, depth of field, point of view, composition, focus, graininess, exposure, and paper contrast—are not particularly instructive guidelines for a critique of his work.<sup>22</sup>

For example, the French army expected Garanger to shoot individual rather than group portraits. As a result, his work specifically enlisted him in one-on-one encounters with Algerian women—meetings that, at first glance, would seem to yield purely exploitative exchanges between the Frenchman and his “native” female subjects. Yet the creative and political potentials of these individual confrontations between photographer and photographed subject are, instead, highly ambiguous. On one hand, as Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins suggest, the photographic genre of the individual portrait is less likely to reproduce stereotypical or Orientalist constructions of “Third World” or “native” subjects. On the other hand, the nature of Garanger’s portraiture required that it be somewhat posed, which ordinarily affords the photographer a greater degree of control over the image.<sup>23</sup> Some observers might interpret this control as an extension of colonial authority, despite Garanger’s stated personal and political desire to contest the French colonial enterprise in Algeria.

Similarly, the political objectives of the identity card—to classify and identify Algerians to the French military—obliged Garanger’s subjects to confront the camera in full frontal view. This classificatory function significantly limited the potentials for how and where Algerian women might look *vis-à-vis* the photographer. Ordinarily, the photographed subject has total control over the nature and direction of her look. He or she might choose to directly confront the camera; to look at something else within the photographic frame; to look off into the distance; or not to look at anything at all—perhaps even to close his or her eyes. For Garanger’s subjects, however, these fields of vision were restricted by military objectives. Because their portraits had to be clearly recognizable to colonial authorities, women were expected to meet the camera’s eye.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the principles of photographic design see Terry Barrett, *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> For more on this, see Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*.

With these constraints in mind, I will briefly consider some of the ways in which Algerian women attempted to transform the photographic space of Garanger's images from within. Although they were required to confront the camera in full frontal view for purposes of identification, many women managed to customize this posture, especially by way of hand gestures and bodily positioning. For example, some women use their hands to draw their clothing more closely toward them in a self-protective gesture [Figs. 1,8]. Others rest their arms on or just below their chests, with tightly closed fists aimed at the camera [Figs. 2,5]. Several of Garanger's subjects conceal their arms beneath their veils, whereas one woman drapes her arm across her chest and knees in a posture that seems to signal audacity and defiance [Figs. 3,7].

The women photographed by Garanger most strikingly communicate resistance with their eyes and facial expressions. As one might expect, none of these women opt to smile for the camera. This is important to note in a cross-cultural encounter in which the smile would typically serve a "mitigating" function to mute the potentially disruptive or confrontational role of the "other's" return gaze.<sup>24</sup> Instead of smiling to efface or palliate the asymmetrical power relations between colonizer and colonized that might emerge from these photographs, Algerian women confront Garanger's camera with lips tightly pursed, their mouths conveying resolve and the desire to be recognized on their own terms [Figs. 1,2,4,8,9]. Many women dramatically scowl or frown at the camera [Figs. 3,4,5,6].

The women in Garanger's images also communicate an explosive mix of indifference, curiosity, indictment, and hostility with their eyes. Some women gaze directly at the camera with eyes wide open in a spirit of challenge and inquisition [Figs. 1,2]. Others pointedly look downward at the camera lens to convey disdain for the colonial photographic enterprise [Fig. 4]. Still other women glare sidewise at the camera in a gesture of disgust and dismissal, or concentrate their stares slightly upward to escape the photographer's gaze—and the confines of the photographic frame—altogether [Figs. 3,5,7,8]. One woman narrows her eyes and furrows her brow accusingly at the camera, whereas another lowers her eyelids to express determination and a desire for confrontation [Figs. 6, 5].

<sup>24</sup> Lutz and Collins 198.



Figure 1. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 2. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 3. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 4. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 5. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.





Figure 6. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 7. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 8. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.



Figure 9. © Marc Garanger, "Femme algérienne, 1960." By permission of the photographer.

Collectively, women's looks assume an aggressive, hostile, even scathing quality throughout Garanger's work. Especially, they destabilize colonial positions of mastery and domination *vis-à-vis* the image. Although women's looks "may be difficult to discern [amidst] the traffic of the more privileged gazes of image-producers and consumers, stories of contestable power are told there nonetheless."<sup>25</sup> The defiant postures and expressions that haunt Granger's imagery locate possibilities for subversive rupture within the processes of photographic composition and interpretation.

After fulfilling his military duty, Garanger sought to highlight these stories of resistance by arranging for the public display of his work in explicitly anti-colonial contexts. Beginning in 1961, Garanger organized a series of photographic exhibits in France to spark public debate about French military practices in Algeria. He also published anti-colonial photo-essays to raise awareness of the brutalities of occupation, and to memorialize Algeria within the French national imaginary. Ultimately, Garanger hoped to shatter French silence regarding the Algerian revolution.

In his introduction to a published collection of identity card portraits entitled *Femmes algériennes 1960*, Garanger recalls that while photographing Algerian women, he was repeatedly "hit by their look at point-blank range."<sup>26</sup> As he elaborates in a subsequent publication:

The gaze is a means of communication and knowledge, and I don't think that the people I photographed had any illusions about that. Women's violent protestation of colonial aggression [especially forced unveiling and portraiture] is visible in every one of their gazes. *It is this gaze to which I want to bear witness.*<sup>27</sup>

During one of his identity card *expositions* at a French art gallery, Garanger was startled by the reaction of a group of young Algerian girls viewing the exhibit with their mothers, survivors of the revolution. He notes that the women's gazes seemed to "cross" or intersect at the surface of his images. I would also add that this particular "crossing" functions, like Barthes' *punctum*, to disrupt photographic composition.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Lutz and Collins 216.

<sup>26</sup> Marc Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes 1960* (Paris: Contrejour, 1982) 3, my translation.

<sup>27</sup> Marc Garanger, *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux: Algérie 1960* (Paris: La Boite à Documents, 1990) 7, all translations mine.

<sup>28</sup> Garanger, *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux* 8.

I want to explore the productive capacity of these crossed glances, as contentious meeting between women's looks and the photographic image. What becomes possible when women critically engage with their images—especially when their looks collide with colonial fantasies? How do these moments of dis-identification resist absorption into the specular economy of masculinist nationalist, and Orientalist, vision? How do women's looks destabilize photographic composition, and challenge binary constructions of creation and consumption? And how does Leïla Sebbar creatively mobilize this gap between the photographic gaze and the resistant look?

Because he pictorially foregrounds and retrospectively attends to the critical significance of women's defiant looks, Garanger might be said to resist a male-centered, voyeuristic gaze. Literary critic Winifred Woodhull subscribes to this view of Garanger's work by reading his imagery as a record of women's contempt and defiance rather than passive subordination.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, in light of Garanger's participation in the French army, his images might be expected to perpetuate colonial exploitation. Cultural theorist Kaja Silverman adopts the latter premise when analyzing Garanger's photographs.<sup>30</sup> For Silverman, Garanger's photography is enabled and circumscribed by the violence of forced unveiling, coupled with Algerian women's "horror of being photographed for the first time."<sup>31</sup> Silverman rightly emphasizes the exploitative origins of colonial photography, and understands Garanger's identity portraits to exist on a continuum with Orientalist imagery of the sort analyzed by Alloula. For Silverman, both sets of images help to construct sexual and cultural otherness, and to promote social hierarchy. She approaches the Orientalist trope of woman-as-spectacle as always "complicated by other kinds of culturally constituted differences," especially race.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb* (Minneapolis, Minnesota P, 1993), 43. I mean to evoke "voyeurism" here in its broad aesthetic sense, and also in light of its Freudian connotations as a psychological inclination to take a sadistic pleasure in exposing the "other." For more on this, see Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Silverman analyzes the photographs by Garanger that are showcased in a film by Harun Farocki entitled "Images of the World and the Inscription of War" (1988).

<sup>31</sup> Voice-over in Farocki's film. Cited by Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 148.

<sup>32</sup> Silverman 147.

Silverman fails to acknowledge the ambivalence of Garanger's self-described position as both an opponent and executor of the material practices of colonization. Yet Garanger's attentiveness to moments of tension and contradiction within the process of colonial image-making allows for feminist recuperation of his images, however conditional. Sebbar's decision to write the textual accompaniment to *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux* attests to this potential, as does her creative engagement with Garanger's photography in *Sherazade*. Garanger understands the Algerian women that he photographed as critical agents of photographic representation. He reads in their looks a scathing critique of colonialism and, especially, an astute awareness of the ways in which colonial representation often facilitates political conquest and the transmission of fantasy.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, for *Sherazade*, Sebbar's protagonist, the image is most productively explored as a fantasy that encapsulates both the seeds and limits of subjugation and contestation. As a result, *Sherazade's* trafficking between fantasy and identity, which plays out along a continuum of complicity and resistance, proves an endlessly ambivalent enterprise.

### III. Un-mapping ownership, identity, and the *carte d'identité* in *Sherazade*

I don't think that Algerian women ever interiorized the image offered by the colonizers. I, Algerian-born, have *never* met an Algerian woman who did not resist the use or appropriation.

Helene Cixous, unpublished notes,  
December 1996

To create an image, do you have to destroy madly?

Leïla Sebbar, *Le Fou de Sherazade*

<sup>33</sup> As in most colonial endeavors, artists accompanied soldiers to Algiers on their *mission civilatrice*. See Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850–1900* (London: Routledge, 2000 ); Gerard-Georges Lemaire, trans. Harriet de Blanco, *The Orient in Western Art* (Cologne: Konemann, 2001), originally published as *L'Univers des Orientalistes* (Paris: Edition Menges, 2000); and Assia Djebar, *L'Amour; la fantasia* (Paris: Edition Jean-Claude Lattes, 1985, trans. 1993).

Leïla Sebbar intervenes in these debates by revisioning the questions of ownership and agency that simultaneously haunt theoretical formulations of the subject and object of representation; the legal and colonial histories of photography; and the relentless mappings of the national identity card. By constantly reproducing and reassessing Orientalist images throughout her work, Sebbar frustrates the visual economies of agency and submission that appear to “fix” the identities of artist, subject, and viewer in an unwilling embrace with the violence of colonial imagery. Not only do Sebbar’s protagonists radically interrogate the *mise-en-scène* of representation; they also participate in the violence of image creation.

Born to a French mother and Algerian father, Sebbar inhabits the interstices between French and Algerian national identity. Although she does not precisely fit the definition of a *Beur*, or a second-generation Maghrebian immigrant living in France, her work shares the primary preoccupations of *Beur* literature including race, sexuality, multiculturalism, nationality, and immigration. A prolific writer, Sebbar began to explore the possibilities of narrating diasporic fiction in the eighties. Her efforts culminated in a trilogy of novels chronicling the urban exploits of a female *Beur* protagonist named Sherazade. These novels include *Sherazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982), *Les Carnets de Sherazade* (1985), and *Le Fou de Sherazade* (1991).

*Sherazade: Missing, Aged 17, Dark Curly Hair, Green Eyes*, the first volume of Sebbar’s trilogy, constitutes a prolonged attempt to unmap the conceptual politics of the identity card.<sup>34</sup> We first meet Sherazade after she has fled her family’s home in the HLM, or suburban housing projects, in search of a better life in Paris. A teenager with scarce financial resources, Sherazade shares a squatter’s apartment with an eclectic group of *Beurs* and post-1968 leftists. Lively, conversational, and irreverent in tone, the novel describes Sherazade’s adventures as she roams the streets of Paris with her newfound friends. Her nomadic wanderings spark constant confrontations between “high” and “low”—which roughly correspond to French and Algerian—cultures. Endless warring between Sherazade’s two main cultural spheres of influence fosters a somewhat romantic longing to return to native origins—a desire that ultimately proves impossible to sustain or fulfill throughout Sebbar’s trilogy.

<sup>34</sup> Leïla Sebbar, *Sherazade (Missing: Aged 17, Dark Curly Hair, Green Eyes)*, trans. Dorothy Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1982)



The first installment of Sebbar's *Sherazade* trilogy especially brings to life the "fierce looks" evoked by Marc Garanger's photo-essays. *Sherazade* traces historical loss, and anxieties about identity, as they impact personal efforts to subvert Orientalist imagery. Hungry to explore the national, sexual, and ethnic politics that coalesce in the identity portrait, the novel constitutes a literal and figurative attempt to file a missing persons report of sorts.

By staging feminist interventions into Orientalist visual culture, Sebbar offers an ambivalent meditation on the role that fantasy might play to "un-suture" the relations between image and identity.<sup>35</sup> The following discussion will address the varied subject positions engineered by *Sherazade vis-à-vis* Garanger's identity card photographs in order to show how *Sherazade* uses colonial imagery as a point of departure to misrecognize hegemonic sexual, racial, and cultural identities.

#### IV. Reading Garanger's photographs

In her introduction to a collection of Marc Garanger's photography, Leïla Sebbar describes Garanger as "a young French soldier, a man, a foreigner, who wanted to preserve the memory of years of violence in the gazes and gestures of women of the Hauts-Plateaux of Algeria."<sup>36</sup> Sebbar imagines the defiant voices that might have accompanied women's "point-blank" looks at Garanger:

They say *no*, they don't want to be regarded as primitive in their traditional African dress. No, they refuse here . . .<sup>37</sup>

She suggests that Algerian women refuse identification by either targeting or withholding their gaze from the soldier-photographer that attempts to fix their images.

During the Algerian revolution, sexual and colonial aggression against women converged in campaigns of rape by both French colonial and Algerian nationalist men. Sebbar discusses wartime rape as a strategy of sexual violation and genealogical deprivation:

It's not enough to destroy the body; houses must be beaten to their very foundations until life's site of production is destroyed. To rape women is

<sup>35</sup> For more on suturing, see Linker.

<sup>36</sup> Leïla Sebbar in Garanger, *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux*, back cover, all translations mine.

<sup>37</sup> Sebbar in Garanger, *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux* 34.

precisely that kind of destruction: it is to insinuate the enemy in the most profound place of the female body. To destroy forever the possibilities of *jouissance* and motherhood, to prevent descent, to sever filiation.<sup>38</sup>

By emphasizing rape as a genocidal tool, Sebbar conceives of feminist resistance not only in aesthetic terms—as hostile looks that deflect colonial violence—but also as essential to personal integrity and national political survival. She understands the French colonial mission as an effort to thwart Algerian cultural transmission:

Transmission is impossible. Who are the Ancestors? Who will be the descendants? Although deprived of genealogy, women are rediscovering fragments of memory in everyday objects and domestic rituals.<sup>39</sup>

Although women are similarly evoked as the “transmitters of culture” in masculinist nationalist discourse,<sup>40</sup> Sebbar works this affiliation to slightly different ends. While she references a nationalist rhetoric of lost origins, she also emphasizes the provisional status of national, ethnic, and sexual identities. For Sebbar, resistance is possible in the gap between women’s looks and coercive identifications—a space born of memory, critique, and hope.

For Sebbar, identity is at once indebted to, at war with, and inextricable from the image. To navigate the charged intersections between image and identity, Sebbar investigates the strategic possibilities of “disidentification,” which is not reducible to a desire to reject representation. Instead, it is a “strategy that works on and against dominant ideology”<sup>41</sup>—one that involves at least partial incorporation of, and negotiation with, dominant fictions. Sebbar challenges facile notions of identity politics by suggesting that the self is always infused with the potential for other identifications. Her *Sherazade* trilogy bears out Diana Fuss’s claim that “even our most impassioned identifications may incorporate nonidentity, and our most fervent disidentifications may already harbor the very identity that they seek to resist.”<sup>42</sup> *Sherazade*’s self-fashioning involves multiple processes of identifying with and against.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Sebbar in Garanger, *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux* 64.

<sup>39</sup> Sebbar in Garanger, *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux* 70.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Michel Pecheux, *Language, Semantics, and Ideology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982).

<sup>42</sup> Fuss 10.

<sup>43</sup> For an overview of Sedgwick’s analysis, see Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999) 8.

By unmapping colonial projects of identification, Sherazade echoes Sebbar's own refusal to identify with exclusionary categories of racial or national affiliation. As the child of a French mother and Algerian father, Sebbar locates herself at a peculiar "crossing" that defies categorization. As she explains in a letter to a friend:

I am neither a Maghrebian writing in French nor a Frenchwoman with French roots. . . . If I talk about exile, I am also referring to cultural crossings. It's at these points of junction or disjunction where I live and write, and contest simplistic notions of identity.<sup>44</sup>

Highlighting the various crossings at play in her genealogy—"mon histoire de croiséé"—Sebbar rejects exclusionary constructions of French or Maghrebian identity, much like her protagonist Sherazade. Instead, she formulates an intersectional model of identity, one that takes into account the nuances of geography, language, and history to forge a feminist politics of location. Sebbar conceives of identity as, above all, a contested and negotiable territory of intersection, fantasy, selective affiliation, and disjunction.

Most strikingly, Sebbar's literature amplifies the violence and productivity of Algerian women's crossed glances. In an exemplary passage within *Sherazade*, the protagonist fortuitously discovers the wartime photography of Marc Garanger. As Sherazade leafs through a coffee table copy of Garanger's *Femmes algériennes 1960*, her sentiments recall Sebbar's photographic commentary accompanying the text:

These Algerian women all faced the lens [*l'objectif-mitrailleur*] as if they were facing a machine-gun, with the same intense, savage look—a fierceness that the image could only record without ever mastering or dominating.<sup>45</sup>

In this respect, both Sebbar and Sherazade emphasize the resistant potentials of the female gaze. Interestingly enough, Sherazade's encounter with these images immediately follows an experience of seeing herself on screen for the first time. A few minutes prior to her photographic discovery, Julien's friend, a film director, had heralded Sherazade as the perfect girl to play the lead role of Zina in his upcoming film:

<sup>44</sup> Leïla Sebbar and Nancy Huston, *Lettres parisiennes: Histoires d'exil* (Paris: Barrault, 1986) 133-34, my translation.

<sup>45</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade* 237-38

That's her! That's Zina! I've been on the lookout for ages, I've had the idea of a girl like this. I [wanted] to find the girl who got away from all of the stereotypes. . . . And then Julien showed me some photos. I don't trust photos, unless I've taken them myself. But there you are, I can see with my own eyes, Sherazade in person . . . Zina.<sup>46</sup>

Sherazade is taken aback by the mixture of enthusiasm, fantasy, and projection with which Julien's friend greets her. After shooting a few scenes, she reviews a videotape of her performance in a state of detachment:

Sherazade could see and hear herself for the first time on a screen. It was curious, as if it didn't concern her. The girl she was seeing wasn't her.<sup>47</sup>

By the tape's end, Sherazade remains noncommittal and unconvinced about her identity *vis-à-vis* the fictional Zina.

In the wake of her performance as Zina—and the feelings of alienation or misrecognition that it occasions—Sherazade catches sight of Garanger's photographic collection. She views his identity card photographs with a mixture of anger, sadness, resistance, and solidarity. As she turns the pages of the book, tears stream down her face: she is powerfully moved by the images, and seems to identify with the plight of their female subjects. The narrator describes Sherazade as “weeping like one who has taken leave of her senses—softly, silently, ceaselessly.”<sup>48</sup> The photographs awaken in Sherazade an unexpectedly profound sense of estrangement, loss, and connection. Through her tears, she notes that the photographed women “all spoke the same language, her mother's tongue.”<sup>49</sup>

Leafing through Garanger's wartime identity portraits, Sherazade employs a Barthesian “remembering look”<sup>50</sup> that puts the image in contact with a time before. For Sherazade, photography triggers a painful act of re-membering: “a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.”<sup>51</sup> Born after the revolution, Sherazade did not witness firsthand the ravages of war and colonization. Instead, a persistent inability to access the past trauma-

<sup>46</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade* 233-34

<sup>47</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade* 237.

<sup>48</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade* 238.

<sup>49</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade*. 238.

<sup>50</sup> See Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World*.

<sup>51</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Foreword: Remembering Fanon,” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986) xxiii.

tizes her life as a Maghrebian immigrant in France, and precludes successful mourning. Sherazade's ability to mourn her lost homeland is partially restored by Garanger's photographs. Because they equip Sherazade with a supplemental shortcut to the past, they allow her to temporarily mourn her (lack of) Algeria.

Given its melancholic undertones and placement immediately following her alienating cinematic debut, Sherazade's perusal of Garanger's photographs would seem to trigger a staunch rejection of fantasy.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps Sherazade's encounter with these images will preface a realist turn to the restorative potentials of the photograph as "certificate of presence"? After all, the photographed women refuse to comply with colonial and Orientalist fantasies, and Sherazade is openly moved by their defiance. Her connection with Garanger's photographs seems to reveal, at least in part, a longing to dispense with the imagined communities that she has been forced to construct in order to resurrect the "real" Algerian nation.

Yet Sherazade's rejection of fantasy proves as fleeting and unstable as her geographic coordinates within Paris. Elsewhere in the novel, she willingly and repeatedly indulges Orientalist stereotypes to highlight the potential for entrapment and disjunction that coheres in any effort to fix or map image, identity, and identification. Sherazade's resistant practices repeatedly derail the creation of fantasy-based photographs within the text. But they also enlist her in highly stereotypical, albeit ironic, performances of the very same brand of Orientalist fantasy. As a result, Sherazade's opposing tactics—on one hand, to frustrate or deny the production of fantasy-based images, and on the other, to playfully embody Orientalist fantasies of identity—demonstrate the complexity, polyvalence and mutability of her negotiations between image and identity.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Winifred Woodhull and Anne Donadey have interpreted Sherazade's encounter with Garanger's photography as a rejection of, or turning away from, fantasy. See Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press, 2001) 132; and Woodhull 121-22. Woodhull understands Sherazade not to share in the resistant look of the women in Garanger's photographs, but to tearfully identify with the critical documentation of their oppression and, as a result, to reject all forms of photographic fantasy. She approaches Sherazade's sense of divide between image and identity as less an effort to "denounce all representation as repressive than to signal the need to use representation to bring the history of colonialism into the present in critical and productive ways" (122). I agree with Woodhull's distinction here. However, I also view Sherazade's behavior as participating in the violently resistant "looks" of the women in *Femmes algériennes 1960*, all of which serve to misrecognize or disidentify with the composed image.

Ultimately, Sherazade's reaction to Garanger's photography moves beyond tears and the realist rejection of fantasy. Sherazade confronts these images as, above all, homeless—"melancholic objects"<sup>53</sup> that fail to resurrect the Real precisely because they can "never fully supplant the lack of history."<sup>54</sup> Yet Sherazade does not read Algerian women's images as symptomatic of absolute domination. Instead, she apprehends "the severity and violence of people who submit to arbitrary treatment, knowing they will find the inner strength to resist."<sup>55</sup> While viewing Garanger's photography, Sherazade compounds the photographic point of view in order to envision the plural positionings, relationships, and incongruities that converge in the identity photograph.

Because Sherazade's look highlights dispersal and "preserves and intensifies the violence"<sup>56</sup> of relations between self and world, it functions as glance rather than gaze. Acting as saboteur or trickster, Sherazade's glance conveys "unofficial messages of hostility, collusion, rebellion, and lust. Against the Gaze, [it] proposes the body and desire."<sup>57</sup> Throughout the novel, she deploys this subversive glance to misrecognize or disidentify with composed or intended images. Ultimately, Sherazade's glance upon images of women reinforces the violent looks of the women photographed in *Femmes algériennes 1960*.

By reframing Garanger's photographs, Sherazade identifies with their female subjects not as a fellow victim, but as a comrade-in-arms. She decenters male authorship by focusing on the critical distance between women's looks (or glances) and the camera's gaze. Just as strikingly, she counters the seemingly fixed photographic image with an understanding of identity as precarious and unstable. In this sense, Sherazade reconfigures the identity card photograph as a work of art rather than a certificate of presence or an immutable mapping of national belonging. She also resists the presumed passivity of image consumption by using her own look to destabilize relations between image and identity.

*Sherazade* situates the identity card at the crossroads of sexual, class, racial, national, and cultural politics. By displacing the voyeuristic

<sup>53</sup> Susan Sontag develops this understanding of photographs as "melancholic objects" in *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977).

<sup>54</sup> Cheng 146.

<sup>55</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade* 237.

<sup>56</sup> Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 93.

<sup>57</sup> Bryson 94.

gaze, Sherazade imaginatively dislodges a coercive network of names, faces, and places. Her alternate framing of Garanger's photography allows for the possibility of other desires and spectators to emerge *vis-à-vis* the image—a possibility that, as bell hooks points out, is typically omitted:

When I asked a black woman in her twenties, an obsessive moviegoer, why she thought we had not written about black female spectatorship, she commented: "We are afraid to talk about ourselves as spectators because we have been so abused by 'the gaze'."<sup>58</sup>

Sherazade's desire to move beyond the wounding potentials of the gaze is evident in her orchestration of the look as a tool for both aesthetic and political transformation. Like Sebbar, Sherazade imagines the unruly look not in the binary terms of subject and object, but as the basis for a politics of desire that might disrupt hierarchical relations between colonizer and colonized, self and other. Rather than assimilation, nostalgia, or identification, women's looks in *Sherazade* provoke misrecognition. Sherazade's reception of—and receptivity to—Algerian women's contumacious looks betrays a creative commitment to feminist confrontation and empowerment.

Thus, immediately following Sherazade's tentative agreement to play the fantasy role of Zina in Julien's screenplay—"gang leader, rebel, poet, adept with a knife, fearless, unruly, as illusive and frightening as a war leader"—she eagerly enlists in another war of sorts with the colonial gaze and image.<sup>59</sup> Her gesture can be understood as an expression of solidarity with the unruly subjects of Garanger's work, and as an attempt to disorient the hegemonic constellations of name, face, and place at stake in national identity photographs.

By identifying with the unruly subjects and confrontational glances of Garanger's images, Sherazade pursues a creatively deconstructive politics of retouching and re-membering the scene of representation that I have alternately called disidentification or misrecognition. Her irreverent play inserts "the consciousness of a break," or a stammer, into the photographic scene.<sup>60</sup> It radically reconfigures the racial and sexual economies of looking typically at play in the colonial image.

<sup>58</sup> bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 126.

<sup>59</sup> Sebbar, *Sherazade* 236.

<sup>60</sup> Hirsch 214.

Significantly, Sebbar evokes women's looks as catalysts for photographic decomposition. Throughout *Sherazade*, women's looks testify to the complexities of the visual as a theatrical flurry of fantasy, assimilation, and creative subversion.<sup>61</sup>

It is precisely at the moment of her encounter with Garanger's photography that Sherazade's look becomes "productive." This "productive look":

necessitates the struggle, first, to recognize our involuntary acts of incorporation and repudiation of the dominant aspects of visual culture; and then, to see *differently*.<sup>62</sup>

Sherazade's introduction to Garanger's portraiture marks the moment at which her remembering gaze—or her gaze upon Algeria's traumatic, colonized past—becomes both disjunctive and productive. Her look does not simply return or reverse the gaze, but displaces conventional ways of seeing. In the space of parallax between look and gaze, Sebbar elaborates an iconography of sexual and racial misrecognition premised on "productive looking." The "productive look" creates "opportunities for re-cognition," and offers her "something else to be" *vis-a-vis* the colonial image.<sup>63</sup> As Silverman suggests, "the look is not truly 'productive' until it effects one final displacement: the displacement of the ego. It does not fully triumph over the forces that constrain it to see in predetermined ways until its appetite for alterity prevails over sameness and self-sameness."<sup>64</sup> Sherazade's look at Garanger's imagery can be seen in this light—as an opening up of the consciousness to otherness, and as a realization of the mutually embedded nature of self and other, fantasy and identity.

By lingering in the ambivalent space between complicity and resistance, viewer and viewed, Sherazade imagines an alternative iconography of sexual and racial disidentification. Her reading of Garanger's identity card photographs frames identity-formation as a complicated and painful journey encompassing "fractures, splits, contradictions, and incomplete suturings."<sup>65</sup> In place of a passive model of femininity, Sherazade substitutes a feminist reader and "meaning-maker-contributor" able to invent new forms of subjectivity

<sup>61</sup> Deborah Cherry similarly interprets the visual as an important arena of intervention and definition. See Cherry 7.

<sup>62</sup> Silverman 184.

<sup>63</sup> See Sandoval 35.

<sup>64</sup> Silverman 183.

<sup>65</sup> Hirsch 215.



and pleasure relative to colonial imagery.<sup>66</sup> For *Sherazade*, the traffic between image and identity constitutes a “hot zone”<sup>67</sup> of ownership and dispossession, assimilation and misrecognition. Most at stake in this relationship are women’s “productive looks,” which enable them to forge alternative aesthetic and political possibilities.

Rather than neatly mapping the coordinates of name, face, and place *à la* the national identity card, Sebbar highlights the complexity and, finally, the impossibility of charting one’s position *vis-à-vis* the image and its site of production. Ultimately, *Sherazade* records neither the “death of the author” as such, nor the birth of the sovereign subject. Instead, the novel both elicits and lingers in parallax, allowing *Sherazade* to “read” women’s images with a creatively intersubjective model of authorship and appropriation. As she surveys Orientalist representations of women, *Sherazade* seems to ask of their subjects: “who are you?” and “who am I in relation to you?” In this sense, she richly exploits photography’s potential to blur the lines between the subject and object of the gaze. Sebbar’s novel enacts a feminist politics of deterritorialization that both participates in and decomposes the violent subtexts of colonial history and Orientalist aesthetics. For *Sherazade*, “fantasy, melancholic incorporation, and creative disintegration are *constitutive* of, and fundamental to, the formation of any racialized body.”<sup>68</sup> But *Sherazade* figures representation—especially images of the female body—as the site of inscription for sexual and national, in addition to racial, fantasies. Transnational feminist subjectivity is at once haunted by, enamored of, and at war with the image—especially its violations and fixations on the other, and its potentials for transgression.

By productively viewing or actively negotiating with inherited images, *Sherazade* constructs a sense of self that both assumes and subverts the other’s gaze. For *Sherazade*, the mobile contours of the “I” come into play through projects of seeing, which encompass self and other, complicity and resistance. In this sense, *Sherazade* blurs binary visions of the subject and object of representation, and contributes to longstanding interdisciplinary debates about what it means to own or author an image.

<sup>66</sup> Trinh T. Minh-Ha 1991:19, 93.

<sup>67</sup> With this term I mean to evoke ecological “hot zones”: geographic regions that are home to a rich variety of species, yet whose species are at the same time at perpetual risk of endangerment or extinction.

<sup>68</sup> Cheng 107.

Sebbar's violent manipulation of the gaze helps to produce a new eye—one that sees, for example, from the perspective of the torn aperture with which Marcel Duchamp stages his female nude series *Étant donné* (1946–1966), or the kaleidoscopic lens through which contemporary American photographer Cindy Sherman ironically performs her “self.” The disturbing glances that abound in *Sherazade* can be read as resistant efforts to jam the machinery of recognition, identification, and colonial representation. They also constitute efforts to recast women as historical agents, and as catalysts for destructively creative politics and poetics of disidentification. *Sherazade* bruises Oriental images and reworks them to disjunctive ends. By crafting productively feminist readings of the image, Sebbar approaches visual culture not as a static inheritance to be accepted or rejected, but as a difficult benefactor that requires constant acknowledgment and strategizing.

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