The Ethnographic Gaze, Spatial Boundaries and the Changing Functions of Racialized Femininities in French Algeria

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Gendered perceptions of Algerian society were instrumental in constructing a colonial knowledge by which Franco-Algerian relations were defined. Indeed, the conquest (1830) and subsequent occupation of Algeria was often imagined as an eroticised gendered dynamic, wherein French 'virility' was juxtaposed against the 'fecundity' of the pacified Algerian landscape as a potent metaphor for the colonial mission.[1] This gendered dynamic, however, had more profound implications than colonial symbology. France's *vocation superieure* of bringing the 'light' of civilisation to the *indigènes* of Algeria was often fixated on the female body.[2] Frantz Fanon has identified European treatment of the eroticised indigenous female body as the ultimate site that 'the specific features of his relations with the colonized society manifest themselves.'[3] Within this framework, the gendered female body, rather than being treated as a discrete category from race, was in fact a key site wherein the articulation of colonial racialized and ethnic tropes were played out. Furthermore, the female body was articulated as a mode of 'penetration' into the Algerian familial and private sphere. French preoccupations with 'unveiling' became a tool of subjugation and discipline, in the Foucauldian sense of 'being seen' or 'on stage' as relinquishing

[1] Yael Simpson Fletcher, ""Irresistible Seductions": Gendered Representations of Colonial Algeria Around 1830" in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 197.
[2] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 204.
[3] Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled" in *Decolonisation: Perspectives from now and then,* ed. Prasenjit Duara (London: Routledge, 2003), 46.

power to the voyeur. This is most effectively applied to the Algerian context through Djebar's notion of the 'stolen gaze.'[4]

In postcolonial discourses of coloniality and gender, the female body is problematised as an indicator of supposed 'civilisational' backwardness, and subsequently appropriated as a projection of both colonial anxieties and domination. This is most seminally explored in Spivak's example of *Sati* in British India, wherein the marginal practice of widow immolation became an inflated colonial emblem of indigenous civilisational adolescence, only rectified by extended British control of the private sphere.[5] We can observe a similar colonial emblem in discourses around the veil - loosely alluding to the Maghrebi *hayek* – which was problematised by the French as both a literal and metaphorical barrier to the *mission civilisatrice.*[6] This can only be understood through processes of essentialism, orientalism and 'othering,' which are typified in General Daumas' conception of *'la femme arabe'* as the archetypal indigenous woman, whose marginal status under indigenous patriarchy was interpreted as a self-evident truth of the civilisational inadequacy of the Algerian population as a whole.[7]

This essay will thus contend with this essentialist *femme arabe* archetype, encompassing the Arabo-Berber Muslim model that defines discourses surrounding veiling, by exploring 'outlier' identities. Freidman's exploration of the active 'distancing' of Algerian Judaism from its North African features reveals that Jewish women could attain racial and gendered prestige the closer in proximity this came to a European model of femininity.[8] Complicating matters further are the oft-neglected Touareg, whose existence outside of the understood Arabo-Berber framework coupled with their matriarchal traditions problematised French attempts to essentialise the indigenous woman.[9] Their ethnographic exclusion from the Kabyle

[4] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 135;
Assia Djebar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound I" in *Women of Algiers in their Apartment,* ed. Assia Djebar (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 137.
[5] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).
[6] Sara Kimble, "Emancipation Through Secularization: French Feminist Views of Muslim Women's Condition in Interwar Algeria," *French Colonial History*, 7, no. 1 (2006): 108-128.
[7] Julia Clancy-Smith, "La femme Arabe: Women and Sexuality in France's North African Empire," in *Women, the Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, ed. Amira Sonbol (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 55.
[8] Elisabeth Friedman, "The Jewish Family: Claims to a European Identity," in *Colonialism and After: An Algerian Jewish Community* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), 60.
[9] Paul Pandolfi, "L'imagerie touarègue entre littérature savante et littérature populaire,*" L'Année du Maghreb,* 7, no. 1 (2011): 101-113.

myth of racial prestige on account of their recalcitrance - namely during the Flatters expedition of 1881 - *despite* meeting the civilisational standards of 'privileging' the position of women, reveals that the relation between gendered and racial 'knowledge' was often tightly bound to political power.[10] This notion is bolstered by the conclusion drawn by French feminists that indigenous Muslim women were ultimately 'irreformable,' perhaps indicating a disinterest at the heart of ostensible attempts to 'reform' Algeria, whilst conveniently constructing a perpetual need for French dominance.[11]

Figure I: Eugène Delacroix, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, 1834.
Oil on canvas, 180 × 229 cm: Louvre, Paris, France.

[10] See George R. Trumbull IV, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
[11] Kimble, "Emancipation Through Secularization," 112.

Figure II: Eugène Delacroix, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement*, 1847-9. Oil on canvas, 111.13 x 84.14 cm: Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France.

As outlined, much of French discourse surrounding indigenous women was hinged upon the veil, the exploration of which requires a working definition within an Algerian context. Moroccan theorist Fatima Merinissi's examination of veiling practices in the Maghreb asserts that both Islamic and European (Freudian) perspectives view female sexuality as a destabilising effect on society, and to which strict regulatory measures are applied.[12] Whilst Judeo-Christian and Freudian approaches articulate female sexuality as 'passive,' Mernissi outlines that the Qur'anic acknowledgement of female sexuality as 'active' necessitates veiling practices as an extension of 'spatial boundaries' between masculinity and femininity.[13] This framework ultimately constructs a public/male and private/female dichotomy, and within this, the insertion of the male European gaze into the Algerian domestic space can thus be understood as not only an attempt at 'unveiling,' but

[12] Fatima Mernissi, "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* ed. Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 2003), 98.
[13] Ibid.

also by extension, an attempt at destabilising indigenous gender relations.[14] It is under this framework that Djebar understands the Orientalist depictions of the colonial harem as a 'stolen gaze,' exemplified in Eugene Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Fig. I 1834 and Fig II, 1847-1849). In spite of Delacroix's professed love and 'intoxication' with the 'spectacle' of the harem, clearly exemplified in the unreality of the sublime, 'picturesque' aesthetic values, further intensified through the nostalgia of the 1847-49 version, Djebar asserts the painting cannot be viewed without the theft of the female subjects' agency in the forefront of one's mind.[15] The painting was rendered possible only through colonial domination, wherein the 'master' felt pressured, as a civil servant, to allow Delacroix to enter the harem.[16] Here, we can interpret the realities of the colonial hierarchy as a vehicle for what Spivak defines as 'epistemic violence;' wherein the female subject is 'disqualified' outright from representing or speaking for herself, her knowledge having 'been disqualified as inadequate to [its] task.'[17] Through this, Delacroix's gaze is in fact 'stolen' in two senses; through literally having gazed upon the 'forbidden' female subject, and having effectively stolen her ability to 'speak.'[18]

Perhaps the separation of the romanticised aesthetic of Delacroix's work and the realities of its complicities in colonial domination is naive; Smith argues that the aesthetic and moral principles of the 'picturesque' in celebrating the sublime took on another meaning when applied to a colonial subject or landscape.[19] Not only did the picturesque gaze triumph over 'conquered landscapes and peoples,' but consciously rendered them static, idle and infantile in their 'premodern indulgences.'[20] Djebar argues that the ethereal, 'aquarium-like' lighting communicates this passivity, idleness and ultimately the phantasmic nature of the women portrayed.[21] This resonates with an aspect of Said's *Orientalism,* in which the 'Oriental' subject is not merely represented, but construed through the colonial *imaginary,* wherein the subject is a site of articulation of a binary between the Self (European) and the Other

[14] Ibid., 499.
[15] Djebar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound I," 134.
[16] Mildred Mortimer, "Edward Said and Assia Djebar: A Contrapuntal Reading," *Research in African Literatures,* 36, no. 3 (2005): 58.
[17] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 76.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Sean P. Smith, "Aestheticising Empire: the Colonial Picturesque as a Modality of Travel," *Studies in Travel Writing,* 1, no. 1 (2020): 7.
[20] Smith, "Aestheticising Empire," 1.
[21] Djebar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound I," 135-36.

('Oriental'). [22] Through this, the women of Algiers in their apartment do not represent themselves, but instead the motifs of 'sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, and intense energy,' motifs which were articulations of a European yearning for a 'pretechnical' lost past.[23] In this, representations of femininity were innately racialised, and the racial meaning assigned to the female bodies in *Women of Algiers* were an additional removal of agency from the colonial subject.

Delacroix's penetrative gaze into 'forbidden' female spaces was echoed by his Orientalist contemporaries, such as Chasseriau's *Juives d'Alger au balcon* (Fig. III). The painting shows a clear attempt on the part of the voyeur to liberate the Jewish female subject from her 'cloistered existence,' juxtaposing the shadowed confines of the harem with the open sky.[24] Though the subjects may seem more embodied than Delacroix's 'resigned prisoners,' the fact that the gaze is positioned secretively from behind locates the power firmly with the voyeur.[25]

Figure III: Theodore Chasseriau, *Juives d'Alger au balcon,* 1849.
Oil on panel: Louvre, Paris, France.

Benson Miller notes the aesthetic parallel with Chasseriau's *The Return of the Captives,* wherein the vulnerability of the white female subject at the hands of Barbery slave traders is also represented by her bare back, her 'defenseless white flesh' rendering her a 'faceless captive.'[26] This aesthetic parallel cannot be coincidental, given that paranoia about barbary corsairs in the Mediterranean, coupled with the Philhellenist glorification of white femininity exemplified in works such as Delacroix's *The Kidnap* (1827), were

[22] See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 204-206.
[23] Said, *Orientalism*, 118-119.
[24] Peter Benson Miller, "By the Sword and the Plow: Théodore Chassériau's Cour des Comptes Murals and Algeria," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 4 (2004): 704.
[25] Djebar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound I," 135.
[26] Ibid.

central in French domestic debates preceding the invasion of Algeria.[27] Through Chasseriau's inversion of this vulnerability, he makes a clear allusion to the subjugation and enslavement of the Algerian female subject, almost in vengeance of the (mostly imagined) subjugation of the white female subject at the hands of the Oriental corsair.[28] The sexual vulnerability of the white female captive is thus transposed upon the women on the balcony, the presence of the voyeur within the harem itself further accentuating this threat. This sentiment is encapsulated succinctly in the remarks of Chasseriau's contemporary, Theophile Gautier, likening Chasseriau's harem subjects to 'captive barbarians brought back to our civilization.'[29]

Figure IV: Jean Geiser, *La Danse*, c. 1900s.

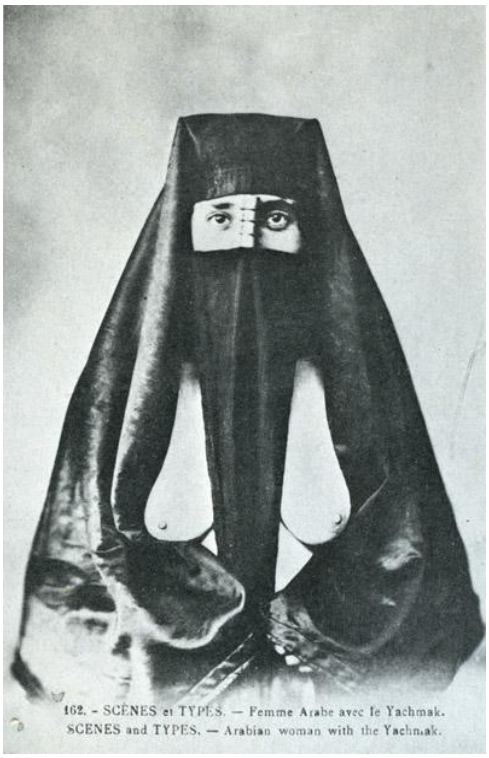

Figure V: Attributed to « Nuredin & Levin" probably Lévy et Neurdein réunis, *Femme arabe avec le yachmak,* c. 1890s.

[27] Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 158.
[28] See Weiss' assessment: 'Contrary to expectations, however, they did not find "millions of captives who groan in the bottom of deep and dank dungeons[...] nor did they discover an inner sanctum of lily-skinned beauties held against their will.*'* From Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs,* 167.
[29] Miller, "By the Sword and the Plow," 705.

Here, the triumphant nature of early colonial presence in Algeria is revealed; that in spite of its aesthetic reverence for the sublime, Oriental depictions of indigenous women were ultimately a celebration of militaristic, and indeed epistemic dominance. Gautier's allusions to 'br[inging] back' the Oriental captive to 'civilisation' is suggestive to the medium of painting itself as a mode of epistemic violence, wherein the subject's right to 'speak' is erased, their body transfigured through a lens of celebratory colonial dominance.

Though distinctions between 'high' romantic art and popular art of the later colonial *cartes postales* are important in understanding their function and impact within the broader colonial discourse, Prochaska argues that both forms shared an undercurrent of the 'colonial picturesque.'[30] With the pacification of Algeria and the eventual transition to civilian rule in 1871, a growing appetite for the 'spectacle' of colonial *scènes et types* both domestically and among the growing *pieds-noir* settler communities triggered the mass production of photographic *cartes postales* during the 1890s. These representations, to Prochaska, can be considered as 'picturesque,' comparable to a Delacroix or a Chasseriau, by presenting a 'simplified, codified' and consumable version of Orientalist tropes, being construed through the same processes of decontextualization and imagination.[31] Clancy-Smith defines the period from 1871-1900 as more firmly fixated on locating and 'knowing' the female indigenous subject, and it is within this context that an intensification of the eroticisation and ironising of veiling practices can be understood.[32] MacMaster and Lewis contend that European contact 'even with heavily veiled women in public spaces was charged with erotic meanings,' seemingly inverting the intended function of the veil as a protection from being 'seen.'[33] This inversion, wherein the veil is paradoxically eroticised as concealing a 'corollary of hidden delights,' again amounts to a form of epistemic violence that appropriates the meaning of cultural practices and reformulates them to express the dominance of the colonial gaze.[34] This eroticism bolsters Fanon's contention that 'the rape of the Algerian woman in the

[30] David Prochaska, "The Archive of *Algérie Imaginaire*," *History & Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (1990): 406.
[31] Ibid., 407.
[32] Julia Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender and Identities in the Making of French Algeria, 1830-1962" in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism,* ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and France Gouda (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 155.
[33] Neil Macmaster and Toni Lewis, "Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling," *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 123.
[34] Ibid.

dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil… we here witness *a double deflowering.'*[35]

This tension, between the veil's eroticism and its simultaneous stifling of the male European gaze, is played out in erotic *carte postales.* For instance, Jean Geiser's *La danse* (Fig. IV) and *Femme arabe avec le Yachmak* (Fig. V, attributed to Lévy et Neurdein réunis, 1890s) encapsulate this disdain for the veil as a prohibitive barrier to the indigenous female body, thus ironising it through the paradoxical exposure of breasts. Prochuska's analysis of *cartes postales* as 'decontextualized… like a photograph viewed too close up' perhaps does not go nearly far enough when applied to these highly eroticised images; Malek Alloula declares that these *carte postales* are 'ventriloquist art … nothing but a form of aesthetic justification of colonial violence.'[36] Said's notion of the imaginative quality of Orientalism is here taken to its extreme. Whereas Orientalist painters constructed their colonial *imaginaire* through the aesthetics of the picturesque, the *carte postales* go further in manipulating the subjugated female body to perform eroticised fantasies that lie in direct opposition to the ordinary social function of the veil.[37] The archaic Ottoman Yachmak draped over the subject's exposed breasts (Fig. V) is an additional layer of ironic disdain, seeming to allude that no matter what affiliations to the precolonial order are maintained, the power to gaze upon the indigenous woman belongs only to the European. This manipulation of the female subject is arguably more epistemically violent than earlier Orientalist depictions. Whilst the *Women of Algiers* have their ability to 'speak' erased, these photographs force the female subject to 'speak' in the language of degrading hypersexual fantasy, forced to view themselves from the male European gaze.[38]

[35] Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," 45.
[36] Malek Alloula, *Le Harem Colonial: Images d'un sous-érotisme* (Séguier: Paris, 2001): 86-87; Prochaska, "The Archive of *Algérie Imaginaire*," 407.
[37] Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 204-206.
[38] This idea invokes not only Fanon's thesis of the white gaze applied inwards, but also the scepticism evoked by Spivak of whether the colonised female subject can ever authentically 'speak,' as speaking requires a context where one's speech is received and understood. Here, that context is dominated by the colonizer's 'speech' of eroticised colonial fantasies. See Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 103-104.

Figure VI (above left): *Jeune fille de Bou Saâda*. This exact image is also circulated as a *Jeune fille Kabyle* (See: Allaoua, p. 45).

Figure VII (above right): *Jeune fille de Sud.*

Figure VIII (left) : *Jeune bédouine*.

All Jean Geiser, c. 1900s.

Jean Geiser's body of work also exemplifies another manipulation of the female subject: the construction of ethnographic essentialism, through 'types.' Alloula delineates that the supposed documentation of ethnographic 'types' could be just as performative as the eroticised veil.[39] Figures VI-VIII show the same model performing the supposed typologies of a 'young girl from the south,' a 'young bedouin' and a 'young Kabyle girl.'[40] He further speculates that this deceptive and

[39] Allaoula, *Le Harem Colonial,* 44-45.
[40] Ibid.

arbitrarily performative series represents a colonial anxiety to 'penetrate Algerian society that inhabits colonialism,' and thus, where this 'penetration' did not truly exist, fill in the gaps with a colonial *imaginaire.*[41] Any ethnic affiliations this model had are essentially nullified through these images; essentially separated from her own personhood, she becomes the ultimate malleable colonial subject. These images reveal the inseparability of gendered and racialized stereotyping, by which the female body was a vehicle for arbitrary racial categorisation - and equally, that the female body was never entirely separated from an explicitly racialised eroticism.

Lorcin asserts that notions of the 'impenetrability' of Muslim Algerian society, typified by its 'cloistering' of women in the private sphere, were present from the conception of French Algeria.[42] However, in the interval between the end of military rule (1871) and the 'high watermark' of imperialism of the 1920s, French positivism about the colonial mission waned as the notion of Franco-Algerian assimilationism was becoming understood as a failure.[43] This was typified by the declining potence of 'Kabylophilia;' the Kabyles, once conceptualised through faulty physical anthropology as civilisationally close to Europeans, were increasingly reframed by their 'impenetrable' Muslim identites, no londer acting as a foil to the racially 'other' Arabs.[44] This retraction of racial 'favour,' to Lorcin, must be viewed in light of their recalcitrance during the 1871 insurrection of Kabylia, which alludes to the punitive quality of ethnographic knowledge outlined by Trumbull.[45] This rejuvenation of the idea of all Islamic societies, Arab or Berber, as racially 'other' was inevitably played out on the indigenous female body. Daumas' *La femme arabe* (1912) shifts the colonial conceptualisation of indigenous women from being 'objects of luxury,' typified by earlier Orientalist depictions, to a site of hidden cultural *'moeurs,* customs and ideas,' of *maladies morales.*[46] The veil, then, shifts from hiding sexual mysteries to concealing ethnic and racial mysteries, the deviance of which is made self-evident

[41] Ibid., 45.
[42] Patricia M. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 63.
[43] Ibid., 172-173.
[44] See such authoritative contemporary anthropological texts as Perier, "Des races dites berbères et leur ethnogénie," *Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* (Paris, 1870).
[45] Lorcin, *Imperial Identities,* 173-174.
George R. Trumbull IV, "Discipline and Publish: Militant Ethnography and Crimes Against Culture," in *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[46] Clancy-Smith, "La femme arabe," 56.

in Dauma's condemnatory tone. This essential role that the body plays in supposedly revealing ethnographic 'truths' is not exclusive to the female body. Anthropologist Dr. Atgier's presentation of *Les Touaregs à Paris* in 1905 prefaces that the Touareg practice of male veiling rendered it 'impossible for [them] to be able to study the features of their physiognomy which they jealously hid from the eyes of all.'[47] This centrality of the body in revealing ethnographic 'deviance' is yet again another mode of controlling and appropriating the agency of the colonial subject, removing all epistemic control they might have over interpreting and understanding their own bodies.

This shift from the female body as a subject of sexual curiosity to one of moral and philosophical analysis of the 'civilising' function of empire attracted another gaze, that of the white European woman. An increased interest in what Trumbull dubs 'moral ethnography' captured the imagination of metropole French feminists, whose ostensible universalism sought to liberate their indigenous 'sisters' from the perceived oppressive yoke of Arab patriarchy.[48] Nuñez critically approaches the 'universality' of this feminist concern, arguing that it propagates the same processes of othering as earlier Orientalist characterisations; 'the aspiration to sameness simultaneously emphasized the existence of difference.'[49] This paradox is evident in the writings of Dorothée Chellier, the first female European doctor to practice in Algeria, reporting on her mission among the Chaouïa in the Aurès in 1895:

> 'I believe there would be interest for us, respecting Arab moeurs, to act on women by women. Among civilized peoples, and much more among primitive peoples, it is always by operating on the mind of the woman that one really penetrates the family. Let us cooperate in the education of the child by obtaining the trust of the mother, by visiting her,

[47] Author's translation: '*Il nous avait alors été impossible de pouvoir étudier les traits de leur physionomie qu'ils cachaient jalousement aux yeux de tous, la conservant voilée complètement, sauf au niveau des yeux que l'on voyait étinceler dans un mince intervalle de leur voile de figure.'* Dr. Atgier, "Les Touaregs à Paris," *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* 10, no. 1 (1909), 223.

[48] Trumbull IV, ""Have you need of a model, he will furnish one on command": The Gendering of Morality and the Production of Difference in Colonial Ethnography," in *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 183.

[49] Rachel Nuñez, "Rethinking Universalism: Olympe Audouard, Hubertine Auclert, and the Gender Politics of the Civilizing Mission," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 30 no. 1 (2012), 25.

> accustoming her to follow our directions. By doing so, we will get the result that we have been looking for so long in vain to get.'[50]

Chellier encapsulates here Nunez's notion of exacerbating difference through seeking 'sameness;' whilst advocating 'act[ing] on women by women.' The clear dichotomy of the subject (white femininity) and the object (indigenous femininity) maintains a rigid colonial hierarchy. This duality is maintained by processes of essentialism. While partially acknowledging the ethnic distinction of the Berber chaouia –*'la femme chaouïa est plus accessible que la femme arabe'*– she ultimately asserts that this 'penetration' of the family through Western medicine applies equally to 'wild' and 'distant' tribal women as to Arab urbanites.[51] The fact that this 'moralizing' ethnographic lens is present in a text largely focussed on medical practices reveals how coloniality perpetuated beyond 'official' and administrative entities. Indeed, Amster argues that birthing practices and midwifery were a key site of asserting the epistemic dominance of Western medicine.[52] This epistemic dominance over birthing, and by extension, life itself, was a metaphorical triumph over the indigenous female body, who is symbolically detached from her new-born who has been birthed 'into modernity.'[53] This sentiment is echoed by Chellier, who agreed that she fails to relate to the female subject authentically, instead 'accustoming her to follow our directions' in removing her offspring from her influence and under the wing of a French model of modernity. The centrality of the female/mother as a 'carrier' of culture, as outlined by Daumas in his accusation of hiding *maladies morales* underneath the veil, is essential to this feminist 'women [acting] on women' perspective. Covertly, it casts the indigenous female subject as ultimately disposable and irreformable under the *mission civilisatrice.*

Essentialism is therefore a key consequence of the perceived failure of assimilation. Though the Kabyle myth did not entirely 'dry up,' Kimble notes that whilst pseudoscientific claims to the 'whiteness' of Kabyle ancestry lost their potency, certain other cultural motifs, such as *hachouma,* a code of female politeness or modesty, were brought to the forefront to exemplify the docility of the Muslim female

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[50] Dorothée Chellier, *Voyage dans l'Aurès: notes d'un médecin envoyé en mission chez les femmes arabes* (Tizi Ouzou: J. Chellier, 1895), 5.
[51] Chellier, *Voyage dans l'Aurès,* 7.
[52] See Ellen Amster, *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877-1956* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 175.
[53] Amster, *Medicine and the Saints*, 192.

body.[54] As with all modernist grand narratives, this depended upon the creation of outliers and exceptions. Where, then, did the Jewish female body figure into this narrative of indigenous 'impenetrability?' The Cremieux decrees of 1870 effectively naturalised Algerian Jewry as French citizens. Considering the abandonment of the positivist ideal of total assimilation – rejecting the viability of 'the union of the daughter of the vanquished with the son of the victor,' which Daumas ridicules in his writing in 1871 – does the Jewish example represent a triumph of French assimilationist efforts? [55] Friedman argues in her study on the Jewish family under French colonialism that the perception of Judaic and French cultural proximity was far from coincidental. Although a shared Judeo-Christian treatment of female sexuality as 'passive' meant that veiling was not practice, representing an authentic distinction from Islamic practice, Freidman documents a conscious 'uprooting' of Jewish cultural practices from their Maghrebi features.[56] Though a small elite of Algerian Muslim 'évolués' practiced similar 'Frenchifications' of their dress, language, and customs to pander to French politics of colonial respectability, Freidman characterises these processes within Jewish communities as both more ubiquitous, and 'self-conscious.'[57] This ubiquity also transcended class boundaries far more prevalently than in Muslim 'évolués.' Freidman gives the example of Algerian Jews whose first languages were Judeo-Arabic dialects, and even women without formal French education consciously mimicked the *pied-noir* accent.[58] She notes that 'these women have a limited French vocabulary and make grammatical mistakes, but their intonation and pronunciation are not those of an Arabic speaker.'[59] This reveals that language could become a vehicle for the expression of cultural affiliation, even transcending class and educational boundaries. It also begs the question of the extent to which the racialised rhetoric of colonial discourse becomes self-perpetuating, in the Fanonian sense of turning the colonial gaze 'inward' and policing one's own colonial respectability.[60]

[54] Lorcin, *Imperial Identities,* 173; Kimble, "Emancipation Through Secularization," 112.
[55] Eugène Daumas, *La femme arabe* (Alger: A. Jourdan, 1912), 1. Published posthumously (deceased in 1871).
[56] Mernissi, 'The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries,' 498; Friedman, *Colonialism and After,* 64.
[57] Friedman, *Colonialism and After,* 60.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* preface.

This idea of adopting the colonial gaze resonates through the work of Jewish Algerian novelist Elissa Rhaïs, but instead of being turned 'inward' and becoming a form of self-regulation, and Fanonian and Foucauldian approaches argue, this gaze is turned outward towards the rest of indigenous society.[61] In an interview with the *La Francaise* journalist, Huguette Champy (1928), she comments on the status 'nos femmes orientales,' from which she notably separates herself, asserting that Arab women, 'cloistered for centuries, without a period of prior adaptation … will not be able to use their freedom wisely.'[62] Freidman notes that despite the 'cloistering' of both Jewish and Muslim Maghrebi women being near-identical, the advent of French influence prompted Jewish women to paradoxically criticise the practice in Muslim women – the veil used as the potent symbol of this 'oppression' in an identical manner as French colonial discourse.[63] Rhaïs' perpetuation of the myth of Muslim women's incompatibility with 'liberation,' othering them further with the label 'Oriental' despite the history of Orientalist othering of Jewish women like herself (Fig. III), can be cynically understood as a symptom of 'divide-and-conquer' politics that characterised arbitrary racial distinctions of the epoque. The notion of survivalism under a dichotomous colonial regime is a perhaps more sympathetic view of Rhaïs' 'cosying up' to a French model of femininity, even if at the expense of 'nos femmes orientales.' Either of these interpretations can be understood by again invoking the concept of 'epistemic violence,' here demonstrated by the fact that the only way an *indigène* can speak within French feminist discourse is to speak the language of the dominant colonial epistemology.

Although Jewish Algerians can be considered an 'outlier' identity from the Arabo-Berber Muslim model, it still functions within this framework to perpetuate the supposed 'unassimilable' nature of Muslim indigeneity. The Touareg as an ethnic group troubled this dichotomy. As a Berberphone ethnic group, nomadic, Islamic and yet largely matrilineal, Pandolfi argues that their treatment by ethnographers constituted not a dualistic Self and Other, but a 'triangular' relation wherein the Touareg were effectively a site of mediation between European and Arab identities.[64] This was often played out in early ethnography (1850s-1870s) through an ostensible

[61] Patricia Lorcin, "Manipulating Elissa: The Uses and Abuses of Elissa Rhaïs and Her Works," *Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 5 (2012), 908.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Friedman, *Colonialism and After,* 76.
[64] Pandolfi, "L'imagerie touarègue," 103.

glorification of Targui women, Duveyrier praising their charm, beauty and apparent liberation.[65] These early texts are defined by their true incapability to understand Touareg social dynamics within its own context. Each appraisal of their 'noble' character is framed within pseudoscientific physical anthropological claims of 'a rare whiteness,' coupled with the pseudo historical claim that Touaregs are 'truly' Christian, masked by a superficial Islamic 'veneer.'[66] Equally, each trait deemed comparable to European Christian norms are juxtaposed against that of the Arab, down to even the discussion of jewellery – the Touareg variety being 'tasteful and would be well seen in Europe… so these are no longer the crude ornaments of the Arabs.'[67] Here the 'triangular' relation is clear, not only a mechanism to give further weight to the ethnographic sentiment of Arab inferiority, but a mode of organising cultural information that existed outside of European epistemological understandings.

Given this ethnographic flattery of Targui women, directly attributed to their liberation from patriarchal oppression, why did this not become a model for indigenous femininity for those 'reformers' who were ostensibly concerned with the position of women? This question is partially answered by the advent of pessimism concerning the failure of assimilation invoked by Lorcin. Just as Kabyle women were reframed by their 'submissive' Islamic identity, Touareg women were effectively lumped into the *femme arabe* tropes almost by default.[68] This, however, offers an incomplete explanation of the Touaregs' declining ethnographic favour. Trumbull outlines that following the Touareg attack on the Flatters military expedition (1881), this act of violent recalcitrance from a group previously enshrined as racially and culturally aligned with the French required an ethnographic rationale.[69] Just as their

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[65] Author's translation: *"Plus heureuse que la femme arabe, la femme targuie n'est obligée ni à moudre le blé, ni à aller chercher sur son dos l'eau et le bois, ni à faire la cuisine ; les esclaves pourvoient à tous ces besoins, de sorte que, comme les dames civilisées, elles peuvent consacrer du temps à la lecture, à l'écriture, à la musique et à la broderie. Ce n'est pas sans quelque émotion, qu'après avoir traversé quatre cent lieues de pays dans lesquels la femme est réduite à l'état de bête de somme, on constate, en plein désert, une civilisation qui a tant d'analogie avec celle de l'Europe chrétienne au Moyen Âge."* In Henri Duveyrier, *Les Touareg du Nord* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1864), 430.

[66] "Quand, en deçà de la région des dunes de l'Erg, on voit la femme arabe telle que l'islamisme l'a faite, et, au delà de cette simple barrière de sables, la femme touareg telle qu'elle a voulu rester, on reconnaît dans cette dernière la femme du christianisme" in Henri Duveyrier, "Note sur les Touareg et leur pays," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 5, no. 1 (1863): 124.

[67] Henri Duveyrier *Journal de route* (Paris: Challamel, 1905) quoted in Pandolfi, "L'imagerie touarègue," 105.

[68] Lorcin, *Imperial Identities,* 173.

[69] Trumbull IV, *An Empire of Facts,* 212-219.

'nobility' was racially codified by their 'whiteness,' their criminality was equally enshrined as an inherent cultural and racial phenotype. Trumbull dubs this process 'discipline and publish,' invoking the Foucauldian notion of discipline.[70] An additional Foucauldian notion this process encapsulates is the inseparability of political power and knowledge.[71] Here, the production of knowledge is an expression of reactionary political forces, revealing the contingency of ethnographic and gendered knowledge. The Targui woman and her potential for a matrilineal model of indigenous femininity is essentially scrapped, her body now a carrier of a culture arbitrarily branded 'criminal' by nature.

In conclusion, gendered imagery and discourses were central to French perceptions of Algeria. In earlier Orientalist depictions, gazing on the female body was a means of breaching the 'veil,' though it was often aestheticized as playful eroticism. The darker undercurrents of militaristic triumph over the indigenous 'captive' revealed the true attention of this gaze – to 'penetrate' Algeria itself. This act is inextricable from the context of racial stereotyping, by which the female body 'carried' perceived cultural secrets and thus was subject to further control through ethnographic and even medical enquiry. This enquiry cannot simply be viewed as neutral or a passive 'perception' or 'viewing,' but was constructive, imaginative, and often, an active attempt to dominate or erase native epistemology. As this analysis was focussed on French perceptions of Algeria, a nuanced examination of indigenous responses is beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is crucial to not equate the subjugation of the colonized to epistemic violence with an absence of agency. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabba highlight the intertextuality of colonizer/colonized dynamics, wherein subversion and hybridity are used to mediate the colonial 'condition.'[72] These subversions became most visible during the War for Independence (1954-62), typified by the use of the *hayek* by female *mujahidat* to conceal explosives. Here, the female subject weaponizes the essentialism and stereotyping of the veiled woman as submissive and powerless, subverting its power and rendering it meaningless. This essay thus finds that Spivak's contention that the Subaltern cannot 'speak,' whilst certainly applicable to the *Women of Algiers in their*

[70] See Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 139.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

apartment, does not account for these moments of subversion and rejection that inevitably follow the epistemic violence of gendered and racial 'gazing.'[73]

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[73] Though Fanon's theories have been useful in analysing the colonial gaze, it must be noted that his glorification of unveiling can be understood as a simple inversion (rather than subversion) of colonial eroticism to construct a nationalist counter balance. It is reminiscent of Spivak's characterisation of Indian nationalist responses to *Sati* - 'the women wanted to die' - as in, a defensive reclamation of the narrative, rather than a rejection of it. See Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 93.

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