

## Orientalism: from unveiling to hyperveiling

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In the heterogeneous field of 'Orientalism', 'Europe's collective day dream' of the East,<sup>1</sup> a particularly prominent part has been played by the image of veiled women. The central importance of the veil in European representations of Oriental society derives not only from its role as the most public and visible signifier of radical sexual segregation, but also as the key marker of the essential inferiority of Islamic societies. The image of the veil, both in texts, paintings and photographs, is strategically placed to signify a much wider field of religious, social and cultural practices which include *pardah*, the harem, polygamy, a repressive political order based on the subjugation of women, Oriental despotism, sadism and lasciviousness.

There are numerous studies of the classic literary and artistic depictions of the veil, mainly through the work of the French Orientalist painters of the nineteenth century, Delacroix, Ingres, Gérôme and others.<sup>2</sup> However, little attention has been given to the mass media adaptation and diffusion of Orientalist images after 1900 and, in particular, to the radical shift in the iconographic representations of veiling that came about with the end of empire and in the contemporary post-colonial era. The last fifteen years have seen a proliferation of media images of veiling, a process closely linked to growing western perceptions and fear of an Islamic threat. The ready facility with which the media have been able to deploy stereotypes of veiling is not an entirely new phenomenon, but one which owes its efficacy to the extent to which publicists can play on the resonances that are rooted in a much older Orientalist tradition. At the same time stereotypes of veiling have undergone a fundamental reconfiguration to fit the shifting ideological needs of western societies.

Our argument is that during the whole of the French colonial period (which can be demarcated by the period from the conquest of

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Algeria in 1830 down to the war of independence in 1954) 'classic' Orientalism was centred on erotic images of **unveiling** or what might be termed the 'Scheherezade syndrome'. This fiction, a projection of European masculine fantasies, which claimed to uncover and expose to the public gaze the inner secrets of the forbidden and sacred, the harem and the Turkish baths (*hammam*), reflected French colonial hegemony, an invasion and sexual conquest of the space that Muslim society held to be most forbidden (*haram*). This kind of representation remained remarkably unchanging in its essentials until the mid-twentieth century. However, rapid decolonization, particularly of Algeria, fractured the Orientalist dream and led to a politicization of the veil. The post-colonial imagery has been far less concerned with unveiling than with maximizing the social, cultural and political distance between the 'West' and 'Islam' and conveying a sense of threat through an inversion which emphasizes the most complete forms of female covering, a **hyperveiling**. It is this dramatic inversion which we seek to explore.

### Classic nineteenth-century Orientalism

European stereotypes of the harem rested on two interlinking themes, those of lascivious sensuality and despotic cruelty. Through the image of the violent and cruel sultan or sheik who had at his command numerous wives and slave odalisques, the European male could indulge in fantasies of sexual domination and perversion while evading the restraints of repressive European puritanism and Christian monogamy. This erotic imagery was well established during the eighteenth century through Antoine Galland's popular *Mille et une nuits* (1707–14) and numerous writings like Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721), but received its most powerful expression in the nineteenth century through Orientalist paintings and the literature of travel and evasion (Gustave Flaubert, Gérard de Nerval, Théophile Gautier . . .).

The East fascinated writers and artists since it represented a double transgression of both European and Eastern taboos. The journey across the Mediterranean was an escape from bourgeois constraint and Victorian prudery into a terrain in which every manner of sexual licence could be indulged.<sup>3</sup> Erotic fantasy and the depiction of 'primitive' nudity was of course a feature of travel throughout the non-Western world, from Tahiti to Africa. But in these sexual utopias the women were imagined to offer themselves freely, while in the Orient sex was even more alluring precisely because the harem was secret and forbidden and offered a frisson of excitement and a challenge to the courage and daring of the European male. A

constant theme of Orientalist literature is that of the European voyager/voyeur who catches sight, from a rooftop or through a peephole, of an unveiled and unsuspecting Oriental beauty.<sup>4</sup> In numerous Orientalist paintings of the harem and *hammam*, as in Ingres's famous *The Turkish Bath* (1862), the 'eye' of the viewer is positioned as that of somebody peering in upon naked women, who are oblivious of the intrusion.

It is significant that contact even with heavily veiled women in public spaces was charged with erotic meanings. Europeans claimed that veiling created a sense of mystery, danger and allure and accentuated the beauty of Arab women's eyes. 'Alors on sent', noted Gérard de Nerval, 'le besoin d'interroger les yeux de l'Égyptienne voilée, et c'est là le plus dangereux ... c'est derrière ce rempart [the veil] que des yeux ardents vous attendent, armés de toutes les séductions.'<sup>5</sup> The stricter the control of women's appearance the more it was assumed to be a corollary of hidden delights and the licentious activities of the harem.

The literary and artistic portrayals of unveiling, the harem, *hammam* and 'slave market' were rarely based on observation. Not only were the interiors of Muslim households strictly banned to European males, but – as French artists travelling to the Middle East were to discover – Muslim women, with the exception of prostitutes and some Jewish models, would not pose under any conditions. Orientalist artists quite frequently painted French models in their Paris studios, keeping to hand a bric-à-brac of orientalia, hookahs, peacock fans, swords, eastern costumes and carpets, with which to adorn the 'set'. Ingres, who never travelled to the East, based his famous *The Turkish Bath* on Lady Mary Montagu's account of her visit to a *hammam* in the early eighteenth century. The Orientalist painters, and the later studio photographers, whether located in France or the Maghreb and Middle East, staged tableaux that were as much an expression or projection of fantasy as were the many popular painted reconstructions of classical antiquity or Biblical scenes.

### Commercialization and the popular Orient

Art critics claim that Orientalism was in decline by 1880 and had been largely superseded by 1900.<sup>6</sup> However, this is a conclusion drawn from a narrow concentration on genre painting and fails to note that by the turn of the century Orientalist images were yet to make their greatest popular impact in Europe. Changes in technology, especially the commercialization of photography during the later nineteenth century, followed by the cinema after 1896, marked a dramatic increase in the diffusion of Orientalist images of

the veil and harem. The studio photographers who began to establish themselves in the Middle East (Bonfils in Beirut, Lehnert and Landrock in Cairo, ND Photos in Algiers) were influenced by painters and, vice versa, painters utilized studio photographs.<sup>7</sup> Delacroix helped with the lighting of nude models in the studios of the photographer Eugène Durieu but also based some Orientalist paintings, like the *Reclining Odalisque*, on photographs.<sup>8</sup> Alloula has shown that the immense production of postcards sent by tourists, soldiers and settlers to metropolitan France between 1900 and 1930 reproduced the classic nineteenth century themes of the 'unveiled' Orient – the erotic dance, the harem, the naked odalisques.<sup>9</sup>

The channels through which the harem image was diffused throughout France were numerous: presentations of belly-dancing in music-halls and theatres; the appearance of dancers from the famous Ouled Naïl tribe in colonial exhibitions; newspaper and hoarding advertisements for tourism in North Africa, the popular book collections of 'ethnographic' photographs such as the *Galerie Universelle des Peuples*; stage and opera productions and so on.<sup>10</sup> But the greatest impact came from the cinema, which had an enormous success during the last half-century of colonialism.

During the period from 1911 to 1962 some 210 feature films were shot on location in North Africa, without counting the numerous Orientalist films made in French metropolitan studios or the United States. Valentino's *Son of the Sheik* (1926), *Beau Geste* (1926), *The Garden of Allah* (1935) and many other films were shot in the sands of Arizona. A standard scenario in many North African productions like *Le Sang d'Allah* (1922), *Yasmina* (1926), *L'Esclave blanche* (1927), *Le Désir* (1928), and *Dans l'ombre du harem* (1928), was that of the intrepid French hero who penetrated the harem to 'rescue' a beautiful captive European or Arab princess from the lascivious clutches of a cruel sheik. Publicity for *Yasmina* promised the viewer 'toute la magie de l'Orient, toute la féerie lascive des harems, tout le lyrisme voluptueux de ces recluses'.<sup>11</sup> Such films, which reached an enormous popular audience, reproduced all the banal stereotypes of traditional Orientalism. The genre reinforced the image of eastern women as highly eroticized while, through the allegory of unveiling and disclosure of the harem, the Western eye asserted a colonial invasion and violation of the central values of Muslim society. While indulging in erotic fantasy and possession of the 'Other' female it simultaneously underlined the inferiority and barbaric nature of Islamic society which enslaved women, through polygamy and force, to the odious lust of cruel sultans.

One of the key aspects of Orientalism is that the representations of veiling, the harem and dancing bore little if any relationship to any

social reality. Film directors, whether in the dunes of California or Algeria, indulged in pure fantasy. Almost no use was made of North African actors, except as background figures, while dress and architectural sets were a bizarre pastiche of Egyptian, Indian, Hindu and other styles. Erotic dancing featured an 'improbable melange of Spanish and Indian dances combined with a touch of Arabian belly-dancing'.<sup>12</sup> The Orient of the cinema, as with the epics of Indiana Jones, was a syncretic never-never land and, as Megherbi notes, the camels, dunes and oases of the Maghreb constituted, 'un ensemble d'éléments interchangeables à souhait' without any historical or social specificity.<sup>13</sup> Ella Shohat notes of such stereotypes that they can lead to a kind of essentialism, 'a limited set of reified formulae' and a certain ahistoricism in which 'the analysis needs to be static, not allowing for mutations, metamorphoses, changes of valence, altered function'.<sup>14</sup>

Critics of Edward Said have argued that his path-breaking work was flawed by its interpretation of the Orient as a homogeneous and unmodulated construct.<sup>15</sup> Billie Melman has demonstrated that representation of the Orient, and specifically of the veil and harem by European women, was not at all unified, but showed a plurality of notions and images.<sup>16</sup> But in general the stereotypes of veiling/unveiling retained, especially at the level of the mass media and public opinion, an astonishing durability and homogeneity throughout the colonial period.<sup>17</sup> When, just before World War I, Grace Ellison submitted to a British newspaper a photograph of a Turkish household interior that showed it to be like a European drawing-room, it was returned with the comment, 'The British public would not accept this as a picture of a Turkish harem.'<sup>18</sup> The popular but entirely fantastic clichés of Oriental veiling that remained dominant until the 1950s are significant because it is this 'misrepresentation' which has enabled contemporary, post-colonial propagandists to continue to fabricate images presented as social reality.

### Franz Fanon and the politics of the veil

The dominant and eroticized representation of the veil and harem was suddenly challenged and subverted by decolonization and, in particular, by the cataclysmic events of the Algerian War (1954–62). This period marked a decisive fracturing of colonial hegemony and a dramatic shift in French perceptions of the veil away from the erotic (unveiling) towards a new emphasis on the over-veiled as a signifier of **political** danger. This shift in perception stemmed from the role of Arab women in the Battle of Algiers and can be analysed through a seminal essay by Franz Fanon, 'Algeria unveiled', and in Gillo Pontecorvo's film, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).<sup>19</sup>

During the inter-war period the French will to unveil had already assumed a political as well as an erotic form. Colonial ideologues became concerned with the perceived repression of native women under Muslim custom and law and felt that it was a duty of enlightened Western government to introduce reforms that would abolish child-marriage, polygamy, repudiation, divorced women's lack of property rights and other 'barbarous' practices.<sup>20</sup> Only such reform would enable a backward people to assimilate and enter the portals of civilization. For colonial ideologues the status of Muslim women was held to be the key symbol of *the* state of Arab society as a whole.

However, such a project was inspired less by disinterested benevolence than by an ideological intent to emphasize the inherent superiority of Western culture over Arab barbarity and to legitimate the *mission civilisatrice*. In French North Africa, as in British Egypt, veiling became the key target of colonial rhetoric and a justification for the eradication of indigenous culture.<sup>21</sup> Both French colonial and Algerian nationalist commentators shared the view that while colonialism had succeeded in the military, economic and political domination of indigenous society there still remained one final barrier which blocked French attempts to subvert and control Algerians and this was the private and impenetrable zone of the Muslim family and household. Women, as the repositories of traditionalism, which they reproduced through the socialization of children, were regarded as the linchpin of cultural resistance to French hegemony. One Algerian response to colonialism may have been to accentuate the full length veil as a symbol of cultural protection and resistance to the denuding gaze of the European or what was called in Arabic *keshf* (to reveal or expose).<sup>22</sup>

Franz Fanon noted the appearance during the 1930s of a growing 'theoretical' concern for Algerian women on the part of colonial ethnologists, sociologists and administrators who 'solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered ... After it had been posited that the woman constituted the pivot of Algerian society, all efforts were made to obtain control over her ... Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian society.'<sup>23</sup>

During the Algerian War women became the focus of a struggle between contending colonial and liberation forces, particularly as they were held by both sides to hold the key to the battle for 'the hearts and minds' of the society.<sup>24</sup> This socio-cultural combat, symbolized by the veil, assumed a new twist when, during the Battle of Algiers, FLN women utilized the large folds of the *haik* to carry

weapons past the controls of the French military. In a later phase of the war women militants reversed the tactic and were able to carry bombs through check points by dressing as chic Europeans, a stratagem that succeeded by radically inverting Orientalist stereotypes. This revolutionary use of veiling/unveiling provided one of the central motifs of Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*.<sup>25</sup>

Suddenly, for the French, veiling assumed a sinister and overtly political meaning and the more **complete** or radical the form of the veil, the more threatening, since it concealed the activities of the terrorist. The wish of the *pièdes noirs* to pierce beneath the veil, to 'westernize' Algerian women and to associate them with the colonial order, received an extraordinary expression during a mass demonstration on 16 May 1958 at the height of the generals' insurrection. The military/psychological warfare experts orchestrated an exuberant day of 'fraternization' and bussed in thousands of Algerians who then joyfully linked arms with *colons*. As part of this choreography European women 'spontaneously' liberated their Muslim sisters, who may have been prostitutes hired for the occasion, by pulling off their veils. These propaganda images were then diffused through the world's press.<sup>26</sup>

### The veil and post-colonialism

The Algerian War marked a crucial moment when the predominant erotic discourse/image of Orientalism and unveiling was superseded by a new representation, that of the maximum covering as the signifier of political danger and terrorism. This was a prefiguration of a representation that has become almost universal in the French and Western media since 1979.

During the period from the end of the Algerian War (1962) until 1979 there was a singular absence of images of veiling in the French media. The bloody end of colonialism meant that the exotic forms of Orientalism, in films, literature and advertising, rapidly disappeared or were repressed. The collapse of imperial hegemony meant that the popular themes of the Orientalist genre, French heroes rescuing beautiful princesses from the clutches of sadistic sheiks, could no longer be sustained. As so often after humiliating national defeat, collective amnesia and silence reigned.<sup>27</sup> It was mainly in the United States, which carried no colonial baggage, that the Orientalist film survived in Hollywood productions like *Harum Scarum* (1965) which opened with Elvis Presley, in 'Eastern' garb, leaping from his horse to free a captive woman from two evil Arabs.<sup>28</sup> The period from 1962 to 1979 was also one during which there was little concern with Islam as an external or internal political threat.

Since 1980 the French press has been literally inundated with images of veiled women, a change that can be related to two interrelated phenomena. Firstly, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the war in Lebanon, the Gulf War, the activities of terrorist organizations and the spread of fundamentalism into the Maghreb, especially Algeria, have created a level of anxiety that is higher in France than for any other Western nation. Secondly, from the late 1970s Muslims inside France have achieved a much higher level of 'visibility', not through further immigration but through the process that Gilles Kepel has called 're-islamization', a phase of more overt religious practice and mosque construction.<sup>29</sup> Politicians, particularly in the Front National which made an electoral breakthrough in 1983–4, have exaggerated the extent to which Muslim immigrants threaten to undermine French identity and culture, or may act as a fifth column for fundamentalist terrorists. A dramatic shift in the volume of press reports on Islam, as well as in the way in which Muslims were represented, both reflected and helped to generate and deepen these new concerns.<sup>30</sup> Central to this ideological process has been the careful construction and manipulation, in image and text, of the veil, a type of fabrication that has been able to draw upon and reshape an older tradition of Orientalism.

One frequent use of the veil image is to accompany press reports on 'fundamentalist' régimes, from Iran to Algeria and Afghanistan. These are generally of two types: one in which heavily veiled women are shown carrying weapons, establishing an equation between the oppression of women, fanaticism and terrorism. The second, and most common, are simply of veiled women, but in which the editorial preference has been for photographs which show the maximum or contextually most bizarre dress forms or hyperveiling. The messages here are fairly obvious: the veil is the signifier, just as it was in the colonial period, of an entire social, political and cultural order (barbarism, oppression, 'medieval' values, fanaticism). This type of representation can be found in the Western press in general. For example, in recent years in Britain and the United States there have been numerous popular 'authentic exposé' accounts by Western women of captive life in the harem, reviving an old Orientalist favourite.<sup>31</sup>

However, we will restrict our treatment to French media representations of veiling among Muslim women *inside* France, since it is here that the ideological manipulation of images is most evident. To comprehend the nature of media fabrication and distortion requires some background knowledge of the historical and social reality of veiling styles, customs and practice among Muslim women. Historically among the women of the Middle East and North Africa

the size, colour and form of the veil has varied enormously from one region to another and instead of being fixed for eternity has been subject to constant change, expressing a range of aesthetic, gender and political meanings.<sup>32</sup> In the rural areas of the Maghreb and Middle East most peasant women did not wear a veil at all and it was not traditional among the Berber women in Kabylia, from where most immigrants originated. When Algerian women first migrated to France in large numbers from about 1950 onwards the minority who were veiled, as with those from the Sahara region, rapidly abandoned traditional dress for European style clothing.<sup>33</sup> Among the 'second generation', those who either migrated to France when very young or have been born there, where there is an assertion of Muslim identity through dress, this has been expressed through the *foulard* or headscarf which leaves the face entirely free. Among the 200,000 Muslim girls of school age in France today probably between 0.25 and 1 percent wear the *foulard*.<sup>34</sup> The number of Muslim women in France who wear the veil or some form of face covering, as distinct from the *foulard*, is very small indeed and may be mainly restricted to a tiny minority of fundamentalist militants, like those who demonstrated in Paris during the '*foulard affair*' on 22 October 1989. The press largely ignored the fact that most of these marchers were not the much-feared and hated Algerian fundamentalists, but Turkish women who may have been influenced by an earlier 'veil' controversy in Turkish politics dating from 1984.<sup>35</sup>

A first characteristic of the French press use of images of veiling is that, as with earlier forms of Orientalism, little attention is paid to the sociological specificity of Muslim dress. For example, a newspaper or magazine may select from its photographic bank a picture of an Iranian woman in full-length *chador* to illustrate a report on Islam in France. Such misrepresentation can be interpreted as an ideological or political construct rather than as editorial convenience or sloppiness. From the many hundreds of veil-images that have appeared in the French press since 1980, we shall select one as typical: the cover of *Le Nouvel Observateur* for 7 February 1986. This shows a close-up, frontal image of a veiled woman, only the eyes visible, with the heading 'L'Islam En France'.<sup>36</sup> The editor(s) may have selected this photograph primarily because it simply made for a good cover: this *was* an arresting image. However, the photograph is not one of a French Muslim woman, but a studio fabrication specially constructed by the journal.<sup>37</sup> The top half of the veil is in blue material, the bottom half in deep red, divided by a white band and the lighter texture of the face. The arrangement, which bears no relation to any known veil, but rather to the *tricolore*, is not dissimilar in intent to the cover of a *Figaro* supplement 'Dossier sur

l'immigration' of 26 October 1985 which showed a bust of Marianne wrapped in a veil, and alongside the question, 'Serons-nous encore Français dans trente ans?' The staged cover of the *Nouvel Observateur* is in line with a whole tradition of Orientalist invention that reaches back into the nineteenth century. One consequence of the older forms of Orientalism disseminated in France prior to 1962, in particular the stereotypical images of veiling in the popular cinema, novel and advertising, is that journalists can continue to manipulate such clichés since the public have no means of knowing when a photograph bears no relationship to reality.

The distinguishing feature of the *Nouvel Observateur* cover, as of most journals, is that editors have invariably selected or fabricated photographs of **maximum** veiling and concealment to illustrate the Islamic presence in France. The purposes here are various. The veil (let alone the *foulard*) is, as noted, exceptional among Muslim women in France, but the implicit purpose is to suggest that this, the style that carries the most negative connotations, is the norm, or may become so in some threatening future.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, as with colonial Orientalism, the veiled woman is chosen as the symbol or signifier for an entire social and religious order, the immigrant community. There are multiple levels of meaning here: the maximum veil indicates a barbaric order in which women are the victims of patriarchal oppression, seclusion and 'infamous' practices like child-marriage and polygamy. The cultural distance between Muslims and French 'civilization' is made as wide as possible so as to suggest the impossibility of integration and to maximize the dangers presented to Republican values and unity. Veiling and concealment are also inherently sinister, as with masking in general, and lurking always behind the figure of the woman is the shadowy fundamentalist, the fanatical bomber who manipulates her – just as he had done in the Battle of Algiers. Lastly, the *Nouvel Observateur* cover is also ambiguous in that the utilization of an attractive model harks back to the older Orientalist tradition of concealed eroticism.

The one exception to this pattern of 'veiling-as-danger' is a special 1994 issue of *Le Nouvel Observateur* on 'La Résistance à l'intégrisme' which argued that many Muslims in France were opposed to fundamentalism. The cover of the magazine shows the face of an unveiled North African woman, while the inside 'Dossier' on resistance is accompanied by a large photograph of a belly dancer performing for immigrant workers at Renault and by the caption, 'Non, tous les musulmans ne sont pas fanatiques!'<sup>39</sup> Curiously, an attempt to associate Muslims with French society is symbolized, as during the colonial period, not only with unveiling but with one of the key stereotypes of erotic Orientalism.

Another feature of the widespread use of the veiled image is that it can be so positioned in the newspaper/journal layout as to convey powerful meanings regardless of the accompanying text(s). A photograph – often like a prominent headline – is what first attracts the reader's eye and may 'set the tone' or control how the text is read. Indeed, so powerful are the meanings conveyed by the stereotype of veiling that photographs are frequently used on their own and left 'to speak for themselves'.<sup>40</sup> The 'documentary' quality of photographs lends them an air of reality or objectivity which discourages questions about their veracity.<sup>41</sup>

The largest and most interesting body of evidence on veiling relates to the famous *foulards* affair of October 1989, when three girls of North African descent were barred by a headmaster from attending their secondary school in Creil on the grounds that the headscarf was a provocative religious symbol in breach of the laws protecting the secularism of state education. This relatively insignificant event triggered a passionate national debate which centred on a complex of issues, ranging from integration/assimilation and the unity of French society to the rights of women and the fundamentalist danger.<sup>42</sup> What is of concern to us here is that the controversy was precipitated by and crystallized around the symbolism of the 'veil'. This was no mere accident, but was indicative of the extent to which Orientalist stereotypes of veiling had become deeply sedimented within French society.

The controversy is of interest for the evidence of a semantic confusion over the 'correct' term to apply to Muslim dress, and the opportunity this provided for ideological 'positioning'. The executive committee of the Socialist Party, for example, deeply split over the affair, debated for over half an hour whether to use the term 'foulard' or 'voile', the decision to employ the latter marking a victory for the orthodox *laïque* tendency.<sup>43</sup> Siblot's analysis of the press shows that the main terms used were 'foulard', 'voile', 'tchador', 'hidjeb', 'fichu', 'turban', 'khiemar', 'cagoule', 'mante', 'mantille', 'couvre-chef', 'robe', 'sitar'. Which particular term(s) were used by television reporters and press journalists was not, 'un choix neutre et innocent'.<sup>44</sup> In general the right-wing/populist press, including *Le Parisien libéré*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Quotidien*, opted to use the term 'tchador'. During a debate in March 1990 M. Darriulat, editor of *Le Parisien*, remarked that 'tchador' was preferred by his newspaper since it evoked, 'directement la responsabilité d'un pays, en l'occurrence l'Iran', as did the headline, 'Le Hesbollah tire les ficelles'.<sup>45</sup> As Siblot notes, the introduction of new terms like 'tchador', 'hidjeb' and 'khiemar' and the public ignorance of their meaning, paradoxically conferred upon them their main function,

that of signifying, quite literally, a foreignness (*une étrangeté*). Conversely, this is why other more neutral or 'homely' terms like 'carré' or 'châle' were avoided, since they minimized symbolic distance.<sup>46</sup> In some instances the linkage between veiling and barbarism was made quite explicit. Max Clos, in an article in *Le Figaro* with the heading 'Tchador, excision, cannibales', asked rhetorically, '... devons-nous accepter sur notre sol l'excision et le cannibalisme? Apparemment, nous sommes loin du voile. Pas du tout. C'est le même problème, la boucherie et la mutilation en moins. Car les conséquences sont identiques sur l'essentiel: la sauvegarde de notre identité.'<sup>47</sup>

The 'foulard affair', and the debate over the **lexical** terminology of the 'veil', is of interest since it made quite transparent a process of media construction and 'invention' of veiling that had been going on for many years, but almost solely through the selection or construction of **images** (usually photographs). These images had been all the more powerful, and insidious, precisely to the extent that their messages were conveyed at an almost unconscious level. Socialist or liberal journals in 1989–90 were generally critical of the ideological uses of terms like 'tchador', yet a study of the images of veiling used by the 'left' press in the decade preceding the 'foulard affair' shows that they had been responsible for habituating the French public to an association between the full veil, immigration, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Indeed during the controversy itself journals of all political persuasions continued to show a preference for photographs of women in the Iranian *tchador* to illustrate reports on the *foulards*.<sup>48</sup> The Front National jumped on the bandwagon by launching a new electoral poster which showed the large eyes of a blond and unveiled model with the caption, 'Immigration. Ouvrez les yeux. Votez Front National pour ne plus se tromper.'<sup>49</sup>

If there has been any continuity in the French representations of the veil over the last two hundred years, it has been that they have invariably been ideological fabrications. But the major shift in form has been away from unveiling as a metaphor for colonial domination, towards radical hyperveiling as a marker of political and cultural danger. However, these persistent stereotypes are now being challenged and subverted by a new generation of young French Muslim women of immigrant descent.<sup>50</sup> Through a proliferation of radio programmes like *Radio Beur* and *Radio Gazelle*, newspapers (*Sans Frontières*) and novels they have countered the negative and degrading images of the French press. 'Ces jeunes', notes Jazouli, 'veulent investir et maîtriser les espaces médiatiques pour renverser le processus.'<sup>51</sup>

1. Victor G. Kieman, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 131.
2. See Philippe Jullian, *The Orientalists. European Painters of Eastern Scenes* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977); Donald A. Rosenthal, *Orientalism: the Near East in French Painting, 1800–1880* (New York: University of Rochester, 1982), Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions. Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: Pandora, 1988); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978); L. Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (Paris: ACR Edition, 1985); Reina Lewis, 'Women and Orientalist artists: diversity, ethnography, interpretation', *Women. A Cultural Review* vi, 1 (1995), 91–106; Malika Mehdis, 'A Western invention of Arab womanhood: the "Oriental" female', in H. Afshar (ed.), *Women in the Middle East* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 18–58.
3. In the twentieth century this continued to be the attraction of Tangiers as the locus of the alternative drug culture of writers like William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Paul Bowles.
4. See for example the extract from Paul Raynal, *L'Expédition d'Alger* (1830), in P. Lucas and J.-C. Vatin (eds), *L'Algérie des anthropologues* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 98.
5. Gérard de Nerval, 'Voyage en Orient', in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), II, 261. On the European preoccupation with veiled women see also Jacques Berque, *French North Africa. The Maghreb Between Two World Wars* (London: Faber, 1967), 340–3.
6. See Jullian, 28.
7. On the studios see Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women. The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950* (London: Quartet Books, 1988), 39–47. The Bonfils studio had its own mail-order catalogue as early as 1876.
8. Rosenthal, 122.
9. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).
10. N. Bancel et al., *Images et colonies. Iconographie et propagande coloniale sur l'Afrique française de 1880 à 1962* (Paris: Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, 1993).
11. Pierre Boulanger, *Le Cinéma colonial* (Paris: Seghers, 1975), 62.
12. Ella Shohat, 'Gender in Hollywood's Orient', *Middle East Report*, January 1990, 42; see also Richard Abel, 'Arabian nights and colonial dreams', in *French Cinema. The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 151–60; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), Chapter 4.
13. A. Megherbi, *Les Algériens au miroir du cinéma colonial. Contribution à une sociologie de la décolonisation* (Algiers: SNED, 1982), 58.
14. Shohat and Stam, 199.
15. See, for example, James Clifford, 'Edward Said, Orientalism', *History and Theory*, xix (1980), 204–24.
16. Billie Melman, *Women's Orients. English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
17. On the tendency for racist stereotypes to 'assume a life of their own' see Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), Introduction.
18. Sarah Graham-Brown, 80.
19. Franz Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (London: Earthscan, 1989), 35–67.
20. Jean-Paul Charnay, *La Vie musulmane en Algérie d'après la jurisprudence de la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Quadrige, 1991).
21. On British India see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam. Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), Chapter 8, 'The Discourse of the Veil'. A similar strategy was pursued in India, see J. Liddle and R. Joshi, 'Gender and Imperialism in British India', *South Asia Research*, v (1985), 147–65.
22. M. Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence. Algerian Women in Question* (London: Routledge, 1994), 52–3.

23. Fanon, 38–9.
24. The FLN position was stated in a collective, pseudonymous work: Saadia-et-Lakhdar, *L'Aliénation colonialiste et la résistance de la famille algérienne* (Lausanne: La Cité, 1961).
25. See Shohat and Stam, 251–5.
26. Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace* (London: Macmillan Papermac, 1987), 290–1; Fanon, 62–3. A photograph of this unveiling is reproduced in F. Renaudot, *L'Histoire des Français en Algérie, 1830–1962* (Paris: Laffont, 1979), 281.
27. Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli. La Mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).
28. Shohat, 4 1.
29. Gilles Kepel, *Les Banlieues de l'Islam: naissance d'une religion en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).
30. See Constant Hamès, 'La construction de l'Islam en France: du côté de la presse', *Archives en sciences sociales des religions*, lxxviii, 1 (1989), 79–92; S. Bonnafous, *L'Immigration prise aux mots. Les immigrés dans la presse au tournant des années 80* (Paris: Kimé, 1991); A. Battegay and A. Boubeker, *Les Images publiques de l'immigration* (Paris: Harmattan, 1993); Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Immigration, ethnicity and political orientations in France', in Brian Jenkins and Tony Chafer (eds), *France: From the Cold War to the New World Order* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 207–18.
31. Jean P. Sasson's, *Princess*, billed as 'an appalling indictment of the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia', has sold over 250,000 copies, see *The Guardian* 25 April 1996; other examples of the type are Zena Muhsen, *Sold into Slavery*; and Cherry Mosteshar, *Unveiled. Love and Death Among the Ayatollahs* (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1995).
32. See Sarah Graham-Brown, 249–50, on the extent to which, in modern Egypt, Turkey, Jordan and elsewhere, the *hijab*, often presented as a return to tradition, is an 'invention' and 'not actually the same as any past style of veiling'. Fanon, 36, comments on the political and symbolic meaning of Moroccan women replacing the white veil by the black. There is an extensive sociology which investigates the significance of veiling to Muslim women: see for example, Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985); Chahla Chafiq and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Femmes sous le voile. Face à la loi islamique* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 1995); Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling. Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); U. Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982); Elizabeth Fernea, 'Ways of seeing Middle Eastern Women', *Women. A Cultural Review*, vi, 1 (1995), 60–6.
33. Photographs of North African women immigrants from 1961 show them to be entirely Europeanized in dress: see for example, Anne Tristan, *Le Silence du fleuve* (Bezons: Au Nom de la Mémoire, 1991), 17, 80–1
34. François Gaspard and Farhar Khosrokhavar, *Le Foulard et la République* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995), 29–30.
35. Emilie A. Olson, 'Muslim identity and secularism in contemporary Turkey: "The Headscarf Dispute"', *Anthropological Quarterly*, lviii (1985), 161–71. The demonstration was organized by the *Association Islamique en France*, a group that appears to have been introduced by Turkish militants from West Germany.
36. For similar *Nouvel Observateur* covers of veiled women see the issues for 5 October 1989, 'Fanatisme. La menace religieuse'; 26 October 1989, 'École: Le Piège religieux', 2 November 1989, 'Profs, Ne Capitulons Pas!' and 22 September 1994, 'L'Islam et les femmes'.
37. That the cover photograph is a construction has been confirmed by *Le Nouvel Observateur* which has given this as the reason why it will not give permission for its reproduction in this essay.
38. Alaoui Abdallaoui of Rabat wrote a letter to the *Nouvel Observateur*, 28 February 1986, expressing 'ma stupeur, mon agacement et mon inquiétude' on seeing the cover and noting its contradiction with an article in the same issue which

- indicated the danger, 'que l'imaginaire collectif en France est envahi d'images négatives'.
39. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 December 1994, 4–5.
  40. The comments made by Teun A. Van Dijk about the strategic and cognitive function of the headline, in activating the reader's relevant knowledge in memory and influencing the way in which the main text is interpreted, holds equally well for images: see his *Racism and the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), Chapter 3.
  41. Sarah Graham-Brown, 243–4.
  42. For the background to this affair see Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race' and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London: Routledge, 1995), 125–31. A dossier of press cuttings on the affair for October–December 1989 consists of four volumes and over 600 pages. This can be consulted at ADRI (Agence de Développement des Relations Interculturelles), 42 rue de Cambronne, Paris.
  43. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2 November 1989, 35.
  44. Paul Siblot, 'Ah! Qu'en termes voilés ces choses-là sont mises', *Mots. Les Langages du politique*, 30 (1992), 5–17; Antonio Perotti and France Thépaut, 'L'Affaire du foulard islamique', *Migrations Société*, ii, 7 (1990), 65.
  45. Antonio Perotti and Pierre Toulat, 'Immigration et médias. Le "Foulard" surmédiatisé?', *Migrations Société*, ii, 12 (1990), 15.
  46. Siblot, 10–11. Note the comment of Edgar Morin in *Libération*, 28 November 1989, 'Le mot foulard banalise: ce n'est qu'un morceau de tissu. Le mot tchador ayatollise. Le mot hidjeb maghrébise, voire folklorise. Le mot voile religionnise ...'.
  47. *Le Figaro*, 13 October 1989.
  48. See, for example, the photographs accompanying the article by Étienne Balibar in *Libération* of 3 November, by Jean-Marie Gaudeul in *La Croix* 4 November, and by Denis Lensel in *Le Quotidien* 7 December 1989. *Actualité de l'émigration*, 9 November 1989, was one of the very few journals to show a full-length photograph of the Creil students which shows that they wore normal French dress; the same issue noted that most of the press published, "'à la Une" la photo d'une gamine en tchador le poing levé ...' and news, instead of analysis, had become 'exclusivement choc visuel'.
  49. See the photograph and report in *Le Quotidien*, 9 November 1989. The play on unmasking was a constant in the discourse of Le Pen; he stated, for example, that the *tchador* 'ne doit pas nous masquer des réalités autrement graves, comme celle des assassinats qui se produisent dans nos villes ...' (interview in *Le Quotidien*, 11 November 1989).
  50. See for example Augustin Barbara, 'Représentations de la femme musulmane par les non-musulmans', *Migrations Société*, iv, 19 (1992), 11–22; Mireille Rosello, 'Du bon usage des stéréotypes orientalistes: vol et recel de préjugés anti-maghrébins dans les années 1990', *L'Esprit créateur*, xxxiv, 2 (1994), 42–57. For a critique of Orientalism among Western feminists see Leila Ahmed, 'Western ethnocentrism and perceptions of the harem', *Feminist Studies*, viii, 3 (1982), 521–34.
  51. A. Jazouli, *L'Action collective des jeunes Maghrébins de France* (Paris: Harmattan, 1986), 109.