Orientalism Revisited
Art, Land and Voyage

Edited by Ian Richard Netton
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Visual ethnography, stereotypes and photographing Algeria

Susan Slyomovics

“The imperial conquest,” Edward Said writes, “was not a one-time tearing of the veil, but a continually repeated, institutionalized presence in French life, where the response to the silent and incorporated disparity between French and subjugated cultures took on a variety of forms.” Based on access to technology, there were vast, institutionalized inequities and disparities between conqueror and subjugated peoples, since the camera and conquest overlapped chronologically, linking French photographic representations of Algeria and Algerians to the larger phenomenon of Orientalism in its enduring historical and visual aspects. The camera was not merely a device to capture images, and photographs functioned as more than “sensorially restrained objects: mute and motionless variegated rectangles.” Photography contributed to creating meaning and signification through the everyday, repeated and systematic practices of picture taking by the French in Algeria. For Said, whose corpus engages with the politics of Orientalist representation in the media, photography, and advertising, it is obvious that “[t]here can be no unilateral withdrawal from ideology. Surely it is quixotic to expect photographic interpretation to serve such a purpose.” He alerts viewers, readers, and especially photographers to the need for “a proper schooling in the visual faculties.” His insistence on the image as possessing an ideological point of view underpins his call for scholars of the visual to revisit the variety of imagined, pictured geographies of the Orient. To do so, I explore the visual, cultural form of biometric technologies that marked the French colonial bureaucratic presence through a set of colonial tourist postcards of Algeria, called Scènes et Types in French, and consider these images in relation to the parallel and coeval practices of French-imposed identity photographs and anthropometric classification systems. Such complex legacies of colonial French photography in Algeria re-emerge as Scènes et Types photographs and continue to circulate in Western museums and publications to this day, a century after their initial production and circulation. Moreover, since contemporary North Africans have become consumers of their former colonial visual histories even decades after Algeria’s independence, Said’s enduring question remains pertinent: “how does a culture seeking to become independent of imperialism imagine its own past?”

Photographs were the pre-eminent popular media for France to know Algeria, following France’s 1830 invasion of Algeria and the camera’s appearance in the
late 1820s (an invention claimed by the Frenchmen Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Daguerre). The colonial photographer coded the photographs so that they were associated with certain meanings, often determined by the imperial agenda that was installed—consciously or unconsciously—in the photograph. Surveying a set of themes and ordering them into simple categories, photographers developed a “stock of signs” and “cognitive connotations” that enabled a shorthand identification of France’s most significant possession outre-mer. The immediacy of photography—which differed from other illustrative techniques—furthered the colonial endeavor by helping the French public assimilate Algiers into its consciousness.

Photography produced knowledge about Algeria—a knowledge characterized by Malek Alloula as merely a form of “pseudo-knowledge of the colony”, spectacularly so in relation to the ways in which the French imagined Algerian women. In Alloula’s path-breaking work on French postcards of Algeria, entitled *The Colonial Harem*, he describes the reach of photographic image making:

Photography steps in to take up the slack and reactivates the phantasm at its lowest level. The postcard does it one better; it becomes the poor man’s phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams. The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourist, the soldier, the colonist. It is at once their poetry and their glory captured for the ages; it is also their pseudo-knowledge of the colony. It produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano, the fertilizer of the colonialist vision.

Alloula compares Western and settler-colonial photographic production to great seabirds hovering high above ground with their excremental output showering Algeria because colonial French photography similarly hovered high above Algeria to estheticize, exoticize, eroticize, and stereotype Algerians. Notions about the stereotype when applied to the native, the “indigene,” are best exemplified pictorially by Alloula and other critics under the rubric of *Scènes et Types* (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Many of *The Colonial Harem*s re-published and re-circulated French postcards depict photographs of Algerian *Scènes et Types*: exotic scenes and physical types mailed back to the metropole during the early decades of the twentieth century, when France’s hold over North Africa from Dunkerque to Tamanrasset appeared unchallenged. *Scènes et Types* belong to a visual genre in which an individual appears within the frame, with or without background, on location or in a studio, but always in visual contexts that masked urgent political and economic realities in the colony. Alloula’s focus on art history and the Algerian body passes lightly over political economy but acknowledges the colonial “double bind”, defined by David Henry Slavin, as the redoubling of the ways in which “picturesque” Algerians depend on tourism which invented the ‘picturesque’, while tourism perpetuates the ‘backwardness’ that legitimated French domination.”

Figure 7.2 “Types Algériens. Famille d’une femme des Ouled Nails.” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.
Captions are an additional characteristic of the genre of Scènes et Types that underscore transformations of the individual into a type, while announcing a priori an act of categorization. Thus, Scènes et Types postcards must be accompanied by a text that is brief, broadly generic, vaguely ethnological, rarely self-explanatory, and sometimes geographically situated. Captions are conventionally placed as close as possible to the image or branded directly upon it. The text of the caption is a mini-narrative that is fragmentary and incomplete, with sentences deliberately not fully grammatical because minus the subject, verb, and object — for example, a Mauresque, a Bedouin woman, a Janissary, a Jewish woman, etc. Since photographs exist without captions but not the reverse — namely, a caption without a photograph — whatever image is considered photographable leads to what is captionable. Nonetheless, Scènes et Types captions are strikingly uninformative. Therefore, photographs can be made to say whatever the mini-narrative caption says it should. Critic Susan Sontag, who thought deeply about captions, declared: “All photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions.” Captions provide a specific kind of legitimacy and authority to an image that itself stands in for generalities and operates synechdochically — the corporeal part standing for the entire body politic. Consequently, both caption and image work together to reinforce interpretative extremes — at one end of a spectrum concerned with the visual expression of generalities, which is what we view in Scènes et Types postcards, and alternatively, a focus on physical details and physiognomic typologies to the detriment of the human content of an image.

Algerian anthropologist Malek Chebel points to the significance of the postcard’s visual practices by looking at its resemblance to inventories of races, peoples, and tribes. Chebel maintains that such photographs and postcards mask the deeper anxieties (l’angoisse) of the colonizer, who must depersonalize by speaking in terms of masses and crowds (Chebel’s terms are la masse, massification). According to Chebel, each country of colonized French North Africa typified a different visual stereotype:

In Morocco, it is above all the architecture of cities (gardens, gates, fountains, markets, medersas) that intrigue and hold the attention of colonial painters and illustrators. In Tunisia, the landscape and artisanat were priorities. In Algeria it was the society: “scènes and types” rained down, mouskères (Arab women), demi-mondaines, professions (barbers), Tuareg chiefs (amenokals), dancers (nailiye) were at the same time occasions that permit discerning the Other in the immeasurable challenge of the image. These tendencies were obviously not neutral: they reflected the contradictions of the moment, often the will [wish or desire (volonté)] to find some paradigms in an ocean of uncertainties.

To assure what Chebel terms above the colonizer’s “will to find some paradigms in an ocean of uncertainties”, the image-plus-caption protocols of Scènes et Types flourished alongside physical anthropology as a racial science. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, projects to compare and contrast races were realized with the help of the camera. One important example
was German photographer Carl Dammann’s 1876 album of approximately 642 small images entitled *Ethnological Photographic Gallery of the Various Races of Man*. Dammann adopted the use of the mug-shot protocol, consisting of frontal and profile portrait views. For French colonial ethnography, influenced by Dammann’s project in Germany, two key figures were Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau and prince Roland Bonaparte (a great-nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte), both members of the Paris-headquartered Geography Society and Anthropology Society, with Quatrefages as the first holder of the chair of anthropology in France’s Museum of Natural History. Algeria was their scientific laboratory in what passed for scientific experimentation, also exemplified by Roland Bonaparte’s famous series of images entitled “Peaux-Rouges” (“Redskins”) that depict an apparently neutral scientific pose of the frontal and profile faces of Native Americans, uniformly photographed and displayed alongside a less famous series of Arab portraits.

Quatrefages’ fellow French anthropologist Paul Topinard invested much effort in finding a scientific basis for European racial superiority. The latter’s 1876 anthropology text was influential in France, and again in England once translated in 1890. Topinard’s methodology can be examined by looking at charts that he established, for example, one to determine the “Berber type” by ranking the variety of different human ear shapes according to his estimation of a universal harmonious symmetry. He maintained that Algerian Kabyles (or Berbers) exemplified ear shapes with a “lobule … wanting” and their typical ear type, he believed, was characteristically to “project out” in ways that defined the Kabyle physiognomy. Topinard’s descriptions were accompanied by a drawing of an Algerian Kabyle attributed to Emile DuHoussset (1863–1911), a colonial army officer and man of action who happened to be present in the rarefied precincts of the Anthropology Society in Paris during Topinard’s presentation on the Kabyle ear. DuHoussset’s drawing (Figure 7.3) provoked a fascinating exchange between Topinard, the theorist of anthropometry, and DuHoussset, the soldier-practitioner. Records of the Anthropology Society meetings reveal that Topinard insisted on the importance of distinguishing the Berber or Kabyle from the Arab Algerian according to specific, scientifically documented physical attributes, among them the characteristic Berber protruding ears. In response, Colonel DuHoussset, a military officer and published ethnographer of the Berbers, asserted that the Topinard’s caption of “Kabyle/Berber” in Topinard’s *Anthropology* text was incorrect. DuHoussset declared that as this was his own drawing, he could assert that, in fact, it depicted an Arab. Topinard countered by pleading for all travelers, visitors, and military personnel to engage in the project of measuring Algerian native physiognomy with the appropriate scientific instruments. Furthermore, he asserted that anthropometry would prove that the Berbers/Kabyles were the genuine “Peaux-Rouges” (“Red Skins”) of North Africa. Colonel DuHoussset retorted that neither his own artistic drawings nor Topinard’s observations and measurements were valid. Of interest to me is DuHoussset’s conclusion as early as 1876 that only “photography imposes itself today as the most correct basis for all anthropological studies … the apparatus, instantly producing face and profile was less cumbersome.” Thus, photography documented and served as evidence
for the very stereotypes that photography created. As this exchange between Topinard and Duhousset attests – despite evidence of a wrongly captioned image in which an Arab is mislabeled a Berber because of his ear shape – colonial anthropologists abstracted racial characteristics to create racial types, which were then given visual attestation through the drawings, photographs, and captions provided by photographers and ethnographers.

**ID cards: “speaking likenesses”**

Colonial anthropological racial types preceded, influenced, and dovetailed with the classification and anthropometric identification system developed in the 1890 work of Alphonse Bertillon, *La Photographie judiciaire*. Bertillon, the French police clerk credited in 1872 with the invention of the standard frontal and profile shot to identify récidivistes, called identity photographs *portraits parlés* or “speaking likenesses”. Bertillon’s techniques, similar to the documentation of Carl Dammann (1819–1874) and the photo albums of Roland Bonaparte, influenced the practice of visually documenting criminals as well as the colonized population of France’s overseas possessions. The identity card photograph coincided and was in complicity with the advent of French colonialism that would
introduce to the Maghreb the French police service, the prison system, and an anthropometric section (service anthropométrique). Anthropometry deployed photographs, captions, and written descriptions to establish extensive physiognomonic portraits of criminals that traversed the human body section by section. As the work of Michel Foucault attests, the birth of the prison and of police photography in the 1840s are central to issues of modern disciplinary power that call for isolation, supervision, surveillance, and the imposition and recording of individualized names. Thus, Scènes et Types photography emerges not only from colonial tourism but also from the parallel historical contexts of criminological photography and the establishment of the identity card, both pictorial processes closely associated with the overriding aims of French colonial and military administrations. The pictured colonial subject is framed within the paradigm of certainty embodied in a portrait, but “homogenized” according to the requirements of French colonial power in Algeria.

In nineteenth-century Algeria, French laws governing identification cards as well as the family passbook formed part of French bureaucratic controls established over the population. This apparatus of French state control over an individual was preceded historically by registration controls for the French family, embodied in the family passbook (in French, livret d’identité et d’état civil, and in Maghrbi Arabic, kunnash al-tarîf wa ‘l-halâh al-madaniyyah). Algeria was subjected to a nineteenth-century European “culture of identification” in which the personal name is the essential component of the modern state system of identification: in France, laws governing personal names (for example, the law of 1 April 1803, repealed only in 1993), restricted the French to names duly registered at birth. Laws creating family documentation papers for a couple and their offspring are said to have been enacted after fires set during the 1871 Paris Commune, an uprising that burned registers of civil status in the Paris region. Demonstrators targeted for destruction official buildings, such as the Palais de Justice and the Hotel de Ville, housing birth, marriage, and death certificates. For a time, Parisians could fabricate false documents and create new identities. By 1875, however, residents of greater Paris in the Seine prefecture carried family passbooks.

How does the state, whether colonial French or post-independent Algerian, contain massive population increases in new urban settings created by colonization? What are the ways that identification procedures, and therefore techniques of controlling the individual body, were used to track crowds, rioters and dissenters? How did the jurisdictional claims of the Arab–Berber–Islamic naming clash with French paper-recording technologies? France extended the notion of standardized names to their Arab subjects in North Africa, beginning with Algeria, the first North African country invaded in 1830 and colonized. The law of 23 March 1882 on the civil status of Muslim natives in Algeria imposed the combined French systems of identity cards and patronymic surnames on all Algerian heads of households. In cases of Arab refusal to choose a fixed surname, article five states that French civil servants may create one of their own devising. In contrast to French naming practices, pre-colonial North African names consist minimally of a first name followed by the father’s name
and the grandfather's name, but often include a string of names representing the holder's moral, physical, or social qualities, place of birth or ancestry, and tribal affiliation or membership in religious orders. An Arab-Berber name functions as a biography, unique to the individual and, thus, disappears with his death. Anthropologist Hassan Rachik calls this naming tradition a "beautiful labyrinth", a history of names inherited from his Moroccan forbears that changed every generation, pointing to the ways in which identity is never fixed by name but rather to be sought through points of intersection with place, family migration, and even national consciousness:

If I write imagining that [my grandfather] were speaking: "You know, identity cannot be totally inherited nor rejected totally. It is for you to construct your own identity multiplying endlessly your circles of belonging. In the matter of identity there is little to transmit from generation to generation, but much to invent individually and collectively. Identity is not a simple line linking an individual to a group whatever the foundation of the group—linguistic, religious or political. Identity is the actual connection that a biography has with other biographies and other groups. ... Look! I did not submit to my father's name. Can you not see what a labyrinth you become entangled in wanting to reunite in one text what I have lived successively and partially? Even for a single individual, names and identities change, fall into disuse."

In the Maghreb, the French perceived onomastic chaos and discontinuity in the Arab-Berber preference for human history embodied in a biographical approach to naming. Furthermore, French officials queried how names could be individually assigned, genealogically arranged, alphabetized correctly, and made orthographically uniform. The proliferation of Ahmeds and Mohameds recurring from grandfather to father to son raised the possibility of a bewildering and uninformative genealogy comprising, for example, Mohamed ben Ahmed, son of Ahmed ben Mohamed, grandson of Mohamed ben Ahmed. In addition to the French standardization of names as part of the identification process, all documentation of Muslim subjects in Algeria (including Arabic-language place names) was to be written not in Arabic but in French, Algeria's sole official language. To produce Arabic-language personal and place names accessible to users of the Latin alphabet, two French army interpreters attached to France's Ministry of War in Algeria were charged with fashioning a transcription protocol. With minor changes, William MacGuckin de Slane's and Charles Gabeau's 1866 transcription of Maghrabi names remains in use in North Africa and France to this day. Collective stereotyping in postcards lived alongside the creation of individual North African identity that was arbitrarily fixed, visualized, and transcribed for official confirmation purposes into a French-created and redacted document of identity. That the French colonial police force was in charge of issuing identity cards in Algeria apparently contributed to their unpopularity and the initial lack of compliance, as did the two required accompanying photographs in profile and full face, as if the bearer were a wanted criminal. Identification—a civil and legal practice in France to establish citizenship—was placed under police control in
Algeria, emphasizing its role as a criminological practice foisted on tractable colonies to circumscribe identity without granting full citizenship. Furthermore, Algerian identity documents were rightly understood by the native populace as a prelude to mass conscription.

The emergence of the ID card of the "disappeared"

French-imposed bureaucratic controls were maintained after Algeria's independence from France in 1962. Indeed, these techniques were carried over intact and deployed just as restrictively and punitively. In this essay, the techniques of identification - first, over the individual body, and then the family unit - form an intersection for complex twentieth-century histories of Algeria. In the aftermath of the Algerian war of independence (1954–1962), what linked the identification system, the criminalized body, and the criminal justice system? James Scott proposes the concept of a "legible people", a metaphor for the emergence of writing as central to the creation of nationhood and to modern forms of national control. People come to legibility, can be "read", when they are under the official scrutiny of paperwork, files, dossiers, archives, records, and identity documents. The formation of a centralized, authoritarian, postcolonial Algerian state in 1962 owed much to continuities with the bureaucratic French colonial state. Family passbooks and identity cards remain constituent elements of Algerian sovereignty even as they are administrative formalities of civil identification that extend control over the population, a surveillance that was at its most efficient and rigorous in large urban settings.

Currently, the power of the identity card reaches beyond the police station, the courtroom, and even the grave to determine who we are, what names we give ourselves, and how we reconstruct the past through narrative, storytelling, and photography. The identity card, an artifact born of colonial control and post-independence repression, has been transformed into memory devices, the traces of remembrance with which to conjure the dead and missing. More than 6,000 Algerians are officially recognized as those forcibly disappeared, although international and national human rights groups estimate between 10,000 and 20,000 missing Algerians during the bloody decade of the 1990s, which claimed over 200,000 Algerian lives. To this day, many Algerian families do not know the whereabouts of family members disappeared, and where, and if, there are victims' graves. The identity card photograph is what remains. The photograph, regardless of its bureaucratic provenance, proves existence. An identity card photograph is an object that can be referred to and pointed at, the sole evidence to anchor the presence of the disappeared, as families grapple with absence. No one, especially the bereaved families, considers the photograph to be remotely related to the reality of their missing ones. The picture is all that remains.

An Amnesty International book of photographs entitled A Biography of Disappearance: Algeria 1992 - is filled with examples of identity card portraits that have been repurposed - some images are enlarged, framed, and pasted on the wall, while others resting in their frames are brought to the dinner table and seated in the owner's former place. These images look out and speak to
the audience, underlining the import of witnessing and testifying to the presence of visual likeness in the absence of the physical body (Figure 7.4). Why has the ID photo become emblematic simultaneously of the visible, the invisible, and the missing body? How do some bodies come to matter (to paraphrase Judith Butler) or fail to matter? Bodies formerly and formally exhibited become bodies erased and bodies denied. In many cases, the bereaved parent carries or wears the portrait of the missing child, spouse, or family member.

In Algeria, as elsewhere, when the right of relatives to bury their dead is absent – a right recognized cross-culturally, no less than legally – pictures represent the missing and unburied body as it was photographed when alive. In North Africa, complex funeral rites are prescribed both for the community and for the

family unit. They begin at death with the command to wash, dress, and shroud the body, and then to lament and pray. Family and friends bear the corpse to the cemetery, and prayers are offered at the gravesite. A long period of mourning ensues, with specific ceremonial gatherings, for example, to mark the fortieth day and the first anniversary of the death. For the deceased and for the bereaved, it is considered among life’s gravest misfortunes to be deprived of the observance of mourning rituals such as a funeral, and obligatory visits to care for the grave. The loss of the ability to express mourning conventionally and individually, no less than the uncertainty whether family members are in fact dead, carries with it immeasurable grief and trauma. Certainly an unforeseen use for the French identity photograph that was maintained in post-independent Algeria is as a souvenir and memorializing image to a family member, a piece of paper rendered more poignant in the case of those forcibly disappeared, unburied, and grieved over.

The circulation of Algerian ID photos in North African homes and Western museums

In 1982, French photographer Mark Garanger published a book of photos entitled Femmes Algériennes 1960 that consisted of ID images produced in 1960, when he was conscripted into the French army and dispatched to Algeria during the war of independence (1954–1962). A single-page introduction is the exception in this book of portraits of Algerian women that otherwise contains no words, in which Garanger describes techniques deployed to capture images:

The French army decided to impose ID cards on Algerian natives slated for the so-called regroupement or “resettlement camps”. I photographed approximately 2,000 people, 200 a day, mainly women … It was the faces of the women that impressed me greatly. They had no choice. They were forced to unveil themselves and let themselves be photographed. They had to sit on a stool, outdoors, in front of the white wall of the hamlet. I received their gaze at close range, the first witness to their mute, violent protest. I want to bear witness [témoigner] on their behalf.35

I juxtapose the fruits of Garanger’s army work of the 1960s that continue to circulate widely in European and American museums with a second photograph – the 1924 official school picture of an all-girls school in Tlemcen, Algeria, one established by the Islamic reformist Nahida or “renaissance” movement to educate women in Arabic (Figure 7.5). The eleven-year-old child on the viewer’s left, second row from the end, is Yamina Ben Yelles, my mother-in-law, whom I never met. In a series of unpublished oral history interviews collected in the 1980s towards the end of her life by her daughter, Chafika Berber, my sister-in-law, Yamina described the first time she was forced to go out in public without her veil. Her husband, Sid-Ahmed Berber, my father-in-law, had been expelled from Algeria to France for nationalist activities and, as she sat unveiled amid her bundles and young children on the pier in Marseilles in 1952, she recalled to her daughter the many ways that she felt naked, exposed, and miserable to
the colonizer’s gaze. The area of the school photograph containing the face of Yamina Ben Yelles was reproduced and enlarged by her family, a visual excerpt, in order to create an individual portrait for her descendants.

I bring together Garanger’s ID images and my Algerian in-laws’ family photos to open up an inquiry into the nature of “indigenous photography”. Parallel to colonialist photography is the anthropological concept of “indigenous photography”, to describe the moment when photographic techniques are disseminated to the natives (indigènes). Owing its introduction in Algeria to primarily French photographers, the production of “indigenous photography” represents a historically rich resource and archive. However, is the concept of indigenous photography a recognition that, as in the Arab East, many minorities were trained in photography? Scholars have profiled Arab Christians or Armenians as the visual documenters for the urban Levantine elites. In Tlemcen, Algeria, a city that was one-third Jewish until independence in 1962, among the prominent photographers in the region were the Cohen family, Algerian Jews who maintained a large photography studio. Or is indigenous photography the deployment of the rich and violent heritage of colonialist photography by the native? Does my mother-in-law’s photo speak only to the formal properties of the well-known, French-imported practice of the annual school picture, or does it bring some knowledge about Algerian women’s education in 1924 and the unwritten history of local Arabic language education initiatives by a populist, urban, reformist Muslim movement? What happens when these photos are cropped, detached, and framed to decorate the homes of her children and grandchildren because the school photo and the ID card are what remain visually of a beloved mother and grandmother? Moreover, even in a pre-Photoshop but post-independent North Africa, there have been a variety of strategies to appropriate, repurpose, repatriate the endlessly circulating colonial images that produced and reduced categories of the Algerian to a minimum type, that evacuated any violence from the frame, and that demonstrably exhibited the empire’s control over the visual archive. How do we understand when aspects

Figure 7.5 Yamina Ben Yelles, Berber family photographs, Tlemcen. Author’s collection.
of the dominant colonial photographic practices, such as photocopying technologies and framing practices, are re-contextualized by the formerly colonized? How does one overcome, or avoid, seeing oneself as the French colonizers saw the Algerian natives? Activist visual anthropology came to one conventional solution by placing the subaltern and the colonized behind the camera, aiming to produce what the discipline of anthropology terms indigenous photography, an ambiguous multivalent term that no longer means photographs of the indigenous inhabitants but encompasses photography by the indigenous inhabitants. Indeed, what defines an image as indigenous? Or perhaps indigenous photography is reclaiming through re-captioning the Scènes et Types images re-circulating on websites, as, for example, a Moroccan website that posts colonial Scènes et Types postcards to pose the haunting question: "Can you find your ancestor, your grandparents?"

“One day captions will be needed”: Dennis Adams and the Getty Exhibition, Walls of Algiers

Susan Sontag informs us in her last book, Regarding the Pain of Other, that "one day captions will be needed". Sontag is prescient to insist that photographs do not make us understand anything; we need historical, political, cultural contexts for understanding and these a photograph cannot provide. According to the current generation of Maghribis searching for ancestors among the vast French archive of Scènes et Types postcards, captions are needed and names are traceable. For the moment, in addition to scholarly publications, internet postings, and domestic décor items, museums are increasingly the repository for the heritage of colonial ID photographs and Scènes et Types postcards, some of which are in collections privately amassed or in the archives of North African photography studios currently deposited in museums such as the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Museums accord value to these materials and include them in their displays, catalogs, and exhibitions. While ID photos and postcards emerged as a result of nineteenth-century anthropological and colonial notions of classifying and categorizing peoples, they also eerily mirror the social histories of museums as a site of collecting, classifying, display, and entertainment.

My essay concludes with a consideration of the recent Los Angeles Getty Museum exhibition (May–October 2009), The Walls of Algiers, which deployed French colonial Algerian Scènes et Types postcards and ID cards. The Getty exhibition was curated by Zeynep Celik, an architectural historian and professor at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and Frances Terpak, senior curator at the Getty Research Institute. My contribution to the Getty Museum exhibition was to introduce the curators to the work of American artist Dennis Adams, whom I first met during a conference in 1998 at MIT, where we both then taught. Algeria has been the focus of many projects for Adams. His artistic interrogations of post-colonial transformations in Europe and Europe's collective amnesia about its colonial pasts launched three decades' worth of his photography, video installations, and site-specific works in urban public locations such as bus shelters, pedestrian tunnels, street signs, and public urinals (pissoirs). Adams writes: "My idea was to crack the silence. I wanted to touch the subject of [the Algerian]
war through a public intervention that went straight to the nerves." One such project, rejected as controversial by the Dijon municipal authorities, envisioned publicly exhibiting the photographs that document the decolonizing processes in Algeria that led to dismantling statues of heroic French figures during the year 1962, when they were transported from Algeria to France upon Algerian independence. Among the objects presented in the Getty Walls of Algiers exhibition — another Adams effort to intervene in French-Algerian silences — was his reframing of the famous series of identity card photographs of women from the Aurès region of Algeria photographed by Marc Garanger. At considerable expense, Adams purchased ten of Garanger’s ID photographs for his project entitled “Recovered 10 on 10 (Adams on Garanger)”. He summarizes his project:

Ten books were produced, each with a different portrait of an Algerian woman on its back inside cover. These photographs were taken by photojournalist Marc Garanger in 1960, when he was in the French military service in Algeria. They were selected from over 2000 portraits that were ordered by military authorities for terrorist control purposes. The majority of these photographs were taken of women, all of whom were forced to remove their veils. The lower portion of each portrait has been “re-covered” with ten pages of photographs in which Adams documents social housing projects on the outskirts of various French cities. Today, many of these decaying modernist projects are occupied by Algerian immigrants, signifying the culmination of France’s turbulent history with its former colony.

From Adams’s oeuvre of ten books, one appeared in the exhibition encased in a standard museum glass display case that permitted only a single page for display and viewing. My interest is not to unpack obvious historical and gendered ironies of Adams’s complex intervention and composite image production in which, on the one hand, a French male conscript photographer, March Garanger, unveils Algerian women forcibly photographed during a ferocious anti-colonial war in 1960 Algeria and, on the other hand, an American male, Dennis Adams, re-veils the same Algerian women with superimposed images depicting post-colonial views of decaying, Maghribi-inhabited social housing projects of 1993 Parisian suburbs (Figure 7.6). Indeed, in my interview with Adams (November 21, 2004, New York City), he acknowledged: “I know the implications of gender, the white male from America putting himself in the middle”. Nor am I here concerned with critiques of Adams’s modernist appropriations and estheticizing of Algerian women’s ID photos and the presumed desolation of Algerian lives in the Parisian periphery. Perhaps, this is because I see Garanger and Adams inextricably bound in a variety of ways. For example, from the legal perspective, Adams informed me that he signed a contract agreeing not to exhibit Garanger’s photographs alone, which I interpret as Garanger enforcing claims to both authorship and ownership of the ID photos that he presents as indissoluble, unchanging artifacts that nonetheless allow for modernist appropriations. Can Garanger claim ownership of the ID photographs he took, or do such images belong to the French military archives, or to the Algerian state, or to the female subjects photographed against their will?
Adams is intrigued by these confusions of authorship. An earlier 1991 installation, *Road to Victory*, is described in an online catalog: “Eight vitrines, Duratrans black anodized aluminum, wood, steel, plastic, tinted glass, mirror, fluorescent light referencing WWII aerial reconnaissance photographs taken under the supervision of Edward Steichen.” During World War II, Steichen was placed in charge of American naval combat photography. Adams persevered in the face of Museum of Modern Art personnel who insisted that he request permission from Steichen’s estate by arguing successfully that Steichen could not claim ownership over public domain images that belonged to the US military, even though Steichen was the photographer of record. Are Garanger’s images, in a sense, the “war booty” that Adams suggested to me?

Instead of theoretical approaches that draw on feminist, modernist, and copyright frameworks, I prefer to interrogate Adams’s felicitous, multivalent title, “recovered,” and what it might mean for family photos, ID cards, and stereotyping postcards that re-circulate in museums, homes, private collections, and the internet. Theodor Adorno’s epithet “museal” to describe a rupture in relations between the viewer and the object applies to Adams’s “10 by 10” project, to most of the Getty museum exhibition visitors, perhaps less so to Garanger’s Algerian corpus, and not at all to my Algerian in-laws and other Maghribis in
search of direct genealogical links to visualizing their French colonial pasts. For this discussion, I draw on anthropology’s current concern with the topic of repatriation, which includes both archives and human remains. Colonizer administrations in the post-independence era appropriated the formerly colonized archives and shipped them from colony to metropole, with the result that the archival pasts and histories of newly independent states reside elsewhere. Strengthening Algerian claims to the right to their archival past are current determinations about provenance and pertinence, meaning that though the French created the documents, they did so in Algeria (provenance), and they are about Algeria and Algerians (pertinence) in strikingly dramatic and often life-threatening ways. The international archives community has formally adopted a position on archival claims stressing the inalienability of official records and worked for restitution, which could include microfilmed copies as the mutually acceptable form of return. French jurist and legal expert Louis Joinet authored a much-quoted United Nations document, published in 1997, in which he linked his opposition to impunity for perpetrators of human rights crimes to a subsection that he entitles “the right to know”, one that has become a credo for archivists worldwide and is known as the Joinet principles.47

Item 17: This is not simply the right of any individual victim or closely related persons to know what happened, a right to the truth. The right to know is also a collective right, drawing upon history to prevent violations from recurring in the future. Its corollary is a “duty to remember”, which the State must assume, in order to guard against the perversions of history that go under the names of revisionism or negationism; the knowledge of the oppression it has lived through is part of a people’s national heritage and as such must be preserved. These, then, are the main objectives of the right to know as a collective right. Item 18: Two series of measures are proposed for this purpose … The second is aimed at preserving archives relating to human rights violations.

Documents and photographs matter to people on all sides of former conflicts. Aside from known cultural values for history, nation building, and heritage, what lies in the archive, functionally speaking, are documents, histories, obligations, and rights. The Algerian government has repeatedly requested access to French archives to document issues more serious to the authorities than visual family histories. For example, Algeria repeatedly requested since its 1962 independence – a demand granted by France only in 2007 – the maps that determine the current placement of tens of thousands of active land mines along Algeria’s eastern and western borders when the French built the 700-kilometer Challe and Morice lines during the war of independence. So potent and potentially inflammatory are the contents of archives that on April 29, 2008 French parliamentarians debated the project of a law of archives in which an increased limit to 75 years would be placed on access to government archives. Such an extension effectively places both the collaborationist Vichy French World War II archives as well as the French records of the Algerian war of independence beyond access,
in defiance of the Joint principles of the collective right to know. French legisla-
tion is at odds with parallel European legal projects on the disposition and trans-
parency of archives. In England, the current 30-year wait is undergoing review,
with proposed legislation going forward to shorten the three-decades-long
waiting period; in the former Soviet Eastern bloc countries, the pressure to open
Communist-era archives has led to a maximum 18- to 20-year waiting period. 48

Objects in museums possess a history, while the museum enterprise is to
sidestep, if not efface that history during the brief episode of museum display
and exhibition (for example, May–October 2009 at the Getty). Recovering the
histories of the museum object—in my case, studying Algerian women’s ID
photographs—is also an enterprise full of irony and paradox. 49 At the heart of my
in-laws’ domestic, intimate recovery of ID photographs is a profound gratitude
for the mere existence of their grandparents’ images that formerly chronicled
occasions of forcible picture taking. As well, they acknowledge what Gayatri
Spivak terms the “enabling violence” of colonization and what Algerians in turn
have come to call “un acquis” (that which is acquired). What can be enumerated
and viewed, the sum total of all that has been acquired voluntarily or forcibly
from French-imposed culture in North Africa, defines what was acquired: these
are the poisoned gifts of their colonial history that pertain to their frozen Algerian
patronymic surnames, francophone, and photography.

Notes

3 Edward Said, “Bursts of Meaning,” Reflections on Exile and Other Essays
of this topic, see my “Edward Said’s Nazareth,” Framework: The Journal of Cinema
and Media, vol. 50, nos. 1 and 2 (2009), pp. 9–45.
4 Said, Culture and Imperialism, p. 214.
Algiers,” in Zeynep Celik, Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Terpak (eds), The Walls
of Algiers (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 87–133.
6 Zeynep Celik, “A Lingering Obsession: The Houses of Algiers in French Colonial
Discourse,” in Zeynep Celik, Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Terpak (eds), The Walls
7 Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
8 On Scènes et Types photography see the edited volume by Pascal Blanchard (ed.),
L’outré et nous: scènes et types (Paris: Association connaissance de l’histoire de
l’Afrique contemporaine, 1995); Leila Sebbar and Jean-Michel Belorgey, Femmes
d’Afrique du Nord: Cartes postales (1883–1930) (Paris: Blue Autour, 2002); and
9 David Henry Slavin, Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919–1939: White Blind
Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,
2001), p. 20. For a critique of Alloula’s absent historical and political perspectives,
see the book review by Jean-Noël Ferrié and Gilles Boetsch, “Contre Alloula: le Harem
colonial revisité: L’image dans le monde arabe, Annuaire de l’Afrique du Nord, vol. 32
(1993), pp. 299–304. On histories of French postcard production in Algeria, see David


15 Quatrefages was also the foremost French “acclimatizer,” who drew on Algeria as proof for his racial thesis on acclimation and physiognomy in the colonies. He predicted that the French settlers of Algeria were certain to acclimate successfully and thus advocated from his scientific ethnological expertise for increased French colonization and immigration to Algeria. See Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau, Rapport sur les progrés de l’anthropologie (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1867), pp. 230–240 and George W. Stocking, “Polygenist Thought in Post-Darwinian Anthropology,” Race, Culture, and Evolution (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 54.


26 The decree is in Robert Estoublon and Adolphe Lefèbure, Code de l'Algérie annoté: recueil chronologique des lois, ordonnances, décrets, arrêtés, circulaires, etc., formant la législation algérienne actuellement en vigueur, avec les travaux préparatoires et l'indication de la jurisprudence (Algier: A. Jourdan, 1896), p. 500 with article five on p. 574.


33 One of the earliest visual attestations of this practice that I found was Robert Capa's 1943 Naples photograph depicting women weeping at the funeral of twenty dead teen-age partisans. Capa presents an image of mothers gathered in lamentation around the unseen photographer, each one grasping a soldier's ID card of her son in uniform, their wails of sorrow almost audible.


36 Prohaska, "The Return of the Repressed."


39 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, p. 29.

40 See, for example, the Ken Jacobson collection described in his Odalisques and Arabesques: Orientalist Photography 1839–1925 (London: Quaritch, 2007).

41 For the edited volume, Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City Through Text and Image, and in the interests of full disclosure, I contributed a back cover blurb: "In this richly documented volume, the people, images, and places of the city of Algiers come alive. A group of outstanding scholars have been brought together to consider Ottoman, French colonial, and post-independence Algerian history through photography, popular culture, visual studies, religion and language. Their scholarship reveals how the inhabitants actually live in Algiers, how social relations were and are conducted, what are the symbols of political authority and the boundaries of religious space, and how the city, then and now, is delineated through memory and identity."


http://rue89.com/2008/04/17/archives-vichy-et-la-guerre-dalgerie-bientot-inaccessibles


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