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Wanted Women, Woman's Wants: *The Colonial Harem* and Post-colonial Discourse

Le Harem Colonial: Images d'un sous-erotisme by Malek Alloula, an Algerian poet and critic, was published in France in 1981; it appeared in its English translation, as *The Colonial Harem*, in 1986 (in the Minnesota Theory and History of Literature Series, Vol. 21).[1] As the initial title stipulates, it provides a commentary on images, specifically on a series of French postcards depicting mainly eroticized "scenes from Algerian life" under colonial rule during the first three decades of this century (which Alloula calls the "Golden Age of the colonial postcard" [5]). The aim is to address, to some extent create, a new audience, one capable of seeing through the immediate scene of the images in order to view the machinery of colonialism at work, behind the scene.[2] Edward Said has cited *The Colonial Harem* as an "excellent example" of the kind of post-colonial text that "open[s] the [Western] culture to experiences of the Other which have remained 'outside' (and have been repressed or framed in a context of confrontational hostility) the norms manufactured by 'insiders' and that "[t]he pictorial capture of colonized people by colonizer" is made "intelligible for an audience of modern European readers" ("Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" 158). This view, by no means unanimous,[3] is nonetheless roughly accurate in at least its most general point: Alloula does intend to bring

1 All references are to the English edition.

2 I would like to acknowledge the Killam Trust Fund, which provided financial support during the writing of parts of this paper.

3 The most forceful and valuable critique is that provided by Mieke Bal. In "The Politics of Citation," she considers *The Colonial Harem* together with Raymond Corbey's *Wildheid en Beschaving: De Europese Verbeelding van Afrika* and Sander Gilman's *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*. In Alloula's case, Bal notes that his "aesthetic judgements get hopelessly confused with the erotic ones, and any hint of an explanatory moment in his analysis suffers from this confusion, which ... we may wish to call aestherotics" (35-36). My interest is less in Alloula's unreflective eroticizing of the postcards, his critical voyeurism, than in the ways in which his sexual politics directly influence, and occasionally constitute, his post-colonial politics.

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the "outside" closer to the "inside" and, in doing so, to reverse the distinction by presenting not only a critique of political "capture," but a counter-image of resistance as well.

But Alloula's agenda is not as clear-cut as Said would have us believe; it is, in fact, heavily veiled. This essay will consider the ideological methodology /methodological ideology displayed in *The Colonial Harem*. It will be argued that, while Alloula's depiction of colonial practise is often valuable and occasionally brilliant, he seriously distorts his critique by employing a discourse whose stated intent never quite connects with the unstated voice of his feminine subjects. To trace this divergence I will reread his readings of the postcards: first by mapping Alloula's colonial allegory and drawing on it a few new lines; second, by examining his notions, explicit and implicit, of women's place, space and subjectivity; and third, by considering the very different, but also closely related, socio-political position of the Algerian prostitute, both as it appears and does not appear in Alloula's account. I will then conclude with a brief examination of some of the implications of Alloula's sense of historiographic communication and critical audience.

I. GRAPHING THE PHOTOGRAPHER: ALLOULA'S COLONIAL ALLEGORY

The form of Alloula's resistance, to the extent that *The Colonial Harem* itself may be considered as a type of re-formed postcard, is that of the extended caption. In place of the awkward colonial mimicry of, say, "Ah! qu'il fait donc chaud!" (Figure 1), or more generally, of the "rhetoric of camouflage" (28) everywhere apparent in the confiscatory language of power (all "*Scènes*" *and* "*Types*," so concerned with collecting, processing, possessing those genealogical *objets trouvés* that mark the successsful termination of alternative histories), Alloula means to give voice to a nationalist signature, then articulate that formally "outside," now "inside" speech as a continuing story told in its own independent register.

Yet the aim of the re-writing is not to efface the stigmatic trace of the original slur. In fact, the continued presence of colonial commentary — reductive, banal, inaccurate — is necessary as a foregrounding device. Two discourses (one the language of subjection, the other the language of the subjected speaking back) share the same subject space, but are actually separate, are made to speak from a distance, "in opposition" (a key term for Alloula [5]). It is, in a way, the distance of this proximity, the rift between rival inscriptions and readings, that allows *The Colonial Harem* its force as verbal counter-point and polemical

"riposte"[4] (xi), that aims its retaliatory speech as a "return to sender" (Alloula 5).

Essentially, the quarrel between the two writing/imaging voices concerns the definition and possession of the Harem: whose Harem is the real one?, who will have the last word on its inhabitants?, whose picture will prevail? Alloula makes his case against the colonial imaging of Algeria in an overtly allegorical way: "in this essay.... I always speak of *the* photographer and never of the photographers" (131, n26: in deference to this design "the photographer," uncapitalized in Alloula's text, will be represented here as The Photographer). The basic terms of the allegory are as follows. The Photographer is a metaphor for colonialism — not only the French North African version, but all colonialism — and the political violence of the latter is understood to be analogous to the imagistic violence of the former with respect to his subjects. Accordingly these subjects represent the political history of all of Algeria — a history which, for The Photographer, both begins and "develops" (in the dark) coterminously with colonial history and terminates at the point at which colonialism begins. The relation of colonized (female) to colonizer (male) is sexualized as a metaphoric rape and forced prostitution of identity, of the violation of women's bodies by the male gaze, the latter term itself functioning as a metaphor of perverse desire played out as a mode of power. In this context it should be noted that the word *harim* itself works toward a parallel conflation, designating both "an inviolable place" and "a female member of the family" (sometimes, "a wife").

So framed, the case against The Photographer is a familiar one and, at least in its general assumptions, justifiable. There would seem to be little doubt, for instance, that the postcard-project is not ethnographic, but libidinal at a (usually) ridiculous, though perniciously effective level, a kind of perverse erotography; that the portraits are more cameos of colonial desire and fantasy than psychological or sociological readings of their supposed subjects; and that the voyeuristic gaze of The Photographer produces a series of reductive takes fully complicit with notions of the Orient as, simultaneously, inscrutable mystery and passive raw material. Further, throughout his analysis Alloula makes clear the extent to which the postcard series depends on at least two pre-determined and contradictory images of Algerians as 1) an undifferentiated unity, in which individuality is dissolved into an amorphous essential identity, a mythic collection of ever-present traits and characteristics untouched by historical change, and 2) as a near-infinitely decomposable *absence* of unity, in which native social, religious and legal traditions, the infrastructural basis for ideas of a distinct nation, exist only in order to be appropriated and/or erased.

4 The term is used by Barbara Harlow in her "Introduction," in a quotation from Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (12).

From one angle of the colonial perspective, the question of Algerian identity is always manipulable and always resolvable, since it is both out of time, eternally fixed, and behind the times, eternally backward and primitive. Yet from another equally persistent one, it remains mysterious, an unknowable core without a centre; or, in relation to the Western centre, an elusive periphery without defining features, precisely recognizable as a boundary (the dark rim around the white consciousness) but vaguely empty in terms of any actual territory existing independent of Western values. In the context of such contradictions, it is to Alloula's credit that he attempts 1) to redefine the terms of perception, hence of discourse (for Alloula, the postcards are "*photographed discourse*" [130, n14]), against the prescriptive falsities of The Photographer's lens, 2) to analyze the image series not as a local phenomenon alone, but also as a method of image-control symptomatic of colonial practice generally, and 3) to support this generalization with at least the beginnings of a theory of reproduction as both phantasmal projection and ideological appropriation. It is the third of these aims, the master term in the colonial dialectic, that is of most interest here.

Even a cursory reading of *The Colonial Harem*'s postcards provides ample evidence that the colonialist creation of ersatz native images demands the rejection of any notion of a singular subject in favour of its mass reproduction, in this case of the *Algerienne* in favour of the *algerienne*.[5] For The Photographer, Algerian women, whether veiled or unveiled, are ultimately, on one level, mere faceless busts and, on another, interchangeable proofs that what is real is only what is reproducible by and under Western eyes. Similarly, genuine difference is not just inconvenient, but impossible, an epistemological mistake since, quite literally, it cannot be seen to be admitted by those who make and sell images. Yet, more difficult to locate but nonetheless operative, there is also a sense in which the imputation of such a weak or faded-away identity works against the politics of control by revealing the degree-zero of its own nationalist allegorization. In the psychomachic opposition of France and Algeria, France "wins" by reducing Algeria to nothing, but also "loses" unless that nothing is continually resurrected as an enduring absolute threat that cannot be finally defeated, lest that victory make void the whole reflexive mechanism of dominator and dominated, Master and Slave.

If, then, as Alloula argues in Chapter 2 ("Women from the Outside: Obstacle and Transparency"), it is the elusiveness of these women (see Figure 2) that first attracts and frustrates the colonial gaze, eventually frustrates it to the point of seeking their exposure *and* their effacement, then it is also the power of that gaze to forget the original and remember only its image that guarantees the vacillating

5 129, n6 reads: "[From the translators: the author distinguishes typographically between Algerian women in their historical reality and in their representation in the postcard. The first is the *Algerienne*; the second is the *algerienne*...]."

"truth" of what is reproduced — guarantees, moreover, that this appearance of truth is itself made coherent only insofar as it is technologically reproducible or, in Marxist terms, insofar as its currency (in both senses) is acceptable as, let us say, an exchange value. If these women had not been photographed, had not already been perceived as images or simulacra (although stubbornly haunting ones), then they would not be able to take their "natural" place in a system of consumption which equates the stereotype with the real. In this case the stereotype is the economy of the postcard.

Of the stereotype, Sander Gilman writes in *Difference and Pathology*: "I believe that stereotyping is a universal means of coping with anxieties engendered by our inability to control the world" (12). In a related way, the entry of the postcard images into Western consciousness, specifically their dispersal throughout France, participates in, and indeed represents, a belated exercise of power. I use "belated" here not only to indicate a second-hand distortion of subject by image, the serialization of otherness into a uniform manufactured identity of Otherness, but also to stress the presence of a revisionist program operative at political and psychological levels. If, in Gilman's terms, stereotypes function both to name a place of "anxiety" and to isolate the means of its "control," then their efficacy acknowledges a psychic priority which, despite itself, runs counter to the very myth of a Master narrative; that is, anxiety *precedes* control, creates the necessity for control and determines its character as a belatedness, one whose presence is specular in terms of native identity, yet nonetheless symbolically concrete and active in terms of the colonial psyche.

I do not mean to understate the violence of the political control, but merely indicate that at the same time that the postcard works to sublate and elide Algerian identity by a process of false mimesis, it also represents the partially sublimated truth of a colonial anxiety with regard to the ubiquity of its power. It is in this respect that Alloula's characterization of colonial practice as a phantasmal desire, and his allegorization of that desire in the figure of The Photographer, is most usefully heuristic. What is revealed here, paradoxically, is a reciprocal mystification of antipodes — the natural and the historical. In this sense, the colonial present — the latest last rung of a Grand Narrative — continually produces a stigmatized version of "its own" past, the anarchic natural (or primitive) whose repetition may be figured as an introjected return of an anti-type, the failed domination of which is simultaneous with the successful domination of external nature, of the various atavistic bodies represented by the Grand Phantasm that is "Algeria." Again, control over threatening forces (eruptions of desire, unlocalizable returns of fantasy) presupposes an initial *form* of repression, which in turn is projected politically.

For Alloula, the scene of this repression, psychological and political, is "the colonial harem," the scope of whose artificiality is designated by an extension of the "studio" metaphor: "Whereas the model is a figure of the symbolic appropri-

ation of the body (of the Algerian woman), the studio is a figure of the symbolic appropriation of space" (21). And: "It is the use of the model (her physical presence) that constitutes the studio, and it does so even when the photos are shot in a natural decor (exteriors)" (129, n13). Again, the colonial presumption is that the private (interior) and the public (exterior) are completely permeable, completely open to the act of ubiquitous surveillance implied in the *stereo*type. This presumption answers a need for a peculiar kind of totality — one that seeks to naturalize the mechanics of its own view by transforming Algeria itself into a vast pseudo-harem, a native studio in which artificiality is not a matter of The Photographer's props and poses, not a colonial technique of illusion and distortion, but the defining condition of Algerian identity. Algerians are *naturally* artificial; and Algerian women, in a way, are doubly so, since their natural environment is itself a simulation: the harem-as-prison (Alloula's third chapter is entitled "Women's Prisons"). Thus colonial logic justifies the truth of *its* simulation by portraying it against a previous simulation. Since Algerian women are naturally imprisoned, are not "free" (real) Algerians, then The Photographer's roving studio is not a place of caricature and fantasy but a place of truth and even liberation. In this way, by a strategy of selective opposition, The Photographer is able to pursue a project of erotic oppression in terms of the photographed women *and*, without blinking, a project of erotic repression in terms of the falsity of his own studio-harem. Thus: to the extent that The Photographer is the creator of false images, the interloper in a domain he does not wish to understand but is compelled to imagine and recreate, hence the fabricator of images by which he attempts to control his desire *both to know and not to know himself*, the mobility of Alloula's characterization opens up a variety of related interpretations, some of which may be sketched here. For instance, on the final page, he writes: "The postcard is an immense *compensatory undertaking*, an imaginary revenge upon what had been inaccessible until then: the world of Algerian women" (122). And later, in the closing paragraph: "Voyeurism turns into an obsessive neurosis. The great erotic dream, ebbing from the sad faces of the wage earners in the poses, lets appear, in the flotsam perpetuated by the postcard, another figure: that of *impotence*." These passages encapsule a mechanism of desire played out, but never exhausted, as at once a stratagem of control and a marker of "impotence." Control, then, is also the compensation of impotence, is in fact another name for impotence, a "revenge" of the colonial self on itself for its double failure: the inability to penetrate fully the harem and the inability to expunge or control fully the obsession to do so.

Such a reading provides a psychoanalytic paradigm of colonial practice; yet, as Alloula stipulates, "the sad faces of the *wage earners*" [my emphasis] refers not only to those "in the poses," but includes The Photographer as well: "He [The Photographer] is the wage earner of the phantasm" (131, n26). Here the psychoanalytic model is expanded to suggest the economic face of colonialism,

and the Marxist critique of capitalism as a rapacious feeding upon the communal body, albeit a safely foreign one. This perspective connects Alloula's statement that "the Harem has become a brothel" to the additional role of The Photographer as "a procurer and a bawd" (122). Of course, it might be argued that this double-tracking of The Photographer allegory as both repository of desire and its intermediary pimp is over-determined to the point of contradiction, since the figure of the pimp is not exactly the client of his own sexual desire: he does not sell to himself. Mieke Bal, for one, is severely critical of The Photographer-colonialist allegorization for just this reason: "For Alloula, the photographer is an individual to be treated as an analysand, whose desires are projected unto the women. But this very personification conflates the maker and the viewer" (36).

Yet Alloula's point is exactly 1) that The Photographer is *not* an individual (again: "The true voyeurism is that of the colonial society as a whole. The postcard photographer is not important as an individual" [131, n26]) and 2) that the postcard series, *as* a series, represents not only a singular product but a communal *mode* of production (the mode, like its product, is a "saturated metaphor," 85). The Photographer's camera, then, is a collective stereotype machine, a mechanism that produces a false image of Algerians but also, in the "negative" manner of Marx's ideological *camera obscura*, returns an inverted (Marx) or perverted (Alloula) image of its user. If this image is read historically, particularly as the product of a History whose colonial investment is codified geographically — as a politics of national bodies, conflicting national desires — then the work of that codification must be seen as itself over-determined and contradictory. After all, it is the colonialist, not the critic of colonialism, who wants to forget, as far as possible, his double identity as pimp and client, wants to forget or repress the fact that he is also the maker (the producer role) of what he views (the consumer role). Further, as I have argued in the preceding pages, since what is sold is an image, a simulation of desire, the relation between that desire and its reproduction, between a symptomatic libidinal/pathological economy and a systematic prostitution of images, is fully interdependent. Thus The Photographer, as pimp, *is* the client of his desire in the sense that he sells himself, to himself, as a reification imaged in the open figure of the colonized body. Here the panoptic quality of the stereotype is revealed in the form of a *thanotopsis*. "What he [the Photographer] brings back from his expedition is but a harvest of stereotypes that express both the limits of fabricated realism and those of the models frozen in the hieratic poses of death" (35). The final mimesis of this graven image may be read: Algerian woman as dead colonialists, the fetishized gaze returned as its own Medusa.

II. THE (W)HOLE OF THE GAZE: CRITICAL SCOTOMATA[6]

Interestingly, it is the acuity of his critique of The Photographer which reveals some of the limitations of Alloula's approach. In the context of his second aim, the subversive recuperation of the photographed bodies, the reinscription of their history as post-colonial counter-text, we must take him at his word: he means to write his own "exorcism," that is, to project himself as object of desire in the place of the photographed women and from such a position to speak their/his words as if they were identical:

> What I read on these cards does not leave me indifferent. It demonstrates to me, were that still necessary, the desolate poverty of a gaze that I myself, as an Algerian, must have been the object of at some moment in my personal history. Among us, we believe in the nefarious effects of the evil eye (the evil gaze). We conjure them with our hand spread out like a fan. I close my hand back upon a pen to write *my* exorcism: *this text.* (5)

I do not consider this to be an unmanageable presumption in itself, therefore will not argue that a male has no right to speak through a female experience; further, I can accept the solidarity of Alloula and female Algerians to the extent that the shared experience is understood to contain a significant element of difference. It is this latter point that Alloula will not accept, or at least will not make room for in the ideological paradigm he creates.

In Chapter 2, for instance, Alloula goes to some lengths to characterize the way in which, for a "foreign eye," "[n]othing distinguishes one veiled woman from another" (7). Yet his own text, the text of the opposing gaze, makes only the most rudimentary gestures toward individuation and, although avowedly an attempt to interrupt and reverse the levelling discourse of colonial pseudo-History, is itself distinctly chary in terms of the actual historical circumstances of Algerian women, then or now. For instance, he writes:

> Here there is a sort of ironic paradox: the veiled subject — in this instance, the Algerian woman — becomes the purport of an unveiling. But the veil has another function: to recall, in individualized fashion, the closure of private space. It signifies an injunction of no trespassing upon this space, and it extends it to another space, the one in which the photographer is to be found: public space. (13)

6 Generally, a scotoma is a defect, or dark spot, in the field of vision. Psychoanalytically, it designates a defensive process whereby the subject fails to perceive, fails because he does not wish to perceive, certain circumscribed areas of his immediate wordly situation, and/or of himself. I employ the term in contradistinction to Alloula's use of "leukoma": "The whiteness of the veil becomes the symbolic equivalent of blindness: a leukoma, a white speck on the eye of the photographer and on his viewfinder" (7).

The first paragraph defines the way in which, confronted with the authentic hiddenness of Algerian women, the colonial failure to see past the veil, to replace the truthful mask with an invented transparent one, is refigured as the provocation for the false undressing of the women featured in the rest of the postcard series. The second puts forth the "real" function of the veil, and writes its counter-textual function as a resistance to the trespass of the outsider, a resistance in which public and private space are implicitly conflated.

Certainly this is true to an extent, as Barbara Harlow points out (in her "Introduction") with respect to the role of women in the Algerian revolution: "the women of the FLN [National Liberation Front] ... could conceal within [the veil's] folds the weapons and explosive devices they carried between the French and Arab quarters of the city" (x). Yet this is not really Alloula's sense of a veiled resistance; instead of the *mujahida* of the FLN, he reinstates the "quiet and almost natural challenge" (14) of the veil. Quietness and naturalness — according to Alloula, these are the properties of the veil and of the women who yet manage to wear it as a challenge. But what of the women who do not wear the veil, those women for whom Alloula speaks, those whose nakedness is neither "quiet" nor, presumably, "almost natural?" Do they present a "challenge," and if so, to whom? — to the colonialist or to the Algerian critic, the male who historicizes their voice as a mute veil?[7]

In brief, Alloula's solidarity with the photographed women, therefore his right to speak from their position and enunciate their violation as his own, would be considerably more convincing if he had indicated some awareness that the veil, actual and metaphorical, is binding/blinding in two ways: not only as the self-induced lure of the colonial voyeur, but as a symbol of an *Algerian* commodification of women as well. Without so indicating, without inspecting closely the genealogy of the native veil and harem, Alloula's speculation, perhaps his specularization, of a "private space" is vitiated by the fact that this space, created prior to colonial presence, not in response to it, also marks a very public privatization of property, a reinscription of the rights of the native Master.

Harlow attempts to rectify this omission by introducing the unveiled voices of contemporary North-African feminist dissent. She cites works by Fatima Mernissi and Fadela M'rabet (xxi) and, in the context of a *native* colonial gaze, the look that denies to women the right to look back, quotes from Assia Djebar's *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*:

> That look was thought for a long time to be a stolen one because it was that of the stranger, from outside the home and the city. For several decades now, as one nationalism

7 In her "Veiled Threats: Malek Alloula's *Colonial Harem*," Laura Rice-Sayre provides virtually the same argument in much greater detail, though it should be noted that I was unaware of the existence of her article when writing this one.

after another is successful, one realizes that inside the Orient delivered unto itself, the image of the woman is no differently perceived: by the father, the husband, and in a way more troubling still, by the brother and the son." (xxii; Djebar 73)[8]

In Alloula's conceptualization there are just two choices: traditional or colonial, the native harem or the colonial harem. What Djebar provides is another option, the option which does recall the photographed/silenced women, and begins to articulate a response on *their* behalf, in a discourse more credibly attuned to what might constitute the unstill, still tangible echo of *their* voice, quite differently perceived.

To pinpoint the crux at which these two voices-by-proxy cross and diverge, if they were not always only parallel, requires a return to the problematic notion of "the model." Alloula writes:

> The photographer will come up with more complacent counterparts to these inaccessible Algerian woman. These counterparts will be paid models that he will recruit almost exclusively on the margins of a society in which loss of social position, in the wake of conquest and the subsequent overturning of traditional structures, affects men as well as women (invariably propelling the latter toward prostitution). (17)

This passage performs a work of careful division and de-nomination. The first distinction is that between the women of Chapter 2, those who wear the veil and maintain a unity of resistance both private and public, who represent the concealed truth of Algeria, and the unveiled women of the remaining chapters, the "paid models" who prostitute a false revelation. Yet the terms of this division — so confidently categorical — are, to say the least, questionable. Generally speaking, Alloula's analysis, in fact the congruity of his entire insider project, requires that the profession of the photographed women be examined only in relation to The Photographer, the outsider. He is simply and simplistically not interested in considering the pre-colonial, colonial, or post-colonial social positions of prostitutes in his own society, therefore not concerned with speaking for his putative subjects but around and against them — that is, in favour of the true model, the real Algerian woman, the one who plays by the rules. Since the assumptions of this passage are nowhere else qualified, it is fair to assume that when Alloula says that the "paid models" were "invaribly *propelled* toward prostitution" he means exactly that: that they became prostitutes because an external force, "in the wake of conquest," acted irresistably upon them, thereby splitting the term "model" along the lines of a discrete political grammar. The veiled women are models in the sense that their example is to be emulated; the unveiled woman are models only in the sense that they represent second-hand

8 It is, to borrow Alloula's phrasings, an "ironic paradox" that the two voices "in opposition" here are that of wife and husband: Djebar is married to Alloula.

distortions of their betters, are not really the real thing. Since Alloula's definition of "the original" depends on its differentiation from "the model" (the paid one [130, n21]), the natural from its perverted replica, the suggestion is that these other models are not therefore real Algerians because 1) they are prostitutes and 2) they have allowed themselves to be photographed in an unnatural, unrepresentative state — in both cases, irremediably Other even at home.

What we are presented, in essence, is a kind of backhanded citizenship test, a granting of real (native) or false ("marginal," native-but-foreign) status based, first, on the exclusionary stratifications of social class, then again split according to gender. For although the colonial destructuring of Algerian society "affects men as well as women," it does not seem to propel men toward prostitution, not even at the metaphorical level. Nor, it should be said, does Alloula ever consider the obvious role of Algerian men in maintaining a time-honoured, "traditional" and very extensive network of economic sex. As Willy Jansen points out in her chapter on contemporary prostitution ("Disturbers of the Sexual Order" in *Women Without Men: Gender and Marginality in an Algerian Town* [1987]), this system-within-a-system includes not only the covert, but also licensed brothels with fixed prices and the custom of staging drinking parties at which the entertaiment is a a mix of sex, dance and song (performed by the *saika*, who is to be differentiated from not only the common non-musical prostitute — generically known as a *qahba* or *sarmuta* — but from the lowliest practitioner on the scale of exchange, the unregistered independent, who is often referred to as simply as an "outside woman" or a "free woman"). Jansen also stipulates that, while such activity is widely known, little disguised and generally accepted — and considered a natural thing for the males involved, though not for the women, except as it proves them unnatural — its existence "is not openly acknowledged to outsiders" (162). So much for Alloula the student of norms, the cross-cultural "sociologist."[9]

But as it stands, falteringly, on the ideological level of *The Colonial Harem*, the metaphoric stigma of prostitution — of "the wage earners" who sell their bodily parts as the whole of Algeria, whose participation is complicit with colonialism's necrophilic metonymy of exchange — applies only to (some) women. An Algerian male (Alloula, for instance) has to overcome so much more (his natural resistance?) before descending to non-identity.[10] Moreover, it is, so to speak, by virtue of the vice of his descent that the photographed Algerian male becomes, in an act of negative substitution, no longer male but female, therefore a "free" unaffiliated prostitute. But free for what? — only to become a *M'Tourni*,

9 "Sociologist" is Said's rather bewildering description.

10 Alloula notes that it must have been difficult to find male models for the "couples" scenes (Chapter 5, "Couples," 37). But why? Presumably the answer is that some "complacent" Algerian women will readily accept payment for producing false images of themselves and their country, but that not many men will do so.

one who turns his back on his own culture, who embraces the enemy and betrays the clan. Alloula's traditionalism, itself predicated on a casting of immobile social levels and types, is more overtly displayed, not surprisingly perhaps, in Chapter 5, entitled "Couples." Speaking here of a postcard bearing the contradictory inscriptions of "*Collection Idéale*" and "*Familie Indigene*," Alloula writes:

> When it undertakes to represent the couple, the postcard does much more than it intends: *it juxtaposes two perfectly heterogeneous spaces without any regard for a social equilibrium that it can neither understand nor accept.* The artificiality of the pose, which upsets the established order (and the partition of space is part of this order), is visible in the self-conscious and assumed attitudes of the models in front of the lens. This suggests that such an order, which the models must have interiorized since they are part of Algerian society, sets up resistances that are not very easy to overcome even under conditions of simulation. (38)

Insofar as Alloula contrasts an internal social system to the imposition of an external one, contrasts therefore the defeated actual to the triumphant illusion in order to highlight "a symbolic violence perpetrated upon Algerian society" (38), the parallel is instructive of colonialism's recombinatory motivation, its divisive classification "of the extended family, the clan, or the tribe" under the counterfeit name "of a more rational order" (38). However, his characterization of the authentic family — which involves the "coupling" of "two *perfectly* [emphasis mine] heterogeneous spaces" with "social equilibrium" — is itself suspect in terms of its imputed "*Idéale.*" Alloula's notion of "equilibrium" (in which "the irreducible traditional family" becomes "the very kernel of resistance to colonial penetration" [39]) is as forgetful as his use of the veil and his silence on the structural complexities of prostitution, and for much the same reasons.

As he sees it, and seeing is more than half of believing, as he himself has shown, gender difference is not a problem when a male Algerian critic attempts to speak in and through the guise of a woman, speaks on their shared behalf what Algerian women themselves are presumed to be incapable of saying. Then Each means All, and that All is a *homogeneous* solidarity. Except, of course, when it is not: when photographed women are prostitutes and photographed men are ... well, something different; except when it is politically useful that they be "perfectly heterogeneous," completely solidified into a separate "equilibrium" whose balance is heavily tilted toward the male side. Such contradictory perspectives resemble those of The Photographer in that women's place is seen again as a deformable "space," a kind of replete emptiness alternately defined as Same or Other: Same when it is time to resist the colonial harem, Other when it is time to return to the natural state, the Algerian harem.

Nowhere perhaps is this inclination more directly stated than on the final page, in the completion of an identity between Alloula's traditionalism (one might risk, his fundamentalism) and a previously-cited passage concerning The Photographer:

> The postcard is an immense *compensatory undertaking*, an imaginary revenge upon what had been inaccessible until then: the world of Algerian women. Imprinted on the cards, they are the figures of a Parousia: they are reborn, but this time they are available and consenting, submissive and possessed. The postcard can represent them in this way, runs the rationalization, because that which established and maintained the prohibition around them, namely male society, no longer exists. The imaginary abolition of prohibition is only the expression of the absence of this male society, that is, the expression of its defeat, its irremediable rout. (122)

As a description of distortion as a political weapon, one of the "imaginary" methodologies employed by the outsider to infiltrate and defeat the insider perspective, to replace by erasure Algerian society with colonial society, the passage is subtle and convincing. What is less convincing is, first, that resistance again is made synonymous with the concept of "prohibition," and second, that that prohibitive resistance is defined and maintained precisely through *the absence of women*, an absence which makes Algerian men more visible. As a defense against The Photographer this chivalric avowal is justifiable — Algerian men defend Algerian women — but the terms of the defense reduce women to a passive and objectified role, an immured subjectivity. Algerian men defend Algerian women, or rather would defend them if they could, by removing them from the representational and political scene, by recovering their natural and traditional role as a hiddenness. What is at stake here is not so much the violation involved in their exposure but the shame that such exposure brings upon male society, upon a society whose potency is defined as its ability to protect its women from other males; that is, to keep them "inaccessible," in the harem (again, *harim* — Arabic for sactuary, indicates both inaccessibility and femininity; from the same root comes *haram*, indicating the sacred and the forbidden).

Considered allegorically, if the postcard series is a "*compensatory undertaking*" for the colonialist, then so too does Alloula's anti-postcard answer a need for compensation. In both cases "Woman" plays the role of shifter in a discourse of power, by which I mean (following Jakobson) a signifier that effects a transition between different discourses or codes, a "space" of trans-actional conflict and negotiation. Woman, then, represents an exchange-value not only with respect to colonial production/reproduction, but as an intermediary amulet-term (part sacred charm, part forbidden malediction) the possession of which bestows upon its owner the power to determine compensation: for The Photographer, an imaginary compensation for an impotence concealed by the exercise of power; for the Algerian male, a traditional compensation for an impotence revealed by the lack of power. Both parties suffer from a kind of modesty, a

shyness which the possession of women would cover up. Alloula's modesty, despite his announcement that he, too, is an exposed woman (more precisely, a prostitute) in the political sense, seeks its retrospective compensation for injuries received not by articulating a re-valued feminine voice, not by expanding the franchise of Algerian narration to include what that narration itself has denied, a matrilineal line of argument and dissent, but in a discourse historicized only at the level of "riposte."

Again, Harlow is the contextualizer: "Assia Djebar's series of *histoires*, *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, 'translates,' she says, the polyphonic memory of the contemporary Algerian woman. 'But from what language? From Arabic? From a popular Arabic, or a feminine Arabic? One might as well say, from a subterranean Arabic...'" (xxi; Djebar 37). Yet the dialogue into which Alloula enters is one between the voice of resistance and the voice of colonial oppression, both of which are, in his view, "prohibitively" male. Woman mediates this quarrel, but only by powerless proxy, as the excluded middle; that is, in secret, as herself the voiceless secret the control of which is negotiable, and priced to sell by both sides.

In other words, the political incarnation (another "rebirth") of women's place as a space "established and maintained" by man's resistance, going under the name of "the traditional family," demands both a complete (or "perfect") interiorization of gender difference (heterogeneity proves homogeneity) and a complete exteriorization of gender unity (homogeneity proves heterogeneity). The effect is that the very solution designed to resolve the colonial division of part into whole, whole into part, invariably relies upon the same inside-outside confusion and, to a considerable extent, exacerbates it by defining the site of that confusion as the core of resistance. In this context Alloula's notion of a pre-signified social whole, a utopian place in which the contradictions of heterogeneity are abruptly perfected into "the very kernel" of traditional homogeneity, therefore a place which need not be conceptualized anew but simply recalled, betrays an urge toward a dead-end totality as inert as that displayed in the photo-histories of The Photographer.

III. DIS/CLOSING THE PROSTITUTE

Earlier I suggested that the voices represented by Djebar and Alloula diverge at the point at which the conceptualization of "the model" becomes functional. To make clear what I consider to be the implied direction of Djebar's divergence we might consider another early passage by Alloula: "Algerian society, particularly the world of women, is forever forbidden to him [The Photographer]. It counterposes to him a smooth and homogenous surface free of any cracks through which

he could slip his indiscreet lens" (7).[11] Once again, a society without "cracks," all forbidden and forbidding "surface," fundamentally discreet, and descended from a single, sustained, mythic source, a primogenesis without divergence, both homogeneous and homogenous. This tactical façade is to be understood in a nationalist context, as a unified front, a smooth essentialism that blunts the outsider's lens. But there are many lenses, some of them inside the facade. If we attempt to look through the eyes of Alloula's subjects, the prostitutes, the question is whether that look tells, or models, another story, whether it cracks open the line and barrier of secrecy so as to allow alternate ("subterranean") voices not only to emerge but to claim the status of the emulative, to become the native site and source of a productively heterogen(e)ous critique.

In *The Colonial Harem* the life of the prostitute is everywhere indiscreetly apparent, but only discretely open for critical reading. Their lives are meaningful only to the extent that they fit smoothly within an allegorization of coercement, subjection and domination imposed by colonial power: all that Alloula sees is a system of predatory imposture. But if we look elsewhere we see a different picture. When Alloula's postcards are compared to the non-commercial photographic record compiled by Matthea Gaudry (published as *La femme Chaouia de l'Aures: Étude de sociology berbère* and *La societé feminine au Djebal Amour et au Ksel* [1929 and 1961, respectively]) we find a great number of similarities and differences.[12] Although, as with Alloula, Gaudry's subjects were not exclusively prostitutes, those she did photograph 1) presented themselves willingly, without force or payment and 2) presented themselves as they were, naturally, without fakery. As it bears upon Alloula's thesis, the crucial difference is in the similarity: i.e., in the poses assumed — in doorways, in the streets, a generally mobile physical placement of the self, a will to portraiture rather than caricature— and in the representative "props" displayed — cigarettes, alcohol, an unveiled face, eyes that look where they will, etc. If this is how these women wished to present themselves, at least to the outsider (although in this case a woman, and not a customer in any sense), then is it still possible to argue, without qualification, that such self-exposure represents an aberration from the

11 It is instructive to read Alloula's insistencies against, for example, the following passage from Pierre Bourdieu's *Algeria 1960*. "The opposition between the inside and the outside ... is expressed concretely in the sharp division between the women's space — the house and its garden ... a closed, secret, protected place, away from intrusions and the public gaze — and the men's space — the place of assembly, the mosque, the cafe, the fields and the market" (121: as quoted in Peter R. Knauss's *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria* [5]).

12 Sarah Graham-Brown's *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography in the Middle East 1860-1950* provides, in addition to a large-scale compilation, an intelligently balanced appreciation of cross-cultural nuances and shifts in attitudes toward photography in general within the Middle East (and North Africa).

natural native order, or that these woman are so many speechless/gazeless Philomelas, so many bodies without language, not even the body language of gesture and look?

I think that Djebar's answer would be plainly *no*, but it is a response that prompts an uncomfortable realization. For what we should see in Alloula's postcards, if mentally superimposed upon Gaudry's photographs, is not only a scene of foreign intrusion and violation, but in a very real and disturbing sense the glimmers of a limited, yet potent, dissent. The tragedy of that dissent is that the power of self-presentation, however severe its proscription, becomes most visible in the prostitute, the unnacceptable internal outsider (as Jansen puts it, "To smoke, drink, wear Western clothes, chew gum, or walk with great strides, makes one a great man — if one is a man. If one is a woman, it makes one a harlot" [188]).

The connection between the women of the postcards and Algerian feminists of today, even allowing for an undeniable (if grindingly slow)[13] advance in conceptions of social fluidity and feminine possibilities, is one whose efficacy depends upon a difficult work of memory, a "polyphonic" listening-back across time to those fugitive accents still locked and forgotten in the still-life, to the stubborn personality of their testament. Exactly then, a work of "translation," situated in the rifts, the "cracks," between the seamless opacity of traditional discourse and the scored-over palimpsest of the matrilocal Body, provided that even that Body is understood to contain a plurality of individual bodies and a spread of reticulately articulate fissures: again, not the forging of one speech, but the retrieval of a "polyphony."

One site of this listening/looking may be located, in its preliminary and liminal form, by a reversal of the notion of *obscenity*: not the obscenity of the postcard portrayal, not the critique of that obscenity, but the *ob-scene* position of these Algerian women — one that would seem to be "away from the scene," outside the studio *and* the native harem. A place of mediation perhaps, with a different audience, a woman's place that is not forbidden but, within constraints, relatively free. The critical glossing of such "voices" cannot be written, as Alloula insists, in an interlinear fashion alone, since all the lines before us (on the postcards) are those dictated by the colonialist. A *marginal* gloss is needed as well, extending into the periphery even at the risk of dicovering there a new semiotics of divergence and relation, another foreign language. The pivot-points

13 A number of texts document in detail the difficult gains won by Algerian (and generally, North African) women, as well as the painful regressions in *de jure* policy and *de facto* attitudes. Among these, one of the most recent and thorough is Peter R. Knauss's *The Persistence of Patriarchy* (1987). Also exemplary are Fatima Mernissi's ongoing revaluation of the veil in *Beyond the Veil* (1987; rev. ed.) and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991).

of this "secondary reflection"[14] are precisely those phenomenological moments at which history intercepts and interrogates myth with a critical address that speaks through the only material discourse available: the historical situation of those women who were representative Algerians *before* they were photographed, and who remain so not only *after*, but *at that very moment* as well — perhaps particularly at that moment. For it is then, amid all the cancelling gazes, that their paradoxical "lack" (of social place and voice) becomes most visible or legible, standing in relief against the strategies employed to confine it and so creating the opportunity for a critical audition before a diverse audience, though not the one(s) Alloula has in mind.

Concerning the issues of critical communication, motive and audience, Alloula writes:

> A reading of the sort that I propose to undertake would be entirely superfluous if there existed photographic traces of the gaze of the colonized upon the colonizer. In their absence, that is, in the absence of opposed gazes, I attempt here, lagging far behind History, to return this immense postcard to its sender. (5)

Personally, even if Gaudry's evidence is forgotten momentarily, I do not see any such uniform absence of response in the postcards themselves. Scorn, boredom, indifference, pensiveness, anger, or curiosity, amusement, satisfaction and pleasure are other possibilities; so too are ambiguous combinations of expression; so too should it be admitted that those photographs which are less forthcoming in their immediate "expressiveness" might by the deliberateness of that very withdrawal constitute a responsive resistance, a refusal to participate in the masking-unmasking game, whether foreign or native; or perhaps not even a refusal to play, but a determination to make use of the mask, not only for reasons of access to a bit of relatively unpatrolled space, but simply for survival's sake as well, out of necessity. The qualification is chastening. The game-space of identity permitted the prostitute, however much we might wish to focus on the boundary-shifting possibilities, is still primarily a space "established and maintained" by Algerian men. The status of a limited liberty not only extracts, for instance, the price of the loss of kinship relations, but also provides male society with a powerfully visible tool of coercion with regard to all women. In order to sustain the traditional dynamic of maintainance and condemnation, it is *necessary* that the prostitute embody that contradiction publically, as a repository of error and aberration, a walking wrong direction. With the understanding that "prostitute" refers here to the outside/free woman, the *habituée* of socio-spatial thresholds,

14 The epigraph to Chapter 4 ("Women's Quarters") is a quotation from Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*: "It is not impossible to perceive the photographic signifier ... but it requires a secondary action of knowledge or of reflection." To which it might be added, in this case, a *primary* act of acknowledgement as well.

the working conditions of this necessity may be outlined according to the following steps and precepts.

First, that the prostitute's manipulation of the social mask (they are women playing at and to the freedom of men) enacts a kind of agressively ambivalent semiotic ritual, a Family Romance staged in the theatre of the contested Algerian street, and authorized by the presence of male participants who are also spectators. Second, that it is this male actor/audience that determines the character of the plot, directs the gestures, judges the performance — not in terms of accurate mimesis but in terms of its artificiality (they are men playing with the lack of freedom of women). This theatre (the place where one sees) sacrifices realism (these are not real women) in order to define the street (the real *gestus*, the world of men) as itself a scene of perpetual displacement and transference. Here representation meets its Double, in double form. The emergence of the prostitute 1) constitutes a transgression that may be enjoyed (we are tolerant, we let it be) because its appearance is controlled, codified, strictly choreographed; 2) provides also the vindication (we are just, we must condemn) for the disappearance of all other women, in that those who inhabit the open — the outside women — are perceived as nothing more than the antithetical doubles of those who are enclosed — the inside women.

This little drama of the street — with its blindness and vigilance, its secrecies and revelations: the conflicted proximity of all those mobile eyes — is, in a Freudian sense, uncannily intimate with the "strange-making" power of metaphoric and metonymic substitutions. Its obsession, in this case, is to foreclose the boundaries of female identity within the familiar definition of the home (the *dar*; also a spatial indication for wives and children); that obsession's methodology, however, works through a process of estrangement, with the prostitute again the medium of transmission, in order to typify the interactive openess of the street as a homeless place wherein women are exiled from themselves, become prostitutes of their own identity. Such an unstable signification (its character: division, alteration, transference, revenge on that transference projected elsewhere) corresponds exactly to the mechanics of the colonial perspective. In this sense, the street is the native equivalent of the studio. In both places the prostitute is both unreal and too real, a threatening body and a passive mannequin. In both places, too, believing precedes seeing.

So where, now, to look for other signs, possible communications that preserve at least a trace of unassimilated subjectivity, some resistant quiddity? What remains are only that site with which we began — the colonial postcard — and that act of sighting to which analysis must make its terminating return — to the women of the postcards, *as they appear there*. What is surrendered in this return is the will to connect and schematize; what might be achieved is the accidental exchange, the chance encounter.

To choose just one of the postcards, how might one read the expression — if either term is still useful — of the woman of Figure 3 ? Admittedly, it would be difficult to speak what this woman might be saying, yet the recognition of that difficulty is part of the tactful compact involved in speaking for another, in any work of ventriloquism, however motivated. But surely, one insists, there is a meaningful look there, if not several. Do not her eyes and her mouth bespeak a dignity both wary and fierce? Does she not *surprise* us (even "capture" us) with the immediacy of a gaze that draws the meaning of the postcard away from the caption "Buste de Mauresque" and toward something altogether different and her own, and then more forcibly returns us to the stark graffito of the number — the 43?

Is it not then also legitimate to look away from the number, even to forget it for a time, in order to attempt to *recognize* her, if only to be moved by the impossibility of it? For perhaps — at a certain point, but just where is the problem — the very impulse that should be resisted here is that which seeks to stipulate precisely, to analyze, idealize and freeze the meaning of the postcard in terms of, say, the obvious *loci* of communication — eyes and mouth. It might be better to admit the presence of an enigma, not as Alloula does — in order to legitimatize a schematic vagueness and refuge from perception — but so as to refuse to cut and parcel out a particular set of meanings where too many unknowable ones converge, in the entire elusive sum of her bearing and being, its present overplus not its absent lack.

Yet if Alloula's critical motivation is not to become, in his words, "entirely superfluous," then nearly all the models (some more than others) must remain blank and superfluous.[15] He cannot recognize the counter-gaze, even at the level of "traces," cannot account for the possibility that some expressions may not offer themselves to theoretical reading, may not undress themselves properly, fully disclose themselves as an "absence" and a silence, before the abstracting *critical* gaze. To do and see otherwise would be to admit that the photographed women are not merely allegorical figurations, projections of desire and phantasmic images (colonial *and* native), spaces penetrable and impenetrable, and the like, but that they are, at the least, credible representatives of what once was "real" — real in the sense that there is, whether figured as lost or recalled, another history (rather, many histories) particular to Algerian women, and

15 Quite apart from our disagreement about the photographed women's expressiveness, I think Alloula is wrong in supposing that his project needs to justify itself as a uniqueness. If, in the sense that Alloula means it, such "opposing glances" did exist, and I think they do, his own writing would not be rendered "superfluous" on that account; but he would have to consider the existence of forms of resistance other than those he advocates, and targets of resistance other than those he admits.

embodied negatively and positively (though not exclusively) in the life of the prostitute — though embodied at a distance.

That is to say, even when these women, in a limited but forceful way, do speak on their own behalf, they do so with and from a *prior*ity whose distance cannot be simply reinscribed as the fallen (ignored or perjured) voice of the Real returned in full, self-sufficently articulate. Instead, the reader sympathetic to the continued presence of the counter-gaze, thus to the survival of a look which may be historicized, must also realize that what he/she sees *now* is a material testament whose evidence is itself belated and fragmentary: in this case the real contexture and circumstance of history speaks from a perspective of injured authenticity.

By "authenticity" I do not mean the rather soulful specularity of, say, Heidegger, nor do I wish to reinstate the status of the victimized voice in terms of an unmediated residual positivism. What is indicated is simply that with regard to issues of historical witness the legitimacy of the photographed women, the endurance of their cancelled testament, is founded, unquietly, on the possibility of an address whose ethical trope is the "turn" of that silence of negation into a negation of silence. Yet the work of such recovery — if it is not to perform merely a doubly ersatz redemption, an allegorical sleight of eye and voice — becomes truly subversive or "postively negative" only when it recognizes a methodological problem; namely, the presence of a questionmark (i.e., What *does* Woman want?) latent in its own design, some recalcitrant other look outside the stalled transit of Alloula's gaze and non-gaze dialectic.

So far, we have seen that Alloula figures Algerian identity, at least as it is represented/not represented by women, as an inward nakedness requiring a veil,[16] a secret in need of male protection and definition, a quiet naturalness, an empty gaze, a lost voice: all hollow stages in the same manouver, a self-protecting tautological enclosure. The result is that so long as the photographed women bear the imprint of the foreign gaze, are in fact a kind of archival testament to its endurance (again, Alloula's claim that he has suffered the *same* gaze), the credibility of *their* witness, however reconstructed or unreconstructed, cannot be admitted as political evidence unless the stigma of their appearance, the stigma that they *are*, is exorcised and erased into silence. Only then, at an utopian remove which does indeed lag "far behind History" (though in another sense, not all that far behind) are they fit for recuperation, for readmittance into the Algerian family.

So dramatized, if the "correspondence" between critic and colonialist is taken a bit further, if Alloula's politics are considered as a type of protective

16 See Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card* for a discussion of the genre's paradoxical "openness" (in the section called "Envois") and the relation between "the naked truth" and "truth as nakedness" (in the section called "Le Facteur de la Verité").

projection, then his notion of exorcism (itself a verbal rite) stands in need of its own "return to sender." Accordingly, what I am calling here Alloula's *retrospective projection* — a kind of backwardly-vigilant border patrol — does perform a work of "exorcism," but not, or not only, the one he intends. He means, of course, to expel the foreign body, the colonial contagion which infects the familial Algerian body and contaminates his own. Yet it is also meant to perform a work of introjection undertaken in order to sustain, against the already successful threat of its unnatural dissolution by the outsider, the fantasy of a wholeness, and wholesomeness, naturally resident in a lost Algerian society. It is this society, a pre-colonial rather than a post-colonial one, which his text reclaims and nominates as the founding narration, the true starting-place of the corrected historiography. The underlying faith here is in the possibility, in fact the necessity, of a precise social balance, of a native *ration*ality that becomes the rationalization for an unproblematic return of the Original. This return, however, is not progressive, but eschatological in that it seeks the end of the story at the source, attempts in the name of protecting its subject a closure of that subject's narrating role. Conceived as it is in terms of a fundamental biologism, this immured subject, however much it is meant to stand out against an exposed colonial objectification, is more a product of misplaced nostalgia than the reinstatement of an over- or under-looked identity. Not surprisingly, this kind of projection unto the external — this translation of silence into a political "equilibrium" whose *praxis* requires the disappearance of the other, disturbing half — shifts the ground of Alloula's project from a rectified historiography (a continuing event) to a reified ontology (an ahistorical *fait accompli*).

IV. THE ADDRESS OF THE POSTCARD: RECONSIDERED

What is absent from Alloula's analysis, I have argued, is precisely that conceptualization of the negative which might allow the stigma of silence, the visible shame of a false exposure, all the violent banalizations produced by the postcard gaze, to be turned around, re-turned to history as themselves the destabilizing condition which permits a present interlocution. In this context I want to conclude by circling back to the notion of audience as formulated by Said, and consider again Alloula's methodology of "riposte," this time taking into account the presence of another addressee, another auditor in the postcard chain-letter.

To this point the transit of exchange may be described in the following way: The Photographer has sent a postcard home to *his* audience, colonial France, where it is perceived as a positive, or at least innocuous, image of colonial practice; then Alloula, the retrospective critic, intercepts this message, sees himself portrayed in the negative, and replies by writing a post-colonial version, addressing his post-dated riposte both to those who sent and received the false original and to those who, in a sense, continue to do so today, provided that they are not Algerian. As Alloula intends it, the functional position of the

photographed women in this image-exchange is identical to the place of his address, is based on the full equivalence of their history and his truncated version.

Yet, looked at more closely, there is another participant — the contemporary intellectual, particularly of French extraction — and it is this outside party that Alloula enlists as interlocutor, as the sympathetic mediator who will pronounce the success of his argument. One might say that the presence of this third party is overtly and tacitly sedimented throughout *The Colonial Harem*. For instance, the dedicatory page reads: "This essay, which owes so much to Wardiya and Hayyem, is dedicated to the memory of Roland Barthes." One may, of course, dedicate one's book to whomever one likes, and indeed *The Colonial Harem* owes Barthes's *Camera Lucida* a particular debt, but it still seems curious that the memory-work of the dedication does not make some gesture toward those who are, after all, meant to be recalled in the text. Further, while the rather veiled "Selected Bibliography" cites requisite works by Barthes, Sontag, Said and Metz (to mention only some of those most familiar to English-speaking readers), it does not include any texts of North African, or even French, feminism, presumably because he considers their critique, once again, to be identical to his own. More generally, while Alloula's conceptual categories and critical vocabulary — his "phantasm" and "Imaginary," his "gaze" and "libidinal investment," for instance — are conspicuously indebted to contemporary psychoanalysis (specifically to the work of Lacan who, oddly, is never mentioned),[17] and provide a number of insights concerning the psyche of the oppressor, these critical tools are never interrogated in terms of the limit of their applicability to the fundamentally binary and gendered (i.e., Manichean) historical/political counter-paradigm defended by Alloula. In each of these cases the exclusions speak as loudly as the inclusions.

What I want to point out is that whereas Alloula does repay — by citation and dedication, by the covalence of his language with that of the contemporary French intellectual — many, if not all, of his immediate theoretical debts, thereby insuring his own line of critical credit, he does not address a similar compensation for use with regard to his historical subjects: the photographed women. The result is a text in which the debt of authorization, the debt owed by the post-colonial critic to the colonized on whose behalf he writes, is too easily, too dismissively, marked "cancelled" or "paid in full." The first debt of *The Colonial Harem* is owed to those who are not able to collect it; moreover, it is owed to those who would most definitely *not* recognize even an approximation of their own life reflected in Alloula's account. It is the photographed women, then, not Alloula's and Said's "audience of modern European readers," who are, or should be, the true interlocutors of the postcard exchange. The neglect of this other audience imposes an unfortunate limitation on the possibility of critical intervention, and validates Said's "non-confrontational" description in a way that neither he nor Alloula considers.

17 If Lacan may be briefly invoked, we might say that *The Colonial Harem* presents a confrontation between the realms of the Imaginary (colonial) and the Symbolic (post-colonial) while working a hasty end-run around the Real, that realm whose wayward contingency stands in heterogeneous relation to the antithetical co-ordination of the other two, as much the "materialist toxin" (as Benjamin put it) to historical/theorectical narration as it is that troubled effort's equally necessary index.

Fittingly, it is a picture that speaks what Alloula does not say. Of Figure 4, he writes:

> One of the cards provides dramatic illustration of the sexual connotation of confinement that is overdetermined by the phantasm of the harem. In it, the imprisonment of women becomes the *equivalent of sexual frustration*. On the other side of the wall, a man is desperately clutching the bars that keep him from the object of his unequivocal yearning. The grimacelike countenance of his face, the mask of suffering that is imprinted on it, leave no doubt about his intention to be united with the prisoner, the woman in the harem.

Aptly put, we might say, except when we recognize that if "sexual" is replaced by "critical" the passage reads as an unwanted confession; except when we realize that Alloula confuses the positions of "inside" and "outside," confuses exactly that audience-situation for which Said finds him exemplary. A quick check of the other postcards in the "Women's Prisons" chapter verifies what should be obvious. All the "barred window" postcards, including Figure 4, present the bars in the *foreground* of the sill. The subject behind those bars is the captive, not the other way round; that is, here the man is imprisoned, not the woman, and their gazes do not meet. Put another way, read allegorically, it is in this case the Algerian critic who, seeking to identify himself with his women, to speak himself from their "inside," is barred from that very access, confined in the unexorcised loneliness of his own presumptions and method.

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FIGURES 1-4