

The Violence of Photography ?

‘Le Besoin d’Histoire’ in Leïla Sebbar’s ‘La photo d’identité’.

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L'image, c'est ce qui reste quand tout a disparu.

Leïla Sebbar, 1997 interview with Dominique Le Boucher (Laronde 2001: 160)

Médias partout, information nulle part.

Graffiti in Paris, October 2003

Introduction : War, Photography, Assymetry

In her recent installation ‘Retelling Histories’ (2003), the Franco-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira shows a video-taped conversation between herself and her mother, in Arabic and French, in which the artist’s mother recounts her experiences during the Algerian War. The central event in the mother’s narrative is the forced photographing by the French Paratroopers of Algerian women in her village, in order for the occupying army to control the insurgent indigenous population with identity cards. If the violence of this was undeniable - the French army wanted a photographic inventory of women who would not normally show their faces to male strangers, in a rural culture where the photograph was considered a threat to the soul -, this story suggests also a dialectic of photography in which the photograph acts as an agent of meaning across time and place.

The narration of this story is also timely, as it accompanies recent revelations about the singular lack of photographic images emerging from the insurgents' side of the conflict, a gap in Algerians' visual *vécu*. As Benjamin Stora recently confirmed in *Le Monde*, access to photographic coverage of the Algerian War is still extremely limited and largely skewed:

Le fait central est que nous avons une masse de photos françaises et très peu de photos faites par des Algériens, du côté algérien. L'ennemi est de ce fait invisible. [...] On ne voit pas, ou très peu, les exactions commises par des Français, alors qu'on voit très bien celles commises par des Algériens. (cited in Guerrin 2004)

Indeed, the preface to the catalogue of the recent exhibition of photography from the Algerian War (Gervereau/Stora 2004: 8) speaks of a 'dissymétrie', 'une guerre inégalitaire des images': 'les images de la violence sont, dans le fond, d'un seul camp'.¹ And this asymmetry in access to photographic evidence exists as much in France as it does in Algeria: thus permission was refused to the exhibition for reproduction of those photographs held by the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris relating to the massacre of over 200 hundred Algerians in Paris on 17 October 1961 (110 n11).

This imbalance in the photographic work which emerged from the Algerian War in fact goes back to the war itself. It was not until 1958 – half way through the war, and following de Gaulle's famous visit to Algiers – that there was systematic photographic coverage of the War by the press; and now it was a coverage that showed the full horror of the conflict: after 1958, writes Gervereau, '[l]'Algérie devient "violence" tout court dans les images' (38).² In their bid then to satisfy what Gervereau calls 'le besoin d'Histoire' (2004: 75), Algerians have tended to construct their 'imaginaire' of the War

¹ Though up until 1990 Marc Garanger was the only French photographer to have published a monograph of Algerian War photography (Naggar 1996: 423). The rare photographs taken by Algerians that are known about are shown in Gervereau/Stora 2004 for the first time and commented upon by Abdelmadjid Merdaci ('Un point de vue algérien', 161-179), filling the gap in the 1992 IMA exhibition in which very few of the 200 or so photographs came from Algerian reporters or family albums (Gervereau/Stora 2004: 139).

² Thus the publication of Bourdieu's photography in Algeria from 1959-1960 (2003) is all the more timely: though not concerned with the War - calmly documenting 'normal' daily life away from the conflict - Bourdieu's photo-studies project a timelessness and a (deceptive) serenity, which sit awkwardly with what we know is taking place elsewhere in the country at this time.

not by documentary photographs but by fiction and especially films (Guerrin 2004: 19). However, compared to the United States vis-à-vis the Vietnam War, this ‘besoin’, says Stora (93), has yet to be felt in France; and the irony of this he suggests (114) is that, *pace* the dictum that says that it is the victors who write the history of a conflict, it is France, with its vastly more voluminous photographic record of the War, which has so far written this history.

It is this context which must be borne in mind when we consider how we look at photographs and how we negotiate what Jane Hiddleston (2003) calls the ‘spectral traces’ of cultural memory found in literature and photography; and it will be to the ‘historical’- as opposed to memorial – functions of photography that we will return in our conclusion. This asymmetry also raises questions about the reception of photography of the Algerian War. Not only do captions become crucial, given the anonymity and propagandist aims of the images; but so do the moment and overall context in which the photographs are shown and seen. It could even be argued that *re*-presentations of photographs alter radically, if not totally, the meaning and significance of each image.³ This will be a central argument in this chapter: by looking at the photographic work of Marc Garanger, as treated by Leïla Sebbar in her short story ‘La photo d’identité’, we will examine the competing historical and memorial functions of the photographic medium.

The Photographic *Oeuvre* of Marc Garanger

Celebrated in the recent 50th-anniversary commemoration of the Algerian War in *Le Monde*⁴, Marc Garanger first went to Algeria in 1959 as a conscript, and, having worked for the French army as official photographer, went on to photograph the War independently. In this way, Garanger stands in marked contrast to other renowned French photographers of the War- Marc Flament, who worked with Colonel Bigeard and remained wedded to the justice of French military intervention, and the celebrated

³ Indeed, it would be a fascinating (if not ambitious) research project to look at the ‘fate’ of photographs (say war photographs) to see how their re-presentation – for example, in the recent ‘Wehrmacht’ exhibition in Germany – has altered with History, and consequently how this has influenced our perception, understanding and use of, and access to, the past.

⁴ Garanger returned recently to find the women he once photographed, a moving moment prefigured by the comment in Sebbar’s short story ‘La photographie’ in which the narrator suggests that the photographer who tells the women ‘doucement’ ‘qu’il ne [leur] fait pas de mal’ ‘reviendra, peut-être, un jour, après la guerre’ (1992, 111).

Magnum photographers Raymond Depardon and Marc Riboud whose photographic work was only in its earliest stages. Indeed, it is Garanger who has been the most influential in terms of photographic representations of the Algerian War. After 24 months of military service as an *appelé de contingent*, Garanger returned to Europe in 1961, but had difficulty getting his work published. Apart from six portraits of Algerian women published in the *Illustré suisse* magazine, it was not until 1982, a full twenty years after the War, that he was able to find a publisher for his collection. These photographs in his first published collection (1982) were those that the French Army had ordered from Garanger for the purposes of checking Algerians' identity. Later publications of his work then included his own private photography including other portraits not taken for the French Army's identity card policy. Garanger's work then is divided into two types: the 'early' 'professional' identity-card work, ordered by the French Army in 1960 and carried out in the Aïn Terzine region; and the personal 'amateur' work covering a wide range of images (Garanger 1984 and 1990).

It is not surprisingly the 1982 publication which has caused the most controversy, since it shows exclusively the women whose identity cards were formed by these photographs - a moment described in Sedira's recent installation with which we began this article - and suggesting a violence of the photographic act, despite Garanger's declared aim in publishing them more than twenty years after their being taken merely to 'témoigner'. There is indeed a strong current of thought that suggests that, to quote Edward Said, 'the act of representing others almost always involves violence to the subject of representation' (from 'In the Shadow of the West', cited by Eileraas 2003a: 807). This idea is repeated more strongly and commonly described negatively in critical theory of the 1980s and 1990s as the 'gaze' (Eileraas 2003a: 813, Woodhull 1993: 43, and Silverman 1996: 146-48). The 'gaze' is deemed a (generally male) oppressive look that tends to deny the subjectivity of those represented and gazed at, often objectifying the latter under the weight of (Western) stereotyping. With regard to Garanger's photographs, and the 'gaze' of the viewer of his photographs (and by extension the gaze of the camera eye itself) notwithstanding, these critics of the 'gaze' have asserted that the women photographed against their will can be seen, unequivocally, to be defying the

camera, and thereby repeating a point that Sebbar made about Garanger's portraits (Garanger 1990: 34; see Eileraas 2003b: 91).

Indeed, according to Marie Chominot and Benjamin Stora, Garanger's 'travail de commande' is 'sans doute son travail le plus personnel, devenu universel et presque atemporel'. Their overall judgment is unequivocal:

Les « non-poses » frontales de ces femmes algériennes échappent à la rhétorique du portrait de presse. Elles révèlent une confrontation intense entre le photographe et son modèle et traduisent magnifiquement la dignité conservée de ces femmes en résistance. (Gervereau/Stora 2004: 66)

Interestingly, they point to that the simplicity and the 'très grand dépouillement' of his photographs where the avoidance of the 'théâtralité' of exhibitionism makes these images perhaps the best witness to the violence of the war (66).⁵ Sebbar too in her commentary on Garanger's 'amateur' photography in Algeria in 1960-1961 (Garanger 1990) (that is, the photo-work not commissioned and ordered by the French Army) is clearly impressed by the eye that Garanger has.

Building upon this dialectical view of the defiant gaze in Garanger's subjects, this article will follow the positive (as opposed to the more common 'negative') dialectic in Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted aphorism: 'Every document of culture is also a document of horror'. It will take up the argument of the relationship of the 'gaze' to photography – a document of culture if ever there was one – to explore the dialectics of the photograph both as political and social phenomenon, and as dialogic and 'multivalent' myth. It will do so by asserting that, though photography is not itself a language (*pace* Burgin 1986), the photographic image does constantly *invite* language, thereby creating an inter-art, or inter-medial phenomenon. So by taking on board Gisèle Freund's argument (1974) - to apply language to photography is necessarily to 'détourner' the photographic image - we will attempt to go one stage further than Benjamin, to suggest that the photographic has the potential, (especially? only?) when touched by language, to attract a myriad of

⁵ See also Stora 1997, where he describes Garanger's portraits as 'superbes': 'les visages serrés, sobres, fragiles et droits tranchent avec le portrait « scénarisé ». Les regards disent un refus' ; their simplicity is a 'hommage aux femmes du Sud' (171).

negative and positive ‘meanings’, across time and space. This discussion is prompted not simply by the debates over photography in the press and by the need to know and/or see, versus the censorship (for whatever reason) of photographic images (from the atrocious photographs taken by American soldiers holding Iraqis captive at the Abu Ghraib prison to the censored images of the American Army’s bombing of Falluja), but also by Vilém Flusser’s suggestion (2000) that the interaction of language with photography has its own negative dialectic: that we forget (ignore, misrecognise) the photographic images that, ubiquitously, permeate our world. So this chapter is about the specificity of the photographic medium, partly in contra-distinction to other modes of representation (such as painting), partly in its interaction with language, but above all in relation to its historical (as opposed to memorial) *noème* (Barthes 1995 [1980]). It is through the writing of Leïla Sebbar and its engagement with Garanger’s photography that this discussion will be conducted.

La photo d’identité

The past is never dead; it’s not even past.

William Faulkner

*On ne peut pas dire: le passé était. Il n’existe plus,
il n’existe pas, mais il insiste, il consiste, il est.*

Gilles Deleuze (1968: 111)

As critics have consistently underlined, Leïla Sebbar’s work is concerned with the visual (Merini 1999, chapters 1 and 2; Achour 2003), aiming to deconstruct voyeurism, subverting the gaze and looking specifically at how this affects women (Majumdar 2002, 196). In Sebbar’s early fiction, especially her novel *Shérazade* (1982), we see protagonists ‘radically interrogate the *mise en scène* of representation; they also participate in the violence of image creation’ (Eileraas 2003a: 830). However, Sebbar is not only concerned with the image generally; she also regularly engages with photography. If two photographs construct the narrative of *Le Chinois vert de l’Afrique*

(Achour 2003: 129-30) and photography is ‘stratégique’ in *Le Fou de Shérazade* and implicitly redolent of Garanger’s work (Achour 2003: 135-36), then her short short ‘La cause du peuple’ (in Sebbar 1999b: 7-16) is a stark critique of war photographers. But Sebbar’s work dwells on one set of images by one photographer in particular: Algerian War photographer Marc Garanger. Indeed, she has collaborated with Garanger on his photographic work (1990), writing fragments of social, historical and ethnographic content to ‘illustrate’ his silent images of Algerians seen in their daily lives. His work appears in her fiction, explicitly, in *Shérazade*, in the short story ‘La photographie’ (1992), and most recently in ‘La photo d’identité’ (1996). In each case it is the ‘early’ professional work of Garanger that is featured in Sebbar’s stories, that is those most problematic images taken forcibly (mainly of Algerian women) in order for the French Army to establish identity cards. This chapter will suggest then that there is a shift in Sebbar’s fiction away from the concerns with the (male) ‘gaze’ of the 1980s, towards the historical, away from ‘identity’, towards the political as historical, to the memorial as critique. This shift is already evident in her fictional narrative of the 17th October 1961, *La Seine était rouge*, and in her story *Soldats* (both published in 1999), a trend evident in her 1996 set of short stories, *La Jeune fille au balcon* in which ‘La photo d’identité’ was published.

Despite the title, ‘La photo d’identité’ is not then really about identity as such, or even the relationship between memory and identity; but rather about the politics of representation. Already in the 1980s Sebbar had shown her eponymous heroine Shérazade leafing through the same Garanger volume that will feature in the 1996 short story. The main innovation of ‘La photo d’identité’, by contrast, is that, though the Garanger photograph featured in the story is a portrait of an Algerian woman, it is Algerian males who are the central figures examining the photograph. In other words, Sebbar has shifted the ground, or widened the debate, to consider not just colonial gaze, but also (ex-)colonized male ‘gaze’⁶. Furthermore, the (possible) ‘villain’ in this story is the (French) woman and bookstore owner who glibly exhibits the Garanger portrait of an Algerian

⁶ Interestingly, in Sebbar’s commentary on Garanger’s ‘amateur’ photographs of Algerian women (1990), she comments upon the males in one image gazing at the women dancers (56-57); furthermore, the last third of this photo-study, ostensibly on women of the Hauts-Plateaux, covers families and then the men of the same region, and ends with the burial wishes, not of a woman, but of a man (74-75).

woman prominently in her shop, called 'Des deux rives' (a name to which we will return in the conclusion). 'La photo d'identité' seems then to be saying something different than merely sending up the (male) orientalist gaze. If a photograph invites language, fabulation, is (part of) our relation to a verbalized real, past or present, then Sebbar had not made a distinction in *Shérazade* between the various media of visual representation, concerned as she primarily was with representations of orientalism (see Talahite 1998: 66, 69). And not mentioned by Majumdar in her survey of photography in Sebbar's work (2002) is the interaction of text and image, of photography's 'noemic' potential for multivalency. Is Sebbar trying now (in 1996) to say something also about photography, in distinction to painting and to other forms of representation?

Written as free indirect speech in appropriate slang, with Yacine, a young boy of second generation of Algerian parents who clearly knows nothing of his parent's homeland, as the central protagonist, 'La photo d'identité' narrates his attempts to find out more about the (Franco-)Algerian past and his place within this. In this sense, it is not a story about memory as such – the boy is very young here – but about access to the past, a need for History. With all his family and friends seemingly conspiring to deny him access to this past, he sees a book in a bookshop called *Femmes Algériennes. 1960* (65). Later we find out that the photographer is called Marc Garanger and a friend of the bookshop owner.⁷ This is (ostensibly) the main point of the short story: a pun on the 'photo d'identité' suggests that he finds (at least, some form of) access to the drama of his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents as Algerians living through the War. However, the ostensibly hidden part of the double meaning of the title - the search for Yacine's identity via a photograph – is in fact the *studium* (to borrow Barthes's photographic term), that is the more obvious meaning in the story; the *punctum* of the story - the hidden, more painful and thought-provoking aspect – is found in the actions of the mysterious man who joins Yacine at the shop window and in his subsequent story and final act of retribution. Thus, in Sebbar's 1996 story, the photographs in Garanger's book are indeed 'identity photos'; in a clever twist, Sebbar takes us to a third dimension, beyond Yacine's own search for identity and beyond the identity photo in Garanger's stills of Algerian women

⁷ 'La photo d'identité' was originally called 'Le soldat photographe' when published in *Aliénations* (2, 1994, 9-21).

from 1960: to that of a stolen, or captured, identity, but one which is then finally liberated.

This 'liberation' is brought about by the mysterious man who joins Yacine outside the shop window. It turns out that the man was seven years old during the Algerian war (probably Yacine's age now) and was told by his grandmother that his mother had gone mad because the French soldiers had forced her to be photographed (the grandmother in Sebbar's earlier short story about Garanger's photography, 'La photographie', also goes mad because of being photographed by the French army⁸). The man himself is now deeply suspicious of all acts of celluloid. He exclaims to Yacine:

Le photographe français, il était soldat, il a volé l'esprit de ma mère avec la photographie. Si tu prends l'image, tu prends l'âme et il reste seulement le corps le visage, ils sont vides. [...] Fais attention, tu ne le sais pas, personne ne t'a appris. L'image, le Prophète a interdit l'image, il faut aimer Dieu, pas son image, tu comprends. Si on veut te photographier, tu dis non. (Sebbar 1996: 76)

And he continues, in a manner reminiscent of the fate of the journalists at the start of Mathieu Kassovitz' 1995 film *La Haine*:

Dans les banlieues, il faut chasser les journalistes et les photographes de la télévision, ils nous prennent tout, tu comprends, tout. Si tu voles l'image, tu détruis la personne, fais attention, ils te tueront, pas avec le fusil avec la caméra [...]. Le photographe français, le soldat, il a volé la raison de ma mère, elle est devenue folle. Si je le trouve, je le tue. (77)

Though the short story is ostensibly about a young second-generation boy's search for his own identity, we can see that Yacine does indeed understand what is happening now (he gives a reassuring wink to the bookshop-owner who had heard the man's last threat):

⁸ The grandmother who goes mad in Sebbar's earlier short story about Garanger, 'La photographie', describes graphically the 'honte' and the curse which she thinks will befall all those women who allow themselves to be photographed without the veil (Sebbar 1992: 110).

Yacine is beginning to understand that past of his own family is occluded. And it is via the antics of the mysterious man that he begins to see this.

Having thought that Garanger was already dead, the man finds out from the bookshop-owner that he is still alive. Now he hatches his 'plot' with Yacine's help. He rips out one of the photographs in the Garanger album (presumably the one he considers to be of his mother), looks at it one last time and then swiftly tosses it onto the fire of the wood-burner: 'Voilà, c'est fini, j'ai tué le soldat photographe et ma mère me reconnaîtra quand j'arriverai chez elle, au village', he exclaims: 'C'est fini. Au revoir, madame' (82).

Not only is Sebbar's story a mirror image of another short story on the *noème* of photography – Calvino's 'Adventure of the Photographer' (1983) in which an unfortunate camera-owner does not know what *not* to capture on film; it is also far more significant than the ambiguity suggested in the story's title. The 'photo d'identité' really is just that: a remnant of the way in which the French army tried to control the rural Algerian population with identity cards, as well as a symbol for the man and a whole generation (not Yacine's) who lived through the War. We learn that the man's father disappeared into the *maquis* (or so his grandmother who told him what to do about Garanger's 'theft' of his mother's soul seemed to believe), never to return; that the French paratroopers, having forced the villagers into a 'village de regroupement', then stole the villagers' prize horses. The man recounts also how his grandmother told him to go and live amongst the occupying French forces, to accept everything they teach him and tell him to do, but that above all he must find his way to the photographer.

It must be said that the narrative of the grandmother to the man as a young boy is highly symbolic; we are never sure exactly what happened on the day the photograph was taken; rape is also strongly suggested in the account given by the grandmother to the man:

Un matin, ils ont obligé les femmes, jeunes et vieilles à quitter les maisons, et, sur la place, le soldat photographe s'est mis au travail. Le chef a ordonné aux femmes d'enlever leurs foulards, les vieilles n'ont pas voulu, il n'a pas insisté. Elles avaient mis leurs bijoux, les mains de Fatma, la clé de la maison autour du cou, comme si on allait les déplacer encore une fois, encore plus loin. Elles ne comprenaient pas ce qui se passait, moi j'ai compris après, quand la tête de ta

mère s'est vidée. Ta mère était belle, la plus belle femme du village. Elle s'était cachée, mais les soldats l'ont trouvée, ils ne l'ont pas battue, mais ils l'ont traînée jusqu'au banc contre le mur blanc... (79-80)

At this point, the man tells Yacine how he interrupted the story to ask his grandmother what the men from the village were doing. Though the grandmother stresses that the photographer was only obeying orders, the event is symbolic of a form of rape. Indeed, rape by paratroopers is mentioned too in Sedira's mother's story with which we began this article. Achour too (2001) describes her initial disgust at reading Garanger's book, 'ce travail de "policier"' (when it was first published in 1982), saying: 'Au premier "viol" venait se surimprimait le second, plus distant mais aussi symbolique' (101), as she quotes Fanon's view that the Algerian women unveiled by the French acted as an 'éventuel objet de possession'. In other words, the removal of the veil is followed by a second violation, that of the photograph being taken. Indeed, this suggests something important about the veil itself.

The veil, as Reina Lewis has recently argued, is 'rooted in specific historical moments and locations' (Bailey/Tawadros 2003: 10). A number of critics have pointed out how, with the veil forcibly removed from the women before they had their identity photo taken, this was a first 'rape', for which the photographing was the second.⁹ Furthermore, as Bourdieu confirmed in his study of French social policy in Algeria, *Le déracinement* (first published in 1964, quoted in 2003: 116), it was the 'regroupement' policy implemented by the colonial forces that had encouraged the wearing of the veil for women; before, not required to cover up in front of people from their own clan, women in rural Algeria had gone about their daily business without wearing the veil; but the 'regroupement' now exposed women to men from outside their village and therefore necessitated the modesty of a veil. So, not only did France's colonial policy forcibly remove the veil – as Fanon had predicted –, but it had also been instrumental in encouraging its widespread usage in the first place. The intrusive 'gaze' of the colonialists' camera was therefore 'prepared' by the inadvertent encouragement of the

⁹ It is interesting to note that, in France today, since 1989, a similar discourse has justified the 'progressive' Republican argument against the right to wear a veil at school, a position which has compromised some feminist and far left political groupings alike (Boulangé 2004: 5).

veil by the colonialists' 'pacification' policy of regrouping villages. Thus the 'gaze' and the veil institute a dialectic which runs parallel to the 'dialogue' enacted between writing and photography: Sebbar's 'La photo d'identité' seems to be suggesting that the photographic image can receive historical dignity when augmented and commented by written text.

This idea comes across in Achour's reaction to Garanger's portraits for the French Army's identity-card system. She describes how she began to feel more ambivalent, less and less critical, towards Garanger's identity portraits when she read Garanger's stated belief in the 'texte d'ouverture' that he was acting as these women's 'premier témoin de leur protestation muette, violente'. Achour describes how eight years later Garanger 'récidivait' again, this time in the collaborative volume with Sebbar (1990); and Achour now questioned herself during the 1990s, this decade of war: 'Pouvait-on simplement assimiler le port d'un appareil photographique au port d'armes de mort?' (102). Firstly, Achour realizes, Garanger's (forced) photographs of Algerian women were helping to 'effacer l'amnésie de l'image de guerre', something that Garanger insists strongly was taking place in France at this time. 'Libérer la parole, [...] lever la chape de silence' was his first aim (Garanger 1984: 14) and to protest 'contre cette oppression de l'armée française' his overall intention (Garanger cited in Majumdar 1994: 16). More importantly perhaps, Achour now suggested that 'le photographe, contrairement à de nombreux appelés, ne l'avait pas vécue en aveugle; il avait donné un sens à sa présence dans ce lieu et dans ce temps' (102). For Achour the veil of imagic secrecy which has covered the history of the Algerian War especially for the Algerian women affected by it is now more important than the perceived violation of the veiled women to which Garanger's photographs seem to testify. This reappraisal of Garanger's work helps us to interpret Sebbar's story in a new light.

Writing and Photography

Sebbar's story has none of the photographic simplicity of Mohammed Dib's short stories (*Au Café*, *Le Talisman*, not to mention 'La nuit sauvage', which are brilliant and minute tableaux of the War, which somehow capture the *vécu* of the events). Hers is a

multilayered, dialogic interrogation of representations of the past, in which an image is both the opening for, and the denial of, an identity. It is not insignificant that, though ‘fictional’, ‘La photo d’identité’ portrays ‘reality’ to the hilt; time, place and person are scrupulously respected : the War photographer Garanger, his photos in 1960, in (amongst other places) Bordj Okriss (76).¹⁰ Indeed, this story is an example of what Brahimi sees as the use of the *fait divers* in Sebbar’s short stories (174-76): the information supplied in ‘La photo d’identité’ is matter-of-fact, excessive even (the amount of factual information relating to Garanger’s ‘acts’ is overwhelming).¹¹ Having written the commentary for Garanger’s ‘amateur’ photography in Algeria (Garanger 1990) a few years before, Sebbar now seems to be musing in this short story that there *really are* people who remain connected to these photographs, either as the subjects (which is very possible only thirty-five years after the ‘decisive moment’ of the photograph) or as relations or friends of those captured in the image(s). It seems, in writing ‘La photo d’identité’, that Sebbar’s aim is in no way to fictionalize, but to confront the issue of photographic representation head-on. Sebbar is also exploiting further the idea of destroying a photograph which had concluded her previous short story on Garanger ‘La Photographie’ (1992).

‘La Photographie’ seemed to be suggesting that to forget the War is itself a malediction; like the man’s story in ‘La photo d’identité’, we see a little girl listening to her mother’s story about how her grandmother went mad following the photographic session organized by the French army, and who then tears up the photograph of her grandmother, and not out of shame for the photograph but to show that she rejected her grandmother’s failure to remember the War, her madness having destroyed her memory. ‘La photo d’identité’ then takes the rehabilitation of Garanger’s forced photo-portraits one stage further. And here we seem to be entering an entirely different phase, even remit, of the short story: a story that documents a real photograph so closely, that dramatizes the publication of a photograph so elaborately, is clearly gesturing towards

¹⁰ Sebbar herself was born during the colonial era in the Hauts Plateaux, a fact, as Achour points out, immediately identifiable in the Garanger volume (109); see also Sebbar’s commentary (Garanger 1990: 16-17) where she narrates memories from her childhood in Algeria.

¹¹ For Achour this is a weakness in Sebbar’s story, which she compares to Nourredine Saadi’s 2000 novel, which is ‘moins stéréotypée quant aux croyances populaires des Algériens’; she repeats this comment (2003: 136) concerning the stereotype of the interdiction of human representation in Islam that Sebbar sets up, possibly in reaction to the oft-cited 1985 novel by Michel Tournier, *La Goutte d’or*, which features this myth of capturing the soul in the photograph.

what Barthes called the *noème* of photography (1995 [1980]). It is not so much that the photograph of the man's mother, and the circumstances of it, and all the others by Garanger, are material for fiction – though this is in one sense true, as Yacine has no existence beyond the story; rather the story is an attempt to see how a face, a person travels across history, often via this strange object, the material and chemical proof of what Barthes calls the 'ce qui a été' of photography (1995 [1980]: 1165). Importantly, Sebbar does not remain simply within a Barthesian phenomenology of the photograph, but introduces the photographer himself into the centre of the drama. This automatically produces a dimension that Barthes's treatise on Photography can only hint at: that of the photographer's intention. And 'intention' becomes the story's link between the real and the fictional.

We can see the mixing of fact and fiction (or the disruption of their tidy relationship) by using a well-known image or set of images in Sebbar's 1982 novel *Shérazade*, where whole chapters are given the names of French orientalist painters to point out that Shérazade's fictional and literary existence problematizes the real images of the Louvre that we have seen and can go and see. But there is a much sharper focus on the issue in 'La photo d'identité', thanks to the specificity of the photographic medium. The painted image may well be infinitely re-interpreted with respect to the context of the moment of interpretation, but ultimately the intention of the painter can be located in a school and in a style (such as orientalist painting).¹² A photographic 'portrait' by contrast – here an identity photograph at the height of the Algerian War – is a much trickier object, in spite of the apparently simple, utilitarian intent of a photographic record of identity made for security purposes.

Firstly, a photograph is infinitely reproducible (hence the irony, even humour, of the man thinking that by tearing up this one photograph, he has rid his mother of the spell). Secondly, as Flusser argues (2000), there is specific relationship to the photograph in contemporary society, which implies that we do not *really* know what a photograph is; or rather we tend to forget a photograph's mechanical and historical origins and its iconic status, over-influenced as we are by a pithy caption and/or by the specific context of its

¹² Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* consider this in relation to Picasso's 'repainting' of Delacroix's picture; see also Mortimer 2001.

place or manner of presentation. Thirdly, and as Christiane Achour is frank enough to admit, it is far too simplistic to criticize Garanger for publishing the identity photos that the French Army ordered him to take surely his *intention* in showing them 20 years after the event, as she seems to imply, now is to ‘témoigner’. It could be argued also that 1982 was an important moment to publish his first album and provide a photographic representation of the War especially given the wave of anti-Maghrébin racism sweeping across France in this period (see Ben Jelloun 1984: 27-32).¹³

Furthermore, as Achour argues, the person photographed returns the gaze of the photographer and, more importantly, of each viewer of the photograph since. As Achour puts it: ‘Lire les *Femmes algériennes 1960* devrait entraîner une interrogation sur l’Histoire, une recherche de sens, sur cette mise en scène apprêtée’ (106); and it is hard not to agree with Achour when she concludes that the ‘objectivité de la photographie est illusoire’. Her argument appears now to support the main point of this chapter, that photography’s multivalency in relation to the past and the present can, though potentially infinite, be temporarily ‘hijacked’: ‘[la photographie] est document comme les textes, comme les archives, [...] elle parle de la guerre en un discours polysémique que seul l’emprisonnement par un autre discours peut circonscrire et canaliser’ (111).

In saying this however, Achour seems to be denying a certain specificity to the photograph, to be loathe to apply her final comment here to Sebbar’s story. It is almost as if Achour is suggesting that a photograph, or any other document, is free-standing, when clearly it never is. The photograph *always* invites another discourse, is never pure, is constantly surrounded by language (narrative, commentary, caption). And thus, I would argue, Sebbar’s story in ‘La photo d’identité’ is only ‘stéréotypée’ in Achour’s words (2003: 136) if one accepts Achour’s purist view of the photograph.

The *mise en abîme* deployed in ‘La photo d’identité’ – when Yacine looks through a small hole in the mist that has gathered on the window as he and the man stare at the Garanger portrait (61) – helps us to concentrate on the photographic medium. The story then invites a more circumspect understanding of the photographic image. We may not

¹³ It is important also to point out that each time an identity portrait appears in Garanger’s work it is signaled as such in the caption: for example the portraits of ALN commander Bencherif and a woman from Le Mezdoor, taken in November and October 1960 respectively (Garanger 1984: 18 and 19, republished in Stora/Gervereau 2004: 64 and 67), are both captioned as ‘identity photographs’, in contrast to the portrait (taken in the Aumale, August 1961) of the woman with her children (see Gervereau/Stora 2004: 66).

actually see the photograph in the story (although we are strongly invited to do so), but the ‘mistake’ by the man (who believes that by tearing up the photograph of his mother he has not only released her soul, but also removed the photograph from circulation), is a deeply poetic comment by Sebbar on the *noeme* of photography, on how the photographic is infinitely reproducible and yet easily (if only temporarily) ‘contained’ by the context of its reproduction.

If this is correct, other comments by critics that see Garanger’s photographs as monovalent now appear one-sided and incomplete. Eileraas for example argues that ‘Garanger’s most provocative images record not only the violence of colonial representation, but also the destabilizing potential of Algerian women’s looks’ (2003a: 814).¹⁴ This argument would be convincing if Garanger had *intended* things in this way, if Algerian women had *intended* to ‘return the gaze’. But Eileraas has spent the beginning of her study explaining how ‘intentionality’ and authorship are highly questionable categories in such documents; had these portraits been paintings, I might be tempted to agree with her (because intentionality in painting is far more verifiable than in a photograph). But Eileraas does not stop to consider the *noeme* of photography, especially in its interaction with language: the attached caption, the history behind and the commentary alongside.¹⁵ In other words, photographs inhabit a world of negative and positive *spirals*; they can (usually) be more or less dated and localized, but their function and meaning are aleatory: just as one can construct any number of ‘stories’ around a photographic image, so the intention of both camera-operator and subject(s) are ultimately unknowable. My position here is not some kind of liberal, laissez-faire attitude to photography of violence – which would be deeply irresponsible in the age of Abu Ghraib.¹⁶ Nor is my argument here in favour of treating photography as unmediated ‘slice’ of reality: on the contrary, I wish to argue that we verbalise, both externally and/or internally (perhaps as we do with reality), what we see in a photographic image (with the

¹⁴ See also Jallane An-Ani (Bailey and Tawadros, 2003: 103): ‘Although Garanger’s portraits could be described as a perfect illustration of the relationship, through photography, between the colonizer and the colonized, the ambiguity that arises in a number of the portraits undermines this thesis’.

¹⁵ Indeed, we could imagine, for example, any of these photographs being used to help loved ones trying to find each other after the War; on this, see the very moving photo-within-a-photo shown by Freund (1974: 98).

¹⁶ It is very possible that the atrocious Abu Ghraib images were ‘constructed’ for the camera, not a real ‘sexual’ scene. Does that make any difference to our view of the Coalition forces involved?

proviso that we accept that ‘ce qui a été’ is represented in it); we question and discuss, imagine and fabulate, on the basis of what is in front of us. This is not to reiterate a point about the lowly legal status of celluloid in a court of law, but to remind ourselves of the phantasmagoric ‘fascination’ of *seeing* the (or a) past (moment). This is (paradoxically) not the dialectic of the text (as we might imagine with a ‘textual’ view of photography), but the photographic dialectic of the real, albeit in segmented and framed form, and the intentions of which are unknowable. Thus, we can understand Shérazade’s use of the Garanger photos in Sebbar’s 1982 novel, in which the ‘image-process is at stake’ (Majumdar 2002: 204, quoting Woodhull). But what happens to photographs out of their ‘context’? The photograph, photography, is never all negative (if you will excuse the phrase), nor ‘dead’, as Venner (2001: 85-86) hints in his reading of the photograph in Rachid Boudjedra’s novel *Le Démantelement*.¹⁷ It lives and breathes as soon as it is looked at.

Conclusion: the *deux rives* of photography

So, with the photographic *mise en abîme* an important element in ‘La photo d’identité’, the *deux rives* in the bookshop’s name may refer not simply to the way Sebbar considers her own split nationality and identity (French mother, Arab father). It could also be a key referent to the fiction/truth ‘rives’, between both of which Sebbar, and perhaps photography, sit; and it alludes to what Michel Laronde calls ‘la polysémie de l’image’ (2003: 24). Indeed, we could see in these two *rives* a more politicised view of the dialectic of photography. We do not know exactly *why* Sebbar (re-)wrote Garanger back into her fiction in ‘La photo d’identité’; Sebbar displays also a need to invent stories that complement photographic representations of her childhood past; and there are a number

¹⁷ In *Le Démantelement*, Tahat el Ghomri’s photograph of himself taken in 1956 is his ‘unique preuve tangible de ce qui s’était passé réellement’, and, as Venner suggests, his only proof of his identity. The dialectic of the photograph is shown graphically (and in its negative direction) in the fate of Mouny in Saadi’s 2000 novel *La Maison de lumière*: not only brutally interrogated because the photographer who holds her photo is found assassinated and she is suspected, she is then hanged by her brothers to save their honour (Achour 2001: 110-11).

of examples of this in her 1990 collaborative essay with Garanger's images, such as her reference to 'the key as resistance' (Garanger 1990: 10-11), and to the women who 'would' be washing in the river (20-21), both 'invented' by the photo-essayist Sebbar; or maybe she needed a final 'exorcism' of colonial images, to borrow Malek Alloula's word (1987: 5). So somewhere between the fabulation that takes place in her photo-essay accompanying Garanger's 'amateur' portraits taken in Algeria in 1960 and the 'effet de réel' deployed by the 'La photo d'identité' short story, we find photography in all its complex relation to the written.¹⁸ But also we can see photography itself as both multivalent and yet also, phenomenally, as part of the fixed real. This dialectical view of the photograph is not, I hope, to be taken as a cheap assertion of some vague 'postmodernism', but as recognition of the radical rewriting potential of the photograph.

The story by Sedira's mother (with which we began this article) ends with the mother narrating how, when the *fellaga* found it safe enough to return to the village after the French army had left, the first thing they did was to tear up the newly-produced identity cards. In this way then, what passed for symbolic violence - the forced photographic violation of identity - now became a symbolic object in the revolt against colonialism. But it also had a significant communicative function: the drive towards an independent Algeria, waged largely in rural areas, could draw on this experience to realise that the French army had little, if any, control over the insurgent population. Indeed, this 'dialectic' – whereby an oppressive phenomenon offers a path to liberation, what Martin Shipway calls 'la durabilité et la qualité subversive' of the photograph (1999: 82) – is at the heart of Sebbar's 'La photo d'identité', and of Alloula's *Le Harem colonial*, and is a general feature of Assia Djebar's work on the visual image. So Anne Donadey is right to argue that 'Sebbar's treatment of Garanger's photographs [in *Shérazade*] and Alloula's critique of postcards bear testimony to the colonizer's inability to totally master or dominate the Algerian people' (132). But how does the visual image have this capacity to invert? Does a narrative of this inversion need to show the relevant image(s), or can written discourse on and about the visual and the visually symbolic represent this returning of violence against oppression? This chapter has tried to suggest that the written photograph can be infinitely returnable: 'On ne peut faire dire à un texte tout ce qu'on

¹⁸ See my recent chapter on the modern French *photo-essai* (Stafford 2005: XXXX).

veut – à une image, oui’ (Debray 1992: 79); at the same time, we have tried rigorously to insist upon context, or ‘canal de transmission’ (Barthes 1993 [1961]: 938).

This leads to a strange situation with regard to the (photographic) image and its writing in fiction (here, Sebbar’s short story). For we can agree with Debray’s comment; but what happens when there is interference between the two media? In a sense, the Garanger photograph has been re-written in Sebbar’s short story, but it is now fixed (if one has read Sebbar’s story); and, though we do not actually *see* the photograph, we have locked it into a certain past and into an even more certain future: the photograph by Garanger in Sebbar’s short story is the image around which access to the past – as opposed to ‘memory’ – is henceforth organised, and thus resembles, in many ways, Abdelkébir Khatibi’s ‘tattooed memory’ in which ‘the signs of remembered scenes and experiences migrate, circulate, and constantly need to be deciphered’ (Kelly 2005: 241). Therefore, Hiddleston’s valid attempt (2003) to point to the shortcomings of memory – ‘far from impartial or complete’ in relation to the Algerian War (2003, 61) – does not perhaps go far enough in considering a historical (even historicist) *noème* to photography, especially when we factor in its interaction with language and different historical contexts (the ‘reception’). History and memory are perhaps more antagonistic than we might expect, the latter having seemingly relegated the former during the 1980s (Stora 2004: 217). There is then, not just a ‘besoin de l’histoire’, but maybe even an ineluctability of a photograph’s relation to its historical specificity. And it is we, those people who read and interpret a photograph in a particular context, who have to locate and designate its historical reality (About/Clément 2001).

‘La photo d’identité’ also suggests that Garanger’s photographs – both those ordered by the French Army and his own personal work in Algeria – could become what Gervereau calls ‘de véritables icônes mondiales’ (2004: 159), filling the gap in the dominant iconography of the Algerian War, especially for an Algerian view of the War which is yet to take shape (Merdaci in Gervereau/Stora 2004: 179). It also illustrates Laronde’s suggestion that Sebbar’s short stories and *récits* of the 1990s, as opposed to the novels of the 1980s, ‘posent la question du politique dans la fiction’ (2001: 30). Sebbar’s story shows that it is a question not so much of a forbidden and forbidding gaze (Majumdar 2002: 203) when we contemplate Garanger’s magisterial portraits, rather that of the

motive of the man's actions in tearing up the photograph of his mother, of controlling the past: the symbolic violence of photography is met equally by the symbolic tearing up of the photograph. Thus, it is not simply a *devoir de mémoire* that Sebbar invokes, which she has neatly and polemically extended to the women (and other subjects) of the 'Hauts Plateaux' and of other parts of Algeria during the War. She has also raised crucial questions as to the role and function of photography in a media-saturated society. Indeed, the reductive stereotyping that press photography currently uses to chronicle the civil war in Algeria today (Peyroulou 2004) suggests that the relevance of Sebbar's critique is likely to endure.

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