PARTIAL VISION: REMEDIATIONS OF THE ALGERIAN VEIL IN FILM AND
SCHOLARSHIP AFTER FANON

by

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B.A. (Hons), American University, 2014

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Art History)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2017

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Abstract

This thesis takes up the Algerian *haik* (veil), and more specifically how the process of veiling and unveiling first described by the Martinican-born psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, have been depicted in film. Scholars repeatedly associate Fanon’s famous essay “Algeria Unveiled” (1959)—which considers the role of the veiled Algerian woman in the revolutionary struggle—to Gillo Pontecorvo’s equally prominent neo-realist film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), where the veil plays a prominent role in allowing the Algerian woman to carry bombs undetected. Similarly, an allusion to the Algerian woman and the veil appears in the documentary *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989), directed by avant-garde filmmaker Harun Farocki, where the director shows photographs of women unveiled during the war by French soldiers. Previous scholars have compared the women in this film to those in *The Battle of Algiers*, and by extension, those described by Fanon in his essay. Rather than reading the veil through lenses of “the gaze” or Orientalism, the two dominant discourses applied to these films, the interpretation I provide synthesizes two concepts from media theory, specifically theories of cultural techniques and remediation. I argue that the dynamic operation of veiling and unveiling, a cultural technique that produces gendered and colonial difference, is what lends the veil to remediation, as Fanon’s argument and the process of veiling and unveiling are visualized in cinema. Viewing these films as examples of the veil through layers of remediation—from Fanon’s critical essay to Pontecorvo’s dramatic film to photographs to Farocki’s experimental documentary—the cultural technique of veiling disrupts the binaries—such as gender—it seems to impose. The very process of veiling and unveiling itself complicates a stable reading of both the veil and the Algerian woman.
Lay Summary

In looking at representations of the Algerian Islamic veil (*haik*) in three prominent works—Frantz Fanon’s essay, “Algeria Unveiled,” (1959), Gillo Pontecorvo’s Italian neo-realist film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), and Harun Farocki’s experimental documentary *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989), this thesis begins by examining what has motivated scholars to bring these works into dialogue with one another. Borrowing a concept from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation* (1999), I argue that Fanon’s reading of the veil was “remediated” in different ways by Pontecorvo and Farocki in the form of film. Additionally, by focusing on the veil as a dynamic medium that transforms itself and its subject with each operation of veiling and unveiling, I demonstrate that the veil cannot be contained as a monolithic entity despite portrayals, both past and present, of it as such.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Madeline Ullrich.
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Acknowledgements

I feel very grateful for the encouragement and support I have received over the course of my Master's degree—from professors, classmates, friends, and family members, in Vancouver and afar. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. T’ai Smith, whose dedication to the vision of my thesis at times even outweighed my own. I could not imagine UBC without her expertise, advice, patience, and above all—her kindness. I would also like to thank my reader, Dr. Katherine Hacker, for her encouragement and her incredibly valuable comments and recommendations. My sincerest thanks to Dr. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Dr. Saygin Salgirli, and Dr. Catherine Soussloff for providing settings for lively discussion in their seminars. And a special thank you to Dr. Serge Guilbaut and Dr. John O’Brien for their seminars, and especially for giving my classmates and me the opportunity to take our art history knowledge across Canada and abroad. These are experiences I will always remember and cherish.

To my cohort: thank you for providing engaging discussion (and at times, rigorous debate), but more than anything, for your friendship and camaraderie. A special thank you to Heather Caverhill and Jackie Witkowski for making the learning curve a little less steep for me during my time at UBC. And to the first-year (now second-year!) MA/PhD students: thank you for a breath of fresh air, enthusiasm, and new friendships at a time I really needed it.

Finally, I could not have completed my thesis without the love and encouragement from my close friends and family. To my D.C. friends, thank you for always providing me a home, no matter where I go. And to Andrea Shaffer—thank you for being my D.C. home all the way in
Vancouver. My deepest and sincerest gratitude goes to my parents, Jeff and Cheryl Ullrich, for their constant support, and above all, for their unwavering confidence in my dreams. Last, but certainly not least, thank you to my big sisters, my best friends, and my heroes: Kelsey and Allison.
Chapter 1: Introduction: The Veil as Cultural Technique and Object of Remediation

Frantz Fanon’s 1959 essay “Algeria Unveiled” has become one of the most cited essays on the history of the Algerian Revolution. A National Liberation Front (FLN) sympathizer, Fanon’s testimony of the importance of the veil as an instrument in revolutionary action, written during his deployment at the Blida-Joinville hospital in Algiers, has become not only a dynamic retelling of key tactics in the FLN’s military strategy, but also a compelling primary source document used by scholars, artists, and filmmakers. One such interpretation of Fanon’s essay, Gillo Pontecorvo’s Italian Neorealist film, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), has achieved an equally iconic status in its retelling of the 1957 military conflict in this North African colonial city.

Fanon describes the veil, or more specifically the *haik*—the large, white, square veil that entirely covers a woman’s body and face—as what, “demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component […] the woman seen in her white veil unifies the perception that one has of Algerian feminine society.”¹ Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has similarly noted that the veil gained increasing significance during the French occupation of Algeria as early as the nineteenth century.² As a technique used by women, veiling provided privacy and protection from the French occupiers in cities where interactions between the colonizer and colonized were increasingly frequent. In a somewhat similar manner as the United States’ need to “save Muslim women” in the Middle East during the so-called War on Terror soon after 9-11, the French

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likewise enacted a “civilizing mission” in their conquest of Algeria in 1830. Like the breakup of tribes, the introduction of a money economy, and the decimation of the social and familial fabric that had defined the region for centuries, the attempt to ban the wearing of the *haik* was a strategy of colonial domination. In addition to subjugating Algerians economically and socially, the “civilizing mission” culminated in sartorial domination, when the French Administration started a campaign to “save” Algerian women from the veil. Mutual aid societies founded by French settler women, along with French radio programs, and Settler schoolteachers, encouraged female Algerians to discard any form of head covering, which they determined was the result of the “barbarism” of Algerian men and culture. The veil thus took on a double significance in the revolutionary struggle; as worn by women, it became at once a symbol of resistance to French colonialism on the part of the Algerians, a resistance culminating in the struggle of national independence (as depicted in Pontecorvo’s film), and a practical instrument to aid guerrilla warfare through strategic veiling and unveiling.

The aim of this thesis is to focus primarily on the latter function; specifically, it will investigate how the material use of the veil, or the process of women veiling and unveiling first described by Fanon, has been visualized and depicted in film. Many scholars have pointed to Fanon’s profound influence on Pontecorvo’s filmmaking, made evident in what might be

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3 The veil also has a lasting significance in French society today. What started out as the *affaire du foulard* in France (legislation making it illegal for girls and women to wear Islamic headscarves in public spaces) in the early 2000s has become increasingly rampant across Europe in the past ten years, particularly with the increase of immigrant and refugee populations from the Middle East. The reasons for this increase in xenophobic behavior has been theorized by a number of scholars as a result of a desire for secularization on the part of the state (which then ironically becomes its own “religion” in this process), as well as a clever instrumentalization of the rhetoric of sexual democracy on the part of right-wing, nationalist political parties. See Talal Asad, “Trying to Understand French Secularism,” in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 494–526; Eric Fassin, “National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe,” *Public Culture* 22, no. 3 (October 1, 2010): 507–29, doi:10.1215/08992363-2010-007.

considered the most famous scene from *The Battle of Algiers*—the unveiling scene. In the interior space of a stronghold in the casbah, a woman, looking in a mirror, removes her *haik*, as two women behind her do the same. Mimicking Western dress through hair, makeup, and clothing, the women unveil and transform in order to successfully pass through French military checkpoints. These women all then successfully plant bombs in the respective locations assigned to them: a bustling restaurant, an Air France gate at the airport, and a crowded dance hall.

This pivotal scene has achieved such iconic status in the collective memory of European and American culture that it often serves as a reference point for analyses of other instances of veiling within Islamic revolutionary struggles, such as the Iranian revolution or conflicts in the Middle East in the present day. These citations are both visual—seen as recently as 2007 in the video installation *Vanity: Make Down II* by artist Dennis Adams, who uses stills from the unveiling scene printed on paper to wipe camouflage makeup from his face—as well as textual, particularly when referenced by art historians and film theorists to analyze instances of veiling and unveiling in other photographs or films.

Throughout the course of my research, the connection made by scholars that I found to be most salient was between Pontecorvo’s film and Harun Farocki’s documentary *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989). Farocki’s film is perhaps most similar to Pontecorvo’s

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5 The most popular example of this is that the film was shown to officers in the Pentagon in 2003. See Nicholas Harrison, “‘Based on Actual Events …’: Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers*, 40 Years On,” *Interventions* 9, no. 3 (November 2007): 337, doi:10.1080/13698010701618554.

6 Adams takes up the Algerian War in a number of his multimedia artworks; for example, he has also made use of *The Battle of Algiers* in his 2008 collage work *Probe*, where the artist superimposes images of actress Jean Seberg from Jean-Luc Goddard’s *Breathless* (1959) upon street scenes from *The Battle of Algiers*. Additionally, he has used another set of photographs to be discussed at length in this paper: French soldier Marc Garanger’s 1960 military ID photographs of unveiled Algerian women. For more detailed descriptions of these works in particular see Zeynep Çelik et al., eds., *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image* (Los Angeles; Seattle: Getty Research Institute; In association with University of Washington Press, 2009); Susan Slyomovics, “Visual Ethnography, Stereotypes, and Photographing Algeria,” in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (New York: Routledge, 2013).
in its brief but powerful treatment of images of Algerian women; early on in the film, Farocki shows the military ID photographs of women, taken by French soldier Marc Garanger in the Algerian countryside in 1960, photographs published collectively as an album in 1982 under the title *Femmes Algériennes 1960.* Turning the pages of the book and mimicking the process of veiling and unveiling with his own hand before the camera, it is unsurprising that scholars analyzing this scene could be reminded of the Algerian woman depicted in Pontecorvo’s film; while removing a veil from her face, she gazes at herself—and back at us—in the mirror.

This thesis will consider such visual and textual references to Fanon’s essay and *The Battle of Algiers* through the lens of media studies. Rather than reading these films by Pontecorvo and Farocki through theories of “the gaze” or Orientalism—the primary methodologies that visual studies scholars have used to discuss these scenes—the interpretation I will provide here is inspired by media theory, specifically theories of cultural techniques and remediation. What I hope to accomplish through such a consideration is two-fold; on the one hand, in theorizing the veil as a “cultural technique”—repetitions (in this case, veiling, unveiling, and re-veiling) that encode distinctions within a given society—I will provide a new postcolonial

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7 Marc Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes 1960* (Paris: Contrejour, 1982). The most recent and comprehensive analysis of these photographs is that of historian Neil MacMaster, though even his analysis is brief as he is more interested in Garanger’s other photographs, which he argues have been overshadowed by the sensationalism surrounding the ID cards. See Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the “Emancipation” of Muslim Women, 1954-62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 210–11.

8 Hamid Naficy is one of the only scholars to consider the veil within film at length; he writes about the veil as modesty, and how said modesty is encoded into the aesthetics veiling and unveiling. While noting the lack of women in Iranian films and how actresses are expected to modify behavior and dress, Naficy cautions the reader to resist seeing the veil as purely oppression; “Veiling as a social practice is not fixed or unidirectional; instead, it is a dynamic practice in which both men and women engage. In addition, there is a dialectical relationship between veiling and unveiling: that which covers is capable also of uncovering. Even though the rules of modesty require that women follow certain dress codes, in practice women have a great deal of latitude as to how they organize themselves for the gaze of the male onlookers.” In Hamid Naficy, “Women and the Semiotics of Veiling and Vision in Cinema,” *The American Journal of Semiotics* 8, no. 1 (1991): 48, doi:10.5840/ajs199181/225. Additionally Laura Mulvey has corrected her own formulation of the male gaze in relation to the Islamic veil, based on Naficy’s suggestions. See Laura Mulvey, “Afterword,” in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 259.
reading by further elucidating the operations that support colonial difference, particularly
gendered difference. Bernhard Siegert, who has theorized cultural techniques at length, focuses
primarily on what he calls “ontic operations” and their ability to create the “real,” “natural,”
order of things; for example, a door processes the difference between “inside” and “outside.” The
veil may be read in this way as that which processes the difference between the Algerian woman
and French woman, or the Algerian woman and Algerian man. However, as Siegert suggests and
I will argue, the very same operations may equally be key to destabilizing or “liquidating” the
very distinctions they create. The films I have mentioned thus far, *The Battle of Algiers* and
*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, will serve as visualizations of these processes of
veiling, unveiling, and re-veiling and their consequences. At the same time, I will argue that their
different depictions of veiling procedures must account for the way the films themselves
intervene in, interpret, and frame the veil (and Fanon’s argument)—through the use of the
camera, the frame, and the edit (or the cut).

In this way, the concepts of mediation and remediation, as discussed by Jay Bolter and
David Grusin, provide a useful framework to understand how the process of veiling and
unveiling is captured, visualized, and disseminated through film. According to Bolter and
Grusin, remediation (a term they borrow from the founding theorist of media, Marshall
McLuhan) comes out of a desire for visual immediacy and access, made evident through the use
of illusionistic devices over the last several hundred years, namely, linear perspective and
foreshortening.9 We desire unmediated access to our surroundings, yet this illusion of

The term “remediation” was first coined and defined by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media: The
Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), where he famously wrote: “the ‘content’ of any medium is
transparency cannot occur without the continued proliferation of new digital technologies, a paradox Bolter and Grusin refer to as “the double logic of remediation.” The first half of this double logic—the desire for immediacy—may serve as one possible explanation for the desire to unveil the Algerian woman, as remediation functions through visual modes of mediation to put the viewer in the same space as the object they are viewing. At the same time, remediation may also serve as a tool to understand why the scene showing the Algerian women in Farocki’s film leads scholars to immediately cite *The Battle of Algiers*, and why scholars analyzing the unveiling scene in *The Battle of Algiers* quote Fanon. As Bolter and Grusin would point out, it is in essence no longer possible to understand these films in isolation from one another; “we see film through other media and other media through film in a play of mutual remediations.”

The first chapter of this thesis will contextualize Fanon’s own theories of the gaze within the medium of the veil—specifically, why his understanding of gazing complements a study of the veil and film, especially *The Battle of Algiers*. Additionally, it is necessary to situate Fanon’s essay “Algeria Unveiled” both within the broader political moment of the French campaign to unveil Algerian women beginning in 1957 and within contemporary feminist scholarship. The historical context of the French unveiling campaign is relevant for an understanding of the films within this study, while feminist critiques and readings of Fanon reiterate a need for a nuanced reading of the veil.

In the second chapter I will trace previous scholarly arguments that have taken the veil into the realm of media studies, and how my argument—through a consideration of cultural techniques—will expand upon and challenge existing analyses of the veil within the Algerian

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always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph […] the content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera.” 8.

10 Ibid., 82.
revolution. This challenge will come through a theory of a mediating third space, using both media theory and postcolonial theory to understand how the veil simultaneously creates and disrupts our understanding of colonial difference. Media theory also plays a large role in the following chapter, “Remediating the Veil,” where I consider how *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* points to *The Battle of Algiers* by remediating a published volume of photographs. I also seek to understand why scholars have previously made such a connection. Rather than attributing the connection of the films to a purely static understanding of the veil, I argue that the veil, like (and as a form of) remediation resists a stable reading by forcing viewers to consider the veil from multiple viewpoints and subject positions.

Halida Boughriet’s 2004 film *Les Illuminés*, which I will analyze in the conclusion, also performs such a reading of the veil by placing the viewer within the subject position of a veiled woman. Her film captures aspects of the three previous works I discuss in this thesis in that she makes herself (and the viewer) subject to the colonial gaze described by Fanon and also makes visible the cultural technique of veiling. As a remediation, her film provides a new lens with which to understand other films that portray veiling. Viewing all of these films in tandem and with an understanding of the veiling as an ambiguous, processual operation destabilizes a reading of the veil and the Algerian woman as entirely legible and homogenous.
Chapter 2: Remediating Fanon

2.1 Fanon and the Colonial Gaze in Film

Given Fanon’s influence on Western scholarship and understandings of the veil, it is unsurprising that many analyses of the veiling and unveiling scenes from *The Battle of Algiers* would take on a psychoanalytic or Orientalist dimension. Robert Stam argues that Fanon himself, as a psychologist in Algeria, inspired both psychoanalysis and critiques of Orientalism (even before Edward Said) as diagnostics for how the colonizer views the colonized.11 Though “the gaze” often refers to a *male* gaze that makes the female body the site of scopophilic fantasy (as well as anxiety and threat) and is indebted to the legacy of feminist film theory made famous by Laura Mulvey, a number of black feminist film theorists, such as bell hooks, as well as those working in postcolonial studies, note that racial difference provokes a similar kind of gazing between colonizer and colonized.12 Many of these same theorists look to Fanon as their starting point. For example, hooks cites the now famous scene in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) where Fanon recalls a young child seeing him and, being frightened, says to his mother, “‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’” Fanon describes the aftermath of this encounter, which hooks quotes:

…the glances of the Other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self. This ‘look’ from—so to speak—the place of the Other, fixes us, not only in its violence, hostility and aggression, but in the ambivalence of its desire.¹³

In “Algeria Unveiled,” Fanon speaks of a similar type of fragmentation of the body once the Algerian woman is unveiled and subjected to the look of the “Other” in the European city:

The veil protects, reassures, isolates. One must have heard the confessions of Algerian women or have analyzed the dream content of certain recently unveiled women to appreciate the importance of the veil for the body of the woman. Without the veil she has an impression of her body being cut up into bits, put adrift; the limbs seem to lengthen indefinitely […] The unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve […] the absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman’s corporal pattern. She quickly has to invent new dimensions for her body, new means of muscular control.¹⁴

With the veil removed, the woman must prepare to face the look of the European; adaptation to being seen without the veil is not only subjective in this case, but crucial to successfully carrying out tasks assigned by the FLN. If the Algerian woman is discovered as not being truly “Europeanized,” the mission fails. Conversely, these women are also expected to adopt the veil once again; for example, women who never wore the veil before but did so in solidarity with the FLN after the 1958 unveiling ceremonies also had to learn a new corporal pattern.¹⁵

If we consider Fanon not just the starting point of the gaze in film theory, but for our purposes here, of veiling and unveiling in cinematic representation, we could ask the following: did Pontecorvo cite Fanon directly? Considering scholars who study the veil, The Battle of Algiers, Algerian history, and make explicit the connection between Fanon’s essay and Pontecorvo’s film, it would seem the answer would be “yes.” Stam makes exactly this point in

¹⁴ Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 59.
¹⁵ Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 62.
his essay on Fanon and his legacy in film when describing the scene from *The Battle of Algiers* which the Algerian women, unveiled, successfully pass through the French military checkpoint. He writes, “The sequence almost literally stages the passage from ‘Algeria Unveiled,’ in which Fanon describes the Algerian woman’s confrontation with the colonial police.”

There are a number of instances in *The Battle of Algiers* that immediately bring Fanon’s “Algeria Unveiled” to mind. For example, early on in the film, we see an Algerian woman passing through a military checkpoint from inside the casbah, the Muslim quarters of Algiers, to the outside parameter of the *ville nouvelle*, where French settlers reside. As the woman passes through the border of the checkpoint, one soldier grabs her as if to stop her from walking further. To this the woman throws up her hands, angrily exclaiming, “Don’t touch me!” She then continues to walk through the checkpoint, while another French soldier shakes his head in dismay, warning the offending soldier, “Never touch their women.” A pivotal moment that establishes the success of veiling, the woman is able to successfully carry a firearm to a waiting FLN member outside the casbah, who uses the weapon to shoot a nearby French soldier, causing chaos and passers-by to flee.

This scene can be read as a parallel to Fanon’s early descriptions of the veil in his essay, particularly the FLN’s decision to involve women in the national struggle. He describes the initial involvement of women as a moment of uncertainty: “the woman who might be acting as a

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16 Stam, “Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema,” 518.
17 There are a number of problematic moments in the section where Fanon discusses the male leadership of the FLN and their indecision over whether or not to allow women to join the fight against the French, which according to Fanon, “Until 1955, was waged exclusively by men.” He clearly forgets the numerous ways that women contributed to combat in indirect ways. At any rate, he first describes the decision of the FLN to include women in combat as being unable to navigate the city because of their “relatively cloistered life.” He adds that the FLN where additionally hesitant because of the French army’s use of torture. They were finally pushed to allow women to fight purely for a lack of manpower; they wanted to have reserve cells to replace active cells on the front line. In Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 48-50.
liaison agent, as a bearer of tracts, as she walked some hundred or two hundred meters ahead of the man under whose orders she was working, still wore a veil; but after a certain period the pattern of activity that the struggle involved shifted in the direction of the European city.”

Indeed the woman in the film would not have been able to cross the checkpoint without her veil. Yet soon the veil becomes suspect; Fanon discusses the French goal to unveil the Algerian woman; he accounts for part of this desire as a tactic to “win women over” to the French side.

Important to this comparison is the fact that, while it has often been seen as a transparent document of FLN tactics, *The Battle of Algiers* was itself a narrative mediated, at once, by the medium of film and by Fanon’s somewhat removed observations of Algerian women at the time. In other words, Fanon’s gaze was remediated, one might say, in the scripting, framing, and editing of the film.

2.2 The Veil in Context

Historian Neil MacMaster has recently documented this tactic in detail, showing that targeting Algerian women specifically was a well-orchestrated plan on behalf of French army generals and government officials. They enlisted the assistance of ethnographer Jean Servier, who created “Operation Pilot,” consisting of a large-scale rubric “*Emancipation de la femme*” intended to convince Algerian women of their supposed “backward” way of life. This plan was enacted in a variety of ways, but in terms of the veil, MacMaster notes that, “Army propagandists had undoubtedly initiated a media campaign on this theme [of female emancipation], and in particular against the veil, as early as the summer of 1957. In July 1957

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18 Ibid., 51.
Radio-Alger broadcast in both Arabic and Kabyle editions of the programme *Magazine de la femme* the thoughts of a Muslim presenter called ‘Nadira’ in which she excoriated the veil and called for the emancipation of Algerian women.” After enlisting these propaganda strategies, the Fifth Bureau (a segment of the army primarily combatting the FLN) began a more overt campaign to unveil Algerian women; in 1958, pied-noir women issued a petition that called directly for unveiling. They claimed that in order for there to be an ‘*Algérie Nouvelle et Française,*’ the Muslim woman must become “modern and civilized”:

[I]t is necessary that she builds a plan for the future like the French woman and in order to achieve this each Muslim woman must remove her veil or the *cachabia* [robe] that smothers her, that impedes her in her work, or during her education,...and which above all else deprives her of her liberty and imprisons her between four walls.  

Not longer after this petition circulated, “unveiling ceremonies” began taking place, in which Algerian women (some *évoluées*—educated, upper-middle class women) were photographed taking off their veils and burning them. On May 18th 1958, in a widely photographed event, a parade of women, largely orchestrated by sections of the French army, marched down the streets of Algiers while carrying banners that read “Vive de Gaulle” and removing their veils. Conversely, a number of FLN sympathizers began wearing the veil for the first time as a result of the unveiling ceremonies to show their solidarity with an independent Algeria. In short, Fanon first published *A Dying Colonialism*—the book that includes his chapter on the veil—in 1959, at the height of both French propaganda strategies calling for the removal of the veil and the

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20 Ibid., 122.
21 Ibid., 123.
22 McMaster notes it is unlikely that these women were FLN sympathizers—the majority were either *évoluées* or poor, rural women. In Ibid., 137.
resulting unveiling ceremonies. He was aware of the nuances of the veil at this time and what its shifting significance meant for the Algerian woman.²³

The FLN was also apparently aware of the nuances of the veil and cleverly took advantage of the recent mass unveilings (which the French saw as a “victory”) to appropriate the French stereotype of the unveiled woman as being “modernized” and in favor of Algérie française. This leads us to the example above, cited by Stam: the scene from the Battle of Algiers in which the Algerian women unveil and pass into the European city. French guards flirt with one woman, while another woman passes by relatively unnoticed, if not warmly acknowledged by the soldiers. The third woman, being somewhat older than the other two, brings a child with her to make her disguise even more convincing.

This scene in particular is the one most analyzed by feminists and most often linked to Fanon as he describes the unveiled woman:

Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards, or bombs the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols.²⁴

Interestingly and surprisingly enough, Pontecorvo claims to have never read Fanon’s “Algeria Unveiled.” In her interview with Pontecorvo, film scholar Neelam Srivastava was able to speak with the director more about Fanon’s influence on The Battle of Algiers, as well as some of his

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²³ Though he does not mention the unveiling ceremonies as such, he alludes to them directly, writing, “French colonialism, on the occasion of May 13th, reenacted its old campaign of Westernizing the Algerian woman. Servants under the threat of being fired, poor women dragged from their homes, prostitutes were brought to the public square and symbolically unveiled to the cries of ‘Vive l’Algérie française!’ Before this new offensive old reactions reappeared. Spontaneously and without being told, the Algerian women who had long since dropped the veil once again donned the haïk, thus affirming that it was not true that woman liberated herself at the invitation of France and of General de Gaulle.” In Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 62.
²⁴ Ibid., 58. Stam uses this very quote to show the similarities between Fanon’s essay and The Battle of Algiers. See Stam, “Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema,” 518.
other anti-colonial films. Srivastava notes that Pontecorvo denied citing Fanon directly. She writes:

Pontecorvo claimed that Fanon had had an important influence on intellectuals of his generation: ‘Many of us had read him, both within and outside the university. [The Wretched of the Earth] was a very highly regarded book.’ His consistent denial of any direct citation from Fanon may perhaps be due to professional pride, but also shows the importance of contextualizing The Wretched of the Earth and Studies in A Dying Colonialism [A Dying Colonialism] in the lived experience of the Algerian war.

Despite Pontecorvo’s claim, few scholars seem to believe that Pontecorvo’s film can be read independently of Fanon’s essay. Their reasons for this are in part practical; Saadi Yacef, one of the leaders of the FLN, a star in The Battle of Algiers (which famously enlisted non-professional actors and Algerian citizens in the film), the author of the memoir Souvenirs de la Bataille d’Alger (upon which Pontecorvo and screen writer Franco Solinas based The Battle of Algiers), and the founder of Casbah Films, one of Algeria’s first post-revolution film production companies, did read Fanon and was aware of Fanon’s presence in the FLN. In a 2004 interview, he pays homage to Fanon, telling interviewer Gary Crowdus, “I did not meet him personally, but I knew him through his writings and his devotion to the Algerian cause. Before his death he took care of a large number of our people. He was a very great man.”

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26 Ibid., 103.
27 David Forgacs provides one of the most detailed accounts of how Pontecorvo came to direct the film, particularly why Yacef went to Italy for find a director as well as how the film transformed from Pontecorvo’s and Solinas’s original vision, a film called Parà which was to feature a French paratrooper who returns to Algiers as a photographer. In David Forgacs, “Italians in Algiers,” Interventions 9, no. 3 (November 2007): 351, doi:10.1080/13698010701618570.
While it is essential to make note of the actual connections between Pontecorvo, Yacef, and Fanon that may have influenced Pontecorvo’s filmmaking, even without this anecdotal evidence, the visual allusions to veiling and unveiling linking Fanon to Pontecorvo are unequivocal and thus a convincing example of remediation. After all, in their discussion of film Bolter and Grusin argue that remediation is concerned not just with direct citation, but also with a “more complex kind of borrowing.”29 “The contemporary entertainment industry calls such borrowing ‘repurposing’: to take a ‘property’ from one medium and reuse it in another.” they write, and “[w]ith the reuse comes a necessary redefinition, but there may be no conscious interplay between media. The interplay happens, if at all, only for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions and can compare them.”30 Additionally their hypothesis of film’s desire to seamlessly represent (and re-present) the medium of the novel (or journalistic narrative) without direct citation indeed correlates with Pontecorvo’s denial of Fanon’s influence in his film, for audiences, “want to view the film in the same seamless way in which they read novels.”31 In this way, the director fulfills the viewers’ desires to be confronted with the issues of the Algerian Revolution unmediated (arguably a goal of both neo-realist and documentary film genres). This desire of unmediated representation is additionally evidenced by his use of untrained actors, a small crew, filming in black and white newsreel-style, and non-classical editing, which ultimately gives the film a documentary aesthetic.32

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 44.
2.3 Feminist Critiques

Lindsey Moore’s critique of both Fanon and *The Battle of Algiers* is the most comprehensive in terms of its linking the two works together explicitly (her own act of remediation), as well as in summarizing feminist critiques of Fanon, Pontecorvo, and Algerian nationalism as a whole. Moore echoes previous feminist concerns with Fanon’s essay for its glorification of women in the revolution while ignoring their relative disenfranchisement in Algerian society as a whole, for lacking factual testimony (context which historians, such as Marnia Lazreg and Djamila Amrane, have painstakingly reconstructed through interviews and socio-historical evidence), and “for silencing women and/or of endowing women with an agency which is merely designated, structural and auxiliary.”\(^{33}\) One of the more biting critiques is that of sociologist Marieme Helie-Lucas, who dismisses Fanon’s essay (and by extension *The Battle of Algiers*) for turning the Algerian woman into a tool of nationalism, calling these projects instruments of “mythmaking”:

The image that the outside world has formed of women in the Algerian liberation struggle is shaped by Frantz Fanon’s books, a very widely distributed film called *The Battle of Algiers*, and a true story of a few national heroines [the women in interviews conducted by Amrane]. From these sources, the Algerian woman appears as a freedom fighter who carried arms against French colonialism and its army, a ‘terrorist’ who planted bombs in

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the city during the Battle of Algiers, who was equal to men in the struggle and who shared decision-making both at the political and at the military levels.”34

Taking Helie-Lucas’s critique seriously, it cannot be denied that *The Battle of Algiers*, perhaps more so than Fanon’s writings, could be considered as a form of propaganda on the part of the FLN and the government installed soon after the revolution ended in 1962. The film can be considered as nationalist as it is anti-colonial. T. Deanean Sharpley-Whiting, who has written the most extensive collection of essays on Fanon and feminism to date, points out that nationalism, especially as it has transformed in contemporary Algerian society, is “one of the primary oppressive factors impacting women’s daily lives,” and that women’s liberation in Algeria was only a temporary measure in order to aid the revolutionary struggle.35 Simultaneously reading and critiquing Helie-Lucas, Sharpley-Whiting picks up on the nuances of the veil that Fanon attempts to describe, calling the conflicting viewpoints feminists hold in regards to his writing “inevitable,” while noting that Helie-Lucas’s has simplified Fanon’s analysis.36 She instead asks us to consider the shifting significance of the veil, an object—like that of the French radio, as Fanon points out in a different essay from *A Dying Colonialism*—that cannot be considered Manichean in nature but instead ambiguous and hybrid. “[T]he veil, like the radio,” she writes, “was no longer a static cultural symbol; it too could be transformed, modified under

35 Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon*, 58.
36 Ibid., 62.
revolutionary circumstances. During the doffing and donning commanded by the revolution, the veil ceased to function as an inert traditional symbol.  

Sharpley-Whiting does not go into the details of Fanon’s essay on the radio. This medium is however important to consider here, in that it lends itself to a re-reading through media studies. In the essay “This is the Voice of Algeria,” Fanon questions whether or not the radio, as a technology, can always be considered “French” once it is appropriated by Algerians to spread anti-colonial messages across the radio waves. Initially introduced by the French military, the radio transforms once Algerians pick up on its usefulness for the revolutionary struggle. He writes:

Before 1954, switching on the radio meant giving asylum to the occupier’s words; it meant allowing the colonizer’s language to filter into the very heart of the house, the last of the supreme bastions of the national spirit. Before 1954, a radio in an Algerian house was the mark of Europeanization in progress, of vulnerability […] It was the decision to give voice to the occupier.  

Yet once the radio was adopted and appropriated by Algeria, and used as a means of circulating news about the Revolution through Algerian sources and Algerian sources alone, it took on a new meaning, or “had been ‘digested’ in connection with the national struggle,” in Fanon’s words. The radio program The Voice of Fighting Algeria became the National Liberation Front’s line of communication with the average Algerian.

37 Ibid. Additionally, see Frantz Fanon, “This Is the Voice of Algeria,” in A Dying Colonialism, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 90.

38 Additionally, Fanon questions if even French language, which the Algerians use to communicate, is purely “French,” writing: Expressing oneself in French, understanding French, was no longer tantamount to treason or to an impoverishing identification with the occupier. Used by the Voice of the Combatants, conveying in a positive way the message of the Revolution, the French language also becomes an instrument of liberation. Whereas formerly, in psychopathology, any French voice, to one in a delirium, expressed rejection, condemnation, and opprobrium, with the struggle for liberation we see the initiation of a major process of exorcizing the French language. The ‘native’ can almost be said to assume responsibility for the language of the occupier. Fanon, “This Is the Voice of Algeria,” 90.

39 Ibid., 92.
My point in bringing in Fanon’s thoughts on the radio here is to show how he was thinking about objects and media concurrently with and within the revolution. He insisted upon the role of everyday objects in more than one instance and was quite aware of the nuances of object histories; once brought into Algeria, the radio can never be “purely French” as the Algerians were able to successfully appropriate it for their own ends. It changes the history of the radio and becomes part of that history. Fanon makes virtually the same argument in “Algeria Unveiled” when he describes the shifting of the veil from pre-revolutionary Algeria (where it is seen purely for its ability to separated sexes) to its role as an instrument in the revolution. This is likely why he goes through the effort of describing the veil on so many registers: there is the veil before 1954; the veil used as a tool to hide and conceal; the veil once the French become determined to ‘unveil Algeria’ and enacted forceful unveilings in Algiers; and the veil that becomes a symbol of the Orientalist stereotype manipulated by Algerians to trick the French into seeing “European” clothing as reliable signifiers.

In the sense that Fanon produces his own remediation of the veil, remediating Fanon into an understanding of *The Battle of Algiers* and by extension *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* adds a more nuanced understanding of the veil within the political context at the height of the revolution, when Fanon was writing “Algeria Unveiled.” At the same time, feminist re-readings of Fanon call into questions Fanon’s own biases of the veil, as well as recalling Fanon’s own media-based interpretations of the revolution, which will serve to inform a reading of the veil in the next section.
Chapter 3: The Veil as Cultural Technique

3.1 The Veil as a Tool in Revolutionary Struggle

As analyzed in the previous chapter, many feminists disagree with both Fanon and Pontecorvo for making the woman appear as a “tool” of the revolution. On the one hand, we must take this critique seriously; many scholars studying the veil, for example, have noted how the veil becomes a fetishized object that denies women any sort of agency. Additionally a number of scholars have pointed out the “in-betweeness” of Algerian women in colonial and postcolonial discourse; she is either a pawn in France’s game to “Westernize” Algeria, or fodder for the FLN’s mission. Readings of the Algerian woman as representing the “nation,” — a narrative first propagated by the French, then by men in the FLN and afterwards— additionally denies concrete, lived female experience in the revolution. Leading scholars on Algerian postcolonial feminist theory Winifred Woodhull and Marnia Lazreg have critiqued Fanon’s essay, the former writing, “the Algerian nation, and by implication, all Algerian women are embodied in a single female figure—as if women in Algeria comprised a homogenous, monolithic group […] The possibility of imagining a cohesive (though not unitary) national body relies on the rhetorical strategy of

reducing the multiple, heterogeneous identities of Algerian women to a single figure.”

This idea of a homogenous Algerian woman largely persists due to a lack of testimony from those women who participated in the revolution, as an overwhelming majority—in fact, ninety-six percent—were illiterate. While Pontecorvo’s film focuses largely on militaristic aspects of female involvement in the revolution, we must also acknowledge the thousands of women whose efforts in hiding Algerian fighters, cooking meals, and washing clothing—work typically and derogatorily characterized as “women’s work”—contributed to the success of the revolution.

The lack of written and even oral testimony makes an interpretation of women’s physical presence in the revolution even more crucial. While previous scholars argue that a focus on the veil alone does a disservice to Algerian women’s role in the revolution, I would instead suggest that a focus on the instrument and mechanism of the veil solidifies and requires the presence of the female body as an operator and ultimately a mediating third between inside and outside. An interpretation through the dynamic operation of veiling and unveiling resists a reading of the Algerian woman as being monolithic and thus rendered symbolic. If the radio, for example, can disrupt a French/Algerian binary, can the veil not do the same? What if, instead of viewing the Algerian woman as a stable category, the veil has the potential to disrupt this category, even if temporarily?

A number of media scholars have picked up on the veil as a tool in revolutionary action. Wendy Hui Kyon Chun’s essay “Race and/as Technology or How to Do Things to Race,” examines how race is partially constructed and mediated by technics, positing that,

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41 Winifred Woodhull, Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.
“technological mediation, which has been used to define humankind as such (‘man’ as a ‘tool-using’ animal), is always already a mix of science, art, and culture. Humans and technology, as Bernard Stiegler has argued, evolve together.”⁴³ Chun uses this point to argue that while race as technology is linked to subjugation (as well as colonization), via segregation and eugenics, “to make clear distinctions in society, where none necessarily existed,” an understanding of race as technology may also create a potential for poiesis, for agency.⁴⁴ Chun uses Bhabha and Fanon here; Bhabha, to show how, through colonial mimicry and a performance of race, “may pose an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers.”⁴⁵ Chun believes Fanon, on the other hand, questions the boundary between human and nature, and “suggests an embracing of factors not usually considered human. That is, if race as technology does make it possible to expand without limit, could this power stem not from asserting the difference between humans and technology, technology and poiesis, but rather through an acceptance of their similarities—race as prosthesis?”⁴⁶

In a similar vein to Wendy Chun, Beth Coleman has brilliantly argued for an understanding of the Algerian veil in terms of technological agency, denaturing race from its biological status and instead calling it a “levered mechanism,”—“a contraption with a spring or handle that creates movement and diversifies articulation.”⁴⁷ Coleman describes the unveiling scene, noting that in particular their mission is successful, “not because they look French but

⁴⁴ Ibid., 46.
⁴⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.
⁴⁶ Chun, “Race And/As Technology or How to Do Things to Race,” 49.
rather because they look colonized. Coleman certainly gets right to the heart of the matter here, showing how dress, when used as “passing,” can move the colonized into a new subject position; however, I suggest we also turn back to Fanon to consider veiling/unveiling on a larger scale, especially to elaborate on Coleman’s point that “clothes become a technology of sorts within the specificities of place, time, and nation.”

While scholars have read the scenes in the *Battle of Algiers* as homogenizing women’s identity, if we read the scenes instead through the lens of media theory, we can see how they are instead the opposite; they destabilize a homogenous idea of not only colonial difference, but of gendered difference in Algerian society. The veil processes the difference between Algerian man and woman, as well as between Algerian and European. But through the women’s adaptation between veiling, unveiling, and re-veiling, the steady operation of veiled/unveiled that seemed relatively easy to identify before the revolution is thrown off-kilter.

Recalling the unveiling ceremonies that had occurred in 1958, MacMaster points out that the veil became an unstable signifier for a variety of reasons; Algerian women who never wore the veil previously began to wear it after the French started their campaign to unveil women. Similarly, women who were French sympathizers, some who never wore a veil, donned it only to attend unveiling ceremonies where they removed it before a crowd. While over the course of the two-hour film scenes of veiling in *The Battle of Algiers* are rather brief, even these few moments of veiling and unveiling show the unraveling of the veil as a symbol that is neither

48 Ibid., 197.
49 Ibid., 198.
50 MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 2012, 134. See also Nilüfer Göle’s research on the rapidly changing signification of the veil. Though her research focuses primarily on present-day Turkey, her consideration of the veil’s shifting from its historical status as a “stigma symbol” to “prestige symbol” is relevant here. In Nilüfer Göle, “The Voluntary Adoption of Islamic Stigma Symbols,” *Social Research* 70, no. 3 (2003): 809–28.
entirely subjugating nor emancipating. The “historic dynamism” of the veil that Fanon speaks of in “Algeria Unveiled” is not just referring to the women who were “carrying bombs” for the FLN, but the relationship to women and the veil during the Algerian Revolution as a whole. ⁵¹ The Battle of Algiers, as a remediation of Fanon’s understanding of the veil, also shows how this dynamism was materialized in the veil itself and the complexities of the veil as a symbol and a tool in the revolutionary struggle. At one moment, it is a safe place to conceal and hide weapons; in another instance, it makes the woman a target to suspicion.

3.2 The Mediating Third and the Third Space

As I highlighted in the introduction, cultural techniques are processes or “ontic operations”—like opening and closing, or dressing and undressing—that create distinctions within society. Our understanding of what is “inside” or “outside,” “sacred” or “profane” and what is “human” or “non-human” are all informed by cultural techniques. Siegert tells us that, “[o]perating a door by closing and opening it allows us to perform, observe, encode, address and ultimately wire the difference between inside and outside […] all cultural techniques are based on the transition from nondistinction to distinction and back.”⁵² If we are to correctly understand what Siegert is suggesting here, it is in the performance of actions—and for the purposes of this essay, procedures of veiling, unveiling, and veiling again—that create meaning in the first place. At the same time, these operations, and the veil in particular as the mediating third space, disrupt previous distinctions. A door, for example, is both inside and outside at the same time, a portal that is always between inside and outside. It cannot be reduced to either inside or outside. This is

⁵¹ Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 63.
what Siegert calls a “mediating third,” or “basal cultural technique.”

Distinctions cannot exist without the mediating third; yet this mediating third may be key to destabilizing the very distinctions they create.

Siegert writes, “Basal cultural techniques always already imply an unmarked space. By necessarily including the unmarked space that is excluded by the processed distinctions, cultural techniques always contain the possibility of liquidating the latter.” This unmarked space creates an opening for displacement, or what Homi Bhabha refers to as a “third space” or “hybridity.”

We can then perhaps consider a “mediating third space,” an amalgamation of cultural techniques and postcolonial theory, a space in which distinctions can be challenged. Like the basal cultural technique, the third space, according to Bhabha, “enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood though received.”

Similarly recognizing a third space calls into question the self-alienating limit of the “real,” showing that—“no culture is plainly plenitudinous, not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority, but also because its own symbolic-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification, and meaning-making, always underscores the claim to an originary, holistic, organic identity.”

In this sense the veil creates a space of

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 15.
57 Rutherford, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” 211.
58 Ibid., 210.
agency through the veiling and unveiling Fanon describes in “Algeria Unveiled” and that is remediated in *The Battle of Algiers*.

The veil—as a mediating third, as prosthetic and as an actor—disrupts the French colonial project and disrupts the “natural order of things” in the eyes of the colonial forces by overturning assumptions previously held to be “real.” A battle that is still being waged today, the early 20th century French colonizer wanted the Algerian woman to “unveil” herself—as the key to winning Algeria was to convince the Algerian woman of her misfortune, so much so that, as Fanon says,

> Every new Algerian woman unveiled announced to the occupier an Algerian society whose systems of defense were in the process of dislocation, open and breached. Every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the *haik*, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer.  

The Algerian women resisted this forced unveiling on account that it represented infiltration of the colonizer’s influence. It is when she unveils on her own accord—in order to pass as a “colonized” woman—and carry out the mission of decolonization, that the colonizer/colonized, European/Other binary is disrupted. The mimicry of the Algerian woman in her lifting, removing, and unveiling subverts the French colonizer in the sense that her European dress—originally seen as a victory of modernity and a sign that the French were “winning over” the women—in fact makes a mockery of the French by forcing them to realize that dress—whether it’s the veil or European fashion is completely unstable. Only when the Algerian woman starts mimicking the colonized through unveiling, and doing so not to conform to the colonized dress but rather to *destroy* the colonizer, “like a fish in the Western waters,” do the French begin to

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59 Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 42.
realize that the veil as a barrier between European and Other is entirely unstable. This is what Bhabha means when he says, “it is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.”

Once it became known that Algerian women were using European dress to carry on the mission of the FLN, veiling reappears. Fanon points out that, “Europeans and Algerians were equally suspect. All historic limits crumbled and disappeared. Any person carrying a package could be required to open it and show its contents […] Under those conditions it became urgent to conceal the package from the eyes of the occupier and again to cover oneself with the protective haik.” The European/Other pairing is disrupted, here in the sense that no one is safe. Yet, the return of the prosthetic aids the Algerian woman in being able to resume her role in the revolution; its augmentary purposes allow for the woman to go undetected. In this way, quoting Fanon one last time, “The veil was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle.” The radical technicity of veil ultimately demonstrates the artificiality and insecurity of the distinction of European/Other.

60 Ibid., 58.
61 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 86.
62 Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 61.
63 Ibid., 63.
Chapter 4: Remediating the Veil

4.1 Remediation of *Femmes Algériennes*

If a theory of cultural techniques provides a new way of understanding the veil, what does remediation do in this process? I will now return to Harun Farocki’s *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* in order to compare this film with *The Battle of Algiers*. In my estimation, these two films are viewed in tandem partially because of their subject matter (or at least the brief moment in *Images* when Farocki shows the photographs of the Algerian women). This explanation is also limited, however, because the women in the photographs and the women in *The Battle of Algiers* relate to the veil in entirely different ways, as I will show.

Marc Garanger, the soldier whom I mentioned earlier, took the photographs of the Algerian women shown in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. These images, now widely known by the title of a collected volume, *Femmes Algériennes*, were captured in villages south of Algiers in the present day wilaya of Bouïra, where he was ordered to take photographs of women in six villages and resettlement camps. Garanger has claimed to be an FLN sympathizer and even succeeded in smuggling the military photographs to Switzerland, where they were soon after published and disseminated across the world. In retelling the story of how the photographs originally came into being, Garanger recalls that, “…the camp major decreed that the inhabitants of the villages must all have identity cards […] Either I refused and went to prison, or I accepted. I understood my luck: it was to be a witness, to make pictures of what I saw that mirrored my opposition to the war.”

These photographs were then used by the French

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to create identity cards not just in a move of surveillance, but as a way to ease the *regroupement* process that displaced over 3 million Algerian civilians during the war.\textsuperscript{65} The identity cards were used to track who ended up where, as well as to create a civil register—which came with reforms such as voting rights, family allowances, child bride marriage reform—also integral to the French “emancipation” plan mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{66}

In *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* the photographs of the Algerian women are shown very briefly. The viewer is shown the front cover of the book *Femmes Algériennes*, one or two photographs in the book itself, as well as a close up of one woman’s mouth and then her eyes. During this initial introduction to the photographs, the narrator explains that these women are “being photographed for the first time”:

> The year 1960 in Algeria, women are photographed for the first time. They are to be issued with identity cards. Faces which up till then had worn the veil. Only those close had looked on these faces without the veil: family and household members. When one looks into the face of an intimate, one also brings in something of the shared past. The photograph captures the moment and thus crops away past and future.\textsuperscript{67}

As the scene continues, the latter shot of the woman’s eyes mimics the veil in that the woman becomes one who can see without being seen. The rest of her face is cropped away. Taking this notion further, Farocki then uses his hand to cover first the eyes of the woman, and then the mouth, again mimicking the movement of the veil. While this takes place, the monotonous voice of the narrator continues to explain the context of these photographs:

\textsuperscript{65} Garanger himself has compared the *regroupement* villages to concentration camps. In Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{66} MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 2012, 215. Additionally important to the identification and *regroupement* process is the system of naming imposed on Algerians by the French government. The name-as-caption falls outside of the frame of the identity photograph itself, but nevertheless become an integral part of the identity card’s function as a whole. For a brief history of the imposition of the French naming system onto colonial subjects, see Slyomovics, “Visual Ethnography, Stereotypes, and Photographing Algeria,” 134–35.
\textsuperscript{67} Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, 16mm film transferred to video (Facets Multimedia Distribution, 1988).
The veil covers mouth, nose, and cheeks, and leaves the eyes free. The eyes must be accustomed to meet a strange gaze. The mouth cannot be accustomed to being looked at. A mouth, to be able to taste something, must come close to its object. The eye, to be able to see, can remain at a distance from its object.  

One can see why Farocki chose to include the photographs in this film in particular. The film itself is about vision: specifically, the desire to make what is invisible, visible. Centering around aerial photographs taken of Auschwitz by Allied forces, Farocki uses a variety of different scenarios, including Garanger’s identity photographs, to drive home the point that the camera as a technology simply “can apprehend what the eye cannot.” The camera’s ability to capture and perfect human vision lends itself to the controlling gaze of the state apparatus. Conversely, while the camera is intended to perfect human vision, it can also distort it. As film theorist Nora Alter points out, “the historical purpose of photography—whether scientific, military, forensic, or aesthetic—has been not only to record and preserve but also to mislead, deceive, and even destroy: that is, to aid yet obfuscate vision. In other words, to show the in/visible.”

4.2 Reading and Misreading the Veil in Film Theory

Scholars note time and again the forceful unveiling that occurred to make these photographs. Indeed, the photographs are violent: Garanger noted the conditions of duress under which the photographs were taken, saying, “I was circled by armed soldiers to take the shots. The response of the women to the act of aggression against them is visible in each of their expressions.” Both Kaja Silverman and Nora Alter, who have analyzed these photographs in

68 Ibid.
the context of Farocki’s film, elaborate upon this symbolic violence in their analyses of the photographs.

Published in 1996, Alter’s analysis of the film is the more recent of the two; in fact, it is a critique of Kaja Silverman’s 1993 analysis of Images and the Femmes Algériennes photographs in “What Is a Camera?, or: History in the Field of Vision,” which shapes a large part of Alter’s essay. Additionally, Alter enlists a larger question to structure her argument: why has Farocki’s film only been interpreted through Heideggerean and Lacanian lenses? Directing her reader to Fredric Jameson and Louis Althusser, each of whom comments upon in/visibility, and hence the im/perceptible within political economy, she argues that scholars must attend to “the political in/visible and in/audible that moves stealthily beneath, within, and around vision, visuality, and visibility or seeingness.” A significant portion of Alter’s text is also dedicated to uncovering the use of gender in Farocki’s Images, in which the Algerian woman plays a large role. She critiques Silverman for discussing them “only to fold them into post-Lacanian theory of the look and gaze, specifically a rather homogenous ‘colonial gaze.’ What gets short shrift, in both cases, is further political specificity.”

Like Alter, I am less interested in Silverman’s use of Lacanian theory of the gaze to look at Farocki’s film. However, I cannot help but note that Alter, despite her call for specificity,

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75 Ibid., 182.
makes a number of historical and contextual mis-readings of *Femmes Algériennes*. She characterizes these women as fitting into larger notions of *femme fatale* trope as defined by Mary Ann Doane: “At once female and hostile, the ‘inappropriate/d other’ seems to be particularly dangerous when it surfaces not where one expects it, but where one does not.”\(^{76}\) The threat of castration seems to loom under the surface here. While the Algerian woman may indeed be a gendered and racialized “Other” to the French soldiers, the *femme fatale* characterization that Alter posits, especially for its foreignness to the actual lived experience of the Algerian woman in the film, makes an assumption about the motivations of these women. In fact, an attempt to fit the Algerian woman’s body into some trope of woman may be what leads Alter to incorrectly identify the *Femmes Algériennes* photographed by Garanger as the urban “fire carriers” from Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers*.\(^{77}\) Alter correctly notes that the Algerian women photographed are likely of Berber descent due to their facial tattooing; however, she entirely misrepresents these photographed women by equating them with the women depicted in Pontecorvo’s film. In reality, the female actors in *Battle of Algiers* were intended to represent urban women, likely of the middle-upper class, whereas Garanger’s photographs are of actual rural women.

In some respects, the misidentification of *Femmes Algériennes* could be considered a mere oversight; the actual Battle of Algiers took place in 1956-57, Garanger photographed these women in 1960, and Pontecorvo’s film was shot in 1964. However, rethinking this observation through the medium of the veil itself and the cultural techniques of veiling/unveiling that materialize and solidify the veil’s function, it is clear that Alter’s misidentification is predicated

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\(^{76}\) Ibid.  
\(^{77}\) Ibid.
upon what the veil *does*, rather than its historical context in this specific scenario. Her misreading, as yet another remediation of *The Battle of Algiers*, shows the persistence of veiling/unveiling operation from Fanon’s original text. She reads the veil as either veiling or unveiling, rather than as an object with rapidly changing significance that differs for each woman who wears (or does not wear) the veil. Thus, she assumes the veiling and unveiling performed by the women in Pontecorvo’s film is the same veiling and unveiling that occurs in *Images*. While *Images* can be understood as a remediation of Pontecorvo and Fanon, this does not mean the women in each scene can be seamlessly substituted for one another.

As much as Alter critiques Silverman for her a-historicity, Silverman’s essay does provide a framework for a new reading within the language of cultural techniques and remediation in her essay on *Images*. Silverman is primarily interested in the gaze within Farocki’s film, more specifically how “a fundamentally a-temporal gaze is culturally and historically specified.” 78 She argues that Farocki’s film investigates not only the disjunction between camera and eye—that is, how the camera is read as a technological improvement to the inadequacy of human vision—but the camera’s ability to memorialize, mortify, create human subjects, and how all of the above are historically and discursively specific. In making this point, Silverman also notes how Farocki factors in gender and racial difference and that, “it is only through the hyperbolic specularization of the female spectacle that the disjunction between the camera and the male eye can be masked.” 79

The veil, Silverman notes, is largely responsible for this difference, for in Algerian

79 Ibid., 15.
culture “‘femininity’ […] demands the veil and hence signifies public invisibility.” The Algerian woman creates a paradox for “Western” vision and “Western” sexual differentiation, which the camera tries to “correct” by making her body visible. Thus Western sexual differentiation as dependent upon the visible, coincides not only with the Enlightenment desire for transparency (as Farocki stresses in the documentary) but also with French colonialism and its desire to make colonial subjects “legible,” as well as Western liberal feminism and its desire to equate the revealed female body with liberation. Silverman later goes on to say, “Thus, although within the context of Algerian culture, the veil is obviously one of the primary signifiers of women’s subordinate status, it performs a very different function within the context of French colonialism. ‘Visibility’ is similarly complicated, signifying not merely ‘femininity’ but ‘colonialism.’”

Curiously enough, while Silverman makes great strides to show the instability of the veil in cultural difference, she frames it as either entirely negative (“the veil signifies subordinate status”) or positive (something that protects the woman from the colonizer’s vision). She thus compresses the veil, and therefore the woman, into a plus-minus equation. In this sense, she performs a very similar reading of the veil as that of Alter’s; however, if we consider remediation here, in particular Fanon and The Battle of Algiers, the veil cannot fall into such an binaristic model. While Alter is incorrect in identifying Femmes Algériennes as being the same women in The Battle of Algiers, the veil in the latter example becomes part of the history of the veil in Farocki’s own film in the sense that it cannot be reduced to any sort of either/or formula.

80 Ibid., 32.
81 MacMaster has argued that settler feminist groups within Algeria were instrumental in the colonial process. In MacMaster, Burning the Veil, 2012.
Silverman similarly alludes to this possibility without quite getting there. Using Christian Metz’s suggestion that each photograph is “a cut inside the referent,” Silverman indicates another violence in photography: death. The medium’s ability to capture “permits a piece of the real to escape the vicissitudes of time, but only at the cost of a kind of death […] a devitalizing sublation, by lifting that moment out of life into the frame of representation.” The photographic image can never fully represent a totality or “truth” in that it is entirely severed from the context of its creation. Silverman sees this moment as potentially emancipatory for the Algerian women in two ways; the first is that it unravels the logic of colonial documentation by revealing the camera’s (and by extension, the “gaze’s”) inabilities, “insofar as none of us can ever be said to be fully ‘inside’ either language or the images which define us.” In this same way, the veil can never be fully inside a given language, image, culture, or representation.

In short, while both Silverman’s and Alter’s understandings of the veil reinscribe the very binaries they apparently seek to disrupt, their analyses provide an opportunity to revisit Fanon and The Battle of Algiers in order to re-contextualize the Algerian woman Images of the World and the Inscription of War. While Farocki’s veil performs a very different operation than that of Pontecorvo’s, this veil cannot necessarily be viewed in isolation from other instances of veiling and unveiling. Remediation calls for understanding how previous histories of the veil inform present histories, interpretations, and connotations of the veil.

83 Ibid., 33.
84 Ibid., 36. Silverman also suggests “the look” bears potential for resistance. She defines the “look” as bound up with temporality, change, complexity, and memory. Like the photograph itself as a “cut from the referent” the look becomes unwieldy and ungovernable as it has no objective roots. Silverman says the look is that which causes the viewer to understand there is always something of which the photograph cannot show; “the subjective experience of being ‘inside’ those particular bodies” and even more specifically, “the corporeal and psychic ‘reality’ of being female and Algerian in a French colony in 1960.” Ibid., 52.
Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Veil and Mediation in the Media and Beyond

To conclude, I would like to briefly return to The Battle of Algiers and Images of the World and the Inscription of War, as well as a 2004 film by contemporary Algerian-French artist Halida Boughriet, to address some final points in the context of Bolter and Grusin’s notions of immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation.

While referencing scenes from The Battle of Algiers and Images of the World and the Inscription of War that visualize processes of veiling and unveiling, we must keep in mind the fabricated nature of these films. This is not to say that we cannot consider these films as documents of some sort; on the contrary, the fact that The Battle of Algiers is so often looked to by scholars across disciplines as a primary source of authenticity on the Algerian Revolution shows precisely the success of neo-realist techniques in creating a seemingly authentic narrative. Using untrained actors, a small crew, filming in black and white newsreel-style, and non-classical editing gives the film the documentary “feel” that both Pontecorvo and Yacef desired. The film is a document of a specific moment in which Algeria was trying to establish its presence as an independent nation; news (or news-like) media was one avenue in which the story of the revolution could be told to a wider audience.

Audiences similarly perceive the documentary genre as being objective and unmediated, though the genre’s truth-telling quality has been disputed by a number of scholars in recent years, perhaps most famously by Trinh T Minh-ha. She argues that the documentary is merely a style created by “a set of persuasive techniques” dependent upon the viewer’s expectations for
“truth,” as well as strategies on the part of the filmmaker—strategies Minh-Ha argues are no different than those used in broadcast television.85

That being said, Minh-ha notes that documentary can escape its own aesthetics through self-referentiality. She writes, “A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction. It does not work to conceal or exclude what is normalized as ‘non-factual,’ for it understands the mutual dependence of realism and ‘artificiality’ in the process filmmaking.”86 Farocki’s Images of the World and the Inscription of War fits into this self-reflexive category; the film uses documentary photographs, archival evidence, and historical material—media we traditionally imagine as inherently “truthful”—as a way to reveal the very opposite: vision is not always objective; seeing is not always believing.

With this information in mind, what I have hoped to show in my analysis of representations of veiling and unveiling is not that Fanon, Pontecorvo, or Farocki reveal some sort of “truth” about the veil, but how, through an understanding of remediation, Fanon’s essay and these films become another way to consider the veil, particularly due to their influence in collective memory. As Bolter and Grusin point out, “there may be no conscious interplay between media,” but that does not mean that Farocki’s film cannot be considered a reading of both Fanon and Pontecorvo. Previous analyses of The Battle of Algiers that cite Fanon—most without acknowledging or knowing that Pontecorvo supposedly did not read Fanon himself—reinforces the notion of remediation. In a similar vein, acknowledging remediation in this way

85 She lists a few example here, writing “the ‘personal testimony’ technique (a star appears on screen to advertise his or her use of a certain product), the ‘plain folks’ technique (a politician arranges to eat hot dogs in public) the ‘band wagon’ technique (the use of which conveys the message that ‘everybody is doing it, why not you?’); or the ‘card stacking’ technique (in which prearrangements for a ‘survey’ show that a certain brand of product is more popular than any other to the inhabitants of a given area).” See Trinh T. Minh-Ha, “Documentary Is/Not a Name,” October 52 (1990): 88, doi:10.2307/778886.
86 Ibid., 89.
resists that there is one stable “truth” or “source” for what the veil does, who the woman wearing the veil is, or her reasons for wearing the veil. This certainly has ramifications for the veil in the present-day; scholars have already shown through sociological research that any given subject’s relationship to the veil can differ dramatically according to a number of social, economic, and geographic factors.87

Contemporary films dealing with the veil as their subject matter could also be remediations of Fanon. This can be found in films from the past decade or so by female filmmakers who have used the veil as an instrument to question its perception by Western media and society at large as a static object.88 For example, Halida Boughriet’s 2007 film Les Illuminés uses a subjective camera to place the viewer inside a burqa. The artist navigates the city of Paris while wearing the garment; as viewers, we see not just lattice fabric over the camera lens from the burqa itself, but more noticeably hostile glares and confused glances from passers-by.

Sahar Amer, who analyzes Boughriet’s work in her 2014 book What is Veiling? speaks of both space and vision in her brief description of the film: “The viewer suddenly realizes that this is how women wearing the burqa must see the world. They look out as though from inside a prison cell. They can only see it as an incomplete space, discontinuous and fragmented.”89 She adds that while the space feels “claustrophobic,” the looks from onlookers provides an additional layer of interpretation:

87 As previously mentioned, see for example Lazreg, Questioning the Veil; Hoodfar, “More Than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy.”
88 Performance artist Tanja Ostojić performed a similar piece in Manchester, England titled Integration Impossible? in 2005, though wearing a burqa made of camouflage fabric. Additionally, rather than focusing on subjective experiences of veiling, the focus of Ostojić’s piece revolves around immigration politics and Islamophobia, and as Eric Fassin and Judith Sukis argue, how the veiled body comes to represent both threat and sexual fantasy simultaneously. In Eric Fassin and Judith Sukis, “Introduction: Transgressing Boundaries,” Public Culture 22, no. 3 (October 1, 2010): 493, doi:10.1215/08992363-2010-007.
Not only do we see a woman isolated from the world but we are also invited to witness, if only briefly, the hostile stares and misunderstandings she endures daily. Boughriet denounces the oppression of complete veiling as a practice that isolates women from their social environment, and simultaneously she decries the unsympathetic attitude of outsiders toward veiled women.  

Indeed, in an interview with the artist herself, Boughriet maintains an ambiguous stance with the veil; she describes arriving at the idea for the performance piece first out of an interest in the material object of the veil, and the reactions of the audience being somewhat unpredictable:

I was interested in the burka as an extreme form of the veil that covers the face, the eyes of the woman who wears it. So once I arrived at Montparnasse, on the rolling sidewalk that brought me from one area to another, I filmed the looks of passerby from underneath. Looks of shock, terror, worry, voyeurism...I could not identify with the view of others because I was hidden. Nobody knew my expression, nobody knew if I was afraid or worried, no matter nobody. Of course it’s a performance pushed to the extreme since the burka is also extreme—an extreme veil that hides the entire body. I am nothing but a silhouette.

If we view Boughriet’s work as a remediation of the veil, as well as in light of the historical context of veiling and unveiling, a different reading of Les Illuminés occurs that may point to the complexities of this sartorial item. The difference between the veil in Boughriet’s film and the others mentioned in this thesis is that we are now given unmediated access to the subjective position of the woman who wears the veil.

Or at least what appears to be unmediated access. Even as we are lead to believe we have been granted visual access to the wearer’s subjectivity, a reading through cultural techniques and remediation complicates this illusion, rendering it unstable. The cultural technique of the veil

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90 Ibid., 189.
91 Interview with Halida Boughriet, DVD, Resistance[s]. Vol. III: Experimental Films from the Middle East and North Africa. (Paris: Lowave: CNC, 2010). It should be noted that the entirety of the interview is filmed only showing Boughriet’s eyes.
becomes evident as it is placed between the outside world—represented by the disturbed glances of the Parisians who pass by Boughriet—and Boughriet herself, here represented by the camera. The veil displaces more than the other’s vision and her own vision: our understanding of the veil is displaced as well. We cannot know why she’s wearing the veil, whether or not she feels protected by the veil from judgmental glances, or isolated from the outside world. We are left with partial vision.

Understanding these film citations as remediations—not only of one another but of the process of veiling and unveiling itself—complicates a stable reading of both the veil and the Algerian woman. The operations of veiling and unveiling, seen multiple times, from different angles, and through various medial forms, complicates the male gaze, as well as a hegemonic understanding of the veil; the technique of veiling and unveiling, as represented within the films, effectively remediate our understanding of difference. In the bigger picture, reading the films in tandem with one another, and against Fanon’s essay, challenges an understanding of the veil as a static object of “the gaze.” The choice by Algerian to wear a veil or not, at a time when women are still being “unveiled” in Europe, must be understood as a politically complex act. By examining several examples of the veil through layers of remediation—from Fanon’s critical essay to Pontecorvo’s dramatic film from the 1960s to photographs in Farocki’s experimental documentary from the 1980s—the cultural technique of veiling functions to disrupt the very binaries it seems to impose. While Fanon’s text describes the haik as that which “demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component,” these media show how the use and removal of this very same piece of cloth also unsettles any identity it apparently contains.
Figures


Figure 3. Hand covering mouth of photographed Algerian woman. Screen shot from Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War (Bilder Der Welt Und Inschrift Des Krieges)*, DVD (Chicago: Video Data Bank, The Art Institute of Chicago; Drift Distribution, 2011).
Figure 4. Hand covering eyes of photographed Algerian woman. Screen shot from Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War (Bilder Der Welt Und Inschrift Des Krieges)*, DVD (Chicago: Video Data Bank, The Art Institute of Chicago; Drift Distribution, 2011).
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