

**SHOT BY THE WESTERN GAZE:
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S CONSTRUCTION OF THE ORIENT**

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Edward Said, a founder of the academic field of post-colonial studies, describes Orientalism as the complex process that homogenizes Eastern countries into the Orient, thus creating a binary between Westerners and the Oriental Other.¹ The Western construction of Orientalism attributes progress to themselves, and primitivism to the Orient. Although the Western experience of the Orient does not accurately reflect upon the existence of distinct Eastern countries, traits of Orientalism continue to subsist in modern society. *National Geographic*, known for its vibrant photographs of the natural world outside of the United States, has failed to evolve since its first publication in 1888, and continues to convey racist hierarchical notions of European and American superiority from the nineteenth century. Although praised and largely conceptualized as a scientific and educational work, the magazine's photographs of non-Western women greatly stray from an objective representation. *National Geographic* is ultimately a contemporary continuation of Orientalist paintings and photographs that characterize Eastern societies as primitive. In order to fulfill Western expectations of the Other, the magazine assists in creating the non-Western woman's identity as ceaselessly promiscuous and sexually available, and perpetuates a racial hierarchy that normalizes and neutralizes violence against women of color.

The Occident's Understanding of Oriental Women

National Geographic uses signifiers of sexual and racial difference to indicate the presence of the Other. A majority of photographed women of color in *National Geographic* are nude, advancing the racist perception of non-Western women as sexually available.

Anthropologist Catherine Lutz and Sociologist Jane Collins reveal that the magazine's fixation

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 45.

on female nudity is almost exclusively dedicated to women of color: “With some very recent exceptions (photographs discretely from behind), none of the hundreds of women whose breasts were photographed in the magazine were white-skinned.”² Through the exposure of their bodies and emphasis on racial and sexual differences, women of color become a foil to the Western male reader.

Following the publication of Lutz and Collins’s findings in 1993, *National Geographic* has included photographs of nude white women in its magazine.³ In its January 2016 issue, the magazine published Lucas Foglia’s photograph of a Swedish girl swimming naked (fig. 1); a few months later, *National Geographic* prints Charlie Hamilton James’s photograph of two nude Peruvian women in its June 2016 issue (fig.2). Despite their close publication dates and contemporary production, the images highly differ in their portrayal of female nudity. In Foglia’s image, a young white man sits on the brink of an icy terrain and laughs with his female companion who submerges herself in a body of water. Although both figures are nude, their clean bodies suggest that public nudity is not a norm, and the photograph reflects a singular moment of spontaneity. Furthermore, the audience is denied a voyeuristic gaze, because the man’s arm strategically blocks visual access to his genitals and a majority of the white woman’s body is obscured by her aquatic surroundings.

In stark contrast, the two Peruvian women in James’s photograph can be objectified. Both women are nude except for matching short brown skirts. In juxtaposition with the subjects in

² Catherine Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 115.

³ The new objectification of white women in *National Geographic* photographs neither mitigates the effects of the magazine’s decade-long portrayal of native women, nor does this indicate that white women and women of color are now considered equals. Regardless of ethnicity, photographs of nude women can encourage a dominating, voyeuristic gaze, but it is significant to consider the role race has in increasing this pre-established objectification and sexualization. I include a discussion of *National Geographic*’s recent portrayal of a nude white woman in order to stress the importance of an intersectional perspective. *National Geographic*’s inclusion of a photograph featuring a nude white woman should not be considered a victory for equality.

Foglia's image, they are not pristine bodies but are blemished by traces of dirt and sand, suggesting the commonality of their undressed state. Furthermore, these women are off-centered and smaller relative to the whole of the composition. They are not the sole subjects of the photograph, but share this role with their leafy surroundings. By dedicating a majority of the spatial area to the environment, the photograph perpetuates the notion that native women are closer to nature. In addition, the subjects of this photograph remain nameless; the caption simply refers to them as "two women," but the caption under Foglia's image identifies the figures as Joshua and Cecilie. By individualizing them, Joshua and Cecilie do not come to represent an entire race of people in the same manner that the two Peruvian women do. While Cecilie is relatively protected from the objectifying gaze, the two women in James's image have their right breasts exposed and are vulnerable to sexualization. Juxtaposing *National Geographic's* portrayal of nude women of color with white women reveals a racial hierarchy in which the sexuality of white women needs to be shielded from the male gaze, because only women of color are appropriate to objectify due to their inherent Otherness.

In its characterization of women of color as sexually deviant, *National Geographic* visually appropriates nineteenth-century Orientalist postcards and eighteenth-century symbols of female innocence. In 1917, the magazine published *A Bedouin Beauty*, an image of a woman of color donned in white drapery, and holding a golden pitcher that matches her jewelry (fig. 3). The white cloth slips off of her and exposes her left breast, but the young woman appears unaffected as she lifts her head and looks down at the viewer. The image highly resembles the Orientalist postcards photographer Jean Geiser created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (fig. 4). The subject of Geiser's photograph is a young Algerian woman who wears an ornately embellished headdress, indicating her non-Western descent. She gazes out at the

audience while holding a pitcher in her right hand. Paralleling the *National Geographic* image, she wears a white dress that slips off of her shoulder and exposes her right breast. Due to Geiser's acclaimed reputation, it is highly likely that fellow photographers, including those at *National Geographic*, were aware of his work or the general suggestive nature of Orientalist postcards. Furthermore, the motif of a young woman holding a jug unites the two images in a narrative indicating the loss of virginity. In Jean-Baptiste Greuze's 1771 painting entitled *The Broken Pitcher*, a young girl with a pale complexion has a gray pitcher looped around her arm (fig. 5). While she uses the bottom of her white dress to bundle up pink roses, her disheveled garment leaves her left breast uncovered. In contrast to the later depictions by *National Geographic* and Geiser, the pitcher she carries is smashed, a trait meant to mimic her now broken hymen and signify the loss of feminine innocence.⁴ The roses that she gathers in the folds of her dress allude to the prior deflowering act and the young girl's fertility. The broken pitcher in Greuze's painting symbolizes the loss of virtue and virginity, but the vessels in both Geiser's photograph and the image in *National Geographic* are whole. Although this appears to suggest the women's purity, this symbol is not intended to depict Oriental women as morally superior. Instead, the solid pitcher and exposed breast indicate the sexual availability of the non-Western female subjects, and their continual readiness to be dominated. Although the images in *National Geographic* may appear documentary, they are charged with references that illustrate the paradoxical understanding of Oriental women as erotic yet pure, but always to be subjugated.

Ultimately, *National Geographic* perpetuates the motif of the Oriental woman who is eternally naked and sensual, a tradition invented by the West. Historian Eric Hobsbawm

⁴ Walter A. Liedtke, *Flemish Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Survey of Early Netherlandish and Flemish Paintings in the Public Collections of North America*, ed. Guy C. Bauman (New Haven, CT, United States: Yale University Press, 2000), 11.

describes invented tradition as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviours by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”⁵

Hobsbawm describes the ability to attribute a practice onto another group through the form of repetition. As demonstrated by Lutz and Collins, *National Geographic* engages in this form of authorship by disproportionately photographing non-Western women in the nude:

While the *National Geographic*'s search for the topless woman is by no means limited to the region, articles of the Pacific feature far more toplessness than other areas. Fully thirty-two percent of all pictures in our sample that included at least one woman also included toplessness – more than three times the rate of any other region.⁶

By repeatedly portraying non-Western women in such a manner, this representation becomes normalized and daily public nudity is seen, at least to the Western audience, as a primitive, Oriental tradition. The use of nudity to characterize non-Western women as inherently sexual dates back to nineteenth-century Orientalist postcards, such as those Geiser produced. The postcards depicted a contained and carefully fabricated fantasy in which Oriental women, dressed in revealing clothing, posed in provocative positions specifically to arouse their Western male audiences. However, the scenes in Orientalist postcards were constructed with props, and did not align with the realities of non-Western dress that the photographs claimed to represent.⁷

By contributing to the misleading narrative of the nude Oriental woman in contemporary photography, *National Geographic* revives the Western invented tradition that eroticizes and exotifies non-Western women.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introductions: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

⁶ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 137.

⁷ Paul Van der Grijp, *Art and Exoticism: An Anthropology of the Yearning for Authenticity* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009), 80.

National Geographic's Distorted Window into the Orient

National Geographic's emphasis on photography and the camera's believed documentary style assists the magazine in authenticating its portrayal of the Orient. Literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes explains that in photography, "nature seems spontaneously to produce the scene represented."⁸ Barthes reveals that the physical scene and the photo seem to exist simultaneously as a singular entity. Photography appears to possess an objective quality, leading many to confuse the photograph with reality. These images are easily mistaken as unmanipulated truths, while cameras are reduced to documentary objects. When considered with *National Geographic's* devotion to photography as a narrative tool, the magazine's images can convey false notions of objectivity and impartiality. According to feminist theorist Donna Haraway, "There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines."⁹ A controlling gaze is always present in a photograph, although the influence may not be commonly considered. Even though cameras may appear to create a disinterested copy of nature, the photographer's motives and methods of framing the scene result in an individualized conception of reality. However, due to the authority of cameras and its association with technical documentation, photographs in *National Geographic* that depict the Orient as primitive reinforce the accuracy of such a belief. Images can ultimately be used as evidence to support highly racialized claims and prejudices. At the expense of non-Western societies, *National Geographic* exploits photography's connotations with precision and accuracy in order to further its claim as a source of scientific and educational knowledge of the colonial

⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, by Roland Barthes (London: HarperCollins Distribution Services, 1977), 45.

⁹ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988), 415.

world.

National Geographic's self-identification as a scientific magazine further conveys its representation of the Orient as all-encompassing and accurate. The magazine maintains the illusion that everything the public could want to know about the Orient is present within its pages. Former president of the National Geographic Society Alexander Graham Bell asserted, "THE WORLD AND ALL THAT IS IN IT is our theme."¹⁰ Bell acknowledges and praises *National Geographic's* command of language and photography that appears to present all available knowledge on the events and people the magazine covers. These displays of complete and impartial knowledge, as Haraway explains, are "'god tricks' promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science."¹¹ Haraway argues that, especially in the scientific field, conveying information through the use of an omnipresent voice does not produce information that is truly absolute and objective. Despite *National Geographic's* guise of a ubiquitous and impartial discourse, the magazine can only present fragmentary details on its subjects. However, it continues to disregard this limitation, as exemplified in its 2016 mission statement: "*National Geographic* magazine is *the global leader* in empowering people to navigate the world, providing *authoritative, unbiased content* that addresses today's complex issues, while uncovering the wonders of our time" (italicization my emphasis).¹² The magazine positions itself as the leading source of objective knowledge over international issues and peoples. Their persistent self-characterization discourages doubts

¹⁰ Philip J. Pauly, "The World and All That Is in It: The National Geographic Society, 1888-1918," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1979), doi:10.2307/2712270, 523.

¹¹ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," 416.

¹² National Geographic Magazine, *National Geographic Magazine Media Kit*, (n.p.: National Geographic, 2016), http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mediakit/pdf/ng-magazine/NGM_Media_Kit_2016.pdf.

regarding their framing of information that perpetuates misconceptions of non-Western countries. By using photography's perceived encompassing and impartial portrayal of its subjects, *National Geographic* deceptively presents itself as the holder of all knowledge of the Other.

The magazine's use of Haraway's "god trick" and authority from claiming a scientific background, distorts the Orient and fashions a separate identity from qualities meant to elicit fascination. Historian James Clifford describes this as the "process of representational essentializing...in which one part or aspect of peoples' lives comes to epitomize them as a whole."¹³ Writers and photographers consciously select qualities they consider worthy of portrayal, and thereby exhibit control over Western knowledge of the Other. According to writer and political activist Susan Sontag, "The photographer is always trying to colonize new experiences or find new ways to look at familiar subjects—to fight against boredom. For boredom is the reverse side of fascination: both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation."¹⁴ As a retail magazine, *National Geographic's* content selection heavily depends on consumer interests. Sontag reveals that photographers, and therefore consumers, are interested in scenes that characterize Eastern countries as distinct from Western society. By repeatedly emphasizing opposing traits, photographers reduce the Orient into caricatures of the Other. *National Geographic* does not attempt to convey Eastern countries as complex and dynamic, but homogenizes them.

¹³ James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 100.

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 42.

Orientalism as a Product of Western Identity

Photographs of the “primitive” Orient in the magazine are intended to signify the progress the West has made, and reinforces nineteenth-century ideas of a cultural evolution. In a 1915 statement of *National Geographic*’s guiding principles, an emphasis was placed on avoidance of all topics of a “partisan or controversial character.”¹⁵ The mild language of non-partisanship and uncontroversial material downplays *National Geographic*’s ulterior motive to reaffirm the popular standard at the time—the normalized American ideology of Western progress and ascendance to a higher place of authority.¹⁶ *National Geographic*’s 1986 issue directly juxtaposes Western space exploration (fig. 6) with a photograph of a young non-Western girl in a grass skirt (fig.7).¹⁷ The content of the magazine is organized to create a direct comparison between Western scientific advancement and the underdeveloped non-Western countries. Immediately following an article on the U.S.S.R.’s space program is a page that changes the setting to “the Far Pacific at the Birth of Nations.”¹⁸ The word choice of *National Geographic*’s former Senior Assistant Editor, Carolyn Patterson, creates distance between the West and the Orient and further alludes to an inferior primal human state, thereby matching the stereotypical imagery representing primitivism on the facing page. By repeatedly portraying non-Western individuals as closer to nature, especially in contrast to the industrialism present in the West, *National Geographic* perpetuates outdated the idea of a cultural evolution that classifies the Orient as evolutionarily behind. Nineteenth-century art historian Alois Riegl contends that the decline of Eastern art during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should be understood as

¹⁵ Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, “Report of the Director and Editor of the National Geographic Society for the Year of 1914,” *National Geographic Magazine* 27 (1915), 319.

¹⁶ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 19.

¹⁷ Thomas Canby, “A Generation After Sputnik: Are the Soviets Ahead in Space?,” *National Geographic* October 1986, 458-459.

¹⁸ Carolyn Bennett Patterson, “At the Birth of Nations,” *National Geographic* October 1986, 460.

“a quite essential and decisive progression in the development of art and with it of human cultural development.”¹⁹ Riegl references the East in order to impose a hierarchy that characterizes the Orient as inferior. He does not discuss Eastern art in an attempt at inclusivity, but uses the East as a means of comparison. By considering the Orient as an indicator of Western advancement, *National Geographic* consciously continues to impose racially charged hierarchies, and invalid notions of progress.

The magazine’s depictions also attempt to justify pre-existing notions of the Orient as primitive. Art historian Todd Porterfield describes Orientalism as “a discourse—an internally coherent and delimited, fantasy-based description of the Orient which has served to rationalize and advance Western imperialism in the very real of the geographic East.”²⁰ *National Geographic* engages in this Orientalist fabrication of non-Western societies through their overemphasis of difference, which results in a fascination with Otherness. By framing their photographs as unbiased accounts of reality, the magazine replicates popular understandings of the third-world as underdeveloped and in need of Western intervention and assistance in order to progress and achieve the apparent universally desired aim of industrialization.²¹ Although the images in *National Geographic* appear neutral in presentation, they cannot be understood as accurate representations of the Orient, but products of Western feelings of superiority.

Power from Collecting Images of the Orient

¹⁹ Alois Riegl, *Volkskunst, Hausfleiss Und Hausindustrie* (Berlin: Haberlandt, 1984), 32.

²⁰ Todd Porterfield, “Western Views of Oriental Women in Modern Painting and Photography,” in *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, by Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi (Lafayette: International Council for Women in the Arts, 1994), 59.

²¹ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 30.

Racial hierarchies are also present in the act of collecting the magazine issues. Lutz and Collins contend that *National Geographic*'s "high-quality printing and binding and its reputation as a valuable reference tool mean that it is rarely thrown away, more frequently finding its way into attics and secondhand bookstores."²² Although Lutz and Collins attribute the magazine's tendency to be collected, rather than disposed of, to aesthetics and educational value, the images of the primitive Other also hold a continually intriguing feature. Philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard explains that in a collection, "the object attains exceptional value only by virtue of its absence."²³ Baudrillard describes that the impulse to collect stems from the lack of the object's presence, and the collector's desire to alleviate this absence. The compulsion to collect depends on the creation of distance between the collector and the desired object. *National Geographic* capitalizes on the classification of the Orient as distinctly separate from the West by specifically satisfying Western interest in the Orient. The collectible nature of the magazine derives from its ability to fill the absence of the Other, by providing the predominantly white, male, educated, and middle-class audience with seemingly comprehensive insights into the lives of non-Westerners. A 1987 study of 19,124 adults found:

Fifty-five percent of the in-home readers are male, 96 percent white (versus 86 percent of the general population), and their median age is forty-two. They are wealthier and have had more formal schooling than the average American...More generally, 30 percent of the readers can be categorized as in the two highest social classes (upper and upper-middle) as against seventeen percent of the general public.²⁴

In the case of *National Geographic*, Western fascination with the non-Western derives from its binary opposition as different, detached, and separate from the collector's own experiences.

National Geographic caters to the market that seeks to satisfy their curiosities, while

²² Ibid., 2.

²³ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (New York: Verso Books, 1996), 92.

²⁴ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 221-222.

simultaneously confirming the racist beliefs that reduce Eastern countries into the Other.

Ultimately, the act of collecting *National Geographic* magazines can become a highly racialized performance with the Westerner creating personal access to the Orient.

Through collection, the Western male owner also exhibits control in organizing and containing photographic depictions of real individuals of non-Western descent. Baudrillard contends that through the act of collecting, the objects are no longer material bodies offering resistance, but become possessions under the collector's control; their significance depends on the owner as they become the collector's property and passion."²⁵ The images of nude women of color are thereby vulnerable to the dominating and objectifying Western male gaze. These individual women are reduced to objects for the viewer to impose his meanings onto. The collector alone bestows value onto the photographs of the Orient or deems them as disposable and worthless, thus imposing his own value system within the version of the Orient constructed by *National Geographic*. Due to the magazine's selective portrayal of the Orient, collectors consciously or unconsciously bestow significance onto specific aspects based on their own subjective assessments. Professor of English Susan Stewart explains that "in the collection such systematicity results in the quantification of desire. Desire is ordered, arranged, and manipulated, not fathomless as in the nostalgia of the souvenir."²⁶ Desire, as described by Stewart, refers to the aim of bringing the inaccessible closer. This longing for the Other, taking multiple forms including the search for information and sexual objectification of non-Western women, becomes tangible in *National Geographic* magazine's physical compendium of the Orient. Michel

²⁵ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, 85.

²⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 163.

Foucault insists that “when there is desire, the power relation is already present.”²⁷ The collection, deriving from the desire to understand the Other, becomes a sign of visual and intellectual conquest of the Orient. Collectors can exert control over the presentation of their possessions in a manner that gives the illusion of control over the subjects of the collection—non-Westerners.

***National Geographic’s* Normalization of Racism and Violence**

By identifying itself as an educational magazine, *National Geographic* further exerts its ability to create knowledge of the Orient, and proliferate information that characterizes them as underdeveloped. Said elucidates:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.²⁸

Said describes Orientalism with violent language such as “dominating,” “restructuring,” and “having authority over” to emphasize the repercussions of the West’s extensive influence over non-Western identities. Furthermore, Said reveals the power dynamics involved, and describes the immense amount of control the West must have in order to complete such extensive reconfigurations of foreign societies. *National Geographic* gains its authority by aligning itself with scientific research, and exhibits a broad amount of influence over the portrayal of non-Western individuals and communities. As the third largest subscribed magazine, each issue of *National Geographic* is seen by approximately thirty-seven million people worldwide, revealing

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 81.

²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

the magazine's extensive reach.²⁹ Said further contends that "knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental."³⁰ Since *National Geographic* provides information on foreign countries and its citizens to a largely Western audience, the magazine creates Occidental perceptions of the Orient through the topics it discusses. By identifying as an educational magazine, *National Geographic* participates in the construction of the Orient and the proliferates Orientalist ideas.

Through the circulation of racist and sexist notions of non-Westerners with methods including photography, *National Geographic* has the ability to incite violence against women of color. The repeated artistic portrayals of nude Oriental women as visually available creates the inaccurate belief that non-Western women are physically and sexually available in reality. Art Historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau defines imperialism of representation as "the violence that may inhere in the representational act itself."³¹ David Hiser's 1986 photograph, featured in *National Geographic*'s October issue, displays two young nude women of Mogmog, an island in Ulithi Atoll (fig. 8). The scene takes place in an interior setting with both women pushed to the foreground, their nudity on full display. The woman on the left sits with her legs crossed, wearing only a green skirt around her waist, a colorful beaded necklace, and a watch on her left wrist. She gazes out to her right without acknowledging the viewer's presence, allowing the audience a voyeuristic gaze. Her female companion lies on her side in a reclining pose. She is also nude except for an identical skirt tied around her hips. Her head is propped up by a pillow, allowing her to look up at the viewer with an amiable expression. Although she acknowledges

²⁹ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 2.

³⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

³¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Reconsidering Erotic Photography: Notes for a Project of Historical Salvage," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, by Abigail Solomon-Godeau (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 221.

the audience, her gaze is non-confrontation and does not serve to subvert the objectifying Western male gaze. Hiser's representation renders the two women's nude bodies visually available to the audience, and suggests that non-Western women are physically and sexually available as well.

Hiser's photograph also holds striking similarities with Paul Gauguin's nineteenth-century paintings of Tahitian women. Hiser's subject matter of two nude women of color, one sitting and one lying down, is reminiscent of Gauguin's 1892 painting *Aha oe feii? or Are you jealous?* (fig. 9). Although the figural placements slightly differ, Gauguin's painting also enables visual access to the naked bodies of two women of color. Furthermore, Gauguin's 1897 *Nevermore* (fig. 10), displays a nude Tahitian woman reclining across the horizontal length of the canvas. The woman in Hiser's photograph appears to be a direct quotation of Gauguin's subject as they both lay on their sides while resting their heads on an embroidered pillow. However, the woman in *Nevermore* places her arms in front of her, partially obscuring visibility to her breasts. In contrast, the reclining woman in Hiser's photograph rests her arms downwards, toward her sides, granting the viewer full visual access to her chest. Furthermore, Gauguin's subject does not welcome the audience's engagement, because she brings her hand to her face in a gesture of boredom or annoyance and looks away from the viewer. The young woman in Hiser's photograph looks out at the audience agreeably, allowing for her objectification. In comparison with Gauguin's subject, the photographed woman adheres to Western art traditions of the nude female body more vehemently, allowing the viewer a subjugating gaze.

When the disturbing undertones in Gauguin's painted perceptions of native women are considered, the violence described by Solomon-Godeau becomes even more palpable in Hiser's photograph. While documenting his experiences in Tahiti, Gauguin wrote in the margin of a *Noa*

Noa manuscript, “I saw plenty of calm-eyed women. I wanted them to be willing to be taken without a word, brutally. In a way [it was a] longing to rape.”³² This feeling of entitlement to the bodies of women of color reveals the dangers of Orientalist fantasies that objectify non-Western women. This sexualization at the intersections of race and gender characterize women of color as wholly inferior. These power dynamics, typically involving false knowledge of the Orient, can materialize in real instances of sexual violence. Regardless of Hiser’s role in guiding the poses of the women in his photograph, the display of and emphasis on sexuality, coupled with *National Geographic*’s bolstering notions of progress, contribute to the domination of and violence afflicted upon non-Western populations and women of color in particular.

National Geographic, in the form of its photographers and editors, continues to naturalize the violence and domination present in their discourse. Even in the act of collecting, the owner gains the impression of control over the Orient. When coupled with the illustrated accessibility of women of color, the sense of entitlement enhances. By repeatedly photographing nude women of color, the magazine emphasizes their Otherness due to their bare state, and simultaneously disseminates the stereotype of the erotic, exotic woman while permitting a voyeuristic gaze. In addition, the notion of the camera as objective has historically reinforced these presentations of the Orient as factual reality. When combined with Haraway’s “god trick,” *National Geographic* creates a monolith out of Eastern countries, and reduces them to the few dozen pages of description in the magazine’s archives. *National Geographic* brings the Other just close enough for the magazine’s predominately educated, white, and male demographic to examine their strangeness within the safety of their own homes.

³² Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Pallas Athene Arts, 1972), 23.

Figures



Fig. 1. Lucas Foglia, 2016, Photograph, *National Geographic*.
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2016/01/call-to-wild-text>



Fig. 2. Charlie Hamilton James, 2016, Photograph, *National Geographic*.
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/06/manu-peru-biodiversity-national-parks/>



Fig. 3. *A Bedouin Beauty*, March 1917, photograph, *National Geographic*.



Fig. 4. Jean Geiser, *Jeune femme du Sud*, late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, photograph.



Fig. 5. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Broken Pitcher*, 1771, oil on canvas, 109 X 87 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 6. National Geographic 170, no.4 (1986): 458-459.



Fig. 7. National Geographic 170, no.4 (1986): 460-461.



Fig. 8. David Hiser. 1986, Photograph, *National Geographic* (170), no.4.



Fig. 9. Paul Gauguin, *Aha oe feii?* (*Are you jealous?*), 1892, oil on canvas, 66 X 89 cm, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



Fig. 10. Paul Gauguin, *Nevermore*, 1897, 20 X 46 cm, The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

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