The debates about Said’s ideas on orientalism, as a European discourse of defining the oriental Other and, concomitantly, a self-image, resulted in many theoretical approaches in the various fields of research. For example, Bhabha and Spivak introduce such notions as cultural ‘hybridity’ and ‘subaltern history.’ We will not go into these theories here, but it is important to observe that forms of orientalism were also a source of self-identification, not only for Europeans, but also for decolonized societies and for non-European migrants in Europe. Somehow these forms of postcolonial discourse found ways to deal with orientalist perceptions, or at least with the hybridity that European modernity imposed on them. Not surprisingly, the reservoir of images of the Orient that were derived from the Thousand and one nights played an important role in this process of identification of the boundaries of cultural exchange. In this chapter, we discuss two literary works which were explicitly influenced by the Thousand and one nights as a phenomenon symbolizing processes of cultural integration and differentiation and which discuss the cultural and political implications of seeing the Other through images taken from the Nights. The works include the Shérézade trilogy by the French/Algerian author Leïla Sebbar (b. 1941), consisting of Shérézade 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts (1982); Les carnets de Shérézade (1985); and Le fou de Shérézade (1991), and Sayyidat al-maqam by the Algerian writer Wasini al-A’radj or Waçiny Laredj (b. 1954), published in French as Les ailes de la reine (1993/2009).

Both Leïla Sebbar and Waçiny Laredj are of Algerian origin. It is no coincidence that their work is marked by postcolonial discussions, since Algeria experienced French colonial rule from 1830 until 1962. The colonial past resulted, on the one hand, in a complex cultural heritage with a deep rift between French, Arabic, and Berber languages and orientations, and on the other hand, in a large migrant community in France that struggled to find its place in French-European society. The two works should be read in these contexts, as they address the themes of Algeria’s cultural orientation, response to western cultural influence, and the efforts of Algerian migrants to find their place in the host culture. The questions that are raised deal with the tension between authenticity and adaptation, hybridity and assimilation, multiculturalism and resistance to political repression, social prejudices and discrimination. The
two works have another aspect in common: both refer to non-textual forms of cultural expression, such as painting, music, and dance. Thus, they explore Said's idea that literary, artistic, and political discourses interact and perhaps converge in the orientalist discourse of the Other. Finally, both works treat issues of gender in their various contexts.

Leïla Sebbar: *Shérèzade*

In the European tradition of the *Thousand and one nights*, the figure of Shahrazad is primarily presented as a seductress of stunning beauty and sensuality; in the Arabic versions she may be seductive, but her erudition, her knowledge of ancient books, and her eloquence are just as important. Leïla Sebbar has constructed her trilogy of novels *Shérèzade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts; Les carnets de Shérèzade;* and *Le fou de Shérèzade* on these differing images of the narrator of the *Nights*. As the titles indicate, it is centered around the figure of Shérèzade, a name emphatically synonymous with Shahrazad.

Shérèzade is a seventeen-year old girl from an Algerian family living in France. She runs away from home and is reported missing by her parents. She goes to Paris, where she lives among squatters and marginal youths of various cultural backgrounds. The first novel, *Shérèzade 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, relates that Shérèzade meets Julien Desrosiers, a student of oriental languages and an amateur of orientalist painting. When Julien falls in love with Shérèzade, she refuses to commit herself to him, although she does not altogether discourage him either. The story of the novel is built on episodes of Shérèzade's rather haphazard life among her friends, until she decides to travel to Marseille and her native Algeria. It appears, however, that her friend, who drives the car, is a member of a terrorist group and has filled the trunk with explosives. In an accident, the car explodes, but Shérèzade survives the blast and continues her journey.

The second part of the trilogy, *Les carnets de Shérèzade*, relates how Shérèzade manages to reach Marseille, but finally decides not to travel to Algeria; she ends up hitchhiking north. On her journey, she visits several towns and in the meantime, she tells the truck driver stories about her journey through France. She is finally dropped off in Paris. In the third volume, *Le fou de Shérèzade*, Shérèzade travels to Palestine and Lebanon to prepare herself for a role in a film written by Julien. However, in Beirut she is captured by a militia and held hostage for some time. Meanwhile, Shérèzade's mother and sister come to Paris to look for her, while Julien travels to Jerusalem to find her. There he meets a Jewish girl who resembles her and together they return to Paris to finish the film.