

**Artists of Algerian origin exhibiting in France 1989-2012:
An analysis of selected artists' work and its reception -
the urban, the home and the Arab woman, and the 'global' art world.**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the work of a selected number of artists of Algerian origin who rose to prominence in France between 1989 and 2012 and analyses the reception of their work in French institutions of art. The artists are Adel Abdessemed (b.1971), Kader Attia (b.1970), Fayçal Baghrich (b.1972), Samta Benhyahia (b.1950), Zoulikha Bouabdellah (b.1977), Mohamed Bourouissa (b. 1978), Katia Kameli (b.1973) and Zineb Sedira (b.1963).

This is the first in-depth study on these artists's work within a French exhibiting context and it also represents the first critical analysis of the impact that collective memory, French cultural policies and an emerging discourse of a 'global' art world system has had on the reception of their work. Based upon extensive primary research on the exhibiting practices of French institutions and responses of the French press, alongside interviews with the artists, the thesis engages with art historical, sociological and cultural memory methods in order to examine the emergence and reception of these artist's work. The analysis also brings into focus the aesthetic preoccupations of the artists and their diverse contexts of production.

Chapter one presents a critical overview through a historiography of major exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art between 1989-2012. The following four chapters are structured through themes that are recurrent in the artists's work: the urban, the home and the Arab woman and the global world. Chapter two focuses on Abdessemed and Attia's engagement with urban themes, and questions the impact of collective narratives of the 'banlieue' on their work. Chapter three analyses the representations of the self and the domestic in the early work of Benyahia, Bouabdellah, Kameli and Sedira, and proposes that their critical diasporic narratives problematize the dominant discourses of collective memory in France. An analysis of the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira in chapter four foregrounds the discontinuities and continuities within a 'global' world-order with specific reference to Franco/Algerian crossings.

Overall, through a detailed analysis of the institutional contexts of France and the 'global' art world, the thesis offers an institutional critique arguing that diasporic experiences – evident in the work of artists of Algerian origin – are rarely acknowledged or debated in French institutions, while artistic nationality is over-determined. Informed by Isobel Armstrong's concept of a 'radical aesthetic' and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, the thesis also argues that aesthetics and contexts of production need to be acknowledged in the analyses of the artist's work.

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Introduction

The work of contemporary artists of Algerian origin in France has hitherto received little sustained critical attention in spite of the growing number of exhibitions in France featuring their work.¹ This PhD sets out to analyse the work of a selected number of artists of Algerian origin, who have exhibited and worked in France between 1989 and 2012. It also aims to investigate critically the reception of their work in France in this same period. Hence, in light of the apparent rise of a small number of artists of Algerian origin in France, this PhD addresses two inter-related research questions: how has the work of artists of Algerian origin been received in France between 1989 and 2012? What aesthetic, formal and/or conceptual meanings does the artists' work engage with?² In other words, this thesis critically examines, firstly, the reception of these artists' work through research into institutional discourse and cultural policies in France, and shows them to be emerging as part of an art world system, as well as shaped by collective memory of Franco-Algerian relations. Secondly, this thesis investigates these artists' work in relation to contexts of production as well as aesthetic and/or thematic concerns, to propose interpretations of their work that move beyond the frame of identity politics.

The artists under study are Adel Abdessemed (b. 1971), Kader Attia (b. 1970), Samta Benyahia (b. 1950) and Zineb Sedira (b. 1963); with additional references to the work of Fayçal Baghriche (b.1972), Zoulikha Bouabdellah (b. 1977), Mohamed Bourouissa (b. 1978), Katia Kameli (b. 1973). Benyahia, Baghriche, Bourouissa and Abdessemed were born in Algeria and moved to France to pursue their studies. Bouabdellah was born in Russia, spent her childhood in Algeria, and moved to France as a teenager. Sedira, born in France of Algerian parents, moved to the UK where she attended art school. She is still based in the UK but regularly exhibits in France. Attia and Kameli were born in France of Algerian parents and have continued to be based in the country intermittently. Notwithstanding the twenty-eight years between the birth of Benyahia and that of Bourouissa – which means that these artists do not strictly belong to the same generation – and the fact that a number of

¹ Artists Adel Abdessemed, Kader Attia and Saâdane Afif have featured in exhibitions and anthologies on contemporary French art, which suggests that their work is significant for contemporary French art. These anthologies include *French connection* (Montreuil: Blackjack Editions, 2008).

² These two areas of investigation are inter-related since a more complex analysis of the work of artists of Algerian origin supports the critical investigation into the reception of their work.

the selected artists were born in France and a number in Algeria, these artists represent a distinct body of research. First, they have in common an Algerian heritage and French nationality. Second, they rose to prominence in France between 1989 and 2012. Third, they have all, at one time in their career, engaged with issues of Algerian identity and culture in their work. While these artists' mode of production, aesthetic and thematic concerns do differ - and this thesis seeks to recognise their differences - it investigates, by way of an analysis of these particular artists' work, the impact that Franco-Algerian narratives have had on the reception of contemporary art in France at the specific period 1989-2012.

This thesis argues, through an analysis of institutional discourse and exhibited works by these artists, that the reception of artists of Algerian origin in institutions of art in France between 1989 and 2012 represents a conjuncture of three factors: collective memory of Franco-Algerian relations, national policies for the preservation of culture, and the workings of the 'global' art world system. Research into institutions of culture in France over this period demonstrates that national and cultural identity continues to inform the reception of the work of the artists under study. Research into art institutional discourse outside France suggests that this dominance of national identity in France mirrors a wider rhetoric of identity politics that has arisen out of a predominantly Anglo-American movement of institutional critique in the early 1990s. Meanwhile in France, this thesis proposes, the identity of artists of Algerian origin is often used to fulfil different cultural and political agendas; while the representation of artists of Algerian origin in France suggests cultural diversity, it also serves a unifying cultural discourse of a French nation-state that is incompatible with diasporic narratives of continuity and discontinuity between France and Algeria. Hence, narratives of continuity and discontinuity explored in the work of the artists under study are absent from institutional discourse despite the fact that nationality is over-determined. Equally absent, are aesthetics and contexts of production of the art works under study, which this thesis aims to bring to the fore.

This thesis is the first study of the reception of the work of Adel Abdessemed, Kader Attia, Fayçal Baghrich, Samta Benyahia, Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Mohamed Bourouissa, Katia Kameli and Zineb Sedira. Ramon Tio Bellido, Fanny Gillet Ouhanian, Anissa Bouayed and Malika Dorbani have all written on the subject of

Algerian modern art.³ Hannah Feldman and Anissa Bouayed have written about modern French art that images the Algerian war.⁴ Researching for my MA dissertation I found there to be very little scholarship on the subject of Franco-Algerian contemporary art. It therefore seemed critical to focus on contemporary artistic practices since few scholars have made this the subject of their study. Mansour Abrous is the author of an encyclopaedia of Algerian artists that is the outcome of invaluable research but it remains a list of the dates and cities in which artists have exhibited.⁵ The art historian Fran Lloyd has written about the work of Zineb Sedira, as has Lindsey Moore.⁶ There are several scholars or curators working around the subject in the UK under the umbrella of French Studies. Dr Amanda Crawley Jackson's research interests lie in the built space and contemporary art. Under her direction Sheffield University and the Site Gallery have invited a number of contemporary Algerian artists to work and exhibit in Sheffield. Dr. Siobhan Shilton has published on the Algerian artist Zoulikha Bouabdellah.⁷ Dr. Joseph McGonagle and Dr. Edward Welsh curated a show entitled *New Cartographies: Algeria-France-UK* at the Cornerhouse, Manchester in 2011.⁸ However, the exhibition failed to question the representation of Algerian narratives, or the mediation of contemporary practices. With the exception of Dr. Amanda Crawley

³ Malika Dorbani, 'La guerre d'Algérie et les arts plastiques', in *La guerre d'Algérie 1954-2004 la fin de l'amnésie*, Mohamed Harbi and Benjamin Stora ed. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004); Anissa Bouayed, 'Histoire de la peinture en Algérie: continuum et ruptures', *Confluences Méditerranée*, 81 (February 2012), 163-179; Fanny Gillet-Ouhenia, 'Pratique artistique et régime de l'image dans l'Algérie postcoloniale (1962-1965)', *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, 15 (2011) 71-77; Ramon Tio Bellido, *Le XXème siècle dans l'art Algérien* [exhibition Le XXème siècle dans l'art Algérien, 4 April -15 June 2003, Château Borely, Marseille, 18 July – 28 August 2003, Orangerie du Sénat, Paris] (Paris: Aica Press, 2003).

⁴ Anissa Bouayed, *L'art et l'Algérie insurgée, les traces de l'épreuve 1954-1962* (Enag éditions: Alger, 2005); Hannah, Feldman, 'National negotiations: art, historical experience and the public in Paris, 1945-1962' UMI dissertation services, Colombia University, 2004.

⁵ Manssour Abrous, *Algérie : arts plastiques, dictionnaire biographique (1900-2010)* (Paris: Harmattan, 2011).

⁶ Fran Lloyd, 'Cross-cultural dialogues: identities, contexts and meanings', in *Contemporary Arab women's art: dialogues of the present*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Women's Art Library, 1999); Fran Lloyd, 'Re-making ourselves; art, memories and materialities' in *Displacement and difference, contemporary arab visual culture in the diaspora*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Saffron Books, 2001) Lindsey Moore, 'Minding the gap: migration, diaspora, exile and return in women's visual media' in *Contemporary art in the Middle East* (London: Black Dog Press, 2009); Lindsey Moore, *Arab, muslim, women, voice and vision in postcolonial literature and film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷ Shiobán Shilton, 'Belly dancing to the Marseillaise, Zoulikha Bouabdeballa's Dansons', in *Zoulikha Bouadellah Soft Transgression* (Paris : Gold Digger Editions la BANK, 2010); Shiobán Shilton, 'Belly dancing to the Marseillaise, Zoulikha Bouadeballa's Dansons', *Contemporary French & Francophone Studies: SITES*, 12 (4) (2008), 437 – 444.

⁸ The artists shown were Amina Menia, Bruno Boudjelal, John Perivolaris, Kader Attia, Katia Kameli, Omar D, Sophie Elbaz, Yves Jeanmougin, Zineb Sedira and Zineddine Bessaï.

Jackson, the research undertaken by these scholars is informed by postcolonial studies first and foremost, by virtue of their literary rather than art historical background. These studies thus preferred themes of history and identity over art historical methods and questions of aesthetics and production.

In France there have been few studies on the work of artists of Algerian origin. Emily Goudal is submitting a thesis on the subject of modern Algerian art. The historian Anissa Bouayed has written about modern and contemporary artists. The critics Larys Frogier, Elizabeth Lebovici, Jean-Louis Pradel and Fatma Zohra Zamoum are regular commentators on the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira and have followed their rise. This thesis thus occurs at the propitious moment when a number of artists of Algerian origin receive institutional acclaim, but have not yet been the subject of art historical scholarship.⁹

In December 2011, in the early stages of my research I was invited to Algiers. The first time I opened the shutters on the expanse of sea in the bay of Algiers it felt as if I were gazing once more at a familiar vista. From the balcony of my room at the hotel Esafir where Sedira filmed *Saphir* (2006), the concrete breakwater blocks of Attia's photographic series *Rochers Carrés* (2009) were just out of sight. Shipping liners floated through the azure as a continuous reminder of trade and passage. This reminded me of Kameli's video installation *Dissolution* (2009), in which the image of passing ships becomes blurred, as they glide past an area of hot fumes in front of the camera. Seeing the places where these art works were produced brought about a significant change of approach to my research. No longer could I consider *Saphir*, *Rochers Carrés* or *Dissolution* as signifiers of an unknown place. As I became acquainted with the landscape and cityscape of Algiers, I observed the singularities that define Attia, Kameli and Sedira's artistic processes. Until then I had considered, instead, the work of artists of Algerian origin first and foremost for the political and societal contexts that their work related to. I had considered their work for the places that were represented, rather than their aesthetics, or the artists' selection of media

⁹ For example, in late 2010 Sedira was shown at the Palais de Tokyo; *Gardiennne d'Images* was the first exhibition of her work in a national museum of art in the centre of Paris. That same year the MAC in Marseille held the first French retrospective of her work. In 2012 the Centre Pompidou held the first French retrospective of Abdessemed's work: *Je suis innocent*. That same year Attia's work was shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne of Paris and he also presented his work during an accompanying conference. In 2013 Attia and Sedira will feature as part of the festival *Marseille Capitale Européenne de la Culture*.

and form.

The academic pathway that I followed prior to this thesis has relevance here. My interest in Algerian contemporary art and the work of artists of Algerian origin arose through studying Art History and Algerian literature as an undergraduate. My early analyses of these artists' work were influenced by scholarship on literary theory and 'littérature francophone';¹⁰ arguably over-determining political, historical and societal issues. In the early stages of this thesis, I aimed to build upon my MA thesis on the work of Bouabdellah and Franco-Algerian memories by researching into both modern and contemporary art from Algeria and its diaspora in terms of political and historical contexts.

Upon returning from Algiers, I realised that the political tropism through which I had considered artists of Algerian origin was commonly upheld in institutions of art across Western Europe under the terms of identity politics.¹¹ I returned to texts of Hal Foster and the writing of Hito Steyerl, and found a deep resonance to my changed perspective in a text written by Samuel Herzog on the reception of artists from the Middle East and North Africa.¹² I began to focus research on the reception of the work of artists of Algerian origin in France, and to apply art historical methods in more depth, through consideration of historical and socio-economic contexts of production, as well as creative processes and aesthetics. Consequently, this thesis observes the specificities of the visual and the workings of the art world system.¹³

The art object must be considered as visual objects in terms of contexts of production, circulation and reception to work against any form of 'exoticism'. If, as the art historians Lotte Philipsen and Charlotte Bydler argue, the art object is autonomous from real-life because it is dependent on the art market as a system of

¹⁰ 'Littérature Francophone' refers to literature written in French, by authors from non-French origin, usually originating from ex-colonial countries.

¹¹ Tropism is a scientific term that defines the forced bending of an object away from one entity and towards another. I use the expression 'political tropism' to describe an induced or forced move towards discussions of political issues in art, and away from other interpretative frames, such as aesthetic concerns or institutional critique.

¹² Samuel Herzog, 'Art Global: perception locale' in *Créations artistiques contemporaines en pays d'Islam: des arts en tensions*, Jocelyne Dakhliya ed. (Paris: Editions Kimé, 2006).

¹³ By contrast, I contend that analyses dependent on postcolonial and literary studies often disregard specificities of the visual, and the workings of the art world system. For more on this subject see Mark Crinson, 'Fragments of Collapsing Space: Postcolonial Theory and Contemporary Art' in *A companion to contemporary art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

circulation and in ascribing value, then we must indeed be careful not to make the art work the representative of themes of everyday life over and above artistic specificities.¹⁴ Philipsen is critical of exhibitions that present real-life situations as thematic statements and art works as a 'mere illustration of their subject matter'.¹⁵ Similarly, Hal Foster in *Recodings*, published in 1985, cautioned against interpreting artistic practices as merely *presenting* what they aim to criticise. The 'presentative' artwork does not question the complex web of memories that it embodies. Foster argued that the presentative artwork, coerced by institutional discourse, renders the artwork iconic, ahistorical and objectified.¹⁶ Philipsen contends that in response to institutional critique of the late 1990's, real life situations were incorporated into institutions of art as a form of critique. The tendency to exhibit political art has replaced rather than accompanied much institutional critique, while in the absence of institutional critique a political tropism has occurred; and this political tropism is especially prominent with the exhibition of non-Western or diasporic artistic practices. It is this political tropism that the thesis attempts to work around by foregrounding analyses with a study of contexts of production and reception. Philipsen argues that in exhibiting non-Western artists there has been a turn towards what she terms 'ethnic politics'.¹⁷ In other words, collective narratives of antagonism, predicated by popularised notions of postcoloniality, have obscured any sense of inter-dependency between Western and non-Western cultures and societies in the exhibition of art. Chapter four especially attempts to demonstrate the continuities and discontinuities between France and Algeria, working against narratives of antagonism.¹⁸

¹⁴ Art becomes autonomous from reality as soon as it enters the institution of art. The autonomy of the art world system is overlooked, however, by critics who ascribe political agency to art and artists, such as Nicholas Bourriaud, who claims that art can stage real life situations; like Rirkrit Tiravanija who with *Soup/noSoup* (2012) distributed soup as a prelude to the exhibition *Intense Proximité* outside the Grand Palais in Paris.¹⁴ Claire Bishop, like Lotte Philipsen, is critical of this view that art can have political agency. Bishop argues that Bourriaud fails to consider that the works of art he analyses cannot have any political impact for they do not explore the political tensions that exist in all relations between peoples and systems. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon : Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

Charlotte Bydler, Bydler, Charlotte, *The global art world inc : on the globalization of contemporary art* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 2004).

¹⁵ Lotte Philipsen, *Globalizing contemporary art: the art world's new internationalism* (2010) Aarhus: (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010), p.167.

¹⁶ Hal Foster, *Recodings, art, spectacle and cultural politics* (Washington: Bay Press, 1985), p.155

¹⁷ Lotte Philipsen, *Globalizing contemporary art: the art world's new internationalism* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ In working against narratives of antagonism I seek to distance this research from postcolonial

This thesis combines art historical methodologies and theories of cultural memory. As shown in my MA dissertation *Dancing memory*, cultural memory enables a deeper understanding of social and cultural discourse that shape the production and consumption of art objects.¹⁹ In this sense, cultural memory echoes Arjun Appadurai's appeal to treat the cultural rather than culture. Appadurai states:

This point can be summarized in the following form: culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference.²⁰

Like cultural memory, art inhabits private and public realms and enlists private and public narratives in the experience of making and looking. Indeed, viewing art is more often than not a public experience, but draws on both public and private narratives. It is an experience that is mediated by institutional rhetoric, and the private narratives of each viewing individual.²¹ Cultural memory is useful therefore, as a paradigm through which to analyse the ways in which narratives circulate within institutions of art. It acknowledges the dynamic nature of cultural meaning and suggests that minority narratives can effect upon dominant narratives. In this thesis I use cultural memory as an analytical model to demonstrate how minority narratives of artists of Algerian origin can question collective memory.

In particular, I analyse collective narratives of Algerian populations and culture in France at the juncture of public imagination and institutional discourse. The idea of collective memory is dependent on the writings of Halbwachs, who

methodology. Postcolonial methods are not adapted to the socio-economic or historical context of the field under study, while I do acknowledge that postcolonial scholarship by influential figures such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Edward Saïd or Gayatri Spivak have ushered in an opening to African, or Indian art in Western institutions. Furthermore, while relations between France and Algeria are postcolonial in the strictest terms because Algeria was a French colony, artists of Algerian origin are not concerned with reclaiming a history written by a coloniser. The artists under study do not examine the colonial era in their work. Anne Donadey argues that the problem with the term postcolonial is that it defines a timeframe rather than political and power relations. Finally, postcolonial theory, influenced by readings of the work of Saïd, emphasise trauma and fracture in postcolonial societies. By contrast, in chapter 3 and 4, I argue against the notion that migration is lived as a traumatic exile or as a rupture, but insist that migration is a productive experience, and one of continuity as well as discontinuity. Anne Donadey, *Recasting postcolonialism, women writing between worlds* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Alice Planel, 'Dancing memory', in *Zoulikha Bouadellah soft transgression* (Paris: Gold Digger Editions la BANK, 2010).

²⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large, cultural dimensions of globalisation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1996).

²¹ Fran Lloyd, 'Cross-Cultural Dialogues: Identities, Contexts and Meanings', in *Contemporary Arab women's art: dialogues of the present*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Women's Art Library, 1999), p.144.

argues that remembering is shaped by the collective. In essence, in 'Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire', Halbwachs writes that the importance ascribed to memories is dependent on collective narratives. Drawing on the scholarship of Durkheim, Halbwachs proposed that the unity of any given society is dependent on continuity of collective memory. Where collective memory is revealed to be more problematic, is when the past is translated through collective memory to consolidate the social body. As Barbara Misztal contends, memory that legitimises a mnemonic group through a unique history can serve nationalistic ends. Equally, Paul Ricoeur argues that particular groups remember and forget to secure the group's future in history, by way of a commonly envisioned future.²²

The workings of collective memory as a history to secure the past and legitimise the existence of a nation-state, is epitomised by the way in which the Franco-Algerian war has been remembered in France, or more precisely the absence of official commemoration and the active neglect of narratives of the war of 1954-1962 even as it happened. Yet, of vital importance to this thesis is the fact that while collective memory of the war was obscured, it continues to influence contemporary society with regards to public opinion on immigration, 'French exceptionalism', and multiculturalism. Thus, while this thesis is concerned with contemporary artistic production, it builds on the studies of Kristin Ross, Hannah Feldman and Daniel Sherman who, in turn, have sought to juxtapose histories of decolonisation and modernity in France.²³ Processes of decolonisation, immigration, and contemporary cultural policies are not to be disassociated. In this respect, Feldman argues that the first Biennale de Paris in 1959 responded to the dissolution of the French Empire and post-war plans for economic reconstruction at the behest of America. Under Andre Malraux's pen, Feldman demonstrates, Paris was presented as a site of both aesthetic and global importance; an alternative to Soviet Russia and the USA, purged of its empirical heritage and World War II collaboration through France's association with the concept of liberty.²⁴ Similarly, exhibitions like *La Force de l'Art* in 2006

²² Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory and forgetting', in *Questioning Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

²³ Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies: decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (New York and Cambridge: The MIT press, 1996); Feldman, Hannah, 'National Negotiations: Art, Historical Experience and the Public in Paris, 1945-1962' (UMI dissertation services, Columbia University, 2004); Daniel J. Sherman, *French primitivism and the ends of empire 1945-1975* (Chicago and London: The university of Chicago Press, 2011).

²⁴ Hannah Feldman, 'National negotiations: art, historical experience and the public in Paris, 1945-1962' UMI dissertation services, Colombia University, 2004, p.86.

proposed a multiculturalist view of artistic production in France to uphold the status of French art in the face of anti-immigration laws, while ethnic myths are used to explain societal problems, but Franco-Algerian memories are ignored.

Memories of the Franco-Algerian war are especially contentious because before independence in 1962 and during colonisation, Algeria was regarded as integral to France – it had the status of a French region rather than that of a colony. Algeria only won its independence by entering into a war with France that lasted from 1954 to 1962 when the treaty of Evian was signed. Terrorist acts committed on either side by the OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète) and the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) during the war, and routine use of torture by the French army, have further complicated narratives of remembrance. The Franco-Algerian war is now the subject of extensive historical scholarship and its place in the collective memories of France and Algeria has been the subject of studies by Stora et al.²⁵ However, the history of decolonisation was not recognised in France until recently, the title 'guerre d'Algérie' to describe the Franco-Algerian war dates to 1999.

In 2003, when memories of the Franco-Algerian war began to resurface, Sedira created *Retelling Histories* (2003) and *Mother, Father and I* (2003).²⁶ In these two videos she interviewed her parents recounting their experiences of the war and immigration. These videos are significant for two reasons. Firstly, they reveal how deep-seated memories of the Franco-Algerian war remain: when exhibited in Vallauris in 2010, the videos were highly criticised by 'Harkis' associations and the authorities shut the exhibition down on 22 April, only reopening the exhibition in August.²⁷ Secondly, the video demonstrates how both the French and Algerian community have neglected these memories. These videos represent rare references to

²⁵ Stora, Benjamin, *La Gangrène et l'oubli* (Paris: Edition la Découverte, 2005).

²⁶ Sedira states this fact in an interview with McGonagle. Joseph McGonagle and Zineb Sedira, 'Translating differences: an interview with Zineb Sedira', *Signs, New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture*, 31 (3) (Spring 2006), 617-628.

In 2002 the Memorial National de la Guerre d'Algérie was inaugurated. In 2003 the 25 September is decreed a national day in homage to the Harki population and those who fought alongside France during the Algerian war.

²⁷ 'Zineb Sedira bâillonnée à Vallauris', *Libération*, 30 April, 2010, accessed from Kamel Mennour Gallery; Bernard Génies, 'Zineb Sedira, L'expo interdite', *le Nouvel Observateur*, 13-19 May, 2010, p.9; Maurice Ulrich, 'Une censure d'un autre temps au Musée Picasso de Vallauris', *l'Humanité*, 3 May, 2010, available online at lhumanite.fr, accessed September 2010; Florence Buades, 'L'artiste Zineb Sedira toujours privée d'exposition à Vallauris', *Nice Matin*, 06 May, 2010, available online at nicematin.com, accessed September 2010; 'Réhabilitation à Vallauris', *l'Humanité*, 5 August, 2010, available online at lhumanite.fr, accessed September 2010; Ligue des droits de l'Homme (association for the rights of man), www.idh-france.org/La-mairie-de-Vallauris-de-doit-pas For comments of Harkis associations see www.harkisduvar.com, www.BabelOuedStory.com.

the war in the work of artists of Algerian origin who were raised in France or studied there. In part, this is because Algerian histories have featured little in artistic production in France. An analysis of art and films produced between 1954 to 1962 reveals that, even at that time, narratives of the war were limited. As Jean-Pierre Rioux writes, there was no *J'accuse* no *Guernica* associated with the Franco-Algerian war.²⁸

A large number of French films indirectly refer to the Franco-Algerian war. However, films such as *Le Petit Soldat* (1963) by Godard and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) by Agnès Varda, testify to the fact that public concern towards the war was generally limited to the reportage of acts of terrorism and the drafting of soldiers.²⁹ Eveline Desbois comments upon the fact that in seven years of war the *Actualités Françaises* responsible for the circulation of news footage in cinemas throughout the country, presented only 28 newsreels on the subject of the war.³⁰ It appears that the French population was largely unconcerned with the war and were open to negotiations with the Algerian provisional government the GPRA before governing bodies and the military were prepared to relinquish control. Statistics quoted by Charles Robert Averon support the argument that the French population was largely pacifist, on the grounds that the war upset its everyday life.³¹ Kristin Ross' complex analysis of post-war modernisation of French society associates this phenomenon with the process of decolonisation. She argues that the modernisation and privatisation of everyday life went hand in hand with a national agenda to bring stability to the French postcolonial nation-state.³² This politicised view serves to explain why narratives of the war were overlooked even during the period of 1954-1962.

Sirinelli and Rioux have argued that debates about the war within intellectual circles did not spread to the rest of society except for the occasions in which,

²⁸ Jean-Pierre Rioux, Jean-Francois Sirinelli, 'La guerre d'Algérie et les Français', *Cahiers de L'Institut d'Histoire et du Temps*, (10 November 1988), p.32.

²⁹ Worker's unions such as the CGT were perhaps the most vocal in their support of the rights of Algerians. The CGT formed strong ties with Algerian workers, many of whom were unionised; as is dramatised in the novel *Elise et la vraie vie* by Claire Etcherelli.

³⁰ Eveline Desbois, 'Des images en quarantaine', in *La guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, Jean-Pierre Rioux ed., Colloque de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Paris: Editions Arthene Fayard, 1990)

³¹ Charles Averon, L'Opinion Française à travers les sondages, in *La guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, Jean-Pierre Rioux ed., Colloque de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Paris: Editions Arthene Fayard, 1990).

³² Kristin Ross makes the correlation between the rise of a consumerist society and the politics of decolonisation. She reveals to what extent privatisation, modernism and the breakdown of traditional labour retrenched social meaning upon capitalist values, and images of the ideal home and the ideal couple. Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies, decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995), p.89.

attracted by the sensationalist aspect of the debates or petitions, they featured in the press.³³ However, it seems that during the period 1954-1962 there was little public or intellectual debate. As the war progressed, intellectuals did respond to the situation in Algeria and Sirinelli recounts how opinions within intellectual circles became polarised. In autumn 1960 Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and other signatories voiced their support for Algerian independence by signing the 'manifeste des 121'.³⁴ In October, the 'manifeste des intellectuels français' counted 300 signatories and decried the earlier manifesto as an act of treason because these intellectuals had supported the Algerian cause.³⁵ These 300 signatories rallied behind the idea of French culture as a means of emancipation and liberty. Rioux writes of a nationalisation of intellectual concerns.³⁶ Indeed, even Sartre in his preface for Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre*, published in 1961, urged the European reader to take heed of Fanon's lesson, to save Europe from 'death's door', to save France.³⁷

Turning to the art world at the time, the extent to which aesthetic concerns were prioritized over content in the leading art magazine *Cimaise* assured that most artists' work was interpreted as such. Masson, Cremoni or Lapoujade were politically motivated artists and actively supported the Algerian cause, as Anissa Bouayed's study *L'art et l'Algérie insurgée* reveals.³⁸ However, reviews of their work in *Cimaise* show that these artists were nonetheless perceived through the prism of aesthetics only. With few exceptions, artists associated with 'Nouveau Réalisme' and 'Abstraction Lyrique' - two movements promoted by *Cimaise* and the critic Pierre Restany - demonstrated aesthetic rather than political concerns. The fact that few artists made the Franco-Algerian war the subject of their work is also explained by the social and cultural separation between French and Algerian artists working in

³³ *La guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, Jean-Pierre Rioux ed., Colloque de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Paris : Editions Arthene Fayard, 1990).

³⁴ It was published abroad, and censored in France. Sections were published in *Le Monde* throughout September 1960.

³⁵ *La guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, Jean-Pierre Rioux ed., Colloque de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Paris : Editions Arthene Fayard, 1990).

³⁶ Jean-Pierre Rioux, Jean-François Sirinelli, 'La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français', *Cahiers de L'Institut d'Histoire et du Temps*, (10 November 1988), p.25.

³⁷ "You see, I, too, am incapable of ridding myself of subjective illusions; I, too, say to you: 'All is lost, unless...' As a European, I steal the enemy's book, and out of it I fashion a remedy for Europe. Make the most of it." p.12.

"In other days France was the name of a country. We should take care that in 1961 it does not become the name of a nervous disease." p.25.

Jean-Paul Sartre, preface in Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

³⁸ Anissa Bouayed, *L'art et l'Algérie insurgée, les traces de l'épreuve 1954-1962* (Alger: Enag editions, 2005).

Paris. Artists living and working in Paris during the Franco-Algerian war would not have been aware of political events through the testimonies of Algerian artists. There were a number of artists and writers of Algerian origin in Paris at the time, but accounts of collaboration between French nationals and Algerians are rare. Most literature on Algerian artists who worked in Paris during this period state the influence that the Parisian art scene had on their practices but it is difficult to assess the extent to which these artists were present within the art world as they go unreported.³⁹

To summarise, Franco-Algerian memories have failed to a great extent to attract the attention of filmmakers, intellectuals, artists and critics.⁴⁰ This absence is keenly felt in French society where Franco-Algerian narratives remain controversial. Despite diplomatic endeavours such as the festival of Algerian culture *Djazzair 2003*, which I discuss in chapter one, and cultural events commemorating the 50 year anniversary of the 'accords d'Evian' in 2012, it remains difficult in France to envision a shared history, as the historian Alec Hargreaves observes.⁴¹ Indeed, Algerian populations are still seen as other because shared pasts have not been acknowledged until very recently.

The exclusion of a minority group - here the Algerian community - from

³⁹ Studying the geographic context of Paris from 1954 to 1961 by mapping important galleries, art schools and institutions frequented by both French and Algerian artists, my research has shown these two social groups occupied different areas and therefore had little contact with each other. A study of the galleries reviewed in Cimaïse show these galleries to be concentrated in the 6th and the 8th district of Paris, except for the gallery Colette Allendy. Artists of Algerian origin were not shown in this district, apart from the gallery Transposition which exhibited Khadda in 1961, and the gallery Cimaïse who exhibited Benanteur - two galleries in the 6th district and around the corner from the reputable gallery Jeanne Bucher. As members of the North African community Algerian artists were subject to the same curfews and geographic segregation as was the wider Algerian population at the time; as Benamar Mediène, historian and personal friend of modern Algerian painter M'hamed Issiakhem, stated in email communication. By contrast today, artists of Algerian origin living or working in France are exhibited in major institutions in France and abroad, and are seen to represent French contemporary art. Nevertheless, the galleries Anne de Villepoix, Kamel Mennour or Michel Rein that represent, or have represented, several of these artists are 'galleries-leaders', to use a term coined by Alain Quémén, it is problematic that diasporic artists seem to attract the attention of only certain gallerists who are more often than not committed to show several artists of diasporic origin. This suggests that diasporic artists remain a specialised 'niche' interest, despite the fact that their work has little in common aesthetically.

⁴⁰ An exception of note is Pontecorvo's film *La bataille d'Alger*.

⁴¹ *Memory, empire and postcolonialism. legacies of French colonialism*, Alec Hargreaves ed. (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005).

The 50th anniversary was marked by several large-scale exhibitions in Paris. The Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration exhibited *Vies d'Exil 1954-1962, des Algériens en France pendant la guerre d'Algérie*; the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme exhibited *Juifs d'Algérie*; and the Musée de l'Armée exhibited *Algérie (1830-1962)*. Paradoxically, when analysed together these exhibitions seem to re-inforce the parity between French and Algerian memory; two of the three exhibiting institutions are concerned with minority groups – and the third proved to be highly controversial.

cultural and historical representation is furthermore rooted within the rapid development of contemporary French culture and society post-World War II. As Ross argues, the 'logic of (racial) exclusion' that neglects to consider memories of decolonisation within histories of France's modernisation is entrenched within the very process of fast-paced capitalist modernisation. She writes:

One of the arguments of this book is that the very logic of (racial) exclusion that would "keep the stories separate" is itself the outcome of the accelerated capitalist modernisation the French state undertook in those years. The new contemporary racism centering on questions of immigration is, (...), a racism that has its roots in the era of decolonization and modernization (...).⁴²

Effectively, racism sparked by immigration, differences of colour and religion and directed at the Maghreban community as a whole – community of first, second or third generation immigration from the former French colonies of Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia in the Maghreb - is rooted in decolonisation and more specifically its effect on narratives of French modernisation. As will be discussed in chapter two populations of the Maghreb suffer anti-immigrant sentiment far more than other immigrant populations.⁴³

For the purpose of this thesis I consider Algerian narratives separately from Maghreban culture or identity; yet the exclusion from collective memory which I discuss in this thesis is relevant to the study of all Maghreban communities and cultures.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in France great ambiguities remain between the Algerian community and the greater Maghreban community since certain members of these communities have in common a religion, Islam, and an ethnic origin, Arab.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Franco-Algerian relations in the post-war era - woven into the fabric of contemporary French society as Ross determines - explain why Algerian narratives remain especially problematic to French collective memory.

There is therefore a further motive to questioning collective memory. It is through memory, Fran Lloyd argues, that we locate ourselves as social subjects.⁴⁶ Thus, dominant memory has a great impact on minority populations. Homi Bhabha

⁴² Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies, decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995), p.9.

⁴³ Patrick Simon, 'Le logement des immigrés', *Ecarts d'identité*, 80 (March 1997), 5-7.

⁴⁴ A parallel could thus be drawn in further studies between artists of Moroccan origin for example, and the findings of this thesis concerning artists of Algerian origin.

⁴⁵ It must be noted that the Maghreban community is a complex construct of Arab and other ethnicities such as the Berbère.

⁴⁶ Fran Lloyd, 'Cross-cultural dialogues: identities, contexts and meanings', in *Contemporary Arab women's art: dialogues of the present*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Women's Art Library, 1999), p.139.

has urged that nation-states be considered as a continuous process, by which the body politic is shaped by the cultural memories of its changing population. To this effect, in *Nation and narration* he attempts to demonstrate that the 'other' is always within.⁴⁷ Indeed, cultural and collective memory must be constantly ascribed new meaning or it will befall the fate of national myths which often de-legitimise minority memories. Ricoeur has demonstrated how collective memory is often rooted in narratives that do violence another group. In a postcolonial world it is often the case that these groups exist within the body politic. The absence of much discourse about France's colonial past and the process of decolonisation in Algeria shaped Algerian and French identities as mutually exclusive or even antagonistic identities. This phenomenon is key to understanding the reception of artists of Algerian origin in France today. By contrast, this thesis demonstrates that the 'other' is also within.

Cultural memory is a useful paradigm through which to question collective memory. However, cultural memory has limitations. Michael Rothberg advocates readings of a multi-directional memory dependent on what he terms a counter-public.⁴⁸ Rothberg's hypothesis offers a means of bringing critical cultural memory to the fore, but it also shows the limitations of cultural memory by emphasising the value of a counter-public. His idea of a multi-directional memory mediates between different narratives or communities, and between publics and counter-publics. A counter-public, according to Rothberg, is a community that professes cultural difference from a norm, to attempt to question this norm.⁴⁹ Allison Landsberg describes another process of cultural memory by which an individual 'sutures' himself/herself into another historical narrative through an experiential site such as a museum in *Prosthetic memory: the transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture*. She names this phenomenon the prosthetic memory.⁵⁰ The prosthetic memory, she argues, can transform an individual's understanding of

⁴⁷ Homi Bhabha, *Nation and narration* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.4.

⁴⁸ Michael Rothberg, 'Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional Memory and the Counter-public Witness', *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 2006).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "In this process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics" Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory: the transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p.2.

another subject and bring about an ethical shift through knowledge and empathy.⁵¹ However, I argue that the success of transmission in terms of a cognitive or ethical shift is dependent on the presence of counter-publics.

Thus, while Landsberg argues that prosthetic memory can give rise to new subjectivities and even new political opinions, I propose that this is dependent on where memories are experienced; and the notion of a counter-public is problematic when it comes to national institutions of art. National institutions of art are first and foremost at the service of the nation-state. The national institution of art especially is an ambiguous space; a specific institutional context into which myriad individual narratives are projected – individual narratives of its exhibiting artists and the visiting audience. Museums are commonly perceived to be sites of intellectual authority and authenticity, so that their visiting public is less likely to question the narratives found within, unless encouraged to do so explicitly, as I will argue is the case in the museum of immigration Le Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in chapter one. Herman Lebovics, in *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* defines the notion of 'cultural wrappings' to explain the layers of meaning that are inscribed upon museums and cultural institutions.⁵² Lebovics' concept is useful in conceiving of the ways in which institutions of culture may influence the experience of the public. In light of the wrappings that occur in a museum or institution of art, it is perhaps not a site that is conducive to the formation of counter-publics.

Interestingly, Landsberg argues that the grafting of prosthetic memories happens at the point of rupture, when the transmission of memory is suddenly interrupted. This argument has relevance here since the French public at large has experienced a collective rupture in cultural memory during the Franco-Algerian war and since.⁵³ Within the void left by the history of colonisation and the Algerian war of independence, societal problems linked to the immigration of Algerian populations have seemingly grafted themselves within the collective imagination. In questioning collective memory and in bringing the ethical shift that Landsberg observes to the fore in chapter two, I draw upon the notion of a 'radical aesthetic' put

⁵¹ "As this book will demonstrate, prosthetic memory creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the 'other'. Ibid, p.9.

⁵² Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁵³ Benjamin Stora testifies to this in *La gangrène et l'oubli* (Paris: Edition la Découverte, 2005).

forward by Isobel Armstrong, discussed below.

In the wake of the recent 2012 7th Berlin Biennale and the 'occupy movement' there has been much discussion of the relation between politics and art in the art press.⁵⁴ In this thesis I refer to the political not in the sense of the affairs of the government deriving from the Aristotelian *politika*, but of the *politikos* as the affair of city, systems and citizens. I use the term political and depoliticised in chapter one and two to refer to the ways in which art allows a critique of systems of the state and the art world. Like Philipsen, I therefore propose that aesthetics and politics are not mutually exclusive. Effectively, I argue in chapter two, three and four, that it is through aesthetics that the work of Attia, Abdessemed, Kameli, Benyahia and Sedira is politicised. Here, I am indebted to Isobel Armstrong's *The radical aesthetic*, that I discuss particularly in chapter two.⁵⁵ In this text published in 2000, as well as offering a re-reading of aesthetic theory, she outlines what a radical theory of the aesthetic might actually be. Consequently, in this thesis art practices are not thought to directly implement a political aesthetic. In other words, I do not impose political meaning upon these artists' work. Instead, I suggest *readings* of these practices that can reveal a radical aesthetic.

Armstrong draws on the notion of the broken middle. For Armstrong aesthetic experience is an experience of equivocation, which transcends any post-modern emphasis on binaries. Instead, it forms a triune experience where the 'middle' is the 'irresolvable' point between two opposites, and the movement between different positions allows for knowing and discovery. Armstrong also draws upon Hegel's conception of mediation. Mediation for Hegel, Armstrong argues, is the representation and repetition of 'pre-existing forms'.⁵⁶ The aesthetic would thus be a 'form of knowing', or the effect of thought and feeling on the world.⁵⁷ Armstrong does away with the separation between knowledge and affect. She argues, through a close reading of John Dewey, that the basis of a radical aesthetic has to be rooted in a democratic experience of art, open to interpretations of a wide *demos*. "It (art) does not consist in achieved form, which would become finitude, but in the experience of

⁵⁴ Jennifer Allen, 'A taste of Politics', *Frieze*, Issue 148, June-August 2012.

Jennifer Higgle, 'Shouts and murmurs', *Frieze*, Issue 149, September 2012.

⁵⁵ Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.60.

making form, an experience distributed across makers and perceivers.”⁵⁸ Armstrong thus corroborates the idea of a performative act of viewing art in which meaning is shaped through the negotiation between the art object and the viewer, explored in the anthology of Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, for example.⁵⁹ Armstrong lends a further inflection to this notion, however, in emphasising the radical nature of this aesthetic experience.

In *The radical aesthetic* Armstrong contradicts what she perceives to be an opposition in the writing of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze between immediacy and mediation. For the purpose of this thesis I want to reconcile Deleuze and Armstrong through a broader notion of a dynamic experience of knowing and feeling by drawing on the field of cultural memory. The Deleuzian notion of the 'rhizome' as it is defined in *Mille plateaux*, is another corner stone of chapter two. It is defined by three principles. The principal of 'connection and heterogeneity': any point of the rhizome can connect with any other point. The principle of multiplicity: the multiple is wholly substantive and myriad. The principle of insignificant rupture, and the principle of copy: the rhizome has no structure that can be reproduced. Deleuze and Ghattari write: “It (the rhizome) does not have a beginning or an end, but always a middle, from where it grows and spills out.”⁶⁰ The Deleuzian 'rhizome' mirrors the workings of cultural memory, a multitude of grafted narratives both private and public that resurface at different moments.

Armstrong argues that Deleuze disregards the broken middle. Meanwhile, I deviate from Armstrong in her conception of the broken middle as a necessary site of creative anxiety, and the emphasis placed on loss. Armstrong argues that form is dependent on memory. “Form is achieved through the use of the past and therefore through the use of remembered emotion and reflection”.⁶¹ However, she argues that the aesthetic is expressed through a traumatic experience in which cultural memory is a disjunction. I argue, by contrast, that cultural memory is a dynamic and collective process and am thus drawn to Deleuze and Guattari's 's idea of the 'rhizome' since, for Deleuze and Guattari, the 'rhizome' is the site of a multitude of

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.165.

⁵⁹ *Performing the body/performing the text*, Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

⁶⁰ “Il n'a pas de commencement ni de fin, mais toujours un milieu, par lequel il pousse et déborde.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2, mille plateaux* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1980), p.31.

⁶¹ Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford : Blackwell, 2000), p.165.

'agencement'.⁶² In essence, based on a wider and rhizomorphic understanding of cultural memory, we need not limit the transformative or creative agency of aesthetics to the experience of traumatic memory. Notwithstanding this emphasis on trauma and loss, Armstrong's 'middle' is useful to this thesis because she gives particular significance to the site of meeting or juncture. Armstrong's 'juncture' creates what Deleuze would name the 'ligne de fuite' (vanishing point). Armstrong defines this movement between a juncture and further meaning as an experience of radical aesthetics. This middle, or juncture, is also in this thesis the site of diasporic narratives.

Despite the emphasis placed on collective narratives and historical and socio-cultural conjectures in this thesis, the artists under study are not to be considered as a movement. They do not claim a common identity, are not exhibited together as a group, nor are their practices framed by identity politics. Hence, this thesis differs from publications of the same period on black British art such as 'Welcome to the Jungle' in 1994, or the volume *Shades of black* in 2005.⁶³ This thesis is shaped by the fact that in France, the representation of identities in institutions of art is dependent on very different notions of national culture and cultural policies than in the UK or America. Firstly, in France an emphasis is placed on supporting or preserving 'French art' in institutions of art, in contrast perhaps to UK institutions. The critic Christine Rupero argues: "Paris has seen some desperate gestures to promote what could be called the 'French scene' (...)." ⁶⁴ The promotion of 'French art' mirrors preservationist principles of 'l'exception Française' or 'l'exception culturelle' that date back to post WWII cultural politics of Andre Malraux, and the inception of the Ministry of Culture in 1953. Hence, 'multicultural' artistic practices are shown to support a 'French art scene'. Second, if as Kobena Mercer argues, in the UK the de-marginalisation of black British culture redefined British culture, the situation in France differs greatly.⁶⁵ French-ness is not so readily redefined since French culture

⁶² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2, mille plateaux* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1980).

⁶³ *Shades of black*, David Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce ed. (London: Duke University Press, 2005); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the jungle: new positions in Black cultural studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁶⁴ Cristina Ricupero, 'Paris', *Frieze*, 117, september 2008, available online at frieze.com, accessed May 2012.

⁶⁵ Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the jungle: new positions in Black cultural studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.27.

is subject to preservationist principles as the historian Serge Regourd argues.⁶⁶ Multiculturalism or the 'integration' of minority populations within the social fabric is a contentious issue in France. Indeed, Gérard Noiriel and Michel Wieviorka have demonstrated how the inherent problems of multiculturalism are exacerbated in France by the country's Republican dependence on the principles of 'égalité, liberté, fraternité' and 'laïcité'.⁶⁷ The inclusion of divergent customs, languages and peoples within established cultural, civic and judicial realms is intrinsically problematic because the desire to live cultural and social difference is perceived to be an affront to the founding principles of the French nation, in which all are equal within a secular state.⁶⁸ Narratives of continuity and discontinuity between minority and dominant cultures are largely absent from institutions of art. Arguably, if black culture in Britain has become commodified to a certain degree, North African culture in France is still contentious and invisible so that, by extension, artists of Algerian origin have occupied a marginal position. By contrast, in 2000 Mercer argued that in the UK, identity politics and a neo-liberal cultural economy in the 1990s has led to 'Multicultural Normalisation' in the UK.⁶⁹ 'Multicultural normalisation' has not occurred in France in relation to North African communities, while paradoxically, multicultural discourse has entered into the mainstream market and French institutions of culture.

In part, the difference between the ways in which culture and nationality are envisioned in France and the UK mirrors the fact that the French cultural sector and scholarship on art and culture has been largely unmarked by the rise of Cultural Studies, in contrast to the UK. It is not a subject of academic study and it is absent from institutional rhetoric.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, these ideas have indirectly influenced French art institutions in conversing with a 'global' art world system. Thus, this

⁶⁶ Serge Regourd, 'Politiques culturelles: les enjeux de la diversité culturelle', in Philippe Poirrier (ed.), *Politiques et pratiques de la culture* (Paris : La Documentation Française, 2010).

⁶⁷ Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset Français: histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2006); Michel Wieviorka (ed.), *Une société fragmentée? le multiculturalisme en débat* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1997).

⁶⁸ Legal and administrative systems to preserve and promote French culture, referred to as 'exception Française' accentuate even further the difficulties with which minority cultures are accepted into the fold. Minority cultures suggest a departure from dominant cultures, which are actively preserved in France.

⁶⁹ Kobena Mercer, 'Ethnicity and internationality, new British art and diaspora-based blackness', *Third Text*, Winter 1999-2000, 51-62, p.55.

⁷⁰ Since 2012 the Centre Pompidou has organised seminars on cultural studies in conjunction with the university Paris VIII. This suggests a change of approach to the representation of dominant and minority cultures in France.

thesis briefly acknowledges Anglo-American discourse of 'Identity Politics', but focuses on a detailed analysis of the political and institutional framework that has given rise to artistic identities. Equally, this thesis does not focus on issues of gender, race, colour and class that are central to much Anglo-American scholarship on non-Western art and artists; yet chapter two demonstrates that problems endemic to the 'banlieue' of Paris are rooted in class rather than ethnic disparities, and chapter three analyses issues of gender representation. Effectively, closer study of gender, race, colour and class would serve to question the relation between different artistic identities and their social and institutional constructs. However, artists's identities in relation to race, gender or social class are not the focus of this thesis because nationality is the enduring and prevalent factor in defining artistic identities in France.

In order to bring to the fore specificities of art institutional contexts in France and avoid interpretations that would render the work of artists under study a mere 'illustration of subject-matter' to use Philipsen's expression, yet account for the emergence of a small number of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art, I aim to write a politics of location, inspired by the art historian Joan Borsa. Borsa's analysis of the artist Frida Kahlo maps a 'politics of location', in the sense that she argues political and historical contexts to an artist's work need to be acknowledged when the artist occupies a marginalised position.⁷¹ In her article entitled *Frida Kahlo: marginalization and the critical female subject* she analyses Kahlo's work in terms of social and historical contexts to demonstrate how political meaning is created within these 'locations'. "What is still missing is a more radical and complex account of social and historic location that does not only destabilize the lines of 'natural authority' that have existed, but insists on a recognition of how that authority has already been resisted."⁷² Notwithstanding the influence that Borsa's approach has had on this thesis, I use the term a 'politics of location' to emphasis socio-cultural and institutional locations, rather than *identity* as a location. I centre

⁷¹ Borsa argues through the work of Nancy Miller that the presumed death of the author announced by Roland Barthes was the death of an institutionalised and non-marginalised author. Borsa states that he notion of the 'death of the author' is often applied in contemporary art rhetoric to suggest that there has been a shift from a centre/periphery paradigm to multiple peripheries. However, there was no death of the authoritative author. Thus Borsa argues that marginalised groups cannot afford to be placed within this 'new position' in the art world that the death of the author entails. Joan Borsa, 'Frida Kahlo: marginalization and the critical female subject', *Third Text*, 4 (12) (1990), 21-40.

⁷² Ibid, p.23.

my analysis on a critique of institutions and socio-political systems represented in the work of the artists under study, not on their identity as artists of Algerian origin. If the artists under study cannot be defined as a movement, what they share is the experience of exhibiting in France as part of an expanding art market and an increased interest in their work by French institutions. This rising interest in France may be based on what Lotte Philipsen refers to as 'New Internationalism', as this thesis explores.⁷³

This study takes its starting point as 1989. Whether one can be so exact as to date the inception of global art to this year, as many scholars concur 1989 represents a useful cornerstone to situate analyses of contemporary art in the context of a radical shift in geo-politics. This shift augured by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the end of the Cold War, the fall of the USSR and the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 and which brought the former European Communities together under the European Union. The political, cultural and economic changes brought about by these landmark events in the history of Europe have shaped the art world as an economic and cultural system. Two major exhibitions of 'global' art occurred in 1989 in France and in Britain; one of which, *Magiciens de la Terre*, was held in Paris.⁷⁴ *Magiciens* is of significance to this thesis as the first exhibition in France of contemporary non-Western art. In the thesis, I situate the reception of artists of Algerian origin within the history of non-Western art in France, as it is within this broader frame that the artists discussed emerged. The study therefore ends in 2012 with the exhibition *Intense Proximité* at the Palais de Tokyo. This exhibition, crucial to the history of non-Western art in France, aimed to re-evaluate the role of the 'Other' in Western societies and featured an ambitious number of non-Western artists selected by an international team of curators.⁷⁵

France has responded to geo-political changes that have affected the art world in a variegated way. On the one hand French institutions subscribe to 'Biennale culture';⁷⁶ through events such as la Triennale, la biennale de Belleville or la

⁷³ Lotte Philipsen, *Globalizing contemporary art: the art world's new internationalism* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010).

⁷⁴ The other exhibition was *The Other Story*, held in the Hayward Gallery, London in 1989 curated by Rasheed Araeen.

⁷⁵ This exhibition has further relevance to this thesis for it included a number of artists of Algerian origin.

⁷⁶ By putting this term in commas I knowingly suggest that it is a defining and widespread

Biennale de Lyon, French institutions and professionals have sought to dialogue with international art audiences. Meanwhile, there has been a concerted effort within institutions and government offices to maintain the status that French art achieved in the past, and to increase the position of French contemporary art on the global art market. On the other hand, the UN and the European Union place a growing demand upon European governments to recognise the multicultural body politic. It is within this context of tensions between cultural opening and cultural preservation that the rise of artists of Algerian origin is to be considered.

The careers of a number of artists of Algerian origin reflect the parsimonious globalisation of the art world and their careers have depended on a wider network than the French art world system. The four artists that this thesis focuses on in depth: Abdessemed, Attia, Sedira and Benyahia, emerged at the same period with the following of several institutions of 'New Internationalism' that Philipsen outlines, such as the website *universesinuniverses*. They have lived in different metropolises in North America and Europe; Adel Abdessemed in New York and Berlin, Attia in Berlin, Sedira in London. Abdessemed's prolific career was shaped by a large number of exhibitions abroad, as well as exhibitions held in regional institutions in France. Similarly, he was awarded a one-year residency at the Cité Nationale des Arts in Paris in 1999, followed directly by a residency with the International Studio Programme of P.S.1 in New York in 2000. However, in Paris only Kamel Mennour and Le Plateau had shown his work, until the 2012 retrospective at the Centre Pompidou *Je suis innocent*.

In France, the emergence of these artists is linked to individuals like the curator Hou Hanru, and the gallerists Kamel Mennour, Anne de Villepoix, and Martine et Thibault de la Châtre - who represent Benyahia and exhibited the work of Attia in 2001 - however, Abdessemed's career, like Attia's, has depended on a wider network of international galleries. Abdessemed has been represented by the influential gallery David Zwirner in New York since 2008. Attia is represented by the galleries Continua, Krinzinger and Christian Nagel. Sedira's work was unshown in France until 2003. Early commissions of Sedira included *Haddon Hall* (2001) at the Spacex Gallery in Exeter and the video *Don't do to her what you did to me*

phenomena of the contemporary art world since the new global paradigm pervades international artistic discourse.

(1998-2001) for the 49th Venice Biennale. Benyahia was invited to the 50th Venice Biennale by Gilane Tawadros. These four artists have received recognition in France, Abdessemed was awarded the prestigious residency Villa Medici 2013-2014; Attia was shortlisted for the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2005; Sedira was awarded the Prix SAM in 2010 and Gardienne d'Image was thence exhibited in a small show at the Palais de Tokyo.⁷⁷ However, while the collector François Pinault who has bought a significant number of Abdessemed's work is French, the careers of Abdessemed and Attia especially, were propelled by an international art market. Attia was noticed for *La Machine à Rêves* at the Venice Biennale [bought by an unnamed European collector], *Hallal* at Miami [bought by an American institution],⁷⁸ and *Flying Rats* at the Lyon Biennale [bought by Pierre Huber].⁷⁹ Hence the term 'artists of Algerian origin' is more exact than Franco-Algerian artists, which would limit interpretations to a French and/or Algerian artistic context.

The artists under study share in the visual language of contemporary art. Whilst the thematic of their work and the contexts of production differ, they commonly use the mediums of installation, video and photography. Abdessemed's career since the early 2000s with *Zen* (2000) and *La naissance de MohammedKarlPolpot* (1999), has explored underlying systems that govern society in France and globally with uncompromising candour, and he has shown a continued interest for material and artistic act. I focus on the sculptural installations *Practice Zero Tolerance* (2006), *Nuit* (1997) and the photographs *Sept Frères* (2006) in chapter two; the video *Bourek* (2005) and the installation *Exit* (1996) in chapter four. Abdessemed's very early video work like *Ombres et Lumières* (1994), responded to the theme of veiling. However, Abdessemed quickly created videos like *Passé Simple* (1997) that, while anchored within the Maghrebi community, have wider political meaning.

The meaning of the term 'origin' in this thesis encompasses differing relations to Algeria and Algerian culture lived by the artists under study. Abdessemed and Benyahia were born in Constantine; while Abdessemed grew up in the Aurès Mountains, near Batna. On the other hand, Attia and Sedira were born in suburban cities of Paris, in Dugny and Genevilliers respectively. Abdessemed is the

⁷⁷ Sedira has received further recognition in Marseille. The city of Marseille has organised two solo shows of Sedira's work: *Les rêves n'ont pas de titres* in 2010 and *Géo-Portrait, Géo-Portail* in 2013.

⁷⁸ B. de R., 'Attia, un artiste cousu main', *Le Figaro*, 3 December 2004, p.22.

⁷⁹ List of sales in B. de R., 'Kader Attia, le raid psychiatrique', *Le Figaro*, 7 October 2005, p.35.

only one to have studied in Algeria. He attended the Beaux-Arts school in Batna, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Algiers until 1994. In 1994 he moved to France, and registered at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts of Lyon, where he graduated from in 1998. Benyahia and Attia enrolled at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, and graduated in 1980 and 1998 respectively.

Attia specialised first in photography. The exhibition *La Piste d'Aterrissage* at the Centre National de la Photographie and the Galerie La Châtre received acclaim in *Art Press* and *L'Oeil*.⁸⁰ He began to work with installation and video with *La Machine à Rêves* (2003) and *Shadow* (2003), a 3 minutes video showing a dancing man. Aesthetic research defines his later practice. In recent years, Attia has also turned to the themes of memory, modernism and colonialism. He has returned to the theme of the 'Gueule Cassée' most famously at the 2012 Documenta in Kassel.⁸¹ I focus my discussion on the installations *Fridges* (2006), *La Machine à Rêves* (2003), *Hallal* (2004), *Arabesques* (2006) and *Sans Titres* (2006) in chapter two, the photographic work *Rochers Carrés* (2009) and the installation *Untitled- concrete blocks* (2009) in chapter four. Attia's early work examined the juxtaposition of different cultures like the complex installation *The Loop* (2005) that features the mannequin of a dervish dancer, a hung DJ and a break dancer, or the neon sign *Mosqué-Nightclub* (2003), and created a link between Algeria and France with works like *Correspondances* that document through photography and video the lives of his family in France, and in Algeria.

Benyahia's early work in the late 1980s and early 1990s explored geometric patterns and printing methods largely influenced by Algerian modern art. She adopted the pattern of the rosace Fatima, which became her trademark. I discuss in more depth the installations *A la lumière des matins (Albert Camus)* (2008), and *Le Polygone Etoilé* (2003) in chapter three which employ these forms. Benyahia returned briefly to Algeria to teach from 1983-1988, but settled in France after her Masters degree from Paris VIII, with the onslaught of the civil war in Algeria that claimed the life of one of her brothers.

Unlike the other artists, Sedira moved to London from Paris, and a year later

⁸⁰ Pascale Le Thorel-Daviot, 'Kader Attia', *Art Press*, 256, April 2010, p.90.

Damien Sausset, 'Les poèmes visuels de Kader Attia', *L'Oeil*, 531, November 2001, p.77.

⁸¹ He exhibited *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* at the Documenta, and used photographs of 'Gueule Cassée' people who had reconstructive surgery after injury in the first world war with *Open your eyes* (2010).

attended the St Martin's School of Art and Design - from where she graduated in 1995 - and immersed herself in postcolonial and feminist theory that informed her early practice. While installations *Quatre Générations de Femmes* (1997) and *Portrait* (1999) explored Algerian crafts and histories, it is with documentary style videos that she turns to explore Algerian themes through familial narratives. Her recent practice is marked by her return to Algeria and her increasing commitment to the Algerian art world system.⁸² I will analyse Sedira's photograph *Self-portraits or the Virgin Mary* (2000), the video *Silent Sight* (2000) and the photographic installation *La Maison de ma Mère* (Algérie) (2002) in chapter two; and the video *Saphir* (2006) in chapter four.

This thesis does not engage with the work of Algerian artists working in Algeria. This distinction between artists based in Algeria, and artists of Algerian origin based in France, has been made for several reasons. First, the context of production and circulation of the work of artists living and working in Algeria contrasts greatly to that of artists of Algerian origin living or working in France. Second, their artistic education also differs. All the artists of Algerian origin based in France and discussed here studied in France, for the exception of Abdessemed. While I greatly admire the education provided by such teachers as Nadira Laggoune in Algiers, Algerian art schools follow a specific pedagogical logic. Third, artists's varying experience of recent Algerian history – and the civil war in particular – has depended upon their principal place of residence and work. It is therefore crucial to make a distinction between artists working and living in Algeria, and artists of Algerian origin living or working in France.

I have preferred the appellation artist of Algerian origin to define the artists under study throughout this thesis, rather than artists of the Algerian diaspora. This choice reflects the fact that, while all the artists that I consider in this thesis have been concerned with themes that relate to French and Algerian cultural narratives, and in this sense have adopted diasporic idioms, to use Rogers Brubaker's term;⁸³ the concept of diaspora is more relevant to the practices of some artists, and less to that of others. For example, Benyahia has considered diasporic idioms throughout her

⁸² Sedira launched the residency project *aria* art residencies in Algiers in 2012.
<http://ariaresidencyalgiers.wordpress.com>

⁸³ Rogers Brubaker, 'The 'diaspora' diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 (1) (2005), 1-19.

career, while Abdessemed moved beyond themes that relate to the Franco-Algerian diaspora early on in his artistic career.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the writer of Algerian origin Azouz Begag has questioned whether the Algerian community in France can in fact be defined as a diaspora because the Algerian community is disparate and there is little evidence that it forms a diaspora in the traditional sense - in which 'orientation to the homeland' and 'boundary-maintenance' are predominant.⁸⁵ Hence, I prefer the term artists of Algerian origin, instead of artists of the Algerian diaspora, because it is more exact.

Nevertheless, I am indebted to the concept of the diaspora as a paradigm through which to consider artistic practices at a particular historical and socio-cultural conjuncture, and to make known critical diasporic narratives that question the presence of minority cultures in France. Here, I use the term diaspora in the sense that the anthropologist Christine Chivallon has done, as a theoretical group defined by historical and socio-political conjectures. By using the example of Caribbean communities, Chivallon has demonstrated that the term diaspora is relevant in France even for communities for whom a ruptured history and an experience of assimilation have thwarted the formation of a common identity.⁸⁶ Chivallon's analysis of the Caribbean community can be seen to mirror the Algerian community in France, for whom assimilation has greatly impeded the formation of a distinct culture.⁸⁷

Avtar Brah, in 1996, had already distinguished historical diasporas from diaspora as a theoretical concept.⁸⁸ The study of diaspora as a theoretical concept enabled a critique of fixed notions of origin while recognising homing desires among communities. Indeed, Brah showed that not all diasporas share in a myth of return. I

⁸⁴ Abdessemed's early work referred to themes that pertained to identity and Algerian culture in *Ombres et Lumières* (1994), *Passé Simple* (1997), *Chrysalide, ça tient à trois fils* (1999), but today his work is better understood in a global context. Attia, on the other hand, has forged greater links with Algeria throughout this career and his work continues to be concerned with specific aspects of migration, transcultural and colonial identities and Algerian architecture.

⁸⁵ Azouz Begag, 'Les relations France-Algérie vues de la diaspora algérienne', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 10 (4) (2002), 475-482.

Rogers Brubaker, 'The 'diaspora' diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 (1) (2005), 1-19.

⁸⁶ Christine Chivallon, 'De quelques préconstruits de la notion de diaspora à partir de l'exemple antillais', *Revue Européenne des Migrations internationales*, 13 (1) (2007), 149-160.

⁸⁷ Chivallon is inspired by the writing of Hall and Gilroy, and the idea of diaspora that she uses differs greatly from that generally observed in France. In France, minority communities - other than historical diasporas such as the Jewish community - have only belatedly been considered diasporic, the historian Stéphane Dufoix argues. This strict definition of diaspora in France reflects the limited hold of cultural studies in French scholarship, which I observe earlier on in this chapter. Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁸⁸ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Difference, Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

draw on Brah's hypothesis that the diaspora brings into play different localities across and within 'territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries' that are anchored in the local and the global, that are centred and dispersed, and that need to be historicised.⁸⁹ I draw furthermore on Anne-Marie Fortier's argument that diasporas are formed by attachment and detachment from cultural narratives, or are de-territorialised and re-territorialised. She writes:

Against the assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture, on the one hand, and the reification of uprootedness as the paradigmatic figure of postmodern life, on the other, I raise the ways in which cultural identity is at once de-territorialized and re-territorialized.⁹⁰

Therefore, notwithstanding the problematic nature of the term, I am indebted to the notion of diaspora in chapter three, to formulate a politics of diasporic identity in relation to the work of Bouabdellah, Sedira and Benyahia, and in relation to the cultural frameworks within which their work is situated. These institutional frameworks have received limited critical attention. Brah and Coombes argue that not enough has been written about the 'institutional frameworks' within which culture circulates.⁹¹

As this thesis shows, diasporic artists are increasingly called upon by institutions of art to conform to a European-wide trend to recognise minority cultures. Hito Steyerl, in an article on the rise of a young generation of artists of Turkish origin in Germany, explicates these concerns. Chiefly, national institutions have used postcolonial rhetoric such as 'hybridity' to bring legitimacy to Germany as a cosmopolitan power centre in a global market. Artists, Steyerl argues, are shown to occupy an 'intercultural and semiotic gap of difference' to reconcile German anti-immigration policies and the country's ambition for global legitimacy by 'displacing a political problem onto the field of culture'.⁹² This thesis is indebted to Steyerl's perspicuous analysis of institutional frameworks of envisioned 'multiculturalism' in national institutions of art.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.197.

⁹⁰ Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant belongings, memory, space, identity* (Oxford and New York: Berg Press, 2000), p.1.

⁹¹ They argue that 'hybridity' suggests a cultural 'symbiosis' that ignores political, gender or social inequalities and I argue that Chivallon and Brah's notion of diaspora is more appropriate than hybridity for art historical analyses. *Hybridity and its discontents, politics, science, culture*, Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁹² Hito Steyerl, 'Gaps and Potentials: the exhibition 'Heimat Kunst': migrant culture as an allegory of the global market', *New German Critique*, 92, (2004), 159-168, p.163.

The structure of this thesis is designed to bring to the fore salient themes in the artists' work, and evidence the collective narratives projected onto their work to effect a politics of location as Borsa argues, or analyse institutional frameworks as Brah and Coombes suggest. Hence, this thesis is structured thematically. The four different chapters of this thesis build on one another, moving from the space of institutions to propose a history of artists of Algerian origin in chapter one, to then focus on the space of the urban that also serves to introduce societal and cultural context in more detail in chapter two, before then moving to the private realms of home and woman, focusing even further on the workings of collective memory and proposing critical diasporic narratives in chapter three, before finally studying once more institutional contexts in chapter four, in order to open the discussion up to consider the system of 'global' art, and investigate the representation of artists of Algerian origin in France.

Chapter one is rooted in empirical research to evidence the rise of artists of Algerian origin. I researched and brought together a list of exhibitions by artist, and by year, using exhibition catalogues, artist biographies and exhibition reviews. Borrowing from sociological methodologies in creating maps and graphs, I collated information on the exhibitions in which artists of Algerian origin were featured between 1989 and 2012. These maps are included in chapter one. A further map listing the Parisian institutions and places referred to in this thesis is included in the appendices. Undertaking the research for chapter four I found a discrepancy between institutional discourse of a global art world and the limitations to travel some artists still experienced inspired me to conduct further empirical research to clearly ascertain who, and what, institutions of art in France actually exhibited between 1989 and 2012. I analysed the online databases of the Palais de Tokyo, the Centre Pompidou and the ARC. I also studied every issue of the French art magazines *Cimaise* between the period 1989 and 2012 to reach an understanding of what commercial galleries exhibited, and what art magazines had reviewed. Statistical data demonstrates that French institutions are reticent to concretise discourse of global art. Presenting this research using maps and graphs has enabled me to manage this material during the research process. By including these maps and graphs I aim to render this research more easily understandable to the reader; and allow for further research to be conducted using the material I have put together.

Chapter two and three are dependent on the analysis of exhibition catalogues

and reviews, and upon interviews with artists. I conducted research on exhibition catalogues and French art magazines in the British Library and the Courtauld Institute in the UK, and travelled regularly to Paris to consult the library of the Centre Pompidou, the Arts Décoratifs, the Institut du Monde Arabe and the Bibliothèque Nationale. I interviewed Attia and Benyahia in the early stages of research. I referred to the interview with Bouabdellah for my MA. I interviewed Sedira, Kameli, Baghriche in 2011. I conducted several further interviews with Benyahia since there is relatively little written about her work. In these chapters I submit the work of artists of Algerian origin to art historical analysis by considering their practice as a whole and by drawing further comparisons with the work of other artists. I aim to emphasise the wider context of their work and thus refer to the work of a wide range of international artists in the thesis to better define certain aspects of the work of artists of Algerian origin.

The thematic structure of this thesis aims to testify to institutional politics and socio-cultural contexts, as well as creative strategies, private memories and aesthetic concerns that are specific to each artist under study. The first chapter of this thesis is a politics of institutions of art in France. It is a historiography of exhibitions that featured artists of Algerian origin between 1989 and 2012 that maps their rising presence in French institutions; exhibitions chosen because they showed two or more of the artists under study.⁹³ I analyse national institutions to better understand the relation between cultural policies, national conceptions of culture in France and institutional discourse.⁹⁴ I propose that despite the marked rise of artists of Algerian origin, institutional discourse is limited by preservationist cultural policies and a rhetoric of difference so that the cultural value ascribed to work by artists of Algerian origin is over-determined, above and beyond its artistic value.

Chapter two examines questions of the urban, to effect a politics of location that, as I argue in chapter one, exhibitions such as *Intense Proximité* had failed to do. It focuses on the work of Abdessemed and Attia that takes urban Paris as its subject matter. The weight of collective memories of the 'banlieues' or 'Cités' has meant that analyses of the work of artists of Algerian origin have been constructed around issues of identity crisis, segregation, violence and immigration; the population of the

⁹³ The exceptions are *Traces du Sacré* and *L'Argent*, which featured the work of Adel Abdessemed.

⁹⁴ The only exception is the Espace Electra where *Voyages d'Artistes* was shown. This exhibition was organised under the umbrella of the national festival of culture Djazzaïr: 2003.

'banlieues' are perceived to be predominantly of North African and African origin.⁹⁵ The city is also the space where institutional and public policies are implemented and is thus a useful discursive space through which to explore the ways in which cultural narratives inform artistic practice. The political and social issues represented through Attia and Abdessemed's practice are more ambiguous than critics like Tami Katz-Freiman, Tom McDonough or Mona Hafez have argued. I aim to move beyond collective narratives of the 'banlieues' to testify to the wider aesthetic and political concerns of their work, with reference to Armstrong's radical aesthetic and Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome'.

Chapter three focuses on the workings of memory at the juncture of private and public memories. To question collective memories of Algerian women and the Algerian home I analyse the work of Benyahia, Bouabdellah, Kameli and Sedira. These artists re-present diasporic identities made through divergent cultural memories. As Borsa has argued in relation to Frida Kahlo's work, 'natural authority' must be acknowledged and dominant narratives shown to have already been resisted.⁹⁶ I draw upon the idea developed in chapter two of the artistic act and observe how Bouabdellah and Sedira use their bodies in their work to enact and question identities, as Rosemary Betterton amongst others, has theorised.⁹⁷ Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's idea of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation I argue that through the experience of departure and return their work re-territorialises cultural memories to produce new meaning.

Building on the notion of productive experiences of exile developed in chapter three through the analysis of works by Abdessemed, chapter four focuses on geo-political themes in the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira. By analysing a selection of their work I suggest that their work has moved away from identity issues and towards wider narratives as well as aesthetic concerns. Furthermore, in this chapter I situate their work in a global art discourse. It has been argued that changes to the political world order enabled trading across the globe, changing the face of the contemporary art world. However, in this thesis I contend that while commercial

⁹⁵ The term 'Cités' and 'banlieues' respectively translate as residence and suburb, but they are heavily connoted terms, inscribed within the popular imagination through films such as *La Haine* (1995) by Mathieu Kassovitz, novels, rap music, and the reporting of riots.

⁹⁶ Joan Borsa, 'Frida Kahlo: marginalization and the critical female subject', *Third Text*, 4 (12) (1990), 21-40.

⁹⁷ Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance: women, artists and the body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

goods are exchanged freely, both populations and ideas are limited in circulation. My analysis of the global art world in chapter four is indebted to the writing of Charlotte Bydler. Like Bydler I argue that the globalisation of the art world is only partial in that envisioned differences between Western and non-Western art are the consequence of the enduring conservatism of institutions of culture in Europe, and the cohesive nature of the contemporary art world system. Such conservatism is magnified in French institutions of culture because of preservationist cultural policies. Equally, national symbols and myths continue to be preserved and promoted. Meanwhile, founding Republican myths problematise the presence of diasporic communities in the French body politic.

My hypothesis is that, influenced by enduring collective narratives and cultural memory, interpretations of the practices of artists of Algerian origin overlook aesthetics and contexts of production in favour of de-politicised views polarised between rhetorics of difference and integration; diasporic narratives are overlooked while the exhibition of diasporic artists suggests cultural diversity. This thesis argues that notwithstanding the rise in the number of artists exhibited, pervasive collective narratives rooted in colonial history and influenced by rising immigration colour interpretations made of the work of artists of Algerian origin. This thesis represents a 'politics of location' that acknowledges these narratives and opens the interpretation of works by artists of Algerian origin working or exhibiting in France to further interpretation and analysis.

Chapter 1

A historiography of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art 1989-2012

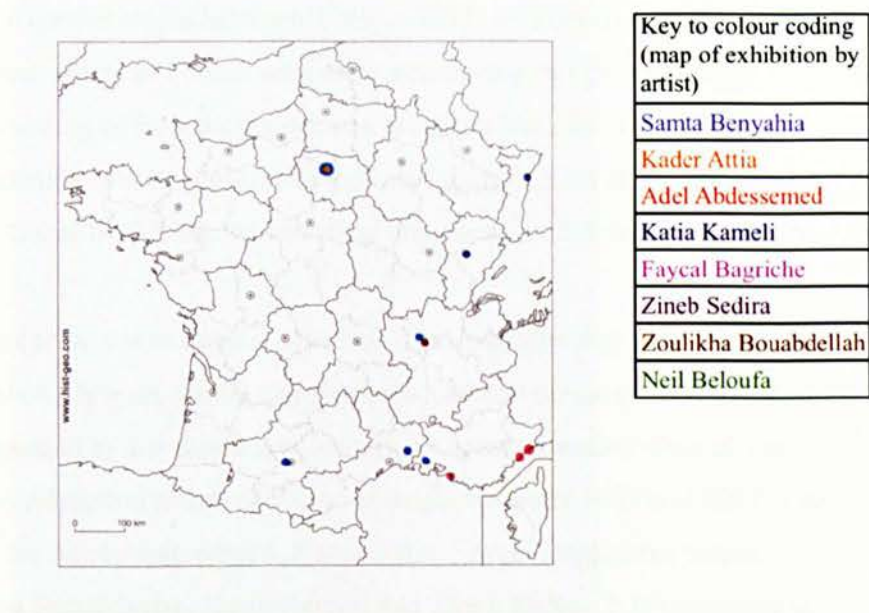


Image 1: Map 1989-2000. The number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

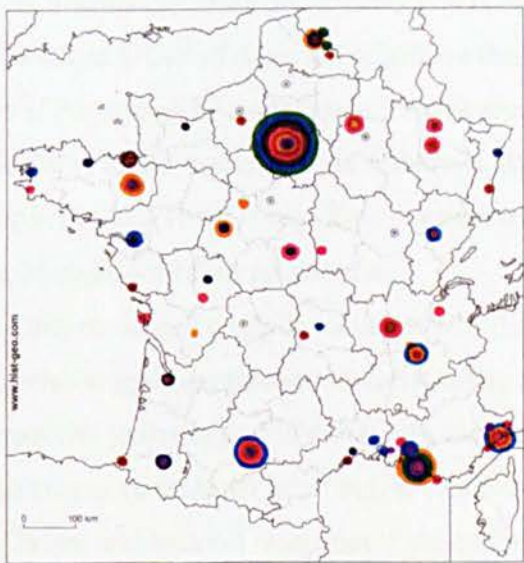


Image 2: Map 1989-2012. The number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a historiography of a selection of major exhibitions that have featured artists of Algerian origin between 1989 to 2012, in order to map the apparent rise of these artists in French art institutions during this period, and to provide an understanding of how their work has been received. In essence, this chapter is an exploration into the politics of the institution. It aims to investigate the institutional context that frames the art historical analyses that follow in subsequent chapters.

This chapter observes in detail a selection of exhibitions that have featured two or more artists of Algerian origin, and that took place in national institutions of art. The tables appended to this thesis provide a more comprehensive view of the exhibitions that have featured artists of Algerian origin between 1989 and 2012. The artists considered are Adel Abdessemed, Kader Attia, Fayçal Baghriche, Samta Benyahia, Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Katia Kameli and Zineb Sedira. It is important to understand the ways in which these artists have been represented together, and in national institutions, in order to analyse the reception of their work in terms of the politics of institutions of art in France; throughout this chapter I note a common tendency in national art institutions to consider identity in relation to nationality. Interpretations of the work of artists of Algerian origin are therefore confined to the distinct nation-spaces of Algeria and France, aside from several exceptions that I underline. In the majority of exhibitions I analysed, there is little discussion of cultural exchange within France. There is also little consideration of each artists' creative processes, and conditions of art production.

In undertaking this research I compiled a list of all exhibitions that had featured artists of Algerian origin by year, and by artist, using artist's biographies, published by their respective galleries and in exhibition catalogues. I corroborated these findings through extensive research in art magazines *Frieze*, *Art Press*, *Beaux-Arts*, *L'Oeil* and *Art Forum*, and Internet resources. I selected exhibitions that had featured two or more artists of Algerian origin, with the exception of two thematic exhibitions of Abdessemed, which I cite [in 1.7] to contrast with other exhibitions. The exhibitions discussed were held in national institutions of art. The only exception is *Voyages d'Artistes* held at the Espace Electra in Paris [in 1.3], a private

institution, but working in collaboration with the national festival of culture *Djazzair 2003*. I selected exhibitions in this way to better understand the link between collective memories and institutional rhetoric. I researched widely for reviews of a selection of these exhibitions in the national press and in art magazines. I have focused on reviews in French but have also cited sources in English in this chapter when these are relevant. Databases of national newspapers *L'Humanité*, *Le Figaro* and *Libération* have been researched because they represent a wide political spectrum. I consulted reviews online and on paper in the libraries of the Centre Pompidou and the Bibliothèque Nationale. I also approached the press relations offices of several institutions such as La Criée, la Villa d'Arson and Le Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration to uncover further reviews of exhibitions they had held. As part of the research for this chapter I also interviewed Isabelle Renard the curator of the Le Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and Catherine Grenier the director of the Centre Pompidou's Centre for 'Recherche et Mondialisation', established in 2009.¹ The focus of the PhD is on the period 1989-2012, and symbolically situates the rise of artists of Algerian origin within wider discussions of global art. The graphs and tables appended to this thesis provide an important context and perspective by including exhibitions between 1989 and 2000. The historiography that follows begins in 2000 with *Paris pour Escale*.

The ways in which minorities are considered in France have gone through significant change throughout the period that this chapter covers; changes that have profoundly affected the reception of artists of Algerian origin in France. In the 1970s under Giscard d'Estaing, measures had been taken to halt the flow of immigration, following its rapid expansion during post-war reconstruction.² During the early Mitterrand years in the early 80s, policies on immigration were relaxed. However, the rise of the extreme right party the 'Front Nationale' (FN) forced the Mitterrand government to reconsider their politics.³ Indeed, other parties responded to the rise of

¹ Isabelle Renard and Catherine Grenier have both worked for the exhibition of artists of the diaspora in national institutions of art. They are, furthermore, experts in the field of contemporary French art.

² Giscard d'Estaing put an end to the system of 'regroupement familial', which enabled the families of migrants to join their relations in France. Furthermore, during his presidency, the 'Bonnet law' in 1980 legislated for the expulsion of immigrants. For more on the subject see Alistair Cole, *French Politics and Society* (London: Pearson Longman, 2005).

³ François Mitterrand was elected President in 1981, and re-elected in 1988. By contrast to Giscard

the FN by making immigration a central tenet of their political programs. As Hargreaves argues, this heralded the beginning of ethnic politics in mainstream parties in France.⁴ In September 1989 two young girls were sent home from their school in Creil for wearing the veil, marking the beginning of the 'Headscarf Affair' or 'Affaire du Foulard Islamique', which remains a highly contentious subject in French law, politics and culture.⁵ The 'Headscarf Affair' is emblematic of rising ethnic politics and rising legislation on cultural and religious difference in French public institutions. That same year, the Centre Pompidou held the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, staging non-Western cultures in the context of contemporary art. However, the certain opening to non-Western cultures *Magiciens* represented was confined to institutions of art.

The cultural politics of Mitterrand formed the backdrop to changing perception of immigrant populations and, by extension, French culture and society. Mitterrand's cultural policies are defined by the historian David Loosely as a 'muddled socialist mission', between two poles of cultural democratization advocated by Malraux and Giscard d'Estaing, and the critique of a democratization of culture by Bourdieu.⁶ Under Mitterrand contemporary art was the focus of national artistic policies with the creation of the FRAC or 'Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain'; regional centres responsible for the acquisition of art and its mediation among local publics.⁷ In the mid-nineties new forms of culture emanated from alternative sites of production. Loosely ascribes this rise to the 'quartier' or 'banlieue' which I discuss in chapter two. Loosely writes:

d'Estaing's presidency, his government opposed previous laws that restricted the rights of migrants mentioned above. Moreover, immigrants were given the right to form associations, an important right in French civic life.

⁴ Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France. immigration, politics, culture and society. 2nd edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

⁵ The newspaper *Libération* reported on the fact that young Muslim girls were dismissed from school for wearing the veil. Several other similar cases were reported and the government took the issue to the national Assembly. This marks the beginning of the 'Headscarf Affair'.

⁶ David Loosely, 'The development of a social exclusion agenda in French cultural policy', *Cultural Trends*, 13 (2) (2004), 15-27.

⁷ The Frac, created in 1983 under Cultural Minister Jack Lang, enabled the decentralisation of the art economy in France. Each regional body is now responsible for a budget allocated by the Ministry of Culture to support contemporary art in France. Quemin argues that the Frac were also supposed to assure a greater diversity of the state's collection of contemporary art. To a great extent, the Frac did indeed enable the rise of regional art centres, which in turn have supported the emergence of young artists in France since the 1980's, artists of Algerian origin included. Alain Quemin, 'Les politiques de soutien au marché de l'art', in Philippe Poirrier (ed.), *Politiques et pratiques de la culture* (Paris : La Documentation Française, 2010).

The 1990s have seen a strong wind of aesthetic and cultural change blowing from the quartier in the form of rap, graffiti and street arts. This is part of a wider, protean movement, sometimes but less specifically associated with the quartiers, (...) with the rise of electronic dance music, the DJ phenomenon and raves.⁸

The government responded to these new forms of culture with cultural policies to combat social exclusion by bringing these new forms of culture into the fold of national institutions, which Loosely argues was ultimately a way of controlling cultural meaning.⁹ During the Mitterrand years, contemporary art rose in status, a fact expressed by the great number of institutions inaugurated. In Nice (1990), the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume (1991), the first Biennale de Lyon (1991), Nîmes (1993), Centre Nationale de la Photographie (1993), Grenoble (1994), and Lyon (1995), as well as specialised journals 'Documents', 'Purple Prose' and 'Blocknote'. Later institutions included the experimental school Le Fresnoy (1997), the Paris Photo Fair (1997), the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Strasbourg (1998), les Abattoirs in Toulouse (2000), Le Plateau and Le Palais de Tokyo (2002).

At the end of Mitterrand's term in 1995 Jacques Chirac was elected president and ushered in a return to conservative Gaullist politics. While France won the 1998 World Cup with a multicultural football team - the hero of which was Zinedine Zidane 'icon of integration'-¹⁰ multiculturalist euphoria was quickly replaced by increased policing in the suburbs.¹¹ Reporting of Islamic terrorism in Algeria during the civil war caused alarmist politics to take hold in metropolitan centres. Following bombings in 1995 in France that were attributed to the 'Groupe Islamique Armée' (GIA) and French residents of immigrant origin, the police were granted special rights to search young Muslims in the suburbs.¹² The Pavillon de Flore collection of African and South Pacific artefacts - moved to the Musée du Quai Branly in 2006 - reflects President Chirac's interest in traditional African Art. The Museum of Immigration, on the other hand, was vetoed by Chirac's cultural minister at the time.

⁸ David Loosely, 'The development of a social exclusion agenda in French cultural policy', *Cultural Trends*, 13 (2) (2004), 15-27, p.25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'Zidane, icône de l'intégration', *Libération*, published online on 10 July 1998, available online on liberation.fr, accessed March 2012.

¹¹ Paul Silverstein, 'Sporting faith, Islam, soccer and the French nation-state', *Social Text*, 18 (4) (Winter 2000), 25-53.

¹² Paul Silverstein, 'Sporting faith, Islam, soccer and the French nation-state', *Social Text*, 18 (4) (Winter 2000), 25-53.

Chirac dissolved the national assembly in 1997, but this led to a coalition and the socialist Lionel Jospin was elected Prime Minister. Chirac was re-elected in 2002.¹³ He appealed to an upwardly mobile population of immigrant origin and the belated funding for the museum Le Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration can be seen as a consequence of this search for electorate.¹⁴ Under Chirac and his successor Sarkozy, minority populations and cultures appear to be integrated. However, the example of the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration discussed in this chapter demonstrates that integration remains partial and fulfils political agendas.

The UN charter for cultural diversity was ratified in 2005. That same year riots erupted in the suburbs of France's large cities and these events sparked xenophobic rhetoric from important figures in the government, including the minister of the interior at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy. Meanwhile, the historian Serge Regourd argues that the recognition of diversity in France, in line with European-wide recognition of cultural minorities, was orchestrated in relation to principles of cultural exception.¹⁵ In other words, the recognition of cultural minorities never questioned dominant culture, which remains protected by policies of cultural exception. Regourd thus surmises that the rhetoric of cultural diversity in France was imposed but not practised.

The FRAC, created to boost the art market and counter the reticence of many museums to embrace the contemporary, contributed to the rise of young artists of diasporic origin. Similarly, literature written by second-generation immigrants, the generation 'Beurs', received wide acclaim in the 1990s. Furthermore, the government also appeared to have open policies towards minority groups, creating ties with Muslim institutions, for example. However, the 'Conseil Français du Culte Musulman' (CFCM) founded in 2000, under the directive of Sarkozy, changed from its initial remit as a socialist project, to a means of controlling minority populations by bringing religion into the public space.¹⁶ Through a careful analysis of the CFCM, the sociologist Murat Akan demonstrates that 'the developments in France illustrate

¹³ The other candidate in the second round was Jean-Marie Le Pen, secretary of the FN.

¹⁴ Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* (Durham, N.C : Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Serge Regourd, 'Politiques Culturelles: les enjeux de la diversité culturelle', in Philippe Poirier (ed.), *Politiques et pratiques de la culture* (Paris : La Documentation Française, 2010).

¹⁶ Murat Akan, 'Laïcité and multiculturalism: the Stasi report in context', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 60 (2) (2009), 237-256.

very well how identity politics can be a state-led project to de-mobilize groups'.¹⁷ Similarly, the prominence of multiculturalist discourse in institutions of art, can be seen in the context of a state-led project to suggest the successful integration of minority groups into the French body-politic, and appeal to upwardly mobile members of minority groups, without changing the status quo.

Today, conservative and republican politics are prevalent in cultural institutions in France, as an article from March 2007 in *Le Monde* exemplifies.¹⁸ The article tackles the polemic issue of the nominations of certain right-wing figures in positions of influence in cultural institutions, and reveals that there are no longer any socialist directors in national museums. However, on the other hand, the rise of national institutions of art, and the energies of peripheral institutions have meant that contemporary artistic practices are given greater prominence in French culture. It is in this context of the rise of contemporary art, the conservative leadership of art institutions, and of identity politics used by the state apparatus, that this thesis is situated.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.252.

¹⁸ 'Polémique autour de nominations 'politique' dans la culture', *Le Monde*, 03 April, 2007
Clarisse Fabre et Nathaniel Herzberg, 'La polémique sur les nominations dans la culture gagne la campagne présidentielle', *Le Monde*, 03 April, 2007.

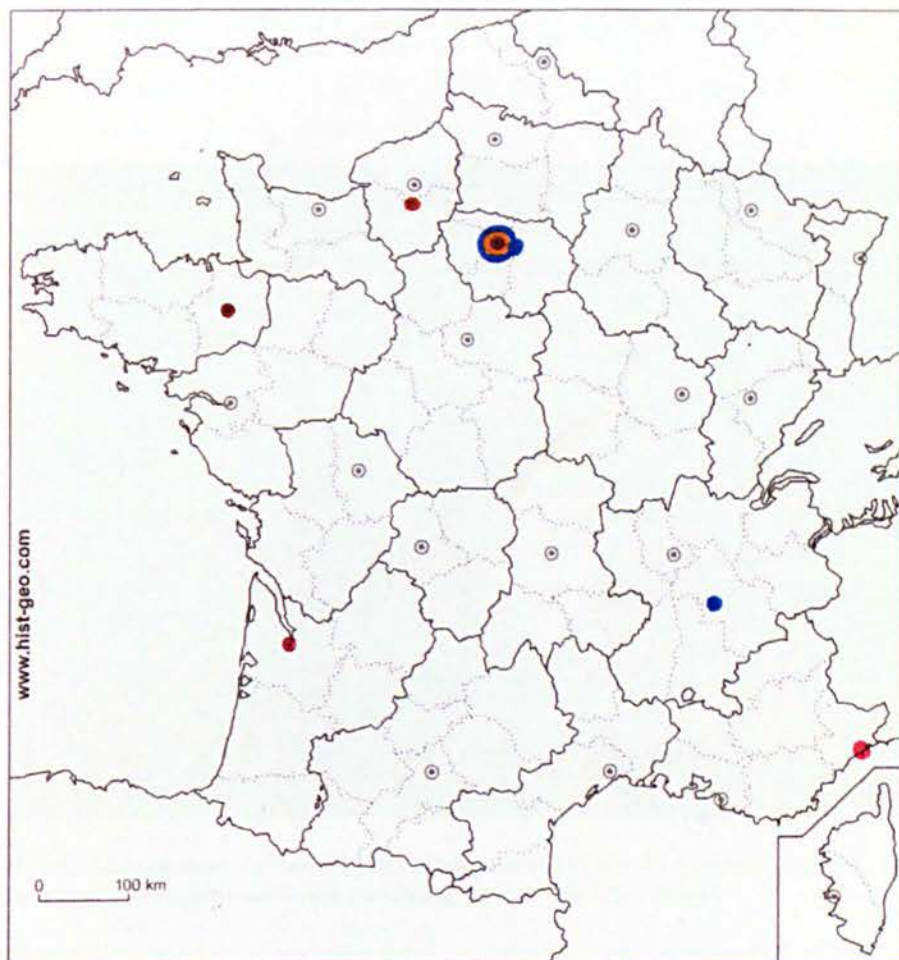


Image 3: 2000 map. The number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)



Image 4: Adel Abdessemed, *Joueur de Flûte* (1996) Colour video, 30 minutes 10 seconds (loop), exhibition view *Je suis Innocent* Centre Pompidou, photograph Alice Planel

1.2 *Paris pour Escale*.

In 2000 Evelynne Jouanno and Hou Hanru curated *Paris pour Escale* for the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.¹⁹ *Paris pour Escale* (referred to from now on as *PpE*) was significant for the recognition of contemporary diasporic artists working in France. Not only was it the first exhibition in France to feature such a number of artists of diasporic origin in a national institution of contemporary art,²⁰ it was also the first exhibition of diasporic artists that acknowledged France as the context of production.²¹ At the core of Jouanno and Hanru's endeavour, outlined in the exhibition catalogue, lay the belief that multiculturalism and migration are essential to the development of societies. Yet, they argued, multiculturalism and migration have been ignored by French art institutions. Observing broader cultural politics, they insisted that globalisation continues to be intellectually and imaginatively repressive - rooted in a Eurocentric logic and a neo-liberal system of commercial exchange.²² I share Jouanno and Hanru's position to a great extent. In 2000 there was very little discourse in France around the subject of art by minority, postcolonial or diasporic artists. Thus, *PpE* was a 'necessary point of departure'.²³ However, I concur with John Clark that the curators' ambition to unveil the social impact of migrant experiences in France was ignored.²⁴ In the following paragraphs, I demonstrate that representation of diasporic artists envisioned by Hanru and Jouanno was forfeited for the promotion of French art.

The title *PpE*, and the artists selected for the exhibition, suggested that

¹⁹ The title can be translated as 'Paris as stopover', and the museum name the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris.

²⁰ Among the artists exhibited were Adel Abdessemed and Samta Benyahia. The other artists exhibited were Ryuta Amae, Ruth Barabash, Bili Bidjocka, Chen Zhen, Gaston Damag, Jakob Gautel, Han Myung-Ok, Eric Hattan, Huang Yong Ping, Jiro Nakayama, Pablo Reinoso, Alejandra Riera, Francisco Ruiz de Infante, Ladan Shahrock Naderi, Shen Yuan, Kristina Solomoukha, Tsuneko Taniushi, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Joël Andrianomearisoa, Moshekwa Langa, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Aimé Ntakyiwa, Alessandra Tesi, Wand Du and Yang Jiechang.

²¹ We will see how future exhibitions of diasporic artists offer little contextual information, to the detriment of art works selected for these exhibitions.

²² Hou Hanru and Evelynne Jouanno, 'Ils résident en mouvement...', in *Paris pour Escale* [exhibition Paris pour Escale, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), 12-15.

²³ Hou Hanru and Evelynne Jouanno, 'Ils résident en mouvement...', in *Paris pour Escale* [exhibition Paris pour Escale, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), 12-15, p.15.

²⁴ John Clarke, 'Chinese artists in France', in *Over here, over there: international perspectives on art and culture* (New York and London: MIT and New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 212-233.

migration was the salient theme of the work exhibited.²⁵ Genevieve Breerette's review in *Le Monde* exemplified this point. She wrote that the work exhibited is predominantly concerned with themes of exile, passage and transculturality.²⁶ However, the work of Abdessemed that she used as an example touches only superficially on these themes. Breerette seemed to suggest that *Joueur de Flûte* (1996) (Image 4) is concerned with taboos of Maghrebi culture. Abdessemed asks his flute player to transcend social norms that exist in Western and non-Western cultures, the video is not concerned specifically with North African taboos.²⁷

The video *Joueur de Flûte* is essentially the stark portrayal of a naked man playing the flute against a plain background.²⁸ It has been well documented that the flute player is in fact the Imam of the Lyon mosque.²⁹ However, the flute player did not betray his religion. He moved beyond, not his identity as a religious figure, but that of a patriarch.³⁰ In an exhibition review published in *Art Press*, Anne Bonnin contradicted interpretations of his work based on Islam and ritual, qualifying Abdessemed's video as bacchanalia-like. Bonnin argued it relates to a series of artworks that use nudity as epiphany, as transcendence of the social.³¹ Maldonado Guitemie, in an article published in 'Parachute', exemplified this hypothesis. He

²⁵ Writing for *Artforum* in May 2001 Marek Bartelik rightly questions whether *PpE* does not in fact reproduce Eurocentric perspectives on art and culture that the curators criticise, despite the professed plurality of the work exhibited. However, for the staff and readership of 'Artforum', the concept of 'other' in art might be tired as Bartelik states, but much can still be said and done in a French context when 'Artforum' published this article. Bartelik overlooks the fact that an exhibition that explicitly documented the very presence of diasporic artists was indeed relevant in France in the year 2000, because there had been little discussion of diasporic practices. Nevertheless, I concur with Bartelik that despite Hanru and Jouanno's perspicuous critique, *PpE* eclipses any diversity in artistic approach by only making the theme of migration explicit. Marek Bartelik, 'Paris pour Escale', *Artforum International*, 39, May 2001, p.184.

²⁶ Genevieve Breerette, 'Paris la cosmopolite, escale d'artistes nomades', *Le Monde*, 20 January 2001, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed October 2012.

²⁷ Upon arriving in France Abdessemed first engaged in comparisons between France and the Maghreb. However, his work very quickly explored themes that have wider political resonance.

²⁸ *Joueur de Flûte* (1996) was first presented to the jury of the Beaux-Arts school of Lyon from which the artist graduated. Manolo Mylonas, 'Abdessemed, Adel la Rage', *Connaissance des Arts*, 652, Septembre 2007, p.81.

²⁹ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.77.

³⁰ *Joueur de Flûte* (1996) documents a live performance in which the performer transcends his erstwhile self. However, Abdessemed does admit that it took months to convince the Imam. Anne Bonnin, 'Interview d'Adel Abdessemed par Anne Bonnin', in *Global* (Paris: Paris Musées: 2005), p. 122.

³¹ Anne Bonnin, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*, 300, April 2004

Abdessemed has used nudity to transcend bodily constraints before with *Passé Simple* (1997) and *Real Time* (2003).

argued that the artist's multiple frames of reference exceed the confines of a given culture.³² Indeed, Abdessemed's work poses critical questions about social norms in *Joueur de Flûte* in line with the artist's wider view on politics. In the exhibition catalogue he stated: "The end of utopias and predominant ideologies, happened before the fall of the wall. Today, there is only one dominant ideology: that of capitalism veiled by globalisation; that is the real danger."³³ It was the ambition of Hanru and Jouanno to situate nomadic artistic identities within a wider critique of multicultural societies across the globe, not to limit the debate to France. An ambition neglected by critics, as Clark also observes.³⁴

The fact that the exhibition failed to bring a critique of French systems and culture to the fore, despite the curator's ambitions, is explained by its institutional context. *PpE* was conceived as the contemporary counterpart to an exhibition of modern art *L'Ecole de Paris 1904-1929, la part de l'autre* held at the same time on a different floor of the museum.³⁵ *L'Ecole de Paris* sought to manifest the central role played by foreign artists in the history of French modern art. In an introductory text to the catalogue of *PpE*, the director of the ARC Suzanne Pagé, defined *PpE* as timely; an exhibition on *contemporary* diasporic influences in French art, alongside *L'Ecole de Paris*.³⁶ *PpE* placed a selection of contemporary artists of foreign origin at the forefront of a proffered vibrant Parisian art scene, just as *Ecole de Paris, 1904-1929, la part de l'autre* was doing for the modern epoch. Indeed, Jouanno and Hanru's exhibition *PpE* was undoubtedly meant to mirror the exhibition of modern art *L'Ecole de Paris*. This may explain the contradictions that exist in Jouanno and Hanru's statement published in the exhibition catalogue. Jouanno and Hanru claimed that decolonisation and the expansion of free trade and communication meant that

³² Maldonado Guitemie, 'Dans le bordel global avec Adel Abdessemed', *Parachute*, 124, October/November/December 2006, 36-51, p.37.

³³ "La fin des grandes idéologies et des utopies, c'était avec la chute du mur. Aujourd'hui il n'y a qu'une idéologie dominante : celle du capitalisme masquée derrière la mondialisation ; c'est le vrai danger." Adel Abdessemed, 'Entretien avec Hou Hanru and Evelynne Jouanno'. in *Paris pour Escale* [exhibition Paris pour Escale, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.27.

³⁴ John Clarke, 'Chinese artists in France', in *Over here, over there: international perspectives on art and culture* (London and New York : MIT and New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 212-233, p.226.

³⁵ In English 'The school of Paris, 1904-1929. That of the other'.

³⁶ Suzanne Pagé, 'Avant-propos', in *Paris pour Escale* [exhibition Paris pour Escale, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.8.

the art world was more multicultural than ever before.³⁷ In a French context this statement was particularly confusing and problematic because it ignored the very prejudices that existed in French cultural spheres even today, prejudices which the curators were aware of and denounced in the same catalogue. In other words, they simultaneously stated that Paris occupied an important position in the global network of art centres, demonstrated by the presence of artists of different origin,³⁸ and yet argued that the multicultural nature of Parisian society is denied by legislative and administrative institutions.³⁹ They did not acknowledge that these claims are conflicting. This can be explained by an overriding desire – or a curatorial brief - to assert France's position of influence in modern and contemporary art. In effect, they celebrated past and current multiculturalism despite the xenophobic nature of French cultural politics; an aspect of French culture that they themselves acknowledged.⁴⁰

Laurent Bossé in the *PpE* catalogue stated that Paris is no longer the artistic epicentre it once was.⁴¹ The tendency to recall the past, while perhaps 'masochistic', as Bossé suggested, nonetheless reflects a desire to return to past glory. Indeed, underlying the discourse of the cultural, artistic and geographic multiplicity of *PpE*, was the idea of Paris as an artistic haven. Through the prism of *PpE*, Pagé placed Paris and France as major stops in an artist's peregrination, thus recognising the relative atomisation of the art world, while at the same time emphasising France in this journey. The picture that Pagé painted of the context of artistic migration was complex, and historical and political contexts were acknowledged. Pagé highlighted the linguistic and historical links between France and its former colonies.

³⁷ Jouanno and Hanru do concede that throughout the modern art period, artists of different origins moving to metropolitan centres such as Paris or New York.

³⁸ "On trouve ainsi à Paris une nouvelle vitalité artistique multiculturelle sans précédent, caractéristique des métropoles post-coloniales contemporaines. Par ailleurs, en exposant de façon internationale, ces artistes et autres intellectuels redonnent à la capitale, leur lieu de résidence, l'image d'une 'plate-forme' culturelle et artistique » Hou Hanru and Evelynne Jouanno, 'Ils résident en mouvement...', in *Paris pour Escalé* [exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), 12-15.

³⁹ "Le plus important est l'établissement d'un véritable multiculturalisme dans la société parisienne malgré le refus permanent de cette réalité par les machines administrative et législatives officielles." Hou Hanru and Evelynne Jouanno, 'Ils résident en mouvement...', in *Paris pour Escalé* [exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), 12-15.

⁴⁰ The assertion of French influence upon contemporary art, flies in the face of Jouanno and Hanru's conception of the art world as a space of constant migration and exchange beyond national boundaries.

⁴¹ Laurent Bossé, 'Préface', in *Paris pour Escalé* [exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.9.

Nevertheless, Pagé ignored the political nature of the exhibition envisaged by Jouanno and Hanru. Instead, she invoked the idea that France is an authority in the realm of art – just as Bossé invoked the country's cultural heritage and its founding principles of liberty.

PpE was preceded by an exhibition at Iniva (London) in 1997 entitled *Parisien(ne)*, that loosely inspired the later exhibition. *Parisien(ne)* was also curated by Hanru but explicitly focused on the changes and tensions brought about by migration. The statements in the catalogue of *Parisien(ne)* contrasted greatly with those found in the catalogue of *PpE* by Pagé and Bossé. Gilane Tawadros (Director of Iniva at the time) and Jenni Lomax (Director of the Camden Arts Centre at the time) emphasised the fact that these artists made Paris their home, they were not 'on a stopover'.⁴² I would argue that this reflected the different approaches of these two institutions. Iniva's remit was to promote diasporic practices within a politicised postcolonial context. In contrast, the Musée d'Art Moderne aimed to promote French art by laying claim to a multicultural art scene of historical precedence without necessarily questioning the political or cultural dimension of migration and multiculturalism. In reviews of *PpE* artistic identities were depoliticised, while cultural differences were over-determined. Tawadros, in her contribution to the *PpE* catalogue, implied that the artists exhibited were considered differently in light of persistent visions of homogenous or pure French culture. She wrote: "Even if, in time, the artists of *Parisien(n)es* and *PpE* will no longer be considered as mere visitors on French soil, at the present, they have been attributed to a separate space. They are thus defined by their 'difference' in light of a pure and invariable definition of Frenchness."⁴³ As I will argue in this chapter, envisioned difference became more explicit with exhibitions like *Djazzair 2003* and *Africa Remix*.

⁴² Jenni Lomax and Gilane Tawadros, *Parisien(ne)s* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts and Camden Arts Center, 1997).

⁴³ "Même si, par la suite, les artistes de *Parisien(n)es* et de *PpE* ne seront peut-être plus considérés comme de simples visiteurs sur le sol français, à l'heure actuelle, ils se sont vu attribuer un espace à part. Ils sont ainsi marqués par leur 'différence' au regard de la définition d'une francité pure et invariable, définition récemment remise en question sur le terrain de football mais pas encore dans l'univers sacré des institutions culturelles." Gilane Tawadros, 'Paris transformé', in *Paris pour Escalier* [exhibition Paris pour Escalier, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.18.

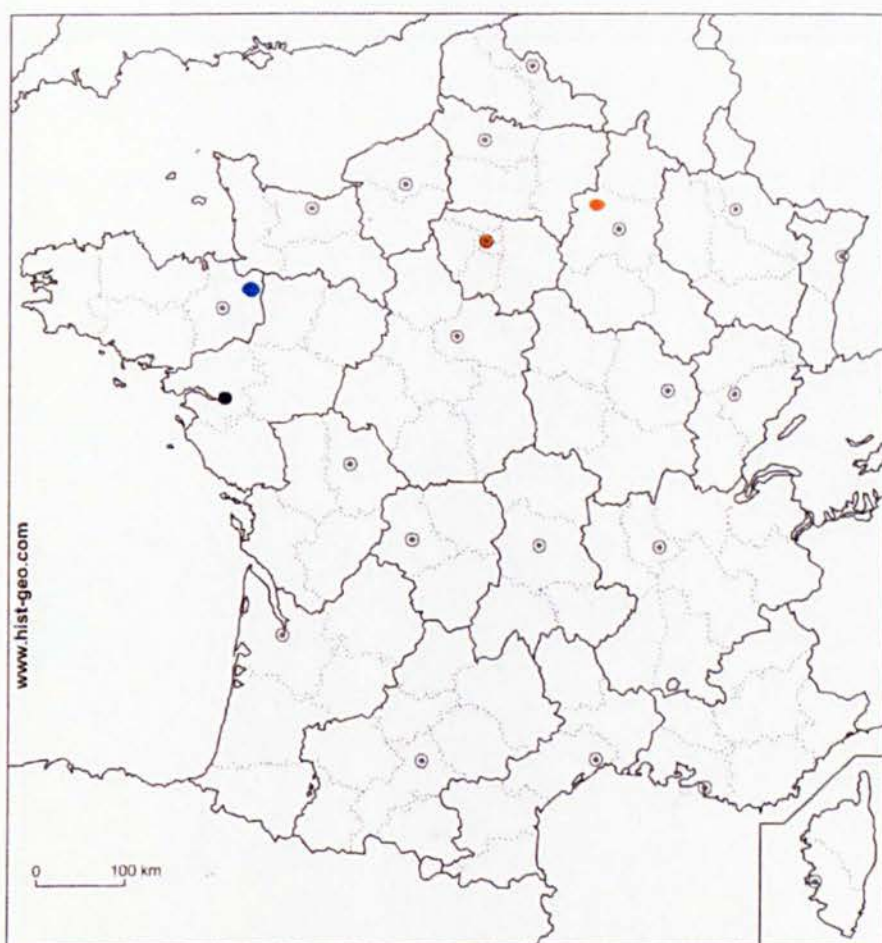


Image 5: 2001 map. The number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

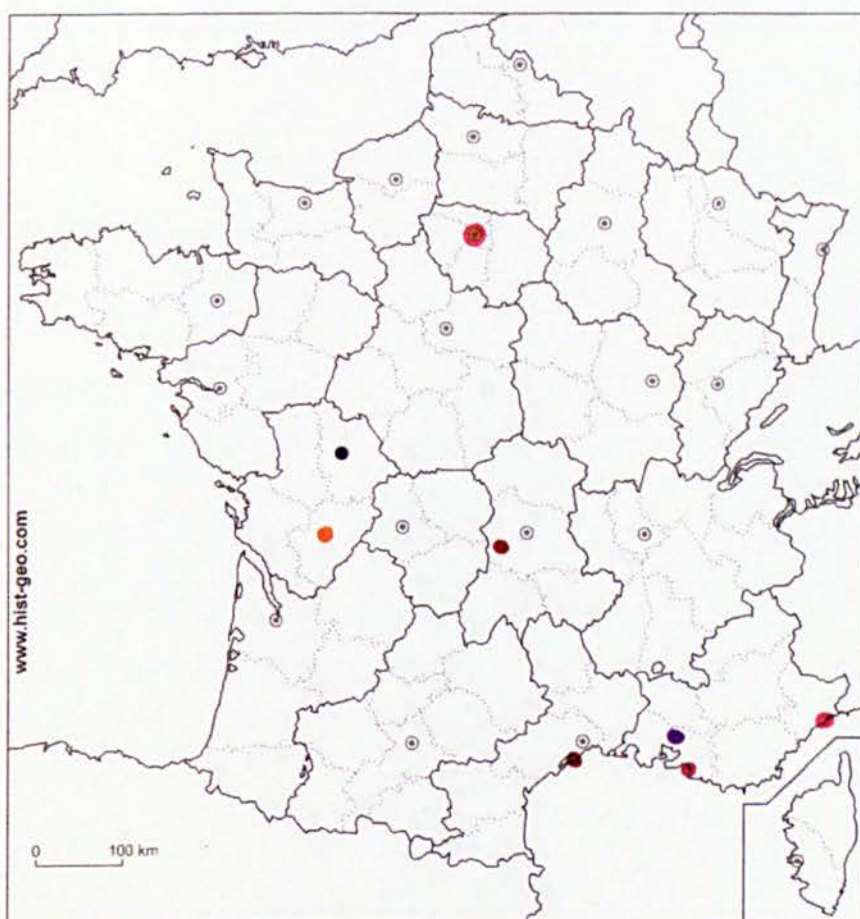


Image 6: 2002, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

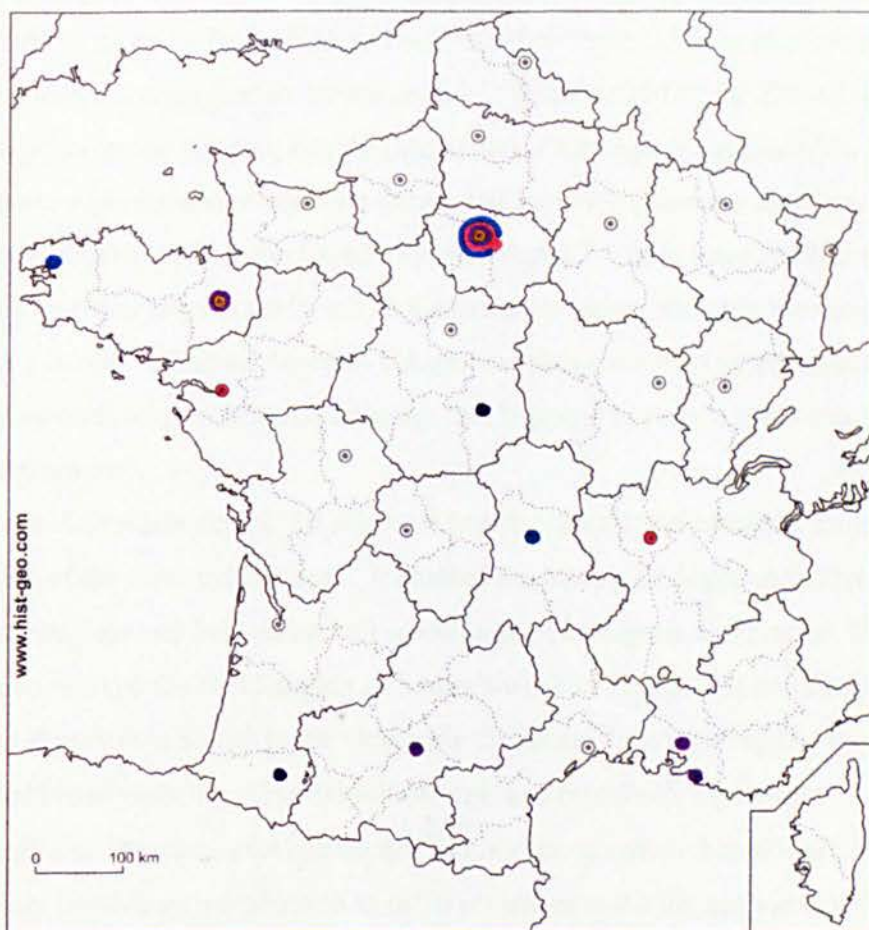


Image 7: 2003, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.3 “Djazaïr 2003”

In 2000 Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Jacques Chirac, the presidents of Algeria and France, committed to the bombastic ‘Djazaïr 2003. Une année de l’Algérie en France’, an officialised posture of concord to be displayed in 2000 cultural events hosted by French institutions big and small over the course of 2003.⁴⁴ Criticised from the onset on either side of the Mediterranean, this diplomatic endeavour sought to build bridges between the two countries, and give visibility to Algerian cultural production in its many forms.⁴⁵ Here I will focus on three exhibitions of modern and contemporary art organised under the aegis of “Djazaïr 2003”: *Le XXe siècle dans L’Art Algérien* at the Château Borely (Marseille), *L’Orangerie du Sénat* (Paris), *Ouvertures Algériennes – Créations vivantes* at La Criée (Rennes), and *Voyages d’Artistes -Algérie 2003* at the Espace Electra (Paris).⁴⁶ These three exhibitions gave visibility to artists from Algeria and its diaspora. However, they predominantly situated artworks within an Algerian context and thus presented an essentialised view of cultural origin. Cultural exchange that happens in France itself was for the most part ignored.

Le XXe siècle dans L’Art Algérien was the largest and certainly the most ambitious of the three exhibitions.⁴⁷ It charted the history of Algerian modern and contemporary art and included artists working both in Algeria and France. This exhibition marked the first hanging of Sedira’s work in France.⁴⁸ It travelled from the Château Borely (Marseille) to the Orangerie du Sénat (Paris), giving the work exhibited broad visibility. This exhibition was, and remains, a significant contribution to the study of Algerian art.⁴⁹ However, given the breadth of its remit it could only provide an introduction to different issues and a limited view of the

⁴⁴ Djazaïr 2003. A year of Algeria in France.

⁴⁵ Djazaïr 2003 attracted the criticism of the Kabyle population, opposing the context of violence and the political regime of Algeria at the time. Dominique Wallon, the first curator appointed, resigned in 2001 to protest against a lack of budget.

⁴⁶ One further exhibition is worth mention: *Algérie en Création* at ‘Le rectangle’ (Lyon). I chose not to consider this event, as it did not exhibit any of the artists I am concerned with in this thesis.

⁴⁷ The exhibition was held between the 04.04.03 and 15.06.03 in Marseille, and between 18.07.03 and 28.08.03 in Paris.

⁴⁸ Sedira featured at ‘Les rencontres d’Arles’ before the exhibition *Le XXe Siècle dans l’Art Algérien*.

⁴⁹ The catalogue featured entries from Franco-Algerian writers Malika Dorbani and Fatma Zohra Zamoum, as well as important documents that trace the history of Algerian art. *Le XXeme siècle dans l’art Algérien* [exhibition *Le Xxeme Siècle dans l’Art Algérien*, 4 April -15 June 2003, Château Borely, Marseille, 18 July – 28 August 2003, Orangerie du Sénat, Paris] (Paris: Aica Press, 2003).

selected artists' work. Indeed, *Miss Holmes* (2001) and *Self-Portraits of the Trinity* (2000), two works of art by Sedira chosen for the exhibition, illustrate only a specific period of the artist's production. *Miss Holmes* (2001) is an installation comprising a mannequin clothed in a 60's style dress, beside which were placed a handbag and shoes, all screen-printed with a brown Arabesque pattern. This installation allied feminist ideas and aesthetic notions of the relation between craft and fine art.⁵⁰ *Self-Portraits of the Trinity* (2000) is a series of three large-format photographic prints representing the artist cloaked in a white cloth and photographed against a white background. It illustrates the artist's feminist concerns prominent in her early career - which I explore in chapter three.⁵¹ That the work exhibited in *Le XXe siècle dans L'Art Algérien* was concerned with identity politics contributed to discourse that over-determined these themes in the work of artists of Algerian origin, and overlooked broader cultural and political meaning.

Ouvertures Algériennes – Créations vivantes at La Criée (Rennes) in 2003 explicitly answered the overall ambitions of the festival of culture 'Djazaïr 2003'. The curator Larys Frogier commissioned three young Algerian artists to create work during a short residency in France.⁵² The exhibition also featured the work of Sedira *La Maison de ma Mère*, *Untitled* and *Mother, Daughter and I* (2003), and Attia's *Correspondances*.⁵³ Frogier stated that Attia and Sedira's work speaks of shared histories between Algeria and France. Their work was featured in the show to avoid patronising interpretations of Algerian artists as 'other', by testifying to diasporic narratives. Frogier explicitly stated in the catalogue of *Ouvertures Algériennes* that Algerian culture is in fact much closer to French culture than is usually recognised. Diasporic and Algerian artists, Frogier suggested, partake in French culture, they are not 'other'. Notwithstanding Frogier's curatorial statements, the review of the show in the regional newspaper *Ouest France* placed an emphasis on the tragedies that had hit Algeria recently rather than on the exhibition itself. The article reproduced the

⁵⁰ This installation was first exhibited at the Spacex Gallery, Exeter (UK).

⁵¹ In 2003, Sedira's practice took a distinct turn away from identity issues common in the work of diasporic artists in the 90s, and towards broader socio-historical and aesthetic concerns with the triptych *Mother, Daughter and I* (2003) and the videos *Retelling Histories* (2003), *Mother, Father and I* (2003). *Le XXe siècle dans L'Art Algérien*, a 2003 exhibition, could not account for this shift in Sedira's practice.

⁵² Frogier visited Algiers and its fine art academy Les Beaux Arts d'Algiers to select artists for the exhibition at la Criée. These artists were Khaled Belaid, Farid Redouani and Samira Sahnoun.

⁵³ The work of Zineb Sedira was advantageously exhibited and a diverse selection of artworks were included, in contrast to *Le XXe siècle dans L'art Algérien*.

image of Algeria as an unstable state, at the cost of analysing the work exhibited or the relation between French and Algerian culture. The article implied that Algeria, unlike France, is a country that falls victim to humanitarian tragedies.⁵⁴ The local magazine *Le Rennais* made no mention of Sedira or Attia, but wrote of the three Algerian artists who, to paraphrase, were still '*reeling*' from the emotion of visiting grand Parisian museums.⁵⁵ I was not able to find reviews of this exhibition in the national press. National newspapers or art journals may have focused on a different narrative than local journalists. Nonetheless, I would argue that under the aegis of "Djazaïr 2003", *Ouvertures Algériennes* was interpreted within the frame of positivist France-Algerian relations, contributing to patronising views of Algeria and Algerian artists among the local press.

The exhibition *Voyages d'Artistes – Algérie 03* at the Espace EDF Electra in Paris diverged from other concurrent events by referring to politically sensitive issues. Henri-François Debailleux noted in *Libération* that the exhibition did not have a diplomatic focus.⁵⁶ The curator Jean-Louis Pradel argued that a creative act is in itself a journey and that the artist is 'partial, passionate and political'.⁵⁷ Despite the impassioned lyricism of Pradel's discourse, that suggests a whimsical take on the subject of relations between France and Algeria, there appeared in his text a radical conception of Algeria as a destination of artistic travel that, far from being exotic, is a place that testifies to a contemporary reality outside and *within* France. Pradel decided to present twenty-three artists of Algerian *and* French origin who had links to Algeria. Among these artists were Sedira, Benyahia and Attia.⁵⁸ The catalogue entry by the Mayor of Paris (Bertrand Delanoë) and the Directors of "Djazaïr 2003" (Françoise Allaire and Mohamed Raouraoua) celebrated the Franco-Algerian dialogue symbolised by this exhibition. Nevertheless, because it was made explicit

⁵⁴ Benoît Le Breton, 'Regards Algériens croisés' à la Criée, *Ouest-France*, 6 June, 2003.

⁵⁵ The local newspaper paints a picture of Frogier as a fairy godmother, whisking the three chosen artists to the ball. Caroline Eluard, 'L'Algérie version moderne', *Le Rennais*, July-August 2003.

⁵⁶ Henri-François Debailleux, 'Paris-Alger: dialogue à l'oeuvre', *Libération*, 14 February, 2004 available online at *Libération.fr* <<http://www.liberation.fr>> , accessed June 2012.

⁵⁷ 'partiale, passionnée et politique'. Jean-Louis Pradel, 'Algérie arts et dépendances', in *Voyages d'artistes – algérie 03* [exhibition voyages d'artistes, 21 november 2003 – 28 march 2004, espace EDF Electra, Paris] (Paris : Paris Musées, 2003), p.24.

⁵⁸ The other artists exhibited in *Voyages d'Artistes* were: Ianna Andréadis, Nadia Benbouta, Ammar Bourras, Philippe Cognée, Electronic Shadow, Ghazel, Rachid Koraïchi, Ange Leccia, Hirsoshi Maeda, Tarik Mesli, Daniel Nadaud, Yazib Oulab, Ernest Pignon-Ernest, Bernard Rancillac, Sedjal Mustafa Sadek, Karim Sergoua, Jacques Villeglé, Kamel Yahiaoui and Hellal Zoubir.

that the artists resided in Algeria, France, and abroad, every 'journey' was made the focus of the exhibition, rather than the professed vibrancy of the one context of production of France or Algeria. Writing a review for *Cimaise*, Frédéric Riou testified to the diversity and the political nature of much of the work presented.⁵⁹ In *Libération*, Henri-François Debailleux stated that the diversity of the exhibition mirrors the diversity of artistic production today.⁶⁰ It is perhaps this last exhibition *Voyages d'Artistes – Algérie 03* that has been most successful in giving visibility to artists like Attia, Benyahia and Sedira, while also acknowledging diverse experiences and aesthetic concerns.

Whilst “Djazzaïr 2003” provided the resources and support to enable several important exhibitions featuring diasporic artists, these artists were exhibited as representatives of Franco-Algerian relations. Albeit for *Voyages d'Artistes*, the work exhibited was not perceived to testify to realities that exist simultaneously outside, and within, France. The focus was thus very different from *PpE*, in which Paris as a cultural capital was the discursive frame. Notwithstanding the curatorial statement of *Voyages d'Artistes*, the three events all fell short of communicating to the public the specificity of each artistic approach and experience. Press reviews continued to emphasis de-politicised notions of origin and identity. It is only with the exhibitions *Shake* and *Prosismic* analysed in the following section that these artists were exhibited outside of explicit national contexts.

⁵⁹ Frédéric Riou, 'De l'art et des voyages 'géo-politiques'', *Cimaise*, Winter 2004, 28-29.

⁶⁰ Henri-François Debailleux, 'Paris-Alger: dialogue à l'oeuvre', *Libération*, 14 February, 2004, available online at Libération.fr <<http://www.liberation.fr>>, accessed June 2012.

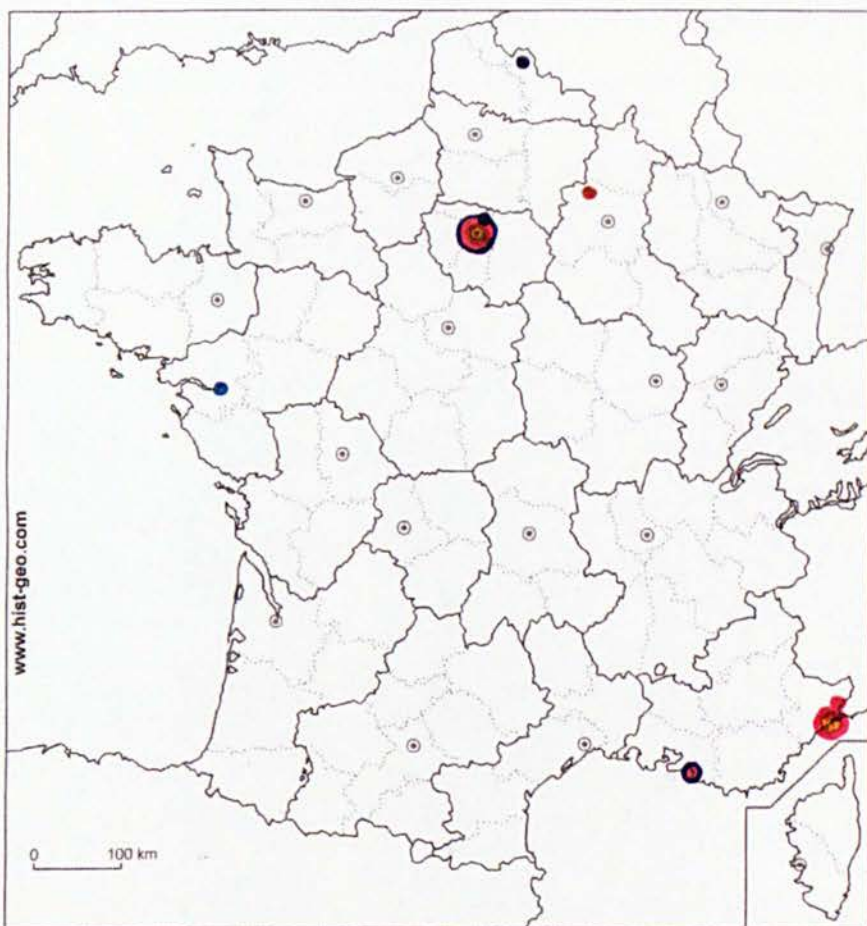


Image 8: 2004, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.4 *Shake* and *Prosismic*: Shaking up French art

The exhibition *Shake* at the Villa d'Arson (4 July – 10 October 2004) was organised in conjunction with the 'OK Centrum für Gegenwartskunst' of Linz (Austria). It was the culmination of a Council of Europe led program to work on issues of cooperation and 'peripheral centres' entitled 'Re:Location 1-7/Shake: A European Adventure'.⁶¹

The questions of identity raised in this exhibition should be understood in a specific European context at a time when new member states entered the European Union. European culture was thus in a process of flux, and this exhibition was part of an effort to question and redefine culture and nationality within the European Union.

The press release for the French exhibition read:

Does the state, the nation still constitute relevant and workable political concepts? The project of the exhibition *Shake* aims to question these historically determined notions (state, national identity, etc.) in the face of a new European political order and a global economy.⁶²

Shake thus elicited interesting counter-positions to the previous exhibitions we have analysed, in that it aimed to criticise the very notions of national culture that *PpE* and *Djazzair 2003* directly or indirectly affirmed. The exhibition demonstrated just how permanent frames of nation and state are, and how they condition culture, and private and collective identity.

Shake featured *Adel a démissionné* (2001), a sign that bore the words 'Adel a démissionné'.⁶³ In the catalogue of the exhibition *Valeurs Croisées* where this work was also exhibited, Elodie Lécuyer argued that *Adel a démissionné* reveals the interdependence between the artist and financing institutions.⁶⁴ Indeed, it appears that in

⁶¹ *Re:Location 1-7/Shake: A European Adventure* run from 2002-2004. The exhibition was held at the Casino Luxembourg - Forum d'art contemporain (Luxembourg), the International Center for Contemporary Art in Bucharest, the ArtStudio in Cluj (Romania), the Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej "Laznia" in Gdansk (Poland), the Galéria Jána Koniarka in Trnava (Slovakia), the migros museum für gegenwartskunst in Zurich (Switzerland), the O.K Centrum für Gegenwartskunst in Linz (Austria) and the Villa Arson - Centre national d'art contemporain in Nice (France).

⁶² "L'Etat, la nation constituent-ils encore des concepts politiques pertinents et opératoires ? Le projet de l'exposition *Shake* est de mettre en question ces notions historiquement déterminées (l'état, l'identité nationale, etc.) face au nouvel ordre politique européen et à la mondialisation de l'économie." *Shake* press release http://archives.villa-arson.org/communiquede/2004SHAK_CP_FR.Shake.

⁶³ In English 'Adel has resigned'. *Shake* featured *Un Cri Court* (1999) by Abdessemed, a cryptic and worrying video of seeming psychosis. A music conductor is asked to exteriorise sounds to the rhythm of a metronome. The exhibition also featured *Hallal* (2004) and *Correspondance* (2003) by Attia.

⁶⁴ Elodie Lécuyer, 'Adel has resigned', *Valeurs Croisées* [Exhibition *Valeurs Croisées*, Ateliers de

this installation the artist effects a refusal to be co-opted by curators. I would argue that this work is a critique of the art world and of cultural politics, as was also argued in the exhibition catalogue.⁶⁵ In this way, like the exhibition *Valeurs Croisés*, *Shake* situated political critique within the institution of art itself.⁶⁶ In chapter four I return to these issues and propose a renewed institutional critique by researching into the workings of the art world system, to problematise the use of diasporic practices for political and diplomatic ends.

The 'Fondation Ricard' held the small group exhibition *Prosismic* (12 October – 18 November 2004) during the Fiac 2004.⁶⁷ The nine artists selected by the curator Jouanno were all shortlisted for the 'Prix Ricard' art prize of 2004.⁶⁸ Whilst the Prix Ricard is awarded to the artist who best represents contemporary *French* creation, *Prosismic* made no reference to a French art scene. It is interesting that, like *Shake*, the title communicated the idea of seismic movement, and indeed this exhibition also sought to question artistic identities in contemporary society. The artists exhibited seemed nonchalantly global in the sense that their national identity was not the subject of study. Instead, *Prosismic* focused on the wider relation between art practices and the seismic changes that Jouanno argued were 'shaking up' society. *Tchüss* (2004) by Abdessemed is a one minute looped video of footage showing the arm of Abdessemed's daughter as she waves goodbye. Katia Kameli exhibited *Baboushes de sept lieues* (2004); two Baboushes shoes were placed in a small vitrine.⁶⁹ Both works represented states of travel and the artistic strategies adopted and adapted to creative practices in flux. *Prosismic* thus approached the work of artists of diasporic origin in terms of creative processes, instead of enlisting their work to fixed views of identity and nationality; An approach that is crucial for an understanding of diasporic practices.

Rennes, 2008](Dijon: Les Presses du Réels, 2009), p.268

⁶⁵ *Shake*, available online at <http://archives.villa-arson.org>.

⁶⁶ *Le Figaro* quotes the director of the Villa d'Arson commenting on the continuing importance of nationality and borders, and the ways in which artists question these borders. The article also emphasised the diversity of practices exhibited. Apart from *Le Figaro*, however, the exhibition did not spark the interest of journals or newspapers. There was therefore little discussion generated around the problematic that the exhibition raised. Sophie Latil, 'Cartes d'identités Européennes à la Villa d'Arson', *Le Figaro*, 14-15 August, 2004, p.14.

⁶⁷ The Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain or Fiac is an annual art fair that takes place in Paris.

⁶⁸ Adel Abdessemed, Mircea Cantor, Ruth Barabash, Marc Boucherot, Véronique Boudier, the group Echopark, Adriana García Galán, Katia Kameli and Stefan Nikolaev.

⁶⁹ Baboushes are shoes that are traditionally worn in the Arab world.

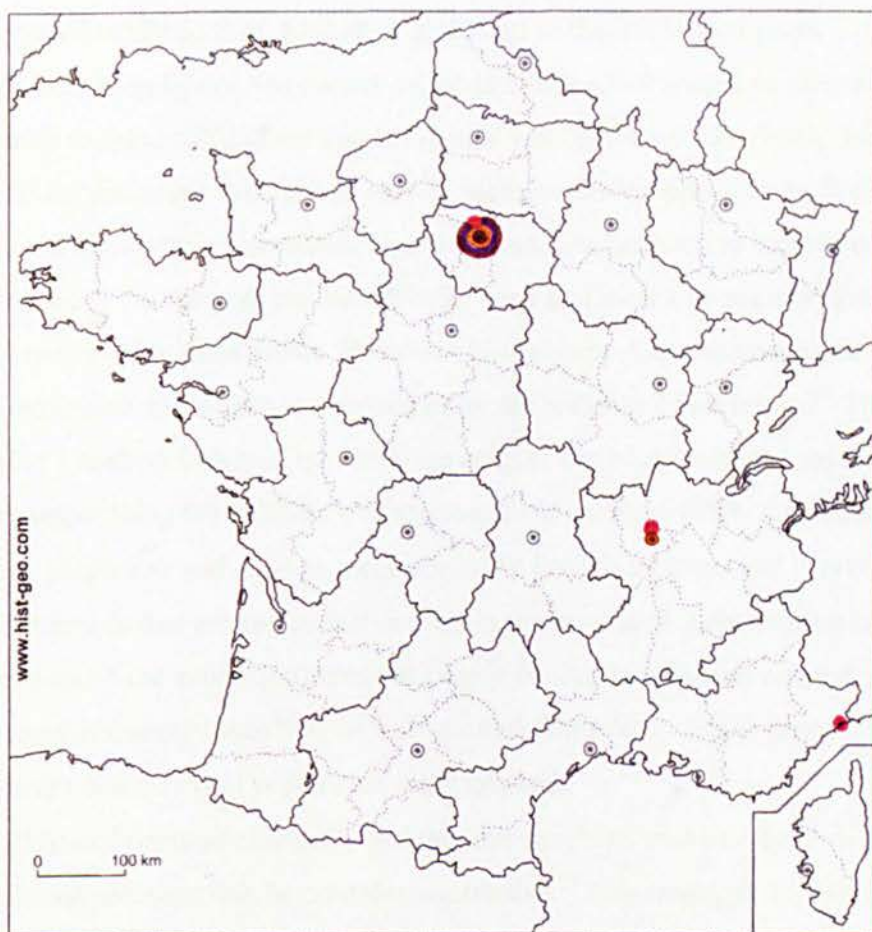


Image 9: 2005, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.5 *Africa Remix*

Subtitled *L'Art d'un Continent*, the touring exhibition *Africa Remix* (referred to from now on as *AR*) was shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2005. *AR* featured the work of eighty-four African and diasporic artists with the aim to survey contemporary African art. Sedira's work was featured in the exhibition, as well as the work of Zoulikha Bouabdellah, whose career the exhibition launched.⁷⁰ *AR* was influenced by a wider institutional context; in response to the growing number of international exhibitions of African or global art in the last fifteen years. To paraphrase Simon Njami, the curator of the exhibition, *AR* sought to offer an alternative to these exhibitions that in Njami's view had been too closely inspired by postcolonial discourse to celebrate non-Western artists in opposition to Western artists, and not on their own terms, Njami argues. The decision to include the work of artists from the diaspora can therefore be seen as a means to question the easy categorisation of African artists. However, Njami's approach was not made explicit in the exhibition and was thus overlooked by the majority of art critics.⁷¹ The curator and critic Elisabeth Lebovici contrasts the eclecticism of *AR* with the universal notions underlining the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* of 1989. A comparison between *Magiciens* and *AR* was recurrent in the French art press and is revealing of two phenomena that are key to this thesis. On the one hand, it demonstrates how debates around the exhibition were once again limited to a French context. On the other hand, it demonstrates how in both *AR* and *Magiciens* - but in contrast to *Prosismic* - conditions of production were ignored.

Njami is critical of identity politics and sought to move away from postcolonial premises that he considers restrictive.⁷² The catalogue of *AR* listed the birthplace of the artists rather than their nationality, an approach that stays true to artist's diverse identities and experiences.⁷³ However, it would seem that Njami's critical stance towards identity politics was not brought to the fore. Reviewing the

⁷⁰ The video *Dansons* by Bouabdellah received critical acclaim and sparked academic interest. Shioban Shilton, 'Belly Dancing to the Marseillaise: Zoulikha Bouabdellah's *Dansons*', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 12 (2008), 437-444.

⁷¹ *Africa Remix* (Paris : Editions Centre Pompidou, 2005).

⁷² I have heard him mock negritude theories by quoting Wole Soyinka: "Le tigre ne proclame pas sa tigritude, il bondit sur sa proie" (the tiger does not declare it's tiger-ness, he pounces on his victim).

⁷³ Zoulikha Bouabdellah is presented as being born in Russia.

exhibition for *Art Press*, Cédric Vincent wrote that *AR* borrows the same logic that defined exhibitions of African art Njami aimed to criticise. Vincent wrote: "If he wishes to demarcate himself from the debates, often fruitless, of the 1990's, it remains that he reuses the panoramic model as well as the rhetoric of inclusion."⁷⁴ Njami himself made sweeping remarks in the catalogue regarding African cities that have no centre, Africa as a continent where one has to reinvent oneself, and I paraphrase, where women and men dance while they give birth to children they do not know will survive them.⁷⁵ While Njami aimed to move beyond identity politics inspired by postcolonial theory, it is difficult to identify these objectives in the sweeping and stereotypical comments cited⁷⁶. Indeed, the exhibition was criticised for using banal themes and for ignoring the history of contemporary art in the West and in Africa.⁷⁷ The critic Maureen Murphy wrote: "Bringing together the work of artists from totally different generations (...) whose career (...) and conditions of production in their respective countries have nothing to do with one another (...) is less of a critical or innovative approach than a remix, a mix of every known genre since Magiciens."⁷⁸

Responding to Murphy in the same issue of the journal 'Gradhiva', Njami focuses on one detail of her criticism: the reference to *Magiciens de la Terre*. Njami accuses Murphy of pandering to the notion of 'French exceptionalism' thus posing questions that are irrelevant. "But suddenly, we have the notion of French exception that comes into play, and questions that have no place to be in Düsseldorf as in London, hereby fuel empty debates."⁷⁹ Murphy's reference to *Magiciens* is in fact

⁷⁴ " S'il souhaite se démarquer des débats, souvent infructueux il est vrai, des années 1990, il n'en demeure pas moins qu'il reprend à la fois le modèle panoramique et la rhétorique de l'inclusion qui l'accompagne." Cédric Vincent, 'Africa Remix, down tempo', *Art Press*, 312, May 2005, p.30.

⁷⁵ Drawing on Foucault, he then compares this to industrialised societies mocking the 'scandalised' West in a way that echoes dated views on African authenticity as a criticism of Western values.

⁷⁶ The work of Bouabdellah exhibited in *Africa Remix* has very little to do with the experience of Africa as a continent of poverty, tradition, postmodernity and ritual that Njami writes of. *Dansons* (2003) is a video in which the artist bellydances to the rhythm of the French national anthem.

⁷⁷ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'L'Afrique a show', *Libération*, 31 May, 2005, available online at liberation.fr, accessed October 2012.

⁷⁸ "Réunir des oeuvres d'artistes de générations totalement différentes (...) dont le parcours (...) et les conditions de travail dans leurs pays respectifs n'ont rien à voir (...) relève moins d'une démarche problématisée et novatrice que d'un "remix", d'un brassage de tous les genres connus depuis les Magiciens de la Terre." Maureen Murphy, 'A propos de l'exposition Africa Remix, l'art contemporain d'un continent', *Gradhiva*, 2 (2005), p.142.

⁷⁹ "Mais voilà que soudain l'exception française se met à l'oeuvre et que des questions qui n'ont pas lieu d'être à Düsseldorf comme à Londres deviennent ici matière à faux débats." Simon Njami, 'Par Simon Njami', *Gradhiva*, 2 (2005), 144-145; Njami would argue that the comparison between

relevant since it has been a key event in the history of contemporary African art in the West. I have observed the limiting aspect of 'l'exception culturelle' that Njami mentions in relation to *PpE*, and it appears that other commentators of *AR* were in fact guilty of 'French exceptionalism'; which cannot be said for Murphy's text. Marie-Laure Bernadac wrote in the catalogue that a survey of African art was needed after *Magiciens*. This comment, coming from one of the co-curators of *AR*, indicates how international discourse on non-Western art that developed since *Magiciens* in 1989, has been ignored in French institutions. Indeed, Bernadac stated that France was late in organising a survey of African art which she ascribes to a French desire to find solutions aside from postcolonial theory.⁸⁰ By 2005, non-Western art had not yet been the subject of much institutional debate in France. Therefore, it is especially problematic that Njami's curatorial stance was not made explicit and that *AR* failed to be situated in a wider international context of exhibitions, in that it continued to obscure the variety of contexts of production of 'African' art already absent from much institutional discourse. Further comparison with *Magiciens* enables me to better enunciate this point.

Magiciens was curated by Jean Hubert Martin and exhibited in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou. It remains controversial to this day.⁸¹ The exhibition sought to combine modern Western art with non-modern African art. Cesare Poppi in an article published in 'Third Text' in 1991, commented that *Magiciens* brought legitimacy to art production from a broad geographical region, the first step to the incorporation and assimilation of African contemporary art into western institutions of art.⁸² However, his reading of *Magiciens*, influenced by a criticism of postmodernism, questioned the assimilation of non-Western art. He argued that postmodernism presents cultural production not as an 'integrated life-world', but as symbols of a global discourse that ignores power differentials and is supported by means of mass communication. Poppi wrote:

Magiciens and the exhibition *Africa Remix* is facile, it shares the same location (the Centre Pompidou) and Jean-Hubert Martin (the curator of *Magiciens*) was also involved in *Africa Remix*.

⁸⁰ "France is always behind, some say, because she attempts other analytical approaches in order to reach different conclusions than those weakened by postcolonial theories." "La France est toujours en retard, dit-on, car elle tente d'autres approches analytiques afin d'aboutir à d'autres réponses que celles appovries par les théories postcoloniales." Marie-Laure Bernadac, *Africa Remix* (Paris : Editions Centre Pompidou, 2005), p.11.

⁸¹ Paradoxically, *Magiciens* was critical of the exhibition *Primitivisms* in New York in 1984.

⁸² Cesare Poppi, 'From the Suburbs of the Global Village: Afterthoughts on *Magiciens de la Terre*', *Third Text*, 14 (5) (1991), p.85.

It is in placing the question at the historical level concerning the nature of continuity (where it exists, that is) that the postmodernist delusion of synchronicity can be dispelled. The simultaneous existence of different 'cultural species' assumed to be the very evidence of the 'polyvocality culture' overlooks the issues stemming from the consideration of power differentials, of the divergence that exists between the centre and periphery today⁸³

Jean-Hubert Martin's ambition with *Magiciens* was to dispel the idea of African traditions as timeless. However, as Poppi argues, juxtaposing contemporary work alongside traditional objects obscured the relation that the two objects have with their respective pasts and thus also hid the 'objective' differences that exist.⁸⁴ Poppi posits that the lack of discourse on objective differences is as patronising as was colonial discourse. "Is the lack, or even the unwillingness itself, to bring upon ourselves the responsibility to judge and select, not perhaps as discriminatory and patronising as the old colonial attitudes?"⁸⁵

It is this same criticism, of failing to make explicit contexts of production and exhibition, that I would apply to *AR*. Njami aimed to represent African artists on their own terms without imposing any overarching curatorial discourse. However, the artwork featured and the exhibition itself lacked contextualisation, diasporic artists and African artists were exhibited together without differing contexts of production being stated. The example of *Magiciens* demonstrates that simply withholding information relating to the history of artworks and artefacts cannot be a solution to the question of non-western or diasporic exhibitions. It is not the geographic or cultural diversity found in *AR* that is problematic, but the variety of contexts of production that are left unexplained to the visiting public and the catalogue reader.

⁸³ Cesare Poppi, 'From the suburbs of the global village: afterthoughts on *Magiciens de la Terre*', *Third Text*, 14 (5) (1991), p.87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.93.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.94.

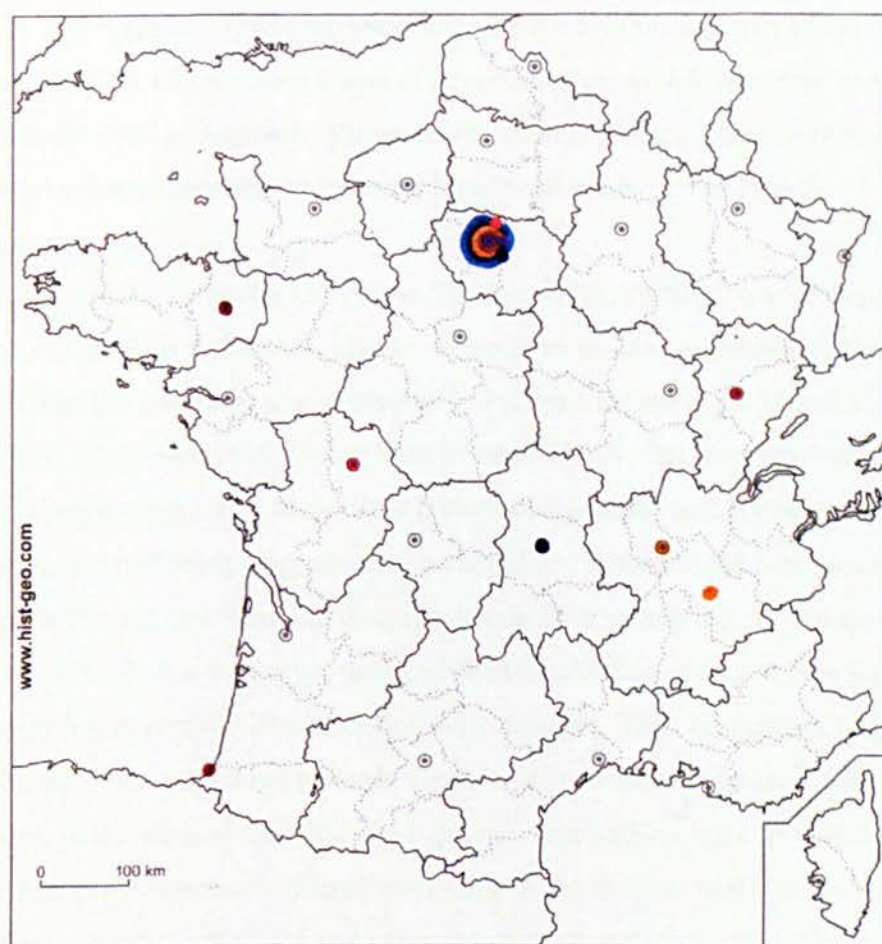


Image 10: 2006, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.6 “Notre Histoire...” What History?

“Notre Histoire...” opened at the Palais de Tokyo on the 20th of January 2006. This group show included the work of twenty-nine artists brought together by the curators Jérôme Sans and Nicholas Bourriaud to ‘federate’ contemporary creative energies in France, as Claire Staebler claims when interviewing the curators for the exhibition catalogue.⁸⁶ “Notre Histoire...” (referred to from now on as *NH*) thus marked a significant change in the way in which diasporic artists had been considered until now. On this occasion, Attia and Abdessemed were exhibited as part of the French art scene. Whilst *AR* presented artists of Algerian origin as African, *PpE* as migrants, and *Djazzair 2003* as Algerian, *NH* presented them as French artists. *NH* presented a French art scene in response to the need for official mediation of French contemporary art.

The exhibition's very title *Notre Histoire*, or ‘our history’, was ambiguous. Indeed, as Hervé Gauville and Lebovici wrote in an article published in *Libération*, the title begs the question: whose history?⁸⁷ Philippe Dagen in *Le Monde* also questioned this chosen title: “Notre Histoire: a brief title, that may seem simple but isn’t”.⁸⁸ It seems regressive to consider history as a singular and common experience because this is inevitably suggestive of nationalism. However, the title may have referred to the fact that Sans and Bourriaud were both to step down from their role of directors of the Palais de Tokyo; the exhibition would thus appear to be a survey of art as they had conceived it to be during their mandate. The two curators claimed that the exhibition was turned not towards the past, but towards the future.⁸⁹ Such an argument, in the view of Gauville and Lebovici, was nothing but a ‘pirouette’, a clever discursive gymnastic. The ellipses included in the title would suggest a definition of history and of the collective that is open ended. Another discursive gymnastic? Who is the collective embodied by the ‘our’ of our history? As Dagen wrote: “Does “Our”, refer to a geography, a preference, a generation? Was the

⁸⁶ Claire Staebler, ‘Faire Notre Histoire’, in *Notre Histoire, une scène artistique Française émergente* [exhibition « Notre Histoire... », Palais de Tokyo, Paris] (Paris : Paris Musées, 2005), p.11.

⁸⁷ Hervé Gauville and Elisabeth Lebovici, “Notre Histoire...” a Dormir Debout’, *Libération*, p.24 January, 2006, available online at [Libération.fr](http://liberation.fr) <<http://liberation.fr>> , accessed April 2012.

⁸⁸ “Notre histoire » : un titre bref, qui paraît simple et ne l'est pas.”

Philippe Dagen, “Notre Histoire” racontée par un art actuel réaliste’, *Le Monde*, 22 January 2006, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed April 2012.

⁸⁹ Art Press, 320, December 2005 – January 2006, p.30.

“History” artistic, political, private, public?”⁹⁰

It would seem that *NH* offered a vision of an artistic community that was far more inclusive than its title suggested. Dagen commented that geography could only loosely have been a criteria of selection. Indeed, while all artists lived or worked in France (with one exception) as *Art Press* noted, artists originated from France, Algeria, Cameroon, Taiwan and Romania. *Le Figaro* wrote of an artistic melting pot that transcends the borders of France. Yet, critics joined voices to argue that the Palais de Tokyo exhibition was an effort to promote a *French* scene. Titling one of the paragraphs of their 2006 article “Une scène Française”, Gauville and Lebovici predicted that 2006 would be the year of politico-artistic manoeuvring to promote French art. In the Staebler interview, Sans and Bourriaud did indeed talk of ‘scène française’ and ‘artistes français’. It is useful at this point to consider the art institutional context that frames this discussion.

In 2001 the sociologist Alain Quemin wrote a report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that evidenced how French artists were disfavoured both at home and abroad. Available to the public a year later when the editors ‘Edition Jacqueline Chambon’ and ‘Artprice’ published the report under the title ‘L’art contemporain international: entre les institutions et le marché (Le rapport disparu)’,⁹¹ it sent a shock wave through French art institutions, as articles in the national newspapers *Le Monde* and *Libération* testified.⁹² In a 2005 editorial of *Art Press*, Richard Leydier stated that France had not been capable - or willing - to join in what he regards as puerile ‘marketing patriotique’. He concluded that France has therefore not known how to export its artists. Is this, he asked, the time for a ‘Made in France’ trademark?⁹³ Christine Macel was quoted in the same issue observing that French institutions of culture could not admit that France has lost its position of artistic authority, and thus continue to consider questions of nationality: “In New York, no one asks themselves the question of nationality because everything is multicultural.

⁹⁰ “« Notre » renvoie-t-il à une géographie, une préférence, une génération ? L’«histoire» est-elle artistique, politique, privée, publique ?” Philippe Dagen, “Notre Histoire” racontée par un art actuel réaliste’, *Le Monde*, 22 January 2006, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed April 2012.

⁹¹ The title of Quemin’s report in English : ‘International contemporary art: between institutions and market (the lost report)’.

⁹² Harry Bellet, ‘Exposition créateurs en quête de visibilité’, *Le Monde*, 11 May, 2006, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed April 2012.

Hervé Gauville and Elisabeth Lebovici, “Notre Histoire...” a dormir debout’, *Libération*, 24 January, 2006, available online at [Libération.fr](http://liberation.fr) <<http://liberation.fr>> , accessed April 2012.

⁹³ Richard Leydier, ‘Editorial: Du Marketing Patriotique’, *Art Press*, 316, Octobre 2005, p.5.

Same in Berlin. Remains the French who continue to ask themselves this type of question. They cannot accept the reality, in other words to no longer be the leaders of the cultural scene since the end of the 1960's."⁹⁴

Three years after Quemin's study was made public, *NH* was the first of several exhibitions that responded to the realisation that French contemporary art lacked visibility internationally as Gauville and Lebovici suggested.⁹⁵ Staebler asked in interview why Bourriaud and Sans felt the need to present an exhibition of French art given their refusal to curate national exhibitions. Rather than disputing Staebler's question, Bourriaud made the tangential comment that such an exhibition was now possible; thus effectively advocating an emerging French art scene without providing any theoretical underpinning.⁹⁶ Bourriaud further stated that artistic movements do not spontaneously emerge but respond to moments of federating positions of art criticism. The underlying meaning of his statement is that *NH* would formulate a critical frame that brought together a rising 'French scene'.

Gauville and Lebovici argued that the work exhibited is representative of a current trend for 'les gros sous', in English 'big money'. Dagen claimed that the exhibition's two defining factors were on the one hand large-scale installations enabled by important sponsors and on the other hand references to manifestations of the present.⁹⁷ *Le Figaro* similarly stated that the work testified to political preoccupations, but it identified no trend, no movement: "29 of them share the space of the Palais de Tokyo, without us being able to identify a trend, a movement."⁹⁸ However, the review also commented on the fact that large installations were numerous. *Habibi* (loved one) by Abdessemed, for example, is a gigantic skeleton

⁹⁴ "A New York, personne ne se pose la question de la nationalité puisque tout est multiculturel. Idem à Berlin. Restent les Français qui continuent à se poser ce genre de question. Ils n'arrivent pas à accepter la réalité, c'est-à-dire de ne plus être des leaders de la scène culturelle depuis la fin des années 1960." Christine Macel in Judith Benhamou-Huet, 'Marché de l'Art: la nationalité, argument de vente', *Art Press*, 316, Octobre 2005, p.42.

⁹⁵ Hervé Gauville and Elisabeth Lebovici, "'Notre Histoire...' a Dormir Debout", *Libération*, 24 January, 2006, available online at [Libération.fr](http://liberation.fr) <<http://liberation.fr>>, accessed April 2012.

⁹⁶ Claire Staebler, 'Faire Notre Histoire', in *Notre Histoire, une scène artistique Française émergente* [exhibition « Notre Histoire... », Palais de Tokyo, Paris] (Paris: Paris Musées, 2005), p.11.

⁹⁷ "Ce sujet, c'est le monde actuel". Philippe Dagen, "'Notre Histoire' racontée par un art actuel réaliste", *Le Monde*, 22 January 2006, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed April 2012.

⁹⁸ "Ils sont 29 à se partager l'espace du Palais de Tokyo, sans qu'on puisse déceler une tendance, un mouvement". 'Notre Histoire au Palais de Tokyo, face au réel', *Le Figaroscope*, 1 au 7 Février 2006, available online at figaro.fr, accessed April 2012.

hung horizontally above the ground as if propelled forward.⁹⁹ The installation dominated the main gallery of the Palais de Tokyo during *NH*. What these press reviews demonstrated is the emphasis placed in *NH* on installation art that is predominantly political. In an interview I conducted with Catherine Grenier from the Centre Pompidou in 2012, she hypothesised that the rise of artists from the diaspora was linked to the worldwide trend for political art. Much of French contemporary art is not political and young diasporic artists would seem to fulfil this demand.

NH, I argue, arose from the conscious decision to formulate a unifying curatorial discourse around a selection of contemporary artworks. It also marks the beginnings of political manoeuvrings in light of the lack of recognition of contemporary French art nationally and internationally. Seemingly, diasporic practices that are defined by large-scale installations and political subject matter support France's bid of validation by international institutions and the art market. Hence I propose that the rise of diasporic artists of Algerian origin considered as French art in French institutions must be analysed within this context. Subsequent exhibitions appear to confirm this hypothesis.

⁹⁹ When exhibited at the Berlin Biennale, *Habibi* featured a plane propellor hung at the heels of the skeleton, thus suggesting a different interpretation to this gigantic three-dimensional memento mori exhibited in Paris. There is yet another meaning of *Habibi*; the artist has been known to interpret *Habibi* as a self-portrait since he tends to work lying on the ground on his stomach.

1.7 *La Force de l'Art 2006*: The political power of art.

The exhibition *La Force de l'Art* was surrounded by controversy even before it opened at the Grand Palais on the 10th of May 2006. This large scale exhibition included proposals from fifteen curators, and the work of more than two hundred artists, among them Abdessemed and Benyahia. It was hoped the exhibition would serve as a platform of national and international scope for myriad forms of artistic expression and discourse. With strong ties to governmental politics, *La Force de l'Art 2006* (referred to from now on as *FA 2006*) responded to the same institutional crisis I analysed in relation to *NH*. Indeed, Catherine Millet wrote: "Greatly awaited and criticised even before it officially opened, *La Force de l'Art* stems from an identity crisis that is specifically French: international curators and critics were accused of paying heed to what happens in Berlin, New York and London, continuing to ignore France."¹⁰⁰ The aim of the exhibition, she continued, was to show the diversity of artistic practices in France.

It was during the *Fiac* 2005 that the Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin publicly announced the project of a Triennale exhibition that would demonstrate the strength and diversity of artistic creation in France.¹⁰¹ *FA 2006* was the first Triennale. The fact that Villepin by-passed the Minister of Culture did not seem to have attracted criticism until the project schedule was attacked for being unfeasible.¹⁰² The press also documented the fact that one artist refused to take part for political reasons (Fromentin), and two curators turned down the job (Millet and Froment). Fromentin's criticism and his refusal to be part of the exhibition, mirrored by *Libération* and *L'Humanité*, was that the hurried way in which the project was conceived and organised testified to the fact that the exhibition was the consequence

¹⁰⁰ "Très attendue et très critiquée avant même son ouverture, la Force de l'art est née d'une crise identitaire spécifiquement française: les commissaires et les critiques internationaux se voient reprocher de suivre attentivement ce qui se passe à Berlin, New York et Londres, et de s'obstiner à ignorer la France." Eleanor Heartney and Catherine Millet, 'La Force de l'Art une réalité protéiforme', *Art Press*, 325, July-August, 2006, 12-14.

¹⁰¹ Henri-François Debailleux and Gérard Lefort, 'En Mai, Villepin fait l'expo qui lui plaît', *Libération*, 18 April, 2006, available online at [Libération.fr](http://www.Libération.fr), <<http://www.Libération.fr>>, accessed June 2012.

¹⁰² The project was from then on referred to as 'Expo Villepin'.

Béatrice Comte, 'Suffit-il d'affirmer la Force de l'Art?', *Le Figaro Magazine*, 20 May, 2006, p.76
Henri-François Debailleux, 'Fromentin n'ira pas à l'expo-Villepin', *Libération*, 4 April, 2006, available online at [Libération.fr](http://www.Libération.fr), <<http://www.Libération.fr>>, accessed June 2012.

of electoral politics.¹⁰³ *Le Figaro* suggested that *FA 2006* was a means to distract the public from contentious issues the Prime Minister was facing at the time.¹⁰⁴

Libération was more vocal in its criticism of the exhibition project, referring to it as 'la farce de l'art'.¹⁰⁵

From its title to the circumstances of its conception, *FA 2006* reflected the government's ambition to inverse the decline of French Art as demonstrated by the Quemin report. Indeed, as *Le Figaro* argued, the Prime Minister was attempting to prove that 'the French scene was not in decline'.¹⁰⁶ However, *Le Figaro* also attacked the exhibition's patriotic slant. *Libération* referred to a tri-coloured exhibition, making a parallel between the national flag and a national art.¹⁰⁷ *L'Express* wittily entitled an article referring to the exhibition "Aux arts, citoyens", a word play on the lyrics of the national anthem: "Aux armes, citoyens".¹⁰⁸ Indeed, *FA 2006* presented art as a national monument of culture. In 2009 this was made explicit with *La Force de l'Art 02* where peripheral exhibitions were staged in major historical monuments. Effectively, in 2009, contemporary art was linked more closely to national heritage. The 2009 exhibition reveals how even in 2006, work selected was officially sanctioned alongside national heritage.

FA 02 in 2009 also occupied the vast space of the Grand Palais as well as the Eiffel Tower, L'Eglise Saint-Eustache, the Palais de la Découverte and the Musée Grévin. Conceived over the course of two years, the exhibition was the culmination of three curators' expertise: Jean-Louis Froment, Didier Ottinger and Yves Jouannais. Among others, it featured the work of Attia and Kameli. Valérie Duponchelle in *Le*

¹⁰³ Maurice Ulrich, 'Faut-il brûler la Force de l'Art?', *L'Humanité*, 25 April, 2006, available online at *L'Humanité*.fr, <<http://www.humanite.fr>>, accessed June 2012.

¹⁰⁴ "Around 17 hours, surrounded by a sea of microphones, Dominique de Villepin had forgotten the sombre affairs of the CPE and Clearstream to inaugurate, all smiles, his idea (...); "Vers 17 heures, entouré d'une nuée de micros, Dominique de Villepin avait oublié les sombres affaires du CPE et de Clearstream pour inaugurer, tout sourire, son idée (...)". Béatrice de Rochebouët, 'Grand Palais, la force dispersée', *Le Figaro*, 12 May, 2006, p.32.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Figaro* allowed Olivier Kaepelin, Secretary of Fine Art in the Ministry of Culture and Communication, to defend himself on this contentious issue. Kaepelin argued he had conceived the project of *FA 2006* 15 years earlier. Notwithstanding Kaepelin's statement, an exhibition so closely supported by the government takes on the hue of official art.

Mary-Guy Baron, 'Un parcours en 15 espaces, au risque de se perdre', *Le Figaro*, 12 May, 2006, p.32

¹⁰⁶ "La scène Française n'est pas en déclin.". Béatrice de Rochebouët, 'Grand Palais, la force dispersée', *Le Figaro*, 12 May, 2006, p.32.

¹⁰⁷ Henri-François Debailleux and Gérard Lefort, 'En Mai, Villepin fait l'expo qui lui plaît', *Libération*, 18 April, 2006, available online at *Libération*.fr, <<http://www.Libération.fr>>, accessed June 2012

¹⁰⁸ In English 'To the Arts, Citizens'.

Annick Colonna-Césari, 'Aux arts, citoyens', *L'Express*, 20 April, 2006, available online at *L'Express*.fr <<http://www.lexpress.fr>>, accessed June 2012.

Figaro recalled the unfortunate nationalistic ring to the 2006 exhibition's name, without commenting on the fact that in 2009 the same title was retained.¹⁰⁹ Yet, Duponchelle showed only enthusiasm for *FA 02* and its endeavour to promote art 'in our country'.¹¹⁰ The title of the article was glorious and proud "La jeune France de l'art au soleil du Grand Palais."¹¹¹ At the other end of the political spectrum, the socialist newspaper *L'Humanité* also praised this exhibition and justified the desire to present French Art by calling upon a vision of the art world as a global entity. "The wish, we may add, to put art that is made in France forward finds its justification in answering to a general discourse according to which the centres of art have moved not only to the United States, but also to London, China, India, even the Gulf, etc..."¹¹² Art critics and journalists did not consider the 2009 exhibition as politically problematic. However, as stated above, the official status of the 2006 exhibition was still present in *FA 02* in 2009. The contrast between the reaction of the press in 2006, and in 2009, suggests that it was the blatant involvement of the government in defining a national art in 2006 that attracted the criticism of the press, rather than the actual process of configuring a national art that endured in 2009.

How were artists from foreign or diasporic origin included in the definition that *FA 2006* made of a national art? The first Triennale presented the work both of artists from the diaspora and those from other countries. Indeed, the exhibition's official website stated that it honoured artists of all horizons and multiple origins.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Valérie Duponchelle, 'La jeune France de l'art au soleil du Grand Palais', *Le Figaro*, 25-26 Avril, 2009, p.31.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ 'The young French art under the sun of the Grand Palais'. Valérie Duponchelle, 'La jeune France de l'art au soleil du Grand Palais', *Le Figaro*, 25-26 Avril, 2009, p.31.

¹¹² "La volonté par ailleurs de mettre en avant l'art qui se fait en France trouvant sa justification comme réponse à un discours général selon lequel les centres de l'art se seraient déplacés non seulement aux États-Unis mais à Londres, en Chine, en Inde, voire dans le Golfe, etc..."

Maurice Ulrich, 'Cette banquise à la dérive', *L'Humanité*, 28 April, 2009, available online at *L'Humanité .fr*, <<http://www.humanite.fr>>, accessed June 2012.

¹¹³ "Without being exclusive of generations, practices or aesthetics, La Force de l'Art' honours artists of all horizons and origins and reminds us that artistic creation is first and foremost a case of passion and choice. Art in France is not a question of nationality but on the contrary the expression of multiple origins and cultures. It is time to recognise and to demonstrate the singularity of a country open to all influences and exchanges, where the initiatives and experiences of very different artists can truly blossom."; "Sans exclusive en matière de générations, de pratiques ou d'esthétiques, « La Force de l'art » rend hommage aux artistes de tous horizons et de toutes origines et rappelle que la création est avant tout affaire de passion et de choix. L'art en France n'est pas une question de nationalité mais bien au contraire l'expression de cultures et d'origines multiples. Il est temps de le reconnaître et de mettre en évidence la singularité d'un pays ouvert à toutes les influences et à tous les échanges, où des initiatives et des expériences portées par des artistes très différents peuvent pleinement s'épanouir." www.rmn.fr/Français/les-musees-et-leurs-expositions/autres-a-

Turning to the artists exhibited, a more modulated view appears. The only contribution that truly honoured artists 'from all horizons' or diasporic artists was that of Hou Hanru. Hanru's contribution was entitled *Laboratoire pour un avenir incertain*. Among the artists invited by Hanru were Abdessemed and Benyahia.¹¹⁴ Hanru aimed to comment on the explosive atmosphere in French society following the European referendum, debates on colonial history, riots and unemployment. Abdessemed's work consisted of a sign that read 'Abdessemed a démissionné' (Adel has resigned), words echoed in the accompanying video. We have already discussed this piece in relation to the exhibition *Shake*. His contribution suggested an openly negative response to Hanru's invitation to work towards an uncertain future; an ironic but candid refusal to participate as an artist. Benyahia directly responded to the theme of social uncertainty in a piece commissioned for the exhibition. Above a floor design of labyrinthine patterns, she hung a large black ball. In an interview she explained:

"An this point in time in France, society was very disrupted, with demonstrations that went on for at least three months. There was an atmosphere of instability, and so Hou Hanru defined this 'uncertain laboratory'. That is why I used black lino in working with my labyrinths. This idea of the labyrinth also refers to the fact that we look for direction, we are getting lost."¹¹⁵

Benyahia's work spoke of a world brought closer together in scattering Moucharabieh patterns across a globe, a symbol of her passage across continents, and thus of cultural and social cohesion through the creation of art¹¹⁶. Abdessemed's

[paris/expositions-149/la-force-de-l-art-grand-palais](#), (Accessed 25 May 2012).

¹¹⁴ The other artists featured were Absalon (Israeli, died in Paris), Adam Adach (Polish, lives in Paris), Maja Bajevic (Bosnia and Herzegovina, lives Paris), Sylvie Blocher et Campement Urbain (France), Véronique Boudier (France), Magali Claude (France), Latifa Echakhch (Morocco, lives in Switzerland), Chohreh Feyzdjou (born Iran), Antonio Gallego (France), Adriana Garcia Galan (born Colombia, studied Bogota and Lyon), Koo Jeong-A (born Korea, studied Paris), Yang Jiechang (China), Map-Office (France), Hans Walter Müller (Germany, studied Germany, Paris), Alexandre Périgot (France), Huang Yong Ping (born China, lives in France), Francisco Ruiz de Enfante (born Spain), Sarkis (Turkey, lives France), Kristina Solomoukha (Ukraine, studied Paris), Tsuneko Taniuchi (Japan, lives France), Pascale-Marthine Tayou (born Cameroon, lives France), Clotilde Viannay (France), Shen Yuan (China, lives France), Chen Zhen (China, studied China, France).

¹¹⁵ "A ce moment là en France la société était très perturbée avec des manifestations qui ont duré au moins trois mois. Il y avait une atmosphère d'instabilité et donc Hanru a définie ce 'laboratoire incertain'. C'est pour cela que j'ai travaillé sur ce support de lino noire avec mes labyrinthes. Aussi cette idée du labyrinthe se réfère au fait que l'on cherche son chemin mais on s'y perd."

Interview Samta Benyahia, Paris, 17 May 2011.

¹¹⁶ "I placed my rosettes on certain continents of this sphere, this globe. I thus narrate the story of this rosette through which I travel around the world and that serves as a link, as exchange between cultures and peoples; a bit like the occidental artisans of the XVI century." "J'ai déposé mes rosaces

approach, in contrast to Benyahia's, suggested a response to the institutional and political context of *FA 2006*. The artist 'resigned' as art was used as an official celebration of national culture.¹¹⁷ The artist's ambivalent views on French nationality indeed suggest that Abdessemed was critical of national artistic posturing of *FA 02*.¹¹⁸ However, this resignation was perhaps nonsensical since he did in fact participate in the exhibition. The aspects of institutional critique that lend meaning to this installation was only suggested in Hanru's entry in the catalogue.

To conclude this analysis of *FA 2006* I want to draw on Hanru's own criticism of political uses of culture: "In this context (of global tension, of social segregation...), established power structures feel themselves endangered. They will seek to render its future more certain by any means, including the use of cultural and artistic events."¹¹⁹ Hanru's exhibition was a critique of the very desire for social cohesion that is sought after by the French government and institutions of culture with the project *FA 2006*. While this issue was indeed present in Hanru's thinking, in contrast to the exhibition *Shake*, there is no explicit institutional critique. Again, the work exhibited was de-politicised whilst serving political ends. In other words, the network of political and institutional systems that the work criticised was coerced in support for the one official narrative of the power of French art.

sur certains continents de cette sphère, ce globe. Je raconte ainsi cette rosace avec laquelle je voyage de par le monde et qui sert de lien, d'échanges entre les cultures et les peuples, un peu comme les artisans au 16ème siècle en occident." Interview with Samta Benyahia, Paris, 17 May 2011.

¹¹⁷ We have seen that the exhibition *Shake* emphasised a political interpretation of this message.

¹¹⁸ It is after receiving French citizenship that Abdessemed creates MohamedKarlPolpot. Baghriche's similarly ambivalent views of French nationality sparked by the process by which he was granted French citizenship, led to the artwork *Enveloppements* (2010). The installation features flags, wound in on themselves so that the nation-states they represent are no longer apparent.

¹¹⁹ "Dans ce contexte (of global tension, social segregation...), le pouvoir établi se sent menacé. Il cherche à rendre son avenir plus certain par tous les moyens, y compris à travers des actions 'culturelles' et 'artistiques'." Hou Hanru, 'Laboratoire pour un avenir incertain', in *La force de l'Art 01 le catalogue* [exhibition 'La force de l'Art 01', 1 May – 25 June 2006, Grand Palais, Paris] (Paris : La Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006), p.188.

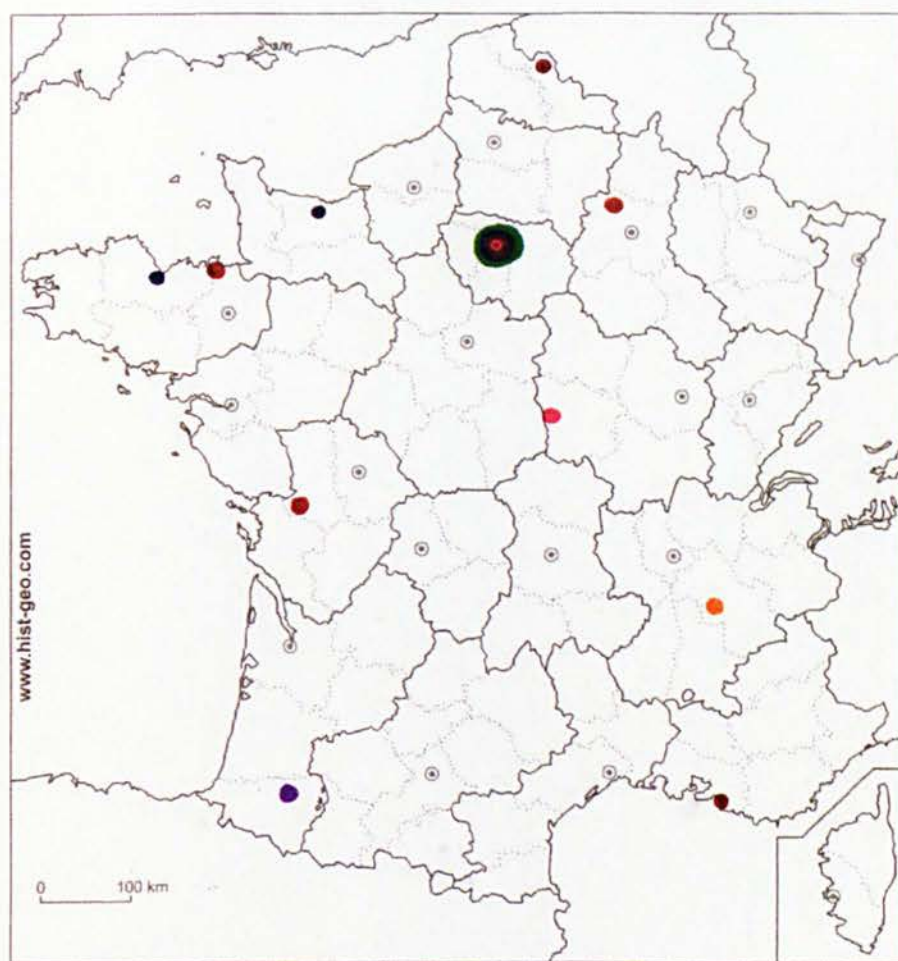


Image11: 2007, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

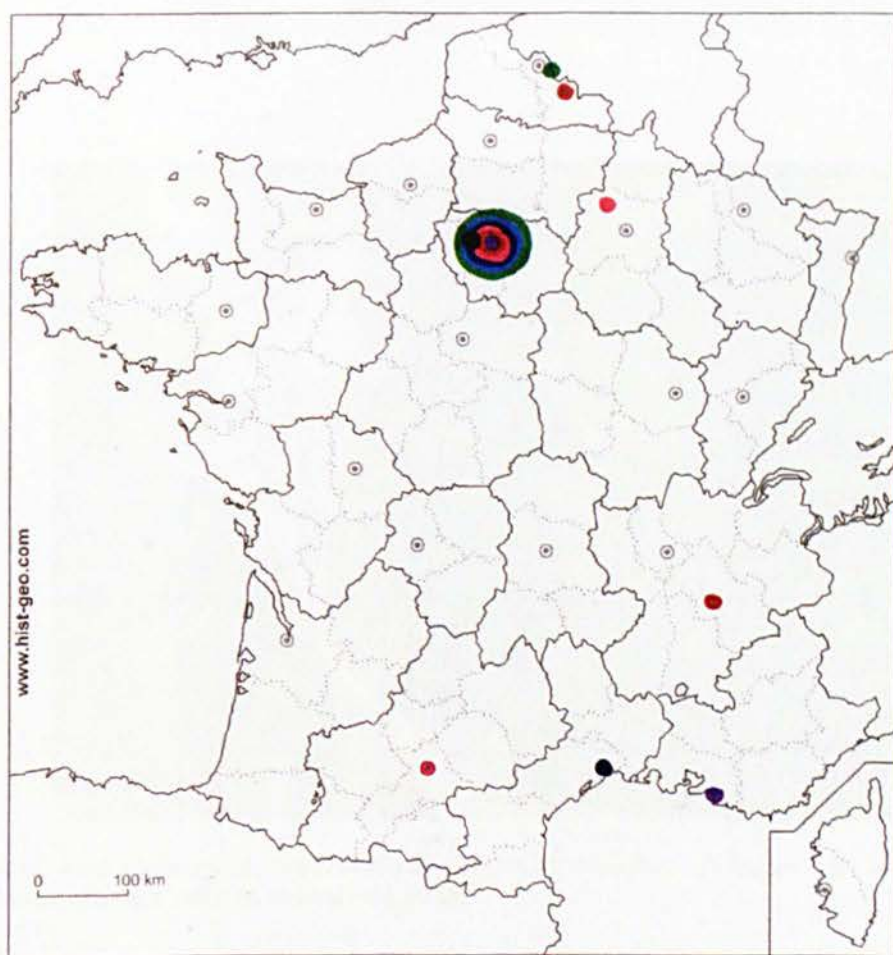


Image 12: 2008, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)



Image 13: Adel Abdessemed, *Zen* (2000) Video, 1 min 33 seconds (loop), images from la criée.org, http://www.criee.org/IMG/jpg/abdessemed_20.jpg

1.8 Thematic Exhibitions

Between 2007 and 2008 there were several thematic exhibitions that seemed to break with national exhibitions of art like *NH* and *FA. Airs de Paris* (25 April – 15 August 2007), curated by Christine Macel and Daniel Birnbaum, focused on issues of urbanisation, and art/design solutions to urban problems. This ambitious exhibition marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Centre Pompidou, and thus sought to validate its development by inscribing the institution into the history of modern and contemporary art. The visitor was shuttled between Duchamp's Paris and today's globalisation.¹²⁰ On the one hand, *Airs de Paris* (from now on *AdP*) responded to a desire to anchor French art in the history of modern art, like exhibitions such as *PpE*. On the other hand, it aimed to explore the theme of global cities, a theme of international and contemporary purview. In this historiography, *AdP* is therefore situated at a junction between exhibitions that featured artists of foreign or diasporic origin within a logic of a national art scene, and exhibitions that featured artists of foreign or diasporic origin to answer to themes that are nationally and internationally relevant.

Artists of Algerian origin were exhibited together in *AdP* under the theme 'Identités et communauté'.¹²¹ The example of Abdessemed's *Zen* (2000) (Image 13) illustrates how the possible diversity of responses to urban contexts risked being eclipsed by monolithic readings of identity and community. *Zen* is a looped video of 1.33 mins in which a young black man stands straight, directly under the camera, gazing upwards. A female hand appears and pours milk onto him. As the camera moves closer to his face, rivulets of white liquid outline the stoic's features. The video is visually striking, as is the subject matter when the viewer is made aware that the black man is a street-hawker and illegal immigrant. *Zen* placed these 'unwanted' men - present all over the capital, yet excluded from any civic or political process -

¹²⁰ The show opened with Marcel Duchamp's *Airs de Paris* (1964) to illustrate the idea that Duchamp's piece heralded the current global art world; Duchamp had sent the piece to New York.

¹²¹ The artists exhibited in this section were: Saâdane Afif, Adel Abdessemed, Zoulikha Bouabdellah and Djamel Tatah, alongside the work of François Curlet, Valérie Mréjen, Valérie Jouve, Jean-Claude Planchet Frank Scurti. Other sections were named, in the order of visit: Introduction; Un autre espace urbain, remix et fictions; nouvelles perceptions de l'espace et du temps; nouveaux langages publics et cultures populaires urbaines, médiation et nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication; conflits risques et accidents; strates territoriales, sphères corporelles, horizons acensionnels, écologie urbaine et biotechnologies, identité et communauté, individu et réseau globalisé.

within the walls of a national institution. The exhibition catalogue served to give a wider context to *Zen*. Furthermore, exhibited near *National (Los Angeles)* (2002) by Saâdane Afif, a French flag created of odd clothing including a Mickey jumper, *Zen* conversely brought to the fore unacknowledged narratives of globalisation. However, *Zen* was also exhibited alongside Bouabdellah's *Croisées - f – Crossing* (2005) which is concerned with multicultural identity. The young artist films a close-up of herself gingerly pulling a rosary out of her mouth until a cross painfully appears. Exhibited together with work by other diasporic artists, and framed by the caption 'community and identity', the viewing public could be excused for only considering *Zen* in terms of identity, without questioning the political aspects of urban society that Abdessemed's work underlines, namely the presence of peoples in the city that are absent from the body politic.

Three years later, again at the Centre Pompidou, the exhibition *Dreamlands* focused on the concept of leisure parks to formulate a different vision of the urban environment.¹²² *Untitled (Skyline)* (2007) by Attia was featured in the exhibition. The installation is comprised of fridges, covered in squares of reflective material so that they sparkle. In Chapter two I will discuss the first version of *Fridges* (2006) that has been interpreted as depicting high-rise buildings in the 'banlieues' (urban zones of social disenfranchisement that line the outskirts of Paris). Within this exhibition, however, the playfulness of Attia's work was brought to the fore. His work clearly referenced a wider reality than that of the 'banlieue'. *Untitled (Skyline)* represents modern glass high-rise buildings and the skyline of large metropolises across the globe. Nevertheless, pedagogic material produced by the Centre Pompidou to accompany the exhibition stated that Attia combined his experience of urban poverty in the 'banlieue' where he grew up, with his Algerian origins. Indeed, the Centre Pompidou document argued that the fridges represented a poor man's version of a contemporary city, the shiny aspect of the installation symbolised his childhood in Algeria.¹²³ Attia draws on a common cultural reference, that of Metropolitan skylines, rather than the 'banlieue' or his Algerian childhood. The notion that *Untitled (Skyline)* (2007) is inspired by shiny Algerian decorations is

¹²² *Dreamlands* was held at the Centre Pompidou from 5 May – 9 August 2010.

¹²³ Centre Pompidou, dossier pédagogique *Dreamlands*, available online on [www.centrepompidou.fr, http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-dreamlands/ENS-dreamlands.html](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-dreamlands/ENS-dreamlands.html), accessed October 2012.

questionable and wholly dependent on the artists' identity. This view is a common trope in interpretations of the work of artists of Algerian origin, but rarely is it so obvious.

Traces du Sacré at the Centre Pompidou and *L'Argent* at Le Plateau were two thematic exhibitions of 2008, featuring the work of Abdessemed. *Traces du Sacré* dealt with the sacred in art.¹²⁴ Whilst *Art Press* and *Libération* were critical of the confusion of genres exhibited in *Traces du Sacré*, the thematic and historic approach allowed for greater diversity of meaning.¹²⁵ The exhibition featured *Also sprach Allah* (2007) and *God is Design* (2005). *Also sprach Allah* is a video filmed in a Berlin apartment. Young men bounce the artist towards the ceiling with a large piece of cloth. At every flight upwards Abdessemed attempts to inscribe the letters that form the video's title on a carpet affixed to the ceiling. *God is Design* is a complex black and white line animation in which geometric forms redolent of Islamic designs interweave and morph into more complex patterns. In the exhibition Abdessemed's work interacted with art works chosen from different periods and contexts, brought together to explore a wide-reaching and overarching theme. *Traces du Sacré* thus explicitly demonstrated how Abdessemed's work references art history.¹²⁶ The artworks featured in the exhibition *L'Argent* challenged the status of capital wealth. *L'Argent* featured *Kamel* (2005), a photographic piece that represents Kamel Mennour, who was at the time the artist's gallerist, being pickpocketed by the artist in the street. *Kamel* is uncommonly suggestive of the financial ties that link gallerist and artist. This underlying narrative is successfully communicated to the viewer in the context of the exhibition *L'Argent*. *Traces du Sacré* and *L'Argent* made no parity between Abdessemed's artistic identity and that of other French or Western artists. These thematic exhibitions thus allowed interpretations of his work outside of themes of geography or nation as *PpE*, *Djazzair 2003* or *NH* had done. Indeed, institutional and political contexts in the case of *L'Argent*, and art historical contexts in the case of *Traces du Sacré* were brought to the fore instead.

¹²⁴ *Traces du Sacré* was held at the Centre Pompidou from 7 May until the 11 August 2008 and was curated by Jean de Loisy and Angela Lampe. *L'Argent* was held at le Plateau from the 18 June until the 17 August 2008 and was curated by Elisabeth Lebovici and Caroline Bourgeois.

¹²⁵ Sean James Rose, 'Sacré Bordel', *Libération*, 12 May, 2008, available online at *Libération.fr* <<http://www.liberation.fr>>, accessed October 2012; Catherine Millet, 'Traces du Sacré interview de Jean de Loisy', *Art Press*, 345, May 2008, 36-43.

¹²⁶ Similarly, Abdessemed's Christs in *Décor* (2011), owned by François Pinault, were exhibited alongside its art historical counterpart in Colmar.

1.9 *Traversées*: Contemporary Arab Art

The next three exhibitions that we will consider are less concerned with universal themes, and more concerned with promoting practices of a particular region. They mark a return to exhibitions that emphasised the nationality of artists of Algerian origin. It therefore appears that institutional trends analysed in this chapter did not follow a distinct chronological pattern but have varied depending on a variety of pressures. The 2008 exhibition *Traversées: Artistes Contemporains Arabes* was one of several exhibitions that bridged French institutions with artists of the Arab world. The thematic exhibitions discussed previously [in 1.8] thus only marked a break from exhibitions that emphasised nationality as the principal defining aspect of artistic identity [in 1.1 and 1.2], and not a development away from a national paradigm in exhibitions of art.

Traversées was held at the Grand Palais alongside the art fair *artparis 08*. The previous November, *artparis* had inaugurated the first edition of *artparis-AbuDhabi* and the two events demonstrate the growing ties between the Middle East and France in the realm of contemporary art that were being promoted. Debailleux in *Libération* observed that these artists newly titillated the interest of buyers: “They are the rising wave that interest the art market.”¹²⁷ *Le Figaro* wrote of ‘a new pool of artists’.¹²⁸ Brahim Alaoui, the curator of *Traversées* was keen to demonstrate the contemporary and universal aspect of the work exhibited. The press release featured a quote from Alaoui which stated that: “Practitioners from the Arab world legitimately attempt to cultivate their differences (from the rest of contemporary art), while still adopting means of communication that are understood by the rest of the world, they adapt or challenge their original signification to give them new meaning.”¹²⁹ According to Alaoui, despite the diversity that this exhibition presumed to indicate, the artists cultivated specific differences. Arab art was thus presented as

¹²⁷ “Ils sont la vague montante qui intéresse le marché de l’art”. Henri-François Debailleux, ‘Arabe art’, *Libération*, 3 April, 2008, available online at *Libération.fr* <<http://www.liberation.fr>>, accessed November 2012.

¹²⁸ “Un nouveaux vivier d’artistes.” Valérie Duponcelle, ‘Le Moyent-Orient, nouveau vivier d’artistes’, *Le Figaro*, 15 February, 2008, available online at *lefigaro.fr*, accessed October 2012.

¹²⁹ Les plasticiens du monde arabe essaient légitimement de cultiver leur différence : tout en adoptant des moyens de communication à la portée du monde entier, ils les détournent de leur signification première pour leur donner un sens nouveau.” *Traversées Artparis 08*, *Le Parisien.fr* in *ParisEtudiants.fr*, <<http://www.parisetudiant.com/etudiant/sortie/traversees-artparis-08.html>>, accessed October 2012.

different-but-the-same: a legitimate currency of contemporary art, while its value was increased by the differences it presented.

Effectively, the commercial context of *artparis 08* coloured the exhibition's discourse. Judith Benhamou-Huet in *Art Press* commented that whilst national identity was not a condition 'sine qua non' of commercial success, it represented an undeniable value.¹³⁰ This statement corroborates the hypothesis that *Traversées* emphasised nationality for commercial ends. Jouanno and Hanru in the catalogue of *PpE* argued that the nineties saw artists of non-western origin used by the market as 'new products'.¹³¹ Tawadros had suggested in the same catalogue that artists of the diaspora may one day not be perceived as different. The example of *Traversées* demonstrates that envisioned difference between diasporic and French artists, which Tawadros observed in relation to *PpE*, remained in 2008.

Traversées aimed to feature a diversity of artistic media, of generations, and countries of origin. *Le Figaro* wrote of a 'Kaleidoscope'.¹³² The blogger 'Lunette Rouge' stated that seventeen of the twenty-four artists claimed plural origin. Alaoui stated that the artists selected were all concerned with the theme of crossings or 'traversée'. However, in the catalogue, Alaoui stated that the work featured also testified to political tensions *in Arab society*, which suggested that the political tensions are not present in the West, and in fact contradicts the idea of a crossing between the Arab world and the Western world.¹³³ For the majority of artists exhibited in *Traversées* the experience of Arab culture is conditioned by the experience of diaspora, and by extension, so is their work. Pascal Amel in an interview with Alaoui for the art journal *Art Absolument* suggested that diasporic artists expressed a part of 'ourselves'. Alaoui's response was inconclusive: diasporic art *reflects* differences and alterity that may also exist in our cities, he argued.¹³⁴ By contrast, *Prosismic* and *Voyages d'Artistes* suggested that diasporic artists testify to

¹³⁰ Judith Benhamou-Huet, 'Marché de l'art: la nationalité, argument de vente', *Art Press*, 316, p.38.

¹³¹ Hou Hanru and Evelynne Jouanno, 'Ils résident en mouvement...', in *Paris pour Escalé* [exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), 12-15, p.13.

¹³² Valérie Duponcelle, 'Le Moyent-Orient, nouveau vivier d'artistes', *Le Figaro*, 15 February, 2008, available online at lefigaro.fr, accessed October 2012.

¹³³ Brahim Alaoui, *Traversées: artistes contemporains arabes*, catalogue Artparis, pdf in <http://meriem.bouderbala.free.fr/multimedia/presse/artparis/catalogue_traversees.pdf>, accessed October 2012.

¹³⁴ Pascale Amel, 'Traversées: artistes contemporains arabes entretiens entre Pascal Amel et Brahim Alaoui', *Art Absolument*, 26, September 2008, 10-23.

experiences that also pertained to our cities. In assuming that all artists exhibited represent tensions specific to Arab societies, Alaoui effectively encouraged viewers to situate the meaning of the work outside of France. Attia's work *Rocher Carrés* (2008) [discussed in chapter 4] is concerned with Algeria and France, and the relation between the two. It is a photographic installation depicting the concrete forms that line the bay of Algiers. The city of Algiers can be seen in several of the photographs behind the concrete blocks, that Attia compares with the concrete forms of Parisian high-rise buildings. This work is appropriate for an exhibition on the theme of crossings. However, the emphasis that *Traversées* placed on political tensions specific to Arab countries eclipsed the fact, for example, that *Rocher Carrés* (2008) draws a parallel between socio-economic issues in France and in Algeria.

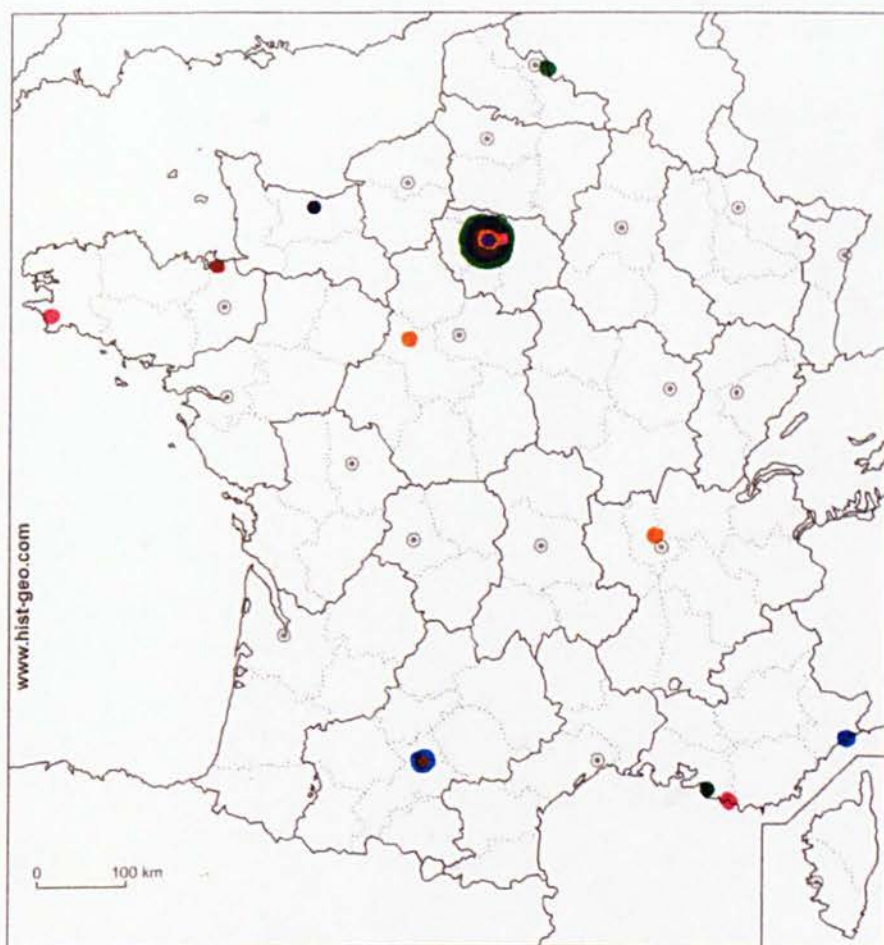


Image 14: 2009, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

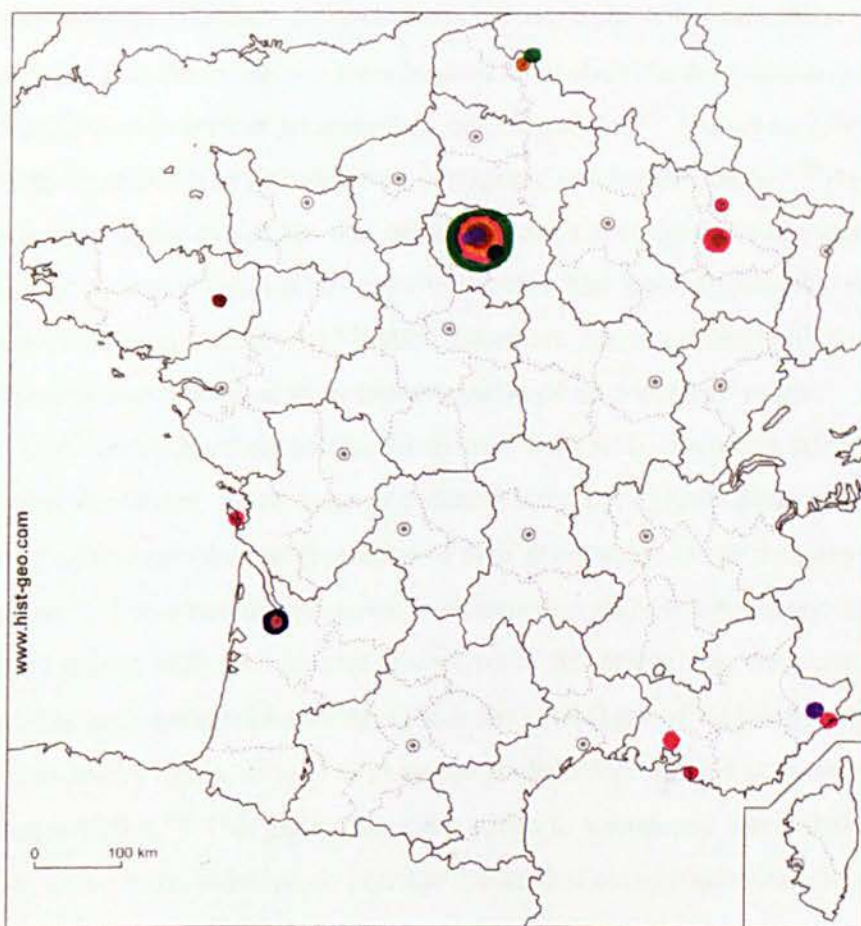


Image 15: 2010, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.10 *La Route de la Soie*: Saatchi in Lille

In 2010 Le Tri-Postal in Lille, showed a selection of work from the Saatchi Collection in an exhibition entitled *La Route de la Soie* (referred to from now on as *RS*).¹³⁵ The two French curators Caroline David and Didier Fusillier selected work from Saatchi's collection of Indian, Chinese and Middle Eastern art, a choice reflected in the title *La Route de la Soie*.¹³⁶ It was widely known that the work exhibited belonged to a private collector.¹³⁷ However, that the selection of work exhibited was thus idiosyncratic was a view seldom upheld. Instead, the art journal 'L'Oeil' stated that the exhibition went beyond what could be considered to be a private collection to present an anthology of Oriental Art.¹³⁸ However, *Libération*, an exception, described it as an exhibition configured to 'Saatchi norms'.¹³⁹ As *Libération* noted, the exhibition was emblematic of a specific trend in contemporary art endorsed by one of its most powerful collectors. The work displayed was a *selection* of Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern art. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate how the work was perceived to be representative of its context of origin.

La Croix du Nord stated that the themes dealt with - women's status, war, society and the Orient - were those of contemporary art.¹⁴⁰ Archistorm posited that the artists exhibited were representative of their generation, rather than any specific nationality.¹⁴¹ These two perspectives, from two very different publications, contrasted greatly with the majority of reviews of *RS*. *MetroLille*, for example, claimed that each artist acknowledges the cultural heritage of his/her country: social conflict, women's rights, as well as ancestral traditions or futurist expressions of changing societies.¹⁴² This generalisation testifies to a tendency when analysing non-Western art to focus attention on political issues that corroborate what the media already states about a particular country, and away from other interpretative frames

¹³⁵ 20th of October 2010 until the 16th of January 2011.

¹³⁶ In English: 'The silk road'.

¹³⁷ This was not the first time that the Tri Postal had collaborated with a private collector. *L'Oeil* recalls that *La Route de la Soie* follows the 2008 exhibition of François Pinault's collection.

¹³⁸ Philippe Piguet, 'Charles Saatchi: Une Collection bien à Soie', *L'Oeil*, 23 November, 2010, p. 98.

¹³⁹ Gilles Renault, 'La Route de la Soie', *Libération*, 28 December, 2010, p.24.

¹⁴⁰ David Pauwels, *La Croix du Nord*, 05 November – 11 November 2010, accessed via le Tri Postal

¹⁴¹ *La Route de la Soie/Saatchi Gallery London*, *Archistorm*, November – December 2010, accessed from le Tri Postal.

¹⁴² Mathieu Pagura, 'Saatchi s'installe au Tri-Postal', *MetroLille*, 19 October 2010, accessed from le Tri Postal.

such as institutional critique, aesthetics, or more complex political subject matter that may question established Western views of international politics.¹⁴³ *Libération* remarked cynically: “And what do they tell us between paintings, installations and photography? That where they live also (mostly), the situation is not rosy, between religious obscurantism, growing poverty intolerance and armed conflict.”¹⁴⁴ As I argued for *Traversées*, *Libération* suggested that these artists were commonly perceived to document problems that mostly happen outside of France. The *Journal du Dimanche* began their article by citing anecdotes that may well feature as news items.¹⁴⁵ The article concluded that the work presented was strikingly accessible. I argue that the work is accessible because exhibitions like *RS* are built around generic views on regions like the Middle East that are influenced by visions of war, poverty and injustice. *L'Indicateur* argued succinctly that ‘as it is plain to see that this road opens on sad realities, a little pedagogy suffices to guide the visitor.’¹⁴⁶ This thesis demonstrates how cultural narratives influence perceptions of non-Western and diasporic art.¹⁴⁷ Reviews of *RS* were emblematic of the influence that collective narratives can have on the interpretation of an exhibition of contemporary art; the exhibition title was widely understood to be suggestive of exotic voyages. Subtle references were made to the Orient, inspired by the exhibition's rhetoric of travel and the Orient. The exhibition review in *Lille Métropole Info* read like marketing material from a travel agency. “Do not hesitate to follow this Silk road, new horizons guaranteed.”¹⁴⁸ *Metro* wrote that we embark on a voyage like that of Marco Polo's.¹⁴⁹ *Liberté Hebdo* referred to a voyage to the end of the nights.¹⁵⁰

The example of Attia's *Ghost* (2007) is indicative of the fact that in *RS* art

¹⁴³ Samuel Herzog, 'Art global –perception locale', in *Créations Contemporaines en Pays d'Islam*, Joséphine Dakhly ed. (Editions Kiné : Paris, 2006).

¹⁴⁴ “Et que nous disent-ils (elles), entre peintures, installations et photos? Que chez eux aussi (surtout), le monde ne tourne pas très rond, entre obscurantisme religieux, paupérisation, intolérance et conflits armés.” Gilles Renault, 'La Route de la Soie', *Libération*, 28 December, 2010, p.24.

¹⁴⁵ Stéphanie Belpêche, 'Lille envoyée spéciale', *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 24 October, 2010, p.31

¹⁴⁶ “(...) comme il saute aux yeux que cette route s'ouvre à de tristes réalités, un peu de pédagogie suffit à orienter le spectateur.” Cambrousse, 'Corps emouvants dans 'la Route de la Soie'', *L'Indicateur*, 22 December, 2010, p.28.

¹⁴⁷ The *Journal du Dimanche* states that Saatchi refused any political engagement. But perhaps here lies the problem. There are no explicit political statements on behalf of either curator or collector, and yet the works of art exhibited are considered to be critical and political.

¹⁴⁸ “N'hésitez pas à emprunter cet itinéraire de la soie, dépaysant à coup sûr!” *Lille Métropole Info*, 10 September, 2010, accessed via le Tri Postal.

¹⁴⁹ Mathieu Pagura, 'Saatchi s'installe au Tri-Postal', *MetroLille*, 19 October, 2010, accessed via le Tri Postal.

¹⁵⁰ Alphonse Cligier, '*Voyages au bout des nuits*', 17 December, 2010, p.13.

was perceived in terms of finite political meaning rather than in terms of artistic process or context. *Ghost* (2007) represents praying figures of men or women cast in aluminium foil and exhibited in large numbers. *Liberté Hebdo* claimed it represents empty shells (of Muslim women) and thus an absence of personality, a process of brainwashing.¹⁵¹ *La Voix du Nord* was an exception when it referred to Attia's biography in enough detail to reveal the diversity of his trajectory, describing him as an 'artist of Algerian origin born in France, working in Berlin and Algiers'.¹⁵² *RS* presented artists from China, India or the Middle East. The fact that artists such as Attia live in the diaspora thus needed to be evidenced. Attia's work is conditioned by his life as a diasporic artist, by cultural references that diasporic experiences entail. The title leads the viewer to consider the void within the human shaped forms. The idea of void has been an abiding interest of Attia and is rooted in an awareness of the history of global architecture, and installation art. These forms of art and design are specific to the development of Western Art and therefore excite the interest of museums, gallerists and collectors in Europe and the USA. Indeed, I argue that the training he received in a French institution influences Attia's practice; his artistic career is dependent on the network of galleries, curators and critics that he had access to living in France, as well as contacts in North Africa and the Middle East. As I argued with reference to *AR*, an art historical approach serves to dismantle monolithic narratives that reviews of *Ghost* in *RS* testify to. For example, exhibited in *L'Experience Pommery 4, l'Emprise du Lieu*, *Ghost* was interpreted in *Le Figaro* as 'peoples of the shadow, praying'.¹⁵³ In *L'Humanité* the figures were stated to be as empty as a ghost's shroud.¹⁵⁴ The contrast between interpretations made of *Ghost* in the two exhibitions, testifies to the influence of institutional discourse in shaping interpretations of art.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² "artiste d'origine algérienne né en France, travaillant entre Berlin et Algiers"

Author unknown, '560 fantômes en méditation', *La Voix du Nord*, 17 October, 2010, p.13.

¹⁵³ Valérie Duponchelle, 'Daniel Buren s'empare des ténèbres', *Le Figaro*, 14 August, 2007, p.24.

¹⁵⁴ Maurice Ulrich, 'De l'art de hanter les caves', *L'Humanité*, 3 April, 2007, available online at lhumanite.fr, accessed 10.10.12.

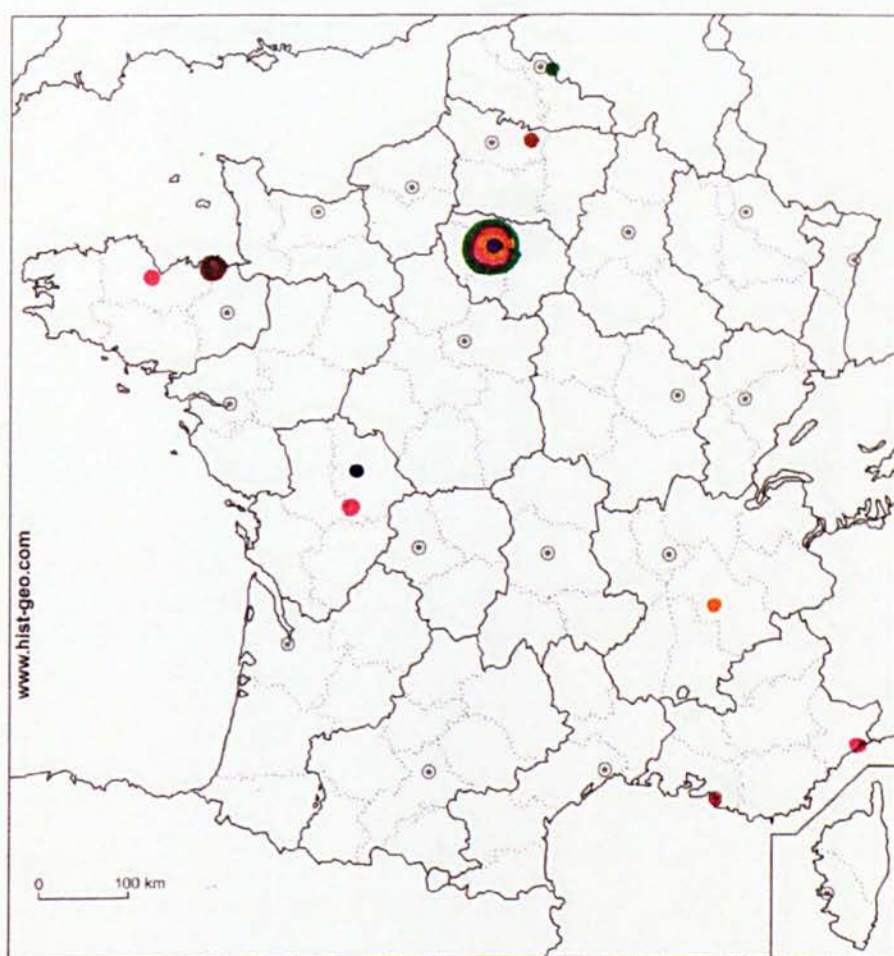


Image 16: 2011, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

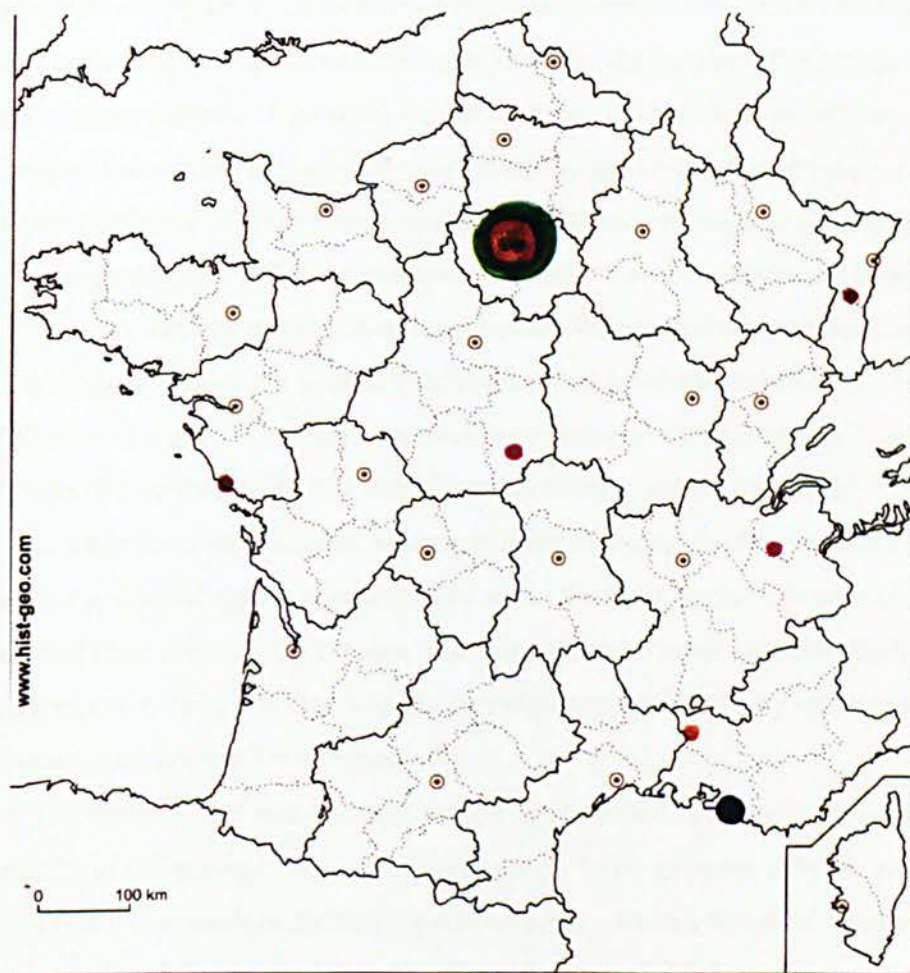


Image 17: 2012, the number and location of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art by artist. Map Alice Planel (original map from www.hist-geo.com)

1.11 La Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration

This section reveals how diasporic identities can be used for political ends by institutions of culture. At the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, artistic work is exhibited as a means of problematizing fixed histories and identities. However, fixed histories and identities that the museum nonetheless embodies, are problematic for the interpretation of the work of artists of Algerian origin that features in its collection. I am concerned with the circumstances of the exhibition of art in an institution that focuses on immigration, how the institution's rhetoric may influence interpretations of the work exhibited. First, I will look at the history of the Cité, second the reasons for integrating art in the collection, and finally assess the permanent exhibition and a recent temporary exhibition entitled '*J'ai deux amours*'.

Inaugurated in 2007, the circumstances that led to the institution's inception testify to the ambiguous position it occupies in the French political and cultural landscape. Supporters of the project petitioned Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in 2005. The Minister of Culture Caroline Trautman, and her successor Catherine Tasca, both proponents of a strictly unified vision of French culture, vetoed the project. Herman Lebovics suggests in an insightful volume entitled *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age*, that Jacques Chirac, in the build up to regional and presidential elections took up the idea of a museum and a research centre dedicated to immigration to build a bridge with the 'assimilating and upwardly mobile' segment of the immigrant population of France.¹⁵⁵

The museum had no collection when it first opened. The museum used the opportunity of collecting contemporary art to show in its galleries to break with previous exhibition models. Exhibiting contemporary art in a historical museum is an unconventional choice, though not without precedence. Holocaust museums like those in Washington and Berlin, aim to give voice to individual memories that diversify a national narrative by including art in their collection, an aim shared by the Cité de l'Immigration. The purpose of the museum is to present the history of immigration in France, a subject that until the opening of the Cité de l'Immigration

¹⁵⁵ Lebovics continues that such an institution would enable research on a community that the government knew little about; the size and character of the immigrant population in France is not documented for reasons of political ideology. Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2004), p.173.

had not been properly historicised in any public institution in France. The museum has first and foremost a pedagogical remit. Its collection is thus predominantly dependent on documents, photographs and objects donated by the wider public. By exhibiting art in its collection the curator Isabelle Renard aimed to confront the documents and objects in the collection with works of art that by being unique are capable of awakening the attention and sensitivity of the visitor.¹⁵⁶ She also talks of giving a voice to those artists who make immigration and migration the theme of their work; work that in its plural nature can allow us to “see differently”. The first artworks that the Cité de l'Immigration collected were by artists from North African diasporas.¹⁵⁷ Of thirty-five artists that feature in the collection, twenty-five have experienced immigration whether directly or indirectly. However, whilst artists of immigrant origin continue to feature predominantly in the collection of the Cité de l'Immigration, nationality was never the main criteria for acquisition.¹⁵⁸

As Lebovics details, the opening of the Cité de l'Immigration followed a broader change in discourse in France regarding the conservation and exhibition of objects from other cultures. The museum moved into the vacated 'Palais de la Porte Dorée' and former 'Musée des Arts d'Afriques et d'Océanie'.¹⁵⁹ One might expect that the decision to house a museum of immigration in a former colonial museum was a 'post-colonial' admission of colonial museology that will be acknowledged in the museum's discourse. Lebovics formulates the concept of 'wrappings' to discuss the layering of meaning that accompanies the exhibition of non-Western objects in Western institutions that the museum curator, as opposed to the historian, is able to engage with.¹⁶⁰ However, the link between colonialism and immigration is not made explicit in the Cité de l'Immigration. There is no layering of meaning since there are no interpretation panels to explain the museum's former role, and its recent

¹⁵⁶ Isabelle Renard, 'Lorsque l'art contemporain interroge l'histoire', *Hommes et Migrations*, 1267, May-June 2007, p.17.

¹⁵⁷ In 2005 the 'Cité' acquired *Assédic-ANPE* (1982) by Chéri Samba, *Mother, Father and I* (2003) and *Mother Tongue* (2002) by Zineb Sedira, and *Climbing Down* (2004) by Barthélémy Toguo. That year they also acquired *Manifestations du collectif de sans-papiers de la maison des ensembles* (2001-2003) by Bruno Serralongue. In 2006 they added *Correspondances* (2003) by Kader Attia and Hamid Debarrah's *Faciès inventaire* to their collection. *Chronique du foyer de la rue Très-Cloître* (2002), Karim Kal, *Images d'Alger 2002* (2003) were also acquired in 2006.

¹⁵⁸ “Et, bien évidemment, le critère de la nationalité n'est pas un critère de choix, absolument, je suis très heureuse que vous l'ayez compris.” Interview with Isabelle Renard, Paris, 15 May 2012.

¹⁵⁹ Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* (Durham, N.C Duke University Press, 2004), p.175.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.159.

transformation, nor is there any information on the website about the building's colonialist past. The exhibitions of the Cité de l'Immigration occupy a small area of the building itself known as the 'Palais de la Porte Dorée'. The rest of the building includes an aquarium of exotic fish, a forum, a library, and space for further exhibitions. The museum has no symbolic authority, therefore, over the meaning of the building in which it sits. The exception is Diadji Diop's vibrant sculpture "...*Dans le bonheur*" (2009) installed in front of the museum, which might signal to the passer by or visitor the diversity of meaning envisaged within.¹⁶¹

The permanent collection, entitled *Repères*, is formed of three axes: anthropological, historical, and artistic. A professional scenographer designed the overarching scenography.¹⁶² Whilst the Cité de l'Immigration dictated the ways in which the work were installed,¹⁶³ specific conditions of exhibition imposed by the artists were respected and, upon selling or bequeathing their work artists were aware that the acquiring institution was not a museum of art, but one of social history. The focus here is to analyse what Lebovics terms a layering of meaning or 'wrapping': how the Cité de l'Immigration may or may not determine the meaning of the art object exhibited.¹⁶⁴

Repères is a dense concentration of interpretation panels, objects in glass cabinets, posters, photographs and art works, organised chronologically but without a determined structure.¹⁶⁵ The entire exhibition is plunged in semi-darkness. Individual artworks do not therefore stand out or offer a contrasting view to other visual information exhibited; they do little but illustrate the exhibition's themes.¹⁶⁶ Renard admits that they have been criticised on this point. "In the permanent exhibition that is what we are a little bit accused of: the public who is not familiar

¹⁶¹ The museum is situated on the outskirts of central Paris, which mirrors the fact that the memories and national narratives encapsulated by the institution are already peripheral to dominant and national discourse. Conversely, at its opening the museum did not have a collection since narratives of migration and immigration had never before featured in a French museum.

¹⁶² Interview with Isabelle Renard, Paris, 15 May 2012.

¹⁶³ Artists were consulted with regards to labelling, but the museum had the final word as to how the work would be installed. As Renard explained, for reasons of space, Barthélemy Togo's *Climbing Down* (2004) could not be exhibited in a room to itself as the artist would have wanted, and for reasons of health and safety it was encircled by a structure of horizontal panels.

¹⁶⁴ Lebovics takes inspiration from the concept of Millefeuille developed by Jacques Hainard. Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ Presumably, to allow the individual visitor the freedom to weave his/her way through the overarching narrative presented.

¹⁶⁶ Whilst Renard did not accept the term 'illustratifs' that I used in our discussion, it is warranted.

with contemporary art cannot distinguish between an art work and a testimonial.”¹⁶⁷ For example, Attia's *Correspondance* (2003) exhibited here, featured two sequences of filmed footage and thirty photographs. Certain photographs are pegged to clotheslines, others, those depicting gravestones, are exhibited at floor level. It is unclear to the viewer if Attia's installation is the work of the artist or of the scenographer, since the exhibition as a whole is interactive and idiosyncratic. The ambiguity between artwork and archival object is problematic. Conceived as an installation, the spatial and aesthetic decisions made by Attia about the ways in which each item is installed are part of the history and concept of the work. However, because insufficient information is provided for the viewer to understand the specificity of each artwork, the viewer cannot ascertain if *Correspondance* is an installation or a series of works that were exhibited in a particular way to fit into the rest of the exhibition's scenography. Furthermore, archival images and works of art are subject to very different historical, cultural, and socio-economic systems, and thus require a different system of interpretation and classification. Indeed, works of art are an idiosyncratic perspective on a specific theme, the historical document is traditionally seen to be a more scientific take on a historical event. The work of art is thus more open-ended than the historical document. Exhibited in *Repères*, *Correspondances* (2003) loses its status as a work of art and thus seemingly documents narratives of migration rather than posing open-ended and personal questions.

In 2012 Jouanno and Hanru were invited to curate the exhibition *J'ai deux amours* exhibited in one of the galleries of the Cité de l'Immigration. *J'ai deux amours* (referred to from now on as *J'2a*) was not the first exhibition of the museum's collection of contemporary art, but it was the first of its scale. “It is a success” wrote *L'Humanité*.¹⁶⁸ *Le journal des Arts* wrote that the Cité de l'Immigration had ‘intelligently answered the challenge of the contemporary art collection’.¹⁶⁹ However, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Télérama* reported that the

¹⁶⁷ “Dans le Repères permanents c'est ce qui nous est un peu reproché: le public qui ne connaît pas l'art contemporain ne fait pas le distinguo entre une oeuvre d'art contemporain et un témoignage.” Isabelle Renard, Interview with Isabelle Renard, Paris, 15 May 2012.

¹⁶⁸ “C'est une réussite.” Magali Jauffret, ‘J'ai deux amours' ou l'histoire artistique d'identités croisés’, *L'Humanité*, 31 Janvier, 2012, p.23.

¹⁶⁹ “Relève avec intelligence le défi de la collection d'art contemporain”. Françoise Chaloïn, ‘Palais de La Porte Dorée, Une Cité accueillante’, *Le Journal des Arts*, 20 January - 02 February 2012.

exhibition was limited, despite the fact that 106 artworks were chosen from the collection.¹⁷⁰ The aim of holding such an exhibition was to present the collection to the public. The exhibition therefore differed from *Repères* in that installations, videos and photographs were presented upon white walls, well lit and spaced out. However, works of art were organised into themes for 'pedagogical reasons' since the Cité de l'Immigration is a museum of history and not a gallery of contemporary art.¹⁷¹ Reviews of *J'2a* testified to the fact that artwork exhibited in the Cité de l'Immigration are wrapped in an extra layer of meaning that influenced critics' interpretations of the artwork. Certain reviews of the exhibition recognised that the theme of the work was first and foremost the criteria of choice, and not the artist's nationality. The art magazine *L'Oeil* wrote: "Of course, the choice of these twenty two artists was not dependent on their foreign origin."¹⁷² *Express Styles* published an article that stated how the artists selected testified to stories of migration, whether or not they had directly experienced immigration.¹⁷³ However, *Le Journal des Arts* wrote that the Cité recently acquired the work of artists that were not of immigrant origin, thus ignoring the fact that to collect artists of diasporic *and* French origin had always been the politics of acquisition of the Cité de l'Immigration.¹⁷⁴ The review in *Bougez* stated: "This exhibition presents the vision of mobility that was lived by twenty odd artists."¹⁷⁵ *Afrique Asie* titled their article "Migrant artists in Paris".¹⁷⁶ 'So

¹⁷⁰ "An exhibition that suffers, and it is a shame, of a presentation that leaves much to be required."; "Une expo qui souffre, et c'est dommage, d'une présentation laissant à désirer."

'J'ai deux amours', *Le Nouvel Obs, Télé Obs*, 02 February - 08 February 2012, p.12

"And one ends up enraged that such a pertinent exhibition is not developed further."

"Et l'on finit pas enrager qu'une exposition aussi pertinente ne puisse se déployer davantage."

Yasmine Youssi, 'J'ai deux Amours', *Télérama*, 28 January - 03 February 2012, p.66.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Isabelle Renard, Paris, 15 May 2012.

¹⁷² "Bien sûr, le choix de ces vingt-deux artistes n'a pas été fait en fonction de leur origine étrangère. Mais souvent, ceux qui s'emparent de la thématique de l'immigration créent eux-mêmes dans une situation de va-et-vient entre leurs origines et leurs lieux de vie, entre un ici et un ailleurs."

Hélène Le Bon, 'Au rendez-vous des coeurs brisés', *L'Oeil*, 641, December 2011.

¹⁷³ "Souvent eux-mêmes de double culture, les plasticiens témoignent chacun à leurs façons. Qu'ils se fendent ou non sur une expérience personnelle, ils racontent en filigrane des histoires (...)

A.C.-C., 'Sans domicile fixe', *Express Styles*, 30 November - 06 December 2011, p.45.

¹⁷⁴ "If the majority of art works in the collection are signed by artists of immigrant origin, and so essentially of Maghrebian origin, the politics of acquisition was recently opened to other countries" "Si la majorité des oeuvres de la collection sont signées d'artistes issus de l'immigration en France, et donc essentiellement d'origine maghrébine, la politique d'acquisition s'est ouverte récemment à d'autres pays (...)" Françoise Chaloin, 'Palais de La Porte Dorée, Une Cité accueillante', *Le Journal des Arts*, 20 January -02 February 2012, page unknown.

¹⁷⁵ "Cette exposition présente la vision de la mobilité vécue par une vingtaine de créateurs (...)" 'L'esthétique de la mobilité', *Bougez*, January 2012, accessed from the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration press cuttings.

Chic' magazine wrote of the personal experience of nomadic artists.¹⁷⁷ Finally, 'le Parisien' made assumptions that were factually incorrect: "In the exhibition "*J'ai deux amours*", 106 works of art were created by twenty three artists who have all experienced immigration."¹⁷⁸ It transpires that journalists and editors of a wide range of publications overlooked the fact that not all the artists featured in *J'2a* were of immigrant origin, a fact stated in the exhibition's press release.¹⁷⁹

Mary Stevens, a French studies scholar, demonstrated how the Cité de l'Immigration presents an 'attractive' means to symbolically enact processes of 'integration' and reign in cultural differences. She wrote: "The museum thus emerges as an ideal solution for the regulation of cultural difference in France, particularly given the extent to which the difference is increasingly articulated in terms of competing memory discourses."¹⁸⁰ Stevens argued that the museum suggests that the histories and memories of immigrant populations are recognised today within the body politic since the museum has archived donated objects alongside historical documents. However, she also argued that these memories can be seen to be controlled or contained within the museum, since the museum mediates between the viewing public and public bodies. Indeed, the recognition of immigrant narratives that the museum brings about does not question the process of assimilation into French society. Lebovics advocates observing what is not shown to reach an understanding of an institution.¹⁸¹ In the context of the Cité de l'Immigration, this reveals how the problematic chapters of France's immigration are ignored. For example, social tension in the neighbourhood of the Goutte d'Or, or the annual fascist demonstrations in Paris, or the violent treatment of illegal immigrants by the

¹⁷⁶ Bachar Rahmani, 'Créateurs migrants à Paris', *Afrique Asie*, 74, January 2012, p.82.

¹⁷⁷ "(...) l'exposition dresse le portrait de plusieurs générations d'artistes particulièrement nomades dont l'expérience personnelle rejoint une forme d'universalisme." Christian Alandete, *International Identity, So Chic*, Winter 2011, 20-23.

¹⁷⁸ "Dans l'exposition "*J'ai deux amours*", 106 oeuvres ont été créées par 23 artistes qui ont tous connu l'immigration." J.L.-Q., 'L'Exil perçu comme un voyage à la Cité de l'Immigration', *Le Parisien*, 02 February 2012.

¹⁷⁹ I would argue that such a widespread error testifies to the expectation that artists of immigrant origin make immigration the subject of their work. Consequently, if immigration is the subject of the exhibition, then it is assumed that the artists will be of immigrant origin.

¹⁸⁰ Mary Stevens, 'Immigrants into citizens. Ideology and nation building in the Cité Nationale de l'Immigration', *Museological Review*, 13 (2008), p.63.

¹⁸¹ "Looking at the *not-shown* is especially valuable, as it can help us decode – depending on the greater context of the museum and the society – various invisible, and therefore powerful, affirmations." Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2004), p.158.

French authorities are not shown; despite the fact that a large detention centre for undocumented migrants happens to be situated very close to the Cité de l'Immigration, just on the other side of the Bois de Vincennes.¹⁸² Conversely, the museum's discourse on immigration speaks of ubiquitous and positive assimilation into French Culture. Stevens argued that the museum represents a dangerous place for political expression as it is subject to internal and external forces that challenge a unified discourse.¹⁸³ I agree with Stevens that the diversity of actors involved in the museum necessarily complicates the message. However, it remains that discourses of assimilation are at the core of the institution's stated objectives.¹⁸⁴ The museum's most public interface, its website, advocates integration and national cohesion.

The ambiguous nature of 'wrappings' at the Cité de l'Immigration is a two way process. Whilst the art exhibited within the museum can potentially complicate any fixity of meaning, the political nature of the museum's discourse is likely to divert the meaning that could otherwise be made of art works towards processes of integration or assimilation. Little is done to communicate to the viewing public the idiosyncratic nature of artistic approaches featured, or the status of the art object as a personal response to wider issues of immigration, rather than an archival document.

¹⁸² This CRA (Camps de Retention Administrative) was burned down by inmates in 2008 to protest against the situation inside the camp, following the death of a Tunisian man.

¹⁸³ Mary Stevens, 'Immigrants into citizens. ideology and nation building in the Cité Nationale de l'Immigration', *Museological Review*, 13 (2008), p.58.

¹⁸⁴ "The Cité wants to be a major contributor to social and republican cohesion in France. Beyond its responsibilities to heritage, it also has an important role to play as a producer of culture and signs. (...) The public institution of the 'Porte Dorée - Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration' is entrusted with collecting, preserving, valorising and enabling access to elements related to the history of immigration in France, notably since the 19th century, and to thus contribute to the recognition of the pathways of integration of immigration populations into French society and to make perspectives and positions on immigration to evolve."; "La Cité veut être un élément majeur de la cohésion sociale et républicaine de la France. Au-delà de sa fonction patrimoniale, elle a aussi un rôle important de producteur de culture et de signes. Ses missions principales sont donc des missions au long cours, dont les enjeux fondamentaux se joueront sur plusieurs années. L'établissement public de la Porte Dorée - Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration est chargé de rassembler, sauvegarder, mettre en valeur et rendre accessibles les éléments relatifs à l'histoire de l'immigration en France, notamment depuis le XIX^e siècle et de contribuer ainsi à la reconnaissance des parcours d'intégration des populations immigrées dans la société française et de faire évoluer les regards et les mentalités sur l'immigration en France." <<http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/la-cite/le-projet-de-la-cite>> (Accessed 19 June 2012).

1.12 *Intense Proximité*: 'La Force de l'Art is dead. Hoorah for the Triennale'.¹⁸⁵

I will now analyse the last edition of the Paris Triennale, which marks the end of the period under study 1989-2012. Following *FA 2006* in 2006 and *FA 02* in 2009, in April 2012 the Triennale was resurrected. A myriad exhibition of work, selected by Okwui Enwezor, was displayed in the Palais de Tokyo instead of the Grand Palais as in previous years. The move from Palais to Palais, and the international credentials of its new curatorial team, reflected a distinct and strategic change of emphasis.¹⁸⁶ *Libération* commented on the tactical reversals adopted by the Triennale to 'save the Triennale from drowning'.¹⁸⁷ The curators placed the exhibition in a larger perspective, *Beaux-Arts* stated.¹⁸⁸

Once the prerogative of 'art français' as I demonstrated [in 1.7], in 2012 with *Intense Proximité*, the Triennale reached beyond the national. Not only was an international art star chosen to head the project, but under Enwezor's helm the project aimed to question our relation to the 'other' in a postcolonial society. Furthermore, the move to the Palais de Tokyo, and several satellite institutions, did not suggest that this event was a monument of culture, as I have argued the first two Triennale did.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, it was enfranchised from governmental control and cultural heritage. However, the decision to embrace the international and the political was not informed by institutional critique, it was largely a tactical decision to better advance messages of national politics.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that within the exhibition there was certainly no emphasis on nationality. Abdessemed and Neil Beloufa were represented alongside 150 artists from within, and beyond the French territory, and despite the weight of the overarching thematic - that of the proximity

¹⁸⁵ (La force de l'art est morte, vive la Triennale)

Bénédicte Ramade, 'Avec la Triennale le monde a rendez-vous à Paris', *L'Oeil*, 645, April 2012, 42-43.

¹⁸⁶ The curators were Mélanie Bouteloup, Abdellah Karroum, Emilie Renard et Claire Staebler.

¹⁸⁷ Vincent Noce, 'Au Palais de Tokyo, la Triennale s'identifie', *Libération*, 27 April, 2012, available online at Libération.com, Accessed February 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Stéphanie Moisdon, *La Triennale 2012*, *Beaux-Arts* magazine n.334, Avril 2012, 61-65.

¹⁸⁹ Events were held at the Béton Salon, le Crédac, Instants Chavirés, Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, les jardins du Musée Galliera and Le Louvre.

¹⁹⁰ I suggest that tactical decisions were made to change the Triennale. Firstly, as *Libération* reports, the two former Triennale were shunned by the public. Secondly, relinquishing responsibility to the Palais de Tokyo meant that the Ministry of Culture avoided cutting even further the 2012 budget of 3.2 million because the Palais de Tokyo took on the project. The initial budget was 5.4 million. Vincent Noce, 'Au Palais de Tokyo, la Triennale s'identifie', *Libération*, 27 April, 2012, available online at Libération.com, Accessed February 2013.

and fear of the other, history and postcolonialism as reference for art - limitless interpretations of their work were possible.

Le Monde wrote that Enwezor was successful in creating an exhibition 'in the French art scene and not of the French art scene'.¹⁹¹ However, the Triennale remained problematic, and indeed, *L'Oeil* wrote that the Triennale 'hedges its bets on affirming that France is the queen of melting-pots'.¹⁹² Vivian Rehberg's, in the English language art magazine *Frieze*, pointed out that the 'outdated and chauvinistic national rhetoric' of the previous Triennale haunted *Intense Proximité*.¹⁹³ The Minister of Culture Frederic Mitterrand was granted a catalogue preface in which he applauded the vitality of the French art scene.

¹⁹¹ "dans la scène française, et non sur la scène française" Emanuelle Lequeux, 'A la Triennale de Paris, l'universalité en question', *Le Monde*, 21 April 2012, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed april 2012.

¹⁹² "la Triennale fait ainsi le pari d'affirmer une France en reine du melting-pot". Bénédicte Ramade, 'Avec la Triennale le monde a rendez-vous à Paris', *L'Oeil*, 645, Avril 2012, 42-43.

¹⁹³ Vivian Sky Rehberg, 'La triennale 2012', *Frieze*, 149, September 2012, p.163.

1.13. Conclusion

The last exhibition in this historiography, the Triennale may herald an opening to wider discourse on art, it nonetheless is still marked by notions of 'exception française'. 'Hoorah for the Triennale', stated 'L'Oeil', reviewing the Triennale as an exhibition with international scope. However, it is perhaps too soon to 'Hoorah' for the representation of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of contemporary art. Despite the number of artists of Algerian origin exhibited in diverse institutions of art across France in the late 1990s, which the maps included in this chapter testify to, the reviews of exhibitions also cited in this chapter show that notions of French art, and nationality, colour their work's reception.

Intense Proximité was the most publicised staging of postcolonial discourse in a national art institution in France since *Magiciens*, and thus echoed a wider shift in French institutions heralded by the creation of the program 'Recherche et Mondialisation' at the Centre Pompidou. However, exhibitions like the Triennale continue to play lip service to the idea of a French national art scene, as was already observed in *Paris pour Escalpe*, *Notre Histoire* and *La Force de l'Art 2006*. This chapter has shown that there is no singular development in recent institutional history with regards to the exhibition of diasporic artists. The exhibition and reception of artists of Algerian origin varies according to cultural policies, artistic trends and questions of national heritage. Exhibitions such as *Prosismic* in 2004, *Traces du Sacré* or *L'Argent* in 2008, successfully transcended the national. *Prosismic* focused on processes of creation as a consequence of globalisation, *Traces du Sacré* and *L'Argent* used a thematic approach. However, I have also demonstrated that, alongside these latter exhibitions, there was a concurrent rise of exhibitions that emphasised artists' nationality, such as *Traversées* in 2008 and *La Route de la Soie* in 2010. Misleadingly, these exhibitions professed thematic approaches, which disguised the fact that artistic identities were defined according to nationality; in *La Route de la Soie* artists were defined as Middle Eastern, Chinese and Indian, and in *Traversées* they were defined as Arab artists. Interpretations made of exhibitions such as *Ouvertures Algériennes – Créations vivantes* in 2003 and *'J'ai deux amours'* in 2011 clearly testified to the fact that despite the curators' intentions, critics in the national press interpreted the work of artists of Algerian origin according to

narratives based on nationality, emphasising established narratives of immigration and stereotypes of Algeria produced by the Western media. The 'wrappings', that the museum or institution of art creates, this chapter shows, does indeed colour the reception of the work exhibited. Analyses of the work of artists of Algerian origin must thus acknowledge artistic processes, diverse aesthetics, and contexts of production to dismantle monolithic narratives. We need a politics of location of the artistic production of diasporic artists exhibiting in France. This thesis aims to presents a politics of location of artists of Algerian origin.

It has been the continuing ambition of Hanru and Jouanno to make minority voices heard in institutions of art in French art institutions, with the exhibitions *Paris pour Escalé* in 2000 and *J'ai deux amours* in 2011. However, artists of Algerian origin still inhabit a site of continuing difference, which Tawadros observed in the 2000 exhibition catalogue. Like Hito Steyerl, I argue that for want of real institutional critique, official discourse of multiculturalism in institutions of art - for example *NH* which suggested that art is a 'grammar of the world', and that France is a land of multiple cultures - cover up continuing inequality and prejudice that also influence the reception of diasporic art.¹⁹⁴ The 2012 Triennale exhibition *Intense Proximité* was a case in point. A hefty catalogue that featured scholarly essays and key texts on postcolonialism backed up *Intense Proximité*. The exhibition aimed to tackle important issues of relations to the 'other' in French society. *Le Monde* stated that Enwezor was well aware of the political situation in France, citing Enwezor's reference to an event, referred to as 'soupe identitaire' by the French press, in which porc was served in neighbourhood soup kitchens to deliberately exclude Muslims.¹⁹⁵ However, there was no debate in the catalogue, or in the exhibition itself, around the actual social and political issues that have given rise to events like the 'soupe identitaire'. There was no discussion either of the role of institutions of art in upholding official rhetoric of multiculturalism in France. This same rhetoric obscures the fact that French institutions remain faithful to a conservative idea of French culture explained by policies of 'l'exception française', and that the French authorities enforce strict immigration laws and republican values that problematize

¹⁹⁴ Hito Steyerl, 'Gaps and Potentials, The exhibition Heimat Kunst: Migrant Culture as an Allegory of the Global Market', *New German Critique*, 92, Spring-Summer 2004, 159-168.

¹⁹⁵ Emanuelle Lequeux, 'A la Triennale de Paris, l'universalité en question', *Le Monde*, 21 April 2012, available online at lemonde.fr, accessed april 2012.

the participation of minority communities in French institutions of culture. Despite multiculturalist discourse, there is little room in institutions of culture for minority narratives or for practices that question the status quo from within.

Artists of Algerian origin are rarely exhibited or interpreted as the other within, in other words as diasporic artists whose work may refer to Algerian culture, but also question the systems that govern French society. An interview with Paul Ardenne in *Art Press* indicates that Enwezor is indeed aware of some of the historical complexities that explain the political and cultural ramifications of the thematic of *Intense Proximité* in France. However, when questioned about the validity of staging an exhibition that aims to value cultural difference in France today, Enwezor sidesteps this problem and instead emphasises the artistic heritage of Paris and its present vitality.¹⁹⁶ In essence, Ardenne challenged Enwezor on the problematic subject of multiculturalism in France, and the role of artistic discourse in this context.

The following chapter aims to explore exactly that question that Ardenne raised, through a politics of the urban in the work of Abdessemed and Attia. I will focus on aesthetics and processes of creation to emphasise the diverse practices of artists of Algerian origin. I will also consider themes of urbanity, identity and immigration, to present a more variegated analysis of the political and social systems that these artists attest to, in contrast to interpretations influenced by collective memory and nationality, observed in relation to many of the exhibitions discussed in this chapter.

¹⁹⁶ Paul Ardenne, 'Triennale de Paris. Interview with Okwui Enwezor', *Art Press*, 389, May 2012, 8-11.

Chapter 2

Representations of the urban:
Adel Abdessemed and Kader Attia



Image 18: Adel Abdessemed, *Coup de Tête* (2011-2012) bronze, 534 x 218 x 348 cm, image from www.lexpress.fr



Image 19: Kader Attia, *Fridges* (2006) installation, 172 painted refrigerators, variable dimensions, image courtesy of the artist

2.1 Introduction

On 21 May 2011 a group of residents of La Goutte d'Or¹ - a neighbourhood in the north of Paris with a high percentage of inhabitants of North African origin - sent out an invitation on Facebook for an 'apérétif saucisson pinard' to take place on 18 June in the streets of the small neighbourhood.² 3400 people subscribed to this Facebook invitation. The authorities forced the organisers to cancel the event following pressures from the association 'SOS Racisme'. The date chosen for the communal aperitif was the anniversary of the call of General de Gaulle to rid France of its occupier during World War II. This symbolic date was not chosen at random, it reinforced the xenophobic overtones of what was in fact a populist demonstration against the presence of Muslim populations in Paris. Muslims cannot eat pork and the aperitif automatically excluded them. This Facebook event, and the demonstrations that the group behind it staged in protest of its cancellation, exemplifies three phenomena of French contemporary society. First, politics are publicly lived in France and the urban and the socio-political systems which are the focus of this chapter are closely linked. Second, unfortunately, the idea of 'terroir', tradition and the preservation of French culture can be called upon to enlist popular support in combating a perceived threat of immigration; especially when French cultural traditions are perceived to preclude the participation of peoples of immigrant origin.³ Third, it shows that the idea that populations of immigrant origin exist outside of French social and cultural norms holds wide currency, outside of nationalist and extreme right parties.⁴

In the catalogue of *Je suis innocent*, McDonough observes the fact that while Sarkozy, as the representative of the French government, recognised the responsibility of France towards the Harki community in April 2012, his presidential campaign was peppered with rhetoric of patriotism and protection against immigration. It is in this context that Abdessemed exhibited *Coup de Tête* (2011-2012) (Image 18) on the public square in front of the Centre Pompidou. *Coup de Tête* is a gigantic bronze sculpture that represents the head but that football player

¹ See appendix i for a map of Paris to situate la Goutte d'Or.

² In English, an aperitif with dried sausages and wine. Pinard is an old slang word for wine.

³ The terroir refers to gastronomic traditions cultivated by generations of subsistence farmers.

⁴ Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France. immigration, politics, culture and society*. 2nd edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p.147.

Zinedine Zidane delivered to Marco Materazzi on the football pitch during the 2006 World Cup.⁵ Zidane's name is synonymous of racism, immigration as well as integration following his success during the 1998 world cup, and the debates sparked by his action in 2006. With *Coup de Tête*, Abdessemed effectively placed a symbol of racism, immigration and integration in a central and public space in the French capital.⁶ However, McDonough ascribes more specific and autobiographical meaning to *Coup de Tête*. McDonough compares Abdessemed's sculpture to Pollaiuolo's sculpture of 1470 of Hercules and Antée. Almost despite himself it seems, McDonough compares Abdessemed to Antée/Zidane. He writes:

To remind the reader that Abdessemed is himself of Berber descent is perhaps to over-emphasise the biographical trope, and yet, it is not unreasonable to see in *Coup de Tête* an inversion of the myth (of Antée), in which the 'North-African' - Zidane was born in France – pushes back his 'European' adversary. A Parisian Antée, then. But in addition, on another level, we can consider this sculpture as an allegorical auto-portrait, in which Abdessemed identifies himself with this violent gesture of Zidane-Antée.⁷

I cite this interpretation because it is emblematic of the mode of interpretation that I argue against in this chapter. In the same catalogue, Hanru makes a similar parallel - not supported by any evidence apart from Abdessemed's identity as an Algerian immigrant - between the figure of Omar Reddad, who claims innocence for a crime he was charged for when the police found the note 'Omar killed me', with Abdessemed and his show *Je suis innocent*. This is a perplexing parallel given Hanru's continued emphasis upon the fact that Abdessemed resists being ascribed to any group, ideology or movement.⁸ Given the contentious nature of Franco-Algerian identities, and the use of ethnic politics in France still today, it is especially problematic to suggest interpretations that produce reductive meaning in the analysis of the work of artists of Algerian origin.

It is important to write a politics of the urban to make sure that the work of

⁵ Rumours at the time suggested that Materazzi had made a lewd and racist comment to Zidane.

⁶ *Libération*, 28 September, 2012, p.30; Lise Géhenneux, 'L'oeuvre d'art face aux tabous', *L'Humanité*, 9 October, 2012, available online www.humanite.fr, accessed November 2012.

⁷ "Rappeler au lecteur qu'Abdessemed est lui-même de descendance berbère reviendrait peut-être à trop forcer le portrait autobiographique; pourtant, il n'est pas déraisonnable de voir en *Coup de Tête* une inversion du mythe, où le 'North-Africain' – Zidane est né en France – repousse son adversaire 'européen'. Un Antée parisien, donc. Mais il faut aussi ajouter que, sur un autre plan, on peut considérer cette sculpture comme un autoportrait allégorique, où Abdessemed s'identifie au geste violent de Zidane-Antée." Tom McDonough, *Tolérance zéro*, in *Adel Abdessemed, Je suis Innocent* [exhibition *Je suis innocent*, 3 October 2012 - 7 January 2013, Centre Pompidou, Paris] (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012).

⁸ Hou Hanru, 'Vivre dangereusement!', in *Adel Abdessemed, Je suis Innocent* [exhibition *Je suis innocent*, 3 October 2012 - 7 January 2013, Centre Pompidou, Paris] (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012).

artists of Algerian origin are not limited to an interpretation of issues of cultural difference, or issues associated only with populations of immigrant origin.

Representations of the urban make manifest the complex political and social systems that govern public life. The work of Abdessemed and Kader Attia that refers to the urban and to themes of segregation, street violence and consumer culture, testify to the wider political causes of societal issues in the suburbs of French cities. However, their practice is yet to be the focus of a mode of interpretation that would reveal how their work explores complex political and social schemata. Indeed, interpretations of their work are influenced by collective narratives of the 'banlieue' as a site of a crisis of multiculturalism rooted in a problematic history of immigration. These collective narratives hold weight within and outside of France. Whilst interpretations influenced by such collective narratives are not wrong per se, they provide only a limited view of the work. In order to complicate these narratives and to open Abdessemed and Attia's work to broader political and aesthetic reading, I draw on the theories of Isobel Armstrong she outlines in her book *The radical aesthetic*, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the Rhizome in *Mille plateaux*.⁹

Fridges (2006) (Image 19) by Attia is an installation made of refrigerators painted in white and grey with row upon row of small black rectangles running up every side to resemble windows. Thus disguised, the refrigerators that form Attia's installation bear more resemblance to blocks of high-rise flats. Effectively, this installation is suggestive of the high-rise buildings that Attia was surrounded by as he was growing up; with *Fridges* Attia recreates the urban landscape of his childhood and adolescence in Sarcelles and Garges les Gonesses - districts on the outskirts of Paris. However, the interest of *Fridges* (2006) to this thesis lies not only in the fact that the installation refers to an urban context familiar to the artist, but how the context signified is seemingly familiar to the French public at large. In a review of a show that featured the work, *Le Figaro* newspaper commented that the installation is a recognisable sign of today.¹⁰ *L'Humanité* wrote that *Fridges* leads the viewer to the world of the 'banlieues', a world of great relevance today.¹¹ High-

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux, capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1980).

¹⁰ "(...) Kader Attia montre sa force du signifiant immédiat dans ses créations narratives."

M. -G. B. 'Musique, 'people' et cités des quartiers', *Le Figaro*, 7 August, 2006, p. 22.

¹¹ "Une salle entraînant le visiteur dans cet univers central d'aujourd'hui que sont les banlieues."

rise buildings (referred to as HLM in France) act as a visual referent for the 'banlieue', in which live a large number of France's immigrant population. The 'banlieue', I will come to show, is a heavily connoted term that can be translated as 'the suburbs' but in common parlance is rather akin to the American concept of a ghetto. These suburbs have been the site of violence and social disenfranchisement linked to issues of immigration and multiculturalism in the popular imagination. *Fridges* is therefore an appropriate introduction to this chapter in which I consider work by Attia and Abdessemed that takes the urban locale as its subject matter. I aim to question collective narratives and to demonstrate that the work of Attia and Abdessemed refers to broader cultural and socio-political phenomena than the 'banlieue'. The places mentioned in this chapter are marked on a map of Paris included in the appendices.

The version of *Fridges* that I consider here was created for the Lyon Museum of Modern Art for a 2006 exhibition, and installed in a small room with a low ceiling. Indeed, in the opinion of Philippe Dagen writing for *Le Monde*, the fridges were installed in 'a room too small'.¹² The confined space in which these refrigerators, come high-rise blocks were installed may have influenced critics in alluding to narratives of entrapment, humiliation and even death when reviewing the exhibition. The theme of the 'banlieue' seems to have imposed itself as a relevant paradigm through which to analyse Attia's work because the artist grew up in the 'banlieue', *and* because it is a theme so prevalent in cultural and political discourse in contemporary France. In the catalogue of the exhibition, Tami Katz-Freiman writes that *Fridges* is symptomatic of the depressing and oppressive environment of the 'banlieue', to the extent that the refrigerators, she argues, resemble tombstones.¹³ Whilst I have just noted that the installation in Lyon may indeed have been oppressive, to equate the installation with a graveyard first and foremost obscures more ambivalent readings.¹⁴ In writing of tombstones Katz-Freiman presumably

¹¹ 'Tsunami pour le temps présent', *L'Humanité*, 24 October, 2006, available online www.humanite.fr, accessed on October 2012.

¹² Philippe Dagen, 'Le réalisme rageur et railleur de Kader Attia', *Le Monde*, 30 June, 2006. available online, accessed March 2012.

¹³ "The effect was that of an accumulation of depressing housing blocks whose effect was so powerful that the viewers walking between them could almost physically sense the oppression and humiliation they engendered. The image of the crowded refrigerator city called to mind a graveyard filled with headstones." Tami Katz-Freiman, 'La voie du bonheur', in *Kader Attia*, exhibition Musée d'art Contemporain Lyon, Le Magasin, Grenoble (Zürich: JRP Ringier), 28-45, p.24.

¹⁴ When I asked Attia about this morbid reference, he eschewed the question by stating that his

referred to a wall painting of geometric and rectangular forms by Attia, exhibited at le Magasin in Grenoble, that the artist referred to as perhaps representing a cemetery. However, to cite the artist, this wall painting represents a variety of spaces that are not mutually exclusive: a city, a village, a ghostly township, as well as a cemetery.¹⁵ Themes of confinement, aggression and poverty are certainly present in Attia's work. However, I intend to demonstrate that the theme of oppression or disenfranchisement influenced by narratives of the 'banlieue', when used as an interpretative framework, can all too easily function as a screen that obscures a more complex understanding of the artist's work. I will consider other possible interpretations of *Fridges* in relation to child-play and embodied experience drawing on Armstrong's notion of a 'radical aesthetic' in 2.3, and in relation to commodity culture and against an 'art of the Banlieue' in 2.4. I will then analyse the ways in which *Practice Zero Tolerance* (2006) by Abdessemed confronts the viewing public with a symbol of violent disaffection in 2.5, and in 2.6, I consider the importance of the artistic act and of the aesthetic in Abdessemed's *Practice Zero Tolerance* (2006) and *Nuit* (1997), Attia's *Arabesque* (2005) and *Sans Titre* (2006). I argue through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the Rhizome that Abdessemed's practice draws on a complex network of cultural references. I conclude this chapter by writing a 'rhizomatic' reading of Abdessemed's *Sept Frères*. I begin this chapter, by discussing aspects of the 'banlieue' in order to understand more fully the reactions of critics to Attia and Abdessemed's work. In the following paragraphs in which I consider the 'banlieue' as a multi-ethnic site, I take my lead from the French sociologist Michel Wieviorka who argues that one must consider the economic and cultural aspects of multiculturalist issues.¹⁶ I thereby begin to formulate a more complex politics of this urban locale, to support multiple readings of the practices of Abdessemed and Attia.

interest lies in what others perceive in this work.

¹⁵ "Je dessine des univers qui font référence aux folies, aux inquiétudes, aux angoisses, aux phantasmes, aux rêves, à tout ce qu'il y a d'inconscient. Comme la ville que j'ai montrée à Lyon, c'est à la fois une ville, une banlieue, une cité, une prison, peut-être aussi un cimetière, l'image revisitée des immeubles, des villages ou des quartiers fantômes ravagés par la guerre. C'est surtout une accumulation de formes qui rappellent schématiquement celles des immeubles pour donner l'impression d'être devant une cité-labyrinthe d'où l'on se sort pas. Cette cité, par extension, c'est aussi pour moi le monde actuel." Jean-Louis Pradel, 'In conversation with Pradel', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition Kader Attia, Musée d'art Contemporain Lyon, 15 June – 13 August 2006, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 21 October 2006 – 7 January 2007] (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2006), 28-45, p.61.

¹⁶ Michel Wieviorka, 'Is multiculturalism the solution?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21 (5) (1998), 881-910.

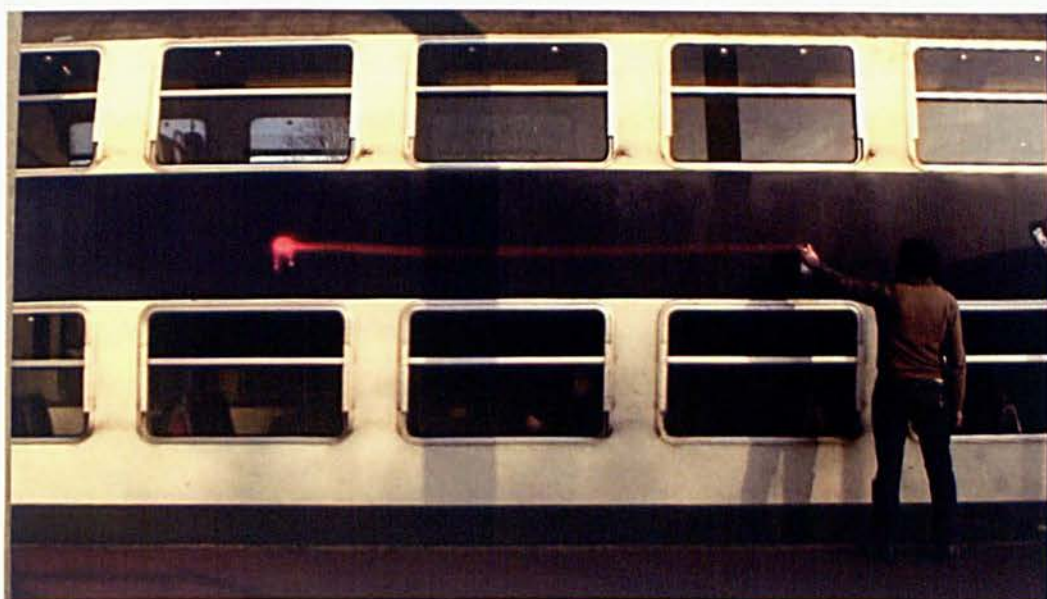


Image 20: Fayçal Baghriche, *Point, Ligne, Particules* (2008) video, image from [ibraaz.org](http://www.ibraaz.org), <http://www.ibraaz.org>

2.2 Myths of ethnicity in the French suburbs

The debate surrounding the 'banlieue' is framed by broader debates of multiculturalism and immigration because the suburbs of Paris and of other large French cities are seen to house a predominantly North African population. When brought together in the same location (the suburb), these debates are especially problematic. While multicultural policies are contentious wherever applied, multiculturalism or the 'integration' of minority populations within the social fabric is especially antagonistic in France. Indeed, as a number of scholars have demonstrated, multiculturalist issues are exacerbated in France by the country's Republican dependence on the founding principles of 'égalité, liberté, fraternité and laïcité'.¹⁷ Cultural difference is anti-republican in France in the sense that the presence of differences within the body politic is diametrically opposed to the Jacobean understandings of equality and fraternity. In essence, French society is anti-sectarian or 'anti-communitariste'. The professor of French Studies Alex Hargreaves argues that in the 1980's it became commonplace to perceive immigration as a danger to national cohesion.¹⁸ He states that the belief that integration cannot work is based on a 'mistaken but sincerely held belief'.¹⁹ In the 1980s the rise of the extreme right party the FN placed immigration as a central issue in French politics, which Hargreaves argues accompanied the beginning of ethnic politics in mainstream parties.²⁰ Whilst the French government is committed to the incorporation of minority groups into the body politic, within these very groups attitudes have been hardened as a consequence of government policies of exclusion.²¹ These issues of immigration and integration are rendered more contentious by the fact that policies of multiculturalism, and public opinion on the subject, is greatly influenced by the cultural memory of immigration and

¹⁷ Murat Akan, 'Laïcité and multiculturalism: the Stasi report in context', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 60 (2) (2009), 237-256; Jeremy Jennings, 'Citizenship, republicanism and multiculturalism in contemporary France', *British Journal of Political Science*, 30 (4) (2000), 575-597; Cécile Laborde, 'The culture(s) of the Republic: nationalism and multiculturalism in French republican thought', *Political Theory*, 29 (5) (2001), 716-735; Romain Garbaye, *Emeutes vs intégration. Comparaisons Franco-Britanniques* (Sciences Politiques : Paris, 2011); Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset Français: histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Editions du Seuil : Paris, 2006).

¹⁸ Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France. immigration, politics, culture and society. 2nd Edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p.141.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.147.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

colonisation. Effectively, public opinion in France holds notional differences between minority populations with regards to integration. European minorities are not sought to pose as many problems as populations originally from North Africa or the Middle East, as evidenced by sociological scholarship.²² Indeed, there remains latent racism towards ex-colonies in France today. France's postcolonial history is a contentious subject that continues to influence the relation between minority and majority populations, yet it has only latently been the site of research or commemoration. As Hargreaves conclusively states:

Sometimes subliminally and other times quite consciously, animosities directed against these minorities have been informed by still-unhealed wounds arising from the trauma of decolonization. Thus, if, as has recently been suggested by leading historians of the Algerian war, it is now sage to say the amnesia surrounding it has been overcome, it is also the case that divisive memories of the conflict continue to fuel antagonisms between different groups now living in France.²³

The notional difference between European and North African immigrants points furthermore to popular anguish caused by perceived religious and historical differences between North African countries and France; differences that are not brought to the fore with other European communities. The current situation in the Middle East and the rise of radical forms of Islam has exacerbated public anxiety. The suburbs of Paris are seen to be hotbeds of violence and sites of destitution, unemployment and religious extremism. As I will show, populations of France's 'cité' (a term that has become synonymous with the 'banlieue') are economically and culturally disaffected, and logistically and geographically cut off from the city centres. However, the 'banlieue' as a cultural phenomenon is the actualisation of the cultural disparity that is *thought* to exist between France and its minorities. For many commentators and politicians the problems rooted in the 'banlieue' are first and foremost evidence of a crisis of multiculturalism. It serves to return to the history of urban development in the suburbs to question this view.

The 'grands ensembles', or state sponsored mass housing projects that began in the 1950s gave rise to a new kind of architecture.²⁴ The 'grands ensembles' broke with previous ideas of the city and thus created new cultural references. The failure

²² Patrick Simon, 'Le logement des immigrés', *Ecarts d'identité*, 80 (March 1997), 5-7.

²³ *Memory, empire and postcolonialism. legacies of French colonialism*, ed. by Alec Hargreaves (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005).

²⁴ The term 'grands ensembles' dates to the 1930's, but it is in the 1950's that the construction of 'grands ensembles' become more numerous.

to create a positive social and cultural narrative around these new cities at this juncture, has contributed to the social and cultural disaffection of its inhabitants. Hargreaves argues that the media is largely responsible for this phenomenon. For example, research has shown Hargreaves states, that the 'banlieues' features regularly in news items but no television shows have been commissioned that would circulate other cultural narratives around these urban spaces and their inhabitants.²⁵ The literature scholar Matthew Taunton demonstrates that the negative discourse surrounding the establishment of Habitats à Loyers Modérés (HLM) and 'grands ensembles' in France was more or less present from the beginning.²⁶ The 'cité' of Sarcelles and its negative effect on its residents was mockingly documented as the invented pathology 'la Sarcellite' in the 1950s.²⁷ Whilst social and political commentators are quick to castigate HLM and 'banlieue', little is said of the economic and cultural perversions at play throughout the history of urban planning that I observe in the next paragraph; and which foreground a different picture of the 'banlieue' than that conjured in the popular imagination focused as it is on a context of immigration and violence. By contrast, the contribution of art historian Hannah Feldman to the catalogue of Attia's show at the Centro Huarte is rooted within a wide and extensive understanding of contemporary French metropolitan culture. Her text introduces the hypothesis I outline here, and provides a useful counterpart to much of the discourse around Attia's work. As Feldman demonstrates it is useful to write a broader analysis of the urban policies that generated these cultural narratives that have haunted the 'banlieues' since 'La Sarcellite' was first diagnosed.²⁸

Municipal housing projects in France such as the HLM - which came to replace the Habitats Bon Marchés (HBM) in 1949 - were conceived to combat the growing housing crisis in the post-war years.²⁹ Social housing in the suburbs of Paris was planned in light of localised and growing industrialisation, and was first and foremost built to house the working class. The model of the 'cité' was developed

²⁵ Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France. Immigration, politics, culture and society. 2nd Edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

²⁶ Habitats à Loyers Modérés: housing of moderate rent.

Matthew Taunton, *Fictions of the city. class, culture and mass housing in Paris and London* (London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2009).

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.106.

²⁸ Hannah Feldman, 'La vie à la surface de tout', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition, Kader Attia, Huarte, Centro Huarte de Arte Contemporáneo, 4 July-28 September 2008] (Huarte : Centro de Arte Huarte, 2008), 173-180.

²⁹ Habitats Bon Marché: Affordable Housing.

because the previous model of the 'pavillon de Banlieue' - the equivalent to the suburban semi-detached - favoured by property investors and developed as transport networks linked Paris to neighbouring townships, did not match the logic of a mobile and growing workforce demanded by industrial expansion.³⁰ After World War II the housing crisis became more severe due to the destruction of cities, a rural exodus, post war baby boom, and a rise in immigration. The rise in immigration during this period was not, therefore, the only reason for the lack of housing. According to Jacques Simon, only 20% of the population living in 'Garnis' (furnished hotels) that were concentrated in districts neighboring industrial centers before the beginning of mass housing schemes, were North African.³¹ Indeed, a large number of French workers were also victims of the housing crisis. This aspect of the 'grands ensembles' memory is all but forgotten, replaced by that of re-housing immigrant populations. Nevertheless, it remains that the active recruitment of North African workers by the government was an important factor in the housing crisis. North African populations were among the more destitute because of high unemployment and the occupation of low wage positions. Thus, before mass housing schemes a large number of recent immigrants were housed in insalubrious buildings and shantytowns, and the large concentration of North Africans in certain areas made them more visible within the public imagination.³² Yet, it is important to understand that although a large percentage of the North African population were candidates for municipal housing schemes, they did not represent the majority of the population in need of housing or re-housing.

It is difficult to ascertain if this remains the case today because population censuses in France do not consider 'ethnic' factors - it is believed that this contradicts the principles of 'Egalité' and 'Fraternité', or equality and fraternity - on which the French nation-state is founded. However, one can indeed imagine that the damaging effects of France's failing mass housing schemes concerns a larger group than a population originating from North Africa. Taunton corroborates this hypothesis when he emphasises that the film *La Haine* by Matthieu Kassovitz is representative

³⁰ Remy Butler and Patrice Noisette, *Le logement social en France 1815-1981, de la cité ouvrière au grand ensemble* (Paris : Librairie Maspéro, 1982).

³¹ Jacques Simon, *L'Immigration Algérienne en France des origines à l'indépendance* (Paris : Editions Paris Méditerranée, 2000).

³² Shantytowns started to appear in 1950 around Genevilliers, Saint Denis, Aubervilliers, Bobigny, Nanterre and Colombes. Jacques Simon, *L'Immigration Algérienne en France des origines à l'indépendance* (Paris : Editions Paris Méditerranée, 2000).

of the diverse racial and ethnic population of the 'banlieue'. He writes: "The film thus reinstates class as the primary motor of social unrest and suggests that post-war urban planning has left a racially and religiously diverse underclass disenfranchised."³³ Analyses of the 'banlieue' as a socio-economic and political conjuncture cannot be restricted, I therefore argue, to issues of minority identities and immigration. It is a question of class and socio-economic disenfranchisement. As Ross argues in *Fast cars, clean bodies*, during this period and with colonisation on the wane, Paris itself became the site of an 'exploitation of everyday life', exploitation that thus affected different classes rather than different ethnicities, through what Ross terms the 'management of space'.³⁴ In analyses of Attia and Abdessemed's work I thus argue that narratives of the urban must be interpreted within a socio-economic and political framework that transcend ethnic politics.

I therefore pursue an analysis of the socio-economic aspects of France's housing schemes. The negative cultural value that the 'banlieue' quickly took on has also contributed to its economic problems by discouraging wealthier populations from inhabiting these suburbs, and commercial ventures to invest locally. The jobs available near the ZUP (Zones à Urbaniser en Priorité) are often of low qualification and therefore low salaried. Transport is expensive, local supermarkets do not have any competition and are therefore free to set high prices. Since the 'banlieues' were built during the 'Trente Glorieuses' 1945-1975, the economy has changed and in the wake of economic liberalism and changes in energy procurement, factories and industrial sites moved abroad or closed down. On many an occasion the cities built to house workers were built, but the work disappeared. Taunton comments on the dismal history of how this urban environment, connected to the workplace but disconnected from the city and its social and cultural centre, lost even that connection.³⁵ Today, the population of Parisian suburbs such as Sarcelles or Gargues les Goneses - where Attia grew up - participate economically and socially in little other way than as consumers, as I will discuss later in reference to Attia's work.³⁶

³³ Matthew Taunton, *Fictions of the city. Class, culture and mass housing in Paris and London* (London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2009), p.133.

³⁴ Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies, decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995), p.8.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Social housing schemes such as the HLM were devised to house the working class, however today these working classes have succumbed to an increasingly consumerist economy and society in which consumerist goods are more widely available, despite high unemployment and economic difficulties.

The economic alienation lived by the population of the 'banlieue' is predicated by the geographical separation that exists between centre and periphery in France's main cities and especially Paris. The extent to which the suburbs of large cities are disconnected from city centres through urban planning and poor transport links is almost absolute and has marked national and local imaginations. The separation between the centre of Paris and its suburbs is partly a consequence of Haussman's plans in the nineteenth century. Haussman's Paris turned in on its uniform self whilst a miasma of poorer suburbs gathered at its fringes. The construction of the ring road surrounding Paris (the Boulevard Péripherique), completed in 1973, exacerbated this separation between Paris and its suburbs. The chasm that the highway creates today within the urban landscape, and the symbolic weight it carries, is embodied in Mohamed Bourouissa's eponymous photographic series. The photograph entitled *Péripherique* (2007) is taken underneath the arches of the ring road so that very little of the surrounding urbanity is pictured. The figures in the photograph aimlessly observe two girls walking past. This photograph illustrates how the Péripherique is an urban space caught between interstices of supermodernity, to use Marc Augé's paradigm, between highway and high-rise.³⁷ I will return to the notion of geographical segregation in this chapter.

It seems that the very history of social housing in France testifies to a culture of segregation that social and municipal housing schemes engendered. Indeed, policies of urbanism were tested in colonial cities as there was both a political need for better crowd control - a contemporary concern of the French government - and the political and administrative infrastructure to implement such policies.³⁸ Nnamdi Elleh, Professor of Architectural History concurs with Gwendolyn Wright, professor of architecture at Columbia, that colonial urban planning served to trial urban solutions for social ills as diverse as overcrowding, poor sanitation, prostitution and industrial pollution. Wright, in *The politics of design in french colonial urbanism* writes that twentieth century colonial urbanism came to rely on the social sciences to directly influence family life, industry, work, and even cultural memory. Colonial urbanism, she states, was truly modern in the sense that it strove to offer scientific and universal design solutions to social and urban problems. The 'grands ensembles'

³⁷ Marc Augé, *Non-place, introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

³⁸ A new generation of architects found a supportive system in the colonies which was under military rule; and thus not subject to administrative or legislative scrutiny that traditionally impeded the implementation of mass urban schemes.

is perhaps the most perverse visualisation of this aspect of modernist architecture. Elleh argues that the main lesson learnt from colonial architecture is that of zoning and segregation.³⁹ To demonstrate the ties that social housing in France has with the colonial regime is to testify to intrinsic aspects of segregation and domination at play within French cities and especially Paris. However, Wright questions the *direct* effect that colonial policies had on urban planning in French cities.⁴⁰ Wright's hypothesis is corroborated by Feldman's analysis of the Marais district in Paris.

Feldman analyses the preservation of whole areas of Paris during the Franco-Algerian war under Malraux in her PhD thesis written in 2007.⁴¹ The Marais district at the time was overpopulated and was home to a large North African community. Feldman shows how the Algerian community at the time became the target of violent control, constant supervision and repetitive police brutality, as well as racism and intolerance and, as a consequence the Marais was redeveloped and its North African community re-housed.⁴² Nevertheless, the fact that former North African residents ended up in shantytowns in the suburbs has perhaps more to do with economic priorities as it does to social or racial discrimination, Feldman states.⁴³ She concludes that idiosyncratic and preservationist views of Parisian architecture echoed colonial principles of the importance of French culture, which I refer to as 'exception française' throughout this thesis.⁴⁴ I would add that this idea of a unifying French culture and its preservation was imposed on the population at large in France, and not only upon its immigrant populations. Indeed, Noirielle argues that the centralisation of France's administration brought about an internal colonialism of

³⁹ Nnamdi Elleh condenses in several points what he sees to be the predominant ideas regarding colonial architecture. His first three points are that architecture was used as a means to segregate and dominate. Secondly, it enabled bourgeois desires of power and exoticism that could not be fulfilled in the West. Thirdly, that imported architectural styles worked towards pacifying and domesticating populations. Whilst this subject cannot be developed in this thesis, Elleh's analysis is of relevance since the relation between modernity, architecture and colonial history is a lasting interest of Attia who has made this the subject of his work, as Feldman also notes. Hannah Feldman, 'La vie à la surface de tout', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition, Kader Attia, Huarte, Centro Huarte de Arte Contemporáneo, 4 July-28 September 2008] (Huarte : Centro de Arte Huarte, 2008), 173-180.

⁴⁰ We should not conclude that colonial or indigenous architecture directly inspired European architecture. The Ecole d'Alger in the 1930's took inspiration from Mediterranean architecture, in contrast to the 'Arabesques' style favoured by the colonial administration.

⁴¹ Hannah Feldman, 'National negotiations: art, historical experience and the public in Paris, 1945-1962' UMI dissertation services, Colombia University, 2004.

⁴² *Ibid*, p.122.

⁴³ Feldman does not fail to pick up on the unfortunate parallel between the act of whitewashing a district, and ridding it of its colored population.

⁴⁴ Hannah, Feldman, 'National negotiations: art, historical experience and the public in Paris, 1945-1962' UMI dissertation services, Colombia University, 2004, p.108.

diverse traditions to create a culture common to the French nation as a whole.⁴⁵ Ross corroborates Noiriél's hypothesis. She writes:

With the waning of its Empire, France turned to a form of interior colonialism; rational administrative techniques developed in the colonies were brought home and put to use side by side with new technological innovations such as advertising in reordering metropolitan, domestic society, the 'everyday life' of its citizens.⁴⁶

Similarly, I have argued in this history of the 'banlieue' that whilst the colonial history of France's housing schemes explains the segregation it has effected between city and suburbs and between rich and poor neighbourhoods, this segregation is predominantly cultural and socio-economic rather than racial or ethnic.

Point, Ligne, Particules (2008) (Image 20) by Fayçal Baghriché makes play of the geographic segregation that exists between suburb and city centre. This video loop of two minutes is a fixed shot of a train station platform on a sunny day, with birds chirping unseen. The first indication of the protagonist's presence comes with the unmistakable metallic sound of a can of spray-paint being agitated. A suburban train pulls into view and as it stops a man walks into the frame, a can of spray-paint in hand. The man remains on the platform. The doors of the train close and as it prepares to leave the man extends his arm and spray-paints the train at close range. As the train leaves and gathers momentum the man ceaselessly sprays while the train's velocity means the paint merely hangs in a faint wisp of colour above the man's hand. This is a work of great simplicity that affords many readings.⁴⁷ Baghriché noted in an interview that he had little funds available to him at the time and knew few people when he arrived in France. This has influenced the rawness and simplicity of his early work. Notwithstanding the relevance of contexts of production, my initial focus here is on a reading rooted in the theme of geographical segregation. No signs identify the station and this increases the sense of anonymity common to all suburban stations, linked together by the speeding shuttle of the RER trains.⁴⁸ The fact that the figure in the video is unable to even make his mark on the train and remains on the platform as the doors close and the train leaves seems to

⁴⁵ Gérard Noiriél, *Le creuset Français: histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2006).

⁴⁶ Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies, decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995), p.7.

⁴⁷ Interview with Fayçal Baghriché, London, 12 January 2012.

⁴⁸ Once the RER train stops running the suburbs are cut off from the city.

enforce the sense of a lack of advocacy and anonymity. The train is active, the mark maker is passive. Associations of spray paint and RER train conjures for anyone familiar with Paris, images of colourful intricate graffiti and scrawled 'Taggs'. Meanwhile, Baghriche's work methodically represents a line in its successive stages, recalling the modernist tradition of Kandinsky's point to line.⁴⁹ In interview Baghriche insists on aesthetic and formal readings of his work.⁵⁰ Here, specific cultural references must be analysed, as well as aesthetic and art historical constructs. Baghriche's work demands a necessary balance between recognising specific cultural references in an artwork and rendering the work a mere illustration of social phenomena. Similarly, in this chapter I open up interpretations of Abdessemed and Attia's work to those of aesthetics, and consider institutional contexts in which their work was exhibited as well as the political and cultural narratives of Paris that their work references.

⁴⁹ Interview Fayçal Baghriche, London, 12 January 2012.

⁵⁰ Ibid.



Image 21: **Kader Attia, *Flying Rats* (2005)** installation, variable dimensions, image from www.artactuel.com



Image 22: **Kader Attia, *Kasbah* (2009)** installation, corrugated iron, tires, aerial antenna, variable dimensions, image from www.universes-in-universe.org.

2.3 *Fridges* by Attia: 'democratic aesthetic', child-play and embodied experience

Building upon my analysis of the narratives densely knitted around the cultural paradigm 'banlieue', I want to return to Attia and his installation *Fridges* (2006). This work was commissioned for the artist's first show in a national institution of art – le Magasin and the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon – and the artist would thus have received unprecedented financial and technical support to produce installation work, yet *Fridges* is indicative of the progression in his early practice from photography towards installation.⁵¹ The relevance of this particular work to this thesis is in the fact that the installation is the first of Attia's work in which the urban is the signified.⁵² Installations such as *Mosquée/Night-Club* (2003), a neon sign that flickered from 'mosque' to 'night-club', represented the relations between Islamic and Western cultures in an urban environment; *Fridges* differs by its focus on the urban environment in itself and conveys wider meaning than ethnic relations.

I have shown how Katz-Freiman's text in the catalogue of the Magasin/Lyon exhibition emphasised elements of oppression and hopelessness. In this instance, Katz-Freiman's otherwise perspicacious interpretation of Attia's work seems to be influenced by dominant narratives concerning France's suburbs. The critic is categorical and does not temper her views. Equally, reviews in *Le Figaro* emphasised the oppressive nature of the installation.⁵³ The artist is outspoken about his views on French and Algerian architecture, and in public talks of the failures of social housing. The artist stresses that the urban environment in which he grew up was ugly and depressing.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the artist's views on violence and segregation are more measured and ambiguous than Katz-Freiman suggests. This will become clear as I analyse the playful relation between space, object and

⁵¹ Previous installations include *Mosquée/Night-Club* (2003), a neon sign that flickered from 'mosque' to 'night-club'. The same year, Attia exhibited the installation *La Machine à Rêves*, that I observe in this chapter together with *Hallal* - created in 2004. Attia created the ambitious installation *Flying Rats* for the Lyon Biennale in 2005. *Ghardaïa*, the Mozabit city of Ghardaïa recreated by the artist with couscous, differed in context and material from *Fridges*, but effected the same playful encounter between city and memory as the installation under study.

⁵² His earlier photographic work included *La Piste d'Atterrissage* (2000-2002), a homage to transvestites of Algerian origin living and working in Paris depicting empty parking lots, roadsides, and small nightclubs. *Los Lamentos* (2005), a series of photographs depicting political graffiti on the walls of Italian towns, is another early work that illustrates Attia's interest in the urban.

⁵³ Béatrice de Rochebouët, Kader Attia dans l'oeil des musées, *Le Figaro*, 17-18 June, 2006, p.41

⁵⁴ Régis, Durand, 'Entretien avec Kader Attia et Régis Durand', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition, Kader Attia, Huarte, Centro Huarte de Arte Contemporaneo, 4 July-28 September 2008] (Huarte: Centro de Arte Huarte, 2008), p.170.

narrative that Attia creates.

In interview, Attia states that the artistic object creates a temporal and spatial distance between the viewer's experience of an artwork and the real object or narrative conveyed. Herein lies the poetry of the artwork, he argues.⁵⁵ Attia speaks of *Fridges* as forming a poetry of the 'cité' through metamorphosis. He writes: "In a way, it's the poetry of dormitory towns. A coarse grey texture, with the kind of large parallelepiped forms you see everyday."⁵⁶ Entering the gallery space at Le Magasin, the viewer either noticed that the installation was made of fridges and then realised that he/she was in fact looking at the maquette of a city with high rise buildings, or the viewer at first perceived the blocks to be high rise buildings and then noticed that they were in fact fridges. In viewing the installation and in experiencing the metamorphosis of fridge to high rise building – or high rise building to fridge - the viewer is aware that he/she had been made to suspend belief in the tangible if only for a moment.⁵⁷ Viewers thus joined ranks with generations of children who have made castles from tables and bed sheets, playthings from an assortment of everyday objects. It is not fanciful to emphasise this element of child-play or visual trickery in *Fridges* as I will now discuss.

Attia refers to child-play in his work in two distinct ways. Firstly, as in an interview with Jean-Louis Pradel for the catalogue of his exhibition at Le Magasin, Attia states that he approaches his practice with the enthusiasm and imagination of children: "While I was making it, I felt like a child. (...) I'd like to think that artists are just big children".⁵⁸ Secondly, childhood is a recurrent theme in his work. For example, *Flying Rats* (2005) or *Childhood#1* (2005) respectively depict children in a playground, and feature children's toys. These two installations are of further interest to me here because they demonstrate that the use of the nightmarish is not specific to the 'banlieue' but is a wider referent in his practice. *Flying Rats* (2005) (Image 21) features life-size figures of children made with a cereal based paste and clothed in

⁵⁵ Jean-Louis Pradel, 'In conversation with Pradel', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition Kader Attia, Musée d'Art Contemporain Lyon, 15 June – 13 August 2006, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 21 October 2006 – 7 January 2007] (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2006), 28-45, p.48.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ This sense of wonder and magical transformation is perhaps more pervasive in the earlier version of *Fridges* than in the version exhibited at the Centre Pompidou and the Baltic. In this later installation, the fridges were covered in mirror tiles.

⁵⁸ Jean-Louis Pradel, 'In conversation with Pradel', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition Kader Attia, Musée d'art Contemporain Lyon, 15 June – 13 August 2006, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 21 October 2006 – 7 January 2007] (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2006), 28-45, p.48.

children's clothes. The figures are arranged as if playing in a sandpit but set in a vast birdcage filled with pigeons. The logical development of the installation is that the birds feed off the seeds, tearing the puppet-like children apart until they are nothing but rags strewn across the floor of the cage.⁵⁹ At the Lyon Biennale in 2005 critics commented on the violent nature of this installation.⁶⁰ *Childhood#1* (2005) is a child's slide, painted an alluring Barbie-pink but fitted, like Mona Hatoum's perverted furniture, with deathly blades.⁶¹

Katz Freiman defined *Fridges* as a somatic experience of oppression in the sense that the embodied experience is almost compulsive. She writes:

The effect was that of an accumulation of depressing housing blocks whose effect was so powerful that the viewers walking between them could almost physically sense the oppression and humiliation they engendered.⁶²

In contrast, *Fridges* seems inoffensive and far removed from the strong reaction that *Flying Rats* and *Childhood#1* generated. Thus, comparison with his earlier work that refers to childhood is revealing of the ambivalent meaning of *Fridges*. Katz-Freiman emphasises the embodied experience of the viewer as he/she walks through the artwork, whilst relevant, I also want to place an emphasis on the use of visual trickery in Attia's artwork which enables behavioural habits and accepted cultural narratives of the city to be questioned by virtue of the viewer's experience being embodied. Arguably, *Fridges* forms a democratic aesthetic experience because it commandeers an idiosyncratic response to a metamorphosis.

Armstrong's analysis of play in her book *The radical aesthetic* is useful here to support an interpretation of Attia's work as a radical and 'democratic aesthetic'. Armstrong argues that play is dependent on cognitive and cultural parameters. Drawing on the writing of Vygotsky, she argues that play is neither an escape from

⁵⁹ This piece caused uproar when it was exhibited in the USA because of the representation of violence to children.

⁶⁰ Emanuelle Lequeux, 'Les nouvelles frontières du scandale, Le dernier Outrage', *Beaux Arts Magazine*, 290, August 2008, p.95 ; Maurice Ulrich, 'Missile ou peace and love', *L'Humanité*, 19 September 2005, available online Lhumanite.fr, accessed October 2012.

⁶¹ *Le Figaro* and *Beaux Arts* have made a parallel between the slide and the issue of female excision, as well as Attia's own traumatising experience of circumcision. However, both articles also state that *Childhood#1* illustrates the broader violence of childhood today. B. de R., 'Kader Attia, le raid psychiatrique', *Le Figaro*, 7 October 2005, p.35; Emilie Renard, 'Kader Attia à double détente', *Beaux-Arts Magazine*, 270, December 2006, p.61.

⁶² Tami Katz-Freiman, 'La voie du bonheur, conflit culturel, désir et illusion dans l'oeuvre de Kader Attia', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition Kader Attia, Musée d'art Contemporain Lyon, 15 June – 13 August 2006, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 21 October 2006 – 7 January 2007] (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2006), 18-35, p.24.

reality, nor is it utter freedom.⁶³ Child-play is dependent on rules, yet it enables a different perception of reality. Play revolves around the pivotal object (in her text the horse/stick) that allows for 'cognitive discovery'.⁶⁴ Armstrong equates the pivotal object with the aesthetic object. In play the 'double-sided pivotal object', or the aesthetic object, anchors the individual caught up in play within the constraints of material life but enables new 'categories' to be imagined.⁶⁵ Armstrong contends that play is emancipatory because through play we dissociate from the 'tyranny' of material experience and on the other extreme the 'primal ooze of the imaginary'.⁶⁶ For Armstrong therefore, play is knowledge as well as the 'prerequisite of political change'. She writes: "The aesthetics is not the political, but it may make the political possible"⁶⁷ The significance here is that through the prism of art play can *intercede* on cultural narratives through measured cognitive shifts. In other words, cultural narratives associated with an object or location, are destabilized through the experience of an aesthetic object that creates a cognitive shift.

From a different perspective, Allison Landsberg argues that cultural memory can create a shift in ethics when cultural narratives are experienced by a viewing public as 'prosthetic memory' which attaches itself like a prosthesis to an individual's 're-membering'.⁶⁸ Landsberg's hypothesis corroborates Armstrong's view that the aesthetic/pivotal shift can give rise to a political or ethical shift. The playful shift that the viewer of *Fridges* experiences from the material object fridge to the pivotal or aesthetic object fridge/high-rise is anchored in the 'cité' as Katz-Freiman has observed, but allows for a different perception of the city as a system. To consider the emancipatory nature of play in relation to Attia's work and to begin to understand how the experience of an aesthetic object is both embodied and cognitive, I turn to the more recent installation *Untitled* (2009). It was commissioned by the 2009 Fiac art fair in Paris and installed in the middle of a large circular basin in the Tuileries gardens. Large metal cymbals rose above the water to resemble strange water flowers. In 2009 when I visited the park to view the installation I witnessed a

⁶³ Armstrong's interpretation of Winnicott's transitional object, which facilitates the transition from infant to child (and away from the mother), is less useful for us here.

⁶⁴ Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p.38.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.39.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.39.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.43.

⁶⁸ By using the neologism re-membering, Landsberg suggests that the individual that remembers reconstructs himself/herself, like a body that has been amputated and to which a prosthesis is attached

happening of sorts that is relevant to our analysis - and that Attia delighted in when I recounted the story. Visitors to the Tuileries gardens approached the basin, a focal point of the park, and commenced to throw pebbles at the cymbals making them reverberate in a disjointed rhythm. Young and old noticed the park warden but were undeterred by him as he began to circle the basin in a small, almost toy-like vehicle, in order to stop the public from interfering with the 'sculpture' - to use the warden's own words. The basin being large, as soon as he had completed half a lap people on the other side started throwing the stones again; defying authority in a playful manner but also appropriating the public furniture, which the installation had become, and breaking with habits of public conduct. In a sense, the 'cognitive discovery' of urban furniture as musical object enabled the public to do away with the constraints of everyday life, in other words, to become playing children. Whilst the behaviour of the public was not part of the conceptualisation of *Untitled* (2009) the 'happening' that I witnessed is suggestive of the way that Attia demands of viewers to dispel behavioural habits and interact with his work.

For *Kasbah* (2009) (Image 22), exhibited in Tours in 2009, viewers were invited to walk on the roof of a shantytown that the artist had constructed on the gallery floor from sheets of corrugated iron.⁶⁹ Attia states that reconstructing a town and asking the viewer to walk about on it was a means to encourage the viewer to approach the subject from a different angle physically, and by extension, metaphorically.⁷⁰ In a conversation with Regis Durand, published in the catalogue of another exhibition at the Centro Huarte, Attia talks also of encouraging empathy in the viewer who is psychologically implicated in the work.⁷¹ Here, Attia seems to corroborate the view that a cognitive shift through aesthetic object or prosthetic memory affects the viewer's psyche - though Armstrong goes further in stating that it is the 'prerequisite of political change'.⁷²

With *Fridges* (2006) viewers were able to walk through and around the

⁶⁹ *Kasbah* was exhibited alongside *Oil and Sugar* (2007), *Untitled (Ghardaia)* (2002) and *Misunderstanding* (2006). Banai Nuit thus argues that together, these artworks trace the archeology of colonialism in postcolonial geopolitics. Indeed, I have already mentioned that the parallels between modernism, cultural politics and colonialism are of great interest to the artist. Banai Nuit, 'Kader Attia', *Art Forum International*, November 2009, 246-247.

⁷⁰ *Kasbah* also references the way in which the population of Algier's Kashbah lays claim to its rooftops.

⁷¹ Regis, Durand, 'Entretien avec Kader Attia et Regis Durand', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition, Kader Attia, Huarte, Centro Huarte de Arte Conteporeano, 4 July-28 September 2008] (Huarte : Centro de Arte Huarte, 2008), p.165.

⁷² Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p.46.

'buildings' that were dwarfed by the viewer's body. A cognitive distance occurred between aesthetic and signified object in this change of scale, while the fact that the viewer could wander around the structures enabled an experience of affect as the artist observes. The art historian Jill Bennett writes of the artwork as creating an experience of affect in the viewer because it is dependent on 'sense-memory', or in other words is felt upon the body.⁷³

As the source of a poetics or an art, sense memory operates through the body to produce a kind of 'seeing truth', rather than 'thinking truth', registering the pain of memory as it is directly experienced, and communicating a level of bodily affect.⁷⁴

Of particular relevance here is Armstrong's reading of John Dewey. It foregrounds the idea of art as a democratic experience that allies the cognitive and the sensual/embodyed. Armstrong argues that the aesthetic must be rooted in 'experience that happens to everybody',⁷⁵ and that allies knowledge and affect.⁷⁶ She writes: "It (art) does not consist in achieved form, which would become finitude, but in the experience of making form, an experience distributed across makers and perceivers."⁷⁷ Aesthetic form, Armstrong argues, is dependent on past memories. As such, she comes close to theories of cultural memory. She writes: "Form is achieved through the use of the past and therefore through the use of remembered emotion and reflection."⁷⁸ Armstrong contrasts Dewey's conservative view of a continuous lineage of cultural tradition with the view that art expresses a traumatic experience in which cultural memory is perceived from a point of disjunction.

It is the vital memory of disjunction, which is the creative agency of form. Seen in this light, cultural tradition becomes the need to remember, to re-remember and perhaps to mythologize, moments of stress, breaks, shock, along with history's partial solutions to them.⁷⁹

However, whilst Armstrong and Bennet only consider traumatic memories as producing affect, I argue that affect is produced through a democratic experience of a cultural narrative. Indeed, Landsberg's paradigm of the prosthetic memory demonstrates that the experience of another person's histories can produce affect in

⁷³ Jill Bennett, *Emphatic vision: affect, trauma and contemporary art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.26.

⁷⁵ Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p.58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.59.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.165.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.165.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.165.

the viewer whatever the nature of the narratives conveyed. The power of embodied aesthetic experience that Bennett brings to the fore, or the democratic and radical notion of the aesthetic that Armstrong outlines, are relevant to any process of cultural memory that is dynamic.

Influenced by theories of cultural memory, I suggest therefore a broader understanding of memory than Armstrong's theory of the aesthetic as an embodied experience that is not limited to the traumatic. Indeed, Attia criticised my use of the term somatic when I discussed this work with him. For the artist, who perceives the somatic as generated by trauma, the somatic is too prescriptive a prism through which to consider his work. Attia's work is not necessarily grounded in a traumatic experience. The experience of playful metamorphosis of *Fridges* allows for a democratic, radical and myriad experience of the aesthetic based on memory and affect.

In interview with Frogier in 2003, Attia noted the affective relation to the 'cité' and its physical setting that develops among its inhabitants.⁸⁰ Indeed, he stated that many are sorry when buildings are destroyed as they gather sentimental value. Private and collective narratives are projected onto the facades of high-rise buildings, and therefore generate affect; however unappealing the architecture of the 'banlieue' is. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard argues that familiar buildings become mnemonic frames, in which memories come to inhabit corridors, and staircases.⁸¹ Furthermore, Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Connerton have demonstrated to different ends to what extent cultural narratives are habitual and embodied.⁸² The experience of a city and the memories it encapsulates are first and foremost experienced in the body because they are dependent on the habits the architectural apparatus create. By representing a city, Attia thus calls upon the experience of its inhabitants, as well as the narratives associated with this urban space in the popular imagination. It is thus democratic because it is open to idiosyncratic and embodied memories of the *demos* or people.⁸³ The French studies scholar Jackson-Crawley

⁸⁰ Larys Frogier, *Ouvertures Algériennes - Créations Vivantes* [exhibition Ouvertures Algériennes - Créations Vivantes, 6 june 2003 -14 august 2003, La Criée, Rennes] (Rennes: Edition La Criée, 2003), p.17.

⁸¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The poetics of space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

⁸² Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) ; Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).

⁸³ The particular public, or *demos*, that we are concerned with here is limited to a viewing public. I do not presume that Attia's work reaches a wider population.

writes that Attia's photographs of Ghardaïa represent the re-appropriation of modernist architecture by its inhabitants. Her statement is of particular relevance to *Fridges*.⁸⁴ She writes:

Similarly, if the inhabitants of Ghardaïa were historically dispossessed of (the meaning of) their architectures by the consuming modernist gaze, Attia's photographs reveal how they in fact use and re-appropriate their cultural legacy producing their built environment not as a frozen, historical artefact (...), but as a living and practised material environment.⁸⁵

The narratives encapsulated by the high-rise buildings of the 'banlieue', by being embodied are more keenly felt by the public experiencing the installation *Fridges*. They are rooted in experience that happens to every viewing-body. The playful metamorphosis at work in *Fridges* creates a democratic and radical aesthetic through a cognitive shift. At this juncture of play, affect, memory and aesthetic in Attia's work lies the possibility of differing meanings formed around the interplay between city and citizens, as well as city and viewing public.

⁸⁴ Jackson Crawley does not consider *Fridges* as so.

⁸⁵ Amanda Jackson Crawley, '(Re-)appropriations: architecture and modernity in the work of Kader Attia', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 19 (02) (2011), 163-177, p.171.



Image 23: **Kader Attia, *La Machine à Rêves* (2008)** mixed media, vending machine, 183 x 100 x 75 cm, mannequin 185 x 80 cm, exhibition view 'J'ai deux amours' Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, photograph by Alice Planel



Image 24: **Kader Attia, *La Machine à Rêves* (2008)** mixed media, vending machine 183 x 100 x 75 cm, mannequin 185 x 80 cm, exhibition view 'J'ai deux amours' Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, photograph by Alice Planel



Image 25: **Mohamed Bourouissa**, *Le Reflet* (2007) lambda print on aluminium, 140 x 225 cm, image from kamelmennour.com, <http://www.kamelmennour.com>

2.4 The notion of 'art of the banlieue' in question

It is not incidental, I will now argue, that Attia chose refrigerators to symbolise the urban setting of a 'cité'. *Fridges* (2006) confronts the viewer with a vision of our consumerist society, a society in which even our habitat morphs into consumerist objects. Critics concur that a central tenet of Attia's work is a critique of consumerist society.⁸⁶ The refrigerator is perhaps one of the objects that best represents the ways in which society has been propelled into the 21st century by electronic and technological advancement and the rise of advertising and a global economy. In the mid 1950s, fridges became objects of fetish, symbols of wealth and standing. They were tantalising objects featured in glossy magazines and black and white advertisement. As Ross observes, images of American households and consumerist objects abounded in France in the post war years.⁸⁷ Today, American inspired visions of big cars, sports-wear brands and other material goods are prevalent in France - as in other European societies. I have demonstrated how social and economic disenfranchisement is pervasive in France's 'banlieues' [in 2.2]. Consumerist objects hold a perverse importance in the cultural imaginary of young people who have grown up in these districts, as Attia and Bourouissa's work illustrate.

Bourouissa's photograph *Le reflet* (2007) (Image 25) shows a figure seen from behind sitting before a pile of cast-aside television sets. The televisions rest on a concrete circular stage on the edge of a small park, framed in the distance by the muted facades of a block of flats. Trees and high rises are reflected in several TV screens. The tension of the photograph is turned inwards, only the back of the figure bent over in the foreground can be seen. While the photograph's title refers to the high-rises, it is seemingly the TV sets that carry the symbolic of the photograph. *Le Reflet* (2007), part of the series entitled *Périphérique* which depicts the suburbs of Paris, manifestly references the perverse interplay of social disenfranchisement and omnipresent consumerist culture at work in the suburbs of Paris, whilst the prevalent discourse surrounding the theme of the 'banlieues', we have seen, is one of violence,

⁸⁶ Katz-Freiman states as such in her short introductory text on Attia for the catalogue of 'Notre Histoire...'. However, in her text, Attia's critique of consumerist society pertains to North-African communities, which the artist is thereby representative of. Tami Katz-Freiman, 'The dream circus or: why did the D.J. commit suicide?', in 'Notre Histoire', p.39.

⁸⁷ Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies, decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995), p.98.

decrepit buildings and immigration.

It is a central aim of this thesis to question finite and limited views of the work of artists of Algerian origin that are predicated solely on socio-cultural stereotypes or cultural narratives. By contrast, scholarship such as that of Mona Hafez that defines a 'Kunst der banlieue', eschews the greater meaning that Attia's work has.⁸⁸ Hafez perhaps responds to critics who refer to Attia's 'banlieue' origins in the French Press. However, while expressions defining Attia such as 'enfant issu des banlieues',⁸⁹ 'enfants des cités',⁹⁰ 'jeune artiste des banlieues',⁹¹ 'jeune banlieusard',⁹² when treated as a unified discourse places a distorting emphasis on the 'banlieue' as a myth of origin, these individual comments are not as problematic as the totalising hypothesis that Hafez develops. Attia's practice cannot be defined as 'art of the Banlieue' because, while it represents urban realms of the suburbs, it also testifies to socio-cultural issues that have wider ramifications than the narratives of immigration and multicultural crisis that are associated with the 'banlieue'. Indeed, installations such as Attia's *La Machine à Rêves*, which raises the issue of materialist culture, at once transcends the specificity of the suburbs to reveal a broader social malaise, at the same time as it seemingly testifies to the more complex causes and effects of cultural and socio-economic segregation at play in the suburbs of France's cities [in 2.2].

In the installation *La Machine à Rêves* (2008), a female figure is seen from behind.⁹³ She stands in front of a drink dispenser filled with dream objects, as the title suggests. *La Machine à Rêves* (Image 23 and 24) is a sobering representation of a difficult juxtaposition of Islamic tradition and Western consumerism. The objects of desire are 'Fashion Chadors', cigarettes, botox, books on loosing one's accent from the 'banlieue'. The dispenser is filled with objects for the young woman who dreams of integration and social climbing, as stated in the catalogue of the 'Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration' which commissioned this installation.⁹⁴ In contrast to Duane Hanson's hyper-real sculpture of a young plump woman carrying shopping

⁸⁸ Mona Hafez, Paris - migration und banlieue, kunst der banlieue, Studienarbeit, Grin Verlag : Norderstedt, Germany, 2008.

⁸⁹ Béatrice de Rochebouët, Kader Attia dans l'oeil des musées, *Le Figaro*, 17-18 June, 2006, p.41

⁹⁰ B. de R. 'Kader Attia, le raid psychiatrique', *Le Figaro*, 7 October, 2005, p.35.

⁹¹ B. de R. 'Miami, passage obligé des amateurs d'art', *Le Figaro*, 3 December, 2004, p.22.

⁹² Richard Leydier, Kader Attia, *Art Press*, 301, May 2004, p.89.

⁹³ *La Machine à Rêves* (2003) was an earlier version using a male mannequin wearing a hoodie.

⁹⁴ La collection d'art contemporain (Paris : Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, 2011), p.28.

bags *Young Shopper* (1973), the figure in Attia's installation is a mere mannequin and the installation is perhaps not as well realised. However, because of its aesthetic failings - due also to the limited financial means of the artist at the time - it is not as cajoling and humorous as Hanson's sculpture. *La Machine à Rêves* is a more acerbic and specific comment on materialist culture experienced by young women of Islamic background in France. Meanwhile, Attia's installation mirrors Wieviorka's analysis of multiculturalism as socio-economic and cultural and Matriniello's class-based analysis. *La Machine à Rêves* is not limited to ethnicity or to the 'banlieue' as a site of immigration and a supposed crisis of multiculturalism. It is a commentary on consumerist culture that also affects French society as a whole.

The meeting of Western consumerism and Islam is the focus of another important project by Attia: *Hallal* (2003), in which Attia created a brand of clothing. However, *Hallal* also enlists wider meaning. The clothes were exhibited at the Saint-Germain Gallery Kamel Mennour in 2003, the logo 'Hallal', a deposited trade mark, was printed on the gallery window, the interior was organised like that of a fashionable boutique. The project was perversely so successful that *Hallal* attracted a quick following just as a new popular brand would. The catalogue of Attia's subsequent show at the Centro Huarte in 2008 documents reactions to the Kamel Mennour exhibition of 2003 in the press. Articles in *VSD*, *ParisObs* and *Le Parisien* failed to pick up on the complexity of Attia's endeavour and seemed to take the launch of the boutique and the label 'Hallal' at face value.⁹⁵ The show was met with strong opposition from the inhabitants of the chic Saint-Germain neighbourhood who petitioned for its closure. As *Art Press* wrote, the inhabitants feared the 'fauna' that the show would attract.⁹⁶ This again testifies to how pervasive the parallel between the suburbs, Islam and delinquency is in the popular imagination. The inhabitants who complained seemed to fear that the Islamic name of the clothing brand would attract delinquents from outside of their neighbourhood. *Art Press* and *Beaux-Arts* have argued that Attia places consumerist culture and orientalist paranoia in opposition. However, it is central to my argument that whilst both *La Machine à Rêves* and *Hallal* reference the commodity culture of the 'banlieue',

⁹⁵ Céline Cabourg, 'Des fringues Hallal', *ParisObs*; Anne-Sophie Damecour, 'Et voici la mode 'Hallal'...' *Le Parisien*, 21 February 2004, p.9; Caroline Derrien, 'Le Business d'Allah', *VSD*, 24-30 June 2004, pp. 38-41 in *Kader Attia* [exhibition, Kader Attia, Huarte, Centro Huarte de Arte Conteporeano, 4 July-28 September 2008] (Huarte: Centro de Arte Huarte, 2008), 118-125.

⁹⁶ Richard Leydier, 'Kader Attia', *Art Press*, 301, May 2004, p.89.

neither are limited to this specific context.

La Machine à Rêves documents a scene that could be witnessed across the capital in parking lots or shopping arcades, whilst *Hallal* was exhibited in Kamel Mennour's gallery located in the fashionable district of Saint-Germain on rue Mazarine. Furthermore, an installation of *Hallal* products *Sweatshop* (2004) was exhibited at the Miami Art Fair 2004. This installation featured a working sweatshop and thus conveyed wider themes of cheap labour, the exchange of commercial goods and the humanitarian cost of consumerist society. Retrospectively, the installation *Sweatshop* demonstrates that neither the earlier installations *La Machine à Rêves* nor *Hallal* can solely be considered as an 'art of the Banlieue'. The work of artists of Algerian origin, I suggest in this thesis, is relevant to French culture as a whole, and not only issues pertaining to Franco-Algerian relations or multiculturalism. To develop this hypothesis I now turn to the work of Abdessemed's and his sculptural work *Practice Zero Tolerance* (2006) in which he places an object of violence that is thought to pertain specifically to the suburbs - a burned car - within the centre of Paris.



Image 26: Adel Abdessemed, *Practice Zero Tolerance* (2006) and *Practice Zero Tolerance Retournée* (2008) terra cotta mould of a car, 365 x 165 x 120cm, exhibition view 'Je suis Innocent' Centre Pompidou, photograph by Alice Planel



Image 27: Djamel Kokene, *Monument aux Non Morts* (2010) brick and paper, image from djamelkokene.com

2.5 Practice Zero Tolerance by Adel Abdessemed

Adel Abdessemed's *Practice Zero Tolerance* (2006) - also referred to as *Practice Zero Tolerance (Clio)* - is a terracotta sculpture to scale that represents the blackened hull of a car stripped of all its parts and furnishings. *Practice Zero Tolerance* (Image 26) is not the first sculptural work by the artist – the large suspended skeleton *Habibi* (2004), and *Bourek* (2005), which I analyse in chapter four, pre-date it.⁹⁷ While Abdessemed has preferred the medium of video, he has latterly produced a number of sculptures like *Telle mère tel fils* (2008), which I also consider in chapter four, and more recently *Taxidermy* (2010). In 2006, the burning car of *Practice Zero Tolerance* (referred to from now on as *PZT*) had become an iconic image of the riots that took place in Parisian suburbs and other large suburban areas in France in 2005, one year before Abdessemed created the sculpture. In fact, the burned car used to create the mould for Abdessemed's sculpture had been impounded by the authorities after being torched during the 2005 riots.⁹⁸ An interpretation of Abdessemed's sculpture informed by the riots is thus brought to bear.⁹⁹

PZT was first exhibited at La Criée in Rennes in 2006 as part of the eponymous solo show *Practice Zero Tolerance*.¹⁰⁰ It was then exhibited at Le Plateau in Paris in 2006. What is particularly interesting to this thesis is that by placing this symbol of rioting into the gallery of Le Plateau, it forces a confrontation between street and national institution, centre and suburb, mediatic object and aesthetic object. I argue in this section that *PZT* is not an icon of the suburbs, but of contemporary society as a whole. Popular revolts like the riots of 2005 are interpreted and remembered as extraneous to ideals of French society, and *PZT* questions this process. As the historian Roman Garbaye writes, riots are perceived to be the symbol of a society in crisis, the exception to norms of national culture and

⁹⁷ *Practice Zero Tolerance* was also exhibited alongside the large sculptural work *Pluie noire* (2006)

⁹⁸ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203.

⁹⁹ Paul Ardenne, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*, 328, November 2006, 81-82; Elisabeth Védrenne, 'Abdessemed, Adel la rage', *Connaissance des Arts*, 652, September 2007, 80-85; Valérie Duponchelle, 'Quand Adel Abdessemed réinvente le monde et sa violence animale', *Le Figaro*, published online on 09 February 2008, figaro.fr, accessed October 2012 ; Gérard Lefort, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Libération*, 21 September 2012, p.III, originally printed in *Libération* 20 September 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Abdessemed also created *Practice Zero Tolerance (retournée)* (2008) exhibited at MIT List Visual Art centre in 2008.

tradition.¹⁰¹ By contrast, McDonough writes in the catalogue accompanying Abdessemed's later exhibition at MIT in 2009 that Abdessemed suggests that the riots be remembered as a part of society, and not as its antithesis. He writes:

This terracotta reproduction of a burned-out car is a challenge to the viewer, a demand that we understand it – and the multiple acts that produced it – as fundamentally social rather than anti-social, as conservative spokespeople on either side of the Atlantic would have it.¹⁰²

Abdessemed's work is social and political in that it engages with complex political systems. In an interview with Brian Sholis from *Artforum*, Abdessemed states: “We (artists) have a very important responsibility, perhaps now more than ever, to speak to the pressing social and political issues of our day.”¹⁰³ Indeed, Abdessemed, underlines the political dimension of his work. “As an artist I don’t have a political strategy, but rather my works are naturally imbued with a political aim.”¹⁰⁴ The fact that Abdessemed exhibits a car that was burned in the suburbs in a central Parisian gallery, is especially noteworthy given the geographical separation between Paris and its suburbs, as discussed earlier in this chapter [in 2.2]. The art historian Tom McDonough writes of ‘importing the lived experience of the suburbs into the centre of the capital itself’.¹⁰⁵ Exhibited at Le Plateau, Abdessemed’s work inserts the theme of the riots within high culture, and therefore questions the idea promoted by members of the French government at the time that the anger and dissatisfaction encapsulated by the charred remains of the car concerned only gangs of violent suburban youths. In the context of contemporary France, to suggest that the riots are a part of society - and are not its antithesis - is also to question the myth that the riots are an ethnic problem outside of French national culture. Garbaye writes that rioting populations are usually thought to be of immigrant origin and the debates sparked by the riots in France often converge around themes of cultural, ethnic or racial criteria

¹⁰¹ Romain Garbaye, *Émeutes vs intégration. Comparaisons Franco-Britanniques* (Sciences Politiques : Paris, 2011), 10-11.

¹⁰² Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.82.

¹⁰³ Brian Sholis, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Artforum.com*, October 13, 2008, Accessed from David Zwirner Gallery.

¹⁰⁴ Gareth Harris, 'Politics can be as vicious as a chimpanzee...', *The Art Newspaper*, October 15, 2010, p.15.

¹⁰⁵ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.79.

and the problems of integration of different communities and cultures.¹⁰⁶

The title refers to the broad application of modern notions of the policy of 'zero tolerance' that originated in New York and has become more widespread since 9/11.¹⁰⁷ In interview with Lebovici, to the question why 'practice zero tolerance', the artist answers: "Because Bush said it in the United States before Sarkozy in France used the expression again, it raised and went beyond the logic of 'tolerance thresholds'."¹⁰⁸ The philosopher Giorgio Agamben demonstrates that the concept 'state of exception' - a political state engineered to implement policies of zero tolerance - is becoming the norm, paradoxically, rather than the exception.¹⁰⁹ Agamben argues that the state of exception is in fact a state of 'law'; in which the state-apparatus, to respond to exceptional circumstances, creates laws that break normal legal procedures and yet are legitimised by established legal structures. As the wide application of Agamben's theories demonstrates, the theme of zero tolerance and state of exception resonates with societies across the Western world. Abdessemed all too keenly felt the wider ramifications of states of exception when he lived in New York. In *Le Monde* Harry Bellet recounts how the artist decided to leave New York after 9/11 because of mounting anti-Arab sentiment; a direct consequence to the state of exception and the rhetoric of fear engendered by the response to terrorist attacks in the US.¹¹⁰ The artist had emphasised this in an interview conducted with Lebovici;¹¹¹ and *PZT* (2006) testifies to the wider international and political context of the events in France in 2005. I will briefly analyse *PZT* in light of the 2005 riots before broadening my analysis to include states of exception, social disobedience and artistic acts.

Created in 2006, one year after the 2005 riots, *PZT* illustrates a social phenomenon that deeply marked the popular imagination in France. The riots of 2005 were not the first instance of rioting or 'violences urbaine' in France. However,

¹⁰⁶ Romain Garbaye, *Émeutes vs intégration. Comparaisons Franco-Britanniques* (Paris : Sciences Politiques, 2011), p.11.

¹⁰⁷ Policies of Zero Tolerance refer to the inflexible application of a law. However, it is inspired by 'broken windows' theory developed by conservative thinkers James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982, and used by Giuliani, the mayor of New York.

¹⁰⁸ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier 2007), 74-203, p.175.

¹⁰⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *States of exception* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

¹¹⁰ Harry Bellet, 'Adel Abdessemed, l'enfant terrible de l'art', *Le Monde*, March 1 2008, p.16.

¹¹¹ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203, p.122.

it was the first time that the events spread to different areas of France, lasted for so long,¹¹² and caused such panic among members of the government.¹¹³ The events followed a pattern that can be found replicated in previous occasions of rioting: a police altercation with suburban youth that escalates and leads to the death of the youth. Localised demonstrations against police brutality and in memory of the deceased are then ignored or met with renewed violence.¹¹⁴ In 2005, local demonstrations in Clichy sous Bois erupted into a national wave of rioting; the reaction of political leaders at the time were partly to blame for the climate of violence and social tension that caused the escalation of rioting in October and November 2005.

Notwithstanding the wider meaning of the title 'Practice Zero Tolerance', Abdessemed's sculpture also refers to the views of Nicholas Sarkozy - minister of the interior at the time - on policing rioting groups. Sarkozy pledged he would instate a policy of 'tolerance zero' towards the perpetrators of 'violence urbaines' during a press conference at Bobigny on 31 October 2005.¹¹⁵ On 20 June 2005 Sarkozy had declared to the inhabitants of La Courneuve, in front of national TV cameras, that he would clean the suburb 'au Kärcher' (with a Kärcher water jet). His use of the terms 'racaille' and 'voyous' - scum and hooligans in English - raised the polemic even further. Furthermore, in October 2005, Sarkozy made a public declaration denying the responsibility of the police in the affair and suggesting that the youths who died were in fact petty criminals. During the riots, he claimed that they were organised by gangs of delinquents, and went so far as to state that 75% to 80% of the rioters arrested were delinquents or criminals, formerly known by the police, and whose prime ambition was to vandalise and resist order and rule in the French republic.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Rioting began in Clichy sous Bois on the 27 October 2005. The police declared rioting had ended on the 17 November 2005. These two dates thus mark the official beginning and end to the riots.

¹¹³ Laurent Muchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Paris : Editions de la découverte, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Following an altercation with the police in Clichy sous Bois on the night of the 27th October 2005, 3 youths (Tunisian, Turkish and Mauritanian) sought refuge in an EDF power substation. Two of them perished. The violence that erupted that evening was contained and a silent march was organised the following day in memory of the two youths. Police tear gas, used to contain a small demonstration, landed near the district mosque during the prayers of Ramadan which rekindled the violence. Violence spread to Saint Denis and then other regions of Paris and the rest of France. Laurent Muchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Paris : Editions de la découverte, 2007).

¹¹⁵ He was first heard advocating 'zero tolérance' on 29 July 2002, and the same year as the riots on the 3rd of June 2005.

¹¹⁶ Nicolas Sarkozy stated on the 19th of November, in front of members of the UMP, that the riots were caused by "les trafics de drogue, la loi des bandes, la dictature de la peur et la démission de la

The media were quick to criticise Sarkozy for his incendiary language. However, opposition to his policies was by no means consensual.¹¹⁷ Hargreaves argues that the riots of 2005 were rooted in social exclusion and that public reactions to the riots testify to a change in public perception of the 'banlieue'; discrimination is interpreted as a social ill and a cause of the violence that erupted.¹¹⁸ However, Mucchielli demonstrates that whilst politicians from the Left and a large percentage of the population shared this view, the riots were met by rhetoric that stigmatised 'ethnic' youth and incited xenophobia and anti-Islamic sentiment.¹¹⁹ Xenophobic views by politicians from across the political spectrum were indeed reported. At the time of the riots members of the government claimed that Islamic organisations were responsible and pledged to extradite foreign rioters including those who had a resident permit - thus insinuating that there was a link between immigration and urban violence. Xenophobic language became so widespread that the Prime Minister publicly cautioned the senate on 18 November against using scapegoats. Mucchielli concludes that the use of violent policing, the numerous mentions of polygamy, of immigration and of parental responsibility, all demonstrate that right wing politics had gained greater popularity in French society.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, police violence and the curfews that were imposed at the time of the riots were publicly condemned.¹²¹ Hargreaves goes so far as to state that the population at large showed support for the rioting youth.¹²² The continued popularity of politicised rappers such as Keny Arkana - whose songs 'Nettoyage au Kärcher' and 'La Rage' make a link between the politics of Sarkozy, violence and social uprising - testifies to the fact that the

République", going further in stating that "Les banlieues se sont embrasées notamment parce que nous avons engagé une action qui ne s'arrêtera pas, de démantèlement des bandes, des trafics et des trafiquants." Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Editions de la découverte : Paris, 2007), p.52 ; The mayor of Clichy, on the other hand, stated that social-exclusion was the root cause of the riots.

¹¹⁷ The claims made by Sarkozy were quickly disavowed by the judges responsible for judging the rioters. The newspaper *Le Parisien* (7 décembre 2005) then published data collated by the RG, which also disavowed the notion of organised violence. However, Mucchielli demonstrates furthermore that a great number of the French population did not find Sarkozy's claims abject. Statistics published by the CSA shows that 48% of the population deemed that Sarkozy applied the right amount of 'fermeté' needed, 23% too much, 25% too little. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Editions découverte : Paris, 2007).

¹¹⁸ Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France. immigration, politics, culture and society. 2nd edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

¹¹⁹ Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Paris : Editions de la découverte, 2007).

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.52.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France. immigration, politics, culture and society. 2nd edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

riots of 2005 have resonated with young populations outside of the 'banlieue' of Paris and other large cities. It would therefore seem that *PZT*, exhibited one year after the riots, explores themes that remain deeply political and polemical.

McDonough compares *Birth of Love* (2006) and *Happiness in Mitte* (2003), two videos that feature city cats - in the former eating a mouse, in the latter lapping milk that the artist had left out - to support his claim that the riots of 2005 had a profound effect on the work of Abdessemed. He writes: "Something changed between Berlin and Paris, something that rendered the street a space of danger and potential violence: we might name that something as November 2005."¹²³ To place the riots of 2005 as a decisive event in the career of Abdessemed overlooks the wider context of the riots which *PZT* so aptly communicates. Indeed, the title is indicative of the language used by governmental figures in France, which in turn mirrors international policies and a global context of fear and police repression that pre-date 2005.

In France suburban rioting is thought to begin with the phenomenon of the *Rodéo des Minguettes* at Venissieux in 1981.¹²⁴ The next reported rioting that occurred in Vaulx en Velin in the 1990s saw the first use of the word 'émeute'.¹²⁵ Once social unrest in the suburbs was seen to be a social phenomenon defined by the terms 'émeute' and 'violence urbaine', rather than a series of separate events, the French government responded by introducing a number of urban policies called 'politique de la ville'. Further events which took place in the town of Mantes-la-jolie led to the creation of the 'Brigade Anti-Criminalité' (BAC) in 1994. Despite the 'politique de la ville' schemes, Mucchielli notes, riots erupted throughout the nineties and early noughties.¹²⁶

PZT does not reference the one event of rioting in 2005, but the systems set in place to deal with rising dissatisfaction in suburban areas; systems that have proven to be inadequate and are revealing of social tensions. Garbaye writes that urban policies in the 1990's in France targeted specific urban zones instead of

¹²³ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.80.

¹²⁴ Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Paris : Editions de la découverte, 2007).

¹²⁵ In English: riot.

¹²⁶ Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou, *Quand les banlieues brûlent, retour sur les émeutes de Novembre 2005* (Paris : Editions de la découverte, 2007).

particular populations because ethnic policies are unconstitutional in France; ethnicity cannot be a criteria of social policy.¹²⁷ However, notwithstanding the absence of any censors on ethnicity in the Banlieue, Garbaye writes elsewhere that social unrest in the 'banlieue' is commonly thought to be a cultural and ethnic problem. These two observations made by Garbaye testify to the tension that exists in French society where ethnic or cultural differences are not documented and therefore not recognised, and yet these differences are thought to be the cause of social unrest. I have already discussed the myths of ethnicity present in the popular imagination with regards to the suburbs of French cities or 'banlieue'. Garbaye further testifies to the prejudices that the absence of discourse on ethnicity causes in French society. Whilst I do not argue that Abdessemed aimed to bring ideas of ethnicity to the fore, I suggest that *PZT* is an image of great power because of the paradoxes and social tensions that it indirectly refers to.

Abdessemed was aware of social and political tensions at play in suburban areas of France in the 1990s having himself lived in a neighbourhood prone to violence – as Mc Donough notes. When Abdessemed moved to France in autumn 1994 he lived at Vaulx-en-Velin, only four years after severe rioting had taken place there. Problems remained, and indeed that same year, several public buildings were set alight in reprisal against the death of neighbourhood youths. While I agree with McDonough that Abdessemed must have been influenced by the suburban context he experienced upon arriving in France, I argue that *PZT* refers to a phenomenon of violence and xenophobia which is not limited to the year 2005.

Readings of *PZT* are very diverse. In the MIT catalogue the curator Jane Farver argues that the second terracotta mould that Abdessemed made – and exhibited on its side in the US at the LIST centre - *Practice Zero Tolerance (retournée)* (2008), does not only refer to cars incinerated in the suburbs of Paris in 2005 but also to car bombings.¹²⁸ Paul Ardenne writes in *Art Press* that the 2006 version alludes to the calcinated bodies in Nazi crematoria.¹²⁹ In 2009, and again in the catalogue for the retrospective of Abdessemed's work *Je suis innocent* at the

¹²⁷ Romain Garbaye, *Émeutes vs intégration. Comparaisons Franco-Britanniques* (Paris : Sciences Politiques, 2011), p.99.

¹²⁸ Jane Farver, 'Adel Abdessemed acts', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 12-25.

¹²⁹ Paul Ardenne, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*, 328, November 2006, 81-82.

Centre Pompidou in 2012, McDonough writes of *PZT* as a counter-monument.¹³⁰ I want to consider this last hypothesis in more detail.

PZT is reminiscent of Jeremy Deller's recent proposal for a monument to sit on the 4th plinth of London's Trafalgar Square with the tentative title *The spoils of war* (2010). Deller's proposal was to exhibit a burned car from Iraq. By exhibiting the car in the heart of London, the population of London would be confronted with the fact of war.¹³¹ We have seen that Abdessemed similarly brought into the centre of Paris the symbol of urban violence that was thought to happen only at the peripheries of the city. However, Abdessemed's sculpture was not public, it was exhibited within an institution of art so that its power as a 'counter-monument' is limited. A further comparison could be drawn with Djamel Kokene's *Monument aux non morts* (2010) (Image 27). Kokene's sculpture is made of a single brick erected on a wall socket and wrapped in a rectangular band of paper on which the words 'monument aux non morts' appear.¹³² If Kokene's monument is dedicated to the non-dead, then those that are to stand before the monument are therefore not the living, for the non-dead – i.e. the living – are being memorialised and thus absent. Those that are to stand in front of the monument are the public which are thus, in effect, deadened. The brick is an evident symbol of rebellion found in expressions from 1968 as 'sous les pavés la plage', of barricades of bricks during the Paris *Commune* of 1871. To summarise briefly, Kokene's *Monument aux non morts* thus seems to be an invitation to the deadened public to perform civil disobedience against the same state apparatus that dictates social norms and cultural memory in the form of monuments. In light of this comparison with Kokene's installation, I propose that Abdessemed invokes the public to practice zero tolerance, not against violent youth as Sarkozy has suggested, but against the politician's policies. This may seem far-fetched, but in fact other commentators have made similar suggestions. Maldonado in a comprehensive article on Abdessemed's work published in *Parachute* in 2006 argues that *Joueur de flûte* (1996), *Passé Simple* (1997), and *Real Time* (2003) represent trance-like states which enable a transcendence from social norms. As the 'creator' of such situations, Abdessemed positions himself as upsetting public order.

¹³⁰ Tom McDonough, 'Tolérance zéro', in *Adel Abdessemed, Je suis Innocent* [exhibition *Je suis innocent*, 3 October 2012 - 7 January 2013, Centre Pompidou, Paris] (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012).

¹³¹ It is tempting to read *Practice Zero Tolerance* as a monument to commemorate France's neglected colonial past, and current policies of immigration. However, this would be too disable any wider understanding of the piece.

¹³² In English: monument to the non-dead.

Maldonado writes: "Music, dance and the sexual act all pertain to trance, to abandoning oneself to pleasure. All cause trouble for public order (...)".¹³³ In *Art Press* Bonin qualifies *Joueur de flûte* (1996) *Passé Simple* (1997) and *Chrysalide* (1999) as models of 'liberation'.¹³⁴ Furthermore, in another article in *Art Press*, Ardenne comments that the photograph *Zero Tolerance* is a metaphor for public disobedience.¹³⁵

Abdessemed states that he wanted to make *PZT* 'an inaugural image'.¹³⁶ Indeed, whilst the term counter-monument cited previously is an unfortunate choice, McDonough's statement is useful in revealing how, far from dwelling on or commemorating the past, Abdessemed asks the viewer to embrace this image as a symbol of the current age and to come to consider what embracing such a symbol within cultural memory would entail.¹³⁷ As discussed, debates around rioting often converge around the assimilation of immigrant populations. By contrast, *PZT* seemingly testifies to wider political causes and effects of the disaffection in contemporary French society and confronts the viewing public with the systems and tensions that shape society through the urban environment. Abdessemed talks of being a messenger conveying his time. "Je suis un messenger du minimum, illustrant bien son époque."¹³⁸ In other words, his work does not refer to a grand narrative or myth but to the minimal state of political or cultural situations. I will now discuss how Abdessemed conjures the political by focusing on the act of creation.

¹³³ Guitemie Maldonado, 'Dans le bordel global avec Adel Abdessemed', *Parachute*, 124, October/november/december 2006, 36-51, p.38.

¹³⁴ Anne Bonnin, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*, 300, April 2004.

¹³⁵ Paul Ardenne, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*, 328, November 2006, 81-82.

¹³⁶ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203, p.183.

¹³⁷ The counter-monument is a problematic concept. Even a counter-monument is flawed, for it ignores the fact that monuments are themselves self-effacing, as the population becomes familiar with the sight. Counter-monuments can thus only ever be a negation of something that is already a negative, and instead of reminding populations to the problems of collective memory, they corroborate fixed national narratives and encourage forgetting.

¹³⁸ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203.

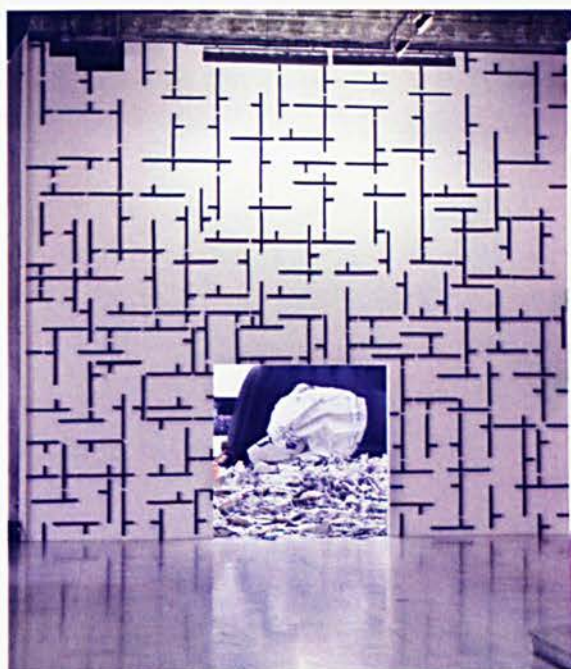


Image 28: **Kader Attia**, *Arabesque* (2006) installation, 'tonfa' truncheons, variable dimensions, image courtesy of the artist



Image 29: **Adel Abdessemed, *Séparation* (2006)** c-print, 103 x 90 cm, image from www.list.mit.edu.com



Image 30: **Adel Abdessemed, *Hélicoptère* (2007)** 3 min video, charcoal on wood, overall dimension 491 x 716 cm, image from http://gregcookland.com/journal/uploaded_images/picAbdessemedHelikopter

2.6 Artistic acts and aesthetics in Abdessemed and Attia's practice

The notion of zero tolerance can be seen as a condition enacted by Abdessemed working against social and urban policies of 'zero tolerance'. The critic Gareth Harris writes:

Practice Zero Tolerance (a title in English in the original) signals this repressive policy and its effects, but also the artist's subversive appropriation of the term, his recoding of 'zero tolerance' as the grounds for an artistic practice situated precisely at the point of social division and conflict.¹³⁹

I will argue that Abdessemed has developed an artistic practice of zero tolerance, in that the artist does not allow himself to accept any limits in the creative act. Indeed, in the occasion of Abdessemed's exhibition at La Criée in 2006, the local newspaper 'Ouest France' published a review of his work which emphasised the aesthetic and artistic dimension of the term zero tolerance as I propose to show.¹⁴⁰

Séparation (2006) (Image 29) is a photograph that shows Abdessemed as he approaches a lion from behind in the middle of a Parisian street. A man stands close by and looks on with a tense expression on his face. The lion stares into the camera. McDonough states that the act of bravado which the artist enacts in *Séparation* 'distracts' from the 'larger social question'.¹⁴¹ But that is to assume that the 'larger social question' is more important than the act. Such artworks as *Helikoptère* (2007) (Image 30) suggest otherwise; and Abdessemed has indeed repeatedly emphasised the importance of the artistic act to the meaning of this work.¹⁴² *Helikoptère* is a video which shows the artist hanging upside down above a tarmac surface in a harness, suspended from a hovering helicopter. In the video Abdessemed is seen pulling his body in an arc in order to draw a large circle. The aesthetic and the political often go hand in hand in Abdessemed's work.

Helikoptère is reminiscent of Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series

¹³⁹ Gareth Harris, 'Politics can be as viscous as a chimpanzee...', *The Art Newspaper*, October 15, 2010, p.15.

¹⁴⁰ Emilie Cénac, 'Practice zero tolerance à la Criée', *Ouest France*, 19-20 August, 2006, accessed from La Criée.

¹⁴¹ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.81.

¹⁴² In interview with Lebovici Abdessemed asserts the relevance of the term act to this practice, instead of performance. He considers 'performance' to reference a specific moment in art history that has now ended. Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', *À l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier 2007), 74-203.

(1987- to present) in which the artist challenges himself to athletic feats in the process of mark making. Barney's own references to the work of Joseph Beuys lead us to consider the influence of the latter artist on the work of Abdessemed. Indeed, the use of animals to question social mores, and an involved relation to materials that is almost alchemic, define the practice of both artists. Bonin questions the artist on his affinities with Beuys in an article in *Art Press* also published in *Global*.¹⁴³ Through the prism of Beuys' work, such as *I like America and America likes me* (1974), it is perhaps clearer to see how Abdessemed's practice is political through the act of making, and the meaning it conjures. Indeed, Beuys claimed artistic practice worked to creatively shape society and systems. At a very different historical conjecture, Abdessemed defies gravity or sets himself physical challenges in the act of making to question social systems. In contrast to Beuys, Abdessemed's work is imbued with urgency symptomatic of contemporary society; his rally cry is 'A l'attaque'.¹⁴⁴ Principles of zero tolerance that he enacts defy natural laws, for example in *Helikoptère* and the video *Also Sprach Allah* (2008). The artist also defies social mores in the act of making, for example unleashing wild animals into the city centre in *Séparation*, exhibiting a star made from Cannabis in a Plexiglas box in *Oui* (2000), asking two women and two men to dance naked on the tables of a neighbourhood cafe at night in *Passé Simple* (1997). Like Beuys before him, Abdessemed places an emphasis on the act of making and the materials used, and toys with different natural or social systems, inciting a reaction in the viewer.

PZT is a terracotta mould of the original car that Abdessemed secured. The artist states his interest, during an interview with Lebovici, in the alchemy that took place between gas and metal as cars were burned on the streets.¹⁴⁵ Gas and metal are two natural elements, to which the fired clay used to make *PZT* becomes the counterpart. Furthermore, the clay lends *PZT* an earthy, fragile, friable and tactile quality, which contrasts with the bulk of the object portrayed. The quality of terracotta so different from the feel of metal associated with a car - and the laboured process of creation of Abdessemed's sculpture using casts - means that the burned

¹⁴³ Anne Bonin, 'Interview d'Adel Abdessemed par Anne Bonin', *Global* (Paris Musées: Paris, 2005), 122-125, p.122.

¹⁴⁴ A l'attaque is the name of the 2007 catalogue of his work, it is also a statement he often cites, as Elisabeth Védrenne writes. Elisabeth Védrenne, 'Abdessemed, Adel la rage', *Connaissance des arts*, 652, September 2007, 80-85.

¹⁴⁵ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elizabeth Lebovici', *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier 2007), 74-203.

car is transformed from a mediatic object with a didactic meaning to an aesthetic object that, as Armstrong has argued, is already known by the viewer but escapes everyday reality to effect radical and democratic meaning.¹⁴⁶ *Libération* notes that Abdessemed's use of a fragile and timeless material enables the artist to transcend didactic references.¹⁴⁷ The conflicting association of materials and objects is a recurrent theme in Abdessemed's work. In *Moscow (Five Sisters's)* (2010) five pairs of ice skates made of blown glass hang on the gallery wall. *Music Box* (2009), a music box made of a metal cylinder punctured with metal screws, plays an idiosyncratic excerpt from Wagner's *Di Walküre* (The Valkyrie) as it revolves. These few examples confirm that the analysis of the material *and* the aesthetic are paramount to understanding Abdessemed's work. Indeed, in work such as *PZT* Abdessemed creates a radical aesthetic, to cite Armstrong once more, through which the artist explores the systems of social or political violence more than he criticises them. The analysis of *Arabesque* (2005) and *Sans Titre* (2006) by Attia, and *Nuit* (1997) by Abdessemed will explain this last point in more detail.

I have already demonstrated how Attia creates a distance between viewer and object and uses divergent materials to create a poesis of the city. The installation *Arabesque* (2005) (Image 28) was created for the exhibition *Notre Histoire* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2006 and comprised 248 'tonfa' (police truncheons) which the artist picked up in the street after rioting. This installation thus also referenced urban violence. The police truncheons were arranged on a large wall in a grid-like pattern. Attia's work is redolent of a contemporary installation by the south African artist Kendel Geers entitled *Signs taken for Wonders (102) and (103)* (2005) and *Cardiac Arrest* (2005) that are also composed of police truncheons.¹⁴⁸ Geers uses the truncheons to create a star shape in *Signs taken for Wonders (102)*, a circular shape in *Signs taken for Wonders (103)* and a heart shape in *Cardiac Arrest*. In Attia's installation *Arabesque* (2005) the truncheons are arranged in a grid rather than a specific shape. *Beaux Arts* magazine argues that the grid echoes Sufi

¹⁴⁶ Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

¹⁴⁷ "L'artiste aurait donc pu installer simplement au Plateau une vraie carcasse récupérée, mais la transposition dans un matériau fragile et intemporel lui permet de s'extraire de la référence immédiate." Philippe Dagen, 'La rage efficace d'Adel Abdessemed', *Le Monde*, 22 September, 2006, available online Lemonde.fr, accessed March 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Geers also symbolically changed his date of birth to 1968 as his contribution to the 2003 Venice Biennale. The series *Signs taken for wonders* were exhibited at the Fiac 2010 and in the exhibition *L'Artiste face aux Tyrans*.

calligraphy.¹⁴⁹ This interpretation mirrors the title of the installation, the arabesque being a decorative language brought to Europe by the Moors used to decorate architecture and sacred books in the Arab world. Katz-Freiman in the catalogue of Attia's exhibition at le Magasin, writes that *Arabesque* resembles Mondrian's modernist work. She interprets this reference to modernism in Attia's installation as a means to bring the defenceless victims of police violence to the fore by contrasting the failure of modernist utopia with the police truncheons. She writes:

The allusion to the modernist grid may be interpreted as a form of reckoning with the spirit of hope and utopia that promised a better world at the turn of the previous century. The use of police force alluded to by the truncheons, however, creates instead a sorrowful composition of violence directed at those who cannot defend themselves.¹⁵⁰

Attia is well versed in the history of modernism and is not unaware of the failings of modernist universalism. Modernism thus seems an appropriate paradigm through which to view this installation. However, the emphasis on the aesthetic that Katz-Freiman rightly places in her analysis should not be limited to interpretations of violent policing suggested by Attia's use of police truncheons. The meaning of the arabesque in *Arabesque*, as well as Attia's views on the theme of violence, are more ambiguous than it may first seem. The meaning of violence in Attia's work deserves further examination.

Attia returned to the theme of street violence with the installation *Sans Titre* (2006) created for the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon in 2006. The installation comprised three individual artworks. In *Moucharabieh* (2006) the windows of the gallery along one wall were barred by handcuffs linked together in a decorative pattern. The whole wall was painted black and the windows were built upon to create the soft triangular shape of Moorish windows. Lightboxes of the kind used in bus shelter advertisement hoardings were hung on a connecting wall. The glass of the light boxes was cracked in various places to form webs of fissures. Finally, in the middle of the gallery space lay spider-like objects made from the upturned skeleton of umbrellas. The installation successfully integrated all three artworks together. The light boxes radiated a stark clinical light that rendered the

¹⁴⁹ Emilie Renard, 'Kader Attia à double détente', *Beaux-Arts Magazine*, 270, December 2006, p.61.

¹⁵⁰ Tami Katz-Freiman, 'La voie du bonheur, conflit culturel, désir et illusion dans l'oeuvre de Kader Attia', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition Kader Attia, Musée d'art Contemporain Lyon, 15 June – 13 August 2006, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 21 October 2006 – 7 January 2007] (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2006), 18-35, p.23.

glinting metal of the umbrella skeletons and the handcuffs that much more acerbic. The webbed fissures in the glass created a formal link with the spider-like objects arranged on the gallery floor. Whilst these objects might appear inoffensive within a different setting - they are after all quite obviously made from umbrellas, a very mundane object - juxtaposed with the handcuffs and under the white light of the light boxes they took on a frightening dimension, as a review in *Le Figaro* notes.¹⁵¹ These spider-like objects were also menacing by their number and by virtue of the associations that could be made with science fiction films of skittering robots.

The windows on the far side of the gallery space were shaped like Moorish or Moucharabieh windows which are traditionally highly decorative. The decorative pattern barring the windows and the brutal nature of the handcuffs made for an uncanny association. Nevertheless, Attia's juxtaposition here is perhaps a little obvious as the Moucharabieh is an emblem of Islam and Middle Eastern and North African culture in France; the handcuffs in the context of the installation are suggestive of police repression, petty crime and delinquency. Whilst Attia argues that this work interweaves issues of protection and state repression, I would suggest that it is difficult for the viewer to see beyond the common association of police and Islam prevalent within discourse on delinquency and violence in France. Furthermore, the exhibition in Lyon followed the riots of 2005 and would thus undoubtedly influence interpretations made of *Sans Titre* (2006).

The light boxes, however, were far more successful in re-framing the discourse on street violence. The light boxes Attia used belong to the sphere of advertising and are elements of the urban furniture. In the context of a museum of contemporary art, however, they echo the light boxes found in contemporary art galleries to exhibit photographs. The 'frame' of the broken glass in *Sans Titre* (2006) can thus be seen to belong to the exhibition of art, and by extension to artistic practice. In this context – that of art and artistic institution - the spider webs of cracked glass are aestheticized. Notably, Attia is interested in the aesthetic or poetic dimension of violence. Attia was struck by the poetry that vandalism can denote in echo of the idea that creation can also come from destruction. "Violence can be poetic and poetry can be violent."¹⁵² *Le Figaro* quotes the artist as saying that he is

¹⁵¹ M. -G. B. 'Musique, 'people' et cités des quartiers', *Le Figaro*, 7 August, 2006, p.22.

¹⁵² Jean-Louis Pradel, 'In conversation with Pradel', in *Kader Attia* [exhibition Kader Attia, Musée d'art Contemporain Lyon, 15 June – 13 August 2006, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 21 October 2006 – 7

exasperated with vandalism but sees beauty in violence when objects are given a 'second life' in the work of art, in other words when they are transformed by the artist or exhibited in an institution of art.¹⁵³

Abdessemed's work *Nuit* (1997) similarly creates aesthetic meaning with objects of violence. In *Nuit* bullet holes puncture a metal roof through which white light can stream in, echoing a starry sky and creating an aesthetic experience for the viewer. I have already demonstrated that the ambiguous juxtaposition of materials and objects or contexts has characterised Abdessemed's practice. McDonough notes the jarring effect caused by the juxtaposition of a creative act in *Nuit* of violent and destructive precision, and the aesthetic aspect of the installation suggested by the title: that of a starry sky. "*Nuit* is characterized precisely by the tension between on one hand its industrial materials and violent creation – one cannot help but remain aware of how it was produced – and on the other its beauty when installed."¹⁵⁴ When considered together with Attia's *Sans Titre*, it is clear that the meaning of violence in *Nuit* is changed in the context of the exhibition space. Violence within this setting is creative and is aestheticized. Philippe Alain Michaud suggests that Abdessemed re-appropriates and manipulates acts of destruction to inverse their negative charges.¹⁵⁵ In *Nuit* and *Sans Titre* Abdessemed and Attia reject the common view that dismisses vandalism as delinquency, by suggesting that violence is also creative. I have argued that Abdessemed's sculpture *PZT* is social and not anti-social. Furthermore, Abdessemed negates the idea that violence is a localised phenomenon in which the sole actors are the police and 'ethnic' youths. As I have argued with *Fridges*, *Nuit* requires the viewer to pass through the installation; it thus creates an experience of aestheticized violence that is embodied and, by extension, radical and democratic.

At this point Deleuze and Gattari's notion of 'rhizome' is useful in emphasising how the strength of Abdessemed's practice lies in the cultural ramifications that an installation such as *Nuit* creates. Abdessemed's practice is not

January 2007] (Zürich : JRP Ringier, 2006), 28-45.

¹⁵³ Eric Biétry-Rivierre, 'Kader Attia dans l'oeil des musées', *Le Figaro*, 17-19 june, 2006, p.41.

¹⁵⁴ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.79.

¹⁵⁵ "Entre sémiologie et divination, il recueille et interprète les signes de violence qui traversent le monde et les transforme en syntagmes cosmiques, construit un récit mythologique profane et composite, fait d'une infinité de correspondances, qui dit l'interminable naissance de l'ordre et de l'harmonie à partir du chaos." Philippe Alain Michaud, 'Abdessemed', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier 2007), 29-71, p.38.

'arborescent' in that the meaning of his work does not follow one root, but like Deleuze and Gattari's 'rhizome', there is no beginning or end to the meaning of his work. Abdessemed himself has compared his practice with that of an electrician decoding the live wires. His intent is not to heal social wounds but to mercilessly bring to the fore a dense network of quotidian violences that are never articulated.¹⁵⁶ For example, in the process of making the bullet holes in *Nuit*, Abdessemed shot at a sheet of metal with a hunting rifle and cartridges used to kill wild boar; as he documents with photographs and an advertising image for the cartridges in the artist book 'Global'.¹⁵⁷ The packaging of the hunting cartridges reprinted in 'Global' features a wild boar, which is reminiscent of the photographic piece *Sept Frères* (2006) in which wild boars roam the streets of Paris. The web of references that Abdessemed's practice knits is epitomised by the artist's book 'Global'. 'Global' features a dense archive of drawings, photographs and images of Abdessemed's work. The book was conceived by the artist and published in 2005. The insistence that the artist places on the artistic act, and the dense web of meaning that an analysis of his practice as a whole reveals, resists interpretations based on cultural myths such as the 'banlieue' and instead demands a broad and rhizomatic reading. Therefore, as I will argue further in analysing *Sept Frères* (2006), whilst we have seen that certain elements of Abdessemed's background can be useful in analysing his work, we must resist the temptation to draw conclusions that are primarily determined by his identity as an artist originally from Algeria, and thus associated with immigration and the 'banlieue', because such meaning is too didactic and restricted. Instead, I want to observe the radical and rhizomatic nature of Abdessemed's cultural and political references in his work

¹⁵⁶ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203.

¹⁵⁷ Adel Abdessemed, *Global* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2005).



Image 31: Adel Abdessemed, *Sept Frères* (2006) c-print, 100 x 74 cm, image from modernedition.com, <http://www.moderntedition.com/art-articles/french-contemporary-art/adel-abdessemed.jpg>



Image 32: Adel Abdessemed, *Zero Tolerance* (2006) c-print, 64 x 47 cm, exhibition view *The Spectacle of the Everyday* Lyon Biennale 2009, photograph by Alice Planel

2.7 *Sept Frères* (2006) by Abdessemed, a rhizomatic reading

The photograph *Sept Frères* (2006) (Image 31) by Abdessemed features six wild boars roaming the streets of Paris. The camera is placed low to the ground so that the boars are level with the camera lens and a row of parked cars cuts the frame in half. Wet footprints on the pavement show the recent movement of the animals. The street is empty of human presence. The aggressive and unruly nature of the wild boars is heightened by the angle of the camera which catches them head on, the red eyes of the first hog stare into the camera. The photograph was taken on rue Lemer cier where Abdessemed's studio was situated at the time. He used the street as a secondary studio for a number of works such as *Jump and Jolt* (2006) which shows a bucking donkey, *Séparation* (2006) in which Abdessemed is seen approaching a lion as it's tamer looks on tensely, and *Zéro Tolerance* (2006) (Image 32) in which the artist's foot, recognisable because of the trade-mark blue trousers rolled up his leg, rests on a half coiled snake as if he were about to step on it. These photographs are often considered in conjunction with *Sept Frères*, presumably because they are all taken on the rue Lemer cier in 2006 and all feature animals.¹⁵⁸

McDonough argues that the wild boar, snake or lion pictured in these photographs represent communities of people who have little visibility in the centre of Paris.

His target here is not the confrontation of the natural and the human, but the unevenness of social development expressed as the startling appearance of the wild animal within the space of the street. The boar, the snake, or the lion as figures for those excluded from the city, in other words.¹⁵⁹

This series of photographs represents exclusion, or 'social unevenness' McDonough states.¹⁶⁰ McDonough observes the particular meaning that the term exclusion has in France, denoting both a civic and judicial exclusion as well as geographical

¹⁵⁸ Mc Donough argues that neither *Sept Frères*, *Jump and Jolt*, *Séparation* nor *Zéro Tolerance* are premised by an ideological debate around man's relationship to the natural world. Instead, videos like *Don't trust me* and *Usine*, which feature the live slaughter of animals, represent violence witnessed in everyday life. Similarly, as Mc Donough argues, *Sept Frères* (2006) is not a commentary of man and the natural world.

¹⁵⁹ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.80.

¹⁶⁰ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.81.

segregation. McDonough states that the animals were brought into Paris illegally, thus echoing the judicial exclusion which 'the sans papiers' (illegal immigrants) are subject to in France.¹⁶¹ He suggests that the wild animals featured in these photographs are allegorical representations of individuals living on the fringe of society.

In these photographs Abdessemed invents a critical response to this condition, an allegorical return of those populations excluded from the city in the form of wild, often exotic (read: non-French) animals.¹⁶²

Abdessemed is aware of the situation of 'sans papiers' and people living in precarious situations in Paris as the video *Zen* (2000) demonstrates.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, as McDonough himself argues and as I have observed in relation to *Practice Zero Tolerance*, Abdessemed acts merely as a decoder of social systems and does not attempt to determine specific issues. McDonough takes inspiration from Karl Marx's idea of the 'old mole' that buries through the ground and resurfaces occasionally to heighten conflict - which Abdessemed cites in an interview with Lebovici.¹⁶⁴ By citing Marx's idea of the 'old mole' McDonough testifies to the complex political meaning in his practice - which I have defined as rhizomatic. McDonough's convincing but facile analysis of *Sept Frères*, arguing that the wild boar represent illegal immigrants, contradicts his overall mode of interpretation; his reference to the 'old mole' suggests greater complexity of meaning in Abdessemed's practice.

Based on the analysis of Abdessemed's work developed in this chapter, I would argue that the meaning of *Sept Frères* lies not in an allegory or even metaphor of a specific event or specific peoples, but in an experience of urban and social space that has relevance in New York or London, just as much as it does in Paris. In fact, this view seems to be held by critics of his work in France. *Art Press* in 2009 printed a review of Abdessemed's show at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York stating that his work excites a broad and cynical vision of an animalistic relation to social space in contemporary societies. This relation to social space is predicated, *Art Press* continues, on the language of terrorism and catastrophe.¹⁶⁵

The effects that the rhetoric of fear could have on contemporary societies and

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.81.

¹⁶² Ibid. p.81.

¹⁶³ In *Zen* Abdessemed films a street-hawker who is also an illegal immigrant.

¹⁶⁴ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elizabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203, p.202.

¹⁶⁵ Magali Nachtergaele, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*. 358, July-August 2009, p.81.

social spaces imbue the work of the artist Nicholas Moulin. Moulin exhibited the digitally remastered photographic series *Vider Paris* (1998-2001) in 2001 at the gallery Chez Valentin. In Moulin's photographs of Paris the facades of the houses at street level are walled in by vast slabs of concrete. The streets are empty. All that remains in these nightmare-like images are the grand Haussman buildings that line every street. To a lesser extent, the apocalyptic atmosphere conjured by these images is to be found in Abdessemed's *Sept Frères*. Moulin takes inspiration from apocalyptic novels, inspired in turn by the story of Noah's ark in the Old Testament. These novels have furthermore inspired wide-release science-fiction films such as *Twelve Monkeys*, which place animals within empty or destroyed cities as a testament to the fall of mankind.¹⁶⁶ Whilst *Sept Frères* does not draw inspiration directly from these apocalyptic narratives, they summon the same sense of foreboding. I would argue that *Sept Frères* is not an allegory of excluded persons per se but the suggestion of a general malaise in contemporary society communicated through the presence of wild animals within the city centre.

The use of the expression zero tolerance to title one of the photographs from this series of Lemerancier photographs – the photograph that features a snake – confirms the link between *Sept Frères* and the artistic practice of 'zero tolerance'; and the sculpture *PZT* in which an iconic image of street violence becomes an inaugural image for our age. Hence, I propose that *Sept Frères* refers to practices of zero tolerance and changes that these policies effect upon cities and citizens. A review of the 2006 exhibition of Abdessemed at la Criée published in the local newspaper *L'Info Métropole-Le Rennais* suggests that the photographs subtly refer to the riots the previous year.¹⁶⁷ Ardenne in *Art Press*, having noted that there are in fact only six wild boars depicted suggests that the viewer is the seventh of the 'brothers' in the title, a viewer that would also be a wild animal out of place in this world.¹⁶⁸ Patricia Falguières, by contrast to McDonough, interprets Abdessemed's practice in relation to international politics and wider social tensions; she does not seek to impose any particular subject matter onto Abdessemed's work. In a text published in the catalogue of Abdessemed's 2012 exhibition at the Centre Pompidou

¹⁶⁶ *Twelve Monkeys* was inspired by Chris Marker's *La jetée* that impresses apocalyptic visions upon the viewer. The video by the young artist Neil Beloufa similarly conjures narratives of science fiction films. He films a scene in which he has placed a large white rectangular column in the middle of a Parisian street, othering the city and disturbing the coming and goings of the population.

¹⁶⁷ Olivier Brovelli, 'Tollé et tolérance', *L'Info Métropole-Le Rennais*, Summer 2006, page unknown.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Ardenne, 'Adel Abdessemed', *Art Press*, 328, November 2006, 81-82.

Je suis innocent, Falguières argues that Abdessemed's subject matter is the constant state of war that defines our contemporary society, that she defines as states of exception and which the artist, Falguières further argues, evokes through a growing bestiary of wild animals, cats, reptiles, dogs or horses.¹⁶⁹ Lise Guéhenneux, a critic of *L'Humanité*, had already suggested in 2006 a parallel between *Sept Frères* and political satire that featured animals as the protagonists.¹⁷⁰

Falguières' insightful reading of Abdessemed's practice in light of Agamben's seminal work on states of exception places the experience of exile at the core of the artist's practice. She argues that the exiled artist embodies a space of in-between that is a state of exception - just as Agamben hypothesised that the refugee embodies the state of bare life. However, by arguing that Abdessemed's work embodies a space of in-between, she places his work in an analytical vortex which denies the political meaning of Abdessemed's 'raging' practice.¹⁷¹ If his work is in-between, like the refugee of Agamben's 'bare life', then his work is always outside of society and cannot effect a radical aesthetic; because a radical aesthetic as Armstrong defines it is social, it is 'known by all'. Here, the notion of 'bare life' and that of the 'old mole' are diametrically opposed. Meanwhile, when Falguières writes of the nourishing milk that near suffocates the black street seller in *Zen*, equating this act with Macbeth's fear of the overpowering milky tenderness of human nature, the critic testifies to an indefinable anxiety that pervades Abdessemed's work; the 'rhizomatic' experiences of quotidian anxiety, or Marx's burrowing old mole.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Patricia Falguières, 'Etat d'exception', in *Adel Abdessemed : Je suis innocent* [exhibition Je suis Innocent, 3 October 2012 - 07 January 2013, Centre Pompidou, Paris] (Göttingen : Steidl, 2012), 205-211, p.207.

¹⁷⁰ Lise Guéhenneux, 'Tolérance zéro', *L'Humanité*, 22 August 2006, available online lhumanite.fr, accessed October 2010.

¹⁷¹ Abdessemed often refers to the rage translated into this artistic practice. Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elizabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203; Elisabeth Védrenne, 'Abdessemed, Adel la rage', *Connaissance des Arts*, 652, September 2007, 80-85.

¹⁷² Falguières writes: "The artist reveals the machinery of the state of exception, and is in full knowledge of its mechanisms." The critics' words echo Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'la petite machine', political and cultural systems that formulate thought. Patricia Falguières, 'Etat d'exception', in *Adel Abdessemed : Je suis innocent* [exhibition Je suis innocent, 3 October 2012 - 07 January 2013, Centre Pompidou, Paris] (Göttingen : Steidl, 2012), 205-211, p.211.

To pursue the theme of mother's milk further, it is this same indefinable anxiety that suffuses Abdessemed's recent video *Lise* (2011) in which a young woman suckles a greedy piglet.

2.8 Conclusion

To conclude, I have argued that the work of Attia and Abdessemed representing the segregation, violence and socio-economic disenfranchisement in the suburbs of Paris or 'banlieue' cannot, nonetheless, be labelled as 'art of the Banlieue'. It should not merely be interpreted through the prism of immigration, oppression, Islam, or violent youth; themes that the 'banlieue' conjures in the popular imagination. Indeed, a closer analysis of the cultural and socio-economic history of the 'banlieue' already denies such a narrow reading. The social and cultural alienation experienced by inhabitants of French suburbs is perceived to be a problem of immigration and multiculturalism. I have argued that multiculturalism and immigration are indeed contentious issues in France that are rooted in colonial history and influence cultural narratives of the 'banlieue'. However, I have demonstrated that the rise of housing schemes such as the 'grands ensembles' in France is explained by growing industrialism and post-war construction, as well as the rise of immigration. The working class history of the 'banlieue' is all but obscured by issues of violence and immigration. The 'banlieue' as a cultural phenomenon affects a wider population than minority ethnic groups. The economic alienation experienced by this population can be explained by culture and prejudice, as Taunton and Wieviorka argue, and class conflict as Muchielli contends, and is also due to geographical segregation or zoning.

I have shown that while an analysis of cultural context is necessary, we must also consider an artist's aesthetic and formal concerns. By applying research into the history of the suburbs to analyses of Attia's work I reveal that while Attia is critical of social housing, his work that represents the suburbs testifies to ambivalent meaning. Effectively, in this chapter I have attempted to mediate Katz-Freiman's uncompromising view of *Fridges*. The critic argues that *Fridges* depicts a site of oppression and humiliation. By contrast, I contend that *Fridges* also creates a poetics of the 'cité' through metamorphosis and child-play. I draw upon Armstrong's notion of the pivotal object or play as a 'requisite for political change', and of embodied experience. I argue that Attia creates a radical and democratic aesthetic that allows for divergent narratives and memories to come to the fore. Furthermore, I demonstrate that while *Fridges*, *La Machine à rêves* and *Hallal* make known the perverse hold that commodity culture has in French suburbs, the meaning of this

work is not limited to the 'banlieue'.

Similarly, *Practice Zero Tolerance* by Abdessemed refers to the riots of 2005 which took place in the suburbs of several large cities. However, the artist brings this symbol of disaffection into the institution of art and into the centre of Paris. He thus questions the notion that the social malaise it symbolises is limited to the 'banlieue'. *PZT* also refers to the national and international application of policies of zero tolerance and states of exception. Abdessemed's sculpture has been read in diverse ways but the idea of the 'counter-monument' put forward by McDonough is of particular relevance. Indeed, McDonough's interpretation testifies to the social meaning of the sculpture, in the sense that the artist challenges the viewing public to embrace the burning car as a symbol of our age, and of the political systems that govern our societies. Through an interpretation of Kokene's *Monuments aux non morts* I arrive at an understanding of *PZT* as an invocation to the public to be intolerant of the very practice of 'zero tolerance'.

In this chapter, I have also considered how the term zero tolerance can be seen as a form of artistic practice that conveys aesthetic and political meaning. The formal qualities of *PZT* are central to the conception of the artwork and the artist is indeed concerned with the alchemy between gas and metal. The use of contrasting materials is a recurrent aspect of his practice; materials and artistic processes enable the viewer to experience a cognitive shift that transforms the mediatic object of the burning car into an aesthetic object of wider political meaning.

An analysis of the aesthetic is also useful in allowing a reading of Abdessemed's work that complicates themes of violence. Such an analysis can also be applied to Attia's installations *Arabesques* and *Sans Titre*. Whilst Armstrong is critical of certain aspects of Deleuze's writing, I combine Armstrong's radical aesthetic with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the 'rhizome'. Abdessemed's *Nuit* draws on a rhizomatic web of cultural narratives as well as an embodied experience of democratic and radical aesthetic. This hypothesis can be applied to the photograph *Sept Frères*. In contrast to McDonough who perceives this photograph to be a straight forward depiction of social injustice, I argue that *Sept Frères* refers to a wider experience of public space that, like the political satire of literary figures such as La Fontaine, uses animals to comment on contemporary society. A comparison with Moulin's near apocalyptic photograph *Vider Paris* leads me to argue, like Falguières, that Abdessemed's work illustrates current societal malaise.

A number of critics in France have similarly seen the work of Attia as a rhizomatic or complex critique of contemporary society. For *L'Humanité* Attia is critical of 'l'état du monde même'.¹⁷³ In the catalogue of the Prix Marcel Duchamp 2005, Thierry Raspail defines Attia as an artist responding to the 'frenzied kamikaze developments of contemporary society', his practice as pertaining to a specific generation 'la première génération qui n'a pas été moderne, définitivement'.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, *Beaux Arts*, in a 2006 article on Attia, emphasises the myriad cultural phenomena that the artist explores and states that his work reveals a world in which cultures inter-clash rather than interrelate.¹⁷⁵ *Le Figaro*, in 2006, discovers in Attia's exhibition in Lyon a more profound and universal dimension to the artist's work.¹⁷⁶ In 2008, *Art Press* writes of a turning point in the artist's career towards spectacular forms in which political commentary is implicit, and is no longer 'a rallying cry'.¹⁷⁷

And yet, *Art Press* in 2006 evokes Attia's 'modeste' origins of 'petit banlieusard' with an ambiguous reference to Cinderella to explain his fairy-tale ascendance to artistic stardom.¹⁷⁸ The former comment might read as a tongue in cheek recognition of Attia's rise to fame, *if* the narratives around the 'banlieues' were not so pervasive. A politics of the urban needs to be stated so that modes of interpretation may also include aesthetic and broader political meaning, and thus evade collective narratives of sites like the 'banlieue'. It is this politics of the urban that I have attempted to bring to the fore in this chapter in relation to the work of Abdessemed and Attia. Through an analysis of early work by Benyahia, Bouabdellah and Sedira, the following chapter observes in more detail the workings of collective memory. I demonstrate how artists re-present collective narratives of the situation of women of Algerian origin, but also show how these identities are complex, and form psychological and critical locations.

¹⁷³ 'Tsunami pour le temps présent', *L'Humanité*, 24 October 2006, www.humanite.fr, accessed on 10.10.12.

¹⁷⁴ Thierry Raspail, 'Kader Attia', in *Prix Marcel Duchamp* (Paris : Un deux Quatre, 2006), p.10.

¹⁷⁵ Emilie Renard, 'Kader Attia a double détente', *Beaux-Arts*, December 2006, 270, p.61.

¹⁷⁶ Eric Biétry-Rivierre, 'Kader Attia dans l'oeil des musées', *Le Figaro*, 17-19 June 2006, p. 41

¹⁷⁷ 'Kader Attia', *Art Press* 348, p.93.

¹⁷⁸ "Découvrez ensuite l'oeuvre de Kader Attia avant de vous laisser conter le 'cendrillonesque' parcours de ce petit banlieusard miraculeusement téléporté de sa modeste cité aux grands musées." Sophie Alacoque, 'Bettia Rheims Kader Attia', *Art Press* 327, October 2006, p.79.

Chapter 3

Private memories and collective meanings:

Samta Benyahia, Zoulikha Bouabedbellah, Katia Kameli and Zineb Sedira

3.1 Introduction

This chapter further investigates collective memories that influence interpretations of the work of artists of Algerian origin at the juncture of private and public memories, by focusing on the work of Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Zineb Sedira and Samta Benyahia. In chapter two I observed collective memories of the 'banlieues', here I question collective narratives of Algerian women and the home. Artists of Algerian origin which I consider in this chapter explore the relation between the self and representations of the self, as a means to define productive artistic identities. The underlying premise is that identities are formed through negotiation of personal and public histories.¹ This notion echoes Rosemary Betterton's view that by reclaiming authorship of the self and exploring cultural stereotypes, diasporic artists demonstrate that 'we are made through our own and other's histories'.² This chapter builds on the notion of art as a process in making as explored in analyses of Abdessemed's work in chapter two. Referencing Fran Lloyd's hypothesis that artistic practices are acts of discovery through making I argue that in the act of making art Bouabdellah playfully re-presents the culturally constructed self. In other words, she plays with the cultural narratives of different communities that shape her identity. I furthermore argue that Sedira and Benyahia subject cultural memories to a re-territorialisation of memory, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, through the combined experience of departure and return, private and cultural memories are ascribed new meaning in their work.

This chapter is key to the analysis, in this thesis, of critical diasporic locations - represented by the work of artists of Algerian origin - as a way of observing

¹ Identity is hereby understood as a cultural and social phenomenon and thus, as a process of always becoming, as Stuart Hall has conceived it. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial theory: a reader*, Patrick Williams and Chrisman ed. (Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, 1994), 392-401, p.392.

² Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p.162.

‘institutional frameworks’, as Brah and Coombes advocate.³ I suggest that Benyahia, Bouabdellah and Sedira’s work has wider, more political meaning than the situation of Algerian, Arab or Middle Eastern women, although their work references diasporic identities. Drawing on Borsa’s study of Frida Kahlo’s work I write a ‘politics of location’ in terms of artistic female and Algerian identities, while I then move beyond this location by analysing diasporic identities that testify to the fact that the private is political.

In this chapter I aim to move beyond neo-orientalist as well as counter-orientalist interpretations. The French studies scholar Siobhán Shilton argues that there has recently been an ‘emerging tradition’ of ‘counter-orientalist’ artistic practices.⁴ However, the counter-orientalist perspective is problematic for three reasons, I will now suggest.

Firstly, the female artists I focus on in this chapter have all explored representations of the female self,⁵ yet their work is not limited to so specific a subject matter as oriental imagery or patriarchal constructs. By contrast, whilst Shilton recognises the diversity in the practices of artists such as Bouabdellah and Sedira, she surmises that their work questions orientalisating and patriarchal rhetoric.⁶ However variegated Shilton’s analysis of Bouabdellah’s ‘challenge’ of neo-colonial and patriarchy is, postcolonial discourse is over-determined, limiting our understanding of these artists’ work.

Secondly, orientalist narratives form a cultural undertow that forever threatens to divert discourses on Arab or Islamic women, despite feminist ambitions or counter-orientalist narratives. Assia Djebar in *Vaste est la prison* or *Femmes d’Alger dans leur*

³ While I do consider representations of the self in this chapter, it is not the artist’s diasporic identities as such, but the representation of these identities in their work that are the focus of this thesis. *Hybridity and its discontents, politics, science, culture*, Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁴ Siobhán Shilton, ‘Belly dancing to the Marseillaise, Zoulikha Bouadballa’s Dansons’, in *Zoulikha Bouadellah soft transgression* (Paris: Gold Digger Edition La Bank, 2010), p.153.

⁵ I do not want to suggest that this is inevitable, simply because they are women artists; I have included the work of Abdessamed in this chapter to demonstrate that male artists have also explored representations of Muslim women in their work.

⁶ “However, despite its heterogeneity, much of their work reveals a common aim to challenge both neo-colonial and patriarchal attempts to impose rigid identities upon women of Maghrebi descent.” Siobhán Shilton, ‘Belly dancing to the Marseillaise, Zoulikha Bouadballa’s Dansons’, in *Zoulikha Bouadellah soft transgression* (Paris: Gold Digger Edition La Bank, 2010), p.152.

appartement: nouvelles, critiqued patriarchal societies in Algeria. Exhibitions such as *Veil: unveiled* co-curated by Sedira, aimed to question the triangulation between women, Islam and the home. Notwithstanding the strength of feminist critiques, feminist narratives only go so far in dispelling orientalist stereotypes. The emphasis on representing experiences of the feminine self as socially and culturally conditioned is feminism's double-edged sword as Betterton notes.⁷ Similarly, Emily Apter analyses literary and feminist identification with oriental stereotypes in a study entitled *Acting out orientalism*.⁸ She is critical of Homi Bhabha's hypothesis that the colonial stereotype is reformed as emancipatory and myriad expressions of 'subjectivisation', and argues instead that the stereotype is a 'prison-house' that is at once subversive and hegemonic.⁹ For example, the idea of the Arab woman sequestered in the confines of her home that underlines most interpretations of Benyahia's work, paradoxically, owes much to orientalisating paintings and other imagery of women from North Africa produced during the colonial period.

Thirdly, Lloyd questions whether exhibitions of art can transcend binary discourses that give primacy to Western cultural values, and situate diaspora or non-Western cultures as differing.¹⁰ Samuel Herzog asserts that in viewing work produced from Islamic societies or communities, the viewing public will always search for links with religion, the situation of women and politics.¹¹ I agree with Lloyd and Herzog in that female artists from non-Western origin are under-exhibited, and when exhibited, it is often in thematic exhibitions that over-determine themes of veiling or the situation of women in the Middle East. Indeed, Maura Reilly in the catalogue for the exhibition

⁷ Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

⁸ Emily Apter, *Continental drift, from national characters to virtual subjects* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁹ *Ibid*, p.143.

Similarly, Inge Boer writes that it is increasingly relevant to analyse Oriental tropism post 9/11 because such analyses are revealing of the renewed suggestions of a cleavage between Islamic and Western societies in the wake of anti-Islamic sentiment. However, Boer questions how we can undermine Oriental stereotypes. She states that cataloguing stereotypes and reproducing them in a large number of studies, does little to undermine them.

¹⁰ Fran Lloyd, 'Cross-cultural dialogues: identities, contexts and meanings', in *Contemporary Arab women's art: dialogues of the present*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Women's Art Library, 1999), p.13.

¹¹ "Et de quelle façon approchons-nous, aujourd'hui, des oeuvres venues des sociétés d'Islam? Pouvons-nous les regarder sans automatiquement chercher des liens à la religion, à la situation de la femme, à la politique?" Samuel Herzog, 'Art Global – Perception Locale', in *Créations contemporaines en pays d'Islam*, Joséphine Dakhliya ed. (Paris : Editions Kiné, 2006), p.566.

Global Feminisms, argues that sexism and racism are so intrinsically encrypted into the institutional fabric of the art world that they go near 'undetected' whilst they occur at every level.¹²

Betterton argues that representations of the conditioned self *can* be productive if the feminist artist demonstrates that identity is unfixed.¹³ In other words, artists need to successfully convey the notion of identity as 'always in process'.¹⁴ Similarly, Apter suggests that to subvert stereotypes or undermine hegemonic 'character essence', stereotypes must be subjected to post-modern plurality. Nevertheless, I have argued with reference to an article by Cesare Poppi about the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* that postmodern plurality can lead to misleading suggestions of synchronicity, if the contexts of the artwork or 'institutional frameworks' are not acknowledged.¹⁵

Therefore, in this chapter I argue that the political and cultural context of artistic identities [in section 3.1] or the artist's memories of return [in section 3.3 and 3.4] must be taken into account if the work of Benyahia, Bouabdellah and Sedira are indeed to resist neo-orientalising rhetoric or 'character essence'. I begin by analysing how Bouabdellah and Sedira represent the self through their own bodies and through different histories. I then go on to argue that Benyahia and Sedira create transient frames with their work to explore representations of Algerian woman and the Algerian home,

¹² "Indeed, the more closely one examines art world statistics, the more glaringly obvious it becomes that, despite the decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the majority continues to be defined as white, Euro-American, heterosexual, privileged, and, above all, male." Maura Reilly, *Global Feminisms: new directions in contemporary art*, Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin ed. [exhibition 'Global Feminisms, 23 March – 1 July 2007, Brooklyn Museum, New York] (New York: Merrell Publishers, 2007), p.19.

¹³ Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a Reader*, Patrick Williams and Chrisman ed. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 392-401, p.392.

¹⁵ An analysis of Assan Smati's portrait of his mother entitled *Frappe. Tu ne frappes pas assez fort* (2006) can clarify this point. The title is derived from the famous words of the boxer Mohamed Ali. In this large screen-print of 250cm by 200 cm, the artist represents his mother standing in a boxing stance. Smati celebrates his mother's strength, and unwittingly succeeds in subverting stereotypes of North African women, by drawing on a plurality of meaning to sabotage what Apter terms 'character essence'. Smati contrasts his mother's female strength with a male hero. The strength of Smati's work lies in the contrast between cultural references and real life. The socio-historical context of the private memories that he represents, his mother's strength in the face of hardship as a mother and as an immigrant residing in France inform the meaning of *Frappe. Tu ne frappes pas assez fort* or the sculpture *Madone* (2010) that is derived from the screen-printed photograph. The context of production of his work in France with the support of important figures in the art school he attended (Les Beaux-Arts de Saint-Etienne), galleries that have supported him, and French and American/Global culture that has surrounded him, also influence his work.

and how they re-territorialise private memories from a place of departure and return. The final part of this chapter considers the political meaning of narratives of departure and return through the work of Benyahia and Kameli.



Image 33: Zoulikha Bouabdellah, *Ni ni ni* (2007) 67x67cm, image courtesy of the artist



Image 34: Zoulikha Bouabdellah, *Dansons* (2003) video still, image from brooklynmuseum.org,



Image 35: Zineb Sedira, *Silent Sight* (2000) vidéo and sound projection, film still, 16 mm, format 4/3, voice over : Edith Marie Pasquier, 11 min 10s, © Zineb Sedira, image courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris.



Image 36: Adel Abdessemed, *Chrysalide, ça tient à trois fils* (1999) video, 17 minutes, image from www.artnet.com



Image 37 : Adel Abdessemed, *Odradrek* (2012) video, image from www.lunettesrouges.blog.lemonde.fr

3.2 Representations of the self through the artist's body and other's histories

In *Ni ni ni* (2007) (Image 34) Bouabdellah portrays herself *alongside* narratives of domesticity and Arab culture, and not in opposition to these narratives. *Ni ni ni* (2007) is a photographic triptych. Each of the three photographs present the artist against a plain studio backdrop holding a couscous dish up to her face. The photograph is a conventional bust portrait and the artist is plainly clothed. In the first image she holds the two sides of the dish to either side of her head. In the second image she holds the dish with both hands to the lower half of her face, so that her mouth is obscured but her eyes stare at the camera. In the third image it is her eyes that are obscured, her mouth that can be seen. The couscous dish never masks the artist's features entirely.

Bouabdellah's 'couscoussière' is a symbol of domesticity and community. It is a common utensil used in the preparation of home cooked meals in North African families. It is also commonly used to prepare communal feasts. Couscous has become strongly associated with North African culture in France, so that the couscous dish operates as a signifier of the North African community.¹⁶ It is furthermore a signifier of the collective, within North African communities. In photographing herself with a couscous dish, Bouabdellah brings together private memories of familial and communal moments, and cultural narratives of the Algerian or North African community in the French popular imagination.

In *Ni ni ni* Bouabdellah playfully juxtaposes her face and the couscous dish, she does not conflate the depiction of her self with symbols of domesticity.¹⁷ She seems to tentatively embrace the objects she holds; in *Ni ni ni* there is no definite critique. Instead, the couscous dish appears to be the prop of a staged game of hide and seek in which Bouabdellah gingerly enacts identities suggested to her, through narratives of Arab

¹⁶ Attia has also used couscous in his work as a symbol of Algeria or North African communities. He recreated the city of Ghardaïa out of couscous in *Untitled (Ghardaïa)* (2009), and traced a line of couscous on the ground to symbolise imagined boundaries between different communities in *The Myth of Order 1* (2010).

¹⁷ The portrait work of Iranian artist Shadi Ghadirian is a telling counterpart to Bouabdellah's work in terms of representations of the self enacted through the artist's body. Ghadirian pictures women hidden under veils and behind brooms, brushes or feather dusters, while Bouabdellah does not use the dish to hide her entire face. Whilst both artists play with archetypal forms of portraiture, the experience of identity expressed in their work differs.

women, domesticity and community. These narratives are rooted within diasporic, Algerian and French cultural memories. In other words, *Ni ni ni* thus seemingly plays with the social and cultural parameters of female and Algerian identity, in echo of Betterton's statement that 'we are made through our own and other's histories'.¹⁸ In her book *An intimate distance* Betterton essentially argues that the artist's body in the artwork operates as a metaphor for a productive subjectivity, that links the self and the other - or the self and the way that other's perceive the self. It serves to consider this notion of the artist's body as a productive subjectivity within the work. The art historian Fran Lloyd places an emphasis on the performative act in the processes of art making to demonstrate how art is not the reproduction of a fixed reality, but an artist's 'live' act of discovery. She writes:

Equally, these acts of performativity imply that the making of art is not necessarily a representation of the already known which is put in to the work or transcribed onto the surface but that it can be an act of discovery through the process of making in the present, through the handling of materials, through re-memembering, re-thinking or re-looking.¹⁹

Inspired by the writing of Betterton and Lloyd, I consider *Ni ni ni* as a performance of cultural narratives of community and domesticity experienced through the artist's body. As an active process of discovery through making, *Ni ni ni* is thus emblematic of the notion that identity is always becoming.

In 'Dancing memory', I argued that it is useful to consider *Dansons* (2003) by Bouabdellah as a performance of contrasting cultural narratives. *Dansons* (Image 35) is a video which shows the artist belly dancing to an instrumental version of the French national anthem, the Marseillaise. It is three minutes long and filmed in a close-up with a fixed frame. The video begins with the artist walking into shot and wrapping three scarves around her midriff, blue, red and white, the colours of the French flag: the Tricolore. The 'dancer' then begins to belly dance to the rhythm of the Marseillaise. The belly dance is a symbol of the oriental woman. Indeed, belly dancers are emblematic figures of orientalist art and literature. Nevertheless, in Algeria the belly dance is also an activity performed by women in private social circles, and as such is a symbol of

¹⁸ Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p.162.

¹⁹ Fran Lloyd, 'Re-making ourselves; art, memories and materialities' in *Displacement and difference. contemporary Arab visual culture in the diaspora*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Saffron Books, 2001), p.151.

individual expression *and* community. In *Dansons*, Bouabdellah is not necessarily denouncing oriental stereotypes. Indeed, in an early interview Bouabdellah stated that the act of dancing is a release from social rules, it is emancipatory. She said:

I picture myself sitting among the women of my family, forming a circle in which, one by one, all are invited to create with our body and our soul, in the middle of the circle, the most graceful arabesques. They are invited to transcend, for the duration of a dance, the burden they carry from the moment they become aware of their condition.²⁰

I now turn to the national symbols of 'Tricolore' and 'Marseillaise'. Ernest Renan defined the Nation as 'spiritual principle' or idea which is communally sustained through culture and symbols; and indeed national symbols endure in contemporary France. The 'Tricolore' and the 'Marseillaise' are both symbols of the French Revolution of 1789, which remains a crucial 'founding myth' to the extent that, as François Furet has written, the revolution is still perceived to be the symbolic 'an zero'.²¹ We have already seen in chapter two that the founding myths of the French republic 'Liberté', 'Égalité' and 'Fraternité', inherently complicate the assimilation of different cultural minorities into the body politic. Indeed, Raoul Girardet argues that national symbols are only effective if collective memories of France as a unified and historically legitimised nation are also sustained. As such, minority narratives are intrinsically problematic because they question the immutability of the nation-state. In *Dansons* Bouabdellah subverts the collective narratives symbolised by the belly dance, the 'Tricolore' and the 'Marseillaise', and asserts her myriad identity as a Franco-Algerian artist. In a talk at the Brooklyn museum she stated: "I am Algerian and I am French. But in France I am still Algerian because of my face, because of how I look. But for me I am both and I don't want to make any choice."²² I thus suggest that in *Dansons* she is in fact enacting a ritual performed by women, as a means to claim authorship of her Algerian identity. In *Dansons* Bouabdellah performs diasporic identities.

²⁰ "Je me vois assise entre les femmes de ma famille, formant un cercle où chacune, une à une, est invitée à offrir de son corps et de son âme, au milieu de la ronde, les plus gracieuses arabesques. Elle est invitée à s'affranchir ainsi, le temps d'une danse, du fardeau porté depuis le moment où elle prend conscience de sa condition. » Interview with Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Paris, 10 August 2009.

²¹ François Furet, *Penser la révolution Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

²² Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Global Feminisms, Brooklyn museum, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBa0A1ubDY0.

Alec Hargreaves makes a distinction between the cultural production of the first generation of Algerian immigrants whose experience of history was marked by a reticence to remember the war and the absence of Algerian history in France, and the second generation of Algerian immigrants, born in France, more committed to seek resolution in the past because they recognise the influence it has on their present.²³ This second generation of immigrants, like Bouabdellah, question rather than reject dominant histories. Bouabdellah reclaims a diverse identity as both French and Algerian and resists dominant narratives that suggest that these two identities are counter-exclusive. This aligns with Shilton's observation that:

Art and literature depicting immigrants and their descendants most frequently reveals the protagonist's (or artist's) aim to be integrated into a dominant culture without abandoning their culture of origin.²⁴

The second generation of Algerian immigrants is referred to as the generation 'Beurs'. The term is a play on the French word *Arabe*; the syllables are put back to front, shortened, and syllables are placed back to front once more. Noiriél argues that this terminology became common use outside of institutions such as the Académie, which in France regulates the development of the French language.²⁵ The term 'Beurs' is problematic as a catch-all expression for the cultural production of a whole generation. As Noiriél argues, second-generation narratives in literature, music, cinema or theatre did not begin with the rise of 'Beurs' culture. Nonetheless, the term testifies to the convergences that define cultural practices of this generation as an amalgam of French and Algerian culture. Noiriél states that the literature of second generation immigrants often pertains to the private sphere, to the figure of the mother, of interiors and domestic habits, because the home as a private sphere is the site of minority memories, preserved from dominant narratives. Despite assimilationist pressures, as Noiriél writes, dominant narratives are also adopted by immigrant communities because certain cultural norms are beneficial to them in their everyday life. However, Hargreaves mitigates this view by stating that the integration of immigrant populations is both a subjective and an

²³ Richard Derderian, 'Confronting the past: the memory work of second generation Algerians in France' in *Algeria and France 1800-2000* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006) p.248.

²⁴ Siobhán Shilton, 'Belly dancing to the Marseillaise, Zoulikha Bouadeballa's Dansons', *Contemporary French & Francophone Studies: SITES*, 12 (4) (2008), 437 – 444, p.436.

²⁵ Gérard Noiriél, *Le creuset Français: histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2006), p.212.

objective process. The ways in which minority populations are integrated into the majority population is also dependent on the majority's acceptance of minority positions, in a process influenced by cultural memory; or in other words commonly upheld histories. Thus the cultural production of second-generation immigrants is emblematic of the feminist dictum that the private is always political, or that the personal is political.

Dansons was inspired by the events at a football match between the French and Algerian teams during which second generation immigrants booed the French players.²⁶ Bouabdellah was dismayed at both the behaviour of the spectators, and the press which printed that 'Algerians' had booed the players.²⁷ *Dansons* therefore enlists private meaning, and public meaning. The private meaning stems from the fact that within the performance of diasporic identities in *Dansons* Bouabdellah actively claims 'authorship of her self' to use Betterton's terms. *Dansons* thus brings to the fore what I have observed in *Ni ni ni*, that the triptych documents a performative act of making that inventively re-presents the self, constructed through dominant narratives and cultural memories of domesticity and community. However, *Dansons* also enlists public meaning. The video refers to a specific socio-political context in which diasporic narratives are especially contentious.

Bouabdellah suggests in her work that identity is always becoming by playing with representations of women and signs such as the couscous dish and the belly dance. Furthermore, she asserts a diasporic identity as a Franco-Algerian artist. This strategy is explored in Sedira's triptych *Self portraits or the Virgin Mary* (2000) and the diptych *Self-Portraits or the Trinity* (2000) that show figures dressed in a white Haik, and photographed in front of a white and nebulous studio background.²⁸ The artist in *Self portraits or the Virgin Mary* thus appears to the viewer as an evanescent figure in the pervading whiteness of the photograph. I posit that in these two artworks Sedira re-

²⁶ The same event inspired Abdessemed's *Green Book*, a collection of anthems translated into another language by different individuals. The artist already explored the theme of national anthems in *Nervous* (2000), a video in which a young man sings the Corsican anthem in a constant loop, and *Trust Me* (2007), in which a man sings muddled hymns in a syncopated rhythm.

²⁷ Bouabdellah, cited in 'Belly dancing to the Marseillaise, Zoulikha Bouadellah's *Dansons*', in *Zoulikha Bouadellah soft transgression* (Paris: Gold Digger Editions la BANK, 2010), p.153.

²⁸ A Haik is the name given to a white cloth worn by women in North Africa as an outer garment. It covers their heads, arms and legs but not their faces.

presents Arab women through a performative act of absence/presence.

The triptych and diptych are Sedira's first photographic artworks, and they contrast with *Jinns* (2003) in which the artist returns to the theme of absence and presence to effect a more political view on re-presentations of women. The *Self-portraits* follow several earlier videos in which the artist uses her body, epitomised with *Autobiographical Patterns* (1996), in which the artist films herself covering her hand with writing. *Autobiographical Patterns* testifies to the artist's interest in enacting representations of the self in her early artistic practice.

Betterton argues that post-colonial artists experience divergent historical, cultural and social 'positions' that are explored through the metaphor of the absent/present body.²⁹ Whilst I do not suggest that Sedira represents postcolonial histories, Betterton's paradigm is useful in articulating ambivalent critical positions that are suggested through representations of the artist's body. In effect, the image in the triptych and the diptych are imprecise and thus heighten the ambiguity of subject matter. The figures wear a Haik but the title of the image refers to Christian beliefs. In *Self-portraits or the Virgin Mary* (2000) and *Self-Portraits or the Trinity* (2000) Sedira blurs the boundaries between different religious traditions. Building on Betterton's hypothesis, I suggest that by placing her body in the work and concealing it from view while she performs different identities (Christian and Muslim), Sedira enacts different experiences of the self that are culturally determined and often thought to be contrasting.

Silent Sight (2000) by Sedira (Image 36) is a 10 minute long single screen black and white video projection of the artist's eyes framed by two white horizontal bands. Her eyes are closed, then flicker open as the voice-over commences. The voice narrates the artist recalling the memory of her mother veiling when they visited Algeria.³⁰ Throughout the video the eyes of the artist stare out at us. The Franco-Algerian art critic and film director Fatma Zohra Zamoum, argues that Sedira's work is enriched by the fact that, as a diasporic artist, her work operates a 'double mouvement' between memory and identity, between Algerian culture and French culture.³¹ Interviewed by Larys

²⁹ Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p.162.

³⁰ Sedira remembers the fear of not recognising her mother, but finally concludes that wearing the veil was familiar and comfortable for her mother, and accepted by the child that she was then.

³¹ "Les artistes issues de l'immigration ne sont pas dans le même enjeu de modernisation du propos que

Frogier, Sedira states that her work orchestrates a meeting of the different cultures and traditions that she inhabits.³²

The scholar Lindsey Moore shares Zamoum's view that Sedira's work articulates contrasting perspectives on cultural tropes, such as the veil. Moore posits that the veil is a mnemonic device that testifies to cultural lineage at the same time as it confirms its disparate nature.³³ It seems relevant here to consider how diasporic identities can be conversely disparate and linear. Anne Marie Fortier's study of the Italian diaspora in Britain is useful in understanding how the formation of diasporic identities is a continuous, divergent, and active process. Fortier demonstrates how a diaspora is formed by a group willing a community through the reproduction of traditions and histories. Conversely, Fortier argues that identity is not fixed but responds to 'desires for belonging'. It is thus dependent on points of departure from a cultural narrative as well as attachment to it.³⁴

Fortier's conception of diasporic identities explains how Sedira attaches and detaches herself from cultural narratives by enacting memories and female stereotypes taken from collective memory - such as the Virgin Mary and the veiled woman. The absent/present body of the artist is thence a metaphor for active attachment/detachment to cultural narratives. Like Bouabdellah, Sedira does not seek to transgress cultural narratives as much as she builds upon them.³⁵ Indeed, *Self portraits or the Virgin Mary*,

peuvent l'être celles qui viennent d'Algérie. Et je crois que c'est dans ce contact ou dans ce double mouvement qu'il peut y avoir richesse ou enrichissement de contenu." Fatma Zohra Zamoum, in *Ouvertures Algérienne, créations vivantes*, [exhibition Ouvertures Algérienne, 6 June – 14 August 2003, La Criée] (Rennes: La Criée, 2003), p.52.

³² "Il traite de ma rencontre personnelle avec les différences culturelles et la manière dont j'ai appris à négocier toutes mes identitaires, que ce soient algérienne, arabe, musulmane, française ou britannique." Larys Frogier, 'Interview with Zineb Sedira', in *Ouvertures Algérienne, Créations vivantes*, [exhibition Ouvertures Algérienne, 6 June – 14 August 2003, La Criée] (La Criée: Rennes, 2003), p.53.

³³ Moore, Lindsey, 'Minding the gap: migration, diaspora, exile and return in women's visual media' in *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), p.34.

³⁴ "The phrase migrant belongings, in this respect, is meant to capture the productive tension that results from the articulation of movement and attachment, suture and departure, outside and inside, in identity formation." Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant belongings, memory, space and identity* (Oxford and New York: Berg Press, 2000), p.2.

³⁵ The meaning in *Silent Sight* is rendered more complex by the fact that Sedira is a part of both the French and British diaspora, within which diasporic and post-colonial issues are perceived differently. "Il ne faut pas oublier que ma formation en art s'est déroulée à Londres. Ainsi, les problématiques post-coloniales en l'Angleterre sont très différentes de celles soulevées en France ou en Algérie." Interview with Larys Frogier, in *Ouvertures Algérienne, Créations vivantes*, [exhibition Ouvertures Algérienne, 6 June – 14 August 2003, La Criée] (Rennes: La Criée, 2003), p.55.

Self-Portraits or the Trinity, and *Silent Sight* testify to an early stage in Sedira's career in which, inspired by feminist discourse and the theories of cultural studies which she encountered studying and working in London, the artist made her cultural heritage the subject of her work. The term diasporic identity is thus appropriate with reference to Sedira's early work as essentially, the artist attached and detached representations of herself to/from an imagined community.

The notion of a Franco-Algerian diasporic identity as an experience of attachment and detachment from narratives of a dominant French culture, allows me to be more explicit about the political and cultural context of re-presentations of the self that are analysed here. We have seen with *Dansons* that Bouabdellah asserts minority memories within collective narratives of the French nation-state. *Self portraits or the Virgin Mary*, *Self-Portraits or the Trinity*, and *Silent Sight* are concerned with veiling, a pervasive and highly contentious symbol in collective narratives in both France and Algeria. While Sedira was living in the UK at the time that she produced these art works, and was thus highly influenced by discourses on identity that circulated in the British Isles, the artist is particularly sensitive to French cultural narratives, as the artist has stated in interview with McGonagle.³⁶ Her diasporic identity is dependent on French, British and Algerian communities. The particular meaning of the veil in France is crucial to my analysis. It is only in understanding the cultural and political meaning of the veil in France, that we can begin to understand the reception and production of work like *Silent Sight*.

In several early videos Abdessemed also features the veil in a performative act of hiding and revealing the female body. In *Ombre et Lumière* (1994) a young woman in a 20 second video loop lifts a heavy black veil over her head, face turned beatifically to the sun. In *Chrysalide, ça tient à trois fils* (1999) (Image 37) the artist turns around the figure of a young woman wearing a hijab made of knitted wool. The artist slowly unravels the wool to reveal the female naked body underneath. Both videos feature a pared down aesthetic, but the latter video is uncommonly prescriptive in relation to his practice as a whole. The fact that Abdessemed restaged this act recently in *Odradek*

³⁶Joseph McGonagle, 'Translating Differences: an interview with Zineb Sedira', *Signs: New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture*, 31 (3) (Spring 2006), p.622.

(2012) (Image 38), testifies to the enduring significance of the veil in French society. Indeed, the veil is at the heart of a continuing legal and cultural battle during which the French administration and young Muslim women – and their supporters - have become entrenched in positions of opposition. This on-going judicial process is referred to as 'L'affaire du voile' or the 'Headscarf affair'. The constitutional principle of 'laïcité' in France forbids the wearing of religious symbols in public institutions which includes state run schools. However, the dogmatic way in which the French administration carried out its campaign to preserve the secularity of its public institutions has sparked opposition in a number of circles. Moore succinctly argues that the veil is widely considered in the West as a sign of 'radical resistance to assimilation' post 9/11.³⁷ Moore writes:

Echoes of orientalist discourse are especially prevalent in recent debates about Muslim veiling in migrant contexts. Muslim women can be burdened not only by historical discourses constructing them as traditional/oppressed: post 9/11 anxieties around multiculturalism construe veiling as a sign of radical resistance to assimilation.³⁸

This social phenomenon is accentuated in France where the wearing of the veil is seen to threaten republican values, and where young women and Muslim communities have been radicalised as a consequence of the virulent reactions from the government and public institutions. Moore argues that women artists re-present the veil to discredit representations of veiled women as radical resistance. She writes:

As I elaborate elsewhere, women artists do not use veiling motifs in order to pander to a taste for the exotic. Rather, given the loaded signification and simplified understanding of Muslim veiling in the West, they are concerned to re-present and reinvest veils with complex cultural and transcultural meanings and historical narratives.³⁹

However, Moore cites Lloyd's cautionary statement that as Western viewers we tend to interpret the work of non-Western or diasporic artists through binaries of difference or 'postmodern sameness'.⁴⁰ In France, representations of veiled women are especially

³⁷ Moore, Lindsey, "Minding the gap: migration, diaspora, exile and return in women's visual media" in *Contemporary Art in the Middle East* (London: Black Dog Publishing), p.29.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Fran Lloyd, 'Cross-cultural dialogues: identities, contexts and meanings', in *Contemporary Arab women's art: dialogues of the present*, Fran Lloyd ed. (London: Women's Art Library, 1999).

prone to polarised views or interpretations based on 'character essence'.

Michael Rothberg argues that the presence of counter-publics allows for variegated cultural narratives or 'multi-directional memory' to be brought to the fore. In France, where the veil is seen as an especially contentious sign of 'radical resistance to assimilation', can Sedira's re-presentation of private memory create a counter-public? In fact, it seems that in France *Silent Sight*, exhibited in small institutions alongside other more historically themed videos by Sedira, successfully attracted a counter-public of critics who sought to impress on other viewers cultural narratives that acknowledge, but also transcend, the subject of the veil.⁴¹ These critics began to formulate a politics of location for Sedira's work. In the press release for the exhibition in Vallauris in 2010, Odile Biec in conversation with Sedira stated that *Silent Sight* refers to Algeria through memory. The literature produced by Le Parvis Centre d'Art contemporain in Pau for the exhibition of Sedira in 2007, reads that the voice-over in *Silent Sight* plays up to the emotional souvenir of the video.⁴² Le Parvis observed that the veil in *Silent Sight* is metaphorical, invisible and unattainable, because it is only suggested through the rectangular frame. It states that the veil is suggested by way of exposing certain parts of her body, while the rest is hidden. The text compares this 'unattainable' image of a woman, with the Algerian women during the Franco-Algerian war who tried to hide from French photographers. It seems that *Silent Sight* sparked critical responses on the representation of women when exhibited in France.⁴³

⁴¹ Researching widely on the subject of the veil in institutional discourse in France, I came across a fascinating article in *Art Press* written by Houria Abdelouaed and titled 'The Erotics of the Veil'. In this article Abdelouaed questions the meanings ascribed to the veil by a sophisticated analysis of the Coran. Houria Abdelouaed, 'L'érotisme d'un voile', *Art Press*, 371, October 2010, 58-64.

⁴² Le Parvis Centre d'Art Contemporain, Pau, Dossier Valise, available online at http://www.parvis.net/intranet/Upload/Liens/CentredArt/centredart_411.pdf.

⁴³ By contrast in the introduction I discussed how cultural memories of the Franco-Algerian war are only belatedly coming to the fore in dominant narratives in France.

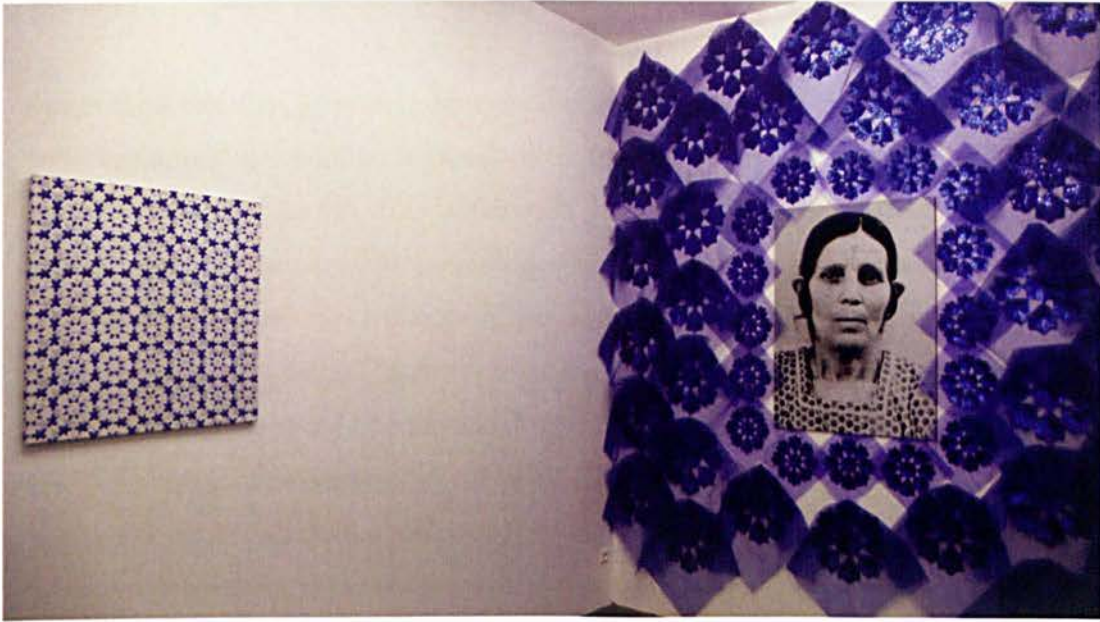


Image 38: **Samta Benyahia**, *A la lumière des matins – Albert Camus* (2008) installation, variable dimensions, sequins, fabric, silkscreen prints, photographs, image courtesy of the artist.



Image 39: **Zineb Sedira**, *La Maison de ma Mère* (2002) installation of 12 colour photographs, 28.5 x 28.5cm ; total dimensions: 90 x 120 cm, © Zineb Sedira, image courtesy of the artist and the gallery kamel mennour, Paris

Section 3.3 Algerian women and the Algerian home through a transient frame

Samta Benyahia uses geometric patterns to populate the spaces in which she intervenes with the familial and familiar in installations such as *A la lumières des matins* (Albert Camus) (2008) (Image 39). This installation was exhibited at the Galerie Martine & Thibault de La Châtre in 2008. It combined hand embroidered and sequined geometric patterns exhibited behind convoluted glass, screen prints of geometric patterns, and large format photographs. The geometric pattern she uses is a rosette, named the rosace 'Fatima', a common motif of Arab and Arabo-Andalusian architecture. Benyahia has over the years made more explicit the parallel that exists in her work between the 'Fatima' rosace and the women of her childhood, by exhibiting images of these women alongside the geometric pattern as is the case with the installation *A la lumières des matins* (Albert Camus). This installation is emblematic of the ways in which, by populating gallery spaces with these blue motifs, Benyahia unearths memories that are marked by cultural exchange and female creativity.⁴⁴

The rosace 'Fatima' is most commonly used in the lattice work that decorate wooden shutters called Moucharabieh. Her installations evoke these intricate shutters that adorned the façades of Arabo-Andalusian houses. The artist recalls as a child in Constantine (Algeria) that the women could be heard but not seen behind the Moucharabieh that rendered them mere shadows. Benyahia's work thus evokes narratives of women's confinement within domestic spheres.⁴⁵ However, it is also these same narratives of confinement that defined orientalist discourse and titillated the imaginary of colonial viewers and readers. While Benyahia may subvert oriental representations of women, her work is not limited to a counter-orientalist position, to use Shilton's definition. Instead, I will demonstrate that Benyahia's Moucharabieh patterns are in a sense a threshold between the private and the public rather than a border between the two, as the reference to the wooden shutters of Algerian architecture may at first suggest.

⁴⁴ *A la lumières des matins* shows the complexity of Benyahia's later installations, using embroidery, photographs, screen prints and wall motifs, it does not testify to the ways in which her installations interact with exhibitions spaces like *About Beauty* at the HKW installation or *La Vie en Paillettes* (2003) in Clermond-Ferrand.

⁴⁵ Assia Djebar's novels such as *Vaste est la prison* are concerned with similar themes.

Ramon Tio Bellido, in an essay published in both the catalogue of *Algérie au Coeur*, and the Venice Biennale exhibition: *Fault Lines* curated by Gilane Tawadros in 2003, impresses upon the reader the need to consider contrasting aspects of Benyahia's Moucharabieh. He observes that, concealed behind these shutters, women were disallowed interaction with public life. However, he states that Benyahia evokes a space that offered a welcome intimacy. Women were able to observe the streets without being seen, and remained sheltered from the heat.⁴⁶ Essentially, Bellido invites the reader to consider the women of Benyahia's practice in a 'simulacrum of presence'. By emphasising the Moucharabieh as a means to avert the outside gaze, Bellido testifies to the fact that the women in Benyahia's work are absent/present. By contrast to the work analysed previously, Benyahia does not re-present cultural narratives through this play of absence and presence. Instead, Benyahia's installations delineate a space of transient meaning, through which she questions collective narratives of Algerian women and asserts private narratives.

The figure of the artist's mother - a recurrent object in Benyahia's work - serves to disable orientalist or even postcolonial readings of her work. Her mother is a strong signifier of memory and lineage, as is her aunt who wintered with the artist's family. This aunt recounted the stories of the 'Tales of Arabian Nights' to Benyahia at bedtime during her childhood. The 'Boukkala' which are female nightly rituals of storytelling that Benyahia also cites as an inspiration for her work, are an emblematic example of women's role in upholding oral traditions, and the scope of female creativity.⁴⁷ In Benyahia's work these women become the representatives of emancipatory traditions and cultural memory. Installations such as *A la lumière des matins (Albert Camus)* by Benyahia thus echo the same female rituals suggested in Bouabdellah's video *Dansons*. Building on my previous analysis of the belly dance in *Dansons*, I suggest that the narratives encapsulated by the Moucharabieh are emancipatory, and to use Borsa's expression once more, 'already resisting' dominant narratives.⁴⁸ In Benyahia's work the

⁴⁶ Furthermore, in Arabo-Andalusian architecture the dappled light that the Moucharabieh create, and the detailed decorative patterns of the shutters, is conducive to domestic comfort and pleasure.

⁴⁷ Interview with Santa Benyahia, Paris, 5 November 2011.

⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the woman as purveyor of oral tradition is in fact a recurring and problematic theme in Francophone Algerian literature. Moore argues that in postcolonial nations nationalist slogans of hearth, home and motherhood elide the involvement of women in national struggles although Moore is careful to

Moucharabieh work as permeable frames through which private and cultural memories are bridged and investigated.

The photographic frame of *La Maison de ma Mère (Algérie)* (2002) by Sedira is a further permeable frame. *La Maison de ma Mère* (Image 39) is a photographic study of the interior of Sedira's mother's house in Algeria. Sedira portrays her mother in a kaleidoscopic view in which shots of her mother's body are intermingled with shots of the interior of her house. When exhibited in the exhibition *Ouvertures Algériennes* in 2003, twelve small-scale square framed photographs were hung in three horizontal rows. These three rows of small photographs offered a fragmented view of a feminine interior and the body of a woman. Each of the twelve shots captured details of stacked silky cushions, lace trimmings, veiled windows, a knotted headscarf and a porcelain bombonière on a lace tablecloth. The pervading white of the backgrounds and pictured fabrics emphasised the sense of delicacy and domestic care signified by these textile fineries. We know from the artist's statement that Sedira aimed to experiment with photographing fabrics and the subject matter is therefore initially secondary. Sedira states that her concerns for this piece were to focus on the fabrics. "With this piece I wanted to work against conventional portrait photography."⁴⁹ At the same time, *La Maison de ma Mère (Algérie)* is also concerned with dispelling the misconceptions made about the Arab house and by extension Arab women.⁵⁰

The central row of photographs focuses on her mother's dress - an arm, neck and head can be made out within the lace that clothes her. Surrounded by the other photographs, the portrayed figure of 'ma mère': 'la maison de ma mère' is subsumed, visually and semiotically, in the domestic environment she inhabits. Moore suggests that the representation of the artist's mother is partial, transient and displaced beyond the frame, and within the domestic interior. Indeed, if absent from the frame she is then signified by her domestic attributes; if present within the frame she is only partially

state that this is not the prerogative of post-colonial nations. Indeed, in Algeria, following independence, the domestic became a symbolic site of authenticity, a sanctum of tradition and memory of which women were both the guardians and the captives. Lindsey Moore, *Arab, muslim, women, voice and vision in postcolonial literature and film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p.78.

⁴⁹ Interview with Zineb Sedira, London, 18 January 2012.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

portrayed. For Moore, Sedira cites conventional parallels between women and domesticity by depicting her mother in a domestic interior. However, she argues that the portrait of her mother is nonetheless transient in meaning because it evades the borders of the frame, thus, the representation of her mother 'encapsulates' but 'exceeds' the context of the home and collective narratives of domesticity.⁵¹

Returning to Betterton's notion that artists present their bodies as absent/present as a means to question the cultural representations of women, here it is not the artist's own body which is absent/present, but that of the artist's mother. The frame of Sedira's photographs and the frame of the Moucharabieh in Benyahia's installation similarly place the artist's mothers in a 'simulacrum of presence'. Moving between the frames and evanescent within each, the representation of Sedira's mother in *La Maison de ma Mère* thus exceeds the easy mimesis that would otherwise be made between her mother and the notion of domesticity.⁵² While Sedira's work forms a matrilineal axis, *La Maison de ma Mère* like Benyahia's work, represents the mother as a signifier of Algerian women, the home and memory, not as the signified. When making *La Maison de ma Mère*, Sedira realised that many of the women of her mother's generation decorated their houses in the same fashion. It is not only the house of her mother that she photographs, but a space at the juncture of private and public memories.

Whilst a frame commonly serves to contextualise a discourse, Sedira and Benyahia use the photographic frame as a trope for othering the familiar. The interior of Sedira's mother's house is rendered unreadable, its meaning is transient; the women of Benyahia's installation are present in photographs but evanescent in the Moucharabieh. The process of othering the familiar mirrors the experience of interrupted memory. Indeed, memory is a process of re-membling; of actively putting back together disjointed or broken narratives.

Annette Kuhn argues that photographs conjure memories that are rooted in

⁵¹ Lindsey Moore, *Arab, muslim, women, voice and vision in postcolonial literature and film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p.133.

⁵² Moore argues that the mother's mobility in *La Maison de ma Mère* (Algérie) suggests an ambivalent relationship between mother and daughter. "The endowment of the mother-figure with narrative, linguistic, and spatial mobility enables the artist to present an ambivalent relationship of intimacy and distance, enigma and familiarity, which she sees as typical of (any) mother/daughter conversations." Ibid.

cultural and private memory, which she defines as an intertext.⁵³ While Sedira never knew the house as a child, the interior she photographs and its intertext rekindle memories of Algeria for the artist. I suggest that in *La Maison de ma Mère* her mother's house acts as a prism through which to calibrate the experience of cultural bridging (between France and Algeria) and the erosion of time (from childhood to her return as an adult). Here, the mother's home is a signifier of memories and narratives and the act of a looking – and making - is a temporal and transient experience. Sedira has described this photographic instillation as a kaleidoscope, as a mosaic and the twelve frames orchestrate the reassembly of a broken vision.⁵⁴ I understand this broken vision as the experience of looking at a space once familiar to the artist transformed by the passage of time. In the next section I suggest that Benyahia and Sedira re-envision domestic realms of Algeria through a gaze informed by the experience of return.

⁵³ Annette Kuhn, *Family secrets, acts of memory and imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), p.14.

⁵⁴ Joseph McGonagle, 'Translating Differences: an interview with Zineb Sedira', *Signs: New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture*, 31 (3) (Spring 2006), p.623.

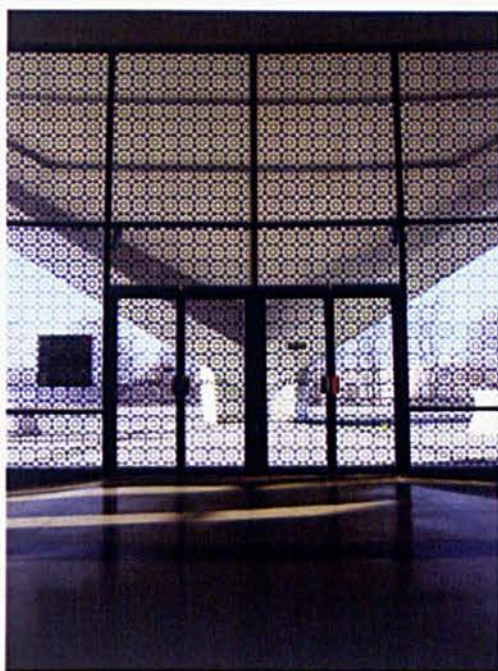


Image 40: **Samta Benyahia**, *About Beauty* (2005) installation view, HKW Berlin, unknown dimensions, image from http://www.hkw.de/media/bilder/2006_1/50jahrekongresshalle/2005.jpg

3.4 Re-territorialising memories from a place of departure and return.

The experience of departure and return underlies Benyahia and Sedira's work that represents Algerian domestic realms. Careful study of Benyahia's early artistic development reveals to what extent her Moucharabieh delineate a space of cultural juxtaposition caused by a multifarious experience of exile. Much of this early work is yet to be exhibited, and is largely undocumented. While still at the Beaux Arts in Algiers, Benyahia experimented with geometric patterns influenced by the Algerian modern art movement Aouchem.⁵⁵ At the Parisian Arts Déco school the artist progressively simplified these signs that she adapted to suit different printing methods. This artistic research was furthermore grounded in theoretical research into the resurgence of traditional arts and crafts in Algerian modern art and responded to the experience of exile, as Benyahia states in an interview with Evelyne Jouanno.⁵⁶ However, Benyahia's was a chosen exile that was lived as an adventure and the narratives constructed through her work are neither nostalgic nor constructed around the binary France/Algeria.

The young artist followed her brother to France for a holiday in 1974. Enthralled by the opportunities opened up as a young woman and an artist, she decided not to return to Algeria and apply to the Arts Déco instead. During this period of training Benyahia was influenced by the political and artistic climate in France. Thus geometric patterns she used came to signify private memories of a changed Algerian past in her practice, but also transcended this specific Franco-Algerian context. Indeed, Benyahia reflected in interview that questions regarding her new dual identity were mirrored and carried further by a wider context of identitarian issues in Paris in the 70's – questions of her identity as both woman and artist.⁵⁷ The Fatima rosace that Benyahia came to progressively work with is a complex signifier that for Benyahia embodies but also

⁵⁵ In post independence Algeria, the movement Aouchem (tattoo in Algerian) visualised a new national identity, inspired by the study of ancestral patterns that cover the walls of grottos in the Tessaly desert. The aesthetic that Aouchem developed is also rooted in the lessons learnt from artists of the Ecole de Paris, however, their work speaks of a political and aesthetic vision that is specific to post-independence Algeria.

⁵⁶ Samta Benyahia and Evelyne Jouanno, 'Entretien', in *Paris pour Escalé* [exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), 12-15.

⁵⁷ Interview with Samta Benyahia, Paris, 5 November 2011.

exceeds the confines of Algerian culture. The Fatima rosace symbolises the passage of nomadic Arabo-Andalusian craftsmen, and the geometric patterns of Aouchem – inspired by the paintings in the Tessali desert – and thus questions a monolithic vision of the Maghreb as Muslim or Arab, as Moore writes.⁵⁸ The rosace further symbolises a complex femininity as a signifier of oral traditions and female creativity. Finally, it evokes an emotive memory: that of the patterned floor or 'Zeligh' of her grandfather's house. Benyahia's work is dependent on feminist and sociological issues which the artist encountered in Paris, as well as complex cultural and historical Franco-Algerian narratives.

I argue here that the experience of departure and return in Benyahia and Sedira's work differs to Said's conception of exile as a loss of the country of origin, of an orphaned subject. Instead, I argue that migration leads to the formulation of new imagined spaces. Inspired by two very different experiences of migration, Benyahia configures installations that symbolically layer traditions and memories. These traditions and memories effectively relocate, or re-territorialise experiences of the self, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term.⁵⁹ Placed within a gallery setting and signified by a transient frame Benyahia's Moucharabieh other the familiar (the zeligh pattern, the photographs of her mother, the Moucharabieh) so that memories are de-territorialised, they are estranged from their cultural and social context. The Moucharabieh thus allows for re-envisionings of the self and of cultural narratives, or in other words a re-territorialisation. This process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of private and cultural memory in Benyahia's work produces new meaning.

Kaplan's reading of Deleuze and Guattari's work on minor literatures confirms the idea that experiences of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation - as processes of relocating signs and languages in another context - are productive because they 'enable imagination' at the same time as they 'produce alienation'.⁶⁰ Kaplan demonstrates how the process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation that occurs as the writer

⁵⁸ Lindsey Moore, *Arab, muslim, women, voice and vision in postcolonial literature and film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2, mille plateaux* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1980).

⁶⁰ Caren Kaplan, 'Deterritorializations: the rewriting of home and exile in western feminist discourse', *Cultural Critique*, 6 (Spring 1987), p.188.

oscillates between minor and major literatures, disallows narratives to be static.

Within the constructs of Deleuze and Guattari's theory, this process can be seen as both de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation – not imperialism but nomadism. The value of this conception lies in the paradoxical movement between minor and major – a refusal to admit either position as final or static.⁶¹

Similarly, in Benyahia's work neither private nor cultural narratives are presented as fixed. While I now return to *La Maison de ma Mère* to discuss this process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of cultural memory, I will subsequently discuss the effect this process has for the artist and for private narratives, with reference to Benyahia's work.

Simon Njami defines Sedira's work *La Maison de ma Mère* as a means to understand and re-appropriate history.⁶² Similarly, I suggest that this photographic installation hinges upon the act of making as a mnemonic exercise rooted in the experience of return, which produced a slippage between the experience of place in the present and its meaning within the artist's private history. The artist revisits private and public memories of to the Algerian home. The cropped photographs in *La Maison de ma Mère* restrict and fragment the field of vision. Indeed, the viewer sees a partial and fragmented view of the interior of Sedira's mother's house. Such a viewing experience evokes processes of remembering, or the partial and Proustian resurgence of memory. Walter Benjamin, in *Berlin childhood 1900*, explains the fragmentary nature of memory through the mediation of his own childhood. The fragmented vision of Sedira's photographs seems to mirror Benjamin's mnemonic discovery of minute spaces of his childhood, such as his sock drawer, or the corner of two Berlin streets where his aunt lived.⁶³ In his text, Benjamin presents childhood as a specific place, instead of a moment in time. It is not the passage of time that is recorded in *Berlin childhood*, but the space

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Simon Njami, 'Une autobiographie assumée', Pdf document in DVD of Retelling Stories with Difference, p.2.

⁶³ "This street-corner was one of those least touched by the changes of the past thirty years. Only the veil - which for me, as a child, once covered it - has meanwhile fallen away. For back then, as far as I was concerned, it was not yet named after Steglitz. It was the Stieglitz, the goldfinch, that gave it its name. And didn't my good aunt live in her cage like a talking bird?"
Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (The Belknap press of Harvard University: Cambridge (MASS) and London, 2006), 63-64.

inhabited in childhood with all the specificities of vision, narrative and scale that this entails. Childhood memory is a means for Benjamin to interpret the present.⁶⁴ In *La Maison de ma Mère* Sedira is also concerned with the space inhabited by memory, with the meaning that the house of her mother conveys in the present.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that childhood memory effects a re-territorialisation of the adult's experience. In 'minor literatures', they write how a process which they term childhood blocks de-territorialise and re-territorialise in the sense that the memory of a place or event is constructed differently from the initial experience.⁶⁵ They write: "Not only as realities but as method and discipline, the childhood block never stop shifting in time, injecting the child into the adult, or the superficial adult into the real child."⁶⁶ Seen through the prism of Deleuze and Guattari, Sedira's *La Maison de ma Mère* can be seen to effect a mnemonic translation akin to the working through of childhood memory. In other words, *La Maison de ma Mère* de-territorialises and re-territorialises memory. It does not re-envision childhood per se, but uses memory to re-envision experiences of the adult self and contemporary cultural narratives.

The house photographed is not one that Sedira knew as a child in Genevilliers on the outskirts of Paris, but the house of her parents when they returned to Algeria. This project marks the return of Sedira to Algiers after a long period of absence due to the civil war. Inspired by her return to Algeria and the discovery of her mother's house there, Sedira captures a space of specificity and detail that makes known personal memories through the idiosyncratic vision of the photographing eye, and the segmented and restricted views of her mother's house. *La Maison de ma Mère* testifies to a charged experience in which childhood memories resurface through objects and fabric within the previously unknown space of her mother's new house.

In *La Maison de ma Mère* Sedira envisions a return from the diaspora that is

⁶⁴ He writes: "For me, nothing surpassed the pleasure of thrusting my hand as deeply as possible in its interior. I did not do this for the sake of the pocket's warmth. It was the 'little present' rolled up inside that I always held in my hand and that drew me into the depths. (...) It taught me that form and content, veil and what is veiled, are the same. It led me to draw truth from works of literature as warily as the child's hand retrieved the hand from the 'pocket'." Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge (MASS) and London: The Belknap press of Harvard University, 2006), 96-97.

⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka, towards a minor literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.79.

conditioned by the act of making as a discovery of private memory, and a meeting between private memory and cultural narratives. The mosaic of photographs of *La Maison de ma Mère* echo the distorted and partial experience of short memory, which Deleuze and Guattari define as rhizomatic because made up of a multitude of 'agencement' of private and public memories.⁶⁷ *La Maison de ma Mère* represents a diasporic experience of 'double movement' as Zamoum has observed in Sedira's work in that the interior of her mother's house re-territorialises narratives of the home by experiencing the de-territorialisation of cultural conventions.⁶⁸ Indeed, Sedira mentions how she was fascinated by the fact that the sense of interior decorating was shared by many women of her mother's generation, and was inspired by French styles and objects.⁶⁹

Benyahia's work bridges French and Algerian culture through her Moucharabieh that work as both frame and window in installations such as that at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin in 2005 (Image 40). Here, Benyahia covered one of the large windows of the pavilion with a blue pattern of Moucharabieh. The HKW installation thus worked as a frame. It created an idiosyncratic prism through which the viewer was to reconsider a familiar and Western cityscape through the gallery window. It also worked as a window in the sense that it opened a passage between cultures. Indeed, the view of Berlin through the window was changed by the addition of the Arabo-Andalusian pattern which in the work of Benyahia is symbolic of narratives of Arab homes and female creativity - oft represented but seldom considered. I have argued that Benyahia's work bridges 'minor' and 'major' visual vocabulary. She uses the language of installation art as well as that of geometric research inspired by modern Algerian art. The HKW installation is emblematic of her work sheathing Western

⁶⁷ Fortier writes that diasporic identities emerge through de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, but she disagrees with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of constant flux. She argues that diasporic identities are grounded in specific spaces, if only momentarily. I concur with Fortier that diasporic identities are indeed invented communities that are geographically and culturally rooted. However, the *representations* of diasporic experiences within the work of Sedira and Benyahia, are not rooted or 'arborescent', but 'rhizomatic', to use Deleuze and Guattari's comparison. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2, Mille plateaux* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1980).

⁶⁸ Fatma Zohra Zamoum, in *Ouvertures Algérienne, Créations vivantes*, [exhibition Ouvertures Algérienne, 6 June – 14 August 2003, La Criée] (Rennes : La Criée, 2003), p.52.

⁶⁹ Interview Zineb Sedira, London, 18 January 12.

institutional spaces with Arabic patterns and thus with the private and collective narratives they conjure. Her work thus places cultural narratives in new spaces. This re-territorialisation creates new meaning for the viewer and for the artist.

The Moucharabieh frame/window enables the artist to re-envision private and cultural memory, I will now observe. The installation *A la lumière des matins – Albert Camus* (2008) featured photographs of her mother and other black and white photographs of women from the Aures mountains in Algeria. Through the figure of the mother, Benyahia also represents a generation of Algerian women that, as the bearers of oral tradition that coloured her childhood, further served to bridge the cultures of colonial France and indigenous Algeria. The artists states that the shared tradition of story telling inculcated tolerance in her and a generation of children, innocent of their parents' experience of colonisation.⁷⁰ Benyahia uses the representation of women as a trope to emphatically insert cultural exchange within the narrative of her early life, and between her two adopted communities, France and Algeria; and thus forms a diasporic identity as observed in relation to Bouabdellah's *Dansons*. Indeed, through her practice, Benyahia asserts herself within these traditions that she states she was privy to as a child.

Refusing to see Benyahia's work as nostalgic, I rather see it as orchestrating psychological spaces in which both private and cultural narratives are explored or re-ordered. Benyahia's construction of domestic spaces of her childhood epitomise the process of rehoming, which Moore describes as resisting hegemonic meaning ascribed to the private domain.⁷¹ She writes that

Arab Muslim women use 'situated knowledge' to transform marginal social spaces into heterotopic, palimpsest and threshold locations. I have emphasised techniques of 're-territorialisation' that critically combine and redefine diverse spaces (...) as part of the project of investing home with new meaning.⁷²

As we have seen, this rehoming in Benyahia's work is predicated by the experience of migration and return to form myriad narratives and new psychological spaces.

The psychological spaces in Benyahia's work have meaning for the artist, as well

⁷⁰ "Le passage d'un conte à l'autre a forgé la culture et la tolérance de toute une génération."

Benyahia Samta, in *Voyages d'Artistes – Algérie 03* [exhibition *Voyages d'Artistes*, 21 November 2003 – 28 March 2004, Espace EDF Electra, Paris] (Paris : Paris Musées, 2003), p.47.

⁷¹ Lindsey Moore, *Arab, muslim, women, voice and vision in postcolonial literature and film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p.102.

⁷² Ibid, p.127.

as the viewing public. Moore configures domestic loci as psychological spaces or '*private, imaginative space*' (Moore's italics).⁷³ As Moore argues, private spaces in literature, film and art, delineate symbolic realms in which public discourse is brought to bear. The private realm thus serves as a metaphor for wider social issues and social constructs within specific communities which, thus extrapolated and exhibited for public viewing, are given contrasting meanings. "Private space is also used to recast the *public* domain, by figuring the former as vantage point and platform from which definitions of community can be entered into and reconfigured."⁷⁴ Benyahia has developed a visual language that does exactly that. In her practice, the Moucharabieh and the Fatima design become the weft through which private memories are woven, memories that reconfigure cultural narratives. These narratives exhibited in institutions of art can be seen to contribute in turn to cultural memory

⁷³ Ibid, p.101.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.101.



Image 41: **Katia Kameli**, *Aïcha* (2001) film stills, video format DV, duration 7mn20s, images courtesy of the artist



Image 42: **Samta Benyahia**, *Le Polygone et le dédale* – *Kateb Yacine (2003)* installation, dimensions unknown, hand-blown glass, sequins, audio loop and wood, image courtesy of the artist.

3.5 Is the private political?

Benyahia's work is underscored with a more critical representation of diasporic experiences and the relation between women and domesticity, than so far explored. In 1992, Benyahia first incorporated life-like representations of women in her work with the large-scale photograph of her mother in an installation entitled *Inside Memory* (1992). In this installation an image of her mother was affixed to a panel on which was painted an abstract geometric print. Other similar panels filled the room. The use of photographic effigies of Algerian women was a homage to the women of her childhood in the context of the heightened tension in Algeria in the 1990's that became a civil war that lasted officially until 2005.

Benyahia had returned to Algeria in 1980 to teach at the Beaux Arts, she left the country in 1988. In 1994 however, she presented the exhibition *Femme d'Alger dans son appartement* at the Centre Culturel Français in Algiers. This exhibition can be seen as an act of courage and provocation against the Islamic forces seeking power and influence at the time. Artists and intellectuals feared for their lives in 1994 after Ahmed Asselah, the Director of the Ecole Supérieur des Beaux-Arts and his son were assassinated. In conversation with Evelyne Jouanno, Benyahia records how local journalists, whether critical or not of her work, applauded the act of holding an exhibition in such a political climate.⁷⁵ In this heightened context, her engagement with abstraction seemed to no longer suffice. It is as if Benyahia now needed to offer the faces of Algerian women to the eyes of the beholder. Indeed, these installations were an act of resistance against the perceived threat upon women and the intellectual or artistic life in Algeria at the time.⁷⁶ Benyahia, like the writer and historian Assia Djebar cited previously, perceives the treatment of women since the civil war as a regression from the partial emancipation women had achieved during the Algerian War of Independence. With the historical context of this earlier exhibition in mind, subsequent installations such as *A La Lumière des Matins.... (Albert Camus)* reads as a further resistance against

⁷⁵ Samta Benyahia and Evelyne Jouanno 'Entretien' in *Paris pour Escalé* [exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.40.

⁷⁶ Interview with Samta Benyahia, Paris, November 2011.

the erosion of memories of the fight conducted by women during the Franco-Algerian war. The representation of Algerian women in Benyahia's work therefore has a specific political and historical meaning. It is not only a re-territorialisation of private memories or a questioning of collective narratives that shape the ways in which Algerian women are perceived in France, as observed earlier in this chapter.

The video *Aïcha* (2001) (Image 41) by Kameli similarly evokes a deeper political meaning. It depicts the artist's aunt Aïcha in her kitchen in Algeria. The domestic setting acts as a screen, upon which are projected memories conditioned by the separation occasioned by civil war. Kameli's video depicts generations of women that are destined for menial domestic tasks, as the artist herself expressed.⁷⁷ I am interested here in exploring the meaning created if one considers the context of the Algerian civil war. Communication between France and Algeria at the time that the video footage was shot was greatly restricted. The artist had remained absent from Algeria for a long period during the war. She felt great anxiety with regards to loved ones, as images and information trickled through on the news.⁷⁸ After shooting *Aïcha* in 1998, the images were left untouched until 2001. *Aïcha* is a looped video of 7.20 min that nightmarishly repeats itself, as if committing to memory the repeated actions of the artist's aunt energetically washing sheets by hand. *Aïcha* evokes the experience of place accessed solely through memory. The choice of an 8mm format means that the images are flickering, subdued in colour and thus associated with home movies; which emphasises the notion that the video acts as mnemonic device.

It is on repeatedly hearing a song entitled Aïcha written in 1996 by the popular singer songwriter of Raï music Cheb Khaled that Kameli started to edit the footage to create *Aïcha*. The uncomfortable juxtaposition of song and image demonstrates the extent to which Kameli's video represents a reality so removed, both geographically and socially, from the heroine of Khaled's song. *Aïcha* is not a criticism of the situation of women in Algiers per se, but rather a comment on a complex web of historical and political events that separate countries and peoples, and occasion a life of poverty and drudgery for some. Kameli's work, although different in focus to the work of Sedira,

⁷⁷ Interview with Katia Kameli, Algiers, 3 December 2011.

⁷⁸ This experience has given shape to the work *Bledi* a work in progress.

Bouadbellah and Benyahia analysed in this chapter, nevertheless breaks down 'character essence' by the jarring juxtaposition of sound and image. Furthermore, the video testifies to a re-territorialisation of the artist's memory of her aunt.

The political context in Algeria in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the difficulty for artists to return to Algeria, forms the backdrop of Benyahia's installation *Le Polygone Etoilé* (2003) (Image 42). *Le Polygone Etoilé* is a self-standing polygon in which a small number of viewers at a time can enter. Each of the eight bays that form the inside of the polygon, are fitted with hand blown patterned glass. The viewer circulates around the room, in the centre of which is a low polygon-shaped box in which are scattered glittering blue sequins. A voice-over of poems by the Algerian poet Kateb Yacine emanate from within the box. Yacine, a politicised poet and playwright who died in 1989, has remained a symbol of 'literature engagé' for the Algerian and Berber cause. Gilane Tawadros, the curator of Benyahia's exhibition at the 2003 Venice Biennale argued that Benyahia defies the political violence present in Algeria by creating a space that engages different narratives past and present.⁷⁹ Benyahia describes the polygon as a cocoon based on Yacine's *Polygone étoilé*, a metaphor for a utopian political and social space. For Yacine, the circle is a metaphor for freedom in space and time, an idea that Benyahia encourages the viewers to enact by circulating through the installation. Tawadros writes that Benyahia creates a space of azure blue that accentuates the sense of idyll, of reflection and memory removed from the context of violent conflict that defines Algeria's recent history.

Whilst the political meaning of the installation is important, process and artistry are also central to the work of Benyahia. Each of the eight windows of *Le Polygone Etoilé* is made up of three panels of hand blown glass. Geometric patterns in blue and green using the Fatima rosace were set into the glass as it was worked. Each central panel is shaped by undulations within its surface. The artist developed this technique with the assistance of master glassmakers in Venice. *Le Polygone Etoilé* is thus emblematic of the artist's concern with form and craft, often overlooked in favour of contextual interpretations of her work. *Le Polygone Etoilé* (2003), like other more complex installations that feature embroidery, printing and photography, heightens the

⁷⁹ Gilane Tawadros, 'The revolution stripped bare', *Nka*, 22 (Spring Summer 2008), 60-79, p.71.

complexity of design and overlay of narratives with each medium conveying meaning. I have observed how the photographs symbolise the women of her childhood, and by extension traditions of oral history, female creativity and cultural memory. In *A La Lumière des Matins.... (Albert Camus)* the artist exhibited hand embroidery of blue fabric and sequins created by Algerian seamstresses, further symbols of female creativity.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Benyahia thus created a very real link to a group of Algerian women by employing them to create work that is more conceptual and developed, than what they do on a daily basis to secure an income.

3.6 Conclusion

Zabunyan, in the catalogue of *Intense Proximité*, argues that artistic creation enables the artist to re-write tangential histories to 'compenser' (compensate) and 'panser' (bandage) the absence of a migrant's personal histories in dominant History. I have demonstrated in this chapter that Bouabdellah and Sedira enact re-presentations of the self lived through their own and other's histories. However, the re-presentations of the self enacted do not 'bandage' traumatic experiences. Zabunyan seemingly shares in the literary theory hypothesis that the North African writer is the subject of a crisis of language that exists as a consequence of the writer's alienation from his/her mother tongue, and of his/her dependence on the tongue of the coloniser. This notion is shared among scholars of 'littérature francophone' or foreign literature written in the French language, sometimes referred to as 'littérature étrangère de langue française'. By contrast, I argue that the process of migration or exile in the work of Benyahia, Bouadellah and Sedira is less concerned with alienation and instead lead to new psychological spaces and processes of re-territorialisation.

Bouabdellah playfully re-presents histories of the Algerian community, as well as symbols of the French nation-state in *Ni ni ni* and *Dansons*. Sedira re-presents Christian and Muslim identity in conjunction in *Self portraits or the Virgin Mary* (2000). The two artists effectively re-present diasporic identities. As discussed, Fortier's analysis of diasporic identity as detaching and re-attaching the self to cultural narratives is productive here. The photographic installation by Sedira *La maison de ma mère*, the product of the artist's return to Algeria, mirrors the fragmentary nature of remembering, as theorised by Benjamin. I have furthermore observed that Benyahia in *A la lumière des matins...* (Albert Camus) uses the Moucharabieh as a transient frame through which to suggest cultural bridging between France and Algeria. The Moucharabieh in Benyahia's work create psychological spaces. Furthermore, Benyahia and Kameli with *Aïcha* re-territorialise memories of departure and return to form political commentary. Like Zabunyan, I conclude that artistic practices can represent, and even enact, tangential or imagined narratives or histories. However, I have argued that the experience of other histories, cultures and languages is not necessarily a traumatic

experience of 'panser' or mending the migrant's lack of history.

I have demonstrated how stereotypes of Muslim, Arab or female identity are questioned in artwork such as *Ni ni ni* or *Aïcha*. They are not direct critiques, and thus move beyond interpretations that focus on a binary of subjugation/empowerment or Western/non-Western. I have focused on the act of making as a process of invention in the work of Benyahia, Bouabdellah, Kameli and Sedira. This enables interpretations that acknowledge but also move beyond collective narratives of the Oriental woman. Private memories can thus be brought to the fore to complicate collective narratives and contextualise political aspects of an artist's work. In so doing Benyahia, Bouabdellah, Kameli and Sedira give shape to diasporic experiences and identities, and psychological and political spaces, at the meeting of private and public memories.

The idea of polarised identities envisioned in Zabunyan's text may be more appropriate in analysing Algerian diasporic communities in France in the late 60's and 70's and Franco-Algerian literature of the war and post-war era when French was the only 'foreign' language spoken, and communication with other European states or further abroad was limited.⁸¹ However, artists of Algerian origin working and living in France today are active within a much wider art world. Interpretations based solely on hyphenated French-Algerian experiences are now of less relevance. The next chapter develops this thinking by situating the practices of artists of Algerian origin in a 'global' art world.

⁸¹ However, differences of class, gender and ethnicity within the Algerian community are often ignored by French studies and literary analyses.

Chapter 4

The global art world system, continuities and discontinuities: Adel Abdessemed, Kader Attia and Zineb Sedira



Image 43: **Samta Benyahia**, *Trois coup de sirènes* (2004) documentation of performance, image courtesy of the artist

4.1 Introduction

Between 2003 and 2006 all of the artists considered in this study shifted their attention from issues of identity and Franco-Algerian cultural memory to examine geo-political issues of migration and the limitation to travel. This chapter places the emphasis on geo-political themes in the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira. It follows on from chapter three and the analysis of the political contexts of private memories in the work of Benyahia, Kameli and Sedira. Effectively, Abdessemed, Attia, Benyahia and Sedira have all arrived at geo-political themes through private memories. For example, in *Trois coup de sirènes* (2004) (Image 43), a commission from the museum in Nantes, Benyahia juxtaposed the narratives of passage from Africa to Europe in cargo ships with the memories of migration of her own family.¹

In this chapter I focus on the ways in which Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira have represented economic migration and the notion of globalisation imposes itself *de facto*. Globalisation has been ascribed many different meanings; Imre Szeman makes a useful distinction between the public or economic meaning of globalisation, and its academic or conceptual meaning. Szeman writes:

The public ambition of the concept of globalization makes it clear that there are two broad uses of this concept that need to be separated. (...) The wide-ranging debate in the academy over the precise meaning of globalization might point to the fact that it is a concept open to re-narration and re-metaphorization, thereby keeping focus, too, on the unstable relationship between the realities the term names and its heuristic role in grappling with this reality; (...). Against this, however, one must consider the function of the wide-spread public consensus that has developed on what globalization means. This is globalization in its most familiar garb: the name for a process that (in the last instance) is understood as economic at its core.²

Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira represent globalisation in the economic and public sense of the concept defined by Szeman. They represent empirical facts of globalisation; that capitalism circulates across the globe, that trading routes criss-

¹ Sedira's video *Saphir* (2006) documentary-like videos such as *Mother, Father and I* (2003) and *Retelling histories, my mother told me* (2003) in which she interviews her parents and documents their experience of the Franco-Algerian war, and of migration. Attia's photographic series *Rochers Carrés* (2009) is suggestive of both the desire for migration, and parallels that exist between France and Algeria. This series follows *Correspondances* in which Attia circulated imagery between his family in Paris, and his family in Algeria.

² Imre Szeman, 'Imagining the future: globalisation, postmodernism and criticism', available from www.individual.utoronto.ca/nishashah/Drafts/Szeman.pdf, accessed May 2012, p.8.

cross the planet, and that faster travel has allowed for legal and illegal migration. However, these artists are *critical* of globalisation in its conceptual sense. In other words, they are critical of the socio-cultural and political phenomenon of globalisation.

Artists demonstrate the limitations of globalisation in its conceptual sense. Szeman writes that globalization is real in that it has tangible effects on the world-order. However, it is not real in that it remains a metaphor. He writes:

Which is to say: while globalization is at one level 'real' and has 'real' effects, it is also decisively and importantly rhetorical, metaphoric and even fictional-reality given a narrative shape and logic, and in a number of different and irreconcilable ways.³

These artists also demonstrate that globalisation is not 'real', in that it does not affect all parts of the world in the same way and that travel is restricted because nation-states and borders remain. This chapter analyses works by Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira that represents the discontinuity of global travel and financial or cultural exchange, while emphasising the fact that their work represents continuity across borders and between cultural memory in France and Algeria. The work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira questions the distinction that is made between 'out there' and 'over here'.⁴ In this way, these artists testify to diasporic narratives, or in other words to minority memories that attach and detach themselves from dominant cultures – as Fortier has defined diasporic identities.

I argued in chapter one that artists of Algerian origin are still considered from a space of difference in France.⁵ Meanwhile, this chapter suggests that the fact that diasporic narratives are overlooked in institutions of culture in France mirrors a phenomenon that can be observed in institutions of contemporary art throughout Western Europe. As diasporic and non-Western artists turned to consider themes of migration, it seems that modes of interpretations influenced by identity politics have simply been replaced by modes influenced by ethnic politics, already observed in

³ Ibid, p.4.

⁴ Here I refer to the two anthologies published by MIT, the first *Out there* published in 1992 and the second 'Over here: international perspectives on art and culture' in 2004. While the first volume considered representations of migration and displacement, against the marginalisation of diasporic identities, the second considers representations of the global and the local and the relationship between the two.

⁵ Gilane Tawadros, 'Paris transformé', in *Paris pour Escale* [exhibition Paris pour Escale, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.18.

chapter two. In institutions of art in Western Europe, identity politics has effectively been adapted to suit a rhetoric of globalisation. In art institutions world-wide, artists of Algerian origin - like other diasporic artists - are still considered from a space of difference.⁶ To write an institutional critique of the 'global art world' in this chapter I take inspiration from the work of art historian Charlotte Bydler, and artist and critic Hito Steyerl, who analyse in depth the art world as a socio-economic system. I demonstrate that in the absence of institutional critique of a 'global' art world, the work of artists of Algerian origin is not opened to aesthetic interpretations.

In the final part of this chapter, by collating empirical research on the artists exhibited in French institutions of art by nationality and geography, I propose that these institutions have not truly opened to 'global' art. Meanwhile, this influences the reception of artists of Algerian origin who are made representatives of their country of origin, and not the representatives of diasporic narratives. I have discussed that policies of 'exception culturelle', and republican principles, problematize diasporic identities in France, while culture and cultural memory do not circulate freely from Algeria to France. By contrast, this chapter aims to bring the continuity between France and Algeria to the fore.

⁶ International exhibitions that featured the artists under study and that were emblematic of this paradigm included: *Where are you from?* (1999) in TR, *Insertion: self and other* (2000) in the US, *Stranger* (2002) in the US, *The New Scherazade* (2003) in Spain, *Periplo del Mediterraneo* (2004) in Italy, *Equatorial Rhythms* (2007) Norway, *Unveiled: New art from the middle east* (2009) in the UK, *The Future of tradition* (2010) Denmark and *Capturing African sunbeams* (2010) in Spain.

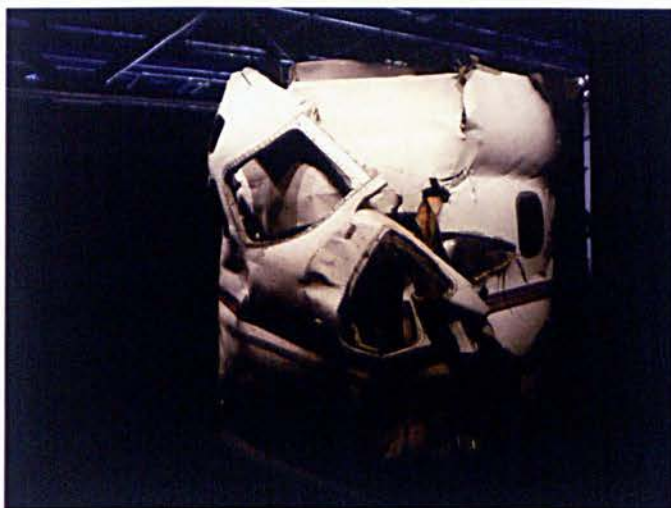


Image 44: **Adel Abdessemed, *Bourek* (2005)** installation shot 'Je suis Innocent' at the Centre Pompidou, Aerojet commander plane, 226x274 cm, photograph Alice Planel



Image 45: **Adel Abdessemed, *Telle Mère tel Fils* (2008)** installation shot 'Je suis innocent' at the Centre Pompidou, airplanes, felt, aluminium, and metal, 27 x 4 x 5 meters, photograph Alice Planel



Image 46: **Adel Abdessemed, *Brik* (2005)** colour video, 1 min 12 s., photograph of catalogue *Situation and Practice* (MIT Press, 2008), photograph Alice Planel

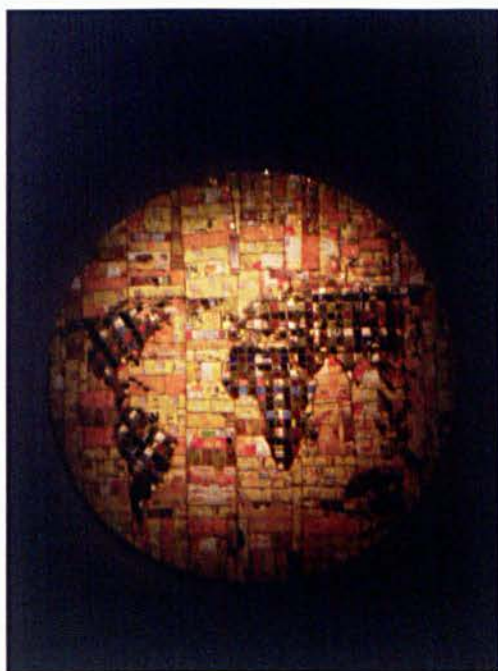


Image 47: Adel Abdessemed, *Mappemonde* (2010) printed steel, diameter 172.1 cm, installation shot 'Je suis Innocent' at the Centre Pompidou, photograph Alice Planel



Image 48: Adel Abdessemed *Exit* (1996) photograph of installation, Venice biennale 2007, image from <http://www.sudsandsoda.com>

4.2 *Bourek* by Abdessemed: private memories in a global world

Bourek (2005) (Image 44) by Abdessemed is a sculpture formed of the mangled body of a small airplane, folded in on itself over and over, like the thin layers of pastry used to make the delicacy from which the title is derived. The sculpture is 226cm wide and 274 cm high, which makes it relatively imposing. It is a freestanding object and when exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in 2012, the viewer could walk around it. The crushed fuselage of the plane was held together by a heavy strap that was wrapped around it impressing upon the viewer the might that was employed in folding the metal in on itself. The serrated edges of the folded metal could not be more different from the soft and fragile layers of a bourek pastry found across the Middle East and North Africa, and some Eastern European countries. *Bourek* was first exhibited in France at le Magasin in 2008.

In a review of the show, *Le Figaro* reiterated the analogy previously used when reviewing *Bourek* at the Miami art fair of 2006 that it was a fusion of the North (with its industry) and the South (humble, festive and inventive).⁷ *Le Figaro* effectively suggests a binary Occident/Orient. The 'North' as a place of industry and innovation symbolises Europe or the US, and the 'South' as a place of tradition and festivities symbolises the general region of North Africa and the Middle East. By contrast, Harry Bellet in *Le Monde* dismissed any grand narratives that opposed Europe to a 'global South'. He made the parallel between the flattened plane and the cakes that Abdessemed's mother makes.⁸ As the artist stated during an interview with Lebovici, the idea for *Bourek* came to the artist while he was talking to his mother on the phone in Algeria as she prepared bourek pastries.⁹ I argue that Abdessemed re-territorialises private memories to question the distance (discontinuity), and the link (continuity), between France and Algeria, and by extension the global atlas as a whole. A comparison between *Bourek* and *Telle Mère tel Fils* will enable me to move this analysis forward.

Telle Mère tel Fils (2008) (Image 45) is another sculpture in which Abdessemed uses the fuselage of planes as the sculptural medium. *Telle Mère tel*

⁷ V.D, 'Adel Abdessemed et le voyage d'Ulysse', *Le Figaro*, 13 January, 2006, p.30
Valérie Duponchelle, 'Quand Adel réinvente le monde et sa violence animale', *Le Figaro*, February 9, 2008, accessed from David Zwirner archive, www.davidzwirner.com.

⁸ Harry Bellet, 'Adel Abdessemed, l'enfant terrible de l'art', *Le Monde*, March 1, 2008, p.16.

⁹ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elizabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203, p.142.

Fils is formed of three small planes dismantled and constructed anew, so that the cockpit and tail of each plane are joined together by a long tube of felt. The planes are interwoven together, serpent-like. The sculpture is massive; it is 27 meters long. In *Le Figaro*, Duponchelle saw in this latter sculpture a reference to an intermingling of worlds that are changed by globalisation.¹⁰ I would also suggest meanings that are literally closer to home. The title of the artwork is suggestive of private memories and the relation between Abdessemed and his mother. In a recent article, *Beaux Arts* cited *Telle Mère tel Fils* stating that Abdessemed recreated a plane using his mother's pastries. In this article they have in fact confused *Telle Mère tel Fils* and a previous video entitled *Brik* (2005) (Image 46), in which the artist indeed makes a plane out of brik pastry. In *Brik* (2005) one can see the hands of the artist as he moulds the pastry into the shape of a small plane before rolling it up, and rolling it out. Analysed in conjunction, *Telle Mère tel Fils* (2008), *Brik* (2005) and *Bourek* (2005) lend weight to the interpretation of personal and global, distance and connectivity. In these three artworks, private memories of Abdessemed's mother in Algeria refer to Algeria and to the local. However, the connection between mother and son, across a continent, suggests an intermingling of worlds. Neither *Telle Mère tel Fils*, nor *Brik*, nor *Bourek* represent an absolute chasm between North and South, or Orient and Occident.

In fact, it seems that Abdessemed aims to turn this very notion of Orient vs. Occident on its head by crushing the plane in *Bourek*. He writes:

If you think that some people go with the wind, you immediately think of the East. If, on the other hand, you think that some people go against the wind, you think of the West, linked to the birth of the airplane. This is how my action of crushing and rolling up the plane came about. I said to myself: "The West invented the plane and today in this global age where there is no more atlas (...) we are all caught up in a cyclone." I rolled up the plane which became a kind of sidereal spiral...¹¹.

Abdessemed here takes up the notion of a global atlas where all things are equal in the 'cyclone of globalisation'. Here it is globalisation in the economic sense of the word, that Abdessemed considers. Abdessemed cites a number of artists who have made the global atlas the subject of their work, including Alighiero Boetti.¹²

¹⁰ Valérie Duponchelle, 'Quand Adel réinvente le monde et sa violence animale', *Le Figaro*, February 9, 2008, accessed from David Zwirner archive, www.davidzwirner.com.

¹¹ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74–203, p.143.

¹² *Ibid*, p.142.

Abdessemed himself returns to this theme with *Mappemonde* (2010) (Image 47). In *Mappemonde* a patchwork of pieces of reclaimed tin represent the image of a globe. The metal was once used to can or package goods in different parts of the world. A comparison with Boetti's work reveals that Abdessemed is critical of globalisation, in the ways in which it effects political systems and everyday life. Alghierro Boetti creates geo-political maps of the globe in which countries are represented by their flag, to reveal political systems of the global world.¹³ Abdessemed similarly explores the 'game plan' that rules the global atlas; but where Boetti's map represent nation-states, Abdessemed features global trade. A comparison between Boetti and Abdessemed's *Mappemonde*, by extrapolation, shows how Abdessemed also engineers a critique against the cyclone of globalisation in *Bourek*. Indeed, in *Bourek* the global atlas is not represented as a continuous place of free exchange. It is also inspired by the separation between mother and son.

The act of creation is again crucial to understanding Abdessemed's work. There are two aesthetic or material tropes in *Bourek*. These are the circle, and the act of crushing the plane. Firstly, in speaking to Lebovici, Abdessemed mentions the relevance of the loop or circle in his work. The loop or circle is found in the spiral of a descending camera in *Schnell*, the wrapping together of a plane in concentric circles in *Bourek*, and the raw immediacy of the filmic image on a constant loop. Falguières considers Abdessemed's practice as a whole as one of looping. She thus keenly testifies to the web of references that interlink Attia's work, as I have also argued in this thesis. Indeed, the notion that Abdessemed's practice is formed of loops substantiates what I have previously defined as a rhizomatic approach, in which creative ideas and cultural references create a dense web - with specific rhizomes resurfacing in different artworks.

Secondly, *Bourek* brings to the fore another aspect of Abdessemed's practice that I have emphasised. *Bourek* documents an artistic act, and in this it is emblematic of Abdessemed's practice as a whole. Abdessemed indeed emphasises the act of squashing the plane in *Bourek* rather than exhibiting the original, just as he used a car to create a terracotta mould in *Practice Zero Tolerance*. He states, "Je ne suis pas un artiste des actes, pas un artiste conceptuel (...). L'avion *Bourek*, je dois l'écraser et

¹³ The recent exhibition of Boetti's work at the Tate Modern in London was entitled 'game plan'.

en faire autre chose.”¹⁴ Through the creative act, Abdessemed re-envisions private memories, and the way that these memories relate to territorial distance, migration and globalisation.

In this respect I concur with McDonough when he enthuses about the way in which migration, or exile, was a productive experience for the young artist. In 1994 Abdessemed arrived in France and created *Exit* (1996) (Image 48). This early installation is formed of a neon sign reading EXIL in the same font and size as a regular exit sign. McDonough writes:

If we routinely come to think of exile as a condition of loss, Abdessemed's work points us toward another reading: of exile as a liberating process, as an exit out of an untenable situation, as even a life-saving escape.¹⁵

Abdessemed is, with Benyahia, the only artist whom I consider in this thesis to have left Algeria as a consequence of traumatic events. However, this traumatic experience is a source of complex political meaning in his work, not of a sense of loss.

Araeen criticises the notion that the postcolonial artist inhabits the position of victim. He writes: “The exiled subject therefore does not operate from a position of loss or as a victim, but from a position from which he/she can locate him/herself in the world as a free subject and change it.”¹⁶ In *Exit* Abdessemed locates himself within a critique of political systems in France. Abdessemed is recorded as stating that with *Exil*, *Joueur de Flûte* and *Passé Simple*, he was not sure if he was the 'patient' or the 'doctor'.¹⁷ This statement suggests two possible interpretations of *Exit*. Firstly, the installation refers to the political context in France. Indeed, Abdessemed has stated that in 1995-1996, a few years after he arrived in France, he witnessed the rise of repressive policing against Maghrebi populations. It is at this moment that he 'turned his back' and created *Exil*, and the 'playful apocalypses' of *Joueur de Flûte* and *Passé Simple*¹⁸. Secondly, exhibited in a museum of art, the private and cathartic

¹⁴ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203, p.144.

¹⁵ Tom McDonough, 'The Mole', in *Adel Abdessemed, Situation and Practice* [exhibition Situation and Practice, MIT List Visual Arts Center 10 October 2008-4 January 2009] (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2009), 74-83, p.75.

¹⁶ Rasheed Araeen, 'A new beginning', *Third Text*, 15 (50) (2000) 3-20, p.9.

¹⁷ Hou Hanru, Evelynne Jouanno and Adel Abdessemed, 'Adel Abdessemed', in *Paris pour Escal* [exhibition Paris pour Escal, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.27.

¹⁸ Hou Hanru, Evelynne Jouanno and Adel Abdessemed, 'Adel Abdessemed', in *Paris pour Escal*

act of *Exil* takes on a public meaning. *Exit* was usually hung above a door in the various institutions it has been exhibited in. The title *Exit* thus corroborates the parallel that the installation creates with exit signs. Drawing on my previous analysis of *Practice Zero Tolerance* as an invitation to the viewer to act, I suggest that *Exil* invites the viewer to embody the state of exile in a joyous and playful take on the pivotal object exile/exit.¹⁹

Falguières, in her text for the catalogue of *Je suis innocent* at the Centre Pompidou, observes that the neon sign of *Exit* is a portal to an undefined and unknown world of exception.²⁰ In her text, exile is a state of 'hors-lieu' or no man's land, or in Agamben's words, a state of exception or 'bare life'. No reference is made however, to the specificities of French culture and French institutional politics that frame the conception and production of *Exit* - and the majority of the work which Falguières considers in her text. Falguières concludes that Abdessemed's experience of states of exception in Algiers in the 1990s and in New York in 2001, have allowed him to understand political machinations. Falguières thus overlooks the fact that Abdessemed has also been critical of the use of policies of states of exception in France. Contexts of production or politics of location, be they institutional or cultural, need to be stated otherwise his work is open to essentialising interpretations. Indeed, we have seen that *Le Figaro* contrasted Orient and Occident in his work, and did not seek more complex meaning.

Le Figaro ignored the continuity that Abdessemed's work also represents. 'Over here' and 'over there', France and Algeria, are interpreted as separate.²¹ Abdessemed considers himself to work within questions of globalisation as a world of tensions between 'here' and 'there'. In interview with Gareth Harris of *the Art Newspaper* he states: "For me, a good artist is tormented by the world, acting inside

[exhibition Paris pour Escalé, 7 December 2000 – 18 February 2001, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris] (Paris: Editions des Musée de la Ville de Paris, 2000), p.27.

¹⁹ Here, I refer to Armstrong's notion of the pivotal object, discussed in chapter two. Isobel Armstrong, *The radical aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

²⁰ Patricia Falguières, 'Etat d'exception', in *Adel Abdessemed : Je suis innocent* [exhibition Je suis Innocent, 3 October 2012 - 07 January 2013, Centre Pompidou, Paris] (Göttingen : Steidl, 2012), 205-211.

²¹ By contrast, in the introduction to the anthology *Over here: international perspectives on art and culture*, Fisher states that 'there' and 'here' co-exist in today's society. She writes: "Reciprocal expansion and contraction meant that 'there' is now also 'here'. *Over here: international perspectives on art and culture*, Gerard Mosquera and Jean Fisher ed. (New York and London: MIT and New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), p.4.

a global social sphere.”²² Abdessemed's work on migration and globalisation does not oppose geographies, neither does he suggest that the global atlas is a homogeneous whole. He suggests that in a global era states of being are subject to continuity and discontinuity. Nevertheless, in an interview with Guy Tortosa for *Le Journal des Arts* published in 'Global', Abdessemed is questioned about *Pressoir fais-le*, a looped video which shows the artist pressing a lemon by stamping on it.²³ Tortosa states that the video reminds him of Arab fruit-stands that line the streets in Paris, to which Abdessemed replies “Are Arab grocers really the only ones who sell lemons?”²⁴ By contrast to Tortosa's suggestion - to use Abdessemed's own expression - his practice is part of the 'Bordel Global',²⁵ which could be translated as the global mess, and resists being ascribed to the 'Ghetto Arabe'.²⁶

²² Gareth Harris, 'Politics can be as vicious as a chimpanzee...', *The Art Newspaper*, October 15, 2010, p.15.

²³ Guy Tortosa, 'Interview of Adel Abdessemed', in *Global* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2005), 117-121.

²⁴ Ibid, p121.

²⁵ Ibid, p121.

²⁶ Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Abdessemed en/in conversation avec/with Elisabeth Lebovici', in *A l'attaque. Adel Abdessemed* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 74-203.



Image 49: Kader Attia, *Rochers Carrés* (2009) c-print, 78.5 x 98.5 cm, image courtesy of the artist



Image 50: **Kader Attia, *Untitled – concrete blocks* (2009)** installation, variable dimensions, concrete blocks, image courtesy of the artist



Image 51: **Richard Long, *Red Slate Circle* (1988)** installation, 37 x 400 x 400 cm, image from [tate.org](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-red-slate-circle-t11884), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-red-slate-circle-t11884>



Image 52: **Kader Attia, *Holy Land* (2006)** c-print mounted on aluminium, image from [artnet.com](http://images.artnet.com/artwork_images_423921915_353227_kader-attia.jpg), http://images.artnet.com/artwork_images_423921915_353227_kader-attia.jpg

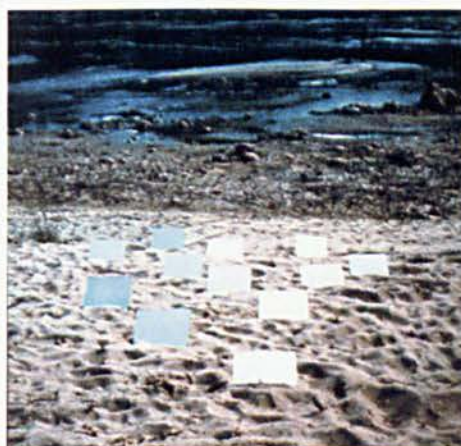


Image 53: **Robert Smithson, *6th Mirror Displacement* (1969)** installation, mirrors, image from <http://imageobjecttext.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/smithson-sixth-mirror-displacement-1969.gif>

4.3 *Rochers Carrés* by Attia: themes of migration and formal research

In all but one of the c-prints in the photographic series *Rochers Carrés* (2009) by Attia (Image 49), a male character is photographed looking out to sea. They are sat, crouched or stood among colossal concrete cubes at the water's edge. There is thus a pleasing repetition in the careful composition of these photographs. The subtle hues of the light-saturated photographs give a nostalgic impression of times passed. However, Attia photographs contemporary figures on the breakwater of Algiers's bay, and it is a series that deals with a contemporary theme: migration. Boats can be seen gliding across the horizon line, confirming the sense of immobility conveyed by the mass of concrete, and by extension the characters that are photographed. While the characters in the photograph look to the horizon, it is what is beyond the horizon line that is envisioned.

From the bay of Algiers the outline of the Spanish coast can be seen on a clear day. Framing parts of the seaside in Algiers, the concrete blocks that feature in Attia's photographs create a barrier between the poor neighbourhood of Bab El Oued and the sea. Across the sea lies Europe, so that the concrete blocks effectively form a barrier between Algiers and Europe. Young men once attempted to climb aboard ships to Europe from the beach which was filled with concrete blocks in the 1970s. These concrete blocks were nicknamed 'Rochers Carrés'. Whilst these blocks do not halt migration, they are symbolic of entrapment, as the critic Rebecca Dimling Cochran argued in 2010.²⁷

In *Art in America* Gregory Volk makes the link between 'unemployed young men with smouldering ambitions' pictured in Attia's photographs, and 'banlieues' apartment blocks.²⁸ This parallel had in fact been offered by the artist during a conversation with Cochran for *Sculpture magazine*. In the article, Attia recalls telling his cousins who dreamed of crossing the Mediterranean to France, that the concrete blocks on the beach, and the concrete blocks in Paris, are not worlds apart. Interestingly, Attia hereby demonstrates that communities on either side of the Mediterranean sea are brought together through shared experiences of segregation;

²⁷ Rebecca Dimling Cochran, 'The Space in between: a conversation with Kader Attia', *Sculpture*, (January-February 2010), 29-35.

²⁸ Gregory Volk, 'Kader Attia', *Art in America*, 3 (March 2010), p.163.

and thus the cultural memories that these experiences generate.²⁹ Attia thus suggests that there are continuities between France and Algeria.³⁰ I will return to this aspect again with the work of Sedira. At this point however, I would like to turn to an analysis of the formal qualities of *Rochers Carrés*; a contextual prism based on the theme of migration only allows for a limited understanding of this series of photographs, as the following analysis will now demonstrate.

The concrete structures strewn across the coastline of Algiers and photographed by Attia in *Rochers Carrés* (2009) have been a point of return for Attia. He first photographed the carpet of concrete blocks in 2007. In this earlier series there are no human beings in sight. Furthermore, the concrete cubes occupied the majority of the frame so that it was the concrete blocks and not the sea that was the focus of the photographs - in contrast to the 2009 photographs. In *Rochers Carrés* (2007) sharp contrasts of light created lines of dark shadows across the sea of grey concrete. The earlier photographic series that depicted the 'Rochers Carrés' thus heralded the importance that formal inquiry has had in Attia's recent practice. The play of light in *Rochers Carrés* (2007) is almost sculptural. After *Rochers Carrés* (2007), Attia effectively turned to installation and sculptural work to pursue his investigation into the forms of the 'Rochers Carrés'. The forms of the concrete blocks in the bay of Algiers have been a source of inspiration for increasingly abstracted work. This turn towards abstraction is one of the defining aspects of his recent work.³¹

In 2008 Attia exhibited the installation *Untitled* (2008) at the Galerie Anne de Villepoix in Paris. The installation was composed of a parterre of small blocks of concrete. One corner of each block was cut so that the blocks sloped slightly as if sinking into the gallery floor. In a review of the 2008 show *Mythes et Poésie du Vide* at Anne de Villepoix, *Art Press* testified to a change in his practice away from more didactic political or social commentary.³² However, Ardenne in this *Art Press* article concludes that *Untitled* (2008) is reminiscent of the curved backs of praying Muslims.³³ It seems to me that this interpretation of *Untitled* is whimsical and over-

²⁹ Rebecca Dimling Cochran, 'The Space in between: a conversation with Kader Attia', *Sculpture*, (January-February 2010), 29-35.

³⁰ This is a theme that Attia also explored with *Correspondances*.

³¹ Another contrasting aspect of Attia's work has been a renewed interest in archives and postcolonial history.

³² Paul Ardenne, 'Kader Attia', *Art Press*, 348, September 2008, p.93.

³³ This would in fact become the theme of *Ghost*, an installation that I have previously discussed and

determines the importance of Attia's Muslim origin. Instead, I suggest that *Untitled* (2008) has more to do with the 'Rochers Carrés' than with praying Muslims. Talking to Cochran in 2010, Attia emphasised the importance of negative space in sculptural work. Indeed, the interest the artist has for absence or emptiness between shapes is reflected in the title of his earlier 2008 show at Anne de Villepoix: *Mythes et Poésie du Vide*. The installation *Untitled* (2009) (Image 50), also shown at the Italian gallery Galleria Continua in a large solo show entitled *Essential*, reinforces the formal parallel to be found with the shapes of the 'Rochers Carrés'. In *Untitled* (2009) small cubes of concrete were stacked in concentric circles in a domino effect. Just as in *Untitled* (2008) the blocks sloped on their side. However, in this later version, each concrete cube bore a tongue and groove-like shape that is to be found on the blocks of concrete of the 'Rochers Carrés'. *Untitled* (2009) thus clarified the link between his installation work using concrete blocks, and the concrete blocks of the bay of Algiers. In fact, the installation was juxtaposed, in the gallery setting, with the photographs *Rochers Carrés* (2009).

This installation explicitly referenced the minimal land art of artists such as Richard Long. While *Untitled* (2009) is reminiscent of Long's stone circles such as *Red Slate Circle* (1988) (Image 51) in terms of the installation's form, a stronger parallel can be made with the work of Robert Smithson *Leaning Strata* (1968) in which the artist abstracts forms of geological strata. This parallel with the work of Smithson seems to be confirmed with Attia's installation *Holy Land* (2006) (Image 52) in which he installed mirrors on the beach facing into the sea, which seemingly references Smithson's *Mirror Displacements* in the Yucatan (1969), and especially *Sixth Mirror Displacement* (Image 53). However, the material that Attia uses and refers to (concrete) is man-made and unaesthetic, by contrast to the materials used by Long in *Red Slate Circle*, and the materials referred to by Smithson in *Leaning Strata*. The concrete infuses the work with a rawness that is jarring, because of the formal nature of the work, and its reminiscence of land art. The use of concrete in *Untitled* (2009) suggests that Attia explores the relation between man and the man-made. Attia thus appears to effect the study of a particular site in terms of senses and concepts, as advocated by Smithson. Smithson writes: "The investigation of a specific site is a matter of extracting concepts out of existing sense-data through

which featured the form of a prostrated praying figure.

direct perceptions.”³⁴ Here, the senses and concepts explored by Attia are the continuity and discontinuity between the global world-order and between Algeria and France (concept), and the sense of entrapment (sense).

The juxtaposition between the photographs and the concrete blocks at the Galleria Continua suggests a contrast between man – the Algerian men pictured on the rocks in *Rochers Carrés* – and the man-made – the concrete of both the installation and the wave-breakers photographed. The aesthetic of *Untitled* (2009) is a radical aesthetic in Armstrong’s sense, in which the aesthetic object (the concrete block/*rochers carrés*) creates a cognitive shift. The aesthetic object in *Rochers Carrés* and *Untitled* (2009) questions the relation between continuity and discontinuity within the global world-order. *Untitled* (2009) questions the effects on everyday life of urban policies in Paris and Algiers (continuity), and global policies that disallow travel (discontinuity). *Rochers Carrés* also evokes the fact that the desire for migration is heightened in a global context; Western narratives of prosperity circulate in countries like Algeria more widely with the rise of systems of communication like the internet (continuity).

In a related work of 2008, Attia created an installation for the Henry Gallery (USA) of towering rows of sloping blocks. These blocks, like *Fridges* previously, engendered an embodied experience in the viewer that aptly communicated the sense of entrapment that Cochran sees in *Rochers Carrés* (2009), and that the artist argues the concrete blocks represent for the inhabitants of Bab El Oued.³⁵ This somatic experience of affect seems to mirror Armstrong’s vision of the broken middle in her understanding of the radical aesthetic, yet Attia’s engagement with sense/concept creates continuity as well as dislocation so that the aesthetic experience or ‘middle’ is not broken. Instead, with *Untitled* (2009) Attia moves further towards a radical and formal aesthetic, and towards an exploration of man and the man-made. The parallel that I have made between *Rochers Carrés* (2009), *Untitled* (2008) and *Untitled* (2009) is useful in emphasising the formal concerns of the artist already present in his early photographic series that depict the bay of Algiers.

³⁴ Robert Smithson, *The collected writings*, Jack Flam ed. (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), p.96.

³⁵ The installation at the Henry Gallery is similar, to a certain extent, to the architect Daniel Libeskind’s Garden of Exile in the Jewish Museum. This small and enclosed garden is made of sloping columns of concrete, and a slightly sloping floor. The uncomfortable physical disorientation that is encountered by the visitor, is supposed to create a sense of empathy towards the disorientation and trauma that Jewish peoples were victims of throughout their history.

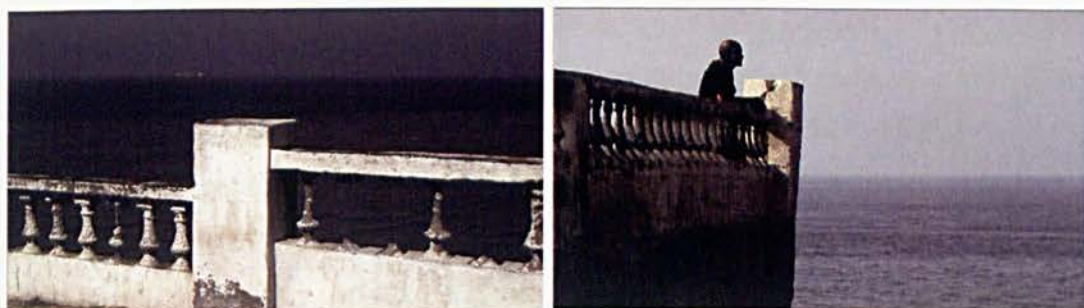


Image 54: **Zineb Sedira, *Saphir* (2006)** video-still, double video projection, 19 min © Zineb Sedira, courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris

4.4 *Saphir* by Sedira: between France and Algiers

I return to the bay of Algiers to consider a significant video in Sedira's career: *Saphir* (2006) (Image 54). *Saphir* is relevant to this chapter for two reasons. It has migration as its theme and it marks a move away from private narratives and identity issues, towards geo-political themes and towards aesthetics. The video of 19 minutes is a two-screen projection of an elusive narrative set in the port of Algiers, and featuring a man and a woman. Shots of a boat and the sea are interspersed with images of an interior overlooking the harbour, a hotel corridor, and a meander of stairs and streets on the port side. The male and female character share the same cityscape, but their paths never cross; neither do the two screens ever place them side by side at any one time. Long, panoramic shots show a cityscape beyond the funnel of a large boat, a seascape, and the facade of a building. These shots intermix with close ups of architectural or interior details, the angular features of the male character.

Saphir (2006) represents a shift in the artist's practice towards cinematographic methods and a meditative power initiated with the production of *On a winter's night a traveller* (2003).³⁶ *Saphir* was commissioned by the Video Umbrella (UK) and the Photographers Gallery (UK). The fact that this video was commissioned by the Video Umbrella meant that Sedira had greater funds at her disposal for the making of *Saphir* and was able to pay for high quality equipment and a more costly production. The cinematic quality of *Saphir* is thus greatly dependent on this commission. The fact that Sedira was able to shoot in public places in Algiers is also dependent on her status as an international artist. Authorities do not forbid the filming in public spaces in Algiers but they do treat artistic activities with distrust; administrative obstacles often hamper production. *Saphir* was first shown in the UK and the exhibition was mentioned in an *Art Press* article of 2006.³⁷ However, the video was not shown in France until the Marseille

³⁶ *On a winter's night a traveller* (2003) - a commission for the Museum of African Art in New York that also shares in the theme of travel. As the title suggests, *On a winter's night a traveller* was filmed as the artist travelled. Sedira takes up this theme once more with *And the road goes on...* (2005). In the former video the artist shoots the scene from a plane, in the latter video from a car.³⁶ *And the road goes on...*, was shown in 2008 in France in the exhibition 'Eclats de frontières' as part of a FRAC collection. *L'Humanité* described it as a radical exhibition marked by the furtive and menacing travelling of Sedira's video Lise Guéhenneux, 'Les oeuvres sans concessions de dix artistes méditerranéens', *L'Humanité*, 18 November, 2008, available online at lhumanite.fr, accessed on 10.10.12.

³⁷ Anna Colin, 'Paris calling. La scène française à Londres', *Art Press*, 327, October 2006, p.37.

retrospective of Sedira's work in 2011.³⁸ Hence little has been written about it in the French press until 2011 and I will thus also refer to sources from outside France.

In *Saphir*, to the rhythm of fade ins and fade outs and careful editing, the narrative unfolds in contrast and tensions between the two screens. The sea seemingly encapsulates these tensions. It is in constant movement but it also forms a liquid barrier between two coastlines; between Algiers and the imagined destination of shipping liners and ferries in Marseilles. The slow movement of the ship echoes the monotony of the comings and goings of the two characters. They both turn to the sea in expectation, or in contemplation. Richard Dyer's article in the journal *Nka* provides an extensive analysis of *Saphir* in which he reads the stairs as a metonym for the process of transition. Furthermore, he suggests that the ghostly disappearances of the woman in the hotel's long corridors, symbolises the tension that exists between the desire for departure and that to remain.³⁹ Dyer continues his inspired analysis of *Saphir* by suggesting a contrast between an opening to the world, suggested by the many windows of the Hotel Esafir represented, and entrapment within, suggested by the eyes of the male protagonist. In relation to the video's formal aspect, Dyer argues that Sedira is concerned with a melancholic desire for escape. As he states: "Sedira is not trying to say that everyone is desperate to escape; it is more the poetics of the desire for departure which is the subject of this film."⁴⁰ I concur with Dyer that *Saphir* speaks of 'arrival and departure',⁴¹ however, I argue that it does not impose a strict contrast between opening/entrapment, and Algiers/Marseilles. Instead, just as Attia emphasises the similarity between concreted neighbourhoods in France and that in Algiers with *Rochers Carrés*, Sedira refers in an interview with Joseph McGonagle to the fact that the cities of Marseilles and Algiers mirror one another.⁴² *Saphir* demonstrates how the two territories are linked by a common history, and by collectively located narratives of passage between the

³⁸ The video *Middle Sea* (2008) features the same male protagonist and has a similar crisp photography and meditative quality as *Saphir*. It thus forms, to a great extent, a prequel to *Saphir*. This video was shown at the Galerie Kamel Mennour in 2008.

³⁹ Richard Dyer, 'Zineb Sedira: Saphir', *Nka*, 24, (2009), p.116.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.117.

⁴¹ Noting the dereliction apparent on the façade of the hotel, Dyer writes of the hotel Esafir as a metaphor for a crumbling colonial power. However, whilst in images such as *Haunted House* (2006) an emphasis is placed on the state of dereliction of the building, I struggle to see the relevance of this for *Saphir*. Indeed, whilst Sedira is critical of the French colonisation of Algeria, in *Saphir* she focuses on contemporary subjects.

⁴² Joseph McGonagle, 'Translating differences: an interview with Zineb Sedira', *Signs: New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture*, 31 (3) (Spring 2006), p.622.

ports of Algiers and Marseille. The artist states

It has often been said that that the two cities, Marseilles and Algiers, mirror each other. They are both situated by the Mediterranean sea and located on a mountain, each with a cathedral overlooking the bay. It's also an important historical trip. (...) It is a well-known journey among Algerian immigrants.⁴³

The sense of 'entrapment and escape' of 'belonging and not-belonging' are not as distinct as Dyer suggests. Sedira proposes, like Abdessemed and Attia, that migration and globalisation enlist continuity and discontinuity between France and Algeria.

In a 2011 article *Connaissances des Arts* defined Sedira's work as a stabbing and protracted obsession with an absent Algeria.⁴⁴ The article further described the artist as an 'apatride', or stateless being. Although mention is made of Sedira's opinion that she is lucky to be able to travel between Algeria/France and the UK, the article nonetheless continued to emphasise the idea of lack, of alienation from a country of origin, and of statelessness. *Le Monde*, in a review of the show *A Transitional Landscape* at the Galerie Kamel Mennour in 2006, wrote that Sedira's origins are 'paradoxical'⁴⁵. In other words, *Le Monde* suggested that Sedira's origin as Algerian and her identity as French are mutually exclusive. As discussed the popular perception that Franco-Algerian identities are in opposition, in spite of its contestation by the génération 'Beurs', appears to still hold weight. *Art Press* stated in a 2011 review of Sedira's show in Marseille, that in her early work, the artist expressed a 'malaise' because the artist is caught between two cultures.⁴⁶ Sedira did indeed critically explore French and Algerian cultures in her early work. However, the experience of dual identity has always been productive of meaning, as I have argued in chapter three, and was not lived as a disquieting experience.⁴⁷

Art Press in a review of the tenth edition of the Montreal photography month,

⁴³ Ibid, p.622.

⁴⁴ "Il y a chez Zineb Sedira l'obsession lancinante de l'Algérie absente, une sorte de quête impossible d'un pays intérieur qui n'appartient plus au passé ni à l'avenir." Valérie de Maulmin, 'Zineb Sedira, vestige de la mémoire', *Connaissances des Arts*, 691, March 2011, p.94.

⁴⁵ Claire Guillot, 'Les traces du passé colonial', *Le Monde*, 30 September, 2006, accessed from Galerie Kamel Mennour online archive.

⁴⁶ Guillaume Mansart, 'Zineb Sedira', *Art Press*, 375, February 2011, p.92.

⁴⁷ The notion that the artist suffered a 'malaise' echoes a common argument in scholarly analyses of Franco-Algerian literature. Literary scholars contend that the writer of Algerian origin experiences a 'mal-être', because he/she writes in the language of the occupier. However, this is not relevant to either the language of art, or to the context in which Sedira trained and practices.

focused on the aesthetic quality of *Saphir*.⁴⁸ Verhagen, in a longer article also published in *Art Press* in 2009, reviewed Sedira's work once more. He remained faithful to the formal qualities and broad metaphors of *Saphir*, and did not subscribe to the idea that the artist is torn between two countries or two cultures. He wrote:

Here, speech, whether from the artist or from others, is neutralized. Instead, we get a formally masterful composition situated at the border of reality and fiction. The history of Algeria remains as present as always, but is evoked indirectly by the nostalgic atmosphere generated by this 1930s French-designed Art Deco hotel. It's up to the viewers to sketch the contours of any possible narrative plot. Algeria, France – these two nations seem to coincide in the gaze of the actor Samir El Hakim.⁴⁹

Like Verhagen, I argue that *Saphir* is the outcome of formal investigation by the artist and contexts of production, and creates continuity between Algeria and France.

The video is the beginning of an artistic process that enabled the artist to forge strong links to the land of her parental heritage.⁵⁰ *Saphir* was filmed shortly after the artist returned to Algeria and Sedira proposes that the Algerian landscape inspired a shift from documentary to cinematographic styles. It is the landscape that became the symbolic bearer of the narratives that were the focus of her earlier work.

I guess this appetite or curiosity for the Algerian landscape came from rediscovering Algeria after twelve years of exile. I forgot how beautiful my parents' home was. *On a winter's night a traveller* was born at that time, just on the spur of the moment.⁵¹

In previous work such as *Retelling histories: my mother told me*, her family are the link to the past and to Algeria. Familial ties were no longer the subject of her work when she travelled there herself. At this point, the Algerian landscape became in turn a metaphor for her family.⁵² With *Saphir*, Sedira strove to circumvent documentary reliance on fact to present a different perspective of the country she had returned to⁵³. This return, however, is not incompatible with departure, and Algeria, is not irremediably distinct from Marseilles. The Mediterranean is not only a liquid border, *Saphir* suggests continuity across the Mediterranean.

Sedira's practice has been multifaceted. The fact that she has explored a

⁴⁸ Erik Verhagen, '10e mois de la photo', *Art Press*, 339, November 2007, p.38.

⁴⁹ Erik Verhagen, 'Zineb Sedira, de l'autre côté de la mer', *Art Press*, 353, February 2009, 55-59, p.59

⁵⁰ Indeed, Zedira has increasingly produced work in Algeria, and whilst she now turns to sites in the UK or Mauritania she is still producing work in Algeria.

⁵¹ Joseph McGonagle, 'Translating differences: an interview with Zineb Sedira', *Signs: New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture*, 31 (3) (Spring 2006), p.622.

⁵² Interview with Zineb Sedira, London, 18 January 2012.

⁵³ Christine Van Assche, 'Interview with Zineb Sedira, *Saphir* [exhibition 'Saphir', 29 September – 26 November 2006, The photographers Gallery, London] (London: Photographers Gallery, 2006).

variety of artistic languages, stems from the need to reinvent herself as she became 'pigeonholed'.⁵⁴ In interview, Sedira explained her move away from the documentary as an existential choice. In answer to Tina Sotiradi's question 'why landscape?' Sedira replied: "I always saw my work as universal. But it seems that art audiences are not able to see beyond the cultural identity level of my work."⁵⁵ Notwithstanding this change in her practice, her origin continues to dictate to some extent how her work is interpreted.

Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira do not speak of statelessness or of oppositions between cultures. Quite the opposite, they suggest that there is a continuity across the Mediterranean. Chapter one demonstrates that diasporic narratives that ally French and Algerian communities and cultural memory, are ignored in the work of artists of Algerian origin. Their work is seen as relevant to Algerian, or Arab contexts, unless it is subsumed into a French art scene, their work is seldom interpreted to represent diasporic narratives. This phenomenon is not limited to France, or to artists of Algerian origin. Despite the presumed opening of the art world to different horizons, and the growing interest for non-Western narratives, interpretations of work by non-Western artists, or by diasporic artists, continue to feature envisioned differences between their work and that of artists of Western origin.

⁵⁴ In an interview with McGonagle, Sedira states: "Yes, I have been pigeonholed." Joseph McGonagle, 'Translating differences: an interview with Zineb Sedira', *Signs: New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture*, 31 (3) (Spring 2006), p.622.

⁵⁵ Tina Sotiriadi, 'An Interview with Zineb Sedira', Corherhouse Telling stories DVD, 2004, p.2.

4.5 'Global Art': an emerging critical practice or a world of enduring difference?

The art historian Hans Belting dates the inception of Global Art to 1989. This view is dependent on an economic or 'public' understanding of globalisation.⁵⁶ However, scholarship and institutional discourse on the 'global' art world is dependent on an ontological analysis of globalisation first and foremost. While contemporary art scholarship has attempted to define and redefine what global art conveys, few critics have written an economic or even socio-economic and institutional critique of the 'global' art world.⁵⁷ Two phenomena coincide to explain this paradigmatic slippage. On the one hand institutional critique is not renewed, Steyerl argues, so that the administrative and financial difficulties experienced by some non-Western artists, the contrasts in contexts of production, and the conservatism of European institutions of culture are ignored. On the other hand, European institutions of art have often exhibited the work of artists who are critical of the notion of globalisation.⁵⁸ This offers a semblance of critique within institutions of art, but does not replace institutional critique. Ethnic politics therefore endure. In other words, interpretations of non-Western and diasporic art are still based on established notions of non-Western countries as lands of exile, distinct from Western countries, as observed earlier in this chapter in relation to Attia, Abdessemed and Sedira's practice.

Belting writes that 'global' art rose like a phoenix from the ashes of modern art, opposed its hegemonic ambitions, and problematized the Eurocentric nature of art history.⁵⁹ The opening of Western institutions to non-Western artists is often perceived to be one of the defining aspects of a globalisation of the art world. It is believed that this was accompanied by the formation of new institutions in non-Western regions, and new international circuits. Indeed, there has been an exponential rise in the number of biennale or triennial across the globe. The curator Okwui Enwezor, who has been an important figure in the promotion of non-Western

⁵⁶ Indeed, Belting's use of 1989 as the dawn of the art world's globalisation, which is widely accepted, effectively suggests that in light of changes within the political world order, trade expanded across the globe changing the face of the contemporary art world. In Belting's definition the 'global' art world takes its lead from globalisation, understood to be an economic process first and foremost.

⁵⁷ Okwui Enwezor, Hans Belting, James Elkins, Nikolas Papastergiadis, Jean Fisher, Ursula Bieman, Gilane Tawadros, have all contributed to the scholarship on globalisation, and its effect on the art world.

⁵⁸ Artists like Renzo Martens, Ursula Biemann, Öyvind Fahlström.

⁵⁹ Hans Belting, 'Contemporary art as global art, a critical estimate', <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/media/file/476716148442.pdf>, p.2.

artists in Western institutions of art argued in an article published in *Diaspora, memory, place* in 2008, that the nineties saw the emergence of contemporary art from 'post-colonial sites of production', that would 'force the reconsideration of the contextual place of artistic activities.'⁶⁰ According to Enwezor, a new network now exists on a tangent from Western institutions and markets, so that transnational group exhibitions have become the alternative sites of production of artistic discourse where multiplicity is recognised.⁶¹

Arguably, little has effectively changed since critics like Fisher decried a continuing Eurocentrism in the art world, in the early 1990s. She stated "The West, in short, never ceases in its attempts to re-centre itself as the privileged subject of knowledge."⁶² The 'artistic discourse production' that Enwezor refers to, is still the remit of institutions that are based in the West. Major art journals online and in print, and publishers of volumes on contemporary art, are based at least partly in the West. Even journals like *Bidune* and *Art, Asia, Pacific*, publications with great insight into the production of art in non-Western regions, are published in English, and their headquarters are in New York. In contrast to Belting's evocation of a 'global' art world, it is still dependent on Eurocentric artistic discourse. While non-Western artists are exhibited in institutions in the West thanks to the work of curators such as Enwezor and Fisher, the Western art world has merely expanded into other cultural centres, as Bydler argues, we have witnessed one artistic language 'expanding' into other areas instead of a homogenous globalization across all centres.⁶³

The differences in contexts of production are important here. The flow of information, funds and peoples are partial in the art world. Western centres of economic or political power remain, as so do borders between nation-states and as diplomatic allegiances. These phenomena influence what art is produced and

⁶⁰ Okwui Enwezor, 'Place-Making or in the "Wrong Place", contemporary art and the postcolonial condition', in *Diaspora, memory, place*, Salah M.Hassan and Cheryl Finley eds. (Prestel verlag: Munich, London and New York, 2008), p.107.

To a great extent, the Association of Art Historians in the UK have overlooked contemporary discourse on the exhibition of non-western art. A sign of change is the fact that Enwezor was invited to the 2013 AAH annual conference as a keynote speaker. This also demonstrates Enwezor's prominence in the field of non-Western art.

⁶¹ Okwui Enwezor, 'Place-making or in the "Wrong Place", contemporary art and the postcolonial condition', in *Diaspora, memory, place*, Salah M.Hassan and Cheryl Finley eds. (London, Munich and New York Prestel verlag, 2008), p.114.

⁶² *Global visions, towards a new internationalism in the visual arts*, Jean Fisher ed. (London: Kala Press, 1994), p.XI.

⁶³ Charlotte Bydler, *The global art world inc.: on the globalization of contemporary art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004).

exhibited, and where it is produced and exhibited. Bydler argues that whilst globalization is defined by circulation across borders, nation-states are still omnipresent since artists and curators are dependent on citizenship, materials and national infrastructures. Furthermore, the flow of information, funds and travel is restricted between nation-states.⁶⁴ As Bydler writes:

If international flows of financial capital, telecommunications, and specialized labour were the entire story, then perhaps it could be said that globalization created placelessness and mobile cosmopolitan, and made the nation-state obsolete. But the mobility of human labour has its limits. National passports decide individual's possibilities of applying for state-funded international residencies, travel, and work, including so-called nomadic artists in international exhibitions. Artworks may appeal to a global audience, but for better or worse, the artist is stuck with a national identity that has also something to do with relations to the so-called global media.⁶⁵

Artistic value is dependent on a complex system that also ascribes commercial value to art and institutions of contemporary art remain cautious in their choices. Enwezor, for example, argues that acquisition and exhibition programs of national museums such as Tate Modern in London, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, do not extend much beyond the canon.⁶⁶ For Bydler, institutions cannot afford to be influenced by quickly changing trends as they must represent a continuity of display. By necessity, large institutions are conservative in their choices.⁶⁷ The sociologist Alain Quemin corroborates this hypothesis. He furthermore argues that aesthetic and commercial value are dependent on inter-influencing systems of the art world. Powerful art dealers 'galeries-leaders', and large collectors 'megalo-collectionneur' - terms that Quemin himself borrowed from the French sociologist Raymonde Moulin - head these two systems. Because of the inter-influence of powerful galleries and collectors, commercial and aesthetic values are thus normalised to bring more

⁶⁴ Indeed, during the exhibition *New Cartographies* in Manchester, where the work of Algerian artists and artists from the Algerian diaspora was shown, the Algerian contingent was not granted visas to travel and they were unable to be present; whilst the artists of the Algerian diaspora featured in the show were present. Artists from the diaspora risk becoming the representatives of their country of origin simply because they are the only ones that can travel to major international art events. This is a crucial point because it influences the way in which diasporic artists are exhibited in France or in other Western countries.

⁶⁵ Charlotte Bydler, *The global art world inc.: on the globalization of contemporary art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004), p.38.

⁶⁶ Okwui Enwezor, 'Place-Making or in the "Wrong Place", contemporary art and the postcolonial condition', in *Diaspora, memory, place*, Salah M.Hassan and Cheryl Finley eds. (Munich, London and New York: Prestel verlag, 2008), p.110.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Bydler, *The global art world inc.: on the globalization of contemporary art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004).

security to investments.⁶⁸

In 1967, Moulin wrote that collectors respond to economic value when buying art but are also influenced by 'le pouvoir spirituelle';⁶⁹ a 'divine power' formed of intellectuals and critics. Meanwhile, intellectuals and critics are financially dependent on institutions both private and public that employ them to grant authenticity and value to the art they exhibit.⁷⁰ By considering the art world according to an international labour market and a capitalist system, Bydler seems to confirm Moulin's hypothesis that art professionals are dependent financially and creatively on one another. For Bydler, radical change in institutional or critical practices is near impossible because of the financial ties that link art professionals together. While Steyerl's view of the art world professionals as strike workers, underpaid and exploited, reflects the complexity of the art world system, Bydler's analysis goes further in revealing the workings of this system.⁷¹ Bydler argues that although some actors in the art world are financially independent, most are dependent on the art world's economic system. Moreover, Bydler also contends that the art world is a highly influential labour market. Art professionals subscribe to similar classifications of artistic value because - for social as well as financial or professional reasons - they depend upon a defined community who share common habits and cultural values. She writes:

A community can be expected to have its own canon of artists and theoretical authorities, and its own views of artistic quality. Socialization in such an art world is equivalent to embracing (or at least understanding) its values.⁷²

Bydler describes the art world system as a community that is devoted to upholding practices and discourse, and relies on a common economy.

Bydler argues that the economic system, and international labour market of the art world, needs to be re-provisioned with ideas and objects. She writes: "As competition increases, the art world-system needs to expand, to find new 'goods' to

⁶⁸ Alain Quemin, *L'art contemporain international: entre les institutions et le marché (le rapport disparu)* (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, Art price, 2002), p.131.

⁶⁹ Raymonde Moulin, *Le marché de la peinture en France, 2nd Edition* (Les Editions de Minuit: Paris, 1967), p.262.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.187.

⁷¹ Hito Steyerl, 'Politics of art: contemporary art and the transition to post-democracy', *e-flux*, 21, December 2010, p.3.

⁷² Charlotte Bydler, *The global art world inc.: on the globalization of contemporary art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004), p.18.

bring home to display, analyse, and further re-circulation.”⁷³ Understood in this way, the exhibition of new artistic 'goods' serves to bolster the art world-system; not to question it. While the 'global' art world has promoted and exhibited artists from non-Western regions, and welcomed non-Western art professionals to a certain extent, they cannot effect neither a systemic change, nor a change of discourse. It is only through an institutional critique that considers socio-economic systems of labour and value, that this could be achieved.

The 'new goods' that enter the 'global' art-market are seldom considered for their aesthetic value. Szeman's analysis of globalisation in 'Imagining the future: Globalisation, Postmodernism and Criticism' in which he contrasts Globalisation to Postmodernism, is revealing. He writes that the notion of globalisation, like postmodernism, allies ontological and epistemological meaning. It is this same conception of globalisation that holds weight in art world discourse. However, questions of ontology and epistemology, how we are and think in a world marked by globalisation and migration, do not suffice to question Eurocentric value systems in the art world. Szeman observes that globalisation, in contrast to postmodernism, is not founded in a notion of the aesthetic. There is no 'global aesthetic'. The 'global' art world is neither the site of aesthetic, nor socio-economic and institutional critique.

In the absence of aesthetic or socio-economic and institutional questions, analyses of 'global' art are limited. Enwezor insists that postcolonial theory is paramount to analyses of the contemporary art world; whilst he warns against reductive and positivist views of cultural affirmation and identity.⁷⁴ Notions like hybrid cultures, diasporic or hyphenated identities that have emanated from postcolonial theory, have successfully brought about a change in the way that Western cultural studies scholars and institutions of art approach minority and dominant cultures and narratives. However, postcolonial methodology has also been used to ground reductive and positivist analyses of contemporary art practices driven by identity. Effectively, such 'postcolonial' analyses use as premise a body of key texts, such as the writing of Homi Bhabha, that have little to do with the socio-economic context of art production or the art world system.

⁷³ Charlotte Bydler, *The global art world inc.: on the globalization of contemporary art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004), p.35.

⁷⁴ Okwui Enwezor, 'Place-Making or in the "Wrong Place", contemporary art and the postcolonial condition', in *Diaspora, memory, place*, Salah M.Hassan and Cheryl Finley eds. (Munich, London and New York: Prestel verlag, 2008), p.121.

Rasheed Araeen in a scathing editorial for *Third Text's* 50th issue in 2000 argues that postcolonial cultural theory, effectively continues the very dominance of culture that it seeks to question. For example, Araeen refutes the presumed sense of exile and loss, that all postcolonial migrants are thought to experience.

I am concerned with those ideas which articulate the experiences of postcolonial mass migration, and which then prescribe and legitimate the art practice not only of those who are presumed to have undergone these experiences but anyone who has migrated to the West. These ideas are based on an assumption that every postcolonial migrant has suffered displacement, loss and is now exiled from his or her original culture or home.⁷⁵

What concerns Araeen, is that this presumed sense of exile, is being used to theorise the subject of a postcolonial 'Other' who is less able to adapt to Western living than his/her European counterpart.⁷⁶ Indeed, as I argued, Sedira and Attia's work is understood through the prism of exile or the desire to leave - or even of statelessness. Such interpretations of Sedira and Attia's work are influenced by questions of ontology and epistemology.

Art audiences and institutions overlook the systemic relation between Western and non-Western societies. Thus the notion of the non-Western artist as a critical witness to the failings of non-Western countries continues to hold currency. This view is rooted in the idea that non-Western countries are indeed places to exile oneself from, and to be critical of. Without aesthetic questions or a socio-economic critique of the art world system, the postcolonial artist is forever in a position of working against the colonial; there is in fact no way of escaping the colonial paradigm.

As the art critic Samuel Herzog states, while we define Western artists by their individuality, we consider non-Western artists for their cultural, social or political opinions. While the artists considered in this thesis are not of non-Western origin as such - they are in fact living and working in France - Herzog's observations are relevant to this study. Indeed, this dominant attitude noted by Herzog is commented upon by several of the artists discussed in this thesis. For example, during a conference in 2011, Sedira was questioned as to why she did not show more interest in geo-political issues in her work. When I asked her to comment on this question, she replied that it is the 'expectation' revealed in this question, that as an

⁷⁵ Rasheed Araeen, 'A new beginning', *Third Text*, 15 (50) (2000), 3-20, p.8.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

artist of Arab lineage she should make geo-political issues more apparent, that is problematic.⁷⁷ Herzog further writes that by striving to be global, by seeking to exhibit artists from all regions of the world in Western institutions, institutions of the art world in fact accentuate envisioned difference between Western and non-Western regions.⁷⁸ As I have shown, interpretations of the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira suggest complex situations of discontinuity, and continuity, between France and Algeria that are overlooked.

Having considered the wider context of global art discourse, I now turn to analyse the ways in which artists of Algerian origin are situated in the contemporary art world in France, in terms of the country's specific approach to the exhibition of non-Western art. Effectively, as I will observe, the approach to non-Western art influences the ways in which artists of Algerian origin are exhibited.

⁷⁷ Interview with Zineb Sedira, London, 18 January 2012.

⁷⁸ He writes: "Pour le dire encore accoutrement, alors que nous définissons les artistes occidentaux par leur individualité, nous définissons les autres par leur identité culturelle, social ou politique. Ainsi, tout en cherchant à être globaux, à réunir tout le monde sous le même toit de l'art contemporain, nous propulsons la consécration d'une différence insurmontable." "In other words, whilst we define Western artists by their individuality, we define the others by their cultural, social or political identity. Hence, by seeking to be global, to bring everyone together under the same roof of contemporary art, we move closer to concretising unsurmountable differences." Samuel Herzog, 'Art global: perception locale' in *Créations artistiques contemporaines en pays d'Islam: des arts en tensions*, Jocelyne Dakhliya ed. (Paris: Editions Kimé, 2009), p.570.

4.6 What statistical research may reveal of French institutional practices.

To test the premise of a 'global' art world in France, the research findings that follow focus on a selection of national institutions of contemporary art, and two contemporary art journals all based in Paris. Chapter one observed institutional discourse in exhibitions across France, I will now focus my analysis on Parisian institutions. Despite the decentralisation of the French art world system since the creation of the FRAC (Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain), national Parisian institutions remain a telling microcosm of the French art world. I aim to ascertain if there have indeed been significant changes in the art exhibited in French institutions of art, since the 'globalisation' of the art world.

While French art professionals claim that institutions of art show artists irrespective of nationality, critics and academics have demonstrated that nationality is still a defining factor in the art world system in France and abroad. Queminn writes: "Despite the formidable acceleration of trade, the art market remains anchored to geography, and controlled by a very limited number of countries."⁷⁹ Effectively, Bydler demonstrates that the diplomatic, financial and administrative policies of nation-states still influence the art world system globally. In Biennale and many art fairs, nationality is still considered. Nationality is thus still used as a defining factor in the art world system. Hence, I collated empirical research with regards to the nationality of artists exhibited in solo shows in France.⁸⁰

The institutional context with regards to non-Western artists influences the ways in which artists of Algerian origin are exhibited, I observe. It is therefore important to understand what is shown. Whilst the idea that contemporary art is global has become ubiquitous, empirical research in a French context suggests that there is a great difference between the artistic discourse formulated during conferences, biennales and publications across the Western world, and what is being exhibited in major Western institutions. Indeed, the following interpretation of statistical data corroborates what has been hypothesised in the previous section. It confirms Bydler's view that institutions of art are unable or reticent to put into practice the rhetoric of a globalisation of the art world. This phenomenon has an effect on reception of the artists of Algerian origin under study.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ This empirical research is included in the appendices.

In the following research, I collated data on exhibited artists by geography. I documented every solo exhibition by year and institution and researched the artist's 'nationality'. I defined artist's nationality according to their country of birth since my aim is to understand what institutions of art are exhibiting according to their own systems of classification. From this analysis I combined artists into six geographical regions rather than a multitude of nationalities in creating graphs, to show a clearer picture. For the sake of this study I have considered Algerian artists as African and Middle Eastern, because that is how they have usually been exhibited in France. Inevitably these seven regions are an imprecise assemblage of geographical regions that do not take into account the stark disparities that exist between contexts of art production in Australia and China for example, Iran and Israel, or South Africa and Senegal. Indeed, economic and cultural characteristics are not underlined, and thus serve to skew the results slightly.⁸¹ Notwithstanding these methodological problems, the data collected should be understood as an indication of general trends of the contemporary art world in France.

I collated information on several important Parisian institutions: the Centre Pompidou, the ARC (Animation Recherche Confrontation), and the Palais de Tokyo between 1989 and 2012; between 2002 and 2012 for Le Palais de Tokyo which opened in 2002. In order to ascertain what commercial galleries have been exhibiting, I referred to the journals *Art Press* and *Cimaise*. The reviews and listings section of *Cimaise* in particular is a good source to gauge what artists galleries in Paris were exhibiting. Nonetheless, the data collected is not extensive and is limited by institutional bias; by its editorial stance and the preferences of its mainly freelance staff. Additional data was sourced from *Art Press* from 2004 to 2007 to corroborate findings on galleries and artistic discourse.⁸²

Since 2002, the Palais de Tokyo was showing more artists from Asia and Central/South America than the other institutions we are considering.⁸³ Middle

⁸¹ Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, South and Central America. The reader should keep in mind that certain of the artists from 'Asia' are of Australian nationality, certain artists from the 'Middle East' are of Israeli nationality, two nations that have strong diplomatic connections with Western powers and institutions which thus facilitates the exhibition of art from these countries.

⁸² *Cimaise* was a leading journal of contemporary art, although erratic publication in recent years seems to confirm that it has struggled to shed its heritage of 'nouveaux réalisme'.

⁸³ Between 2004 and 2006 it put on show the work of nine Asian and Pacific artists and in the same period, six of Central and South American artists. See appendix x.

Eastern and African artists have remained a minority.⁸⁴ Since 2002, the number of solo shows of French artists of French origin has dramatically risen and the number of solo shows of artists from other countries of Western Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and South and Central America have decreased. Solo shows of American artists, however, have remained at a constant. In 2009, *Le Monde* commented upon the fact that the greater Palais de Tokyo would be a national centre for the promotion of French artists in mid-career.⁸⁵ In an earlier article in *Le Monde* in 2006, Henry Bellet acknowledged that whilst acquisitions of French artists by the FRAC represented half of its total, exhibitions of French artists were favoured with 57% average, with similar results for institutions such as the Centre Pompidou.⁸⁶ The Quemin report, which we have already discussed in chapter one, has meant that institutions like the Palais de Tokyo exhibit more French art at the expense of greater geographical diversity.⁸⁷

Under the umbrella of the ARC, four South and Central American artists were exhibited at the Musée d'Art Moderne between 1992 and 2006. Between 1989 and 2001, one artist from the Middle East only was exhibited at the ARC in 1992, one African artist in 1998 (Barthelemy Toguo). Since 2001, one artist from Central and South America (Gabriel Orozco), and one artist from Asia (Apichatpong Weerasethakul) were exhibited; none from Africa and the Middle East, or Eastern Europe. Nine French artists, sixteen Western European artists and nine North American artists were granted solo shows during this time. Hence, whilst more exhibitions were held between 1992 and 1997, it remains that as a trend, there is a decrease, rather than an increase in the number of solo shows of artists from the Middle East and Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia at the ARC between 1989 and 2012.

The Centre Pompidou, from 1989 until 1995, exhibited more West-European artists than French artists, a trend inverted after this date. Whilst the total number of exhibitions held at the Centre Pompidou dropped between 1989 and 2012, French

⁸⁴ No artists of African or Middle Eastern origin were shown between 2004-2010.

⁸⁵ Michel Guerrin, 'Un lieu pour les artistes français au Palais de Tokyo', *Le Monde*, 22 March, 2009, available online at le.monde.fr, accessed October 2011.

⁸⁶ Harry Bellet, 'Exposition créateurs en quête de visibilité', *Le Monde*, 11 March, 2006, available online at le.monde.fr, accessed October 2011.

⁸⁷ However, this is not officially recognised. Marc Olivier Wahler, replacing Jérôme Sans and Nicholas Bourriaud at the head of the institution comments that nationality holds no importance. Harry Bellet, 'Marc-Olivier Wahler, futur directeur « La nationalité d'un artiste n'a pas d'importance »', *Le Monde*, 18 October, 2005, available online at le.monde.fr, accessed October 2011.

and Western European artists represent the majority. Solo shows of American artists and creatives feature less often. Over this period four shows by Central and South American artists were held, between 2004 and 2012, but not one show of an African artist. Six artists from Asia, four from the Middle East, and eight artists from Eastern Europe are shown. Whilst there is an increase in Central and South American artists, the Centre Pompidou's support of non-Western artists remains at a constant low. However, the Pompidou has recently put into place a politics of acquisition and research that concentrates on the regions of North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. In a press pack entitled 'Mondialisation et Multiculturalisme' published in 2010 on their website, the Centre Pompidou outlines the comprehensive projected plan. "For the first time, The Centre Pompidou have committed to an ambitious politics of development of its collection; an opening to artistic scenes in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia."⁸⁸

Turning to the reviews of exhibitions featured in *Art Press* between 2004 and 2012 demonstrates that French, Western European and North American artists, continue to have more exposure than artists of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Central and South America. Data collected from the editions of the magazine *Cimaise* between 2004 and 2012 reveals a similar pattern. Hence, it is surprising that despite the emerging discourse on global art, and a supposed opening of artistic horizons to include peripheral regions, there are generally as many artists from non-Western regions in the early 1990's in *Cimaise* magazine as today in *Art Press*.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Le Centre Pompidou engage une politique ambitieuse et inédite de développement de ses collections et d'ouverture aux scènes artistiques d'Afrique du Nord, du Moyen-Orient et d'Asie du Sud." 'Centre pompidou, Afrique du nord, Moyen-orient, Asie du sud pdf available at www.centrepompidou.fr.

⁸⁹ Data on *Cimaise* reveals that Argentina, Japan, and Mexico are represented more frequently. If, as Bydler argues, the art market is a system of labour in which artists, researchers, critics and curators depend on a network of connections for information, for assistance in producing art, and for the exchange of artworks and their exhibition, then exchanges between Parisian practitioners and institutions and those of Japan and Mexico in the last century set the cultural and institutional precedence for the exhibition of contemporary art from these two countries. Clark, in his article on Chinese artists in France, corroborates this hypothesis on the importance of cultural precedence and social networks. By contrast, the absence of cultural and institutional links between France and Algeria until very recently has hampered the exchange of art between the two countries. John Clark, 'Chinese artists in France,' in Jean Fisher and Gerard Mosquera ed., *Over here: international perspectives on art and culture* (New York and London: MIT and New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), p.213.

4.7 Artists of Algerian origin and institutional discourse

The empirical research of institutions of art and art magazines in Paris discussed above confirms that the exhibition of non-Western artists in France is limited. In part, this is explained by the presence of national and diplomatic barriers. It is furthermore explained by the reluctance, or inability, of large cultural institutions to buy art from 'untested' artists. As Quemain has argued, this is because artistic and commercial value are inter-dependent.⁹⁰ Another explanation, as hypothesised by Bydler, is the conservative nature of the art world. Bydler demonstrates that the art world system is dependent on financial ties, pervasive social networks and codes of conduct. A further explanation in France is the enduring currency of 'exception culturelle'. The Quemain report led to institutions of contemporary art actively promoting French artists. Institutions like the Palais de Tokyo changed their program of exhibition and instituted for example the residency project *Pavillion* and smaller exhibitions that are limited in time to promote a greater number of early career artists, many of which are French. As a consequence, the globalisation of French institutions is limited; despite the ambitions of the Triennale to embrace a rhetoric of postcolonialism and globalisation in 2012, and the claims of the Palais de Tokyo director that nationality is irrelevant.⁹¹

Notwithstanding the imbalance between Western and non-Western artists in French institutions of art, discourse in the press and in institutions of culture suggests that the French art world has opened to globalisation. Nicholas Bourriaud's recent book *Radicant. Pour une esthétique de la globalisation* will no doubt have an influence on institutional discourse and accentuate the idea of a 'global' art world in France.⁹² *Art Press* in June 2011 published an article on the meaning of globalisation in the art world. While this article was critical, it serves nonetheless to raise the status of 'global' art.⁹³ *Art Press* asked several important art professionals for their opinion. While the critic Richard Storr stated that globalisation has no positive effects and only serves to confuse analyses, Bourriaud criticised the 'folklorisation' of the art world, stating that the 'tendency towards cultural essentialist must be

⁹⁰ Alain Quemain, *L'Art contemporain international: entre les institutions et le marché (le rapport disparu)* (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, Art price, 2002), p.131.

⁹¹ Harry Bellet, 'La Nationalité d'un artiste n'a pas d'importance', *Le Monde*, 18 October, 2005, available online at le.monde.fr, accessed October 2011.

⁹² Nicholas Bourriaud, *Radicant pour une esthétique de la globalisation* (Paris: Denoel, 2009)

⁹³ 'Qu'est-ce que la globalisation?', *Art Press*, 379, June 2011, 55-64.

fought, at all costs'. However, he embraced the 'globalisation' of the art world to a great extent, arguing for 'the free play of a productive creolization of singularities, beyond 'cultural identities' that are closed in on themselves and any kind of modernist nostalgia'; the 'altermodern' phenomenon that he argues for in 'Radicaire'.⁹⁴

The 'Alter-modern' position advocated by Bourriaud is visible today in France in group exhibitions like *Intense Proximité*. However, the fact that non-Western artists are still granted so few solo shows compared to artists from other regions, as observed in the previous section, suggests that the rhizomorphic artistic identity advocated by Bourriaud must still be subjected to institutional critique, to evade 'cultural essentialisation'.⁹⁵ The situation observed in French institutions may change. The 'Centre de Recherche et de Mondialisation' of the Centre Pompidou is a key project of the institution.⁹⁶ Grenier agrees that the research centre and the marked interest in non-Western artists of the Centre Pompidou today, will have a strong impact upon institutions of contemporary art in France. However, proportionally, there are in fact fewer solo exhibitions of non-Western artists today than there were in 1989; despite endeavours like Jouanno and Hanru's *Paris pour Escalier*, as early as 2000, and statements that France is the site of multinational exhibitions. Whether or not artists of non-Western origin are exhibited in more transnational group shows, it remains that there is a distinct imbalance between Western and non-Western.

The limited number of non-Western artists exhibited in France - and especially Algerian artists - means that artists of Algerian *origin* are sometimes exhibited as the representatives of Algeria, their country of origin and not of contexts of production or reception. We have seen this to be the case with exhibitions like *Ouvertures Algériennes – Créations vivantes, Le XXe siècle dans L'Art Algérien* [in 1.3], but also more subtly with the exhibitions *Traversées* and *La Route de la Soie* [in 1.9 and 1.10 respectively]. The number of Algerian artists that have been exhibited in France is especially limited (artists of Algeria, not of Algerian origin). During the civil war in the 1990s, France severed ties to a great extent with Algeria. The Algerian civil war was a contentious issue even in France, as I observe in the introduction to chapter one. In this context, Algerian artists were seldom exhibited

⁹⁴ Nicholas Bourriaud, 'Qu'est-ce que la globalisation?', *Art Press*, 379, June 2011, 55-64, p.57.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ The director of the centre for research, Catherine Grenier, has just submitted a re-hanging of the entire collection that places non-Western artists in a more central position in its galleries.

throughout the late 1990s.⁹⁷ There are still few Algerian artists exhibiting in France today. Artists of Algerian *origin* are thus presented as the representatives of their country of origin. The context of production of their work is thus effectively overlooked.

Institutions of contemporary art in France and abroad focus on questions of ontology and epistemology with regards to 'global' art. In ignoring socio-economic paradigms, that Bydler focuses on by contrast, institutions of art and the art professionals of the art world system overlook the enduring weight that nationality carries in the art world. The young scholar Emilie Goudal writes of a paradox in the art world between traditional systems of classification that are dependent on nationality, and the issues of globalisation that contemporary artists consider in their work. She states:

In the realm of fine art contemporary practices are clearly dependent on a system of classification - geographic, political and economic – that is very traditional. Thus, when one discovers an artist's work, one immediately asks oneself about the artist's origin or to which movement he/she belongs to. Nevertheless, the work of a number of young fine artists of Europe and Africa transcends the local to enter into more and more ambiguous questions of globalisation.⁹⁸

As Herzog states in the French publication *Créations artistiques contemporaines en pays d'Islam*, in seeking to be global, the art world has in fact worked to emphasise differences between non-Western, or diasporic artists, and French artists. The fact that artists of Algerian origin are perceived through the prism of enduring difference means that their work that refers to Algeria either directly or indirectly is rarely considered as a comment on French societies as well.

Attia and Abdessemed especially, have been made the representatives of a young French art scene in exhibitions such as *Notre Histoire* and *la Force de l'Art*. In the catalogue for the exhibition *Notre Histoire*, Bourriaud and Sans state that art is

⁹⁷ It was difficult for Algerian artists to travel to France to work, exhibit or study at this time. Indeed, the national airline Air France, suspended its flights to Algiers in 1994. The festival of Algerian culture *Djazzair: 2003* discussed in chapter one [in 1.3], marked a softening of relations between the two countries. It is symbolic that Air France resumed its flights to Algiers that same year.

⁹⁸ "Dans le domaine des arts plastiques les expressions les plus actuelles sont nettement conditionnées par un ensemble de classifications géographiques, politiques et économiques très traditionnelles. De ce fait, lorsque nous découvrons l'oeuvre d'un artiste, nous nous demandons immédiatement quelle est son origine ou à quel groupe in appartient. Toutefois, les oeuvres de nombreux jeunes artistes plasticiens d'Europe et d'Afrique remettent en question les limites des particularités locales pour pénétrer dans les terrains de plus en plus ambigus de la mondialisation." Emilie Goudal, 'Notion d'hybridité dans l'art contemporain Algérien: expressions des paradoxes de la mondialisation', *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, 15, (2011), 79-85, p.79.

the grammar of our world, and emphasised the fact that French art exhibited within was multicultural. The press release for the exhibition *La Force de l'Art* stated:

Without being exclusive of generations, practices or aesthetics, La Force de l'Art' honours artists of all horizons and origins and reminds us that artistic creation is first and foremost a case of passion and choice. Art in France is not a question of nationality but on the contrary the expression of multiple origins and cultures. It is time to recognise and to demonstrate the singularity of a country open to all influences and exchanges, where the initiatives and experiences of very different artists can truly blossom.⁹⁹

La Force de l'Art especially reiterated and accentuated the notion, already present in *Paris pour Escalpe*, that diasporic artists and artists of different origin contribute to the status of French art; a wish reflected in the title *La Force de l'Art*: the power of art. I stated in chapter one that artists of Algerian origin are more concerned with geo-political themes than French art has traditionally been. Thus, artists of Algerian origin are called upon to represent French art in France's bid to raise the status of French contemporary art in the international art market. Indeed, as Grenier has hypothesised, the rise of artists of Algerian origin is partly explained by the increased demand for young contemporary artists and for art with political content. However, the rise in the number of young artists of Algerian origin exhibited in French institutions has to be considered in light of the general rise in the number of young contemporary French artists exhibited in institutions like the Palais de Tokyo. The effort to boost the French art scene has contributed to the careers of artists of Algerian and French origin. While Abdessemed and Attia are shown in exhibitions like *Notre Histoire*, which do not proscribe envisioned differences in interpretations of their work, it is still considered to testify to political issues of ethnicity first and foremost, as I observe in relation to *Fridges* by Attia in chapter two.

It is a dubious paradox that artists of Algerian origin are exhibited as French in exhibitions that suggests that French society is acceptant of difference, at the same time as it promotes a national culture and art scene. Furthermore, in reviews of these exhibitions their work is interpreted as representing issues that are outside of French

⁹⁹ "Sans exclusive en matière de générations, de pratiques ou d'esthétiques, « La Force de l'art » rend hommage aux artistes de tous horizons et de toutes origines et rappelle que la création est avant tout affaire de passion et de choix. L'art en France n'est pas une question de nationalité mais bien au contraire l'expression de cultures et d'origines multiples. Il est temps de le reconnaître et de mettre en évidence la singularité d'un pays ouvert à toutes les influences et à tous les échanges, où des initiatives et des expériences portées par des artistes très différents peuvent pleinement s'épanouir." www.rmn.fr/Français/les-musees-et-leurs-expositions/autres-a-paris/expositions-149/la-force-de-l-art-grand-palais, (Accessed 25 May 2012).

culture. This is seemingly paralleled in German institutions of culture where young artists of Turkish origin are exhibited to suggest that Germany is a multicultural and global nation-state, as Steyerl argues; while their work was limited to ethnic stereotypes and issues of identity politics to justify repressive border controls and limit immigration. Steyerl writes: "Their work was strictly expected to deal with their supposedly own culture, and to present it in a culturally 'enriching' or at least pleasantly pitiful way."¹⁰⁰ She writes further:

This compromise [between German anti-immigration policies, and the country's ambition for global legitimacy] is made by displacing a political problem onto the field of culture. For this purpose, terms of post-colonial discourse like 'difference' and 'hybridity' are shifted and recontextualized in view of severe civil inequality in order to simulate a cosmopolitan society.¹⁰¹

Steyerl provides a more political view of the way that institutions of culture use artistic identity to suggest at once ethnic difference and multiculturalism, as Goudal also observes in relation to the practice of artists of Algerian origin exhibiting in France. Goudal writes:

At times defined as the incarnation of the emerging contemporary art scene of Algeria, but also of France, or even of the UK, Zineb Sedira, Kader Attia et Adel Abdessemed become in turn – sometimes unwittingly – the flag bearers of globalisation and the movement of artists from the south of the Mediterranean, or of the successful integration of migrant communities.¹⁰²

I have argued that the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira represent the discontinuity and continuity that exists in a global world, and especially between France and Algeria. Both Sedira and Attia make an explicit parallel between the two countries. Despite the fact that they have been referred to as stateless persons or exiles, neither Abdessemed or Sedira, nor Benyahia, Bouabdellah or Attia, perceive that they are caught between two cultures. Instead, migration, exile or return can be argued to have been a productive experience that has enabled the artists to re-envision private and cultural narratives through their work. However, not even in the

¹⁰⁰ Hito Steyerl, 'Gaps and potentials: the exhibition 'Heimat Kunst': migrant culture as an allegory of the global market', *New German Critique*, 92, (Spring, Summer 1994), 159-168, p.161.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.163.

¹⁰² "Définie tour à tour comme l'incarnation de la scène artistique contemporaine émergente algérienne, mais aussi française, ou même britannique, Zineb Sedira, Kader Attia et Adel Abdessemed se font – parfois bien malgré eux – les portes-drapeaux d'une identité tantôt signe de la mondialisation et de la circulation d'artistes originaires de la rive sud de la Méditerranée, tantôt le symbole d'une intégration réussie." Emilie Goudal, 'Notion d'hybridité dans l'art contemporain Algérien: expressions des paradoxes de la mondialisation', *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, 15, (2011), 79-85, p.79.

exhibition *'J'ai deux amours'* at the Cité de l'Immigration and curated by Jouanno and Hanru are diasporic narratives acknowledged. Indeed, in France the phenomenon by which institutions fail to recognise narratives that pertain to the non-Western *and* the Western, is exacerbated because cultural institutions are unwilling to recognise diasporic narratives. As I have argued in chapter two, the French administration is particularly sensitive to sectarianism, and diasporic narratives which make known the different cultural groups within the nation-state would seem to be redolent of sectarianism. Indeed, Stéphane Dufoix has argued that French academics and institutions have only belatedly made use of the term in France; to define any other community than traditional diasporas such as the Jewish diaspora.¹⁰³ Diasporic communities are invisible to the French administration, and diasporic culture is to a great extent subsumed in dominant narratives. This thesis has furthermore demonstrated that this phenomenon is mirrored in contemporary art discourse.

¹⁰³ Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

4.8 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, migration is a recurring theme of the work of Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira.¹⁰⁴ The themes of migration and globalisation are significant, furthermore, as they demonstrate a change in the practice of these artists away from questions of identity and towards the aesthetic. However, critics and institutions in France and abroad are seemingly unwilling to abandon previous prisms of identity to embrace the aesthetic and international themes of Abdessemed, Attia or Sedira's practices.

Abdessemed, in *Telle Mère tel Fils* (2008), *Brik* (2005), *Bourek* (2005) is seemingly inspired by the distance that separates the artist from his mother, and the links that are created through travel. This work re-territorialises complex notions of continuity and discontinuity of the global atlas through private memories of mother and son. The three artworks, furthermore, are emblematic of Abdessemed's looping practice and the importance of the creative act to his work. The act of creation, it hereby appears, enables the artist to re-envision a productive experience of exile. While Falguières argues that *Exit* (1996) heralds the no man's land of Abdessemed's politicised artistic practice, Araeen's notion that the 'exiled' artist locates himself as a critical individual, seems more relevant to the political critique that *Exit* suggests.

In contrast to Abdessemed, Attia has not known an exile from Algeria and yet with *Rochers Carrés*, critics have considered the artist to be the authentic witness of the thwarted migration of disempowered youth of Algeria because, it has been suggested, he is himself an exile. However, *Rochers Carrés* is not only concerned with the global discontinuity lived by the youth of Algeria, it creates a parallel between the built environments of Algiers and France's large cities. Furthermore, formal considerations can latterly be shown to hold great importance in Attia's work. Indeed, with *Untitled* (2008) and *Untitled* (2009) Attia abstracts the shapes of the 'Rochers Carrés' in a study of the senses and concepts suggested by the specific site of the bay of Algiers, to form a radical aesthetic rooted in formal and material research. Similarly, *Saphir* (2006) marks a definite shift in Sedira's practice from the documentary to the aesthetic. Dyer argues that *Saphir* is the site of a tension between the desire to leave and the will to return. Instead, I argue that departure and return are

¹⁰⁴ Benyahia, Kameli and Baghriché also deal with images and narratives of migration in their practice, whilst I have not been able to discuss their work in this chapter.

interwoven, just like the histories between Algeria and France are interwoven across the Mediterranean in Sedira's work. As I have previously stated, the experience of exile in Sedira's work should not be read as a 'stabbing' desire for return but as a productive experience of continuity as well as discontinuity.

The fact that artists of Algerian origin are still considered in relation to notions of exile and a critique of their country of origin, rather than recognising complex critiques of political systems of France and Algeria, as well as the aesthetic research in their recent work, is partly the consequence of a systemic failure of the 'global' art world. The 'global art world' has failed to question its own politics of location, and thus continues to promote a rhetoric of difference under the cover of signs of globalisation and artistic migration. Indeed, despite the 'global' rhetoric, artistic discourse remains insular and Eurocentric. Institutions of art are conservative in their choices of acquisition and exhibition because aesthetic and commercial value influences institutions of art, and the art world is dependent on common language, habits and economy.

Empirical research on national Parisian institutions of contemporary art and the French art magazines *Art Press* and *Cimaise* confirms the absence of non-Western artists in large institutions. In fact, there appears to be a general trend of an increase of French artists and a decrease of non-Western artists shown. Artists of Algerian origin are therefore called upon to represent their countries of origin in exhibitions like *Africa Remix* in 2005. As non-Western art is a new commodity on the art market, in its bid to raise the status of French art, French institutions have adopted the rhetoric of 'global' art. Thus, while diasporic artists are exhibited within exhibitions of French art, defined as a multicultural and national art scene, their work is nonetheless interpreted as different from artists of French origin. Artists of Algerian origin continue to be called upon to testify to an elsewhere that is not related to French contemporary society. Instead, it has been suggested that the continuity and discontinuity that Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira represent between France and Algeria effects a politics of the global world, and reinstates critical diasporic narratives in dominant French culture through complex aesthetic research.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis set out to examine the work of a select number of artists of Algerian origin who rose to prominence in the period between 1989 and 2012, and to critically analyse the reception of their work in France.

The emergence of Zineb Sedira, Kader Attia and Adel Abdessemed seemed to suggest that there was a rapid increase, during that period, in the number of artists of Algerian origin exhibiting in French institutions. The empirical research that accompanies this thesis, presented in several tables in its entirety and collated using artist biographies as well as exhibition reviews over the period 1989-2012, documents the exhibitions in France and abroad that featured one or more of the artists under study by year, and by artist. Maps included in chapter one interpret the information found in these tables and confirm my hypothesis that there was an exponential increase in the number of exhibitions of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art between 1989 and 2012.¹

Meanwhile, examining the reception of artists of Algerian origin in France in chapter one and four, this thesis has demonstrated that the emergence of artists of Algerian origin should not obscure the fact that, as France attempted to promote national cultural production and dialogue with the international art world, the reception of these artists' work continues to be influenced by cultural and national identity while diasporic identities that intersect or link France and Algeria are obscured. The exhibition of artists of Algerian origin serves a political agenda of multiculturalism in the face of enduring xenophobia and problems of adapting multicultural policies to the French political system.

By investigating the reception of a selection of artists of Algerian origin works' this thesis has demonstrated firstly, that institutions of art in France between 1989 and 2012 adopted policies to actively preserve and promote French culture, indirectly contributing to the rise of artists of Algerian origin, yet causing their work to be interpreted chiefly for its cultural rather than its artistic value.

Since the Quemin report in 2001 a 'French' art scene has been actively promoted to protect artistic production in France from the decline that the Quemin

¹ Artists of Algerian origin achieved prominence from 2000, the year of *Paris pour Escal*. Before this there was no large exhibition that featured artists of Algerian origin in France.

report observed. Empirical research in chapter four clearly testified to the sharp rise in the number of young French artists exhibited in national and Parisian institutions like the Palais de Tokyo as a result. It thus appears that the emergence of young artists of Algerian origin is linked to the renewed status of contemporary art in France, and the official support it has received since 2001. Effectively, the work of Attia and Abdessemed were included in the French art scene of the exhibitions *Notre Histoire* and *La Force de l'Art* in 2006 which mirrored governmental policies to protect French art. Complex meaning in the work exhibited was therefore ignored in the absence of any systemic critique and the exhibitions answered instead to monolithic narratives of French art.

Furthermore, the Quemin report encouraged French institutions to work more closely with institutions of art internationally in order to compete in an increasingly global art market. As Catherine Grenier stated in interview the work of artists of Algerian origin is generally more political than that of artists of French origin and their work was thus promoted to suggest that France is part of the 'global' art world. The emergence of these artists is also due to related trends of the 'global' art world system such as the thirst for 'new goods'. The exhibition *Paris pour Escal* already testified to the wish to open the French art scene to diasporic practices. Yet, politicised comments on the systems of art and the greater world-order from the curators and the artists were then coerced by official rhetoric of 'French' art. Paradoxically, it thus appeared that the espousal of a rhetoric of the international art world meant that the work of artists of Algerian origin was interpreted as the representation of cultural difference even within exhibitions like *Paris pour Escal*.

Few academic texts exist on the subject of artists of Algerian origin. Findings on the reception of the artists in this study and the ways in which their works relate to institutional discourse in France were grounded in interviews with two art professionals (Grenier and Renard) and the study of catalogues and of reviews. I researched exhibition catalogues, reviews and articles in the French national and *Art Press* and analysed the discourse formulated therein. Furthermore, a study of national newspapers, and several key texts on the cultural politics in France informed my analysis of French institutions of art between 1989-2012.

Overall, I have found that no single pattern exists in the discourse of institutions of art with regards to the exhibition of contemporary artists of Algerian origin in France over this period. Institutional discourse was influenced by curatorial

decisions, cultural policies of national and cultural heritage, and international artistic trends. Curatorial ambitions were more often than not usurped by dominant institutional discourse of France as a cultural centre to be actively preserved and promoted so that interpretations of their work oscillated between the poles of cultural difference and integration into French culture, whilst the practical, aesthetic or formal aspects of their work were seldom brought to the fore because their work was predominantly considered for the culture it was thought to represent.² To invert this phenomenon historical, cultural and institutional contexts need to be acknowledged in order to then explore aesthetics as well as contexts of production.

Secondly, by investigating the reception of works by a select number of artists of Algerian origin this thesis has demonstrated that these artists are still considered in terms of identity, nationality and collective memories, while enduring republican values and ideas of cultural exception problematize the presence of minority voices within dominant French culture and disallow critical diasporic experiences represented in the work of artists of Algerian origin from being brought to the fore in French institutions of art.

In order to investigate existing dominant narratives and to propose alternative interpretations I have employed art historical and memory studies methodologies. To bring findings to the fore, I structured the thesis thematically around four sites of investigation at the intersection of themes in the work of artists under study, and collective memories that shape the reception of their work. These sites of investigation were the urban, the Arab woman and home, and the 'global' world.

Through an analysis of the work of Benyahia, Bouabdellah and Sedira in terms of its institutional and historical context in chapter three, I identified psychological spaces and artistic acts which re-territorialise private memories of self and community to question representations of the Arab woman and effect a politicised and critical diasporic identity. For example, the video *Dansons* by Bouabdellah playfully questions the symbols of the French nation-state the Tricolore and the Marseillaise by juxtaposing them with the belly dance, which in her video becomes a symbol of Algerian culture and community. *Dansons* questions the permanence of collective memory of the French nation-state which disallows

² By contrast, the exhibitions *Prosismic* in 2004, *Traces du Sacré* at the Centre Pompidou in 2008 and *l'Argent* at Le Plateau also in 2008 uncovered complex meanings in the work of Abdessemed.

minority cultures and diasporic identities.

Effectively, the idea of a French national culture is diametrically opposite to the multicultural society. A study of exhibition catalogues and press releases, as well as exhibition reviews in national and local press, in French art journals and magazines, evidenced the absence of diasporic narratives - as attachment and detachment to dominant cultures as Fortier has defined it - in art institutional discourse in France where artists of Algerian origin are concerned.³ Indeed, between 1989 and 2012 critics neglected the fact that artists of Algerian origin have represented 'a part of ourselves'.⁴

A detailed analysis of historical and sociological conjectures on the subject of immigrant populations in France in chapter two suggests that the failure to acknowledge diasporic narratives in French institutions of art is related to commonly held perceptions of populations of Algerian origin as other, and as ill-integrated into French culture. Chapter two explored how ethnic myths shape public opinion on the 'banlieue'. Societal issues in the 'banlieue' are supposed to be the consequence of a crisis of multiculturalism, while socio-economic problems and class conflict which concern all communities, dominant and minority, are often ignored. By contrast, this thesis proposed that Abdessemed and Attia's work that refers to violence and the 'banlieue' questions the political systems that govern French society as a whole. An analysis of a selection of artworks by Abdessemed, Attia and Sedira in chapter four brought to the fore the discontinuities and continuities within the global world-order, and between Algeria and France, represented in their work. Yet, reception of their work shows that the more complex meaning of inter-relations between France and Algeria was supplanted by the notion of the artist as an exile and victim.

While the inclusion of diasporic narratives in institutions of art is exacerbated in France, chapter four argued that this phenomenon is also rooted in a wider discourse of the 'global' art world. Indeed, a study of the 'global' art world revealed that, like other postcolonial artists, artists of Algerian origin cannot escape the postcolonial paradigm of the non-Western or diasporic artist as 'other' because of a

³ With the exception of the exhibition *Voyages d'Artistes* in 2003, reviews of exhibitions such as *Ouvertures Algériennes* in 2003, *Traversées* in 2008 or *J'ai deux amours* in 2011, ignored the fact that artists of Algerian origin question French socio-political systems of France, as well as Algerian politics and society.

⁴ Pascale Amel, 'Traversées: artistes contemporains arabes entretiens entre Pascal Amel et Brahim Alaoui', *Art Absolument* (September 2008), 26, 10-23.

lack of institutional critique and questions of aesthetic.

By investigating the reception of a selection of work by artists of Algerian origin works this thesis has demonstrated, thirdly, that their emergence is influenced by institutional discourse that promotes the idea of a multicultural France in order to justify protecting French culture.

The central hypothesis of this thesis was that the identity of artists of Algerian origin is used to promote political agendas. Indeed, based on an analysis of political and institutional discourse of art in France, this thesis corroborates the argument of Hito Steyerl that artists of diasporic origin – here Algeria - are exhibited to sustain the impression that governments prioritise multiculturalism in the face of continuing xenophobia and tough immigration laws. This phenomenon is the conjuncture of multiculturalist policies advocated by the UN and global economy pressures to open to different communities and cultures on the one hand, and on the other hand tightened immigration laws and increased policing of Muslim groups and individuals - that in France began with the Algerian civil war but today happens on a larger scale still since the terrorist attacks of 9-11.

The press release and exhibition catalogue for *Notre Histoire* claimed that art is the grammar of the world, and emphasised that France is a country of multiculturalism. However, this thesis questions this statement. Empirical research documenting the artists exhibited in a selection of national and Parisian institutions of contemporary art by institution, year, and nationality of artist in chapter four, shows that French institutions of art have not fully opened to artists of non-Western origin. This corroborated the analysis, influenced by the writing of Charlotte Bydler, Alain Quemin and Raymonde Moulin, of the art world as a conservative system dependent on artistic and commercial value and upon a cohesive system of labour.

In the absence of Algerian artists especially, artists of Algerian origin are made the representatives of their country of origin.⁵ Effectively, the space of difference, which Tawadros observes in the catalogue of *Paris pour Escal*, endures. The example of *Prosismic* shows that it is only in recognising the politics of location occupied by each artist, and by situating analyses in institutional critique and aesthetic analyses that the specificities of the work of the artists under study can be

⁵ The exhibitions organised in conjunction with *Djazzair 2003*, observed in chapter one, are emblematic of this phenomenon, with the exception of *Voyages d'Artistes*.

brought to the fore. Hence this thesis has also sought to emphasis contexts of production and aesthetic research in the work of Abdessemed, Attia, Baghriche, Benyahia, Bouabdellah, Kameli and Sedira.

The aim of this thesis was not to create a grouping or movement of artists, but to investigate the ways in which the works of a selection of artists were received in France and to submit a selection of their works to a detailed art historical analysis. Chapter three testified to the representations of Algerian identities that defined the early careers of the artists under study. Chapter four investigated the shift that occurred in their practice towards wider political and aesthetic concerns. Beyond these two common artistic trajectories, this thesis substantiates the fact that their aesthetic and formal concerns differ greatly. Guided by the themes that occur in their work this thesis has sought to foreground the juncture of collective narratives that impact upon the reception of their work and, from this juncture, open their work to different interpretations by considering aesthetic, formal, political and psychological meaning in their work.

Drawing on Isobel Armstrong's *The radical aesthetic* and the notion of the 'rhizome' in Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille plateaux*, this thesis proposed alternative readings of the representation of the urban in the work of Abdessemed and Attia in chapter two, and reveals how their works effect political meaning through aesthetic research. Using Armstrong's theory of the pivotal/aesthetic object I have argued that Attia uses play to intercede in cultural memory through cognitive shifts in the mind's eye of the viewing public. Attia's city in *Fridges* does not only embody collective memories of oppression, it allows for a radical aesthetic to be formed around the location of the 'banlieue', and by extension for differing and idiosyncratic meaning to come to the fore. I have argued that *Practice Zero Tolerance* by Abdessemed refers to a mode of artistic process that bring to the fore a complex critique of political systems, enacted by the artist but inciting a reaction in the viewer. His work engages with a dense network of cultural references to unveil systems of quotidian violence that are otherwise not articulated. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome', this thesis builds on Lebovici and Falguières' critique of his practice as looping or circular to bring to the fore the dense 'rhizomatic' network of cultural references and systemic issues represented in Abdessemed's practice. Yet, this thesis also shows how mediatic objects become aesthetic objects in Abdessemed's work

through an emphasis on materials and artistic processes.

Through the analysis of a selection of Bouabdellah and Sedira's early work, and inspired by the theories of Betterton and Lloyd, this thesis testified to representations of the self in which the self is made of the histories of others, enacted by the two artists through the act of making as a discovery, and the body as absent/present or attached/detached from cultural narratives.⁶ I have also demonstrated that *La Maison de ma Mère* (Algérie) by Sedira and *A la lumière des matins* (Albert Camus) by Benyahia operate as transitional frames for private and public narratives of the home that are de-territorialised and re-territorialised through the experience of migration and return. I have sought to testify to the fact that Benyahia engages with the relation between art and craft and layers narratives and female traditions to configure psychological spaces in which to consider diasporic experiences. I have also argued that the diasporic identities re-presented by Benyahia with *Le Polygone Etoilé*, and Kameli with *Aïcha*, enlist political and critical readings linked to the political situation in Algeria in the 1990s.⁷

I have shown how the video *Saphir* marked an aesthetic turn in Sedira's artistic practice influenced by her return to the landscapes of Algeria and the funds and equipment available to her by the Video Umbrella commission. *Rochers Carrés* by Attia refers to geo-political issues and yet testifies to aesthetic research in the artist's later practice. Indeed, I demonstrated in chapter four that *Untitled (concrete blocks)* mirrors the forms of the concrete blocks of the rochers carrés in an abstracted study of sense, concept and material. This corroborates the hypothesis that political meaning in Attia's work is driven forward by aesthetic research.

The fact that Assan Smati and Neil Beloufa have seemingly circumnavigated interpretations of their work based on their identity seems to indicate that future generations of artists of Algerian origin will not be subject to the cultural tropism that artists like Abdessemed or Sedira still encounter. Nevertheless, the recently formed centre of research at the Centre Pompidou 'Le Centre de Recherche et Mondialisation' will likely bring themes of identity and cultural studies to the fore in

⁶ With *Ni ni ni* (2007), Bouabdellah playfully reclaims authorship of the self by exploring cultural narratives of domesticity and community that exist within diasporic, French and Algerian communities. In *Silent Sight* (2000) Sedira orchestrates a meeting of cultures in which the artist attaches and detaches herself from different narratives and communities.

⁷ Benyahia's installation *Le polygone étoilé* (Kateb Yacine) (2003) effects a radical aesthetic that opposes the civil war in Algeria with a realm of serenity and utopia.

France, so that identity politics may well experience a 'resurgence' in France where it has little history.⁸ This thesis attempts to pre-empt analyses of the work of artists of Algerian origin as a movement predicated by identity politics.

Attached to this thesis are appendices that include transcripts of interviews and data that provide a basis for further research. A key area identified is the need of further research into the French art world system building upon this research and that of Clarke who focuses on Chinese artists exhibiting in France. Equally, further empirical research employing visual and art historical methodologies is required on modern Algerian artists and the reception of their work in institutions of art in France between 1954 and 1989, at a time when, as Grenier stated in interview, the reception of modern and contemporary art is changing in France in part due to the re-writing of the country's recent history.⁹

Meanwhile, there are few art historical analyses of the work of the artists of Algerian origin under study and this thesis thus contributes to a more detailed understanding of their work. Furthermore, this thesis is the first analysis of their works' reception in France at the moment when several of these artists are rising to prominence in France and internationally. In this way, the contribution of this thesis to the field of art history is in proposing a critical art history of the emergence of artists of Algerian origin in French institutions of art. This thesis demonstrates the relevance of the aesthetic in analyses of contemporary art, in which the aesthetic is often dismissed in light of greater emphasis on artistic concepts and on political content, and the relevance of maps and other forms of data visualisation to construct a clearer picture of institutional contexts. This thesis contributes furthermore to scholarship in the field of French Studies. While a number of French Studies scholars have written about the artists under study, these analyses neglect to situate artist's work in terms of their artistic practices, aesthetic concerns or the socio-

⁸ Interview with Catherine Grenier, Paris, 3 October 2012.

⁹ Interview with Catherine Grenier, Paris, 3 October 2012. The research I undertook on modern Algerian artists and the reception of their work in institutions of art in France between 1954 and 1989, not included in this thesis, as the post second world war era lies outside of the focus of the thesis, contributes to recent research by Daniel J. Sherman in *French primitivism and the ends of empire 1945-1975* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011) and to the research of Anissa Bouayed, Malika Dorbani and Kristin Ross. Malika Dorbani, 'La guerre d'Algérie et les arts plastiques', in *La guerre d'Algérie 1954-2004 la fin de l'amnésie*, Mohamed Harbi and Benjamin Stora ed. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004); Anissa Bouayed, *L'Art et l'algérie insurgée, les traces de l'épreuve 1954-1962* (Enag éditions: Alger, 2005); Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies: decolonization and the reordering of French culture* (New York and Cambridge: The MIT press, 1996).

economic contexts that are specific to the reception and production of art objects. By employing art historical and cultural memory methods, this thesis has sought to analyse French socio-cultural conjunctures while also considering the artworks under study as artistic objects. In other words, this thesis has sought to consider the specificities of the works of selected artists of Algerian origin while analysing their exhibition in French institutions of Art between 1989 and 2012.

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Appendix i:

A hand-drawn map of the Paris region, specifically the northern and eastern parts. The map shows various districts and landmarks. Labels include:

- Sarcelles
- Garges les Gosses
- La Courneuve
- Clichy sous Bois
- Le Plateau
- Le Goutte d'Or
- Le Centre Pompidou
- Le Palais de Tokyo
- Kanel
- Mennoar
- l'IMA
- Le Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration
- Genevilliers

A blue line representing a river or canal runs through the center of the map, and several black dots mark specific locations. The map is drawn with simple black lines on a white background.

Appendix ii:
Interview with Kader Attia, Berlin, 25.01.11

Je voulais connaître votre opinion sur l'aspect corporel ou somatique d'une oeuvre. Qu'est-ce que vous entendez par somatique ? Pourquoi somatique? En Français somatique, ça veut dire que le corps réagit négativement, c'est pathologique.

Ce que je veux dire c'est qu'il y a une réaction du public qui est peut-être inconsciente mais qui n'est pas négative. Par exemple avec *Fridges*, qu'il y ait une réaction forte liée aux souvenirs. En même temps, toute installation implique physiquement le spectateur. Je tiens à impliquer le spectateur dans l'espace. Au même moment il y a différentes échelles, une grande ville et des réfrigérateurs, une grande ville et une oeuvre d'art.

Et pourquoi dans ce jeu d'échelles, avoir choisi de représenter les gens si grands? En fait, c'est important qu'au même moment, ils se sentent très grands mais ils savent que c'est faux. C'est une présentation ironique de leur puissance. J'ai un certain regard critique sur ce que j'appelle l'échec du modernisme. On a inventé un logement accessible à tous, bon marché. Ça a commencé dans les années 30 en France avec les immeubles du Front Populaire, ces immeubles en briques rouges. L'échec du modernisme c'est le logement social.

L'esthétique de *Kasbah* renvoie aux bidonvilles d'Amérique latine ou d'Afrique noire, pourtant, *Kasbah* traite de la Casbah d'Alger ? Et pourquoi inviter le visiteur à être sur les toits ? Je vis la moitié de l'année en Algérie et parle en fait de mon histoire et des liens entre la culture urbaine française et la globalisation de l'architecture. La Casbah a été conçue par Barberousse. Il a conçu une ville pour cacher son armée. Alger c'était une ville de pirates. La Casbah a toujours été une ville à part, un système à part. La Casbah a été conçue sur une colline et elle rejoint les hauteurs et la mer. Une ville toute en terrasses, la journée c'était plein de monde. Les toits de la Casbah étaient le monde des femmes. Le lieu des amants, des rencontres. Maintenant c'est aussi là où les jeunes vont fumer des joints, boire de la bière. J'aime bien cette idée de partir sur les toits. Je suis un peu un chat de gouttière.

J'ai entendu par Zineb d'un centre d'art à Alger. On a effectivement un projet : Art in Algiers. La première expo serait sur le thème du Maghreb, l'idée au départ était de n'inviter que des artistes maghrébins mais il nous faut ouvrir l'Algérie. Le monde d'aujourd'hui est en train de casser les ghettos. L'idée est donc d'inviter des artistes étrangers à venir à Alger. Ce qui se passe en ce moment au Maghreb est très important.

Je trouve ça tellement dommage que ce soit sans cesse les artistes algériens qui vont à l'étranger, il faut que l'on puisse inverser ce mouvement. Tout à fait. C'est tellement important. On est tranquille à Berlin, l'on ne se rend pas compte à quel point ce pays depuis l'indépendance a été fermé.

Maintenant que vous habitez à droite et à gauche, êtes vous toujours conscient de frontières ? En fait je travaille beaucoup sur l'idée d'une continuité. D'une continuité culturelle. Pour moi le fait de traverser des frontières entre pays, de passer de l'art contemporain à la danse contemporaine, à l'histoire, c'est essayer de trouver les liens. Je pense que tout mon travail a à voir avec le fait de creuser pour trouver les connexions cachées.

Pouvez-vous m'en dire plus au sujet de votre vidéo pour l'expo à Grasse. Je trouve ça tellement beau cette idée de frontière qui s'envole. La ville de Grasse pendant très longtemps a été une ville nazie, puis après la guerre elle est devenue une ville très à gauche. Cela m'intéresse de savoir comment des villes deviennent aussi extrémistes, comment elles gèrent leurs passés. Aujourd'hui je trouve que c'est surtout une ville très conservatrice, et même raciste. Il n'y a pas de frontière entre le quartier immigré et le reste de la ville, mais on ne trouverait pas un immigré dans un quartier bourgeois. J'ai décidé de tracer sur la place une grande ligne de couscous sur le sol. J'aime bien l'idée que les règles de l'homme n'affectent pas la nature, qui fonctionne par rapport à d'autres critères. La nature, elle se fiche des limites. Je pense que cette œuvre, d'une manière poétique, montre comment la nature nous donne une leçon. Les frontières sont une invention de l'homme. De délimiter, de tracer une frontière, de donner un passeport.

Ce que vous me dites me fait penser à une oeuvre dans le Jardin des Tuileries lors de la flac dans un des bassins, il y avait des cymbales. Il y avait un type dans une toute petite camionnette, un officier du parc qui faisait le tour du bassin sans arrêt car dès qu'il se trouvait d'un côté, de l'autre, quelqu'un jetait une pierre. C'était tellement naturel de vouloir jeter une pierre afin de faire résonner les cymbales. Certains adultes même qui voyaient ce qui se tramait ne pouvaient s'en empêcher. Le jeu en valait la chandelle. Je lui ai demandé pourquoi il houspillait les gens, il me répondit que c'était interdit. C'était stupide et loquace à la fois. C'était vraiment une oeuvre où les gens sortaient d'eux-mêmes et enfreignaient cette frontière, sociale cette fois-ci. C'est incroyable cette histoire. Je suis très content qu'ils réagissent comme ça les gens. Dès qu'il y a du 'bing bang bong' c'est magique. Cette pièce, elle ne vit pas sans. Finalement, on peut tout essayer d'inventer en art... L'art du XXI^e siècle c'est l'art de la théorie, de l'invention, du statement, mais, la finalité en art comme en architecture c'est qu'il dépend du regardeur. En fait le regardeur c'est l'histoire de l'art.

Vous avez tenu un bar à Paris. Ça me frappe comme une forme très développée de cette question d'impliquer un public. Moi j'aime bien l'idée d'agora, de se retrouver au même endroit. Le bar c'était un lieu où il y avait aussi des expositions, des concerts, des représentations autour de la poésie.

Quelle importance accordes-tu au lieu d'exposition ? Au Lieu Unique tu intervies sur plusieurs supports, ou plusieurs 'lieux'. Pour la résidence du Lieu Unique (Nantes) j'ai investi tout l'espace par mes moucharabiehs car l'architecture du lieu m'intéressait. Je suis aussi intervenu dans un lieu public avec *Les Trois Sirènes*, *Les Trois Sirènes* faisant référence au thème de l'esclavage dans l'histoire de la ville de Nantes. De plus, le catalogue du Lieu Unique, comme beaucoup de mes catalogues, fait partie intégrante de mon travail car j'y mets aussi ma touche. J'interviens dans ce catalogue en superposant aux moucharabiehs, une trame, un tissage en mosaïque, d'images personnelles qui proviennent d'albums familiaux. L'intime se fond dans le privé, ou vice versa, dans cette page même qui devient une pièce.

Dans ce catalogue, le départ, la sirène, le bateau, symbolisent une séparation mais démontrent aussi la présence de liens qui perdurent. En effet, ces images sont disposées comme des fenêtres sur la trame des Moucharabiehs et forment une sorte de dyptique avec les images du bateau. A côté de ce fameux paquebot et de ce souvenir un peu sombre dans l'histoire de Nantes, je mets des photos intimes qui traitent de mon enfance. Je montre ma tante ; cette tante c'était une conteuse et quand elle venait passer les trois mois d'hiver à Constantine, elle nous transmettait des contes, tous les soirs blottis contre elle, elle nous racontait.

Avec les Moucharabiehs, est-ce un espace féminin que tu crées, ou est-ce un espace qui fait référence, plus spécifiquement à ta mère ou aux femmes de ton enfance ? Alors, tout est lié. Donc, dans *Constantine de mon enfance* il y a le portrait de ma mère. Tu sais, c'est le premier portrait que je mets en 92 dans une installation. Ce portrait de ma mère est devenu un hommage, c'est devenu un peu le symbole de la femme à travers ma mère. De plus, depuis les années 90, avec la violence qui a commencé à s'installer à Alger c'est devenu un moyen de montrer un visage qui était jusque là plus ou moins abstrait. J'ai fait rentrer la femme dans mes espaces de façon plus directe, avant, avec les moucharabiehs, l'espace était habité d'ombres par superpositions. Dans mon enfance c'était à travers ces grilles que l'on entendait leurs voix mais on ne les voyait pas. On ne pouvait voir que des ombres, elles en étaient transformées. Je pense que c'était pour moi un moyen de résistance, je voulais la présence de la femme.

Tu me parlais tout à l'heure de résistance. Quand je suis partie, les expositions et les musées à ce moment-là ont fermé, ainsi que les instituts français. L'art était complètement banni, les gens avaient peur. Je sentais cette menace sur tout, les arts, les artistes, particulièrement en tant que femme. Pour moi c'était un moyen vraiment de résister et continuer de travailler au travers de mes installations tout en faisant habiter des espaces par des femmes. C'est une sorte d'hommage à toutes ces femmes qui résistaient dans Alger et à travers toute l'Algérie pendant cette décennie. Montrer ces portraits c'était un peu comme un acte puisqu'à ce moment les femmes étaient en première ligne. J'ai habité l'espace, sorti ces femmes qui étaient cachées, fait un passage de l'espace privé dans l'espace qui est ouvert au regard, finalement.

Ces installations font-elles aussi référence aux femmes qui résistaient pendant la guerre d'Algérie? Effectivement, les femmes étaient très présentes pendant la guerre d'Algérie. D'ailleurs, il y en a encore un grand nombre qui sont vivantes. Ces femmes de la Casbah avec leurs voiles blancs à Alger et noirs à Constantine, elles pouvaient être utiles en faisant passer des médicaments, des grenades. Elles étaient énormément utiles et je ne parle même pas de celles qui sont carrément allées au maquis. Elles étaient l'égale des hommes avec les hommes qui luttèrent pour le même combat. A l'indépendance la situation a changé et il y a eu une régression finalement dans le rapport avec les femmes. Je me disais, une génération après l'indépendance, il aurait fallu peut-être ne pas se laisser... les choses se sont plus ou moins tues. Dans les années 90, ou même aujourd'hui, c'est une autre manière de voir les choses. Donc au niveau de mes portraits c'est un peu dans ce sens-là, si tu veux, une façon de les rendre plus visibles qu'elles ne le sont.

Peux-tu m'en dire plus au sujet de l'abstraction de ton travail? Toi tu as vu la gravure. Aux Beaux-Arts en Algérie, quand j'ai commencé à peindre, il y avait dans ma peinture une sorte d'abstraction. Les signes géométriques ont été un fil conducteur. En épurant de plus en plus, à travers la gravure, et cette multitude de signes qui se répétaient, je m'arrête sur un motif qui commence à occuper tout l'espace. Ce motif choisi par rapport à son identification, puisqu'il est identifié dans le

répertoire par le prénom d'une femme : Fatima. Ce motif occupe tout l'espace à travers ce prénom de la femme Fatima, dans lequel habitent, effectivement, tous ces portraits de ces femmes que j'interroge par le chant (puisque dans mes oeuvres sonores tu as des chants, parfois des chants ancestraux, qui se transmettent de mère en fille). Et c'est pour ça que je te dis que tout est lié. C'est lié aussi à mon enfance à Constantine, la maison de mon grand-père avec ce motif Fatima sur le Zeligh.

Quelle influence a eu ta formation parisienne et algérienne? Quand je quitte l'Algérie pour la première fois, c'est d'abord en vacances, et puis en fait ça a duré 7 ans. Je suis restée pour les Arts Déco. J'ai commencé mon cursus avec un travail que j'avais plus ou moins entamé à Constantine, avec des questions que la génération d'avant nous s'est posé avec Aouchem et Khedda, Mesli. Nous on arrive après. En 74 à Paris, tu vas aussi te poser des questions identitaires également. J'ai eu cette possibilité de partir en Europe et la possibilité de continuer sur d'autres questionnements. Je me posais des questions par rapport à ce que je découvrais, sur mes racines, mes origines, ma double culture. Des questions qui ressortent un peu dans le travail dès le début. A Paris 8 quand j'ai fait un DEA en arts plastiques, j'ai fait un travail sur les résurgences de l'art ancestral dans la peinture contemporaine algérienne. Et donc, c'est ça qui a donné par la suite ce travail qui est toujours entre deux.

Je me souviens de ces œuvres où tu fais faire des broderies, quelle est l'importance des échanges que tu tisses au travers de tes œuvres? C'est vrai que c'est très présent chez moi, de faire participer les poètes, la chanson... Les brodeuses ont travaillé pour un projet à Clermont-Ferrand. Au travers de leur travail un lien se fait entre les deux pays. Ce passage se fait également par ces souvenirs de Constantine. Donc, je pars de Constantine pour habiter l'espace de Clermont-Ferrand. Ce travail est très présent dans ma mémoire, la broderie, la préparation des trousseaux de mariée. Il fallait faire ce travail et le terminer à temps pour l'exposition, et donc, en effet, j'ai formé un atelier où j'ai invité toutes ces brodeuses pour ce travail de la fameuse rosace Fatima. Et en même temps c'était un hommage à rendre à toutes ces femmes dans mes souvenirs d'enfance. Et puis, elles étaient ravies de faire un travail artistique. C'était aussi important de mettre ce travail ancestral face à ce travail dans une expression contemporaine. Je fais souvent ce parallèle entre art et artisanat, comme avec la pièce de Venise où j'ai travaillé avec des maîtres verriers. Effectivement, cet échange est très important, humainement, artistiquement, et techniquement.

Dans *Untitled* je vois une résonance avec ce qu'il se passe dans le monde arabe. Cette oeuvre provient d'une accumulation d'images que j'avais en tête. Pendant un moment, sur la rue Didouche Mourade, des femmes, je pense divorcées, répudiées, vivaient dans des cartons où elles y passaient la nuit avec leurs enfants. C'est une forme de commentaire sur la situation de la femme et la révolution (Arab spring) qui ne se passera pas ici. Ce n'est pas forcément une mauvaise chose car les Algériens sortent tout juste d'une guerre civile, et l'opposition politique reste nébuleuse.

Il n'y a pas de slogans, dans *Untitled*. Non, je veux que le spectateur puisse y projeter les siens. Je laisse le champ ouvert aux interrogations.

***Untitled* semble rentrer dans la symbolique au moyen d'une épuration des gestes. Les femmes ont des gestes de danseuses presque, surtout le personnage principal. Chaque geste semble s'étirer.** C'est une chorégraphie, je les ai dirigées dans ce sens. Au début je voulais un groupe de manifestantes plus important. Mais je suis maintenant contente du résultat. J'aime bien cette idée que la symbolique soit concentrée.

Est-ce qu'il y avait un effort de ta part de faire en sorte qu'il y ait une grande diversité de femmes représentées ? Oui. Tu sais, tout est construit. Le personnage principal, qui n'est pas une comédienne, renvoie à la photo de la madone de Bentalha qui renvoie elle-même à une icône chrétienne. En fait, toutes les strates de la société y sont représentées. En effet, la situation dont je traite ici peut arriver à n'importe quelle femme.

Ce que tu dis me fait penser au fait qu'après la Libération il y a eu une régression du statut de la femme, politisée pendant la guerre d'indépendance. Ça c'est certain. C'était important qu'une des femmes porte le Haïk. Le Haïk, c'est le voile traditionnel algérien, et celui de la moudjahiddine. Enfin, c'est ce qui leur a permis de transporter différentes choses, y compris des armes, pendant la guerre.

Il y a eu des interprétations de *Dislocation* assez politiques, d'un endroit qui est domestique. *Aïcha* est aussi située dans un endroit très domestique, mais il n'y a pas eu d'interprétation politique de l'oeuvre. Pourtant, *Aïcha* a aussi un aspect politique. Cette Aïcha, c'est ma tante. J'ai tourné ce film en 98. La situation était encore très tendue en Algérie. Il était presque impossible de tourner des images dans l'espace public. Aïcha œuvre à l'une de ses tâches quotidiennes, elle fait la lessive pour toute sa famille. Trois générations de femmes sont représentées dans cette vidéo, elles sont toutes les trois destinées aux mêmes tâches, n'est-ce pas une forme de servitude ? Un jour, j'ai entendu cette chanson dite de Raï chanté par Khaled, elle décrit une femme aux allures presque exotique, si différente de ma tante. Et c'est là que ça m'est venu.

Dans *Nouba* aussi, tu utilises le son pour créer une dislocation qui semble s'installer au fur et à mesure. À l'époque, l'on parlait beaucoup de musique trans-globale. C'est intéressant, mais ce terme de trans-global me laisse perplexe. Qu'est-ce qu'une musique se situant au-delà du monde ? La musique de *Nouba* reflète le mélange de musiques pendant les mariages en Algérie où l'on entend encore la Darbouka mais où Britney Spears lui succède. Avec *Nouba* je voulais que ce soit comme un clip vidéo. Je voulais montrer, de par cette dissonance de l'image et du son, la dramaturgie présente dans la vidéo.

Cette tension qui monte, et cette dissonance graduelle, me renvoie à *Dislocation* où la même chose s'opère à travers l'image, avec cette ligne qui crée une discontinuation croissante du paysage, de façon cyclique. Comme avec *Aïcha*, j'ai tourné les images longtemps avant de savoir comment leurs donner forme. J'ai tourné ces images en milieu d'après-midi, d'où ce calme inquiétant. Il s'agit de deux panoramiques avec des distances focales différentes. En les re-visionnant plusieurs années après leur réalisation j'ai eu comme un déclic. Les deux films se chevauchent, ce qui crée une ligne verticale. Cette ligne peut être assimilée à mon positionnement, cette dislocation, cet espace de l'entre deux.

Il y a une ligne horizontale aussi, qui guide l'œil le long du paysage qui circule devant la caméra. Je pense maintenant arriver à une épuration de l'image dans mon travail, à une forme de minima-

lisme, de clarté. Oui, il y a bien un mouvement panoramique horizontal, ce sont deux paysages qui en recréent un troisième. Ces paysages sont balayés par le son qui est une reconstitution de l'ambiance, mais tout est faux, tout est reconstitué en studio.

Pourtant, j'étais conquise par le froufroutement des draps. Pour en retourner à cette ligne verticale, l'on retrouve d'une certaine façon cet espace de dislocation dans *Dissolution*. Dans *Dissolution*, on retrouve en effet cet espace de l'entre deux. Dans ce travail, l'image se dissout. Il y a plusieurs plans dans l'image. Je construis souvent plusieurs plans dans mon travail. Dès que j'ai vu cette colonne de vapeur, générée par la chaleur et une usine de dessalement, j'ai été prise d'une grande excitation, cette vision était extrêmement claire pour moi. Elle résume des années de travail.

Tu as une approche intéressante à l'image, je trouve, parfois il te faut un temps pour la digérer, alors que d'autre fois cela t'apparaît de suite, comme une évidence. Il y a dans *Dissolution* une emphase sur l'esthétique, la composition de l'image ; mais aussi une Histoire qui est suggérée par la présence du bateau, l'idée de migration, de voyage, la circulation de produits. D'ailleurs, quand j'ai montré *Dissolution* à Caen certains des spectateurs pensaient qu'il s'agissait du Havre. Je suis très heureuse que ces images ne soient pas spécifiques à Alger et à la Méditerranée, bien qu'elles les illustrent. Mon travail ne se limite pas à un espace géographique défini.

Parlons de *Le Messagé* (2010). Image, langue et territoire se confondent dans ces deux versions du film que tu unis. C'est vrai, mais en même temps je synthétise le travail de Moustafa Akan qui, lui, déjà dans sa conception du film, imagine deux versions. Donc, j'avais déjà quelque part cette vision de territoire en tête, de territoire au-delà du monde arabo-musulman. On le sait dans le monde arabe, ce film il existe en version américaine.

***Le Messagé* est un film culte, tu me l'as dit, cette confrontation que tu mets en place critique-t-elle la vision hétérogène que l'on se fait du monde musulman (vision externe, et interne aussi) ? C'est un film culte dans le sens qu'il est chez tout le monde. Je ne sais pas s'il y a une critique à proprement parlé. Je donne à voir le film dans sa narration, tel qu'il a été pensé. Le spectateur peut y porter un regard critique grâce à sa vision personnelle. Ce que je montre, c'est que le spectateur a besoin de s'identifier au personnage, au héros, et que ce héros-là, il faut qu'il lui ressemble. Pour l'auditoire occidental les acteurs sont occidentaux, même si grimés. Anthony Quinn représente l'image de l'Arabe américanisé. C'est une constatation, il y a une segmentarisation des publics.**

Tu parles de tropisme oriental. Comment consens-tu ce tropisme dans ta recherche plastique ? Ce tropisme est dû à la géo-politique, il y a un regard porté vers l'orient qui se manifeste aussi par un intérêt artistique. On est dans un phénomène qui est très récent où l'occident s'intéresse à l'art oriental en général et des artistes arabes comme moi se tournent aussi vers cet orient ; le tropisme avant était tout à fait occidental. Alors, quand je parlais de tropisme oriental, c'était dans le contexte d'une série où je prends des lieux de prière en photo. Dans ce travail, j'oriente mon appareil vers La Mecque. C'est quand même assez manifeste car moi, artiste du Maghreb, je rejoins une sorte de tradition musulmane, pendant le ramadan. Je ne faisais pas la prière, mais je me rendais dans des espaces de prières, et je prenais des photos.

Il y a souvent question de géo-politique dans ton travail. *Enveloppements* que j'ai vu en 2008, bien qu'il existe une version plus récente, et *Epuraton Elective* (2004-2009) semblent critiquer les symboles nationaux, ainsi que la politique différenciée en termes d'immigration. C'est très juste. Donc, d'abord, effectivement tu l'as vu en 2008 chez Léo Scheer et il n'y avait qu'un seul drapeau, le drapeau français. 2008 est l'année où j'ai eu ma nationalité française et je regardais donc de manière très insistante le drapeau français et l'idée de nationalité. Sarkozy venait aussi d'arriver, je ne sais pas si c'est lié mais les vieux drapeaux ont été remplacés. Deuxièmement, pour la petite histoire, avec l'arrivée du vélib, un deal entre Decaux et la mairie de Paris a été fait en sorte que les panneaux publicitaires deviennent aussi porte-drapeaux. Tu verras, ils y sont encore. C'est un peu traumatisant. J'hallucinai de voir cette identification nationale affichée. À côté de ça je voyais ces drapeaux enroulés par le vent qui donc perdaient toute validité symbolique. L'ironie des éléments montre que cette symbolique ne tient qu'à peu. A début, je concevais de brûler le drapeau, car ce qui m'intéresse aussi c'était cette hampe érectile, mais ce geste me dérangeait car il est trop manifeste, trop violent. Quand j'ai eu l'occasion de redévelopper la pièce, je me suis penché sur la réalisation ludique, que le rouge est prépondérant dans beaucoup de drapeaux. Le rouge a aussi une grande importance symbolique. Cette couleur rouge elle est souvent d'abord inspirée par le drapeau français, pendant la Commune, en relation à la loi martiale qui était instaurée alors.

Ça donne une dimension très intéressante à cette première version car l'histoire de la Commune, c'est une histoire complètement oubliée. Histoire oubliée qui ressurgit malgré tout. En effet.

Tu accordes une importance certaine à l'esthétique, à la plasticité du geste, bien que ton travail soit ancré dans le réel de façon autobiographique, et politique. Je pense à l'oeuvre *Le marché de l'emploi* (2003) ainsi que *Ma déclaration de septembre* (2006). Il y en a une autre qui traite de ce sujet, *Le sens de la marche* (2002) où tout le monde marche à l'envers. Cette figure c'est la figure de l'artiste, enfin, on peut l'interpréter comme on veut, le poète, l'étranger. Mes premières pièces parlent en effet de cette situation où j'étais, de créer coûte que coûte. Avec du corps, car c'était tout ce que j'avais à ma disposition.

Tu prends des 'risques', tu te mets en avant de façon très directe et publique. Le risque n'est que d'ordre pudique. S'exhiber est difficile, mais j'ai fait beaucoup de théâtre avant les Beaux-Arts.

Je ne savais pas ça. Cela me fait penser à l'aspect de mise en scène de *Point, Lignes et Particules* (2008). Est-ce que tu peux me parler un peu plus de cette décision d'avoir un plan fixe qui restreint le regard de l'auditeur et cette succession d'événements. On entend donc les choses avant de les voir, le train, et la bombe. Oui il y a de la composition scénique à ce moment-là. C'est à dire que c'est mis en scène. Le fait d'agiter la bombe, que le spectateur l'entende, donne une idée de ce que ça peut être. Je sais le pouvoir du 'off', que ça excite l'imaginaire. De plus, il y a un jeu que j'aime bien aussi avec cette mise en espace de la vidéo, le spectateur (puisque la vidéo est montrée en boucle) en arrivant devant alors que rien ne se passe peut d'abord penser que c'est une vidéo contemplative.

Il y a en effet un schisme dans l'image entre tag, graffiti, criminalité, et l'image qui s'en suit. Oui c'est vrai. D'ailleurs le tag m'intéresse... mais les nouvelles expressions qu'il représente.

J'ai lu un texte où tu parles du tag comme balise. C'est ça. Le tag à proprement parlé dans le langage urbain, c'est baliser un terrain, signaler sa présence.

Quand je repense à ton travail c'est souvent l'absence du tag qui est représenté, tel que dans *La limite de Saint-Ouen* (2010), *Les abstractions de Saint-Michel* (2010) ou même la performance, *Tentative de repeindre le mur de Berlin avortée par un citoyen allemand* (2008) Alors, pour rester sur *Point, Ligne et Particules* c'est la signature qui est importante, ma présence qui se limite à un élément abstrait de petite taille. Je définis ma présence par un point. Ce point c'est moi, il est fixe et c'est le train qui bouge. J'existe juste au moyen de ma présence mais je n'influence pas nécessairement le monde. Les choses dessinent leurs propres traces mais de par mon intermédiaire. Je suis une balise réduite à son extrême. Et pour les autres oeuvres qui s'inséraient dans l'expo à Quimper je n'interviens pas du tout, je documente les interventions 'artistiques'.

Mais ton intervention, a posteriori, est intéressante avec ces titres qui suggèrent le mythe, comme avec *les Hommes de Taza* (2010). Si l'on ne sait pas que Taza est en Algérie... L'homme de Taza date du néolithique et d'ailleurs ces marques font aussi penser à la peinture rupestre. Oui c'est vrai. La même chose s'opère avec *Le calvaire de Ziana* (2010) : cela fait parler l'imaginaire, fait appel au mythe, celui du calvaire de Prométhée, Saint-Sébastien. Ces titres sont un peu maniérés, pour projeter ailleurs ce que l'on voit. Mes gestes sont souvent minimaux car je suis limité en termes de travail plastique, de matériaux. Je suis donc tenu à faire de la rhétorique de l'image, de primer des manières de penser qui interpellent le spectateur. J'agis donc, pas seulement, mais de façon prépondérante, de manière cérébrale. La réalisation est un procédé final.

Ce qui est intéressant c'est que tu ancras cette manière d'opérer de façon théorique en faisant appel à Kandinsky, par exemple, avec *Point, Ligne et Particules*. 'Point, Ligne sur Plan' de Kandinsky vient très naturellement. *Point, Ligne et Particules* est en contre sens car Kandinsky imagine l'artiste tout puissant, qui peut se permettre de penser le monde, de penser la couleur, alors que pour moi, c'est le train qui bouge. Je me place d'ailleurs souvent par rapport à des sortes de manifestes ou postulats, je relève leurs aspects ludiques et je me les réapproprie ; comme le saut dans le vide de Klein.

Dans *Les grottes merveilleuses* ou bien, *Tentative de repeindre le mur de Berlin avortée par un citoyen allemand* (2008) ce sont les symboles historiques qui sont réappropriés de quelques sortes, déstabilisés. Oui, alors pour l'espace Ricard j'ai fait une performance où je rejouais la journée du concierge du Wall Street Center le 11 Septembre. Mais effectivement cela fait écho à la destruction des symboles.

I would first like to take this opportunity to ask about your new work *Dead End* and *Lighthouse*. *Dead end* (2010) is a video piece, commissioned by the Mathaf in Dorah for an exhibition called *Untold, retold*. Within the exhibition context, represented as an Algerian artist, I knew I was expected to produce a work about Algeria or created in Algeria – whilst, for a long time, I've had in mind to do something in the UK. I do very little in Europe, even in France.

Why a scrap yard? Because it has to do with the notion of the death of a journey, the death of movement, and modes of transport, which is a theme I am interested in. The scrap yard is also a 'clin d'oeil' to Doha and that part of the world - it's relation to oil, and of course to the issue of the environment. Again, I thought as a woman I was probably expected to do something feminine so I wanted my response to be quite violent. I went there for a reki and I liked what I saw, the stories behind the cars, the idea of recycling. As well as video instillation, I recorded a voice over to give a context, to ground it more politically.

Is it fair to say that there is a concern in your work for the processes of installation, that has always been present but is now more defined? I am thinking of *Shipwreck* and *Decline of a Journey I* (2009) I am really interested in negotiating the possible three-dimensional aspects of photography. The light box, such as in *Dead End* already conveys this, while organising them in a pile gives an added sense of 'drame'. As an artist I think it is important to move on from what you already know, what you feel comfortable with. For me it was important to challenge myself. I wanted to think the display of video work outside of the black cube, and the same with photography.

I read in an interview that you favoured the video camera as a tool because of its malleability, compared to your work-intensive photographic practice. Having now produced work that uses the high definition of advanced video technology, does this influence the manner in which you work and the work itself? In video I now work with a crew, which allows me to make better quality work in terms of the films, using HD. This is totally different from the installation process and work such as *Dead end* because with photography I still use the same technology. Perhaps it has changed my vision in that work like *Safir* and *Middle Sea* reflect a shift in style. I am first of all faced with landscapes which are aesthetically pleasing, and secondly the expertise of crew and D.o.P, the quality of the camera. I change the way I work because of the crew and the work changes because of the quality of the image. *Guardienne d'images* shot in HD, harks back to earlier work, although better quality was used when shooting the footage and recording.

Your recent work moves away from the documentary style of earlier videos. *Lighthouse* is quite interesting because it has both. It has a mixture of documentary and more, what I call poetical work. It is a mixture of film and HD in the three parts.

It is a really complex work and very poignant in that though facing the sea the lighthouse is actually recording the history being written behind it, on dry land. How did this project come about? I went to visit this lighthouse as people I know in Algeria had repeatedly talked to me about it. When visiting I came across all these log books and realised I had to do something with this. I liked the idea of the lighthouse as witness to colonisation, to the war... The names change, I discovered, from French to Arabic in 1962. Between March and July 1962 there is a mixture of French and Arab names, but then on only Arab names are listed in the logbooks. Perhaps it is fair to say that this time was a period of transition, of hand-over. There is another aspect to the work, which is in Sama, the second lighthouse that displays a different context being in Algiers. There is a whole period in which there are no visitors, because of the civil war. This is implied in the work.

I remember the names change to Arabic script, and the information that Tahar Dhaout was killed during the war. I find it fascinating how, if you have different knowledge of the history, different aspects come to the fore. With the occurrence of Algerian names the writing becomes childish because during colonisation there was no school for the Arabs after primary. When you read on, the writing changes again. I struggled to find ways to convey this and other historical information. Some of the lighthouse keepers could not read or write, and perhaps that is not so apparent in the work. Like you say it is obvious only for people who have knowledge of the history. The issue was to supply information without saying too much. The same thing happened with *Guardienne d'Images*, it

was a historical exercise. I had to explain a lot in the credits so that people can understand the context, with the danger of the piece becoming like a documentary.

Your continuing interest in landscape seems to allow you to bring aspects of aesthetics and artistry to the fore. Do you think this was not recognised in earlier work? My earlier work was more documentary-like, or experimental. I was rather concerned with what was said, than how it was said aesthetically. Although, in earlier work such as *Don't do to me...* the formal aspect of the work was not talked about because people were more interested in the content than the form.

Was this turn to landscape, trying to go against what you were expected to do, as you discuss with reference to *Dead End* (2010)? It is difficult to say because the shift happened clearly in 2006, as we just discussed, when I worked with a crew for *Saphir*. Two things changed: working with the crew, and working in Algeria. When I went back after 15 years of absence I fell in love with Algiers. I could not continue to work on around my family whom I represented to access Algeria, my knowledge and memory of it. My relationship to the land became closer and the landscape became a metaphor, almost, for my parents, for my family.

You were recently asked in a panel why you have not concerned yourself, in your work, with greater geo-political issues, which took us both by surprise, did it not. Your answer being that your work does have political dimension to a certain extent. I'd like you to explain how you have come to translate political aspects in your work by focusing on personal narratives. I'm not a political activist. I know about politics, but what I know about above all is the context of my family. The problem with the Arab context at present is that artists are expected to make political work in the activist sense; and it is important that some artists do. This is not somewhere I want to go, however, perhaps also because I don't live in Algeria. I do concern myself with the Algerian war, and as you say this is expressed through the work on my family. I am working on something on the civil war, and yes, this work is political but it is this *expectation* that is wrong. My body of work includes a lot of different styles and processes as I perpetually move away from comfort zones.

Which is nonetheless shot through with interweaving themes or trajectories. Exactly. This consistence is something I aim to be apparent whilst I have different approaches.

In an interview with Joseph McGonagle you mention the context behind the creation of *La Maison de ma Mère*, I'd like to focus on the framing of the photographs. Well, that comes again with my struggle with the medium of photography as still imagery. With this piece I work against conventional portrait photography.

The images were shot in Algeria. Does the house hold a specific meaning for you? When I was commissioned to produce this piece I was there so it is coincidental in a sense. However, it was also the moment that I returned after so many years. I was quite surprised by how much I remembered of the interior of an Algerian house, that I could see in my mum's house; memories that dated back to 12 or 15 years ago. I also realised that it was not just my mother but also the women of that generation who were decorating their houses in that style. On the one hand this piece breaks photographic conventions as well as breaking the cliché of the Arab house: the misconception that there would be a lot of signifiers of Arab cultures, and instead there are also elements of French interiors.

Can you tell me about *Quatres generations de Femmes* which also seems to have an underlying concern with the convention of art processes? It was a commission from the Glasgow museum. I had just finished my MA at Slade school of art and I had done a printed wallpaper piece that focused on Islamic pattern. At that period I was interested in the relation between fine art and craft. In the West, I feel there is a lot of snobbery especially compared to the Arab world where the divide is not so great between the two. When I decided to show Islamic patterns in a contemporary context I wanted people to realise that they were not just aesthetic designs but that they draw on mathematics and the cosmos. They are in fact highly conceptual. When the commission came I decided to do similar work using ceramic tiles on which images would be digitally printed. The context of a museum of art was interesting. I was trying to play against the separation between craft and fine art. On the other hand, it was important that as people entered the room they would have to come very close to realise what story was being told. I think this was the beginning of me telling stories.

Question essentielle, quelle est votre politique d'acquisition? Lorsque j'ai intégré ce poste, en 2005, la question se posait de savoir comment parler de l'histoire de l'immigration en France alors qu'il faut voir qu'à l'époque, c'était un musée national sans aucune collection préexistante ce qui est chose rarissime. Il a fallu en 2 ans, puisqu'on a ouvert en 2007, créer les collections de ce musée, créer la synopsis et le parcours lui-même de la collection permanente du musée. Pour donner du corps et de la chair à cette thématique historique qui n'est pas simple, s'est profilé un axe plus anthropologique à travers les témoignages, des témoins de cette histoire qui, à travers le don ou le prêt d'un objet, nous racontent leurs histoires. Et puis, le troisième point clef, point fort, était l'art contemporain. Alors, pourquoi l'art contemporain? Parce que beaucoup d'artistes aujourd'hui, qu'ils soient français ou étrangers, qu'ils vivent ici ou ailleurs, s'emparent de cette thématique liée à l'exil, au départ mais aussi au retour, aux questions identitaires, mais aussi à l'hybridation des pratiques culturelles, artistiques et puis à cette réinvention d'un monde, d'une synergie des cultures. C'est important aussi ce regard qui est forcément subjectif, qui nous amène à voir cette réalité à travers une palette de points de vues. On a commencé à créer cette collection. Bon, évidemment elle est modeste, ce n'est pas un musée d'art contemporain. Mais, c'est une collection qui fait sens en tous les cas. Et, bien évidemment, le critère de la nationalité n'est pas un critère de choix, absolument ; je suis très heureuse que vous l'ayez compris. Avec l'exposition *J'ai deux Amours*, les choses se sont un peu clarifiées. Les gens pensaient que l'on n'expose que des artistes immigrés, et parce qu'ils étaient immigrés, on les exposait. Or, ce qui prime avant tout c'est le sujet de l'oeuvre. Bien évidemment, la plupart des artistes que nous présentons ont des origines immigrées. Les premières personnes que nous ayons achetées c'est Zineb Sedira, car elle s'empare vraiment de ces histoires, et Kader Attia. La première oeuvre que nous ayons acquise c'est *Correspondances*. Ce qui est intéressant c'est de voir l'évolution de cette collection. Au départ, on a cherché des oeuvres qui collaient, ou venaient éclairer le parcours permanent que vous avez vu. Après, comme on créait une collection de musée national, l'intérêt pour nous était aussi de créer une collection qui fasse sens en osant s'ouvrir de plus en plus vers des oeuvres qui soient fortement symboliques ou emblématiques. Donc voilà, pour vous expliquer un peu nos politiques d'acquisition, en sachant que l'art contemporain n'est pas l'axe primordial, c'est un des trois axes à côté de l'histoire et de l'anthropologie.

Il semble y avoir une grande différence entre *Repères* et *J'ai deux Amours*. Il me semble que les oeuvres exposées dans la collection permanente sont exposées à titre illustratif. Avec l'exposition *Deux Amours*, aviez-vous une volonté de faire autrement? Je ne pense pas que le terme illustratif soit apte, je n'aime pas le terme, mais c'est une remarque très juste et très pertinente. Effectivement, dans la collection permanente il fallait que l'on représente un parcours à entrée non pas chronologique mais plutôt thématique, donc on a essayé de croiser ces 3 regards : historique, anthropologique et artistique. Ensuite, et je rends hommage à mes deux co-commissaires, lorsque l'on a analysé ensemble notre collection, on a voulu montrer qu'il y a des oeuvres très fortes qui portent en elles un message extrêmement fort. Donc, on ne voulait pas faire un repère bis, on voulait être plus contemporain. En regardant la collection, des champs de recherches se sont esquissés autour de 5 thématiques, pour des raisons pédagogiques. Là, c'est vraiment la première grande expo d'art contemporain que l'on fait, mais, contrairement aux expos que l'on peut voir dans des centres d'arts, les oeuvres sont placées dans un contexte. Il y a un texte important sur l'oeuvre. On a donné beaucoup la parole aux artistes.

Toutes les oeuvres de l'exposition font partie de votre collection? Oui, tout à fait. Depuis 2005 on ne montrait qu'une petite partie dans le parcours permanent. On s'est dit que c'était intéressant de montrer aujourd'hui, au bout de 5 ans, notre collection d'art contemporain à un moment clef. Les gens ne savaient pas que l'on avait cette collection.

Comment sont prises les décisions d'exposition dans le parcours permanent? Il y avait un comité d'historiens qui travaillait sur les contenus. On a également travaillé avec un scénographe. C'est une exposition qui n'est pas simple, elle a plusieurs entrées. C'est le scénographe qui a fait le lien entre les différentes parties, la mise en scène.

Les artistes faisaient partie de cette discussion? Non, car sinon c'est très difficile. Mais en revanche, certaines oeuvres ont des conditions très précises.

Toujours à propos de *Repères*, est ce que vous pensez à une rotation des oeuvres? Complètement,

c'est le travail que l'on est en train de faire maintenant. A plusieurs niveaux, on est un musée, et avec un musée on a des conditions de conservation préventives. Et puis, pour des questions de contenus aussi. C'est aussi une des conditions, pour un musée national, de valoriser nos oeuvres.

Quelles sont les méthodes que vous utilisez afin de mettre en valeur la spécificité du regard artistique, pour le visiteur lambda? Les méthodes, c'est vrai que c'est plus le rôle du scénographe. Dans le parcours permanent c'est ce qui nous est un peu reproché: le public qui ne connaît pas l'art contemporain ne fait pas forcément le distinguo entre une oeuvre d'art contemporain et un témoignage. Nous, ce qui était très important, lorsque l'on a procédé à l'acquisition d'oeuvres, c'était de préciser aux artistes que ce n'est pas un musée d'art contemporain mais un musée d'histoire spécifique. L'on a aussi présenté les oeuvres avec des cartels, non seulement il y a les didascalies classiques, mais aussi un texte assez conséquent sur l'oeuvre.

De quand date la conception du projet? On a commencé il y a deux ans. Mais la conception est nettement plus ancienne, fruit d'une réflexion, sur plusieurs régions du monde, qui n'était pas intégrée dans la collection. Moi j'avais conscience qu'il fallait aller plus vite et plus large, s'intéresser à d'autres géographies et puis réécrire l'histoire de l'art. Le fait, par contre, de créer un véritable programme avec des moyens supplémentaires engagés, avec une équipe formée, date de 2 ans.

Il est souvent écrit que la France a du 'retard' sur les pays anglo-saxons dans les études culturelles et les études postcoloniales, deux thèmes de recherche du programme. C'est vrai qu'il y a eu une résistance par rapport à ça mais je ne sais pas si on peut le penser en terme de retard. La France a privilégié d'autres approches, et les études culturelles et études coloniales sont donc des études qui ont été peu traduites en français et qui sont donc restées la connaissance de certains spécialistes (qui ne sont pas si nombreux). Je déplore en effet que l'on n'ait pas accordé plus d'importance aux études culturelles et aux études postcoloniales. Dans le passé, c'est une approche qui a été critiquée par les universitaires français, sans qu'elle ne soit enseignée. Cela fait maintenant plusieurs années que les études culturelles et postcoloniales, comme les études de genre, sont prises en compte en France par pas mal d'universitaires et là où il y a un retard c'est moins sur la connaissance, que sur la mise en place de véritables départements. Il y en a quelques-uns, mais il y en a peu.

Ce programme se veut interne à la collection et à l'exposition du musée. Quel est l'impact que ce programme peut avoir sur d'autres institutions françaises? Il y a déjà un vrai rayonnement du programme car il ne suffit que d'un musée comme le Pompidou qui affirme très fortement que l'on développe un axe de travail sur l'internationalisation de nos collections, sur le développement d'un réseau international mondialisé de collaboration, que l'on s'engage dans une participation avec l'université à une relecture ou réécriture de l'histoire de l'art du XXème siècle. Ça a tout de suite fait signal. C'est pour ça que c'était important à un certain moment d'avoir des gestes qui aient une véritable répercussion. Les répercussions sont déjà sensibles, ne serait-ce que dans les discours tenus. On travaille en collaboration avec d'autres musées, le quai Branly et le musée Guimet.

Pourquoi le terme mondialisation ? Il faut s'accorder sur les termes et c'est très difficile de s'accorder sur les termes. Quand on dit art contemporain, moderne et international, ce sont des termes à double sens. Surtout international, qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? C'est pour cela que l'on utilise le terme mondialisation, bien qu'il ne soit pas forcément bon puisque c'est un terme économique, qui décrit des réalités sociales et économiques qui ne sont pas toujours bonnes non plus. Quand on dit art international, c'est trop lié à une conception universaliste ouverte à tous, mais historiquement, tous n'étaient pas impliqués, et il y a des polarités plus fortes. Il y a une politique géographique qui n'est pas traduite par le terme international.

Bien que l'on décrie, suite au rapport d'Alain Quemin, l'absence de l'art français, l'on montre majoritairement des artistes français au profit d'une muséologie plus internationale, ou mondiale. Où s'insère le programme par rapport à ce phénomène? Pendant longtemps les musées français ont favorisé sans doute beaucoup l'art international mais ceci voulait surtout dire l'art américain, l'art allemand, l'art d'un certain nombre de pays internationaux dont on pensait – et ce n'était pas faux – qu'ils étaient des leaders en matière artistique. Ceci s'est fait bien sûr au détriment d'autres scènes, y compris occidentales. Depuis 10 ans, en effet, on prend davantage en compte les artistes français, mais ce que je trouve important c'est que si on a fait ce mouvement c'est que l'on a considéré que dans la géographie internationale, nous ne nous reconnaissons pas un rôle suffisamment important *nous-mêmes*. Une fois que l'on a fait ce constat, les institutions ont donné plus de place aux artistes français. Par contre, on peut de façon tout à fait logique comprendre comment on peut à la fois penser que l'on n'est pas assez international et à la fois que l'on ne montre pas assez d'artistes français. Mes analyses depuis plusieurs années démontreraient que la valorisation de nos artistes se fera en ayant une conception très large de la mondialisation. Il faut s'apercevoir qu'il n'y a pas que les Français dans cette échelle de valeur qui ne trouvent pas leur place. Si on revalorise également ces autres artistes, on crée une géographie culturelle où la France prend plus de place, parce que les critères changent et donc intègrent quelques spécificités françaises, qui sinon passaient difficilement. Les institutions françaises peuvent continuer de montrer pleins d'artistes français, cela ne changera rien au sentiment que les artistes français n'ont pas leur place – et avec artistes français, je parle bien-

sûr d'artistes qui habitent en France. Ce changement se passera quand les artistes et les institutions françaises auront développé des liens de collaborations et d'échanges dans les nouveaux lieux de la mondialisation.

Vous parlez de spécificités. On peut très bien considérer que oui, il y a des spécificités françaises. Ce n'est pas un handicap, c'est au contraire une richesse. Cela inverse un ordre de valeurs. On n'est plus à la recherche d'un langage international, dans lequel les spécificités seraient gommées au profit de l'universel, mais on est porté par un mouvement qui, à la fois, apprécie les échanges, l'hybridité, mais en même temps ne s'arrête pas devant les spécificités culturelles ou nationales et, au contraire, les intègre. La géographie artistique (on le voit dans les grands rendez-vous internationaux comme la biennale de Sao Paulo) est tout à fait différente de ce qu'elle était il y a 15 ans.

Cela répond aussi à des situations économiques et culturelles changeantes. En effet, cela répond à des questions d'ordre économiques, culturelles, esthétiques et philosophiques. C'est une évolution très complexe qui fait que l'on ne pense plus le monde en termes de bipolarité, le champ s'est beaucoup ouvert. Les 'représentativités' sont également transformées. On est dans une époque de transformation très importante qui change année après année. S'ajoute à ça que notre propre histoire, que l'on avait cru assez figée, commence à être relue et reconsidérée.

Quels sont les projets futurs liés au programme ? On a un projet d'acquisition, de réflexion sur la collection, de collaboration avec des partenaires étrangers. Le mois prochain, on fait un grand colloque à Beyrouth. On a un grand projet de ré-accrochages des collections qui prendra en compte cette relecture de l'histoire de l'art et cette mondialisation. On a un séminaire sur l'art et la mondialisation qui a commencé il y a deux ans et qui se poursuit. On participe à deux labex avec des universités. On fait l'année prochaine un festival de jeunes chercheurs.

Quel est le budget, si je puis me permettre, réservé au programme recherche et mondialisation ? Notre programme ne bénéficie pas de budget spécifique. On a toujours affirmé au Centre Pompidou que nous sommes une institution pluridisciplinaire et la programmation de spectacles et de films est très internationale. Au départ le projet recherche et mondialisation n'était qu'un des programmes lancés, aujourd'hui, c'est le mot d'ordre du Centre Pompidou qui se mobilise clairement autour de ce projet. Le fait d'y accorder un accrochage entier c'est une preuve très forte que ce soit devenu l'axe prioritaire.

Je m'intéresse tout particulièrement aux artistes contemporains d'origine algérienne qui sont soudainement bien plus présents sur la scène contemporaine depuis les années 2000. Les raisons sont très complexes et j'aurais voulu avoir votre opinion à ce sujet. Il est clair que parmi les artistes français jeunes des plus dynamiques, il y a beaucoup d'artistes issus du Maghreb, d'origine algérienne et marocaine surtout. Ce sont des artistes qui sont arrivés très tôt sur le devant de la scène. Dans la génération précédente il y en avait quelques-uns, mais là il y en a effectivement beaucoup. Je n'ai pas fait d'analyse sociologique qui permettrait de comprendre pourquoi ça se réveille. Je pense qu'il y a une raison importante qui n'est pas politique, bien qu'il y ait sans doute des raisons politiques. Ces artistes avaient adopté un style abstrait d'abstraction informelle, d'abstraction lyrique, styles que nous avons très vite considéré moins intéressants pour l'histoire de l'art.

Cela pourrait aussi s'expliquer par l'attention très forte que l'on accorde aux jeunes artistes. Absolument. D'abord l'art contemporain a commencé à susciter beaucoup plus d'intérêt, et une attention surabondante est accordée aux jeunes artistes. Cela fait aussi partie du mouvement de la mondialisation; on s'intéresse davantage aux œuvres à portée politique alors que la France a plutôt une tradition formaliste et conceptuelle, pour simplifier énormément. C'est aussi pour ça que les universitaires français ont un peu peur des études culturelles; ils ont pensé que cela réduisait l'analyse à des composantes strictement politiques de relation 'dominant / dominé'. Mais en même tant il ne faut pas faire l'impasse sur ces études qui sont en général bien plus poussées que l'on pourrait le penser.

	##	###	1986	1988	##	1990	###	1992	###	1994	##	1996	1997	1998	2000	2001	#	2003	###	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	##	###
Solo Shows Paris																		Constantin e de mon Enfance (Espace Electra)					La lumière des matins... (MT de la Châtre)				
Group Shows Paris			Algérie Peinture des Années 80 (CNAP)								IM A				Paris pour Escale (ARC)					La Force de l'Art (Grand Palais)					Les ages d'été (MT de la Châtre)		
Solo Shows Regional		Key to colour coding (institution type)										Nos rêves. ... (Colo miers)		Histoire- Géo (Saint Fons)		Recol lectio ns (Pont main)		au langage (Brest), Vie en Paillettes (Clermond Ferrant)									
		Private Galleries and institutions																									
		Art Museums																									
		Public institutions and collections																									
Group Shows Regional		Museum (other)												des Lointain s (Montre uil), Cultes intimes (Arles)	es de Renco ntre (Mont reuil), Racin es (Gren			Bea utés /Afr ique (Nan tes)					Chambr e d'artiste (Nice), Balla Drama (Toulous e)	Parcours artistique s (bretagne)			
		Mar seill e					Bes anço n		Nim es			Strasb ourg															
Solo Shows Abroad			DZ		C H					Femme d' Alger dans son apparte ment (DZ)		Stille Stufe n (DE)	De Maison Blanche à Maison Blanch e (M)	Vielfach es Echo (DE)	Un regard pour une histoir e (IT)			Made in Africa (UK)			(DE), CCF (DZ)	Ein Blick auf eine Geschicht e (DE), Architectu re of the veil (USA)					
Group Shows Abroad	ans de Pei ntur e Alg érie nne (DZ)		Peinture Algérienn e Contempo raïne (DZ) ,Havana Biennale (DZ)			Centre Culture l Françai s (DZ)		Force Sight (DE), CCF (MO)		Biennia le Havana , Ivory Coast, Benin, Senegal		Moro cco				ha t ab ou t H eg el. Patter ns (UK)	Les nouvelles Shérazade (ES), Wallsal (UK), Veil (UK), Bamako Bie., Venise Bie.	Dak 'Art , Mad e In Afri ca ennes (IT)	About Beaut y (DE), Renc ontres Médit errané ennes (IT)	Capturin g Paradise (UK), Ink Painting Biennial of Shenzhe n	Mahrem (TR)	Mahrem (AT)			Dre ss Cod e (U AE)	Dres s Cod e (K W)	

	##	1997	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Solo Shows Paris		Instants Urbains (L'œil du 8)	La Piste d'Atterissage (CNP)	es (Martine Thibault de la Châtre)	Alter Ego (Kamel Menno ur)		HALL AL (Kamel Menno ur)	Kader Attia, exhibition by year and location							Construire. (mam)
Group Shows Paris						Voyage s d'Artist es (Espace Electra)		Big Bang (Musée du Judaïsme), Photographes arabes (IMA)	Notre Histoire (Palais de Tokyo), Nuit Blanche			Tuileries Gardens, La Force de L'Art (Grand Palais), Spheres (Le moulin)	Dreamlands (Pompidou)	Paris - Delhi - Bombay (Pompidou), 2 Amours (Cité Immigration)	Fruits de la Passion (pompidou)
Solo Shows Regional									Tsunami (Grenoble), Kader Attia	L'Empise du Lieu (Reims)		Kasbah (Tours)			
Group Shows Regional				L'Alchimie de la rencontre (Reims)	Les vertus sont des titres... (Angoulême)	Ouvertures Algériennes (Rennes)	Shake (Nice)	8th Lyon Bie.		De leur temps (2) (Grenoble), Dialogues Méditerranée (St Tropez)		Collection 10 (Villeurbanne)	La Route de la Soie (Lille)	De leur Temps (3) (Grenoble), PX (Senlis), Evergreen (Montrouge), SPHERES (Le)	Sphères (le moulin), Mirages d'Orient (Avignon)
Solo Shows Abroad	Humaniste s. (Congo)								Sweet sweat (SE)	Momentum 9 (USA), Square Dreams (UK), Do what you Theater of Cruelty (USA), New Economy (USA), Acceleration (CH), The Politics of Fear (UK), Alles klar?... (AT), Equatorial Rhythms (NO), The Big Easy (DE), Suite Francaise (AT)	New Works (USA), Black & white (Spain), Signs of Reappropriation (USA)	As a fold, Horizon is not a space (DE), Po(l)itical (AT)	Holy Land (IT),	Ghost (DE)	Collages (DE), Performing Histories (USA), Essential (IT), Chkoun Ahna
Group Shows Abroad				L'état des choses part. I (DE)		Fault Lines, Venice Bie., Correspondance (CH)	Snake (AT), Continental Breakfast (CZ), Near East Project (DE), Videozone (IL), The Sweats hop (USA)	SingulierS (CN), The Loop (CH), Living for the City (USA), In between times (UK), Meeting Point (Norway)	Take a walk on the wild side (CH), Canaries Bie. (ES), Drawing Now (USA)	Elefante Negro (MX), Representations of the artist.. (DE), Pontevedra Bie., Defence (SE), Next Yesterday ..(DE), In der Wüste der Moderne (DE), Art Dubai (UAE), Iaspis Open House (SE), Travesia (Canary Islands), Crossings Traversees (EG), Cairo Bie., Réflexir Le Monde (BE)	Unverfälscht (UK), Looking Inside-out (NO), Nation State (ZS), Abu Dhabi Art (UAE), Gargarin. (BE), Thessaloniki Bie., Havanna Bie., Calling Forth (USA), Mehr als 1 T-Shirt (DE), Out of Joint (USA), Louis Vuitton (CN), Pulisoni Performative. (IT), Cargo (DE), Dispositifs optiques (ES), Frontières (ML), Tel Aviv Bie., Disorientation II (UAE), Los de arriba. (MX)	Toldi (Ontario), etold (UAE), Picha (DRC), The Future of Tradition (DE), Busan Bie., Centenary Museo National (CL), Make yourself at Home (DK), Project Europa (USA), The Beauty of Distance (AU),	Toldi (Ontario), etold (UAE), Picha (DRC), The Future of Tradition (DE), Busan Bie., Centenary Museo National (CL), Make yourself at Home (DK), Project Europa (USA), The Beauty of Distance (AU),	Living Room Exotica (CH), Strike Oppose (UAE), French Window (JP), Entre-Temps (CN), Contested Terrains (UK), Dublin Bie. (IR), The Global Contemporary... (DE), Wunder.. (DE), Moscow Bie., Drift (UAE)	In anderen Worten (DE), The Hajj... (UK), Documenta (DE), Liverpool Bie. (UK), Occupy Nigeria (CN), Arsenale (RU), Skyscraper (USA), Where is time (UA), Spaces of Remembrance (DE), Newtopia (BL)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	#	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Solo Shows Paris	Faycal Bahriche, exhibition by year and location							Faycal Bahriche fume (Corentin)		La Planck (Galerie Air de Paris), Le monde propre (La						Voyage voyage (Maison Amérique latine), Paris Décollage (Florence Loewy)
Group Shows Paris						Nuit blanche	au supermarché, La lutte finale (l'entreprise culturelle), Avant Gardes Arabes (Cinémathèque)			Leurres, sournoiseries... (galerie Eof), Giving people what they want... (Glassbox), Domino (Air de Paris), Le petit Noël... (Le commissariat)	Fresh Théorie (Léo Scheer)	Lévêque-Bahriche (Blank), Les sujets en moins (Léo Scheer), Palimpseste (Xippas), Cent (Defrost)	La force de l'art 02 (Grand-Palais), Kit invite (chez Daphné Navarre)	Projection (Station métro Europe), Seconde main (MAM), Land reclamation (White club), La nuit blanche, The Last man out (Fondation Ricard)	Caravane (MENA), Les nuits parisiennes (Le Royal Monceau), Exposition d'été (Anne Barault)	Restons courtois (Anne Barault),
Solo Shows Regional														Quelque chose plutôt que rien (Quimper)		Famille d'accueil (Bourges)
Group Shows Regional	La roulotte (Nice)	Galerie Valentin (Nice)	Dérushage 99 (Cannes), UN + UN (Cannes)	Dépressions (Nice)		Les 7ème vidéogrammes (Marseille), Ecole temporaire (Nice)	Happy end (Cergy Pontoise), Le livre et l'art (Nantes), Complètement à l'ouest (Nantes), SUPERFLUX 2003 (Lyon)	Exposition Buy-sellf (Marseille), M. Saissi... (Nice), Troisième république... (La Colle sur Loup)	Enter your dreams (Villeurbanne), ITAMO (Saint-Ouen), Even clean hands... (Nice)	Collection 05 (Besançon), Legosystème (Poitiers), Tomorrow (Saint-Denis)	Petites histoires inactuelles (Pougues les eaux)	Le dernier qui parle (Rheims), Il faut détruire Carthage (Toulouse), Mieux vaut être un virus que tomber malade (St Ouen), Zapping Unit (La ferme du Buisson)	Point, ligne et plans-séquences (Toulon), Opération Tonnerre (Saint-Ouen), Poor services (Sèvres), Wake up Please (Quimper), Dispersions (Vitry-sur-Seine)	(Bordeaux), Un tout petit monde (l'île d'Oléron), Le temps du dessin (Nancy), It's like a jungle sometimes... (Marseille), Les ruines du futur (château d'Oiron), Le printemps de septembre (Toulouse), Crash Taste (Aix en Provence), The great public sale... (Metz), HIC (Nice)	Pratiques de proximité (Malakoff), Plutôt que rien : Démontages (Montreuil), Cure d'Azote (Nice), Fragmentations (St-Brieuc), Renouveau Réalisme (Linazay), Situation Z (Marseille)	Autres (Annecy), Les monuments invisibles (Noisy-le Sec)
Solo Shows Abroad														Subjective projections (DE)		Solo Show (DE), Short films (UK), Nothing More concrete (UAE), Family Friendly (UAE)
Group Shows Abroad	Kids are all right (DE)		La vidéothèque éphémère (IT), Projet ORESTE (IT)			+/- l'épicerie (IT)		Dashanzi International Art Festival, Brooklyn Euphoria (USA), Summer Shorts (USA), Beneflux (BE)	dis_patch (RS), French Videos On Demand (SI), A.TV (USA)	L'usage du monde (HR),		45000 bacci from Bubaque (GW), Faire et défaire... (NL), Architecture of survival (USA)		As the land expands (BH), The trophy room (USA), 1er festival de photographie (DZ)	100 dessins contre la guerre du Vietnam (BE), Mieux vaut être un virus... (HU), The future of a promise (IT), Eleventh hour (CZ)	Come Invest in Us... (AT), Gwangju Bie., Media Forum (RU), It is what it is. Or is it? (USA), Alienation (UAE), Art souterrain (CA), Domination... (UAE), Wenn du ins feur (DE)

	1997	##	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Solo Shows Paris	Adel Abdessemed, exhibition by year and location								Holidays (Kamel Mennour)	Practice Zero Tolerance (Le Plateau)						Je suis Innocent (Pompidou)
Group Shows Paris				Rein), Paris pr Escalé (MAM), (Chez Valentin)				(Anne de Villepoix), Prosismic (Espace Paul Ricard)		La Force de l'Art (Grand Palais), Notre Histoire (Palais de Tokyo),	Airs de Paris (pompidou), versailles off	L'Argent (Le Plateau), Nuit des Musées (Rodin), Traces du Sacré (Pompidou), Une Histoire Partagée (Cité International)		C'est la vie! (Musée Maillol)		La trémarie (Palais de Tokyo), Néon (Maison Rouge), Fruits de la passion (pompidou)
Shows Regional		Lyon				Vassivière		AA: Habibi (Reims)		Practice Zero Tolerance (Rennes)		Drawing for a Human Heart (Grenoble)				Crucifixion (Colmar)
Group Shows Regional	Carte Blanche (Maison Douai, Lyon)			Juste au Corps (Rennes), Carnets d'Adresses (Louviers)		No Troubles (Sete)		White Spirit (Metz), Shake (Nice)		Transitions (Biarritz)	Eau, air, terre (Melle), La rue (Marseille), L'emprise du lieu (Reims), Passage du	On the Limit (Valenciennes),	Here where I am doesn't exist (Toulouse), Qui a peur des artistes? (Dinard), La Mesure du Désordre (Pau)	Drawing Time (Nancy), Brouillon (Rennes)	Big Brother (Dinard), Fantômes & Cauchemars (Péronne)	Explorers (Les sables d'Olonne)
Solo Shows Abroad					AA (IT, DE)	AA (USA)	AA: Nuit (IT)	AA: Le Citron et le lait (CH)	AA: Happiness in Mitte (UK)	Yan Pei-Ming & AA (Slovenia), AA: God is Design (Israel, Morocco, UK)	Dead or Alive (USA), Poursuite (IL), The Street is my	Trust me (UK)	Les Ailes de Dieu (IT), Rio (USA)	Silent Warriors (UK), Nomadic resident (CA)	Nu (IL)	Who's afraid of the Big Bad wolf (USA)
Group Shows Abroad			9th Bie. of young artists from Europe and the med (IT),	Finale di Partita (IT), leaving the Island (KR), Manifesta 3 (SI)	Tirana Bie. (AL), Een lege.. (BE), Le Ludique (CA), Uniform... (USA), Yokohama (JP)	Così Lontano, così vicino (IT), Metropolis (USA), Rico Bie. (PR), Vidéotrafic (UK)	Venice Bie. (IT), Blood Lines and Connections (USA), Happiness (JP)	Folly (IT), L'Arte del Mediterraneo (IT), Movimento /Movimenti (IT), Odyssey(s) (CN), Periplo del Mediterraneo (IT), Por Total (ES), Shake (AT), The 10 commandments (DE)	3rd Tirana Bie. (AL), Gott sehen (CH)	Canaries Bie., Ink Bie. (CN), Sao Paulo Bie., Accumulation (CN), Art France (DE), Beppu Bie. (JP), Between Bodies.. (DE), Brighton Bie., Choosing religion (CH), Dak'art, Hot/Cold (PL), L'image révélée (TN), Sonambiente (DE), Sweet Taboos (USA), Testigos (ES), Tina Bie. (CZ), Wherever.. (USA)	Thessaloniki Bie. (GR), Istanbul Bie., Venice Bie., Fantasmagoria (ES), French kissin' (USA), Geopolitics of Animation (ES), Global Multitude (LU), Her(his)story (GR)	Bie., Always begins... (UK), Blind Spot (IL), Can Art do More (IL), The Disobedients (NL), Flow (USA), The Gallery (USA), God & Goods (IT), God is Design (BR), In Geneva... (CH), Medium Religion (DE, IE), Mes Amis (IL), Political Correct (CH), Political/Minimal (DE, USA, PL), Shifting Identities	Lyon Bie., 30s. off.. (USA) Barock (IT), Becoming intense (IT), Entre-Temps (RU, BR, CN), Mapping the Studio (IT), Mixed Bathing (JP), Rites de passages (NL), Time vs fashion (DE), Transmission interrupted (UK), Un certain état.. (RU), Universal	21st Century.. (AU), Aichi Trier, Art+religion (DE), Contemplating the Void (USA), Languages... (IT), Les Mutants (IT), Misericordia (USA), Negotiations (CN), Perpetual Battles (RU), sacred Spaces (IT), Signs of Life (CH), Wystawa (PL)	(CH), Commercial Break (IT), FUSO (PT), The House... (USA), Praise of Doubt (IT), Incongruous (CH), Last 1 st Decade (PR), Meeting Point (LB, BE), Out of Storage (NL), Power of Doubt (CN), Roaming Images (GR), Seeing... (DE), Tea Party (IL)	Seoul Bie., Explosion (SE, ES), Forma de Agir (BR), Fremde Ueberall (AT), Glissement.. (BE), Meditations (PL), Nunc Et... (BL), Orange (CA), Something along... (USA), Voices of Images (IT)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Solo Shows Paris	Zoulikha Bouabdellah, exhibition by year and location					Bleu, Blanc Rouge and other colors (La Bank)		Hobb (Galerie La Bank)			
Group Shows Paris				Africa Remix (Centre Pompidou)		Airs de Paris (Pompidou)		Les Mécaniques amoureuses (Maison Guerlain)		Traits d'union, Paris et l'art contemporain arabe (Villa Emerige)	Le Corps découvert (Institut du Monde Arabe)
Solo Shows Regional											
Group Shows Regional							Home? (Nanterre)			Big brother, l'artiste face aux tyrans (Dinard)	
Solo Shows Abroad				Zoulikha Bouabdellah (ZA)	Mutation (BE)		Silence (DE)		Zoulikha Bouabdellah (Morocco)	Set me free from my chains (UAE), Mirage (ES)	
Group Shows Abroad	Dak'art (SN)	Rites sacrés, rites profanes (ML),	Occident vist des orient (SE), Dak'art (SN), Africa Remix (DE)	Africa Remix (UK),	Why Pictures Now? (AT), Africa Remix (JP), Paris Black (DE), L'image révélée (TN)	Global Feminisms (USA), 52nd Venice Biennial (African Pavilion)	l'Art au féminin (DZ), Black-Paris, Black-Bruxelles (BE), The third space : cultural identity today (USA), Empire and Its discontents (USA), 50 moons of Saturn, Torino Triennale	..Wondering Where the ducks Went... (IT), The seen and the hidden : (Dis)Covering the veil (USA), Perspectives : Women (USA), The other shadow of the city (IL), Coexistencias, 2nd Architecture, Art and Landscape Biennial of the Canaries, Abraaj Capital Art Prize (UAE)	Opening the doors, collecting Middle Eastern Art (UAE), Mapping identity (USA), Arts and Cities (JP), Illuminations (After Arthur Rimbaud) (USA)	Fluxus - African contemporary art (IT), Disquieting muses (GR)	Cuerpos (ES), Dessins (TN)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Solo Shows Paris	Katia Kameli, exhibition by year and artist					Bledi a possible scenario (Cinéma-thèque Française),	Bledi in Progress (Kinokho)					
Group Shows Paris		Villette Emergences		Prosismic (espace Paul Ricard)		Show Off (Espace Pierre Cardin), Cosa Nostra (Glassbox)		Vidéo et après (Pompidou), Iconoclastes : Les territoires de l'esprit (Galerie Anne de Villepoix)	La Force de l'art 02 (Grand Palais)			
Solo Shows Regional						Bledi in Progress (Clermont-Ferrant)						
Group Shows Regional	Partez sous les Topiques (Nantes)	Club Club Club (Poitiers)	Festival Acces(s) (Pau), Bandits-Mages (Bourges)	Art grandeur Nature 2004 (Saint-Denis), Populaire (Lille), Buy-sellf (Marseille)	Ici Rever ici (Tours)	Festival de l'Oh (Joinville-le-pont)	Petits Délices (Caen), Frontiere(s) (Saint-Brieuc)	Cinemed, monographie vidéo (Montpellier)	Dislocation et champ de contrainte élastique (saint-Denis), 3X2 (Caen)	Festival International de films de Femme (Creteil), Les Multiples Désirs (Bordeaux)	De la Neige en Été (Poitiers)	Duty Free (Marseille)
Solo Shows Abroad						Bledi in Progress (DZ),						
Group Shows Abroad	Progetto Arte (AT), Romamachine (CH), Werkstatt 2001 (AT)	+/- Epicerie (MNE), Unidee in progress (IT)	+/- Epicerie (PL), Echopark+ (AT), Artissima (IT)	Living library (IT), Troubled Times (IT), Fuxing Park & BizArt Art Center (CN)	Inner island art of survival (IT)	Paris is Burning (USA), The Photographer's Gallery (UK), Sevilla Biental Internacional de Arte		Ethnographies of the future (USA), This is now (ZA), Videozone4 (IL)	This is now 2 (MA), Borders (USA), Panafricain (DZ)	Profondeurs de Champs (MA), Here & There (IE), In Between (HU), Capturing Nor-african Sunbeams (ES)	Here&There (USA), Human Frames (DE), New Carthographies (UK), Pour un Monde Durable (ML)	Higher Atlas (MA), Biennale de Dakar (CG)

Appendix x: Solo exhibitions by artist, year and institution

	1989-1991	1992-1994	1995-1997	1998-2000	2001-2003	2004-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012
SS French	14	17	15	8	18	14	14	14 (saadane afif)
SS W Europe	16	20	13	5	11	8	5	9
SS E Europe	1	1	3			1	2	2
SS Canada		1			1			0
SS S.C America	Centre Pompidou					2	1	1 (gabriel oro-zco)
SS US	11	5	4	1	1	6	2	1
SS M.East, Africa		1 (mona hatoum)			2 (amos gital, marjane satrapi)		1 (ron arad)	1 (Adel Adesmed)
SS Asia		1	1	2		1		2
GS Africa	1 (magiciens de la terre)		1 collection africaine d'alberto magnelli			1 (africa remix)	2 (elle/centre pompidou, traces du sacre: yazi Oulab, Adel Adesmed, Mounir Fatmi)	1 (dreamlands)
GS S. C. America		2 (photographies d'amerique latine. art d'amerique latine 1911-1968)					1 (elle/centre pompidou)	
GS M. East		2 (cubisme tcheques, Moscou s'affiche)				1 (eurovision les nouveaux europeens)	1 (elle/centre pompidou)	1 (les inquiets)
GS E. Europe			1		1 (signes de la bielorusse)		2 (elle/centre pompidou, traces du sacre)	1
GS Asia					1 (alors la chine?)	1	2 (elle/centre pompidou, traces du sacre)	2 (japan, paris-delta)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
SS French	6	5	3	5 (saadane afif)	13	6	8	17	47 20 (Zineb Sedira)	15	12
SS W Europe	7	3	2	4	7	1	5	3	7 2	3	2
SS E Europe					2						1
SS S.C America	Palais de Tokyo				2	4	1				2
SS US	2		1	1	1	3		1	1	2	0
SS Africa	2	1	1					62 total			0
SS M East					1				1	1	0
SS Asia, Pacific	2	2	3	2	4	2					0
GS Africa	(Exposition Collective)				1 (Notre histoire)						
GS S. C. America				1 (translation)			(Exposition Pavilion 7, Jorge)				
GS M. East				1 (Translation, Shirin Neshat)							
GS E. Europe	1 (Exposition Collective)										
GS Asia	(Exposition Collective, Subodh Gupta, Surana Kusolwong)		1 (Live, Hsia-Fei Chang)		1 (Notre Histoire)						

	1989-1991	1992-1994	1995-1997	1998-2000	2001-2003	2004-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012
ARC								
SS French	4	11 (Koo Jeong-A)	12 (Koo Jeong-A)	4	1	3	2	5 (Kader Attia)
SS W Europe	8	12	9	6	9	2	4	3
SS E Europe	1							
SS S.C America		1 (Rirkrit Tiravanija)	1 (Gabriel Orozco)	1		1 (Rirkrit Tiravanija)		
SS US	3	4 (Gonzalez-Torres)	3 (Gonzalez-Torres)		2	2	2	5
SS Africa				1 (Barthelemy Toguo)				
SS M East		1 (Uri Tzang)						
SS Asia							1 (Apichatpong Weerasethakul)	1 (Eko Nugroho)
GS Africa			1 (Delta, Patrice-Felix Tchicaya)	2 (Voilà le monde dans la tête, Paris pour escale)				
GS S. C. America				1 Paris pour escale	2 (Da Adversidade Vivemos; Urgent Painting)	3 (Ailleurs, Ici, I still believe in miracles, Dessins.)		2 (Dynasty, Resisting the present Mexico 2000/2012)
GS M. East		1 (Ateliers 94, Naderi Shahrokh Ladan)		1 Paris pour escale				1 (Dynasty)
GS E. Europe		1 (Parcours Européens II, Prague-Bratislava)		2 (Voilà le monde dans la tête, Paris pour escale)	2 (Traversées; Déplacements Multiplicity)	2 (I still believe in miracles, Dessins sans papier)		
GS Asia	1 (Art conceptuel, On Kawara)	1 (L'Hiver de l'Amour)		2 (Voilà le monde dans la tête, Paris pour escale)	2 (Traversées.; Urgent Painting)	2 (I still believe in miracles, Dessins sans papier)		

Appendix xi:
Solo exhibitions by artist's country of birth 1989-2012 (in percentages)

