

Report on Marseille, Marine Schütz

Badr El Hammami 04/07/2019, "The Trace is something that scares you"



Badr El Hammami.

Badr El Hammami was born in 1979 in Morocco (Rif). He has lived and worked in Marseille since 2016. He graduated from the School of Fine Arts of Valence in 2009 and has participated to various international exhibitions: *Dakar Biennale* (Senegal), 2016; Galerie de théâtre de Privas - Espace d'art contemporain 2016; Moscow Arts Communities, 2015; Morocco: *Arts d'Identités*, Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris, 2014; *100 ans de création*, Musée Mohammed VI d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Rabat (Morocco) 2014.

During our talk, Badr has put forth interesting perspectives for remembering colonialism in Morocco and its continuing significance for social, political and economic lives in Africa and in Europe. In his work, he has demonstrated a willingness to engage with the question of visual memory of postcolonial time and to deliver reflections on Moroccan colonial past in order to capture the extent to which contemporary history of Maghrebin diaspora is silenced. The need to recover memory

from a work in the personal archives and to reconceptualise Franco-Moroccan history is a major preoccupation of Badr El Hammami.

The importance of colonial/postcolonial issues emerged from the onset in our discussion as Badr fostered an understanding of his art from the vantage point given by the decolonization struggles in Morocco. He has framed his project, *THABRATE*, by an introduction about the Rifan war of independence that occurred in the 1920s though.

It's a project I've been working on for years. The word comes from the Berber. It means the letter. I wondered about the wave of immigration in the 1960s in Europe, Marseille, Lyon and Paris. In the 1960s, there has been a contract between France and Morocco, France is demanding a certain number of workers. Morocco facilitates trade, particularly from the Rif and the North. With the relations between Algeria and France, France has turned towards the Rif. (...) Northern Morocco is linked to rather serious events that have not been mentioned in history. This region was marked by the Rif War, led by Abdelkrim el-Khattabi who declared, for the first time, war on the Spanish settlers in northern Morocco, and the French in the centre. The war lasted seven years. The negotiations stopped because France and Spain formed a coalition to stop this war. This ended to a chemical bombardment.

His work reveals the “complex and long historicity⁹³” he probes in his practice bonding the 1920, the 1960 and the 2010s. This temporal movement seems to be elucidated by demands to unpack migrations in Morocco as well as to provide a reading of the intercultural encounters between France and Morocco.

From Morocco to Marseille and the questioning of the borders

Having moved to Marseille for family reasons in 2016 brought Badr to confront with realities that deeply resonated with the orientations his work was already revolving around : “I discovered Marseille, the fact of settling in, I discover history, this land of migrants from all over the world, it is a city that is complex, very difficult to grasp”.

This is the interconnectedness of the issues of borders and of the Berber diaspora at stake in Marseille that - though already informing his work became so poignant - gained new intensity. It is likely that Marseille (he works in the Longchamp district) sparked more personal questionings connected to family and memory in his handling of notions such as displacement, border and political migrations. About his experience in this city, he explains:

You don't feel that the borders exist, things come loose, it overlaps, it's rare that people ask you where you come from, this question is completely erased. We prefer to talk about something else. I feel good in this city. It helped me to start things. In Valencia, I rarely met Berbers, Marseille allowed me to tell it.

⁹³ <https://www.contemporaryand.com/fr/magazines/when-correspondence-reactivates-history/>

In that sense, the relationship between place and aesthetics highlights the importance of the context of creation where a work is inscribed. On this topic, the authors of CNAP website state that “it is often a question of otherness in Badr El Hammami's artistic production, negotiation, co-construction and exchange⁹⁴”. While in several projects, his approach locates *in situ* throughout the relationship he seals with the people that environ him, street vendors (*Côte à côte*), primary school children (*Jeux d'enfants*) or other artists (*Offre spéciale*), he strives to create forms that respond to the contexts of realization in which they take place.

The experimentation of the concept of otherness is connected in Badr's work to the questioning of the notion of boundaries that he explores with a set of installations, texts, photographs, videos and performances. As suggested Art center Appartement 22 in Rabat - where he had a residence - without the notion of borders, that of foreigner would not be⁹⁵. It seems then that in questioning the notion of borders, reassembling them, disrupting them in his works made of maps, made of network of lines and rhizomic forms connecting all territories, it is the very idea of otherness that becomes problematic.



Badr el Hammami, *Untitled*, Woven wool, 2012.

One should notice that national borders have been recently discussed at the occasion the exhibition *Made in Algeria* in Mucem (2016) within broader analysis of coming to terms with colonial heritage. The exhibition's reception in the medias gave way to arguments that frame the ways artists make borders “tall order” within the broader

⁹⁴ « Il s'attache à créer des formes qui répondent aux contextes de réalisation dans lesquels elles s'inscrivent », CNAP. <http://www.cnap.fr/badr-el-hammami>

⁹⁵http://www.appartement22.com/spip.php?article384&id_document=1113#documents_portfolio

challenge of “overcoming the traces (and paths) of colonization (see Hubbell 2016). In 2016, Zahia Rahmani and Jean-Yves Sarrazin assessed that the borders in Algeria are deeply determined by colonization and still remain heavily marked by French past colonial rule. The boundaries that were drawn in the conquest, they argue, did not disappear with the casting off of a colonial power resulting in their enduring presence both for the Algerian and the French (Rahmani and Sarazin 2016).

In this respect, addressing the borders necessarily stands for a way questioning this heritage, and materializing borders as connective becomes a way to question the spatial colonial heritage as well as its role in our relations to self and otherness.

It seems however that the diasporic dimensions of Moroccan and French history have deeply problematize such perceptions on the borders as enclosing cultures within countries. While Badr’s status as a foreigner in France seems to have allowed him to read maps and territories in such renewed terms, the project THABRATE focuses of the sites of entanglements between French and Moroccan cultures produced by colonial history. The artist explores this concern in processing in personal archives of the diaspora he unveils. Oscillating between a critique of the borders *Jeux d’échec* and the reckoning of their arbitrary character, with the diasporic functioning of Berber culture locating both in Algeria, Morocco and France, just to name three localities, his production has engaged with arguing how problematic this notion might be. One the artist’s website on platform *Documents d’artistes*, one claim features to qualify his overall work: the idea according to which circulation of the speech that is a “vital necessity⁹⁶”.

The work that the artist has performed in Marseille since 2016 is engaged in a process that results from the back and forth movements he made between the Rif, from which he comes, to Valencia, and to France, where he studied at the School of Fine Arts and Sevilla. These displacements, coming from his questioning of the notion of border, allowed him to answer the fine art school’s demands to the students “to speak for themselves” which “was extremely difficult for (him) to talk about myself because I come from a Berber culture” without broaching identity in fixed expressions:

From the fourth year, thanks to a study trip to the University of Seville, based on an exchange between the two schools, it was my first return to the South. After a decade of absence, the fact that Seville was a city close to the Moroccan border allowed me to question the Spanish enclaves, the enclaves in northern Morocco. Our idea was to cross this border between northern Morocco and Spain.

The issue of boundaries, which is present in my work, is really starting to appear, and at that moment it becomes a key issue in my work. The question I was asking myself at the time was the question of Europe’s border. Being in Morocco, this gave rise to videographic works from these enclaves. After the return to the Fine Arts of Valencia, this gave rise to other projects that were born around the question of borders (2019).

⁹⁶ <http://www.documentsdartistes.org/memo.php>

After this 2009 trip, he felt more comfortable talking about “who he is” (2019). “How to approach the notion of the border? What border were we talking about?” were the key issues the set up to explore in his work. Basing himself on the Georg Simmel’s assumption making the frontier a spatial form of a sociological fact (the frontier is a sociological fact that takes a spatial form), “the frontier became in his work a rhizomic form”. (2019) The rhizomatic form intends “try to capture” the relational nature of the borders. Interested in the multiplicity and connectivity of the borders he goes on explaining: “We are surrounded by multiple borders”, they draw relations between “continents, between peoples” (2019) or “when it comes to borders, it is really connected”.

A practice exploring the repressed memories of diaspora and war of independence

Thabrate started in 2010 and was exhibited in polymorphous settings in several places in France and Morocco (Lille, Tanger, Tourcoing etc.). It developed as the study of the mails by audiotapes immigrants from Morocco used in France to communicate with the family left behind. Such practices directly echo this seminal concern about the arbitrary nature of borders and the negotiation invented to overcome geographic borders.

Started in 2010, this project is inspired by a correspondence practice that took place between the 1970s and 1980s among Moroccan immigrant workers and their families who had remained in Morocco. In 1962, France encouraged the immigration of Moroccan labour, known as "not too expensive", which, until then, had remained open mainly to Algeria. Following independence, the political situation having become very tense with Algeria, France entered into political and economic agreements with Morocco to facilitate the departure of workers. (Guily 2017)

At the time, audio cassette recordings were widely used to communicate in Morocco. Tape recordings were circulating to announce this need for labour to illiterate people in the villages. The majority of the workers were illiterate and the telephone was not democratized in the villages, so people started using audio cassettes to record. (Guily)



Badr El Hammami, *Thabrate 2010-2017*, View of exhibition, Mahal Art Space, Tanger, Maroc, 2017, Video, sound archives, photographs.

However, as the artist suggests, the project was also a response to the need to question colonial history. Indeed, the economic migrations the artist documents in his work throughout the archives of the lives of immigrants are a direct consequence of colonial the history. As he explains :

“it is 1958- 1959, massacre, that causes the flight to Europe, Spanish enclaves etc. That is why Moroccans choose to leave Morocco and to fly to work in Europe”.

The ways Badr documents the memory of Berber under the postcolonial period paradoxically raise a situation where the legacy of colonial domination seems very much alive and develops on the realms of memory.

On the one hand, as he explains, Spain acknowledged in 2016 that there were chemical bombings” during the Rifan War. On the other hand, the very nature of Berber entangled cultural traces, eschewing national frameworks as it is a culture which spans along several countries, has long defined a situation where it was occulted from national narratives.

When asked by French art critic Elsa Guily whether there is a lack of history towards the diasporic experiences, Badr answered affirmatively and even sketched the idea of a total absence of acknowledgment of the Berbers:

The Berber diaspora is all over the world and yet we never hear about it. There is no archive in France, for example, that collects its history (Guily 2019).

The reasons of this double erasure of Berber culture, could be framed in relation to two different historiographic traditions, that of Morocco and that of France, making Berber history a real blindspot. The acknowledgment of Berber history in the 1960s France, from the viewpoint of French collective memory would have seem difficult to be integrated, for as in the 1960, at a broader scale, France began to “lose its memory”. According to Pierre Nora’s words, *La France perd la mémoire (France is losing its Memory)*. The early 1970s coincide indeed with a moment when social memories have become more problematic – at least to manage - in France (McCormack, J. 2011).

On the other hand, the repression of the Berber memory in Morocco can be viewed in relation to the Hassan II’s national construction project in post-colonial Morocco and his repression of the Berber minority by the symbolical erasure of historical traces as well as their memory. As the artist explains:

This idea of erasing traces of resistance to power continued for years, even after colonization. We Rifains found ourselves excluded from the Moroccan national identity. King Hassan II had made a speech on television saying "these people", to designate the Berbers of the North, "they are not Berbers but barbarians".

These comments made by the artist are indicative of this awareness of the lack of knowledge on Berber culture which could seem problematic to an artist who is himself inscribed in this Berber culture, whose sense is to be based on transmission.

The personal problematic raised by this lack of culture might, from the onset, have determined the artist’s personal awareness about the risk of losing identity. *Thabrate*, his “real poem about exile⁹⁷”, started as way questioning his personal mythology. He plunged in the heart of his family archives to “better highlight the fear of losing his identity⁹⁸”.

⁹⁷http://www.performarts.net/performarts/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3070:t_habrate&catid=13:expo&Itemid=11

⁹⁸http://www.performarts.net/performarts/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3070:t_habrate&catid=13:expo&Itemid=11



Badr El Hammami, detail of installation *To my mother*, 2016.

The testimonies he found out in Rabat and that he maps as “private” and “lively” seem to have affected his own conception of how Berber memory can be handled. According to Pierre Nora, for whom there are sites of memory” because there are no longer real environments of memory (Nora 1997). From this respect, the artist can be said to address the question by creating a site for Berber memory. However, the artist wishes to keep this legacy lively. It is clear that his willingness to “reactivate”, to take up his word, denotes the longing for an aesthetic gesture able to record the lives of the people in mobile ways aiming at physically creating sites for Berber memory.

The project bears the trace of cultural creativity of Berbers in France when it comes to translate their approaches to orality in what they have inherited from Western technology. It appears that the kind of heritage recollected here is a deeply entangled one. Art critic Julie Crenn thus proposed to consider this material as forming “archives of the diaspora⁹⁹”.

The alliance of Berber culture and technology - the tape recorder - has granted he Berber voices a virtuality and an ubiquitous presence that made it powerful. This

⁹⁹ <https://crennjulie.com/2019/09/24/texte-badr-el-hammami-hors-champ-documents-dartistes-paca/>

presents Berber identity under a singular light where the rootedness of a culture is relative.

Beyond family information, with these tapes, there is the possibility of a reconnection between France and Morocco, Western and Berber cultures but also the Berber to their own sense of Berber culture as the site of orality. As the artist explains:

"This mode of correspondence is like an oral letter that has become a tradition in itself in Berber cultural modes of communication". The sending of recorded tapes is a "practice specific to Berber culture", he argues (Guily 2019)

However, not only rooted in tradition, Berber taste for communication is reinterpreted, emerging with new modes of transmission in an adaptation to time allowing to overcome existential and social dissolution. In documenting these practices as the achievement of the recreation of an ubiquitous presence at the moment when their existence was denied, Badr introduces thus the issue of the negotiation of the power relations established by colonialism through the subversive re-appropriation of technology by the Berber people.

Based on the continuum of past and present experiences, the perception of time manifested in the tapes seems to entice such a reconnection. As the artist explains to Elsa Guily in an interview:

In these tapes, the speakers never said the time. The idea of inscription, of a trace of history, was not conscious in practice, at least not in the foreground. The essential thing was to talk to the other, to activate this dynamic of the present, of a shared moment. Oral transmission is as much a carrier of history as writing. It is a very spontaneous transmission practice based on direct witness, from one's own lived reality (Guily 2019)

This search for practices enhancing forms of reconnection to Berber culture from France through is stemmed from the artist's personal need to recover personal and collective Berber memory: elaborating about one part of the work's genesis, he recalls having "I found a tape in my family archives in which I was talking to my father myself".

Besides, this project was not only devoted to the collecting of audio cassettes but of photographs, newspapers and everyday objects. For Badr, objects and more broadly material environment seem to play an important role in the reemergence of repressed histories. Badr has compared his project with the wider movement occurring now at a wider and museal scale with the work around the colonial history through the need to "return to certain objects, to make them reappear". Badr points as an example the case of what Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration is doing with the centre "called

the Galerie des dons”, as “everyone can bring back an object and tell their story” (Guily 2017). Like the museum, he engages with the question of “how to restore the importance of these objects?”

In the case of *Thabrate*, the objects of diaspora do not only compose the traces of modes of life in the France but can also seem open as metaphors of notions such as marginalization. As the artist recalls,

the life the Moroccan found in France was however a difficult one, in “the mines, the metallurgical”. The concerns recollected in tapes the by the way traced experience of migration, they were “about everyday life in France and in the Rif, about separation, events, the first workers' demonstrations, Sonacotra homes, injustices. (Guily 2019).

From this point of view, while the kind of heritage the artist is building around Berber practices do certainly express interculturality and an understanding of the new bonds established after independence between French and Moroccan, it shall not be forgotten that the material assembled also reveals the social problems plaguing Maghrebi immigrants in France.

Tanger’s presentation of *Thabrate* displaying supermarket objects evoking the few objects that could be bought and sent to the family encodes this social precariousness of the Berber migrants, as well as their neglect, in the present, in the respective national memories of France and Morocco.



Badr El Hammami, *Thabrate* 2010-2017, View of exhibition, Mahal Art Space, Tanger, Maroc, 2017, Video, sound archives, photographs.

This personal questioning then turns into a collective one. *Thabrate* reached a new dimension and scale, since it included not only the artist's family own diasporic archives – documenting the strategies to communicate – but that of friends, giving thereby his project the dimension of a real collective memory. The artist has explained he wanted to “reenchant” the narrative and to enhance collective memory.

In sum, he engaged in a process that adds new layers to the official memory politics that had been structuring Moroccan national narratives. The latter was characterized by its exclusivity and the fact every difficult heritage was excluded from it, may it be the colonial one, the one deriving from the exchange between Africa and Europe – namely the diasporic traces of Morocco in France or the Berber one, which is defined by such a cultural/geographic complexity (between Algeria, Morocco, Europe), that it extends well beyond the borders of Morocco.

By giving “new life” to a history of hidden communications, *Thabrate* manifests the process underlying his conception: to work on the "selective memories" or even the

forgotten ones. Integrating the Rifan point of view and episodes referring to the emancipation movements in the 1920 to talk about today diaspora, he started our talk discussing the role of Abdelkrim-El-Khattabi:

The first anti-colonial war took place in the Rif. Not many people know that. Abd el-Krim, who worked for the Spanish - because northern Morocco was then a Spanish colony - understood that the French protectorate was a form of colonization. He was the first to denounce the protectorate system and was imprisoned. (Guily 2019)

In this narrative, Abdelkrim stands for a kind of heroic figure denoting an anticolonial struggle for emancipation who has laid down his arms to protect his people. His role in the Panafrican circles and the Maghreb protest movements that had Egypt as their center in Cairo also emerges in Badr's comments, as he recollects his encounters with King Farouk in Egypt and then with Dr. Vergès, his doctor, in La Réunion Island where he exiled himself until 1947.

Abdelkrim was very much loved throughout the Arab world. Very beloved, a symbol in Europe, very supported, by intellectuals, by a lot of personalities. He made the front page of the Times at the time (2019).

The image Badr el Hammami coins of Abdelkrim as a modern political icon seems thus to participate in broader ways to a form of remembrance that both unpacks and transforms the contents about Moroccan histories provided by Eurocentric epistemologies. It is indicative of his position towards hegemonic politics of memory in France as well as in Morocco.

Aware of the invaluable significance that this material bore for himself (this tape is an invaluable treasure to me (Guily 2019)”, the artist started to collect other tapes.

This sound memory testifies to a very spontaneous moment in the experience. In 2012, during my residency at apartment 22 (in Rabat), I went to meet the neighbours in my old village to collect and collect these correspondence cassettes. But this is something of an intimate nature that people find it difficult to share. These tapes also awaken a history of separation that can be very sensitive. (Guily)

The idea of this project is not to be part of a particular territory, but on the contrary to move, especially since this experience of correspondence in the history of labour immigration in the 20th century has existed on a global scale. (Guily 2017)



Badr El Hammami, *Thabrate 2010-2017*, View of exhibition, Mahal Art Space, Tanger, Maroc, 2017, Video, sound archives, photographs.

« A sound library with tapes »

The artist conceives his practice of collection in the most classical sense of the library as he wishes to constitute « a sound library with tapes » (2019, Guily). However, while he wishes to shift from silence to audibility, and to bring memory of Berber people to be recovered, his reflection is self-reflexively led and opens to a process of exposing erasure of memory as a problem in itself:

“I want to make this audible story visible, while questioning the problem of this erasure”. (Guily 2019)

Beyond pure exposure, the issue at stake is to change the narrative about postcolonial life in France and Morocco and to write a story from this material that deeply challenges the mainstream story and reveals attitudes of appropriation, strategy, creativity in the ways to cope with exile.

As the artist states

with my artist friend Fadma Kaddouri, who has had the same experience, we were interested in reactivating this mode of correspondence by cassettes, in order to "re-enchant" our stories, from our present, through this unique communication practice and by ignoring any other communication technology (Guily 2019).

From this point on view, one can understand the deeply political process *Thabrate* is involved in resides in the sense of the immigrants to witness, communicate, leave their traces. While the 1960-1980s generations carried out their own memorial traces, struggling against the dispersion and the loss of roots, the artist now takes up this initiative to explore their ways of making trace in his own indexical terms. And precisely, as claimed by Badr, working on the traces is not vain: “the trace is something scary”.

Dalila Mahdjoub 18/10/2018 and 17/10/2019
Two interviews, Comptoir Longchamp, Marseille



Dalila Mahdjoub in Made in Algeria exhibition, Mucem.

Of Algerian origin, born in Montbéliard, in the north of Lyon in 1969, the artist has spent her youth in a large family of eight children in the suburbs of the city, where lived mainly the families of Algerian workers who, like her father, arrived in this locality, from Algeria, to work in automobile Peugeot Factory, in the 1950s.

She then left Montbeliard suburbs for Lyon, where she studied the fine arts in the end of 1980s, before leaving for Marseille where she is still living today. In Marseille, her work has revolved around the district of Belsunce that Michel Péraldi describes a the “historical testimony of the bond of dependence woven by the colonization between these people and France” (Péraldi 2001, p. 37). Such an entanglement has played an important role in the recovery of the artist’s identity.

In our last interview, she expressed the impact that the representation of young Maghrebi people had had on her practice. When she was studying for the last year in Lyon fine art School, the riots of Vaux-en-Velin happened. In this suburb of Lyon, in the night of the 6th October 1990, riots outburst as young people burned down cars and shops, bringing the police to intervene. She made a video from the tv news footage she recollected, the latter having “an alarmist tone”, describing the city as being “at the top of the slums of France” and purposefully reworked them in a “state of emergency”. She had privileged for her video “a fragile editing”. In this event and its media coverage, bearing the trace of the harsh stigmatization for the population of the suburbs, lays one

of her sources for refusing to be enclosed. This would mean for her refusing reading grids and especially those operating in art, locating her, as an artist of Algerian descent, as spokeswoman for issues of immigration.

Dalila Mahdjoub's collaboration with Mucem's cycle "Algeria: dreamed and lived"

A recent commission submitted by the Mucem to the artist has brought her to address issues of education, heritage, aesthetics and Franco-Algerian history. As the French Ministry of Culture asked the Mucem to consider a deposit of more than 3000 works of art, ethnographic artefacts, photography and archives originally gathered to constitute the permanent collections of the aborted France and Algeria history museum, in Montpellier.



Algérie-France, la voix des objets.

Dalila was commissioned to dialogue around this collection reuniting objects and documents around chosen themes such as the autochthonous communities, colonial ideologies, contradictory memories and post-colonial heritages in Marseille and the Southern France today. The program directed by Florence Hudowicz, curator in Montpellier Museum and Camille Faucourt was titled *Algérie-France, la voix des objets*. She was in charge for the year 2019 of a project "Algeria: dreamed and lived" curated by Mucem Camille Faucourt, in a classroom of Longchamp middle school in visual arts and history, bringing the pupils to select an image reproducing a document of the collection in the agenda of "challenging our relationship to a sensitive and controversial past, the French colonial presence in Algeria". She provided the pupils with copies of indigenous postcards, sometimes showing brutal realities, such as a Moorish woman, topless.

Central to Dalila is the argument that Franco-Algerian history “belongs to us all” (2019). *Enchanteur* was an attempt to turn her specific conception of colonial memory into an artwork.



Enchanteur, 2019, History and geography teaching manual for French 9 year pupils (2003) concrete and silkscreen, Mucem.

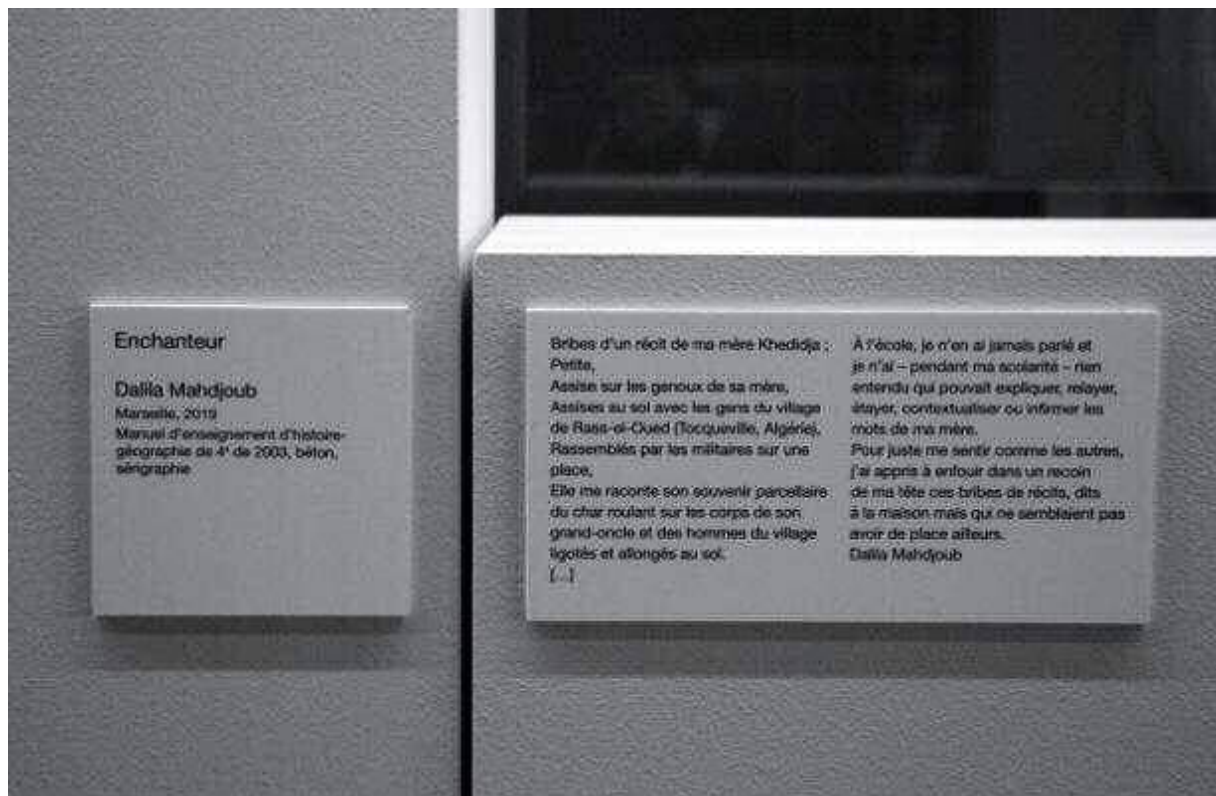
Through a gesture of casing the history and geography teaching manual for French 9-year-pupils she worked with were using and lettering (of the adjective enchanting), she expresses the selective aspect of the ways colonial history is narrated in the manual, calling it “a beguiling national novel”. The book she used while being a post-colonial production expressed conceptual bonds in its way to narrate Franco-Algerian history, with the past colonial representation. In that the book echoed the feelings enticed by the colonial collection including « all these things that have been bothering her for years » and are still “painful”. (Mahdjoub 2019).

But as the artist suggested, grappling with this painful material through language and creation, was all the more necessary, in order to get rid of the trauma. Making a parallel between self-expression or historical consciousness and the action of physical spit-up she explained “it took me years to vomit all this dirt that had been put in my head” (Mahdjoub 2019).

From this point of view, *Enchanteur* invites now the wider audience of a national museum to experience collectively the ritual of purgation, amplifying the process she had explored at an education scale in *Algeria: dreamed and lived*.

More than expressing the ambiguity of French discourse on colonialism, which states it as being “positive”, the work, looking to closeted box, provocatively materializes the image of the coffin.

While the book can be seen reducing the thousands of words informing colonial history to a single unilateral French discourse, the artist imagines a way to these different voices, recomposing thereby two opposed perspective on colonial history.



Enchanteur, 2019, cartels.

Beyond the box, a second part is made of two presentation texts that include beyond the traditional datas (date, technique etc.), words by Dalila Mahdjoub written as a personal memory transmitted by her mother.

Confronting the manual’s enchanting version of Franco-Algerian colonial history, this text written in the first person, addresses the artist’s mother traumatic souvenirs of death and violence, as well as the psychological and metaphysical effects on the artist of such a gap:

*Snippets of a story by my mother Khedidja:
As a child,
Sitting on my mother's lap,
Sitting on the ground with the village people
Of Rass-el-Oued (Tocqueville, Algeria),
Gathered by the military on a
Place,
She tells me about her fragmented memory
Tank rolling on the bodies of his
Great uncle and men of the village*

*Tied up and lying on the ground
(...)*

*At school, I never talked about it and
I have - during my schooling - nothing
Agreed who could explain, relay,
Support, contextualize or invalidate
Words from my mother.
To just feel like the others.
I learned to run away into a corner
From my head these snippets of stories, said
At home but who didn't seem to have
of space elsewhere*

The psychological pain of living in between these two irreconcilable narratives on colonial heritage appear particularly cruel for the artist's psyche, as indicated by the two metaphors she convokes, and which are recurrent in her work: the fragmentation (of memory) and the burying (of bodies). However, echoing to the fact that for the artist this history "belongs to us all", the metaphors of pain are not designed to qualify solely the parts of the work concerning Algerian memory. Circulating, the metaphor of burial is present in the cartel but also informs the object, which is literally buried under a kind of concrete box. Such a circulation seems to suggest that commoning, sharing, cutting across pain could be resources for the trauma to be overwhelmed.

These different moments in Dalila's work reveal the kinds of perspectives she has in mind when it comes to heritage: a refusal to assign the question to heritage to a solely community. The issue of overcoming with divisive scenario seems to be the vantage point from which the artist has engaged with memory issues, the relation between identity and artist. For what pertains to the problem of racial assignation in the artworld, the artist has fought the idea according to which one's ethnicity lends an artist to a predetermined kind of art. She refuses to give credibility to the idea of artist forming part a distinct community, "based on ethnic criterion would be" placing them into a kind of ghetto (Hargreaves and McKinney, 1997).

This position can be echoed when looking at her relationship with artistic institutions. The issue is however less whether she had to adapt her production to French institutions than how the latter address her work in terms that reactivate the old conceptions pertaining to ethnicity. Dalila recalls, as an artist and a citizen, how difficult is for her the issue of belonging to France, as she is constantly ascribed to her Algerian identity. This explains how autobiographical might be her process when she embraces in her art the lives, as a recurrent motif, of those lives she addresses asking "what happen when you are not fitting anywhere?" Alec Hargreaves, the artist has collaborated with in a book, introduces this paradox, intimately connected to the immigration in France according to which the minorities are subjected to as a critical problematic of the postcolonial cultures in France. While French speaking to a very large extent, yet culturally distinct in other ways, Maghrebi minorities are often

excluded as they appear to many among the majority populations as belonging elsewhere (Hargreaves and McKinney 1997, p.4).

Dalila's response to such conceptions is informed by the attempt to overcome the colonial legacy on identity and the self. In our last interview, Dalila explained how this intuition which occurred early, in her life, as she found out being a child that the French views on Algeria never overlapped with her that of her mother, was later reinforced by her reading of Fanon. In *Black skins white masks*, the philosopher appropriates the notion "scissiparity" from biology discourse, where he defines an internal division to comment on the colonial promise of integration. The French imperial and Republican ideal unfolded indeed on the premise according to which the Republic is allegedly one and indivisible. For Fanon, the colonial rule created experiences of alienation of double consciousness and double culture, causing such a violent disintegration of the self that the internal division came as a suited image. The equation "living in one world = living in one language" (Renault 2011, p.79) revealed itself for colonial subjects, creolized people, migrants not only a canon impossible to reach but the source of deep wounds.

Talking of this "inner cleavage", in referencing to Fanon, Dalila has mobilized such an argument originated in political philosophy and psychiatry to transfer it to her own experience as a Franco-Algerian artist. This divisive process has enticed the forming in her vocabulary of a specific image: that of the impossible home.

The artist mentions the impact on herself of "scissiparity", as a colonial legacy. Her numerous projects on the idea of homing present then as an attempt to reimagine mobile senses of identity able to counter processes of obliterations of self. Countering such internal divides, the artist developed informed by a "lust for universality". This position comes from the fact, Dalila explains, that

"I don't have a home in Algeria and here, in the end, I think I am all over the world, it comes from this very deep divide.

La Maison le monde

Earlier in the decade, the artist realized *La Maison le Monde*. In 2014, this installation made in La Compagnie highlighted how a work could purposefully address colonial history, through the artist's personal history, without perpetuating discursive binaries, in inscribing them in a global history of exploitation and solidarities.



La Maison, le monde, 2014, La Compagnie, poster.

LA MAISON, LE MONDE (THE HOUSE, THE WORLD) is described on la Compagnie website as an “installation-atelier” named after a 1984 film by Satyajit Ray (inspired by Rabîndranâth Tagore's novel, in which politics and feelings are discussed) (Website Marseille expo).

On the one hand, the “home” mentioned in the title is present throughout the forms of the installation, as *La Maison, le monde* reproduces her permanent workshop, at home, in the family kitchen. This term also emphasizes the seminal place given to familial narratives as the work was described as a “monument to the father's memory” (Marseille Expo website). As following to the artist's note, “The floor will be made from cardboard made in... collected from merchants in the Belsunce district”, the world's traces are made physically present at home opening on the idea that with the work, “the inside and the outside communicate” (Website Marseille expo).

The installation as well as a workshop space were “delimited by curtains made from labels made in... barcodes, locks, mop curtains, curtain-drapes, curtain shroud, curtain-towel”. (Artist's notes) Such a display prompted the audience to go through several spaces and experience a space within a space, revolving around the shape of the shelter.

This kind of fragile shelter reconstructed temporarily on the model of the complex and in progress space that the artist has roomed in her kitchen with threads, images and archives, directly evoked the common her father's experience when arriving in France: an experience of hard life, of the immigrant with no roots except those they can construct for themselves at the moment, constructions which seem inevitably going to collapse around them. Archives and home assembled here in the form of a house of memory reminded however the importance, when one wishes to reconnect to oneself, that play roots and homing as the one possibility for survival.



Dalila Mahdjoub, *Mise à l'honneur*, 2008, re-used in *La Maison le Monde*, 141 x 152 cm, Fonds Communal d'art contemporain.

A genesis located in the life and death of the artist's father

The *Mise à l'honneur* series, which constitutes the material for *La Maison le monde*, is accompanied by the text « ... à la bonne place » (... *in the right place*). The text allows us to understand how the work came from personal and deeply moving event: the death of her father. She found out also testimonies complexifying this narrative on his life, as she discovered the “two medals of honor for work”. The familial archives then became archives of the “mise au travail” of the worker, but also of a “mise à l'honneur”, she barely could interpret. In a text, the artist describes how the death of Said Mahdjoub, in 2004, unleashed his archives, and centrally his medals of work, and revealed the different reactions of the family members towards the father's past as a worker. It raised difficult issues such as the perception the artist's father and the mother had of their own place in France as Said, became an Algerian worker for Peugeot but never a French citizen.

The whole process of the work seems to revolve around the dialectics between visibility and invisibility, acknowledgement and scorn: as the artist mentions, these rewards were so far an "off-screen " of his father's life. While the artist wishes to never enclose herself or histories in sides, she establishes a formal display suited to such an aspiration. Wishing to talk about her father, but also of more universal histories, not restricted of Franco-Algerian relations, she imagined ways to tell the story of her father, his belonging to a colonial history, in connecting it to several histories and spaces, as indicated by the title *La Maison, le monde*.

Indeed the work revolved around the two medals of work given in 1987 by Peugeot workshop to her father, and the physical intermingling of this "honorary Medal for Silver Work" was "crimped in white yarn" (file of Fonds Communal d'art contemporain) into a broader network of clothes tags, "made in" labels. Each of these medals finds its "place" within physical traces of Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Tunisia, Pakistan, Turkey, Vietnam, Morocco, India, Cambodia, Mauritius, Laos etc.



1991,

A 27 mm tape,

Blue, white, red,

Simultaneously, the medal reveals itself as a memorial object, that has served as vehicle for other commemorations, that of migration. In her text “ ... à la bonne place”, the artist recalls her souvenirs with her father

« My father tells me of his departure from Algeria, his passage through Marseille,

Gateway to work in France. He proudly opens a small blue box, then a second,

It is for all these years of work at Peugeot that they gave them to me” (File *Mise à l'honneur*)

While being a symbol of her father's trajectory, an object on which Said relied to tell history of migration and immigration occurring in 1950s France, the symbol embodies for the artist' father an ambiguous status. Allegedly referring to pride, it also crystallized all the scorn of French society, towards its immigrants.

The artist lets her father speak through her words, talking about

« *A medal as a sham of dignity rendered, by powerful people,*

To exploited, worn-out workers ». (File *Mise à l'honneur*)

Indicative of scorn, and maybe of the impact of forms of transmissions located elsewhere than in the text, and the object.

At some extent, maybe, is this the reason why her mother would have wished to see this medal disappear. In the text accompanying the work reads autobiographically:

“My mother tells me

As we were preparing our move from the tower, before it was demolished,

I wanted to throw away your father's medals...

It's no use! »

The mother's attitude towards the past was itself echoed by the father's own impulse for destruction when he experienced the scorn of the state:

As the artist writes:

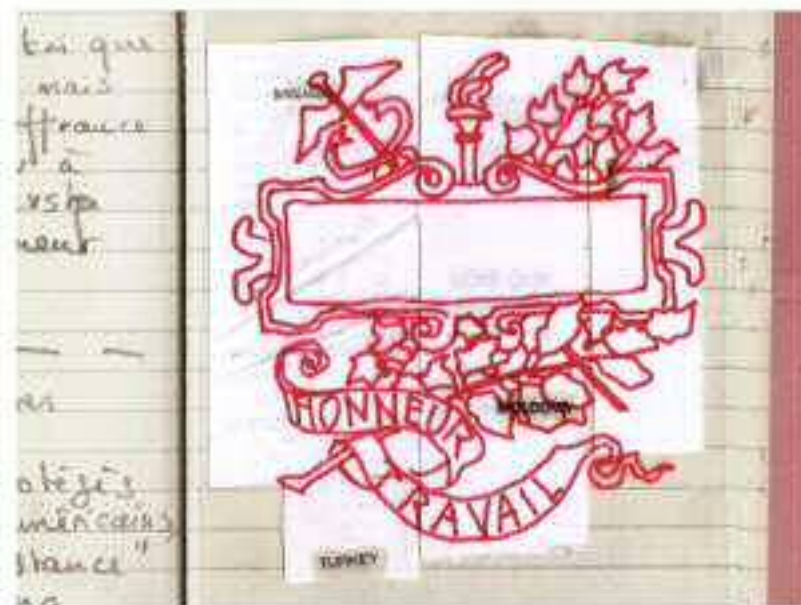
Every year, Peugeot sent leaflets to its former workers, offering them discounts on the purchase of a new car.

What do they want me to pay her with?!

Eruched my father, tearing up the papers. (File Mise à l'honneur)

That is why as she explains talking about the two medals, “their meaning never ceased to oscillate between the notion of "Honour" and that of "Contempt". In spite of its so called willingness to democratize honours, the medal encapsulated many forms of oppression, starting with that of factory work. Like many rituals, such as the purchase to the workers to buy a new car they could never reach with their salary, it fallaciously mirrored them a status within French society, they could never be granted. As deplored by the artist, her father would never become a French citizen, in spite of the many decades he had lived in France.

The description and historical research on medals were instrumental for the artist to disentangle the meanings of these symbols in their national and transnational reach. Drawing helped the artist to decipher their visuality. Reproducing the lines and the components of the medal her drawings gathers “a rosette, one rectangular cartridge, two banners, two floating words "Honor", "Work", a Foliage, a torch, a caduceus, (Text ... à la bonne place, File *Mise à l'honneur*)



Preparatory sketch for *Mise à l'honneur*

The ways the artist turns in her drawings the silver medal into a red networks of lines, prefiguring thereby the whole chromatic treatment of *Mise à l'honneur*, reflects upon the historical link she established between the language of medals and the first “Soviet

military decorations. The medals are engraved with the inscription "Workers of all countries unite! ». (File *Mise à l'honneur*)



As the artist mentions, she has “ taken this color composition back for the original series including Honour #1, #2 and #3” (File *Mise à l'honneur*).

The use of soluchrom on the tags was instrumental to the handling of color, giving a “variation of red according to the label materials”. She adds “ Light and time contribute to wear and tear, tire colours”. (File *Mise à l'honneur*)

But there is no doubt that the legacy of communism promoting transnationalism has given the artist an important clue a for coming to terms with the difficult issue of reimagining her father’s place, far beyond the national based narratives he could not quite inhabit. She would knot this individual colonial history with a broader global working-class histories.

While Dalila’s idea of re-inscribing the familial’s history into a global history of the oppression could seem at first sight quite cynical, the artist finally managed to secure her father the place he never really achieved. As she suggests, the inventory of manufacturing countries in her project, “redefines a territory” the world - the world of exploitation. (file *Mise à l'honneur*).

The materiality of threads

The image of knotting history which is compelling in the artist's life, between France and Algeria found an echo in the technique she used: sewing. As the artist explains, *La Maison le monde* is a « textile work visible/readable on both sides », formed of nine fabric section. Bearing the names *Mises à l'Honneur* #1, #2 etc. (file of Fonds Communal d'art contemporain). The device then put in place allowed me to hang them on stretched cables, with clothes pegs.



Mise à l'honneur number 1, 2, 3, by the artist and the sister, Habiba. Sochaux, PSA, 2012.

The artist documented how she proceeded:

“The collection of labels was carried out for several years with parents of children in a nursery school, a drop-in daycare centre, via networks of friends, by family networks... always in a human-scale relationship with my donors”. (File, *Mise à l'honneur*)

The fact that the death of the artist's father is central at a genetic level is also confirmed by the words the artist chooses to talk about her project. Indeed, whilst, as we shall see, the project is as much about colonial history than about how to deal with post

memory of exile and trauma, the gesture of the seamstress she endorses stands as a way to capture the “ knots in the history of (her) family...”. This reading might be confirmed by the melancholic and affective tonality of the artist claims, as she compares the patchwork-like swathes of cloth to a shroud.

The artist highlights the very materiality of threads and their reach as resources to reconnect histories usually conceived separately:

threads are very clearly drawn on one side around the place of women in the Arab world, and on the other side around the history of immigration based on the story of her father, an Algerian worker at Peugeot. These two aspects are undoubtedly present and central”. (Website Marseille expo)

This has consequences on the ways the artist stages her own gender as an artist, aligning as much herself with the global textile workers mostly female as with her father. Thanks to the materiality of the work, the thread becomes an active force to metaphorically reimagine connections and parallels between realities that are usually being held separate, between past and present, women and men, France and Arab world, the image of the father and oneself.

Embodying these gestures, sewing also performs a physical assemblage echoing the « network of exploitation » oppressed subjects are always submitted to. By highlighting acts of regrounding, denoted by the domestic fragments of the textile, and performed by the combination of different histories of exploitation, acts of togetherness in difference.

Despite operating across a number of heterogenous geographic contexts, there are “links of exploitation that intersect both the gender and women's dimension and the relations of domination between nations that are expressed more particularly in industry, the automobile or textiles” (Marseille expo).

The intersecting nature of power relations is however the specific aspect she wishes to materialize in displaying red threads in the exhibitions:

It is from there that are linked the relations of exploitation that intersect both the gender and the class.

As made clear by the fact that archival fragments are capital in the work, it seems that the trenchant critiques made by the artist relate to the awareness that various forms of domination intersect. While the threads used by the artist serve to echo the entangled nature of relations of exploitations, the materiality resulting contributes to the creation of new syncretic art forms.

More than a willing not to enclose her father in an Algerian history, the sewing together of archives and world signs exemplifies the artist's taste for establishing a transnational view on history and culture. Dalila's method of drawing threads and establishing connections to address colonial remembrance within a wider cultural context sets the stage for new possibilities of reading history, where it is remapped as part of transnational movements, histories of domination, an irresolutely dual act making the case for the interplay of travelling and dwelling.

Indeed, destabilizing the limits of the domestic space as well as the national spaces, the story she makes is one where artist's father, which is becoming "close as possible to us" (Marseille expos) becomes itself a shelter in which the spectator is invited to physically enter.

The work thus fosters this dialogic logic as a method, to which the other realms of spatial imaginary barely resist. Making case for a spatial imaginary based on the interplay between the "precise contact with the distant", many traces of global flows enter the local space of the exhibition center:

The fabrics of the hut that it installs in the place of creation in La Compagnie are mainly made of clothing labels where it graphically highlights the names of the countries named after the mention MADE IN... Nebula of names that draws a kaleidoscopic mapping of the countries of textile production. (Marseille expo, website).

Finding her father a place, rethinking Franco-Algerian colonial and postcolonial history within the histories of today's global working classes

On the website *Marseille expos* association, it features that in her work "immediately, the words of feminism or communitarianism that are naturally associated with these issues must be overcome. Dalila Mahdjoub's commitment implies a much more complex, nuanced and radical political dimension". (Marseille expo). Such a statement reflects upon the ways the artist used cardboards as a floor of La Compagnie that vehicle flows of food, cloths etc. across dispersed domestic space. This illustrates the increasingly transnational significance of colonial history.

The dialectics between the world and the home is based on the statement that, as we have seen, her father's place was not so much in France than in a wider a history of economic exploitation.

In this sense, the work responds to one of the critical questions for Dalila: how to come to term with colonial legacy which is about severing identity, disintegration, alienation, especially in its politics one place, where one's place becoming alienating. She explains about the migrants, that are the other protagonists and exploited workers at a global scale: « I have found them a place, it is a question of finding them a place¹⁰⁰ ».

The process of history making and aesthetics as finding places highlights the impact in the artist's approach of process of constructions of the self where identity and the sense of place is not anymore determined by the criteria such as roots and nation but submitted conceptions resonating with Lawrence Grossberg's notion of "affective alliances". While the attempt to establish a sense of multiple belongings might concern the ways the artist perceives her father within colonial heritage, the range of gestures she mobilizes, sewings, networking, gathering, could be seen as part of way for the

¹⁰⁰ Press release, Dalila Mahdjoub, La Compagnie, 2016.

artist to come to terms with her own exilic subjectivity and would thus bear a metaphorical status for her own work of recollection and reconstitution of the self formed in between experiences, as a Franco-Algerian woman.

Creation and as a resource to overcome postmemory of exile and colonial trauma

Such a sense of multiple belongings might be considered as part of a broader attempt to come to terms with exilic experience which as Edward Said writes « cuts off from the past, the land, the roots », and that exiles feels therefore an urgent need to reconstituted their lives usually by choosing to see themselves as part of triumphant ideology or a restore people » (Said 2008, p. 277)

The artist has described the extent to which she feels she belongs to no place. It appears that her relation to her father's legacy goes well beyond being the recipient of bureaucratic documents and culture but locates in the what Marianne Hirsch has called post-memory, this second hand, delayed and indirect form of experience. Here what is inherited is a post memory of exile and difficult sense of belonging.

As the experience of post-memory exile has often been interpreted by the artist as a situation that left her without a community, focus can be brought on how the artist has processed the need of belonging to help recover not only a sense of self but also a sense of community or belonging.

Though the artist was not personally concerned by exile and loss, her words express the traumatic persistence of colonial history, and its dividing effects, here on the sense of belonging.

Lacking a sense of community, and of knowing she has a place, she asks « what do you do when you don't have a place ? »

One finds traces, in the artist's words, about what position to adopt facing marginalization as she asks « what do we do when we are not at the right place ? » (2018)

She expresses by her words a real paradox, while being not concerned as firsthand subjects by migration, her interrogations constantly echo the effects of firsthand migration on cultural identity as well as discrimination. What is more, her work can all the more echo such preoccupations as home stands for one main problematic for migrant people, whether exiles, expatriates, refugees, or nomads, these people all experience a distance from their homes and often their native languages, (Suleiman 2012).

Interpreting the complex relation between exile and the self, Leila Sebbar has written in *Arabic as a secret song*: « I know that exile is transmitted, I am in exile of myself¹⁰¹ ». This quote allows to highlight that exile has been addressed as state we may be born in, to quote Said. Echoing Sebbar's words, and contributing to an history of the exilic

101 « Je sais que l'exil se transmet, je suis en exil de moi-même ».

reflections, Dalila Mahdjoub's contribution to a discussion of Franco-Algerian relations, addresses the relationships between exile and creation as part of a post-memory experience

This quote invites us to consider the importance of home, and from this respect, the traumatic dimension of the artist's father on Dalila Mahdjoub's work. The way to narrate colonial past in her work does not only pervade through the material exam of her father's archives but in the ways the artist's personal and contemporary concerns are always caught up by the never ending experiences, of exile, marginalization and loss, that are rooted in solely familial and seminal matrix: that of colonial wounds.



Dalila Mahdjoub, *La Maison, le monde*, 2016, installation La Compagnie, detail.

While embodying a history told in terms that eschew nationality and temporal linearity, the threads encompass the issue of rooting and homing and materialize the invisible connections between subjects and their plural cultures. Several layers of reconnections seem to be recollected in Dalila's work in order to establish a community, namely by forming further affiliations, with her father, Arab culture and the global workers exploited in textile workshops.

First, the fact that she tells the exilic story of her father is made present through the house that concretely materializes the homeland the family has left behind near Setif.

It appears that it is less important for the artist to assert a so called Algerian identity defined by ethnicity than to envision identity formed by patterns of difference and alliance, suited to a context of a city where cross cultural and intercultural interactions have constantly refined our ideas of cultural identity in more mobile and multiple ways.

Interestingly these choices tell us about how the artist expresses and constructs herself as a diasporic/exilic subject and the need to reconnect to her father, she reconnects to herself by negotiating his and her discontinuous states of beings by assembling a discontinuous being. As Said writes, exiled poets and writers are those who « lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity – to deny an identity to people », (Said 2008, p. 175). Precisely, in that, she would connect to her father as an exilic daughter.

While exilic conditions may be defined by dialogue between the memory and the experience of here and elsewhere (for Said), Dalila Mahdjoub's work would exemplify two essential characteristics of what Said claims as integral to the experience of exile. On the one hand, the presence of archives probes the memorial need. On the other hand, they are assembled in ways that stand for the artist's desire to establish a connection with her Arab heritage.

The artist puts her oriental heritage at the foreground of the work she creates, though working in a French metropolis as she materializes the border crossing, in artistic, if not epistemologic terms. Her project is less about homecoming than about how to express the accumulated layers of Algerian memory.

Her conception of home, physically and from an ethic point of view seems to relate to the ways of sensing and thinking and belonging she has encountered in Algeria. The form of the shelter, the walls as fabric come from a picture she took in Oran of sheets drying on the door. Speaking from and of diverse loci and conditions, she interpreted this configuration as a site of passage between inside and outside, a porosity that defines modes of inhabiting space in Algeria. This point is made clear by the title of her previous work « From a threshold another » which came of a Kabyle proverb. It says at threshold or the door “where people welcome the visitors, things are going upside down”. The dwell, as conceived in the proverb as the site of unpredictability, rather than enclosure, challenges the notion of belonging. Home is indeed questioned as she dismantles the soft walls to imagine a conception for home fostering passages between the inside and outside.



Dalila Mahdjoub, *Textiles entre espace privé et espace public*, Oran, 2011.

The ways the artist conceptualizes homing opposes to traditional conceptions of space testify to her ongoing attempt to chart how mobilities have profoundly changed societies in recent decades. As recalled by Ann Ring Petersen “historically, the conceptualization of place and movement in the social sciences has been dominated by a dichotomization between sedentarism and deterritorialization, i.e. the tendency to perceive human beings as either static and dwelling a specific place, or as placeless nomads”. (Petersen 2017, p. 2). In Dalila’s project, there emerges a demise of this binary between “home” and “abroad” that intersects with that of the corollary couples mapped by Stuart Hall as the “here” and “there”, “then” and now” (Hall 1996, 247). Such an intersectional dissolution of the theoretical values of nation-centered imperial grand narratives has constituted, according Stuart Hall, the expression of the post-colonial diasporic or global rewriting of earlier these binaries.

Resulting from the reconnection of the artist’s reconnection to her Algerian background, this space which is not anymore a site for enclosure but of unpredictability also denotes ethics of hospitality. There is a tendency to equate both home and nation (‘domestic’ as opposed to ‘foreign’), with security. Consequently, if house, is physically reinterpreted by the artist, so is its close meaning – belonging - and the reactionary tendency to equate domesticity as a national expression. In that, Dalila Mahdjoub suggests a new founding logic, one capable of acknowledging the interaction between the local and the global, and the domestic and its ‘others’.

Her recovery of herself allows then a recovery of new conditions to relate to others, conditions of hospitality in which the ground is set for the people to find their true home. The sense of community emerging from new lineages is further sustained in *La*

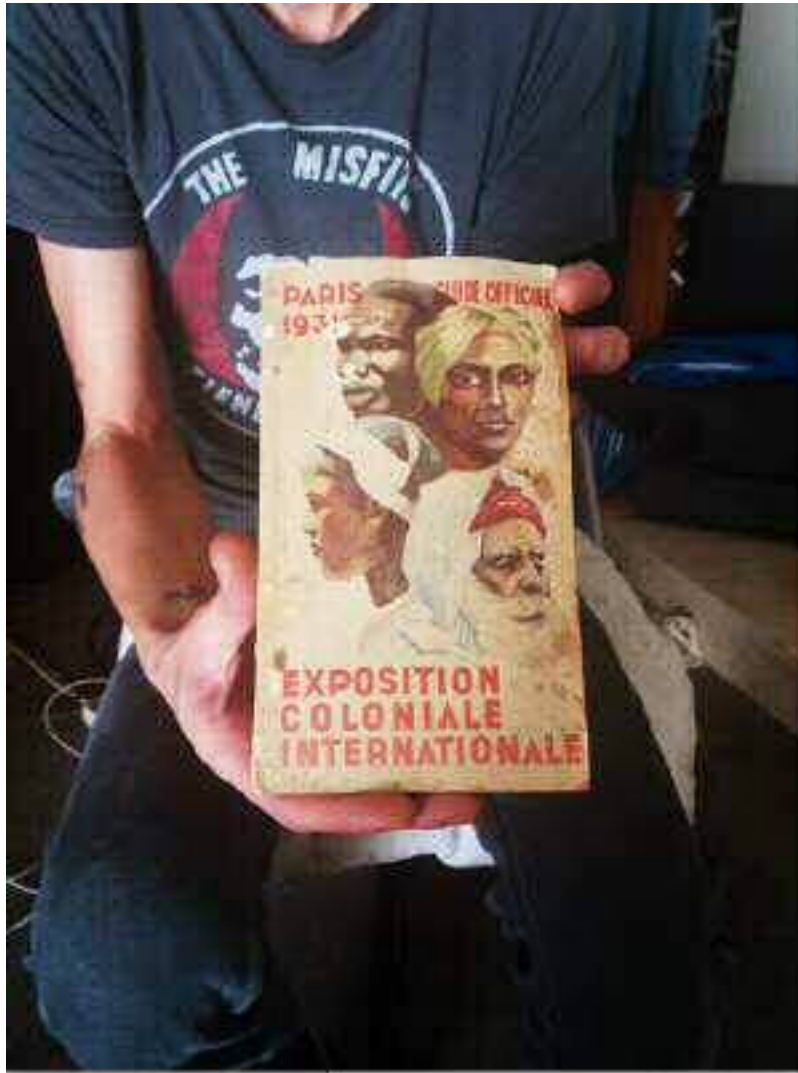
Maison le monde by the tropes of engagement and participation that invite the audience to talk, to sew with the artist, to discuss and to co-constitute the work.

In sum, like first-hand practitioners of exile, Dalila has been confronted to the harsh economic and subjective situation where she felt apart and felt herself not belonging. In multiplying responses, by documenting firsthand exile through archives, even going to collect the exilic imaginary as an archive of the city, she has more recently explored her own exilic condition by way of establishing filiations and identification.

From not belonging anywhere to belonging everywhere, her work explores the many meanings of home as roots, exile or what can allow to come over the pain. It proposes new settings in which it is less through the house, than through the several layers of community that the artist can reconnect to herself and that art might truly art becomes a space as longing to belonging.

Toufik Medjamia Painting colonial history. From critique to pacification

Based on the oral archives 21/12/2018, Mucem workshop talk, Marseille and talk in the Rue Louis Grobet Studio, 17/09/2019



Toufik in his studio with the 1931 Exposition coloniale catalogue.

Toufik Medjamia was born in Bouzaréa (Algiers, Algeria) in 1978. He grew up around Algiers and moved to Marseille, France in 1994 with his family to flee political turmoil. Between 1995 and 1998 he worked as a day care counselor in Marseilles. In 1999 he began working as a graphic and web designer. He interrupted his professional activity to begin art studies. He was admitted at the Aix-en-Provence Beaux-Arts in second year in 2003. He completed his undergraduate degree in 2005 and graduate degree in 2007.



View of degree show, Aix-en-Provence Fine Art School, 2007.

In the WP1/WP5 workshop that took place in december 2018 in Mucem, Toufik Medjamia started to present his work in focusing on the longstanding place of colonial history in his work.

Well I was feeling this past 15 years... I have been working on these issues.

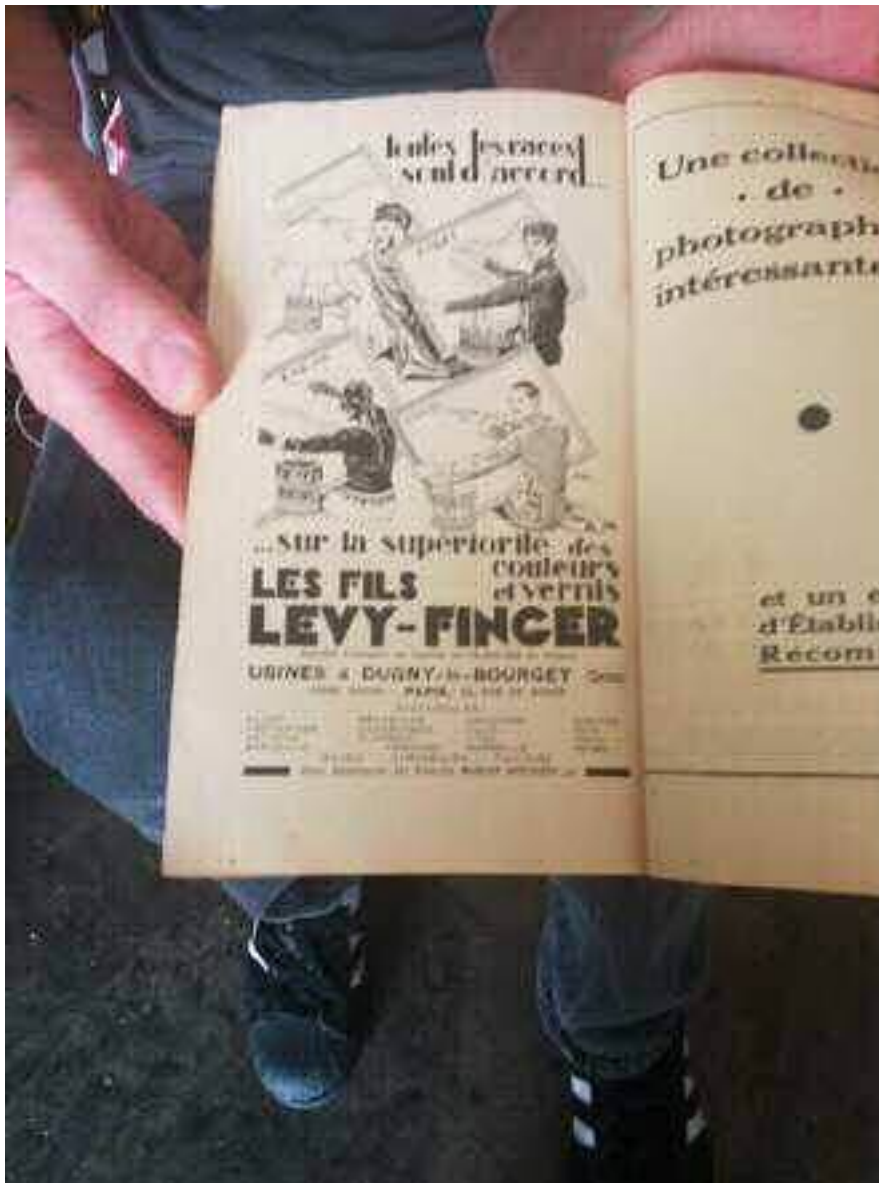
As an artist my job is to create new images whatever the medium you use, paintings, drawings and photographs, but also when you perform, your work is mostly seen through photographs and reproductions.

In Southern France, the lack of work in the city around the colonial past was a rallying crux for the artists to reclaim the images that had shaped the past. For Toufik, impetus was more specifically given by the fact that the narratives proposed on colonial past are subjective, he argues, and presented as monolithic truths:

All of my work resides in slipping in the political issues about the truths of what it was or what was the colonial history, everyone has its own, depending on which side you are and from where you are.

Circa 2003, Toufik started the work *Interdit de nourrir les Indigènes*. At first, it consisted in collecting the archives pertaining to the colonial exhibitions in Marseille that occurred between 1906 and 1922 and then it was turned into a pictorial project. As he recalls, the title is purposefully made to colonial history:

Interdit de nourrir les indigènes in French and *Feeding the indigenous, forbidden* in English was a sign put on the enclosures surrounding during the colonial exhibitions in the human zoos.



Toufik with a catalogue of Marseille colonial exhibition.

Under the name of *Forbidden to feed the Indigenous*, he assembled a documentation on Marseille's colonial past, made installations for his degree and proceeded to display this documentation as well as the works such as painting and videos that draught upon it. The collection revolved for a large part around Marseille's colonial exhibitions of 1906 and 1922. Ranging from postcards to posters, booklets, exhibition catalogues, this collection forms a material he began to analysis, visually in making paintings as well as to analyse it, throughout a real research phase.

The data gathered have led him to periodize some stages pertaining to the evolution of the bonds between the images and the ideological functions surrounding them. He notices then how colonial ideology in images spans from a moment of *discovery* to a

concerted and conscious process of racialization through the images. His general argumentation in the conception of the image is stemmed from visual studies and poststructuralism. While he assimilates his project to that of a deconstruction of the visual colonial heritage, revealing their ideological underpinnings, he uses the notion of deconstruction in a conception that defines the visual realm as being the result of political constructions.

As he suggests in the abstract of the talk he gave in the ECHOES workshop, the images do not stand simply as symptoms but play an important role in the construction colonial ideology and colonization. The ideological contexts of the images of territories or historical representations as well as their effects in terms of perception have been taken into account, very late. The images' constructivist perspective on colonialism is however what has brought him to gather the images produced for the colonial exhibitions and to consider them propaganda. Toufik reclaims the image theorist Flusser's conception on photography, who rejected the pseudo-objectivity of the photographic lens, contributing to the distortion of its documentary value. Photography

"is not a technology of reproduction of the image" but "a cultural technique through which reality is constituted and understood".

Once applied more broadly to the whole range of colonial images "that accompanied the two European colonial waves" (abstract), this perspective is involved as a basis for Toufik's reflection about colonialism visual culture. Collecting archives and periodizing French colonization visual culture in several phases, he considers that colonization has prompted "general categories" of images. While established by and at colonial purpose these stereotypes still exist today, the specificity of this visual culture is that its effects are never ending and that the values it encodes representation, making today's images a site for colonial heritage.

Firstly, Toufik began by defining the colonial visual archives as the "first wave" of colonial imagery as colonial "propaganda". Connected to the end of 19th century and characterized in the first colonial exhibition, it occurred at a moment when the relations systems toward alterity have been forged through visual means. This process revolved around the creation of the language based on the stereotypes and accounts for the "discovery" of others and the exploration of the world, setting the stage for some stereotypes. Toufik gives one example of the stereotypes produced with the creation of the 'savage'.

As witnessed by the fact he quoted the display of the human zoo, this first wave of images revolved around representations sustaining the colonial system of alterity and its divide between colonizers and colonized, cutting across hat between humanity and animality. This was, he argues,

one was the results of this work of "civilizing mission" comparing the savage in his natural and a civilized one, who is dressed, reading the bible and has stopped being a cannibal, and also the industrial and technological improvements given to him by the colonial work.

He adds that the second phase “was to show to greatness of empire and all its huge treasures, living to exoticism and contemporary tourism”.

Thanks to this periodization, the artist has gained an awareness of the visual language of colonization and of the coloniality of images as well, as he collects images which are postcolonial but still revolve around these standards:

these phases are still alive in the subconscious of the European people. Some are more aware than others, the people for former colonies.

These images are all the most deeply rooted in the subconscious that they have been largely disseminated as the colonial exhibitions were considered as popular shows. In her talk *To reframe colonial heritage in order to create re-emergence? Narratives around the visual production of Marseille's colonial exhibitions*, Elvan has recalled the ubiquitous nature of the images produced that unfolded, as the exhibition was defined as a mass leisure activity:

the second colonial exhibition in Marseille had an enormous popular and economic impact: 3 millions people visited the second colonial exhibition which took place in Marseille from April to November 1922. After the success of the first one in 1906, this second event gathered a monumental audience witnessing French Empire's greatness at a large-scale. (Zabunyan 2018, abstract for the workshop).

Elvan has noted that numerous images have been realized and still exist. Documenting architecture, they were depicting “the different buildings and architectures created at this occasion” but a huge amount of them also relates to commercial and advertisement purpose: “most of these images are press photos and films or postcards emphasizing the role of the visual for a popular deployment”. (Zabunyan 2018).

Taking the savage as an example, Toufik explains that it still exists in different kinds of ways in pop and mainstream culture, (that) bear justification, for racism, and discrimination and political stereotype, reinforced by the warrant of clash of civilization and other concepts like this.

Convinced of the pervasive aspect of colonial past in the present, Toufik's process emerges directly from the attempt to identify the resurgence subconscious under new visual form.

What was civilizing mission became humanitarian mission with for example the French concept of humanitarian intrusion.

This reading establishes a deep link between the colonial forms of cultural relationship then and now. Past and present forms such as tourism” and “exoticism” both have in common to produce an asymmetric vision of the world where Western imagination is defining Algerian identity and culture. Following Toufik's terms, “ it draws a world in which the white arose as the absolute patriarch”.

The artist then addressed the contrast between imperial and national/Algerian power brought by the longstanding effects of imperial power that are exoticism and tourism. He is attentive to how these dynamics prevent from exploring the construction of Algerian identity:

Finally, exoticism and tourism are still pretty much alive, encouraging people's representations of their own culture without the possibility of escaping this external depictions in their country but also in the diaspora, and immigrant people living in Europe. So its is on both sides.

An aspect of the shared nature of the colonial heritage might reside in the fact that, as pointed by Toufik, Algerian people of the diaspora in Europe, as well as people in Algeria find themselves confronted to this situation where their own identities are imposed from the outside. An heir of "mission civilisatrice", "humanitarian mission" comes in his words as a critical site for such hegemonic expressions.

To identify the iterations of stereotypes throughout history in an attempt to deconstruct them

In the second part of his talk, Toufik engaged in a presentation of the body of works he has produced from such a material. He has started this part in underlining the connections between his methods of collecting and the plastic production, as well as introduced the main tool his work revolves around: deconstruction. This term he uses locates his project within a larger context of aesthetic re-appropriation of colonial heritage.

Informing a range of contemporary art practices, the question of re-appropriation whether it is archive, aesthetics, or heritage, in which Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, stands as a recurrent symbol to be re-used, testifies of critical uses. The latter often allow the artists to engage with a reading of the past aimed at countering the univocity of representational models. For instance, as Siobhan Shilton explains in her analysis of Kamal Dehane and Djamel Tatah's reinterpretations of the painting, the demonstration of "counter-Orientalist manoeuver" is often at stake. (Shilton 2013, p. 7).



Banania, oil on rhodoid, 33 x 25 cm, 2007.

Echoing such uses of colonial heritage, Toufik endorses a critical position as well. His relation to deconstruction and to reshaping of images owes much to his belief in the necessity to make the stereotype impotent. Precisely, for him, depicting is not sufficient to do so, but requires, as he explains “an other gesture”. It is also a tool, as he longs in his paintings for using colonial to reveal how formative that decipher the violent asymmetries of power. The idea that emerges from the visual deconstruction led by colorisation, contrast etc. is to express plastically a semiotic fact, the colonial understanding of the self based on difference.

Deconstruction is then a tool which is both semiotic and plastic,

The works presented, drawings, paintings, videos ... are inspired by archival documents that I collected. They thrive to identify the iterations of stereotypes throughout history in an attempt to deconstruct them.

The process of deconstructing the colonial images is thus never aimed at contemplation. To engage in an exhaustive task of reproducing images would be running the risk of perpetrating violence. As the artist argues it is important to invent a form where is remembered the “colonial history, racism and domination, without perpetuating the ideology behind”. Deconstruction in that sense allows to grapple with colonial history in coining ways that enhance new uses of images for political engagement in favor of equality as well as an understanding of colonial images in shifted terms, where they can be used as a source of powers of healing:

How can I heal myself from alienation inherited from the postcolonial society I grew up in? This a personal question but also a collective one.

Lastly it should be recalled that Toufik's use of *deconstruction* echoes the methodological discussions that Rycroft has opened on the legacies of colonialism in art history. The term has had an echo in discussions about coming to terms with the realms where imperialism's power is evident. It is for Rycroft one of the kind of concepts that have to be introduced in order to read the *imperial tensions*, an area which had so far resisted to the scope (Rycroft 2015).

When confronted to the colonial violent legacies, art historian Rycroft has made clear that bringing new conceptual frameworks is a condition for the new scholarship on colonial period to emerge. The pending visual, material and epistemological legacies of colonialism in aesthetics - as made clear by advocates of decolonial aesthetics -, have determined the words and the concepts we have in hands to discuss aesthetics. Aesthetic practices and foundational concepts such as modernism, primitivism, universalism and relativism have animated aesthetic debate for long. Interestingly Rycroft makes deconstructionism a realm for historians, one of the sources for emerging opportunities, among other terms such as political philosophy, philosophical anthropology, world art and postcolonialism.

Ghosts of the past

Toufik's collecting gesture lays the ground for the unveiling of colonial stereotypes whose several "texts" – exoticism and differentiation etc.- are informing the place colonial subjects are given in the writing of colonial history, when seen from a French point of view. The issue of the shifting forms under which collective history in function of the point of view of the subject who is writing it has impacted the terms of the artist's response. The artist has created ways of representing that inscribe this duality between what is remembered and what is repressed into the real of the visible, through a reflexion on the coevalness of appearing and disappearing forms : "Actually we don't really know if these images are appearing or vanishing".

The series of circa 50 paintings *Forbidden to feed the Indigenous*, stemming from images selected from his collections of colonial images, "that were used in history books" directly relates to colonial heritage. As explained by Toufik, the ways the source images were shown but also not thought of, was closely related to the ways collective and personal heritages are both nationally structured:

National legacies, countries make their national legacies, and then personal legacies, in the families that have experienced this, people in Algeria, or settlers. In that series I dealt with the way in which Indigenous heritages were "sold".
(Second interview)



Exposition coloniale, 2007, 100 x 80 cm, oil on canvas.

Translated through episcopo onto the canvas, the zones of the works bear unequal degrees of representation and evolve from monochromatic surfaces to more realist handling of human figures. In the work *Pacification* (2007) he has reproduced a visual archive stemmed from a newspaper depicting the General de Gaulle and specter-like figures, treated monochromatically in grey hues. Endowing the figures with a ghostly presence is the technique the artist is using “In the center, it's there, but I'm basically making it disappear” as well as the subject: it “was a work on erasing appearance, is it appearing or re-emerging”. Looking at the source, the history of the engagement of indigenous soldiers in the French army during WWII, allows to understand that the ghostly presence is here endowed with symbolical meaning: staging the figures as ghosts, and the image as dreamy-like space becomes a way to capture the repressive nature of history towards colonial subjects that of “ghosts of the past”.

While endowing the painting resulting from the visual archives with a spectral nature does reflect the handling of colonial history in French collective imaginary and public modes of remembrance, it can simultaneously prevent them from falling asleep calmly part of history. Listening to Toufik's words, one understands that this dialectic between appearing and disappearing is to be pointed in what pertains to his own representation of these events in French collective memory and how an artist can not only bear witness of history in painting but master a process that would encode plastically the fact that he works “on the erased history”. As long as it will act like a ghost, these traces bear a special agency, able to return in the present.

The uncertainty of the images he emphasizes when he draws them at the point where they are about to faint, develops a spectro-poetics TJ Demos' approach in *Return to postcolony*. In this book, showing how a whole generation has reconfigured colonial archives basing on vernacular images, and documentary still, minor images etc. in order to reread the past in the light of traces that come back "to haunt", according to Demos, the postcolonial. In *Return to the Postcolony*, TJ Demos reveals the interest of the artists working dealing with empire for a documentary approach (Demos 2013, p. 50). Basing on Toufik's work, it seems that the necessity to read the present as a site that has repressed its colonial time determines the setting of a *spectro-poetics* that goes beyond solely photography and film, to encompass other visual techniques of representation such as painting.

Bearing the trace of the indexical, the reflexive function of the photograph imbued with an engagement with the past has the potential to "makes visible what has been obscured, what has been excluded and what has been forgotten'. However, Toufik's project can be more specifically understood as a process of remembering colonial history that has been erased in today's French context, where they are « totally absent » and when visible "ideologized". (second interview)

For example, in *Colonial* (2007), the photographic materials were produced at the time of the 1942 surrender of the French colony of Madagascar, then under the authority to the Vichy government in response to the Allied invasion. In the specific case this forgotten part of the French history, the "Ironclad operation", the national history that reemerges is brings us consider Madagascar at the intersection of two forms of political expansionism, colonialism and the Vichy regime.

As in this work, where the gestural drippings of red clearly evoke historical violence, the artist found it necessary to create an aesthetics that desidentifies these images from the realm of historical documentary. Of great significance was for him the idea to imagine ways of bringing images "back in our time".

In spite of his interest in history, his process is less prompted by recollecting history, than by the lack of memory and the obfuscation by colonial memory practices biased readings he considers "totally propagandist", telling they bring culture to barbarians.

As black and white photographs "are identified as more historical, truer, in the context of new and magazines", he uses colour as a means to engage with the debate of the historical nature of black and white photographs and to "get out of the historical image":

Colour is a way of blurring information, it is visual information, you know the theory of colour, calm, cold, and it brings you back to the contemporary, it's what you see, it's like when you look at recoloured images again, it completely changes the image. You are in a thing, which is closer to us, which brings the image back without something more direct, then there is the play between the colours, secondary, how you can also assign them a character. (second interview)

Moreover, in putting colors on the pictures that were largely disseminated, he proceeds to a gesture a layering through colors. As emphasized by Amy Hubbell, layering has entered in the vocabulary of young Algerian or franco-artistes as a means to materialize a peculiar type of memory (Hubbell 2018, p. 8). The project thus would less be about

probing history than about exposing the multiple layers of the past, how one can reformulate what had been erased by colonisation and what had been silenced by the subsequent ruptures of independence. The specific register of memory he engages with would then allow to serve a sense of identity more suited, and will enter in a process of recovering identity, which is one of the artist's aim. As he stated during the conversation, the challenge is to “try to reveal something more accurate in what is our cultural and individual identity”

Pacification. A creating a common heritage



Pacification, 2007, 180 x 157, oil on canvas



Pacification 1, 2007, 25 3 x 19,5, oil on canvas

Like in echo to the War in Algeria, his words underline the extent to which when reacting to the remembrance of colonisation and French Algeria, the memory politics that have been, and that still are ideologized, mapped the debate. The issue that the artist recovers when he recalls that in the art school when he started to recollect colonial archives he was asked “is this a revenge” (understated as an Algerian student on the French teachers) materializes that the divide of the memories has become the legacy of colonialism itself. The ways this history is felt and the difficulty to escape the militarized image of the war play here as matricial image to understand the scars of the history on memory politics.

Like in echo to the Algerian War, Toufik explored the structuring of the his memory politics the presence of two “sides”. It establishes a pervading link between the French politics of colonial remembrance and the effects of the war on collective memory.

With the image of the sides, suggesting a fault line, he reflects one of the most important themes of Franco-Algerian contemporary art practices. The divide and its symbolic form, the line or the scar, has been of great significance to conceptualize the memory issues that abound, as Amy Hubbell has shown. However, the question for the artist is to overcome such kind of divide, to bring the debate to non-confrontational forms. As he said during the discussion “my hope is being to be able to discuss in a peaceful way”.

In his claim, to work on memory rather than history points to the question of the future and the need to create forms of heritage that reflect in the present the existence of a common history, between Algerians and French and more generally between descendants of former colonizing and colonized countries. However, as he recalls, from school onwards, thinking about his education in Algeria, he realized that the answers

to the common but nationalized history: "I learned a story that is supposed to be the same with the same people with the same events but that is not told in the same way". The pitfall is not only that without "pacified means it ends without a confrontation", but that it fails to narrate a common history:

But to find ourselves without a common history, and there is no dialogue between the two (countries), there are no binational things. If it were only to talk about the issue of Algeria, if we could have binational colleges, to have a peaceful approach, that would be great.

As the artist sees it, the situation is one where:

Everyone claims their heritage, it is not true that there is no common heritage, it exists, it is obvious, but it is only that they are not claimed, as such, and that everyone claims their own heritage. That's what brought me to this subject, we had a story, but it wasn't the story.

Toufik gives an interesting anecdote attesting to the difficulty for France to engage when it comes to the way to narrate the past of acknowledging the archives of transculturality, and to interpret it in French national history. Reminding his personal experience, he mentions that during the summer he visited with family the touristic Loire castles. There he found out the unexpected trace of Emir Abdelkader. After fifteen years fighting the French conquest of Algeria, Abdelkader surrendered in 1847. Tired of resisting he consented to exile in Alexandria. But when embarking to France to travel to Egypt, he was finally held back in Amboise contrary to the promise made to him by the generals under Louis-Philippe. Toufik bought in Amboise Castle a postcard of the painting of the Emir by Jean-Baptiste-Ange Tissier (1851).

However, as noticed by Toufik, while being a part of French history, these Algerian traces in the Loire were marginalized:

Abdelkader, he was exiled to Amboise, when he was captured, when he surrendered, with all his *Smala*, they were 80, how it was told, as an anecdote, the castle it is empty. Anyway, it was an anecdote, there were two portraits, that's all, all he was. Had been left of that, past I don't know how many years ago - what arched me was the bed for 80.



Toufik's postcard of Jean-Baptiste-Ange Tissier, *Peinture de l'Émir*, 1851

With this testimony, there is a sense the traces of a common Franco-Algerian history is unachieved as well as its entangled nature is put at distance. Toufik understands this as part of the structuring of the national heritage as process privileging a national history over the other. In order to propose a memorial alternative to this institutional perspective, Toufik has coined the idea of "personal heritage". "Personal heritage" is what is made by people of the imperial histories. Investing heritage with such strategic reappropriations of colonial resources is not new but belongs, he argues, to a decolonial process, as resignifying the colonial archives was an approach opened by leaders of decolonization who subverted what they had inherited to their own search for emancipation:

There is a lot of effect on both sides, the people who fought the wars of liberation, they came from the colonial system, they had served in the army among the rulers, they were educated by the domain system, even if they had the background to emancipate themselves.

It is also arbitrary, we have decreed a certain number of icons for the construction, but these are political choices, they also have consequences on how we tell (second interview)

From this point of view, Toufik's confrontation to the colonial past can be considered as an attempt to generate, via artistic projects, de-colonial process, at it becomes a way to realign with alternative genealogies, where he lays ground for new horizons for himself and for others, which may be terms the terrain for existence and co-existence.

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