Chapter Six
A Sense of Place: envisioning post-colonial space in France and Algeria

Space and the post-colonial

The previous chapter foregrounded the space of the Mediterranean, and its role as a theatre for depicting and investigating the relationship between France and Algeria. We explored how it interferes with and inflects the trajectories of people on both its French and Algerian shores whose lives are defined in some way by moving between the two countries; or indeed, by the desire or inability to do so. The Mediterranean is both a space to be negotiated and a horizon beyond which lie lands at once real and fantasised. Our aim in this final chapter is to examine how France and Algeria themselves are envisioned in the contemporary period, and in particular, how they are portrayed as post-colonial countries. We have considered already, in Chapter 1, how an understanding of colonial Algeria is sustained in the present through visual culture. Our focus here is on how the two independent, sovereign states which emerged out of the Evian Agreements of March 1962, each attempting to forge their own way in a post-colonial world, are perceived and portrayed visually in relation to each other, and what spaces are privileged as locations for staging their relationship on both sides of the Mediterranean. Where do journeys between the two begin and end? What spaces and places are bridged as a result? What points of comparison, contact or opposition are established between France and Algeria through the depiction of space, and what sense of each place do we acquire as a result? How does the circulation of individuals and their movement between and across the spaces of France and Algeria – whether as characters in films or travellers with cameras – open up perspectives on each territory and shape our understanding of them?

Once more, therefore, we return to the central role played by space and its visualisation in the articulation, delineation and exploration of identity, whether national, collective or individual. We discussed in Chapter 1 how the visual representation of French Algeria is a privileged vector for *pied-noir* remembrance. The spatialisation of memory through the photographic image was seen to facilitate individual and collective memory through identification and recognition. At stake in nostalgic photo-books is the restaging of colonial space, and colonial dominion over space, which at once acknowledges and wishes away the epochal break represented by Algerian independence in 1962, and the subsequent assertion of Algerian

sovereignty over a henceforth national territory. The central concern of this chapter, on the other hand, is with representations of post-colonial space. Aware of the contested life of the term 'post-colonial', we use it here firstly in a chronological sense, to characterise space on both sides of the Mediterranean which emerged as a result of the disentanglement of France and Algeria, and was shaped by the economic, political, social and demographic forces affecting each country as they took separate paths.[1] An obvious example of this in the French context would be the extensive programme of state-led modernisation in the Gaullist era which, as Kristin Ross (1995) has argued, and as we discuss further below, can be seen as directly related to processes of decolonisation.

Yet at the same time, many of those forces affected both countries together given that, as Forsdick and Murphy point out, while their relationship may have become 'post-colonial' from a chronological perspective, it was also 'postcolonial', in the sense of being heavily influenced by the persistent legacy of the colonial relationship, whether in terms of the migratory flows between the two countries or 'a reluctantly shared history repressed and yet constantly threatening to return' (2003: 3). Moreover, and increasingly during the contemporary period, the Franco-Algerian relationship has found itself configured within the broader geopolitical and economic transformations characteristic of globalisation, defined both by the accelerated flow of goods and capital around the world, and by its corollary, the increasingly chaotic flow of people in pursuit of opportunity, especially from the global South to the global North (a figuration of economic and geopolitical power relations whose currency was well established by the end of the twentieth century, and for which the Mediterranean basin was a key location). As Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, the shift in the balance of power from nation to capital implied by economic globalisation poses a threat to national sovereignty and national identity, one which each

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[1] Critical debate over the term 'post-colonial' broke out in the early 1990s, and is reflected well in Williams and Chrisman, eds (1994). See in particular essays in that volume by Mishra and Hodge (1991) and McClintock (1992). Central to their concerns are the (often Euro-centric) assumptions of historical progress and linearity inferred by the term, and the tendency for discussion of 'postcoloniality' to elide local and historical specificities. For discussion of the issues in the context of Francophone studies, see Forsdick and Murphy (2003). We would argue that 'post-colonial' has its uses as a chronological marker to describe the ontological and empirical realities of nationhood which arise when Algerian independence is recognised by France, and require both countries to (re)think themselves as nation states; but along with Forsdick and Murphy, we would also assert that the empirical facts of independence and state sovereignty do not mean that a clear line is drawn between a colonial past and a post-colonial present, but that, as we have already seen earlier chapters, the legacies of colonialism and 'coloniality' (among which are certain ways of seeing), persist in and continue to shape the nature, understanding and perception of both France and Algeria.

country must negotiate, and which is arguably felt all the more keenly given that asserting a sense of national identity was central for both in the years following Algerian independence. For as Benjamin Stora has underlined, both the war and Algeria's accession to statehood were crucial events for each country: overtly so, in the case of Algeria, where the national revolution was presented as 'l'essence même de la légitimité du pouvoir', particularly following the military coup of 1965 led by Houari Boumediène (Stora 1991: 7, see also Evans and Phillips 2007: 81-88); less obviously, but no less significantly in France, where the political upheaval triggered by the war, in terms of the constitutional crisis of 1958, the return to power of Charles de Gaulle and the institution of the Fifth Republic, led to the country's political and economic reconfiguration (expressed most notably in a sustained programme of modernisation), and shapes to this day France's political culture, permeated as it is by persistent debates over republican ideology and national identity in a post-colonial context (Silverman 1992 and Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire (eds) 2006).

We noted in the introduction that the Franco-Algerian tandem presents particular complexities in its post-colonial form. On the one hand, to explore their post-colonial relationship is to consider the encounter between two distinct sovereign, national spaces, and concomitantly, the portrayal of two (increasingly distinct) national identities. We need therefore to consider how the national spaces of each country are made manifest and brought into dialogue through visual representation, and also how it might capture and display the consequences of decolonisation for both countries in spatial and other terms. For example, while the two capital cities of Algiers and Paris certainly act as focal points for the staging of the Franco-Algerian relationship – in films such as *Salut cousin!* (dir. Merzak Allouache, 1996) or *Beur, blanc, rouge* (dir. Mahmoud Zemmouri, 2006) – we can also identify the persistence of other notable topoi, such as the *bled* (ancestral village) in Algeria, and the *banlieues* (deprived suburbs of major cities) in France, the development of which in the post-war period as both a phenomenon of urbanisation and a political and social problem is in many ways related directly to the legacy of decolonisation as it is played out in terms of immigration, population distribution and state-led modernisation.

Yet as we also noted in the introduction, the extent to which post-colonial France and Algeria can be thought through as independent nation states has itself been called into

question, most notably by Étienne Balibar, for whom each is irrevocably bound up in the other. What he terms 'l'ensemble franco-algérien' (1998: 81) has the appearance of two nations, the will to be two nations, but in many respects the everyday reality of one nation, a reality forged in particular by the extensive transnational networks constituted by familial links, diasporas and migrations. Balibar asserts the complexity of the Franco-Algerian entity, arguing that France and Algeria are not divided by a frontier in the post-colonial era so much as themselves constituting what he calls a 'thick' frontier or 'frontière-monde' (1998: 81); that is to say, they constitute a world as frontier, as vast border zone or contact zone. As such, the Franco-Algerian space is at once hybrid and hybridising, a location of transnational encounter and identity formation. The notion is pursued by Paul Silverstein (2004) in his discussion of 'Algeria in France'. For Silverstein, the imbrications of Algerian immigrant (and especially Berber) communities within contemporary France opens up what he terms a 'transpolitical' space in which political and cultural debate and exchange cut across national boundaries.

From the perspective opened up by Balibar and Silverstein, the Franco-Algerian tandem emerges as an exemplary coupling for thinking about broader issues concerning the status, stability and location of frontiers in an era when national sovereignty is increasingly called into question by the deregulated flows of capital driving globalisation, and by the political responses to capital's demands, the most notable of which was the creation of the supranational space of the European Union in 1992. Indeed, Carrie Tarr (2007) notes how an increasing number of French films during the 1990s and 2000s explore encounters at and through France's borders. In doing so, they can be seen to stage a general anxiety over the 'porosity' of the national border, and its uncertain status in the context of European integration. For while the national boundaries within the EU are legislated away (for example by the Schengen Agreement on cross-border movement, implemented in 1997), the EU's own supranational frontier is asserted as a filter and bulwark against perceived threats from beyond – a beyond which begins with countries such as Algeria on the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

Mireille Rosello sounds an important note of caution in relation to this. Even as we sketch out the possibilities of a transpolitical and transnational Franco-Algerian space, she argues, we cannot overlook the persistence and realities of borders on the ground, particularly – as we saw in the previous chapter – for those looking north from Algeria and elsewhere: 'pour

beaucoup de ressortissants qui cherchent à mettre en pratique une double appartenance, la séparation est peut-être au contraire plus traditionnellement binaire que jamais' (2003: 795). The peculiarity of the Franco-Algerian relationship, then, lies in the fact that the frontier between them oscillates constantly between dissolution into the transnational and the transpolitical on the one hand, and obstinate persistence on the other as structuring of identity rooted and defined in clearly national terms. Moreover, the Franco-Algerian frontier can manifest itself not merely at the bureaucratic and administrative levels of the state, but at different moments and in a range of contexts and locations: familial, social, cultural. The simultaneous presence and absence of frontiers emerges as a key tension whenever the relationship between the two countries is staged and played out. What interests us here is how visual culture helps to map and understand the complex contours of the Franco-Algerian relationship, and the role played by the visual depiction of space and place in this process.

Any portrait of post-colonial states and spaces will inevitably be inflected by the contemporary realities of those states, and the material, social and political transformations they undergo as they forge their own way in the world. Equally inevitably, such portraits will also be informed by the history and consequences of the colonial relationship between France and Algeria, or what Michael O'Riley, drawing on Balibar, describes as 'the haunting of both national territories by the phantom memories of Franco-Algerian colonial relations' (O'Riley 2010: 80). Put another way, post-colonial Algeria and France are spaces with history populated and traversed by people with histories and memories; people who very often – as we have seen throughout this book – are all too aware of the way in which memory and identity are bound up in place, and whose lives and trajectories are frequently constituted by co-ordinates plotted between and across both national spaces.

Furthermore, the visualisation of post-colonial spaces in contemporary visual culture is frequently inflected by, and embodied within, particular perspectives, subjectivities, histories and memories, whether it be life stories which are staged and dramatised in cinematic form, or (auto-)biographical journeys and projects in the case of a photographer such as Bruno Boudjelal (2009). That is to say, we need to consider how individual trajectories illuminate and draw together the post-colonial spaces of France and Algeria, and the interplay they involve back and forth between individual and collective, past and present, history and memory, and across

spaces which are at once transnational and unambiguously national. So our concern in this chapter is with what we can term, following Rosello (2005), 'performative encounters' between the national, post-colonial spaces of France and Algeria, encounters whose mediation produces new forms of understanding. Where Rosello investigates them in the domain of literature, we explore their manifestation in the sphere of visual culture. We are concerned too with how those encounters are vehicled and lived by individuals with their own memories, histories and trajectories.

Visualising post-colonial encounters

The post-colonial encounter between France and Algeria is a theme evoked most obviously (at first glance at least) in the so-called *beur* cinema which rose to prominence in France during the 1980s and 90s. The films of *beur* cinema are made by, and focus on, the lives and fortunes in France of Maghrebi immigrants and their descendents. As Naficy (2001) and Tarr (2005) among others have argued, they foreground questions of identity as 'in-betweenness', exploring how people of immigrant origin, and men in particular, must negotiate a place for themselves in France, while simultaneously coming to terms with the heritage and consequences of their North African background. They evoke how it feels to live between two cultures and to receive the 'hospitality' – or more accurately, the lack of it – shown by the French republic towards those over whose families it once claimed dominion.

They are also films in which the depiction of space has a vital role to play. Indeed, for Levine (2008: 45), space and territory are the most productive perspectives from which to view *beur* cinema. These films repeatedly investigate France's post-colonial landscapes, and most notably, the housing estates on the edge of the country's major cities where many immigrant populations found themselves settling, and which frame their lived experience within the French republic. In doing so, they reveal the spatial dynamics of power at work in contemporary France; that is to say, how power relations are manifested in spatial terms, and predicated on a persistent opposition between centre and periphery (or at the very least, the persistent perception of the currency of that opposition).

However, as Higbee and Lim (2010: 12) have rightly observed, *beur* cinema for the most part has been concerned over the years with articulating the place of Franco-Maghrebi

youth within the French nation, a preoccupation signalled by Malik Chibane's *Hexagone* (1994), one of the most well known examples of such films. The title makes explicit reference to the familiar metaphor for French national space which, we noted in Chapter 1, took root with particular vigour in political discourse during France's early post-colonial years, as the country found comfort in a figure which asserted a certain self-contained geometry, order and precision, and reflected the modernity it was determined to embrace. The film stands as an invitation to remember the *beurs* and the *banlieues* to which they have been relegated as integral to that national space, and a call for the contemporary republic to reflect on its identity and direction in the wake of the decolonisation which itself triggered the reconfiguration of France's spatial imaginary, and its understanding of its own borders and frontiers.

For Higbee (2007), Algerian émigré directors such as Merzak Allouache or Mahmoud Zemmouri, whose activities, political positions or personal circumstances have led them to leave Algeria or operate between France and Algeria, have engaged more directly with questions of transnational connections, movement and exchange, and explored identity as it might take shape within and between each nation and culture. Yet while they have attracted the most sustained critical attention, figures like Allouache are not alone in staging the relationship between France and Algeria. It is also the concern of directors of *pied-noir* origin such as Alexandre Arcady, Dominique Cabrera and Nicole Garcia, whose own histories and trajectories have made them sensitive to the dynamics of loss, memory, nostalgia and fantasy we explored in Chapter 1. Furthermore, neither is it solely in the domain of cinema where these questions are pursued, even if cinema is where they have been most visibly explored, and where most critical debate has been focused in recent years. Staging the encounter between France and Algeria in spatial terms has been a recurrent theme too of contemporary photography and visual art by those with roots on both sides of the Mediterranean, whether it be the exploration of the role of the ferry as a liminal space between France and Algeria in the work of Élisabeth Leuvrey and Zineb Sedira, discussed in Chapter 5, or Kader Attia's sustained interrogation of the impact of French modernist thinking on colonial space in Algeria (Crawley Jackson 2011).

Likewise, the theme is central to the work of various contemporary photographers, including Bruno Boudjelal and Raymond Depardon, who anthologised a selection of his work on Algeria in 2010. Particularly curious, as we discuss later, is the lavish portrait of Algeria by

French photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand (2006). Part of his 'vue du ciel' project, Arthus-Bertrand's glossy, full colour images of Algeria from the air stage its landscapes and urban environments in spectacular fashion. In other words, considering the visual mediation of the Franco-Algerian relationship in the contemporary period requires us not just to look beyond the work of *beur* and émigré directors to that of other filmmakers preoccupied by the issue, but also – and notwithstanding cinema's vital importance in staging and exploring the Franco-Algerian tandem – to resituate contemporary cinema itself in the field of visual culture more generally.

Negotiating history between France and Algeria

As we noted above, the spatial encounters between each country need to be plotted against the backdrop of, and in relation to, a complex set of historical co-ordinates. Moreover, these co-ordinates themselves have a bearing on how and where the encounter is staged, and how each national space is envisioned. We can identify two crucial determining contexts in particular. The first of these involve contemporary historical realities, the most notable of which is the period of bloody civil conflict in Algeria which broke out following the cancellation of elections in 1992, persisted for the best part of a decade, and had immediate, practical consequences for the portrayal of Franco-Algerian relations.[2] Carrie Tarr (2005: 188-189) points out that despite an increasing concern with the relationship and movement between France and Algeria, Algerian space is relatively invisible in *beur* and émigré films of the period, due to the impact of the civil war not only on the practicalities of filming in the country, but also in terms of the threats posed to cultural figures in Algeria during the conflict, including directors such as Allouache. Consequently, as the 1990s progressed, films evoking the Franco-Algerian relationship – such as *Salut cousin!* and *L'Autre côté de la mer* (dir. Dominique Cabrera, 1997) – were usually staged in a French setting, and it was through photography that visual encounters with Algeria under civil war conditions were played out, the relative mobility and discretion of the stills camera allowing photographers such as Boudjelal, Depardon and Michael von Graffenried to avoid some of the problems confronting cinema film crews.[3]

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[2] On the civil conflict of the 1990s and the events leading to it, see Evans and Philips (2007), chs 5-7.

[3] Nevertheless, all three must negotiate the suspicion of, and hostility towards photography in contemporary Algeria, a legacy in particular of the civil war. As Graffenried puts it, 'je ne vois que de rares situations où les Algériens acceptent l'appareil (célébrations) – pour la plupart des Algériens, aucun moment banal ou quotidien n'est photographiable' (1998: 12).

The relative settling of the security situation in Algeria during the 2000s, marked especially by the election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika as president in 1999, the passing of a 'law on civil concord' which came into force in January 2000, and subsequent amnesties for many of those involved in the fighting (Evans and Phillips 2007: 262-265), meant that more filming began to take place in Algeria. During the 2000s, a range of films, including *Exils* (dir. Tony Gatlif, 2004), *Il était une fois dans l'oued* (dir. Djamel Bensalah, 2005) and *Bled Number One* (dir. Rabah Ameur-Zaïmèche, 2006), set out to stage the Franco-Algerian encounter on Algerian soil, each dealing in its own way with the legacies and consequences of the civil conflict. In fact, the films of this period are striking for the divergent ways in which they envision Algeria, from the quasi-ethnographic investigation of life in post-conflict rural Algeria through the prism of emigrant figure Kamel in *Bled Number One*, to the spectacular aerial photography of glittering seas and majestic Mediterranean cities in *Il était une fois dans l'oued*.

At the same time, material from this period engages with the legacy of the Algerian War and French colonial involvement in Algeria, whose consequences continue to be felt out on both sides of the Mediterranean. It maps the complex layering of history in which individuals become caught up, and through which they must understand themselves and their situation. *L'Autre côté de la mer* and *Exils*, for example, depict two types of 'return' by *pied-noir* figures, one to France and the other to Algeria; and *Exils*, along with *Bled Number One* and *Beur, blanc, rouge*, explores the position of Franco-Maghrebi characters in relation to the increasingly mythical country of roots and origins that is Algeria. *Bled Number One* focuses on the confused legal and cultural status of those born in France to Algerian parents, whose unresolved citizenship leaves them open to the perils of the so-called *double peine* (expulsion to their parents' country of origin following a prison sentence). Indeed, it is through their investigation of migration, return and the negotiation of frontiers that films such as *Bled Number One* and *Exils* raise broader questions about the nature of national space and national frontiers in the contemporary world, and lend the specificities of the Franco-Algerian relationship an exemplary quality. In the remainder of the chapter, we home in on filmic and photographic material from the 1990s and 2000s, by figures from a range of backgrounds, which brings together and holds in tension this constellation of historical, political and social forces; and we examine how such forces are

played out in spatial terms, across the different locations in which the Franco-Algerian encounter is envisioned.

Visions of post-coloniality in France

If we begin on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, it is because – for the historical and political reasons noted above – films evoking the Franco-Algerian encounter in the 1990s are predominantly set in France. They can be situated in relation to a broader concern at the time across the spectrum of French culture with mapping post-colonial France, from *beur* and *banlieue* cinema to literary texts by writers such as Annie Ernaux (1993, 1997), François Maspero (1990) and Jean Rolin (1995), and photographic projects and collaborations (such as Larvor and Sebbar 1998). Such work was identifying the often radically modernised spaces of contemporary France, many of which were to be found on the suburban margins of its major cities (both geographically and socio-economically), as key locations for understanding the political and demographic transformations of post-colonial France, and central to the debate over identity in and of the contemporary French republic. In doing so, it signalled the intimate relationship between French decolonisation and modernisation asserted by Kristin Ross (1995).

If the spaces of the *banlieue* were emerging as particularly important, it is because they were home to large sections of France's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural immigrant populations, welcomed by France as a cheap labour force during the years of modernisation and expansion in the 1950s and 60s; but those spaces were themselves products of the extensive programme of spatial reconfiguration and modernisation pursued with particular vigour under De Gaulle in the 1960s. Having 'decisively slammed shut the door to the Algerian episode' (Ross 1995: 9), and all it represented in terms of France's imperial ambitions, De Gaulle identified in territorial modernisation a means of reasserting the country's national identity, or what he had famously called 'une certaine idée de la France' (De Gaulle 1954: 1). Moreover, it was a strategy dependent directly on France's colonial legacy, not only in terms of the influx of cheap immigrant labour it required, but also because it exploited planning techniques developed in the French colonies, and implemented by the numerous colonial administrators who were beginning to return home. In effect, as Ross puts it, France 'turned to a form of interior colonialism' (1995: 7) during the 1960s. The close links between (de)colonisation and modernisation in France

were made manifest by the appointment in 1961 of Paul Delouvrier, who had previously served as the French government's senior representative in Algeria between 1958 and 1960, to oversee the modernisation and development (*aménagement*) of the Paris region.[4]

By the 1990s, in short, and to borrow from Didier Lapeyronnie (2006), the *banlieue* had become a 'théâtre colonial', where the legacies and consequences of France's activities and ambitions are played out. Itself a product of France's post-colonial transformation during the 1960s and 70s, it contributes in turn to the developments which are seen as symptomatic of France's post-colonial dis-ease, in terms of ghettoisation, social exclusion and communitarianism; and it is with the problem of how France is living with itself in the contemporary moment that much of the literary and visual cultural production of the period is concerned.

The first two films we consider here recalibrate that perspective through their explicit thematisation of contact between France and Algeria. They historicise our understanding of post-colonial France by bringing Algeria back into the frame via their central characters, and reminding us of the ways in which Algeria persists in France. If we bring together Allouache's *Salut cousin!* and Cabrera's *L'Autre côté de la mer*, it is firstly because of the common ground they share. Released in the late 1990s and set in the contemporary period, both are about a visit from Algeria to France, one by Alilo, an Algerian national who comes to Paris to collect clothes destined for *trabendo* (trade of goods imported illegally) in Algiers and meets up with his cousin Mok, of Algerian immigrant origin but Parisian born and bred; the other by Georges, a *pied-noir* businessman who remained in Oran after independence and whose visit to Paris for an eye operation leads to encounters with various family members and acquaintances with connections to Algeria. Both films open up perspectives on Paris as a post-colonial city through the viewpoints of the central characters and the places where they spend their time. At the same time, the contrasting socio-cultural origins and trajectories of the films' main characters (already signalled by their given names) mean they plot different routes across the city, and make clear the complex and heterogeneous nature of its postcoloniality.

Salut cousin! is in many ways an essay about contemporary Paris, and how the city has been shaped, constituted and populated in the post-colonial period. The theme of urban change

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[4] On the role played by returning colonial administrators in French post-war urban planning, see Fredenucci (2003).

is foregrounded from the start, when Mok brings Alilo home to his flat in the ramshackle and crumbling neighbourhood of La Moskova in the eighteenth *arrondissement*, an area which he optimistically presents as 'l'avenir de Paris' thanks to the young, upwardly mobile and artistic populations he claims are settling there. Its instability as a space and its uncertain future is confirmed, in more negative tone, by Mok's neighbour Fatoumata (with whom Alilo will become romantically involved at the end of the film), who argues rather that it is 'menacée par la disparition'. Indeed, during a tour of the city which Mok gives Alilo shortly after having taken him to this relic of a Parisian past, the film highlights a recent attempt to express a vision of French modernity and futurity in the form of the Opéra Bastille.

Completed in 1989, it is one of the most recognisable of the *grands travaux* commissioned during François Mitterrand's presidency to mark the bicentenary of the French Revolution; but along with buildings such as the Grande Arche de la Défense, its role was also to articulate France's national identity and status in the contemporary world through the symbolic manipulation of space. By locating an institution of high culture on the site of one of the founding events of the French Revolution, the state set out to make manifest France's position as an advanced nation and beacon of enlightenment, and underscore the relationship between that position and the events which had taken place at the Bastille two hundred years previously; but if Allouache dwells on the building, it is perhaps because of what it obscures as much as what it symbolises. Panivong Norindr (1996: 251) has argued that the aim of Mitterrand's *grands travaux* was to 'fortify the construction of a national cultural identity and of an imaginary homogeneous community', and that it did so at the expense of obscuring or denying the realities of the increasingly pluralist French society embodied by Mok himself, and the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic district to the north in which he lives.[5]

Allouache triangulates these two locations in central Paris with a third in the near suburbs which reflects another form taken by post-colonial modernisation in France. Mok's parents live on the high-rise housing estate of Les Courtillières in Bobigny, developed as part of the spatial reorganisation of the Paris region led by Paul Delouvrier in the 1960s. Drawing in part, as we noted above, on lessons learned about urban planning and spatial development in the former colonies, the *Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de*

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[5] On the history of the Bastille district and its role as a site for the expression of French identity, see Reader (2011).

Paris, which Delouvrier published in 1965, proposed the radical reshaping of the region's economic and transport infrastructure; the creation of five new *départements* (including Seine-Saint-Denis, of which Bobigny was the administrative capital); and the expansion of mixed and social housing (including projects such as Les Courtillières) in order to accommodate a rising urban population, many of whom were of immigrant origin.

The first scenes at Les Courtillières, shot at night as the cousins return from an unsuccessful rapping gig by Mok, assert the estate's foreboding monumentality, verticality and scale, and as such, contribute to an established iconography and understanding of the post-war *banlieue* as a fundamentally alienating landscape. Moreover, their encounter with it provokes Mok's gloomy narrative of his family history which sounds almost like a textbook example of depravation and exclusion (unemployed father, mentally ill mother, one brother in prison and the other dead from an overdose, sister who has been forced to turn to prostitution). However, Allouache successfully complicates this vision of the *banlieue* when Alilo returns to Les Courtillières on his own to visit Mok's parents, and discovers the gap between Mok's narrative and the stable reality of their family life (father retired, brothers successfully pursuing careers in New York, sister a taxi driver): the *banlieue* suddenly appears synonymous less with alienation than with everyday life in all its ordinary normality. Allouache's more nuanced vision of the *banlieue* is expressed in a sequence shot taken from an elevated position as the sun sets, and which tracks Alilo as he moves through the estate in search of his relations' housing block. The wide angle panorama certainly underlines the scale of the estate and its surroundings, as Alilo, a tiny figure far below us, makes his way between the buildings; but he does so accompanied by the sounds of a football match we can see being played in the centre of the shot, and which grounds his second encounter with Les Courtillières in a more reassuring context of communal leisure activity.

Tracing the circulation of Alilo around Paris, *Salut cousin!* invites us to re-view the city from the immigrant's perspective, while at the same time mapping the locations of immigrant and diasporic life within it. In this regard, the film dwells on the area around Barbès in the eighteenth *arrondissement*, and reminds us in doing so that immigrant communities are not always spatially peripheral, but constitutive also of the spaces of central Paris. The boulevards and bars around Barbès emerge in the film as the locus of an Algiers-in-Paris, where

transnational networks are activated, established and confirmed. Within minutes of arriving in the area, for example, Alilo has encountered Rachid, a former policeman who fled Algiers in fear of his life. The film draws the two cities into dialogue from the start, encouraging the audience to think Paris through in relation to Algiers and vice versa: 'ça me rappelle Alger', observes Alilo in the opening minutes with some surprise, as he encounters Mok's decrepit neighbourhood for the first time. On one level, Alilo's bemused reaction is clearly intended to serve as a humorous and deprecating comment on both cities: if Mok's *quartier* reminds him of Algiers, we assume, it does so in its very decrepitude. His response destabilises the presumed hierarchy between the two cities by signalling a gap between the imagined grandeur and advancement of the former colonial capital (an advancement whose wished fulfilment is expressed in buildings such as the Opéra Bastille) and the reality of its uneven development in the post-colonial era. Yet, read unironically, Alilo's comment can also be taken to express a sense of uncanny familiarity between Paris and Algiers, a recognition on his part of how France left its imprint on the look and feel of urban space in Algiers.

However, Alilo's role involves more than just articulating an Algerian perspective on Paris. Rather, he can be seen to take on a metonymic quality through the way in which his embodied presence also allows Algiers, we might say, to present itself within Paris. It is precisely through Alilo's presence in and movement through the city that Algiers-in-Paris starts to materialise, and the spectator can grasp how Algiers is present in filigree within Paris through a network of traces and connections both historical and contemporary. From Rachid, the policeman fleeing extremist threats and dogged by his actions during the unrest of October 1988, and the radical imam from Algiers who appears in the basement mosque frequented by Alilo's uncle, to the senior Algerian official who organises a bogus arranged marriage for his daughter and Alilo himself, the film reveals the extent to which Paris functions as something approaching an spatial adjunct or extension of Algiers, a back yard for the other capital in which its political disputes and parallel economy can be given free rein.

The constellation of Algerian characters introduced by Allouache can be seen to encapsulate and summarise recent Algerian history (and in particular, how the FLN as Algeria's ruling single party at first resists, then initiates, then quashes political change over a period of three or so years between the riots of October 1988 and the cancellation of multi-party elections

in January 1992). It also demonstrates how historical and political processes begun and played out at a national level have an impact on the lives of ordinary people at the level of the everyday, not least in terms of the country's increasing political and economic disarray; but drawing out how Paris is shot through with Algiers serves too as a reminder of the extent to which Algeria's present is embedded within and defined by its Franco-Algerian past.

The historical depth and persistence of transnational connections between France and Algeria are captured when Alilo meets the Jewish *pied-noir* clothes manufacturer with whom his boss in Algiers does business. The appearance of M. Maurice is both a reminder of the diversity of the Algerian diaspora in Paris, and the degree to which relations between France and Algeria constitute the economic, social and cultural life of the French capital. While he is sure never to return to Algiers, Maurice maintains the presence of the city through recordings of traditional Algerian music which – in an echo of the situations discussed in Chapter 1 – trigger memories of Algiers spatialised as walks through the city's European neighbourhoods. Thus, it seems, Alilo is confronted at every turn with reminders of Algiers, and the diverse ways in which Algeria is present in France, and vice versa.

However, the film also points to the fragility of these transnational connections, and the ease with which people can fall foul of the borders, frontiers and controls which intervene in post-colonial Franco-Algerian relations. The two most obvious reminders come in the form of the deportation firstly of Rachid (caught selling counterfeit Rolex watches), and secondly, at the end of the film, of Mok himself, whose failure to acquire French citizenship, despite being born in France, leaves him exposed to the threat of expulsion. The post-colonial realities of frontiers manifest themselves with the arrival at his flat of the police to serve a warrant for his deportation and escort him to the airport. Of course, his arrest is central to the dramatic irony with which the film concludes, as Alilo, having fallen in love with Fatoumata and decided to remain in Paris, replaces Mok within the parallel economy of the black market and illegal immigration, according to what Rosello (2001) describes as a 'logic of interchangeability'; but Mok's fortunes also serve as a warning that Alilo runs the risk of the same fate, and that his new-found happiness with Fatoumata risks being only temporary.

Allouache's portrait of Algiers-in-Paris, then, is inhabited by a fundamental tension. At once an insight into the persistence and significance of the transnational connections which

bind Algiers and Paris, and the different locations where Algeria is present in Paris, it is simultaneously a reminder of the risks run by the individuals who populate and constitute those networks, and the impermanence of their position within and between each country. The vitality of transnational flows and exchanges belies the fragile position of those who find themselves without the papers necessary to confirm their national identity and belonging, and therefore fall foul of the state's 'inhospitable suspicion of strangers' (Rosello 2001: 118).

The imbrications of Algeria and France are also pursued in Cabrera's *L'Autre côté de la mer*, which came out a year after *Salut cousin!* The complexity and instability of the relationship between the two countries is expressed in the film's title, for it is unclear to which side of the sea, France or Algeria, it refers. The fact that the film tells the story of a visit to Paris by the *pied-noir* Georges Montereau, who has continued to live in Oran since Algerian independence, suggests that the 'other' side is France; but the insistent presence of Algeria in the film returns us constantly to the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Thus, from the start, the film foregrounds the undecideability of their relationship. It signals the persistent role played by each country as the 'other' of the other, as a defining and yet absent presence, one figured neatly in the periphrasis of the title. At the same time, and in concert with Balibar, it suggests how the two countries are in many respects one and the same, how their relationship is defined by contiguity rather than difference. Moreover, the film maps out how this mirroring and doubling shapes the lives of the characters and is central to their sense of identity, belonging and self-understanding.

Like *Salut cousin!* the film draws together and holds in tension different facets of the Franco-Algerian relationship. Set against the backdrop of the on-going civil conflict in Algeria, news of which we see filtering through into France and which, as the action unfolds, begins to spill over into the streets of Paris, it depicts Montereau's visit to Paris for a cataract operation (performed by a second-generation immigrant doctor with whom he strikes up a friendship), and his encounter, after thirty years, with sisters who fled Algeria with the rest of the family in 1962. As Montereau's stay prolongs itself, and the situation in Algeria deteriorates, it becomes clear that his business in Oran is the subject of deals and negotiations as parties in both countries set out to exploit the growing chaos in Algeria. The film succeeds in holding these different historical periods and narratives in relation, and does so in large part by playing them out – in a manner similar to *Salut cousin!* – in the spaces of the former colonial power. Central to this is the way in

which the film distributes the history and memory of the Franco-Algerian relationship across its different characters and locations.

The film's similarities with *Salut cousin!* persist in terms of key elements of the plot. Structured around the relationship between two male protagonists, both films are about the (re)discovery of the former colonial capital by visitors from Algeria, and the encounter with memories *of* Algeria which persist in France. Nevertheless, differences between Alilo's Paris and that of Georges quickly appear, and reflect their different social origins and trajectories. Where Alilo's Paris is that of the northern *arrondissements* and the working-class suburbs, Georges circulates much more in the grand spaces of central Paris (as he attends his consultation at the Hôtel-Dieu on the Île de la cité), the expensive suburb of St Germain-en-Laye to the west (where he stays with his doctor, Tarek) and the leafy *banlieue pavillonnaire* where he tracks down a teenage flame from the last years of French Algeria. His travels also take him beyond Paris to the elegant house and garden of one of his sisters in provincial France. This visit especially highlights the solid middle-class credentials, relative success and accumulation of different sorts of capital by the *pied-noir* diaspora since their emigration in 1962.

The two films also share common ground in the form of main characters with an Algerian immigrant background. Like Mok in *Salut cousin!*, Tarek considers himself to be French above all else. Despite being born to Algerian parents, he has no interest in his Algerian heritage; refuses the assumptions of fraternity and shared origins among Algerian immigrants articulated in ritualised references to the *bled*; and denies any knowledge of the Arabic language. However, his fortunes are in sharp contrast with those of Mok: as a successful doctor in central Paris who lives with his (white) wife and child in the smart western suburbs, Tarek stands as an exemplar of immigrant integration into the French republic, and as such, offers a counter-narrative to the dominant stories of marginalised and alienated youth of Maghrebi origin thematised in *beur* and *banlieue* cinema of the period.[6] However, Tarek's drama stems from the price paid for this apparent success, and he expresses it in spatial terms: 'je suis de la cité et non de St Germain!' he exclaims, during a heated argument with his wife over growing financial difficulties. The trajectory of socio-economic ascension which displaces Tarek from the housing estates of the deprived suburbs to the elegance of St German-en-Laye marks him out as a

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[6] On this, see Tarr (2005), and ch. 6 especially.

miraculé in the sense developed by Pierre Bourdieu; in other words, as someone who has overcome the various obstacles (imposed and inherited) placed in the way of social mobility and self-improvement;[7] but as Bourdieu suggests, the social trajectory which confirms the success of the *miraculé* also risks bringing with it a feeling of dislocation or existential uncertainty, a fragile or uncertain sense of one's place in the social order which Tarek articulates precisely in terms of the spatial dislocation he has undergone.

While the differing histories and trajectories of their characters mean that each film maps out contrasting post-colonial geographies of Paris and France, *L'Autre côté de la mer* nevertheless shares one key location with Allouache's film: a local Algerian café-bar which we can imagine to be in one of the capital's northern *arrondissements*, and which serves as a nodal point for much of the film's action. Indeed, its importance is signified by the fact that it is the first place to which Georges is taken after his arrival from Oran. The bar functions as a microcosm of Algeria-in-France, in that it is not only a meeting place for those with Algerian connections, but a location where different histories converge and encounter each other, whether it be the individual histories of the people who pass through its doors (emigrants, *beurs*, *pieds-noirs* and clandestine migrants), or the large-scale national histories which themselves inflect individual trajectories, from the Algerian War, with its consequences for migration between France and Algeria, to the contemporary civil conflict, news of which is relayed by the bar's television, and produces division and conflict within the bar itself.

As the presence of the television suggests, the bar also plays a crucial role as a place where Algeria is mediated, constructed and represented both for the film's viewers and the characters themselves. It foregrounds questions about how Algeria is made visible to and within France, not least through its own décor. On our second visit there, the camera pans round to reveal a large painting of Oran on a back wall, depicting a panorama of the city from the cathedral of Santa Cruz perched on a hill above it. The painting can be read as a *mise-en-abyme* of the film's concern to explore the idea of Algeria as a remembered, imagined and

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[7] The concept of the *miraculé* took shape in relation to Bourdieu's work on the French education system in the 1960s, which he characterised as a means not of ensuring social mobility but of reproducing the dominant social order. See especially Bourdieu and Passeron (1970). *Miraculés* were those students from the 'dominated fractions' of society who were nevertheless able to achieve educational and through that, social success, albeit often at a price. Bourdieu discusses his own trajectory in such terms, coming as he did from a peasant farming background in the Pyrenees, in the 'auto-analysis' he wrote towards the end of his life (Bourdieu 2004).

idealised place. It opens up a fourth dimension in the café as a space which can vehicle memory, fantasy, loss and nostalgia, its role in doing so underscored by the fact that the shot of the painting concludes a sequence during which Georges watches a customer as he cries over the news that his brother has been assassinated in Oran. The realities of contemporary Algeria, whether mediated by the television news or lived through as shock and grief, enter into collision with the envisioned Algeria of its diasporic communities. Indeed, the film persistently thematises ways in which Algeria exists in mythologized form within France, from the myths of fraternity and the *bled* resisted by Tarek, to the assumptions about life in independent Algeria expressed by Georges' *pied-noir* relatives (repeatedly disrupted by Georges with his own stories – equally fanciful, perhaps – of Sundays at the beach and his Mediterranean lifestyle).

Therefore both *Salut cousin!* and *L'Autre côté de la mer* hold in dialogue the complex intermeshing of the Franco-Algerian past and present, and map them spatially across Paris and beyond. Not only do they produce a portrait of post-colonial France, but they also remind us of the extent to which contemporary France is infused with Algeria. They are also films which, not least by locating their action solely in a French context, are also about the nature, form and persistence of an 'Algérie imaginaire' among Algerian diasporas in France. They explore how Algeria is fantasised and envisioned by different communities in different ways, and how it provokes questions of belonging and identity for those who find themselves caught between two nations and locations.

The theme is pursued in *Beur, blanc, rouge*, a comedy by Algerian émigré director Mahmoud Zemmouri released in 2006. The film focuses on the character of Brahim, a young, male *beur* whose mystified relationship to Algeria as mother country is staged and explored through events surrounding the friendly football match between France and Algeria held at the Stade de France in October 2001. The event gained notoriety both for the booing of the French national anthem before the game and the pitch invasion which led to it being abandoned in the second half; but as Mireille Rosello (2003) has argued, it was also richly symbolic. Not only did it mark the first time that the two nations had played each other since Algerian independence, but the encounter itself, and the manner in which it unfolded also served to encapsulate the persistently problematic nature of Franco-Algerian relations more broadly. We see in the film how football acts as a catalyst for (mis-)recognition and (mis-)identification by provoking

expressions of belonging among supporters, with Brahim – born in France and a French citizen – proudly displaying his allegiance to Algeria with his flag-draped car and his Algerian national team strip. Furthermore, the film problematises the question of national identity through its depiction of French team member Zinedine Zindane (born in Marseilles to Algerian immigrant parents in 1972) as an archetypal transnational figure located between France and Algeria. The question of who owns Zidane and where his allegiances should lie, surfaces frequently, and is expressed most notably later in the film by the presence of his framed photograph in the office of an Algerian customs official.[8]

As such, *Beur, blanc, rouge* destabilises questions of belonging and identity, and does so, we might say, by opening up a gap between national allegiance (identification with a country rooted in affect and emotion) and national identity (a more bureaucratised formalisation of belonging expressed through state-controlled documentation such as passports and identity cards). It also signals the importance of such issues for the so-called *beur* generation in France. We might therefore be tempted to read the film as a celebration of transnational and transcultural identity in contemporary France, and an exploration of how a sense of 'Algerianness' can be constitutive of an identity which is also French. Like *Salut cousin!* and *L'Autre côté de la mer*, it is a film about transnational connections and flows between the two countries, and through that, about getting to grips with the nature of a hybrid identity.

However, like the earlier films, *Beur, blanc, rouge* is also about the limits to those transnational movements and exchanges, about the frontiers and borders between France and Algeria and the forms they take (bureaucratic, most obviously, but also cultural, social and imaginary). It explores how the two post-colonial nations assert their national identity and sovereignty though the policing of their frontiers and the exercising of border controls. Much of the film's action is located at national frontiers in air and sea ports in both France and Algeria, and dramatises what happens when national frontiers cut across and intervene in expressions of transnational allegiance and identification (on making a trip to Algeria at the end of the film, Brahim's family is outraged to hear that they need a visa to enter the country). Moreover, and befitting a film about crossing between North Africa and Europe in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States, it signals how the Franco-Algerian tandem comes to

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[8] For a reading of Zidane as transnational, multi-ethnic and politicised figure, see Guénif-Souilamas (2009).

be situated within a broader geopolitical context and renewed anxieties about identity and alterity in the contemporary world: as he jokes about having shaved off his beard before flying to Paris for the match, Brahim's Algerian cousin Saïd recognises that more so than ever, he and his fellow citizens risk finding themselves on the wrong side of the frontier between the West and the Rest.

Beur, blanc, rouge, like *Salut cousin!*, also draws attention to the precarity of belonging and identity, particularly for those who are perceived as being of immigrant origin in France. The theme is drawn out at the start of the film when Brahim, his car covered with Algerian flags in the days before the match, is challenged by a policeman over his identity, and asked to produce his papers. On the one hand, the exchange is a reminder that, more so than other French citizens, immigrants, and those of immigrant origin, 'are constantly exposed to the inquisitive gaze of power, which seeks anomalies, defects and irresoluble problems' (Guénif-Souilamas 2009: 222). On the other, it opens up the ironic possibility that Brahim's own professed uncertainty over his identity and sense of belonging (as a French citizen whose heart, he tells us, is in Algeria) could be clarified for him by the implacable bureaucracy of the French state, alert to the likelihood of illegal immigration. The speed with which Brahim asserts his identity as a French citizen, and locates himself on the right side of the Franco-Algerian frontier through the presentation of correct papers, signals the limits of his own investment in, and identification with, Algeria.

Brahim's fantasised relationship with Algeria is further challenged by the visit of his Algerian cousin Saïd, a successful businessman. Like Georges in *L'Autre côté de la mer*, Saïd repeatedly calls into question the mystified way in which Brahim views Algeria, dismissing his opening greeting ('tu sens bon le bled!'), predicated on the myth of the *bled* as ancestral home, as without meaning ('t'es fou, ou quoi?') Furthermore, both Saïd's success and the possibility he offers for Brahim to find gainful employment in Algeria bring to light the complex balance of socio-economic status and power between the Algerian diaspora in France and their relatives 'back home'. For the arrival of the successful cousin, dressed in a business suit wearing an expensive watch, throws into relief the socially and economically marginal position of Brahim and his acquaintances in France.

Perhaps the most obvious difference between *Beur, blanc, rouge* and the two earlier films in terms of their depiction of Franco-Algerian relations is that the final part of Zemmouri's film is shot and located in Algeria itself, as Brahim (reluctantly) and his parents (less so) make an abortive trip to Algiers in order to secure his future through working for Saïd and marrying a distant cousin. The trip itself makes clear that Brahim's relationship with Algeria can only remain in the realm of the imaginary and that France remains his real home. The frontier which separates him from his country of election is made manifest by the police car which carries him through the city from the airport to the ferry terminal, Brahim having been identified at the border as a pitch invader during the France-Algeria match and summarily expelled. Nevertheless, the family's brief passage through Algiers is also an opportunity for the city to be presented to the audience. Static long shots in the city allow the viewer to absorb its bustling streets and expansive boulevards, while the closing credit sequence, shot on and around the car ferry as it leaves and heads to France, allows the film to close on images of Algiers' instantly recognisable harbour front, and in doing so, to remind us of its grandeur as a Mediterranean capital. The spectacular quality of these closing shots is echoed in other films of the period, as we shall see.

Visualising returns to Algeria in the 2000s

The use of Algerian locations in *Beur, blanc, rouge* was undoubtedly facilitated by the easing security situation in the country during the 2000s, and reflects a broader trend in cinema exploring the Franco-Algerian relationship at this time. One of the first films to stage a return to Algeria in this period is *Là-bas mon pays* (dir. Alexandre Arcady, 2000), about a *pied-noir* journalist and television presenter, Pierre Nivel, who goes to Algerian during the civil war in order to help the daughter of an Algerian woman with whom he fell in love as a teenager, and left behind in 1962. The film makes visible the conflict of which only glimpses were caught in *Salut cousin!* and *L'Autre côté de la mer*, and offers a portrait of a country in civil war conditions (road blocks, high speed pursuits, ambushes, tense and silent darkness).

At the same time, through its central character, the film thematises precisely the problem of visualising and mediatising Algeria during the civil war. Nivel, we are told, is motivated by the need to bear witness to events in Algeria, and would seem to have the apparatus at his disposal in order to do so; but as *Salut cousin!* and *L'Autre côté de la mer*

would suggest, the extent to which news from Algeria can penetrate the rest of the world, and the form and coherence of the narrative told, remain uncertain. The film itself, and the plot which sees Nivel gunned down by extremists, confirms the Algeria of the civil war as a place of terror and tragedy above all, a place where normality has been suspended. A similar theme emerges in documentary photographic work depicting Algeria at the time. Images taken by Bruno Boudjelal and Raymond Depardon are snatched, hurried and furtive, displaying unexpected angles and perspectives and disobeying conventions of framing and composition. They produce a fragmented portrait of a shattered country, and convey a sense of Algeria as a place in the shadows, a spectral place – one rendered, as Benjamin Stora (2001) has argued, more or less invisible during the 1990s.

Algeria's role in films from the 1990s as a presence in France at once obscure and defining is in sharp contrast to its growing visibility in films and visual culture of the 2000s. Indeed, as *Beur, blanc, rouge* would suggest, visual culture arguably has a key role to play in re-establishing the perception and understanding of Algeria during this period, and reinserting it into a wider visual economy. The decade sees an increasing number of films which stitch together the spaces of France and Algeria (*Exils*, *Beur, blanc, rouge*, *Il était une fois dans l'oued*), or use Algeria as the main stage on which to explore the nature of the relationship between the two countries (*Bled Number One*). Moreover, the theme of returns is one they frequently foreground.

Tony Gatlif's *Exils* (2004) uses the generic device of the road movie to draw France and Algeria together, in the form of a trip from Paris to Algiers by the central couple, Zano and Naïma, both of whom embody specific histories and memories.[9] Zano, of *pied-noir* origins, has an urge to return to his ancestral home. Like Tarek in *L'Autre côté de la mer*, Naïma is born of Algerian immigrant parents, but sees Algeria as a purely abstract location, one in which she has no interest or emotional investment. Their positions are established in the film's opening exchange, with Zano's sudden and earnest enquiry ('Et si on allait en Algérie?') met by Naïma's amused and dismissive response ('Qu'est-ce que tu veux aller foutre en Algérie?'). Also significant is where this exchange takes place. The film's establishing sequence situates us in a high rise apartment block looking along a section of the *boulevard périphérique*, the ring road

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[9] On the emergence of the journey theme in recent Maghrebi-French and North African émigré cinema more broadly, see Higbee (2011).

which encircles Paris and divides the city itself from its urban periphery. The location is rich in terms of its symbolic geography, placing the two characters as it does on the periphery of the centre, and thereby inviting us to infer metaphorically their similarly marginal position within contemporary French society; but the *boulevard périphérique* is also one of the most obvious and significant products of the Gaullist *aménagement* of the 1960s, through which post-colonial France was reshaped and its newly minted hexagonal identity confirmed. In propelling its characters from the margins of one post-colonial city to the past of another, the film suggests that the journey they undertake is one from being in exile in France to returning home to their Algerian roots, and implies the therapeutic nature of that return. In doing so, however, it in fact renders more opaque rather than resolves the question of where home is located.

The film links Paris and Algiers by describing an arc to the west over land and sea via Spain and Morocco, leading to encounters with a variety of people, most of whom are heading north to and through Europe, and have themselves been forced into a different sort of exile – namely, the economic migration symptomatic of contemporary globalisation. While the visual symbolism of this part of the film could appear somewhat laboured, as the two French citizens go against the swelling tide of migration from south to north, it nevertheless offers Gatlif, like Zemmouri in *Beur, blanc, rouge*, the opportunity to situate the central characters, and through them, the Franco-Algerian tandem, in a broader context. For the legacy of the colonial history which drew together France and Algeria now finds itself being played out in the context of population flows between and across developed and developing countries, and the frontiers which inflect and filter those flows. The film's passage to the west opens up a multi-temporal space in which are concatenated historical, memorial and geopolitical narratives more usually understood in straightforwardly linear terms: those still haunted by events in Algeria some forty years ago, as France brought its colonial adventure to a close, come up against people struggling to cope with socio-economic realities brought about by the geopolitical transformations of the contemporary, post-colonial era, and most notably, the reconfiguration of national and supranational borders in Europe in response to the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the growing dominance of economic liberalism. Their journey south, as they head towards an encounter with the colonial past, reveals the unresolved nature of post-war and post-colonial history and its persistent ramifications in the present.

The couple's arrival in Algiers focuses attention more specifically on the legacy of France's Algerian adventure, and does so especially through the way in which the city is filmed. Book-ending the action of the film in Paris and Algiers invites the audience to draw comparisons between the two post-colonial cities; and not unproblematically, against the confident but alienating modernity of Paris, Algiers appears in turn as a decadent and even tragic place, with rubbish piled high in the streets, earthquake damage left unrepaired and abandoned European cemeteries. Following Zano and Naïma around the city, Gatlif's mode of filming accentuates the viewer's sense of dislocation and disorientation. Algiers becomes a city of steps and stairways, of constant movement up and down. Despite the occasional panoramic view, the overall geography of the city is difficult to grasp.

If Algiers appears as a place of ruins and memory in the film, it is in part a reflection of Zano's own preoccupations as he tracks down the apartment in which his family used to live. His exuberant and emotional rediscovery of the flat is in many ways the crux of the film, not least because it suggests the cathartic potential of a return to origins; but it is also a curious and unsettling reflection on the persistence of Algeria's French past. Preserved largely intact by its Algerian occupiers, the family's paintings still on the wall, it has the air almost of a museum or memorial to *pied-noir* life. A sense of Algerian deference before colonial culture and history is reinforced when one of the occupiers, an old woman, brings out a box of old photographs for Zano almost as if she had been in anticipation of this moment of return. We are left with the disconcerting impression that Algeria's French colonial past remains latent at every turn, embedded in the material objects, material culture and built environments which constitute the habitat of the country's now liberated population.

As its emphasis on the uncompromising modernity of Paris would suggest, the film's staging of the encounter between its main characters and the memory-laden spaces of Algiers can also be read as a commentary on identity and belonging in contemporary France. In particular, Naïma's persistent, and in many ways commendably French republican, indifference to her cultural and historical origins ('Je suis française, moi', she asserts on at least one occasion) becomes an increasing source of tension within Algeria, until she is persuaded (or perhaps better, obliged) to undergo a similarly cathartic return to origins by means of a dramatic trance at the hands of a Sufi priestess. Only by properly embracing one's ethnic, cultural and

historical origins, the film suggests, can one properly find contentment, self-understanding and a sense of belonging. Yet by ending as it does with Zano and Naïma leaving the European cemetery in Algiers, walking hand in hand and out of shot, the film fails precisely to relocate its characters in the reality of contemporary France. It is unclear whether their fresh start will lead them anywhere other than back to the peripheral location in which we found them at the start of the film. It is as if, in attempting to resolve questions of belonging through its characters' return to Algeria, the film only serves to problematise them further. Indeed, for Higbee, their return is confirmation above all 'of a loss of belief in a fixed sense of either home or identity' (2011: 72).

The questions of origins, belonging and identity posed for Naïma are also explored in *Bled Number One* (2006) by Rabah Ameur-Zaïmèche. The film begins as he ends his journey from France to his home village in rural Kabylia by Kamel, apparently expelled from France following a prison sentence. The interest of the film lies firstly in the locations it uses (the villages of rural Kabylia and the city of Constantine, rather than the country's grand, Mediterranean capital city), and through those, its portrait of Algeria in the aftermath of civil conflict. It maps the tension and unease which persist within the village community as local militia groups man a road block to guard against attacks by Islamic extremists.

Secondly, like a number of the films discussed already, it uses the device of the return by outsiders or relatives from 'l'autre côté de la mer' (in the form both of Kamel and Louisa, a woman repudiated by her husband, who brings her back from France and abandons her with her family in the village) to examine the persistence of the real, tangible frontiers which remain even for people who might be perceived to be living transnationally, and which are located not just at the level of border crossings and frontier posts, but within communities and between individuals. The film is an exploration both of hospitality, and of the ways in which the gesture of hospitality simultaneously embraces guests and marks them as different. It traces the gradual evolution of Kamel's presence in the village from fêted cousin to troublesome foreign body which, by the end of the film, is on the verge of being expelled.

The process is defined especially by the discursive construction of Kamel as an outsider, the foundations of which are laid in the seemingly jovial and innocuous nickname of 'Kamel la France' he acquires soon after his return. At once a mark of endearment, the nickname nevertheless differentiates him from the group in spatial and national terms: he is

always of another place and origin even as he participates in the celebrations and rituals of community life in the village. We see how welcome, identification and recognition mutate into suspicion, hostility and rejection, and do so in almost unnoticeable ways. A key sequence in this regard takes place around a domino table, where a group of the senior men in the village discuss Kamel following an altercation when he sets upon Louisa's brother in retaliation for the beatings to which she has been subjected. As Kamel surfaces in the conversation, the epithets attached to him shift as his criminal past is recalled ('C'est un grand bandit!) and the group agrees he must go ('La France, c'est fini'). Once the conversation returns gradually to the game ('Lui, il a été en prison, il a été expulsé, et nous on n'a pas fini la partie'), his fate is sealed. From that point on, Kamel becomes increasingly aware of the community's active hostility towards him, and that departure is the only option ('Il faut que je parte d'ici', becomes his mantra).

A similar fate befalls Louisa: given her increasingly troublesome behaviour, the culmination of which sees her wandering the streets of the village, smoking and in her night clothes, to the shocked amusement of the male population for whom public space is their reserved domain (particularly at night), the only logical conclusion, adumbrated by the whispered commentary of the astonished onlookers, is for her to be categorised as 'mad'. After a suicide attempt in Constantine, she finds refuge in a psychiatric hospital, a female-dominated space which appears to offer a more compassionate environment than the world outside.

The film ends with Kamel reflecting on his options. Determined to return to France, but lacking the necessary documentation to do so legally, his only way out is to the east, via Tunisia – that is to say, along another of the routes of clandestine migration from south to north depicted by *Exils*. In raising this prospect, the film joins *Exils* in relocating characters produced by the specific history of colonial and post-colonial relationships between France and Algeria in the broader context of contemporary, global flows. It sketches the uncertain fate of the people who constitute those flows, and the directions of travel and boundaries which frame them.

Both *Exils* and *Bled Number One* offer a melancholic or uneasy portrait of contemporary Algeria, *Bled Number One* through its depiction of the legacy of civil conflict and its impact on local communities, and *Exils* by filming the aftermath of the 2004 earthquake in Algiers, which contributes to an impression of the city as an increasingly ruined place permeated by the ghosts

and relics of the past; and while explicit reference to the civil war is absent from Gatlif's film, the audience is arguably invited to see the earthquake as a metaphor for its impact and consequences. However, it is striking how another vision of Algeria starts to take shape simultaneously in other films of the period, which set out consciously to emphasise the country's return to normality as the decade progresses.

<u>Normality, spectacle and contemporary Algeria</u>

We have discussed already how, in *Beur, blanc, rouge*, the agency of Algeria as a sovereign, independent state is articulated in scenes which stage passport and border controls, where the country's authority over its borders is made clear. The Algerian customs official's implacable assertion that French nationals need a visa to enter the country, in the face of the surprise and indignation expressed by Brahim's mother, reminds us that Algeria is no longer a country in which French citizens – of whatever origin – can come and go as they please ('C'est pareil pour nous en France', he remarks). We also noted that Algeria's sovereign status is further reflected in the film's depiction of Algiers. In particular, the use of long shots and panoramas offer a spectacular, even touristic vision of the city and its landmarks (such as the iconic harbour front) which underscores its size and status as a capital city.

This way of envisioning Algiers is pursued to an even greater degree in Djamel Bensalah's comedy *Il était une fois dans l'oued* (2005). While in many respects a curious, perhaps even inconsequential film, it offers another example of how, as Higbee observes (2007: 57), cinematic comedy in the hands of *beur* and émigré directors is used to raise complex socio-cultural issues. The film's conceit involves a young, white Frenchman from the Parisian *banlieue* (played by Julien Courbey, also featuring in *Beur, blanc, rouge* as a character of similar socio-economic background), who has developed a fantasised relationship with Algeria, convinced that it is his land of birth, and that he was adopted by, rather than born to, his parents of Alsatian and Breton origin. The film is set in summer 1988 – in other words, before the uprising of October 1988 when riots broke out across Algeria, and the onset of the civil war in 1992 – and depicts Johnny's 'return' to Algeria in search of his lost roots. The film is framed by a voiceover from Johnny from the perspective of the present day, which at the end of the film maps out the largely successful and uncomplicated lives of the main characters since 1988. For

Johnny himself, we learn, this involves settling down in Algiers and opening up a corner shop. That is to say, the film draws together two periods of relative normality in Algeria, and in doing so, brackets off the rather more fraught period of the civil war (a point to which we return below).

As this brief synopsis suggests, the film can be seen in the first instance as an ironic commentary through inversion of the dominant way in which the relationship between France and Algeria is understood. The commentary unfolds principally in Johnny's trajectory as a white, working class lad leaving France (and doing so illegally, indeed, smuggling himself out in a fridge being transported to Algeria by a friend's family) to settle in Algiers and serve as the Algerian equivalent of what is popularly known in France as the *arabe du coin*; that is to say, the North African immigrant shopkeeper for whom the route to betterment and prosperity lies through entrepreneurship. In the manner of an allegorical fable, Johnny's story serves to comment on perceptions of immigration and immigrant trajectories within France, and the status of France as a land of aspiration and potential to those on the outside.[10]

That the film is to be understood primarily as an allegory about France and what it stands for in the contemporary world is further suggested by its representation of space, and in particular, the way in which it brings the spaces of France and Algeria into dialogue and thereby invites comparison between Johnny's actual and elected homeland. By casting Algeria as a land of immigration rather than emigration, a place of promise and opportunity, the film allows us to grasp how mythical visions of France as a promised land take shape; and crucial here is precisely their status as visions or images of a dream world. For the two countries are portrayed in sharply contrasting ways. The story begins in France in a location familiar from nearly two decades of *beur* and *banlieue* cinema – namely, the rectilinear, concrete blocks of a post-war suburban *cité*; but it also reminds us (again in the tradition of much of this cinema) that for the most part, such places are inhabited by a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population. Moreover, the action is filmed predominantly in close-up or at mid-range, and in interior or enclosed settings. Doing so generates an impression of confinement and restriction, and leaves the viewer with no sense of the geographical location of the estate or the world beyond it.

The contrast is sharp with Bensalah's filming of Algeria: the spectator's first encounter with Johnny's dreamland is suitably sumptuous. His arrival is marked by a sequence of aerial

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[10] On the film's playful engagement with these cultural stereotypes, see also Abderrezak (2011).

shots filmed from a helicopter. The highly mobile camera offers a spectacular, bird's eye view of the city's key landmarks, including the Basilica of Notre Dame d'Afrique and the harbour front, filmed on a bright and sunny day with buildings glinting and the sea sparkling. Indeed, they are views which – use of colour aside – invite comparison with the equally sparkling images of the city which dominate the nostalgic visions of French Algeria discussed in Chapter One. Furthermore, this sumptuous vision is not restricted to Algiers: as Johnny's journey takes him around the country, into the desert landscapes of the interior and along the coast to Oran, repeated emphasis is placed on the spectacular drama of the country's cities and open spaces. In short, we might say that *Il était une fois dans l'oued* offers a tourist vision of Algeria, a vision constructed for a tourist gaze. Indeed, this perspective is further implied by the viewer's initial encounter with the country as Johnny arrives on the ferry with his friend Yacine's family. Unlike the other films discussed here, *Il était une fois dans l'oued* locates our first glimpse of Algeria outside the subjective point of view of the main character. From the interior of the customs shed where Yacine's family have their passports checked, the film cuts to its aerial flyover of Algiers in a way which puts the city on show for the audience and no-one else.

Once more, we might be tempted to see the spectacularisation of Algeria as part of the film's ironic mode, the extravagance of its portrait reflecting Johnny's fantasised relationship with the country as dreamland. In doing so, it could be seen to offer a commentary on the way in which immigrants or outsiders invest in and (mis-)recognise the place they have elected as home. Yet at the same time, Bensalah's spectacular rendering of Algeria is a gesture which presents itself as *not at all* ironic. In the 'making of' documentary which accompanies the film on DVD, Bensalah discusses his desire to assert the normality of Algeria, in the face of the widespread perception that 'tout y est compliqué'.[11] Viewed in the light of this comment, Bensalah's images of Algiers can be seen as something akin to a love letter to the city, an attempt to render the country visible once more to the wider world after the obscurity of its years in crisis; and it would seem that the tourist vision is perceived as the most reliable mode in which to enable that process.

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[11] Will Higbee (2007: 61) notes that Merzak Allouache had a similar intention in *Bab el web* (2004), situated in the popular Bab el-Oued district of Algiers, and location of his film of ten years earlier, *Bab el-Oued City*, which depicted the early years of the civil conflict in Algeria.

Indeed, the notion of Algerian normality is also pursued at a thematic level in the film through the portrayal of the country as a holiday destination for French citizens, and reflected especially in sequences on board the ferry from Marseilles to Algiers. The crowds sunning themselves on deck represent the well-established seasonal tourist traffic between the two countries, and the transnational links which bind the two as people visit friends and family. Finally, it is in the film's treatment of Algeria's recent history – or more accurately, its elision of it – where the theme of normality is most notably played out. As we noted earlier, the film is set in 1988, with a voiceover from Johnny presenting them (it becomes clear at the end of the film) from the perspective of the present day. A veil is therefore drawn over the decade or more of violence which separate these two periods. The only violence present in the film is the slapstick violence of comedy, and recent Algerian politics and history is emptied from it.[12]

A desire to normalise perceptions of Algeria in the years following the country's civil conflict is also central to a photographic project contemporary to *Il était une fois dans l'oued*. In 2006, Yann Arthus-Bertrand published *Algérie vue du ciel*, a substantial and glossy coffee table book offering a portrait of the country composed, following his signature style, of full colour aerial shots taken (like those in Bensalah's film) at relatively low altitude from helicopters and light aircraft. *Algérie vue du ciel* is part of the broader photographic project which brought Arthus-Bertrand international fame at the turn of the millennium. In tune with contemporary concerns, his portrait of the Earth 'from the sky' (Arthus-Bertrand 1999) is a celebration of diversity both of populations and environments, and an attempt to raise consciousness about the planet's fragility. It exploits the distance and height of aerial photography to produce gently defamiliarising perspectives, albeit ones which often have an anthropomorphic quality to them.

During the 2000s, Arthus-Bertrand produced various spin-off volumes, including that devoted to Algeria which – again, we can assume, for security reasons related to the civil conflict – did not feature in the original project. *Algérie vue du ciel* is a comprehensive survey of the country which displays its landscapes, geology, and cultural and geographical diversity, from

[12] Though it could also be argued that the film's veiling of a troubled decade is itself a comment (intended or otherwise) on the Algerian government's own approach to normalisation within Algerian society in the wake of the war, and its determination to restrict debate and memorialisation of the conflict through legislation associated with the Civil Concord of 2000. As Evans and Phillips put it, Bouteflika's central strategy was simply 'to bury the 1990s' (2007: 266). Yet recent history, and not least that involving an earlier conflict in Algeria, as we have discussed at various point in this book, suggests that it is a strategy which risks returning to haunt Algeria in years to come.

the mountains of the Aurès to the dunes and rock formations of the Sahara. It also depicts many of the country's urban centres and highlights their key landmarks. Of course, as the scale and modalities of the project would suggest, it required extensive resources and logistical assistance in order to be carried out successfully. Indeed, both the extensive list of acknowledgements at the end of the volume (2006: 336), and Arthus-Bertrand's note of thanks to Algerian president Bouteflika in his foreward, make clear the extent to which the project was supported and sanctioned by the Algerian government. As Arthus-Bertrand puts it, 'je lui suis donc très reconnaissant de m'avoir laissé une liberté totale pour voler au-dessus de son pays et de faire ce livre à ma façon' (2006: 1). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the volume might seek to display Algeria in its most advantageous light and indicate that it is, we might say, 'open for business'.

In fact, such aims are spelled out by Benjamin Stora, once again positioned as a key commentator on Algeria, in an introductory essay entitled 'Redécouvrir l'Algérie'. Stora presents Arthus-Bertrand's volume as an object around which different communities with a stake in Algeria can gather and share in memories, from *pieds-noirs* and Algerian immigrants in France, to *appelés* sent to serve in the Algerian War and those who went into exile during 'les sombres années' of the civil conflict (Stora 2006: 30). It is a book conceived for a transnational, Francophone audience, in which we once again find the photographic image being mobilised as a privileged vector for individual and collective memories, but also in order to vehicle those memories and responses in a certain way. As Stora suggests, pursuing a reflection begun a few years previously on how memories of Algeria have become 'partitioned' among different groups (Rosello 2003), the aim of *Algérie vue du ciel* is to enable 'le dépassement de ce constat d'une irréconciliabilité des peuples. Ne voulant plus la répétition obsessionnelle des comportements, la violence des propos qui éloigne, il vise l'entente, la réconciliation possible' (2006: 37). It sets out to create, channel and structure shared feelings, emotions and responses, and in doing so, contribute to a work of reconciliation at a national and transnational level.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of Arthus-Bertrand's project concerns the parallels which can be drawn with the photographic material we discussed in Chapter 1, not just in terms of its affective and emotional intentions, but also in relation to the visual strategies it deploys. Chief among these are the foregrounding of space as a way to mobilise memory and

identification, and the extensive use of aerial photography, with its spectacular and expansive qualities. Moreover, their use in Arthus-Bertrand's project invites similar questions: what does aerial photography both show and not show? What can we see, and what finds itself elided? Just as, during the colonial period, aerial photography's elevated viewpoint disguised the inherent tensions and contradictions of French Algeria, so too, in the aftermath of Algeria's civil war, it disguises not just the fragile communities and individuals portrayed in *Bled Number One*, but a country increasingly beset by problems of unemployment, corruption, poverty and social division. It helps to assert the unity of national space and the mastery of a governing perspective over tensions, divisions and dissent on the ground (in a literal as much as figurative sense). As we have seen at various points in our discussion of the visualisation of Algeria, aerial photography is unavoidably the perspective and prerogative of the powerful. It implies in its very nature an inequality between those with the ability to make visible (including a successful photographer able to call on the resources of the country he works to portray) and those being visualised. Thus, even as it calls for consensus and reconciliation, the book's very modalities cannot help but remind us of Algeria's existence as a contested place, and the extent to which it remains a place of election and exclusion for the audiences it sets out to address.

Beyond the Franco-Algerian tandem

We need finally to consider a further dimension of Arthus-Bertrand's volume, one which aligns it with much of the material discussed in this chapter. For while it addresses a specific audience in the first instance (Francophone transnational), it nevertheless reflects Arthus-Bertrand's wider environmental concerns, a theme touched on in various texts accompanying his images.[13] In other words, like a number of films from the same period, his project suggest that we need not simply to understand how France and Algeria relate to each other in colonial and post-colonial terms (terms which also imply the assertion and negotiation of ideas about national identity, nationhood and sovereignty); but also to grasp the wider geopolitical contexts in which the historical specificities of that relationship are now being played out (contexts alluded to in different ways by Gatlif, Ameur-Zaïmèche and Arthus-Bertrand). Furthermore, the degree to which the dynamics of the Franco-Algerian relationship themselves raise these broader issues

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[13] See p. 225 and p. 324, for example.

underlines, for all its complex historical specificity, the exemplarity of that relationship in and for the contemporary world. Our discussion has also demonstrated, we hope, the vital role played by visual culture in staging and negotiating those issues, through the way in which it envisions space and reminds us that national spaces are also transnational spaces, as well as spaces subject to the forces of globalisation; and as such, always and inevitably, spaces of contestation.