

Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: 28 (Languages and Linguistics)
Title of case study: CS1 Staging the Franco-Algerian relationship through contemporary visual art
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research at Durham University led to an exhibition of contemporary visual art at Cornerhouse Gallery (Manchester) from April to June 2011 exploring the relationship between France and Algeria. <i>New Cartographies: Algeria-France-UK</i> enhanced the understanding of a non-specialist UK audience about a relationship which is historically important for both countries and central to contemporary geopolitics. It helped Cornerhouse pursue its visual arts strategy, and brought economic benefits to the gallery and the wider region by attracting a large audience. It provided the exhibiting artists with opportunities for creative and professional development by commissioning new work or showing work in the UK for the first time. The refusal of an entry visa for one of the Algerian artists became part of a political issue concerning UK immigration policy debated in the House of Lords.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The exhibition was one of three outputs of an AHRC-funded project on the visual representation of the Franco-Algerian relationship since the Algerian War. The project ran from September 2008 to December 2011, and was carried out by Edward Welch (Senior Lecturer in French at Durham University, September 2001 - August 2013) in collaboration with Joseph McGonagle (University of Manchester). The project emphasised the role of visual art in shaping understanding of the relationship between France and Algeria, which has been important politically, socially and culturally in both countries since the time of the Algerian War (1954-62) and Algerian independence (1962). It analysed a broad range of historical and contemporary material, including film, photography and visual print media. Pursuing an established programme of research into post-war French literature and culture, Welch contributed expertise on research topics (the representation of space; urban life and modernisation in post-war France; the relationship between photography and history); and on method (theoretical and critical approaches to the photographic image).</p> <p>The project's findings were published in a co-authored book [output 1], a position-piece article [output 2] and a journal special issue [output 3]. Part 1 of the book demonstrates how the visual image, and photography especially, shaped narratives of French Algeria and the Algerian War at the time and subsequently. It explores how photographs have been mobilised by different groups, such as expatriated European settler communities, French conscript soldiers, and Algerian victims of police repression in France, to assert or challenge certain understandings of France's Algerian history. For example, it shows how the production and circulation of photo-books by expatriated European settler communities (<i>pieds-noirs</i>) sustain and enable a nostalgic vision of colonial French Algeria through two visual strategies in particular: on the one hand, depictions of colonial cityscapes at the height of the French Empire in the 1930s; on the other, images of urban environments modernised in the post-war period as France embarked on a last-ditch attempt to maintain power in Algeria. These visual traces of France's lost empire persist as a marginal, yet nevertheless disruptive, presence in the contemporary French public sphere.</p> <p>Part 2 examines how the post-colonial relationship between France and Algeria as independent, sovereign states has been depicted in film and photography. It emphasises the key theatres and spaces in which the contemporary Franco-Algerian relationship is staged, from the deprived suburbs (<i>banlieues</i>) of France's major cities, to the Algerian <i>bled</i> (ancestral village) idealised as home by Algerians in France. It draws attention as well to the dual values carried by the Mediterranean Sea, as barrier and frontier on the one hand, and hyphen or point of crossing on the other. In doing so, it shows how the Franco-Algerian relationship exemplifies broader issues in contemporary geopolitics, including global economic flows, population movements and configurations of national identity.</p> <p>The project's findings informed the intellectual agenda and content of the Cornerhouse exhibition</p>

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through the selection of artists, and the organisation and grouping of their work on themed floors. The aim of the exhibition was to explore how contemporary visual art from the two countries articulates the relationship between them and their shared history, and to do so for a non-specialist, UK-based audience for the most part unfamiliar with the historical significance and contemporary relevance of the Franco-Algerian relationship.

3. References to the research

Key outputs

1. Edward Welch and Joseph McGonagle (2013) *Contesting Views: The Visual Economy of France and Algeria*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. [Co-authored by Welch at 70%]
2. Joseph McGonagle and Edward Welch (2012) 'Hidden in Plain Sight: France and Algeria in the Contemporary Visual Sphere', *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 3.2, 10-17. [Co-authored by Welch at 50%]
3. Joseph McGonagle, and Edward Welch (eds) (2011) *France and Algeria in Contemporary Visual Culture*. Special issue of *Modern and Contemporary France*, 19.2, including co-authored introduction, 'Untying the Knot? France and Algeria in Contemporary Visual Culture', 123-128. [Introduction co-authored by Welch at 50%]

Evidence of quality

- Research (and exhibition) funded by AHRC Early Career Research Grant (AH/F011431/1), 1 September 2008-31 December 2011, awarded to McGonagle (University of Manchester, PI) and Welch (University of Durham, CI). Grant title: 'Post-Colonial Negotiations: Visualising the Franco-Algerian Relationship in the Post-war Period'. Grant value: £192,000
- All three outputs were peer reviewed

4. Details of the impact

New Cartographies: Algeria-France-UK was a free exhibition of contemporary visual art, co-curated by Welch and the project PI, and staged at Cornerhouse Gallery from 8 April to 5 June 2011. It featured film, video and photography-based work by ten visual artists from Algeria, Britain and France, including the established figures Kader Attia and Zineb Sedira, and emerging Algerian artists showing their work in the UK for the first time (Amina Menia and Zineddine Bessaï). The curators selected work which echoed the concerns of the research project, such as Bessaï's maps of clandestine migration, and Sedira's video portrait of Safia Kouaci, widow of Algerian photographer Mohamed Kouaci and guardian of his archive. They also commissioned new work from UK-based photographer John Perivolaris, who undertook a journey from Manchester to Algeria, taking images at key locations of memory in France and Algeria which formed the basis of an installation in the gallery. They organised work in three themed floors – Journeys, Resources and Memories – which they presented as keys to understanding the Franco-Algerian relationship in the accompanying exhibition guide.

The exhibition attracted a large audience of 14,649 visitors. New media were used extensively to aid interpretation. As curators, Welch and the PI provided contextual material about each artist through QR barcodes in the gallery, for scanning by smartphones, and subsequently available on the exhibition web page. The web page has been maintained since the exhibition closed, and has attracted 5,935 views. Podcasts featuring the exhibition have been played 729 times, and there have been an average of 4,000 hits for each of four blogs written by the curators before and during the exhibition [source 1; all figures accurate as of 31 July 2013]. 426 people attended the public engagement activities accompanying the exhibition, including four gallery tours led by curators and artists; a workshop on contemporary art in Algeria organised by the curators, with contributions from academics, artists and gallery professionals; a film season on contemporary Arab and Maghrebi cinema; and a six-week course on art and politics led by the curators [source 2]. The course was informed by questions central to the research project, including how contemporary visual art responds to international socio-political debates; how artists address politics in their work; and how contemporary visual art circulates inside and outside the established art world. According to Cornerhouse's economic impact report, gallery visits generated an estimated £636,000 gross (£359,000 net) for the Greater Manchester and North West regional economies through spending

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on accommodation, catering, transport, shopping and other activities [source 3].

The exhibition helped Cornerhouse to meet its objective of promoting the work of artists who interrogate international socio-political concerns. Its Programme and Engagement Director stated that 'it is very unusual for an exhibition to be curated by academics and funded by a research council but we were delighted with the standard and outcomes of *New Cartographies*. Visitor numbers were excellent, there was strong interaction and the feedback suggested it was a powerful, thought-provoking exhibition that had a profound effect on attitudes and understanding across different cultures' [source 4]. An Artistic Assessment commissioned by Arts Council England noted that 'the exhibition as a whole has strong impact communicating the overall aims of the exhibition intelligently and thoughtfully', and that it was 'very timely in relation to the on-going political events across many parts of North Africa' [source 5]. The Cultural Counsellor at the French Embassy in London described it as an 'incredible exhibition which [...] definitely contributed to a better understanding between cultures by shedding light through the means of contemporary art upon less media-documented parts of decades of socio-political relations between France, Algeria and the UK' [source 6]. Other visitors at the preview evening commented:

- 'The conceptualisation of it is brilliant and the diversity of the work is extremely impressive.'
- 'It's the first time I've come up to the galleries at the Cornerhouse. I thought it was very interesting and I learnt new things about Algeria.'
- 'I really like the idea of transition and movement of people, it's a really interesting thing to try to map. The way they've done it conveys the human side of it.' [source 7]

According to the specialist magazine *Art Monthly*, '*New Cartographies* maps out changes in the cultural perception of boundaries inside and outside Algeria [...] Indicative of a raised level of consciousness across North Africa, ideas have been conceived with political acumen in new media formats yet the subject matter is expressed and espoused with considerable feeling' [source 8].

The exhibition provided professional development opportunities for two artists based in Algeria (Amina Menia, Zineddine Bessaï), who had little or no previous experience of exhibiting outside their own countries. Menia was interviewed on the BBC World Service programme *The Strand* (first broadcast 6 April 2011, estimated audience 40 million people worldwide), along with Zineb Sedira, whose installation was receiving its UK premiere at Cornerhouse. Two artists sold work exhibited in the show, and the work commissioned from Perivolaris led directly to collaboration with the American novelist Benjamin Buchholz on a photo-essay and related projects. Perivolaris commented that, 'the commission provided me with an opportunity to broaden my horizons as a photographer by using my camera to seek insights into the people, politics and culture of a country which has experienced colonialism, repression and civil war' [source 9]. At 31 July 2013, the blog produced by Perivolaris as part of his commission has attracted 19,058 views.

An unexpected political impact occurred when one of the Algerian artists was refused a visa by the UK Border Agency to attend the opening of the exhibition. His case became part of a campaign to ease visa restrictions on foreign artists visiting Britain, supported by leading figures in the arts world, including Antony Gormley. The issue was raised in the House of Lords by the Earl of Clancarty, and was the subject of a letter published in *The Daily Telegraph*, supported by 100 signatories including the Cornerhouse team [source 10]. The immigration minister Damien Green announced in January 2012 that he would legislate in this area to allow talented artists to enter the UK more easily, although the matter was yet to be resolved.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Statement from Head of Marketing, Cornerhouse
2. Exhibition Report by Cornerhouse and exhibition webpage at <http://www.cornerhouse.org/art/art-exhibitions/new-cartographies-algeria-france-uk>
3. Cornerhouse Economic Impact Summary
4. Statement from Programme and Engagement Director, Cornerhouse
5. Artistic Assessment Report for Arts Council England

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6. Statement from the Cultural Counsellor, French Embassy in London
7. Podcast on exhibition preview evening: <http://www.cornerhouse.org/art/art-media/cornerhouse-podcast-thu-14-apr-2011>
8. Exhibition review in *Art Monthly*, 347 (June 2011), 28-29
9. Statement from commissioned artist
10. Coverage of problem of international artist mobility:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/8599757/Points-based-visa-system-places-unnecessary-burden-on-artists-making-short-visits-to-Britain.html>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-13927454>