

‘Between Myself and Myself Lies my True Country’:
Exploring the Dissonant Legacy of Colonial Worlds
as a Researcher and as an Heiress

● »*Med mano in menoj leži moja resnična dežela*«:
*raziskovanje disonantne zapuščine kolonialnih svetov
kot raziskovalka in dedinja*

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Abstract

This article focuses on the linguistic, spatial and temporal cartography of attachments among displaced people and how it shaped my research interests. Based on experience and several fieldworks, I retrace the legacy of this cartography through the broken tongues - the different languages they inhabit, and use as a means of preserving their imaginary presence in their native country or countries of origin - that carry the ghosts of several languages, place names, daily ritual and commemorative practices, objects, senses and sensations. By emphasising the malleability of languages, spaces and material things, I aim to explore how temporality can be traversed, stopped, restarted, turned back and projected forward through places. This exploration leads me to address the diversity of populations and their history of previous displacements – a heterogeneity that images of exiles from Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, or Morocco tend to relegate to the background. This emphasis allows for better understanding of how each border crossing has redrawn the cartography of attachments and detachments, displacements and the crystallisation of social boundaries, and how each rupture has reinvented continuity.

Keywords: broken tongue, temporality, cartography of attachments, displacement, colonial worlds

Izvleček

Članek se osredotoča na jezikovno, prostorsko in časovno kartiranje navezanosti med razseljenimi osebami ter na to, kako je to oblikovalo moja raziskovalna zanimanja. Na podlagi izkušenj in številnih terenov ponovno beležim dediščino teh kartiranj skozi »zlomljene jezike« – skozi različne jezike, ki jih razseljene osebe uporabljajo kot sredstvo, s katerim si prizadevajo ohraniti zamišljeno prisotnost v svoji domovini ali domovinah, ki nosijo duhove različnih jezikov, krajevnih imen, dnevnih obrednih in spominskih praks, predmetov, čutov ter občutkov. Skozi poudarek na prožnosti jezikov, prostorov in materialnih stvari raziskujem, kako začasnost prečiti, jo ustaviti, ponovno zagnati, obrniti nazaj in projicirati naprej skozi kraje. Skozi to raziskovanje obravnavam raznolikost prebivalstev in zgodovino njihovih preteklih razselitev – heterogenosti, ki jo podobe izgnancev iz Alžirije, Egipta, Tunizije ali Maroka običajno potisnejo v ozadje. Ta poudarek omogoča, da bolje razumemo, kako je vsako prehajanje meje na novo zarisalo zemljevide navezanosti in odtujitev, premikov ter kristalizacije družbenih meja in kako je vsak prelom ponovno ustvaril kontinuiteto.

Ključne besede: zlomljen jezik, časovnost, zemljevidi navezanosti, premiki prebivalstva, kolonialni svetovi

I, who received nothing but fear and secret and shame of myself
 [...] I, who know nothing about myself except what is said about me
 I, brought up now here, in sickness
 I, who know nothing,
 I, who feel I belong to no time, to no country
 Between myself and myself lies an infinite distance
 Between myself and myself lies my true country, Algeria
 (Pascal Bouaziz, 'Algérie', 2021)

We are in the square in front of the building where I grew up, in the south-eastern suburbs of Paris, in a neighbourhood called Mont-Mesly. This neighbourhood expanded at the same time as the arrival in France of various populations resulting from colonisation and decolonisation. However, I remember that my grandmother, who lived one floor below us, used to call the trip across the street to the square 'going to Foug Tataouine'. The few-metre walk seemed like an expedition to a place named after another place in Tunisia, which, when my family lived in Algeria, was a metaphor for travelling to a faraway place. I spent part of my childhood in Foug Tataouine without ever going there. I grew up with the image of a dual space and a divided consciousness passed on to me by the adults. They carried images, smells, sounds and ways of doing things so powerful that these marks were not erased decades after they had to rebuild their lives elsewhere (Benvenisti 2002), totally separated from Algeria.

I could not share the meaning of their loss. I could not exchange memories about a country I never lived in. However, Algeria was like a shadow over the conversations, the tears and the laughter, intertwined with a sense of disarray, alienation and loneliness. It was always there, twisting the meaning of words, the so-called naturalness of practices, the evidence of distances between places, the existence of borders be-



Figure 1: An afternoon in 'Foug Tataouine', Algiers, 1974, 1975? (source: Michele Baussant Personal Archive)

tween spaces and things that die in time. It reminded us of a time independent of space.

This article¹ aims to highlight this linguistic, spatial and temporal cartography of attachments, how it shaped my understanding of the world and my research interests as a descendant of specific displaced people: people who have nothing to do with persecuted romantic heroes,

¹ This article takes up part of an article published in French (Baussant 2023), but develops it considerably in thought and content. It is based on a research financially supported by the CNRS Convergences MIGRATIONS Institute, reference ANR-17-CONV-0001.

with refugees representing a just cause. They belonged to a 'prosaic' mass of people expelled or asked to leave because of their active or passive association with the colonial system. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I would like to retrace the experience and legacy of this cartography through the words that carry the ghosts or corpses of several languages (Mauthner, quoted in Ravy 1996, 447), place names, daily, ritual and commemorative practices, objects, senses and sensations. By emphasising the malleability of languages, spaces and material things, I would like to explore how temporality can be traversed, stopped, restarted, turned back and projected forward through places. This exploration leads me to address the diversity of populations and their history of previous displacements – a heterogeneity that images of exiles from Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco tend to relegate to the background. This emphasis allows an understanding of how each border crossing has redrawn the cartography of attachments and detachments, displacements and the crystallisation of social boundaries, and how each rupture has reinvented continuity.

'To Begin Where I am'²

My article stems from a long research experience based on multiple fieldwork - from France to Algeria, Egypt and the Israeli-Palestinian areas, the United States and several European countries, addressing dynamics of diasporisation, de-diasporisation et re-diasporisation (Trier 1996) among specific displaced minorities, such as European of Algeria and Egyptian Jews³. These populations share several migrations – towards or within colonised territories, between empires, and finally, outside them-, their internal heter-

ogeneity and, in some cases, their liminal position as 'subalterns' identified with the colonial empires.

This work, initiated in the early 1990s, encompasses two research fields – memory⁴ and massive population displacements. It addresses a paradoxical observation concerning those defined by researchers as privileged or co-ethnic migration⁵ (Čapo Žmegač 2010): although everything that refers to their past became not relevant, even disqualified - from the most personal and ordinary moments to major historical and political events – and rarely exchanged except within close relational circles, it still sticks to the present through languages, emotions and practices. I worked on and with people who, for a long time, felt that they were forbidden to talk about their past, that nobody was listening to them. It nurtured their sense of being out of History to the point where, 'in the end, some could no longer remember what they did or did not have to say about it' (Milosz 2001, 13). I tried to understand the impacts of a morally problematic condition of an exile not socially recognized as such, undermining their solidarity and isolating

2 I borrow this subtitle from the title of Czesław Miłosz's book.

3 For Europeans of Algeria with fieldwork in France from 1996 to 2001, and in Algeria in 2003- and for Egyptian Jews, with fieldwork in France, Egypt, Israel, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Italy and Switzerland, from 2008 until now. These fieldworks are rooted in a classic ethnographic methodology combining in-depth qualitative interviews, participant observation, and archival work.

4 It falls today under the umbrella of memory studies. This field did not exist when I began my research which draws on the cumulative knowledge on memory issues forged through approaches both complementary and distinct and from disciplines such as History, sociology, anthropology and the social sciences of politics. These disciplines all played their part in gradually developing knowledge and a shared understanding of the concept. They produced a range of definitions (Lavabre 2000), strengthening its increasingly metaphorical character and the tendency to speak of 'memories' as subjects, acting, thinking, travelling, fragmenting, multi-directional, communicative, transcultural, traumatic, giving second place to the actors who produce and carry them. As for me, I opted for the pioneering work of Maurice Halbwachs (1939; 1941; 1994; 1997) and the extensive analysis of memory provided by Marie-Claire Lavabre (1994; 2000), which circumscribed the collective memory as the homogenisation of representations of the past or the reduction of the diversity of memories that occurs when a shared experience is recounted within a group, a family, a party, or an association, in the present.

5 This term is particularly problematic when used to describe heterogeneous minorities that underwent numerous internal or external displacements to countries colonized by European powers in the 19th and 20th centuries and then dispersed outside these countries following their independence.

them. And still... I observed not the content of what they said or didn't say, but their way of mixing and using language as a means of preserving their imagined presence in the country or countries from where they came. They lived around several centres, built several 'over there' from different 'here' that coalesced, reordered temporalities and reintroduced continuity in fragmentation and disruption.

Research experience may be understood in terms of a journey: 'we leave from home, we cross the world, and we return home, even if it's a different home than the one we left behind, because the departure, the original split, gave it its meaning' (Magris 2001, 13–14).

I imagine this article as a kind of suitcase, a travel kit, which (pp. 9–10) is part of the journey: on departure, when you pack the few things you think you'll need, always forgetting something essential; on the way, when you pack what you want to take home; on the way back, when you open your luggage and no longer find the things you thought were important, and things appear that you didn't remember you'd packed. The same thing happens with writing; something that, while we were travelling and living, seemed fundamental has vanished, on paper, it's no longer there, while something that, in life - in the journey of life - we had hardly noticed takes shape imperiously and imposes itself as essential.

Still, every journey has a point of departure. What was mine? My research grew out of hybrid spaces between different places, people and fieldwork, languages and countries, my incapacity to put down roots anywhere, in a liminal experience of encounters and openings that made me at home and a stranger to each place wherever I lived. These crossroads, intersections and hybrid spaces gave rise to this unconventional writing style for attempting to convey the profound non-linearity, uncertain and fragmentary nature of my work's premise – my embodied experience and my 'perceptual knowledge' (Mac-

Dougall 2006, 5) of the displaced – layers of (in) visibility in discursive and non-verbalized forms of the presence of the past. It begins with sounds and languages as a way to highlight the key role of fragments of worlds, memories, places, times and practices and the qualitative relationships between these fragments, however dissonant: not as a puzzle or a whole to be completed but as so many pieces adding new layers of meaning.

The Broken Tongue: Worlds Within Us

I grew up among displaced people⁶ before growing up to study them. I experienced a dissonant world where the spectres of past worlds and all the absent things and people were exceeded in all parts of the social and material space surrounding me. I first associate this absence and dissonance with an expression: 'To have a broken tongue'. This expression remained enigmatic for a long time in my mind. Brodsky, in particular, summed up the link between exile and language in a few illuminating words (Brodsky 1995, quoted in Heller-Roazen 2008, 49):

To be an exiled is like being a dog or a man hurtled into outer space in a capsule (more like a dog, of course, than a man, because they will never retrieve you). And your capsule is your language. To finish the metaphor off, it must be added that before long, the capsule's passenger discovers that it gravitates not earthward but outward.

This capsule contained the language of the exiled, their broken tongue.

6 This term was discussed by many scholars in different countries that experienced massive fluxes of populations due to decolonisation, as evidenced by Pamela Ballinger, Michele Baussant, Jasna Čapo Žmegač and Andrea Smith. Such people's departure was often portrayed as inevitable (a consequence of decolonisation, their alleged lack of attachment to Algeria, or, for Jews, their association with the colonial power), not forced, and as a quasi-internal displacement. Moreover, the trajectories of some of them are marked by multiple displacements throughout several generations and are sometimes ignored or marginalised in analyses that long tended to consider them as homogeneous populations with the same roots and a shared sense of belonging. See Ballinger (2012), Baussant (2002), Čapo Žmegač (2010), and Smith (2003; 2009).

What could a broken tongue mean? As a child, I imagined people's tongues were broken. Later, I wondered how French or Arabic, like an object, breaks. I remember Françoise, who left Egypt in 1967 and her 'broken Arabic'; Yves, who 'broke' in a continuous stream of French, Hebrew, English and Arabic, all spoken fluently but always with errors and a hesitation that never left him; Jacob, who in French avoided using letters unpronounceable for him, because they 'broke' his language and revealed his foreignness, like this librarian, quoted by C. Naggar: 'I have the accent of a language I don't know, Arabic. The accumulation of rs sometimes prevents people from understanding me. To avoid repeating myself, I choose words without r's: *café au lait* instead of *café crème*' (Naggar 2007, 119); Carole broke the thread of our exchanges by mixing languages because such an object could only be said in Arabic, and such and such food could only be expressed in French. Not that they were all the same. Not that she could not translate them in either language, attribute the same meaning to a word from one language to another, but simply that each thing had its value in a specific language that could not be the same in another. Translating it into another language would always be a failure.

This broken language was a singular, unique language, an idiom for each of us, and always more than a language, sometimes drawing unpredictable trajectories of meaning and interrupted histories, spaces and journeys. It was an everyday, trivial world, made up of words and phrases expressed in French but which came from elsewhere, with mysterious meanings for those outside this world, where to say that a woman was 'in position' meant that she was pregnant, where one could have la *scoumoune*⁷ and where peppers were called piments.

Several languages – Arabic, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Hebrew, German, and English –

melded into one, mainly French, always insufficient for expressing pictures, sounds, odours, colours, objects, food, values, landscapes, situations, and practices. Those most used could sometimes be the mutest, breaking into exchanges, marking gaps. This broken tongue both echoed what linguists call a 'substrate' – 'the persistent remainder of one tongue within another, the forgotten element secretly retained in the apparently seamless passage from one language to the next', 'superstrates' – the changes brought upon the tongue of one people through its adoption by another – and 'adstrates' – changes in one language due to the proximity of its speakers to another idiom to which it is related (Heller-Roazen 2008, 78–79).

Thus, to have a broken tongue covered several meanings: to speak different languages without feeling that one knew any one of them 'correctly'; to possess no language of one's own, no language that one masters; to break, to damage the language by incomplete knowledge of it; to mark a language used in everyday life with syntaxes, pronunciations, turns of phrase which revealed other languages, sometimes silent, sometimes resurgent; to not be able to produce a well-crafted narrative in a language one had mastered; to consistently fail to speak about something and to say at the same time that which was unspeakable; maintaining a difference, preserving the stranger within (Derrida 1993); to carry in the body the mark of a rupture, of an absence, a kind of 'ghostly matter'. This mark also exists among the descendants: 'The words of the language I don't know,' writes Carole Naggar, 'are dead people attached to my living ankles'; they make her 'feel like a stranger in France, in this country whose language I speak without an accent' (Naggar 2007, 94), reminding us that words, like languages, cannot be a shelter, a home nor even less a homeland (Cassin 2013).

The broken language also meant the ability of the people around me to transform or not the timbre of their voice, using different languages and different words. All year round, my parents seemed to go inside themselves, except for one

7 A term designating bad luck, associated in France with Arabic, but probably popularised by the Italians who settled in Algeria and then by the Europeans in Algeria and coming from the Italian *scomunica*, which itself comes from the Latin *excommunicatio*.

month in the summer when they would meet up with their friends from Algeria in the South of France. Even in their homes' privacy and dealings with neighbours, they were careful to speak as neutral French as possible, not to have an accent and to use the 'right' words. Rare were the moments, usually of anger or emotion, when an expression, a turn of phrase, a sentence in Arabic or an accent came out. In the summer, they suddenly began to speak a different language, to inhabit other gestures. It was as if they were rediscovering their naturalness and, with it, their *joie de vivre*.

They could not belong to either Algeria or France, so they strove to appear to be from 'nowhere', 'no time', and 'no country'. Their mother tongue was not 'the only possession that could not be taken from them' as an indestructible part of identity, a home and a homeland (Cassin 2013). They had no mother tongue, or several which coexisted and constantly acted as smugglers behind each other: they were 'all exiles, like transhumants who have burnt their ships'. They '[would] never again find [their] past intact, any more than the mythical bell towers of [their] childhood, the splendid charm of drowsy synagogues or the cry of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer at dawn. [They were] from here and there. Indefectibly' (Hassoun 1993, 66–67).

This concomitance of languages was not only the lasting mark of exile but also the imprint of a past of linguistic coexistence made up of mixing, division and a desire for separation. The complexity of this phenomenon has been exacerbated by the interference, in some cases, of religious affiliations and by a colonial political context that has created a conflictual and emotional relationship with languages. The predominance of French reflected this phenomenon of linguistic hierarchy, which served as a norm for social divisions and sheltered external antagonisms. But as the most culturally valued language by many of these displaced persons, French was in a situation of insularity: both with the demographic majority, Arabic-speaking and/or Berber-speaking, depending on the

country, and with the linguistic community in France. This sense of insularity, the feeling of belonging and being excluded, followed people into exile, with their 'broken tongue': it pointed not to a hyphenated identity but a mark of their othernesses, their double or triple unbelonging and a cultivated feeling of division. As they reflected in their language, they could not choose between their different allegiances: or rather, they choose one or the other, and neither the one nor the other.

From Home, Other Worlds Beyond Sight

People went into exile either from Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, or Egypt; with them, their languages and memories. What does it mean for languages to be in exile? How do we grasp exile in language and retrace a biography of the strata of tongues like we can build a biography of individuals? Furthermore, what to do with blank pages, particularly those concerning the presence of other languages that a priori have nothing to do with the political and cultural context of the countries in question and their use in naming places and objects? How did they become part of these countries' past?

Just as I learnt the broken tongues of the people I grew up with, I shared their lost landscapes, absent relatives, and blank pages as a part of myself. It was a legacy from an era of history that just cannot be eradicated, the era of colonisations and decolonisations. But at the same time, these broken tongues as post signs of memory also bore the mark of silence surrounding my family's life in Algeria. However, silence does not mean oblivion; it encompasses different ways of dealing with the past – 'don't remember, don't talk about, don't know, and don't care.' It is not a 'complete absence of sound. Rather, it refers to the absence of certain discourses about the past' (Xu 2022, 69).

Algeria was present in the exchanges and expressions, inhabiting the memories and shaping the memories of inhabiting. In the social housing estates of the grey suburb of eastern Paris where I was born, disintegrated colonial worlds consti-

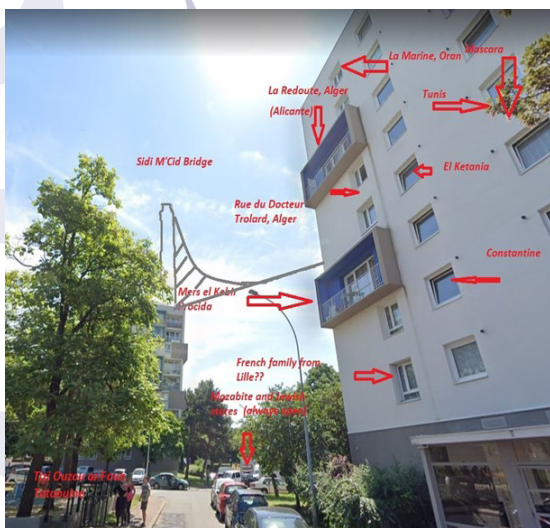


Figure 2: 'What we saw was doubled by what we did not see': a double cartography of my childhood building (sketch by Michele Baussant 2023)

tuted the background of most inhabitants: especially Algerian Jews, Algerians transformed into 'foreigners' once Algeria was independent,⁸ as well as Europeans of Algeria. The latter formed a rather heterogeneous mix of 'settlers' and 'arriving' populations (Byrd 2011), mainly from the European shores of the Mediterranean, labelled *pieds-noirs* during the Algerian War – 'invisible migrants' (Smith 2003) – with whom Algeria no longer wanted to deal and whom France had to integrate while imagining that their history was not entirely its history. Other populations, exiles from other Maghreb or Mashrek countries, were also present.

These buildings of the housing estate, most people said, had been built for them. They formed a landscape without a past where Algeria was rarely mentioned. With little or no reference to it, perhaps most of their inhabitants had come to believe they had never lived in Algeria. Colonisation was an officially closed history, relegated to a past 'irrelevant to the present' (Barnes 1990, 28). However, it sealed their destinies and

8 After independence, Algerians with civil status under local law lost their French nationality, except for those who subscribed to the declaration of recognition of French nationality before 22 March 1967 (order of 21 July 1962).

expectations. And it persisted, despite its selective and generalised disavowal, in France, in the society to which they had been transposed. Sometimes, a remnant, a faint trace, or a tenacious 'presence' (Stoler and Cooper 2013) in the negative, its complex experience translated into a living, multiform presence, something that is and yet is not (Trouillot 1995). This 'visible' invisible occupied a substantial place, sometimes expanded, sometimes constricted.

What we saw was doubled by what we did not see: from the outside, buildings of identical design and appearance and streets named after famous French places or people, with discreet markers (shops, synagogues or prayer halls); inside the buildings, markers based on family names, religious, local and sometimes national references, and multiple ritual temporalities. This marking reshaped borders, hierarchies and encounter zones. All at once, palimpsest and heteroglossia (Bakhtine 1970), sedimentations of time and places were revealed there, symbols and images, separate and dispersed pieces, lacunar, mourning memory, 'where the part is worth the whole and more than the whole that it exceeds' (Derrida 1988, 54).

This space was never for putting down roots, even less so for all those who lived there with a sense of not being where they should be. It was 'a doubt' (Perec 1974), from which the other places of these 'interrupted' lives were reflected, 'cracks', 'friction points', a 'hiatus'. In discovering France, they realised that Algeria imagined and lived as a contiguous extension of the 'French nation', was, in fact, another land. It was enough to walk a few hundred metres in the old historic district of this suburb to feel that 'que ça se coince quelque part, ou que ça éclate, ou que ça se cogne' ('that it sticks somewhere, that it bursts, or that it knocks') (Perec 1974). Haunting modifies the experience of being in time and how we sequence the past, present and past, present and future (Gordon 2008). These spectres are neither invisible nor excess: their whole essence 'resides in the fact that they possess 'a real presence that claims its due and demands your attention'. The

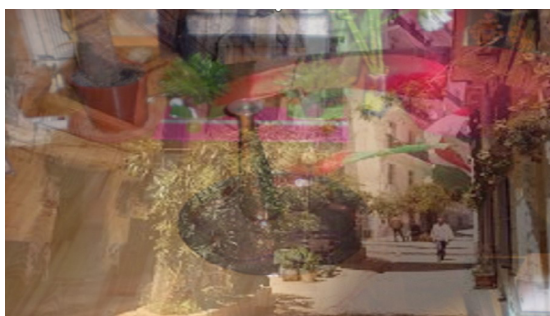


Figure 3: Next to or under the copper tray, the Trolard Street in Algiers (source: Photomontage by Michele Baussant 2023)

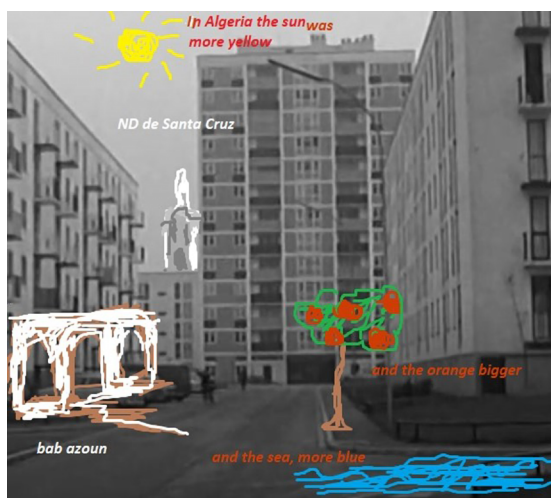


Figure 4: Algiers in Créteil (sketch by Michele Baussant 2023)

haunting, 'unlike trauma, has the particularity of producing a something-to-be-done. It corresponds precisely to that moment (which can last a long time) when things are no longer in their place, where cracks are revealed, and where disturbed feelings can no longer be put aside' (Gordon 2008, 18).

This doubt allowed neither blindness nor the anaesthesia of daily life. Other consciousness strata took shape between the apartments' walls (Benvenisti 2002) without real spatial attachment in the here and now. Few or no images fed the imagination, only names, objects that engaged the senses, encapsulated spaces engraved with the memory of the intimacy of homes, daily

exchanges, shared places and dichotomous environments, 'white spots' on the physical and mental maps of the colonial lived space.

Next to the copper tray, one of the few objects my family brought back from Algeria, was the street of Dr. Trolard in Algier, where my father used to live; from the living room table, the street Michelet, not far from the flat where my father's family stayed; from the stove, we found the street of Bab Azoun, a place my paternal grandmother often mentioned, asking me if I remembered it too, even though I wasn't born in Algeria. Near the painting of the great-uncle, stood Bab el Oued, where my mother grew up; in the bathroom, we were at La Marine, a working-class district of Oran; and with the smell of oranges, revived La Redoute, the last neighbourhood my family lived in before leaving. More rarely, to evoke a distant expedition, in the sand garden just in front of the building, Tizi Ouzou, Foug Tataouine, towns in Algeria that were regarded as very remote. I could see that neither the *rue de Bab Azoun* nor the *rue du Docteur Trolard* were there, but I could see that they were invisible, that they were not there, and at the same time, that they were a real presence that partly shaped our daily space and our exchanges. The objects, buildings, squares and shops that made up the new landscape grew out of the home. They participated in the production of time spaces put into perspective, reshaped by an *entre-soi*, relationships that made it possible to read the new world in which they had to rebuild everything again.

Mirrored Time And Space

Something was broken definitively in Algeria and continued simultaneously in France over there. Everyone left Algeria, and Algeria left everyone. And through this double movement, they all found themselves in the middle of the Mediterranean, leaving and seeing themselves left. The Mediterranean became an elastic space, the point from which my interlocutors

moved and connected their Algeria to Marseille, Carnoux, La Ciotat, Créteil, Lyon or Alicante, transformed into synecdochal places (Baussant 2002). Here, in Nîmes, a shrine dedicated to the Virgin of Santa Cruz, the sanctuary, which duplicates the first sanctuary in Oran while adapting its architectural forms to the context of exile and France, symbolised Oran, Oranie and Algeria; a Saint Michael's Day procession in the streets of La Ciotat 'revived' the village of Mers el Kebir, where the same procession once took place on Saint Michael's Day, and was a copy of the one that was held on Procida, an island in the Bay of Naples.

They also reinscribed alternative histories and multiple topographies produced by and within the colonial framework. The diversity of the people living in this framework and who reshaped the landscape according to their needs, partially erasing or superimposing themselves on previous landscapes, inspired them. I learned about people's attachment to crossing the visible and invisible frontiers of these sedimented topographies of places and times. I experienced it before understanding later how their memories of exile in Algeria or Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt covered up the experiences of other exiles and referred to other absent people and places. For those born in Algeria, their relationship with the country was not just one of living there and being uprooted from it. It was also the story of other journeys, those of their ancestors, to Algeria, of different times and places they brought with them and anchored in that country. The particularity of these cartographies of time and space shaping daily life also lay in this succession of multiple mobilities over the mid-term, whether integral parts of a life project or forced upon them. It blurred the relationship between here and elsewhere, at once the place of settlement, the cultural homeland, the land of birth, the land of ancestors, the land of passage, in a temporality and a relationship to space that produced translations but never the possibility or the projection of a return. Each departure,



Fig. 5: In the middle of the Mediterranean, somewhere between Algiers and Marseille or Marseille and Algier? Year unknown, before 1962 (source: Michele Baussant Personal Archive)

each installation, was a new origin, a new filiation, without erasing the previous strata.

By moving to Algeria and back in trans-colonial and trans-imperial spaces during the colonial period, their ancestors had imagined here their substitute lands for Spain, Italy, Malta and their sometimes completely displaced villages: in Oran, the tutelary figure of Nuestra Señora d'El Salud, better known as Our Lady of Santa Cruz, symbolised an 'eternal' portion of Toledo⁹ and Spain at the same time as it became a relay point with French shrines such as Notre Dame de la Garde in Marseille. In Aïn-Tedelès, a village in Oranie, a new plantation of a grove of Aleppo pines became a Bois de Boulogne to recall France and Paris, which also existed in Algiers, while in Mers el Kebir, the villagers of Procida 'gathered' around the statue of Saint Michael.

Multiple strata, therefore, linked long and short temporalities, distinct places, people and objects, landscapes, values and heterogeneous resources: Procida recomposed in Mers el Kebir, then Mers el Kebir and Procida in La Ciotat, and Mers el Kebir and La Ciotat in Procida. Material artefacts brought back from Spain, Italy and Malta to Algeria, then from Algeria to France, Spain, Italy or Malta, duplicated, recreated, tak-

9 In 1509, the Cardinal of Toledo, Ximénès de Cisneros, acquired the spiritual administration of the city of Oran and its territory, which were attached in perpetuity to the archiepiscopal see of Toledo.



Figure 6: *'Ici c'est là-bas'* (meaning 'Here is down there'), Oranîmes, 1996 (source: Michele Baussant Personal Archive)

ing root, circulating, linking transposed landscapes, extraterritorial,¹⁰ duplicated, sedimented. The transmitted practices make them live in the heart of memory environments; places and their names symbolise districts, then cities that appear to be regions that refer to countries, which are enlarged to metropolises and former colonial spaces, operating unequally between the different territories. The particularity of these cartographies of time and space that shaped daily life also lay in this succession of multiple mobilities over the medium term, whether integral parts of a life project or imposed by force. It blurred the relationship between here and elsewhere, at once a place of settlement, a cultural homeland, the land of birth, the land of ancestors, a land of passage (Ragaru 2010), in a temporality and a relationship to space operating translations but never the possibility or the projection of a return. There was nowhere to return to. Even if they could dream of being 'retrieved', this dream takes the form of a disavowal, as Brodsky notes, as 'they will never retrieve you' (Brodsky 1995, quoted in Heller-Roazen 2008, 50).

These different strata of consciousness and their multidimensional spaces have taught me to question the evidence of a shared past with fixed and assured content, and the elasticity of tem-

porality. This latter could also take many forms. Every year at the same time, on the same Ascension Day, in 'Oranîmes', 'here became there,' and 'yesterday, now', a ritual time that can be performed in any space. Each year, the same event began again without being an exact repetition of the previous one. This event is in preparation throughout the year and organises the ordinary year to return to this gathering day.

While evoking their fulfilment and a better life in France compared to Algeria or Egypt, these displaced people mobilised the present situation of these countries. However, each time they expressed their current difficulties of life in France, they used as a point of comparison yesterday's Algeria or Egypt, the present here and the past there becoming contemporary (Ragaru 2010, 58).

Trips back are the yardstick for gauging a stop in time for the countries they left behind while they have continued to evolve elsewhere:

We left Algeria with people we knew, and then when we go back, we do not know anyone! [...] I went back to the courtyard where I used to live [...]. It moved me. Where my parents used to live, an Arab was living there, a Moroccan who let me in. My mother's furniture was still there, they kept it, even the picture frames. [Interlocutor François]¹¹

For François and others, displacement is a posteriori, a pause in time and a bifurcation of time: that of the people in Algeria, trapped in 'an immobile, regressive temporality' (Ragaru 2010, 57), and that of the displaced people, who have remade their lives elsewhere.

Nevertheless, this perception sometimes coexists with an opposite feeling, the impression that they have remained frozen in time and space, out of place, out of time, without place or time, as is typical of those who are absent. As Daniel Heller-Roazen stressed (2021), there are many ways to be absent and then many categories of absentees who compose, in fact, a multitude: they could be the missing persons, per-

10 Like the castle of Julhans in Roquefort la Bédoule, which would symbolise an extraterritorial past Algeria.

11 François, born in Oran in 1934, lives in Nîmes. Former civil servant. Interviewed in Nîmes, in 1997.

sons who became non-persons in their societies of departure and come into being through unexplained disappearances; the diminished individual, physically present in the societies yet whose rights and prerogatives are reduced; or the deceased, 'a person who ceases to be someone, without, for that matter, becoming any ordinary thing' (Heller-Roazen 2021, 6).

A displaced person covers some of all these categories, transforming the dead left behind, those who flee and do not return, those who stay and keep the furniture and frames, those who become exiles who are not expected, not wanted, into absentees, and ghosts, as pointed out by Pascal Bouaziz (2021) in his song 'Algeria':

When we went to Oran in 2004 with my little family of fake Jews who had disappeared inside themselves on pilgrimage, there was no doubt Algeria. You gave us that, Algeria. You gave us that, Algeria, along with the fear, the unease and the anguish of walking through your ghostly streets. But we were the ghosts walking through a ghost country. We were the only tourists. The town was full of people who seemed to be alive, who looked at us like ghosts but didn't say a word to us. [...] We were like the ghost town, Oran, which hadn't moved for decades. We walked as Jewish ghosts, Jewish ghosts in a ghost town. And we walked into the old Jewish quarter that had disappeared, we Jews who had disappeared from themselves. We walked into the Jewish quarter that had disappeared. We walked like living ghosts from another country. We hardly dared to be there. We whispered like ghosts. We hardly dared to make a sound. And we arrived at Grandpa's bakery. And we went into Grandpa's bakery. And I saw that the boss knew who we were. And I saw that the boss did not want to know who we were. And I saw that Algeria was still afraid of us coming back. But there is no need to be afraid, Algeria. There is no need to be afraid. Who still dreams? Who still dreams of returning?

Who Still Dreams?

I grew up in a dissonant world with no correspondence between words and images, where everything I saw hid invisible worlds, past times sticking to the present, exotic and out of place, both literally and figuratively: a past that tells of the 'disappeared' people, places and objects among which I grew up. But where had they disappeared to, since I could point to these places on a map, to see on current photos that they still existed, to touch the copper tray in the living room and talk about it with the people who had brought it back from Algeria? Something about them could no longer be seen even when they were there. They were out of sight. But for those who remembered them, it was at the same time as if, paradoxically, in a strange blindness, they were still there and continued to exist. I discovered and experienced them like a short-sighted person, covered by a veil where I could only make out the outlines without ever being able to avoid their presence.

This dissonance shaped my research and my quest to see. I may have thought that I had discovered by chance the Mas de Mingue neighbourhood in Nîmes and its pilgrimage to the Virgin of Santa Cruz, transposed from Oran (Algeria), to which I dedicated my Ph.D. in anthropology. While some people decried the event and the memories exchanged between Europeans from Algeria as a nostalgia - for some dubious - for the colonial world, I learned something else: a place of reunion and mourning, a space of devotion or a third space linking divided and hierarchical times, places and identifications. The sedimentation, superimposition, discordance of the traces of memory, and the evocations and groups that carried them created a breach, opening in the now and the here in different places and times, beyond even Algeria and France. They reflected multiple interpretations of spatialities and historicities, dense and loose points of identification (Rossetto 2018) and relationships, even conflictual ones, to different territories beyond Algeria and France. The horizon of existences did not align with state borders: their relevant territories

resided in relationships, not in 'being here', but in being together.

Materiality and place remain a central theme in the social sciences and works on exile. Objects, places, and buildings are often viewed as points of stability and memory frames, as a form of continuity to an interrupted human life, assuming that 'living matter and its history bestow on the object a presence, which activates its entire surroundings' (Borcherdt 2021). The places and objects left behind became powerful attachment forms of memory and belonging, as Halbwachs (1941) pointed out. However, this focus on materiality is likely because it is easier to know what one does with space than to know what one does with time (Heschel 1951). There has never been an easy answer for me on what to do with space. Of course, like many other researchers, I have long focused on the things and people that occupy space and how they inhabit it. However, the different sedimentations of languages, places and names in which I lived made me doubt that material things give meaning to the temporality of individuals. Instead, the opposite, temporality, gives meaning to the material world.

During my childhood, I observed not an architecture of places but an architecture of the time, a palace in time (Heschel 1951) that reshaped filiations and affiliations, linking them in continuity beyond the loss of places that broke them. A palace built from practices, memories, names, languages, sounds, smells, and invisible objects made visible that we can feel, understand, and touch without ever knowing them. Not a dream of return, a transmission: I, the child of exiles, explore the halls of this palace of time, my home, with all the living and the dead I recognise as mine.

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Summary

This article focuses on the linguistic, spatial and temporal cartography of attachments among displaced people from the colonial worlds and how it shaped my research interests. These displaced have nothing to do with romantic heroes persecuted, with refugees representing a just cause. They belonged to a 'prosaic' mass of people expelled or asked to leave because of their active or passive association with the colonial systems. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I retrace the experience and legacy of this cartography through the words that carry the ghosts or corpses of several languages, place names, daily, ritual and commemorative practices, objects, senses and sensations. This exploration leads me to address the diversity of populations and their history of previous displacements – a heterogeneity that images of exiles from Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco tend to relegate to the background. I explore how each border crossing has redrawn cartography of attachments and detachments, displacements and the crystallisation of social boundaries, and how each rupture has reinvented continuity. Through the malleability of languages, spaces and material things, I am interested in how temporality is traversed, stopped, restarted, turned back and projected forward through places. This focus leads me to question materiality and place as points of stability and memory frames, as a form of continuity to an interrupted human life and to give priority to temporality and time in our understanding of the material world: a time that reshapes filiations and affiliations, linking them in continuity beyond the loss of places. This reflection on time and materiality is finally a way to better understand the issue of absentees and non-persons related to displacement, transforming the dead left behind: those who flee and do not return, who stay and keep the furniture and frames, who become exiles, who are not expected, not wanted, into absentees, and ghosts.

Povzetek

Članek se osredotoča na jezikovno, prostorsko in časovno kartiranje navezanosti med razseljenimi osebami iz kolonialnih svetov in na to, kako je to oblikovalo moja raziskovalna zanimanja. Razseljene osebe nimajo zveze z romantičnimi preganjanimi junaki, upravičenimi begunci. Te osebe so pripadale »prozaični« množici ljudi, ki so bili izgnani ali pozvani, da odidejo zaradi svoje ak-

tivne ali pasivne povezanosti s kolonialnimi sistemi. Ne da bi se pretvarjala, da sem izčrpna, ponovno beležim izkušnje in dediščino te kartografije skozi besede, ki nosijo duhove ali trupla več jezikov, imen krajev, dnevnih, obrednih in spominskih praks, predmetov, čutov ter občutkov. Skozi to raziskovanje obravnavam raznolikost prebivalstev in zgodovino njihovih preteklih razselitev – heterogenosti, ki jo podobe izgnancev iz Alžirije, Egipta, Tunizije ali Maroka običajno potisnejo v ozadje. Raziskujem, kako je vsako prehajanje meje na novo zarisalo zemljevide navezanosti in odtujitev, premikov in kristalizacije družbenih meja ter kako je vsak prelom ponovno ustvaril kontinuiteto. Skozi poudarek na prožnosti jezikov, prostorov in materialnih stvari raziskujem, kako začasnost prečiti, jo ustaviti, ponovno zagnati, obrniti nazaj in projicirati naprej skozi kraje. Na osnovi tega poudarka podvomim o materialnosti in kraju kot točkah stabilnosti ter spominskih okvirih kot obliki, ki daje kontinuiteto prekinjenemu človeškemu življenju, in v našem razumevanju materialnega sveta dajem prednost začasnosti ter času: času, ki preoblikuje sorodstva in pripadnosti, ki jih povezuje v kontinuiteti onkraj izgube krajev. Ta razmislek o času in materialnosti je končno način za boljše razumevanje vprašanja odsotnih in ne-oseb, povezanih z razseljevanjem, ki preoblikuje mrtve, ki so ostali za nami, tiste, ki bežijo in se ne vrnejo, tiste, ki ostanejo in obdržijo pohištvo ter slike, ki postanejo izgnanci, ki niso pričakovani, ki so nezaželeni, v odsotne in duhove.