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(Re)turning to Ruins: *Pied-Noir* Visual Returns to Algeria

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In commemoration of the 45th year of their exile, 500 pieds-noirs *and their families gathered in Toulouse, France in May 2007. During their meeting, the Amicale de Saïda viewed the film* Saïda . . . On revient! sur les pas de notre enfance, *which chronicles the return voyage of members of the community and their encounters with the places of their past. The amateur film provides a return to Algeria for the* pieds-noirs *who could not physically make the journey. While many buildings in the images were in ruins, the* pieds-noirs *did not view the present and experienced a return to somewhere other than what was filmed.* Saïda . . . On revient! *is one of numerous journeys to Algeria that have occurred in the past 50 years. Notable Algerian-born authors Albert Camus, Marie Cardinal, Leïla Sebbar, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous have all participated in written and real returns to Algeria, and they all reflect on the ruins of Algeria that haunt them in their exile. By analysing the representation of real ruins in documented returns to Algeria, this article demonstrates how ruins of lost locations hold potential to ruin the stability of the past.*

Pour commémorer les 45 ans de leur exil, 500 pieds-noirs et leurs familles se sont réunis à Toulouse, France, en mai 2007. Lors de la réunion, l'Amicale de Saïda a projeté le film Saïda . . . On revient ! sur les pas de notre enfance, *un documentaire du voyage de retour des membres de la communauté et leurs rencontres avec les lieux du passé. Ce film amateur offre un retour en Algérie pour les pieds-noirs qui n'ont pas pu faire le voyage actuel. Bien que de nombreux bâtiments filmés étaient en ruines, les pieds-noirs n'ont pas vu le présent. Ils ont expérimenté un retour à un endroit ailleurs qu'à la destination filmée.* Saïda . . . On revient ! *est un parmi plusieurs voyages en Algérie qui ont eu lieu dans les 50 dernières années. Des auteurs célébrés, nés en Algérie, tels qu'Albert Camus, Marie Cardinal, Leïla Sebbar, Jacques Derrida et Hélène Cixous, ont tous participé à des retours réels et écrits en Algérie, et chacun réfléchit aux ruines de l'Algérie qui le hantent dans son exil. En analysant la représentation des ruines réelles pendant des retours documentés en*

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Algérie, cet article montre comment les ruines des lieux perdus peuvent ruiner la stabilité du passé.

In May 2007, 500 *pieds-noirs* and their families originally from Saïda, Algeria, met in Toulouse, France to commemorate the 45th anniversary of their exile. During their 18th biannual reunion, the group viewed the film *Saïda . . . On revient! sur les pas de notre enfance* (2006) which chronicles the 2006 return voyage of 80-some members of the community and their encounters with the places of their Algerian past. This amateur film produced by two participants in the trip, Amicie and Bernard Allène, is the composite of multiple travellers' cameras and its goal is to provide a return to Algeria for the *pieds-noirs* from Saïda who could not physically make the journey. I was invited to attend this screening by the president of the Amicale de Saïda, Louis (Loulou) Baylé, and during its début I witnessed the *pieds-noirs* both in the film and in the audience calling out in recognition, 'ah! C'est le magasin de mon voisin. Là, c'est chez toi. Voilà la boulangerie . . . ', even though what they were viewing was clearly now something else. Aiding their recognition of the places from their past, through the editing process, a voiceover was added pointing out old landmarks in Saïda. For example, the film of a bare hillside is accompanied by the narrator's announcement, 'la montagne de la croix', and then, through digital manipulation, a cross appears on the hilltop before quickly disappearing again. Likewise, the narrators confirm, 'ah, ici ça n'a pas changé', as the travellers peer out the windows of the minibus that carries them into Saïda.

This visual return created by the Amicale de Saïda left me nauseated with the swaying, bouncing, and shifting camera angles. I had to look away while those around me were riveted. A woman two rows back broke down in anguished sobs, presumably from seeing what she had lost or perhaps from recognition of the monuments that had been haunting her for so many years now visible before her. This visual return to iconic locations partially confirmed what was remembered but also ruined the past for some of the *pieds-noirs* around me. What was projected was not what they had lived 45 years prior, and what they recognised in the film was the past instead of the present.

This film, coupled with its showing in Toulouse, demonstrates the rupture in time that occurs for the *pieds-noirs* when revisiting and remembering their homeland. Whereas the filmed images demonstrate the present state of Algeria, and this present is obvious to someone unfamiliar with Saïda, the *pieds-noirs* who once lived there see their memories transposed upon the screen. In an odd moment of recognition of the gulf between memory and reality, however, my neighbour in the theatre, Alphonse San Miguel, who had made the voyage with the group, lamented the crumbling buildings in the film. 'Mais non, ils ne doivent pas montrer ça. Ce n'était pas si mal que ça!' he repeated while shaking his head throughout the film. What he saw on the screen did not correspond to what he had experienced during his return a few months prior, and what he remembered from his recent return was not the ruins he saw in the film. Mr San Miguel's response is emblematic of the ruptures created in *pied-noir* returns

(real, written, or filmed), and the ruin symbolises the disconnection that occurs when memory is confronted with place.

Saïda . . . On revient! is just one of numerous returns to Algeria that have occurred in the past 50 years, and these pilgrimages have only multiplied in the last decade. Notable Algerian-born authors Albert Camus, Marie Cardinal, Leïla Sebbar, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous have all participated in written and real returns to Algeria throughout their literary careers, and they all reflect on the ruins of Algeria that haunt them in exile. More recent filmed returns, such as Derrida's *D'ailleurs, Derrida* (1999), demonstrate the tenacity of the past for these exiles and the fragmentation that occurs when the homeland is revisited. In this article I will explore the literal and visual representations of ruins in the returns of both prominent and lesser-known Algerian-born people, giving special attention to the restorative and reflective forms of nostalgia experienced in confronting iconic locations of the past. By analysing the representation of real ruins in documented returns to Algeria, this article will demonstrate how ruins of lost locations hold potential to ruin the stability of the past.

The *Pieds-Noirs* and Nostalgia for Ruins

Nearly one million *pieds-noirs*, or the former French citizens of Algeria, were exiled primarily to France during and after the Algerian War (1954–1962). For the majority of those leaving towards the end of the war, the departure was a traumatic experience, and many lost family members, homes, belongings, as well as their monuments to the past. Their separation continually haunts them in their new lives in France. Compounding the effects of their chaotic departure, the reception of the *pieds-noirs* in France was often unwelcoming and many lived in difficult conditions upon their arrival. In their time of need, many members of the *pied-noir* community banded together and associations based loosely on their regional ties in Algeria began to quickly appear in France. The *pieds-noirs*, confronted with the wilful silence of the French that lasted through the 1990s, eagerly spoke of their homelands in an attempt to save the memory of their pasts and to promote their perspective on Algeria.

As a result of the trauma they suffered, the *pieds-noirs* were almost immediately nostalgic and, for the most part, their early accounts of the past focus on the loving attachment to Algeria, their 'paradise lost'. In short, their painstaking written re-creation of the homeland, evoking the sights, sounds, and smells of Algeria, attempts to make the past present for both the author and the reader. This particular form of writing, often referred to as 'nostalgérie',[1] demonstrates psychological motivations at work in the texts (i.e. the compulsion to repeat, avoidance of the present, need for creating a fictive stability, etc.), and it is what Svetlana Boym classifies as restorative nostalgia in her seminal work *The Future of Nostalgia* (Boym 2001, p. 49). The authors repeat their pasts in an effort to reconstruct the homeland, even though, as Judith Butler explains, this repetition is a vain effort to 'inhabit that past within the terms of the present and effect its fantasized reconstruction' (Butler 1990, p. 264). Nonetheless, the authors of *nostalgérie* tend not to recognise that, as Boym observes,

'nostalgia tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial' (Boym 2001, p. xvii). The *pieds-noirs* effectively attempt to materialise what no longer exists, and as such, their writing becomes a ruin—a marker of what used to be, hoping to prompt recognition. In their efforts to fill an immeasurable void, many *pieds-noirs* are caught in a cycle of repeatedly re-creating the homeland while clinging to fragments of their past. Nostalgia for the wholeness of the past may be inescapable for the exile, but while some seek to bridge over a rupture that gave independence to a formerly colonised people, others articulate return in a way that directly acknowledges separation.

Literary and Visual Sites of Ruins

The nostalgic vision of the past permeates the texts of well-known Algerian-born authors such as Albert Camus and Marie Cardinal. Although primarily known for his philosophical essays and novels, Camus also repeatedly rewrote Algeria. Born in 1913 in Mondovi, Algeria, Camus lived mainly in France from 1943 until his death in 1960. Long before Algeria became independent, Camus nostalgically reproduced a dormant location symbolic of a dead past in his 1938 essay 'Noces à Tipasa', which was written roughly around the time of his first departure:

> Au printemps, Tipasa est habitée par les dieux et les dieux parlent dans le soleil et l'odeur des absinthes, la mer cuirassée d'argent, le ciel bleu écru, les ruines couvertes de fleurs et la lumière à gros bouillons dans les amas de pierres. [. . .]
>
> Nous arrivons par le village qui s'ouvre déjà sur la baie. Nous entrons dans un monde jaune et bleu où nous accueille le soupir odorant et âcre de la terre d'été en Algérie. (Camus 1959, p. 11)[2]

Camus's detailed description continues, evoking the odours of Tipasa and inserting himself into the landscape before turning his attention to the ruins: 'Dans ce mariage des ruines et du printemps, les ruines sont redevenues pierres, et perdant le poli imposé par l'homme, sont rentrées dans la nature' (Camus 1959, p. 13). Camus re-creates Algeria and yet witnesses the ruins as they fade before him, returning to nature and losing their value as markers of the past:

> Comme ces hommes que beaucoup de science ramène à Dieu, beaucoup d'années ont ramené les ruines à la maison de leur mère. Aujourd'hui enfin leur passé les quitte, et rien ne les distrait de cette force profonde qui les ramène au centre des choses qui tombent. (Camus 1959, p. 13)

While he appears to understand the need to release the ruins, his nostalgic attachment to Tipasa remains intact. Tipasa is known for the ruins of three great churches which represent the Christian (Latin-based) society that preceded the Arabs. Its Arabic name, *Tefassed*, means soiled or badly damaged. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tipasa was the destination of many class trips for the young French-Algerians during the colonial years and is widely recognisable by the *pied-noir* community as a whole, not just to Camus. Today it is also the site of a stele to Camus with a quotation from 'Noces à Tipasa' engraved upon it.

Much like Tipasa, another famous archaeological site, Timgad, stands out in literary and visual texts on Algerian memory. The site is pictured in the photo-documentary work *L'Algérie oubliée: Images d'Algérie (1910–1954)* by Gérard Guicheteau and Marc Combier (2004), which attempts to question the memory of Algeria in a historical context, and it is revisited by Marie Cardinal, whose long literary career constantly reconnected her to Algeria. In her 1980 return travelogue *Au pays de mes racines* Cardinal recalls a childhood visit to Timgad. Although Cardinal demonstrates in her works that she believes it is possible to return to Algeria, and that a ruin can substitute for the past, her recognition of other histories and other peoples that preceded hers on the same land seems to indicate otherwise. The ruins of Timgad evoke other rulers whose reign has ended. Cardinal writes her memory as though she were actually on site:

> Tout autour de moi, partout, il n'y a que des constructions détruites. Combien de milliers d'habitants vivaient ici? La ville est grande. Combien de Romains? Pas seulement des soldats, mais aussi des citoyens sûrement, des hommes, des femmes, avec leurs enfants. Des paysans, des boutiquiers. Une ville comme une autre faite pour que des gens y vivent. (Cardinal 1980, p. 107)

This Roman colony, like Cardinal's, was a settler colony, meant to endure for generations. Although projecting herself back to childhood, Cardinal seems to foretell the fate of the French colony also to be left in ruins. Whereas these ruins indicate a time beyond return, Cardinal evokes them in tandem with her own past:

> Les colonnades paraissent extrêmement hautes et longues à force de ne plus rien supporter. Elles se dressent. Elles témoignent depuis longtemps qu'un peuple conquérant a vécu là. Et qu'il est mort. *Elles ont pris sa place* et elles vivent immobiles, rigides et belles. (Cardinal 1980, p. 107, my emphasis)

This recollection is symbolic of the ruins Cardinal would uncover in her own dead civilisation, and it demonstrates her attempt to substitute written and visual memory for the past. The leftover columns, once functional, are anachronistic monuments that now serve to remind one of parallel pasts and evoke an ahistorical Algeria. Although the fall of French colonial rule seems evident, Cardinal makes no direct connection between the ruins of a past before hers and the ruins of her own past that she was preparing to encounter in Algeria. Instead, throughout her travels, Cardinal strives to reconnect the past to the present (to materialise the immaterial), and she largely ignores the changes that occurred in Algeria during her absence.

Throughout *Au pays de mes racines* Cardinal seems to be on the brink of understanding that her past no longer exists in Algeria; yet, the author continually insists everything is the same. In a moment similar to that portrayed in the film *Saïda … On revient!* upon her arrival in Algeria, Cardinal searches for her family's factory and her escort says, 'c'est là, c'était là, juste après le jardin d'essai' (Cardinal 1980, p. 111). To this she responds in writing, 'je m'en fiche. Je ne veux plus me laisser captiver par aucun détail parce que maintenant il y a Alger devant moi. […] Bonjour ma mère, ma sœur, mon amie' (Cardinal 1980, p. 111), demonstrating the reconnection between place and memory. For Cardinal, everything is even more beautiful than she remembered, but as

she aptly writes, 'je voudrais tout voir et je ne vois rien' (Cardinal 1980, p. 111). Instead of recognising the past as *past*, Cardinal insistently inscribes her past self onto the present in an effort to reattach herself to her roots. While I would argue that her contradictions throughout the work reflect her inability to arrive at her destination, Cardinal strives to cover over the historical rupture. At the end of *Au pays de mes racines* she writes that the reattachment is successful, and she is reassured that she still loves her country: 'je sais maintenant que c'est bien cette terre que j'aime. Je me sens imprégnée de son odeur, de ses rythmes, de ses couleurs, de sa musique' (Cardinal 1980, p. 219). She expresses that she is restored and reconnected to her roots through her journey to and subsequent writing of Algeria.

In *Déracinés: Les pieds-noirs aujourd'hui*, psychologist Danielle Michel-Chich explains the value of a return voyage to Algeria:

> le voyage en Algérie constitue un moment marquant pour le pied-noir qui le fait, une étape dans la construction permanente de son équilibre, un répit dans la bousculade des souvenirs et, souvent, un apaisement de la nostalgie maladive dont il souffre depuis 1962. (Michel-Chich 1990, p. 141)

To the contrary of what we have seen in the returns of Marie Cardinal and the *pieds-noirs* in the film *Saïda . . . On revient!* Michel-Chich insists, 'la réalité ne peut donc en aucun cas correspondre à l'image du pays d'antan' (1990, p. 141). In fact, for the returning *pieds-noirs*, it is extremely important to recognise their country in order to validate their attachment: it is recognition that gives the ruins meaning. Because of Cardinal's inability to see Algeria as independent from her, the return voyage, a supposed cure for her amputation from the past, does not stop her yearning for the homeland. She must continually re-create her attachment to Algeria from her subsequent photo-documentary work *Les Pieds-Noirs* (1988) until her last novel, *Amour . . . Amours . . .* (1998).

Les Pieds-Noirs provides a fascinating example of visual ruins of an Algerian past. This large-format coffee-table book, which bears Cardinal's name in large letters on the cover, is half autobiography accompanied by personal and collected images of the lost homeland, and half a communal documentary of the Français d'Algérie written by other well-known *pied-noir* authors such as Béatrix Baconnier, Albert Bensoussan, Francine Dessaigne and Janine de la Hogue. Among numerous iconic images of Algeria, once again the ruins of Tipasa are pictured in this volume (Cardinal 1988, p. 24). The book makes a return voyage on behalf of the *pied-noir* community while allowing Cardinal to recollect personal stories from her childhood combined with her thoughts on the *pied-noir* people. For the most part, the black and white photos re-create a happy past, depicting Algerian labourers, French architectural feats, familiar monuments, and city views and landscapes that are sure to provoke emotion from the *pied-noir* community or to attract sympathy from the French public.

Published during the wilful silence surrounding the so-called *guerre sans nom*, the book glosses over the more painful episodes of Franco-Algerian history that are pictured but not commented in any detail. A troubling example, the last page in the book shows a boat leaving what is presumably the Port d'Alger. While the image

plainly evokes the exodus of the Français d'Algérie, the accompanying text, a literary and nostalgic piece by de la Hogue entitled 'Ballade triste pour une ville perdue', laments the eclipsing of the happy past. In this, the sole reference to any trauma or even the departure of the *pieds-noirs*, she writes on behalf of her people, 'ils avaient vécu intensément, physiquement, et voilà que la violence de leur vie, du soleil, du vent, des vagues, devenait une violence de l'esprit' (Cardinal 1988, p. 293). Although this ending to *Les Pieds-Noirs* is not particularly shocking, the page preceding it is. In the top left-hand corner is an advertisement for travel in France: 'Vous allez en France . . . Vos vacances commencent sur le bateau' (Cardinal 1988, p. 292). This page pictures French and Algerian people coming off of an Air France flight with the commentary, 'l'on ne rêve que de Métropole, toute population confondue, et de voyages en France' (Cardinal 1988, p. 292). The juxtaposition of tourism ads for France and de la Hogue's ballad for the loss of her home disrupts the nostalgic unity of the past that the book attempts to create. As with the film *Saïda . . . On revient!* the authors attempt to leave the *pied-noir* in Algeria or to hint that their exile is only temporary. The reality of the permanent exile of the *pieds-noirs*, however, makes these combined references to departure rather troubling. The abrupt end to *Les Pieds-Noirs* emphasises that few exiles are able to recognise Algeria as the location of their trauma. Instead, their current homeland of France has born the brunt of their criticism and blame for their losses. This inability to identify the locus of suffering makes healing a particularly challenging task and actually serves to sustain their nostalgia for Algeria.

Recognising Ruins

Dylan Trigg articulates the disconnection between place and body when revisiting the location of trauma as memory supersedes the present. For Trigg, a ruin is a 'location of memory, in which trauma took place and continues to be inextricably bound with that location in both an affective and evidential manner' (Trigg 2009, p. 88). Ruins, then, do not need to be a physical or built environment, but a place of recognition and recollection of the past.

While many *pieds-noirs* revisit Algeria in an attempt to restore themselves with the past and believing in the possibility of reunification, Trigg's essay demonstrates that the return to a location of trauma disrupts the logic of time and simultaneously renders memory insufficient at recovering the past. Ruins recall absence, contesting the idea that memory can be contained by place:

> In short, we are faced with a phenomenology of negative space, a location defined not only by what has ceased to exist, but also what cannot be accommodated spatially. [. . .] The significance of this tension is that the ruin mirrors the internal 'terrain' of the witness to trauma, and so achieves a testimonial dimension. (Trigg 2009, p. 96)

Many who return to Algeria are confronted with this tension but are unable to articulate it. Instead of seeing ruins, they insist upon the recognition of the past and the faithfulness of their memory to the reality of their experience. Authors like Marie

Cardinal (and many others) do experience fragmentation when returning, and this becomes evident in *Au pays de mes racines*, but most cannot fundamentally accept an Algeria that has gone on without them. Even so, Trigg writes, 'the ruin's capacity to haunt the viewer effectively undercuts a claim of temporal continuity and, instead, offers a counter-narrative in which testimony becomes guided by voids rather than points of presence' (Trigg 2009, p. 89). He continues, 'the encounter pushes the ruin beyond place, beyond time and toward an otherworldly landscape comprised from remains that *ought* to have been confined to the interior of the unconscious, but now stands before consciousness as a leftover in the world of appearances' (p. 99, author's emphasis). Whether viewed or filmed, the ruin as a moment of personal recognition represents the inability to articulate the past and the traumatic event '*trembles* as an incommensurable void is given a voice between the viewer and the place' (p. 99, author's emphasis).[3]

As what happened in the past 'trembles' before them, the *pieds-noirs* have an opportunity to reflect on the absence and voids that now appear. Visual returns through film or photo-documentaries allow subsequent opportunities to revisit the (ruined) location, now from a safe distance, and the return may be repeated *ad infinitum* for deeper inspection. Disturbing, however, is that in collective returns multiple pasts are gathered into one image that must be recognised to be meaningful. Communal returns attempt to elicit a certain type of memory from iconic locations, but all of this meaning condensed into one image necessarily creates tensions, distortions, and movement. This 'trembling' between recognition and past is an opportunity for what Boym calls reflective nostalgia that 'cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes spaces' (Boym 2001, p. 49). Whether the confrontation takes place in a journey or through visual encounters in books or film, the exile may find it productive to explore the distortions that time has marked on the ruin.

Iconic, Moving, and Fragmented Ruins

An example of an iconic location that is frequently re-created in *pied-noir* visual works is the church of Notre Dame de Santa Cruz which stands on a hill above the city of Oran. The church appears in numerous websites and return films, as well as printed collections such as René Bail's *Souvenirs d'Oranie* (2003) and Elisabeth Fechner's *Souvenirs de là-bas: Oran et l'Oranie* (2002), both of which use the church in their cover art. During the colonial years Notre Dame de Santa Cruz was the site of annual religious pilgrimages, and it is now a symbol for the *pieds-noirs* from Oran of their past in Algeria. Thus, there is a long scene at the end of *Saïda . . . On revient!* in which the group from Saïda celebrates a mass in the church with Monseigneur Georger. It is apparent in the film that the church has not been well maintained with paint chipping off the façade; yet, the *pieds-noirs* seem to portray a sense of reconciliation with their homeland in this final scene. After the mass is complete, and as *Ave Maria* plays in the background, the camera pans out over the Mediterranean and we see the sun set

behind a hill in Oran. The filmed return to Saïda ends in Algeria, leaving the *pied-noir* returned 'home' in this iconic ruin of their past.

Although the film delivers a sense of reunion, disturbing this unity is the knowledge that the statue of Our Lady from Notre Dame de Santa Cruz was moved to France in 1963. The original church in Oran remains an important monument to the colonial past, but now thousands of *pieds-noirs* gather each year during Ascension at the new Notre Dame de Santa Cruz sanctuary in Nîmes-Courbessac where the statue is kept. The statue has become an important relic and the procession of Our Lady to the church is an emotional experience full of reunions and shared memories for many of the exiles. In the church's shrine numerous photos, statues, and religious pieces that have been repatriated from Algeria are on display to memorialise what was lived 'là-bas'. This site, believed to be a source of physical healing, demonstrates the importance of ruins or relics from Algeria for the community. At the same time, however, the movement of pieces of the past to new homes destabilises the location of memory.

This movement between France and Algeria is the primary focus of Leïla Sebbar's works. Born in Algeria to an Arab father and a French mother, Sebbar's goal is not to re-create Algeria but to sustain a place in between France and Algeria, to demonstrate the connections between her two homes, and to join her story with others who are also caught between the two poles. In the preface to Sebbar's visual work *Mes Algéries en France* (2004), Michelle Perrot describes the fragility of past locations (ruins) and she explains the image as a substitute:

> Les lieux sont éminemment fragiles, menacés par la destruction, l'usure, les réaménagements incessants, l'oubli. [. . .] Autant de menues reliques d'un décor aboli, dont il ne reste parfois que des souvenirs de fleurs.
>
> La perte, qu'elle soit celle de la séparation, de l'exil ou de la mort, rend d'autant plus précieuses les photographies. Condensé de temps, instant suspendu, énigmatiques, voire indéchiffrables sans le regard familier encore capable de les lire, elles tiennent dans ce mémorial une place de choix non pas seulement illustrations mais *pièces de puzzle*, éléments du paysage, fragments du corps à recomposer. (Sebbar 2004, pp. 12–13, my emphasis)

The photo makes the ephemeral more tangible, but it always requires a dialogue with the spectator. The photographed place must be recognised if it is to be used as a piece in the puzzle or considered a ruin. Photos can be worn and distorted, but they are tangible pieces from which the exile can recompose herself. Sebbar is not absent of nostalgia for her past in Algeria, but by placing her story in dialogue with many others who are crossed between France and Algeria, she demonstrates the importance of movement in between. As Sebbar explains in *Lettres parisiennes*, a dialogue on exile with author Nancy Huston, she feels at home in her fictional writing because of the false unity it creates, but she also uses her writing to sustain her fragmented identity which is crossed between France and Algeria (Sebbar & Huston 1986, pp. 28–29, 134).

Fragmentation, movement and its subsequent distortions are at the centre of Jacques Derrida's filmic and deconstructed return to Algeria in *D'ailleurs, Derrida* (1999). This piece exemplifies how the filmed return home is a ruin that can ruin the

past. Not being able to return to Algeria himself (although he had previously done so in 1984),[4] film director Safaa Fathy made the trip on his behalf with a list of monuments to be captured. When Fathy returns from Algeria and shows Derrida her filmed version of his return, Derrida sees that his memories and the specific icons representing his Algeria come through only in ruins—faded versions of lived experience that are impossible to translate or completely access. Fathy states that what she filmed was 'encore plus ruines que les ruines. Sans corps' (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 56). The end result is a filmed version of Derrida in an 'oriental décor' somewhere that is not Algeria spliced together with brief scenes of his hometown, El-Biar. The filmed version of Derrida reflects upon the meaning of ruins and changed spaces, specifically religious monuments, within the context of Algeria.

In the film the two revisit many ruins (literal and figurative) of the places that played a significant role in Derrida's life: France, Algeria, Spain and California. While they 'revisit' they do not directly return to the past nor do they have the intention of returning. Instead these returns are constantly displaced. Through the concept of ruins, the authors express the destabilising nature of returns. They recognise that each piece of the past, each monument that is revisited in the present cannot have the same meaning as it did before. These monuments are, in fact, an anachronistic repetition that changes each time it appears. After filming these varied pseudo-returns, the two recount their movie in *Tourner les mots. Au bord d'un film* (Derrida & Fathy 2000) which explores the importance of the untranslatability of film into book and past into present while investigating the overarching theme of return. Untranslatability also indicates the impossibility of pinning down a location in film and book as the location is always *ailleurs* as a result of its past. Derrida expresses this impossibility as a result of the multiplicity of identity throughout time. As Derrida and Fathy repeat the voyages to Derrida's homelands in their book, the contexts are recast from the present, problematising history, memory and the very concept of return. Unlike what we have seen in restorative nostalgic works, the authors revisit locations of nostalgia in order to destabilise the fixedness of these imagined places and to demonstrate the impossibility to return (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 23).

When Fathy visits Derrida's former home in Algiers, she is not even sure she has arrived at the right location. Not only have the street names changed, but the entire context of the home is so different that it is unidentifiable from the past description and photo she has received from Derrida. Only the woman who now lives in the home is able to recognise the photo and confirm that it is the same house. Thus, it is only from the present that the identification of the past occurs. Apart from the changing context of the home, even the changed present political situation contributes to the difficulty in placing the home. The film crew's permission to film was contingent upon acceptance of an army escort and this entourage makes any sort of authentic 'return' to Derrida's home even more impossible for Fathy (Derrida & Fathy 2000, pp. 38–39). The present occupants are unwelcoming, making Fathy and her assistant stand in the doorway rather than allowing them to enter. Furthermore, Fathy notes that the occupants now speak yet another foreign language (Bulgarian), distancing the present

even more from the past and making the location even more inaccessible. All of these changes create a new context of Algeria—one that is foreign from the past because the one returning (Derrida) is not *present* to recognise or, indeed, misrecognise it. In spite of this disjunction, in the end, shards of ruins will still be relayed to Derrida who will have the opportunity to reassemble them in his viewing. This experience echoes Perrot's 'pièces de puzzle, éléments du paysage, fragments du corps à recomposer' (Sebbar 2004, p. 13).

One particularly powerful symbol of Derrida's fragmented return is the mismatched tile in the author's former house. In the entryway to the home, there is one point where the star-like tile pattern is broken as one tile had been inserted upside down. Under the photograph of these tiles in *Tourner les mots* is the caption: 'qui est ce carreau [. . .] mal ajusté, disjoint, désajusté, déplacé ou mal placé?' In fact, this unfitting piece symbolises Derrida. As he expresses to Fathy, he, like the tile, is both destabilised and destabilising. His present and presence disrupt unity with the past, and he is an anachronistic representation recalling an elsewhere that is no longer relevant. In fact, the troubling tile, like Derrida who resists and deconstructs, is simply a replication of all the others. Only the position determines the pattern, and the one that is remembered perturbs the entire picture. Derrida, too, demonstrates the impossibility of monumentalising himself on the screen as he exists in multiple copies. The one fixed in film perturbs an infinite pattern. As in this slippage between selves present and past, Derrida can return neither to one Algeria nor to one self. There are many Derridas and many Algerias. Both the tile and Derrida are pictured ruins, representing the un-fixedness of the past, disrupting nostalgia and the potentially unifying return home.

More than being just emblematic of the author, however, this tile, much like in Cardinal's discussion of ruins in *Au pays de mes racines* (1980), is evidence of those who came both before and after Derrida:

> Ce mauvais carrelage, après soixante ans, reste bien là, survivant. Qui est ce carreau? Il survit et assiste impassiblement à mon enfance comme il survivra probablement à ceux qui, aujourd'hui, nous ont succédé dans la même maison. Cette survie fait alors un signe qui s'étend vers une exemplarité plus générale: c'est toujours à partir d'une tension, d'une interruption, d'un défaut, depuis la blessure d'une dissymétrie que la mémoire s'organise, en quelque sorte. (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 93)

The tile as a ruin holds different values at any given time in history. Its dissymmetry is cause for contemplation and remembrance. The tile's mistake (or the mistake of the tile) has survived those who have walked upon it, and its function and symbolic meaning have evolved throughout time, much like the Roman ruins in Cardinal's work. The columns, strangely out of place now that they no longer support walls, are unrecognisable, unfixed and slipping figures.

Absence is inherent in the ruin. The symbolic return (or the turning towards Derrida's past) is even further complicated because Derrida's absence allows the film crew access to places where Derrida could not go. For example, the film crew manages to visit Derrida's school from which he had been expelled during the Vichy years.[5]

Fathy and Derrida recognise this vacuity: 'même si l'on sait que c'est la maison de Derrida, et même si l'on sait que c'est sa chambre, il n'en reste pas moins que les fruits se sont déjà affranchis de cette information qui les fait exister. Dans la plénitude, ils deviennent une métaphore de l'absence' (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 68); and, 'bien que la maison des Derrida soit habitée, elle n'en reste pas moins une ruine, la ruine de ce qu'elle a été, de ce qui a eu lieu là et nulle part ailleurs' (p. 40). If we look at these objects and locations as Derrida's, we also know that they have been freed from Derrida; they recall the fact that they are no longer his.

Because Derrida did not physically return, nor did he direct this return, value is evacuated from the past when he passively views the shard of memory. Derrida's second-hand return, reduced to a fixed point on film, carries instability within it, allowing a different interpretation each time it is viewed yet without offering a new perspective. The author only experienced a ruin of the ruin of his home, as the smells, sounds, and textures are evacuated in the two-dimensional space over which he had little control. The captured ruins are further devoid of meaning because the one who should recognise them could not within their new context.

In a similar way, Derrida's long-time friend and compatriot, Hélène Cixous, returns to Algeria both in her writing and in reality to dispossess herself of the past. Much like Derrida, Cixous's Jewish heritage caused multiple layers of separation for her while she was still living in Algeria. Born to a German-Jewish mother and a father who was a Sephardic Jew, Cixous was excluded in Algeria during the Vichy years and suffered from her not-Frenchness and her inability to arrive in Algeria as recounted in *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000). In a much earlier essay, 'Une virginité de mémoire' (1989), Cixous writes of her unwillingness to return to her hometown, Oran:

> Je sens que j'ai envie de ne pas retourner à Oran. J'ai envie de garder Oran dans une virginité de mémoire. Parce que si j'y retourne, cela provoquera une grande joie, mais cela provoquera aussi ce que provoquent tous les retours, l'effacement du souvenir, et le remplacement d'un souvenir ancien par un souvenir récent. (Cixous 1989, pp. 89–90)

Cixous's reaction is not uncommon, and as Michel-Chich (1990) points out, many refuse to return because:

> ils veulent protéger leurs souvenirs, se protéger eux-mêmes d'un choc qui pourrait menacer leur équilibre précaire, ne pas découvrir une réalité qui leur fait peur car le problème n'est pas seulement de revoir les lieux que l'on a aimés et d'où l'on a été arraché, il faut aussi affronter le changement. (p. 135)

Cixous realised her attachment to memory, and the lack of desire or inability to return or even arrive, are recurrent themes in her works, even in her 2007 novel *Si près* which documents her return voyage to Algeria. Her return, however, is clouded and confused as she attempts to find landmarks of her own past as well as those of the now absent Jacques Derrida. Cixous uses photos published in Derrida's works, possibly the same ones Fathy used, to guide her return. Seeking what she calls *TonAlger* in El-Biar 'où je ne suis jamais allée' (Cixous 2007, p. 174), Cixous is lost in her former homeland.

She is surrounded by ruins of other pasts, hers included, and her book demonstrates the inability to recognise the past in the present. Although her fragmentation is clear, Cixous experiences reunion and certain recognitions. In the end, she finds her father's grave, and she states, '*j'ai trouvé:* c'est la construction absolue' (Cixous 2007, p. 209, author's emphasis). She is rejoined to that essential missing piece left in Algeria—another person, a ghost—rather than a recognisable location. Unlike Cardinal who declares renewed love for her homeland, Cixous finds 'l'immortel chagrin' (p. 212) in Algeria.

Cixous declares that she had always resisted film, 'je n'ai jamais eu l'envie soudaine de garder une trace visuelle' (Cixous 2007, p. 99) and that she would not film Algeria; yet, she does film, as though to add another filter between her memory and her experience of Algeria. Upon her return to France, she shows the film to her nonagenarian mother and her brother. The camera allows Cixous to visualise the fragmentation that she often expresses in her writing: 'je vois et je vois que je vois [. . .] Je vois ce que je n'ai jamais encore vu ce que je ne verrai jamais' (p. 100). She also points out the absences and vacuity of the image, 'ce que ne voit pas la caméra' (p. 210), and what she did not see in Algeria until she saw the film in France. She sees that she does not see:

> Je n'ai pas vu le coq. Mais la caméra l'a vu. C'est drôle. Cette caméra qui voit ce que je ne vois pas. [. . .]
>
> Quand je reviendrai à Paris, je me verrai voir le coq avec ma mère, tout d'un coup, avec ma mère je me verrai au Clos-Salembier, dans l'escalier, je me verrai ne pas voir le coq en haut de l'escalier dans le film, à droite, au-dessus de ma tête [. . .] puis je verrai tout le coq que je n'ai pas vu, sur l'écran, le coq et moi, dans le même plan, je verrai que je ne vois pas. (Cixous 2007, p. 151)

Cixous deconstructs the visual elements captured, demonstrating that film and experience are not the same: 'la caméra regarde, je ne regarde pas ce qu'elle regarde. [. . .] La caméra ne voit pas les abîmes. Je tombe' (Cixous 2007, p. 137). The movement between memory, experience and reflection is stupefying in Cixous's work, and she allows the readers to stumble along with her to Algeria and back again.

Rather than pursuing a discourse of being at home, as we see with Cardinal and others who want nothing more than a reunion with Algeria, Derrida and Cixous uncover their absence, dispossession, foreignness, and incapacity to return (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 74). As a result of these displacements, only the dizzying motion of return (or turning) remains. This movement is clearly represented in the film *Saïda . . . On revient!* with its nauseating shaking and multiple views spliced together. As the film attempts to portray a common trip to the past, it easily betrays the unity of the experience. The ruins *tremble* as the exiles move between past and present, verbalising and projecting the anachronous memories onto the changed reality of Algeria. It is through movement (and its subsequent distortions) that the crippling nostalgia for ruins may be undone.

This returning motion to a destination that no longer exists is the fate of the exile according to Safaa Fathy:

> l'étranger se reconstitue, et recommence dans la dispersion de ce qu'il est, et avec les restes de ce qu'il a été, dans la rupture de sa filiation. Et toujours mal, puisque, fatalement, il demeurera toujours humble et toujours près de la terre, toujours étranger. (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 30)

The impossibility of finally returning is equally demonstrated in Camus's *Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). Sisyphus, the absurd hero condemned to perpetually push a rock up a hill only to watch it slip away again, triumphed by accepting his eternal return: 'il est supérieur à son destin. Il est plus fort que son rocher' (Camus 1942, p. 165). His rock, a ruin of his past life, became his companion in the journey: 'chacun des grains de cette pierre, chaque éclat minéral de cette montagne pleine de nuit, à lui seul forme un monde' (p. 168). Recognition of the impossibility of arrival allows the foreigner to bear the past; and it is through the motion of return, as displayed in the imagined, written, and visualised returns of the *pieds-noirs*, that the exile finds strength to unhinge the attachment to the location of ruins and to continue the impossible journey.

Notes

[1] The term 'nostalgérie' was coined by Marcello Fabri, a French writer from Algiers whose 1938 poem of the same title expressed his physical longing for Algeria during a long stay in France.
[2] This paragraph is also reproduced in Cardinal's *Les Pieds-Noirs* to introduce the second portion of the book, 'Terre et hommes' (1988, p. 85).
[3] Trigg (2009, p. 99) concludes, 'what is experienced is less a direct fragment of a broken narrative, and more a *murmur* of the place where that narrative once existed' (author's emphasis).
[4] The author cannot return for the fear of risking his life. One of his Algerian friends had been assassinated for organising a conference in Algeria in Derrida's honour (Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 94). Derrida did return to Algeria prior to this film, however, in 1962, 1971, and 1984 (Derrida & Bennington 1991, p. 305; Derrida & Fathy 2000, p. 89).
[5] In *Jacques Derrida* (1991, p. 59) by Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington there is a photograph of the school with the following caption: 'la façade du lycée de Ben Aknoun, un ancien monastère, près d'El-Biar. J.D. y entre en sixième, en est expulsé l'année suivante (octobre 1942) à l'application des lois antijuives. Le lycée est transformé en hôpital militaire à l'arrivée des Alliés. J.D. y est réintégré après la guerre et y finit ses études secondaires.' Two pictures of Derrida's first home in El-Biar are also included in this text (Derrida & Bennington 1991, pp. 400–401). Fathy actually used these images taken during Derrida's 1984 return to Algeria to find the house during her visit in 1999. Cixous later uses Derrida's photos to find his home in *Si près*. The return on behalf of another, living or dead, is likewise the goal of the film *Saïda . . . On revient!* (2006).

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