



AFAC visits Algeria

Algiers

Oran

Mostaganem


Constantine

March 2013



آفاق AFAC

The Arab Fund For Arts and Culture
الصندوق العربي للثقافة والفنون – آفاق



With a population of nearly 40 million and a total area of 2,381,741 square kilometers, Algeria is the largest country in the Arab region, the African continent and the Mediterranean basin. It is rich on many levels: oil wealth, strategic location, geographic area, youthful population and an abundant cultural heritage. The modern history of Algeria, however, has been deeply

Introduction

marred by the tragedies of colonization and warfare. It has been only 50 years since its independence from the French in 1962 and, in fact, only 14 years since the end of the Black Decade in 1999 and the election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika as President. The Algeria of today is a very young country. Things are still in the process of construction.

The Black Decade still haunts the country. It began in 1992, when a conservative political Islamic party won the elections for the Algerian National Assembly and the government responded by cancelling the elections. The Islamists decided to fight back, targeting government representatives, while the government used all its resources to eliminate this insurgency from its roots. The political struggle for ascendancy escalated into a war of indiscriminate violence; both sides were brutal and society became paralyzed. By the end of the decade, an estimated 200,000 Algerian civilians had lost their lives and thousands disappeared.

The current government's reaction to emerging from this age of repression has been to prioritize the arts and creative expression in order to enhance the sense of Algerian unity. "After the terror of the 1990s, a strong cultural life became the new cultural policy objective," write Professor of Political Science & Information Makhoul Boukrouh and cultural researcher Ammar Kessab. A significant portion of the national budget is dedicated to the cultural sector. In fact, the Algerian Ministry of Culture has the largest budget in comparison to all the other countries of the African continent and the Arab region. Public institutions receive the largest part of the government subsidies with the aim of hosting numerous cultural events nation-wide.

While this is a seemingly beneficial attitude for the arts and culture sector of the country, responses are actually mixed. Some find the heavy-handed and near total support of the government as, adversely, smothering to innovation and prone to corruption. "A new generation is growing up and learning to be entirely dependent on government support rather than working independently," one veteran filmmaker complained. This polarization between publicly-supported work and independent work within the field of Algerian contemporary culture emerges as a recurring theme throughout our visit.

Algiers is the capital city, with a population exceeding 4 million, a sprawling sea-side metropolis with bright white walls shaping its buildings. On our arrival that evening, we immediately had a meeting with AFAC grantee Habiba Djahnine, a documentary filmmaker and founder of Bejaia

Landing at Algiers and Bejaia Doc Meeting

Doc. Habiba is dedicated to creating an independent filmmaking

scene and supporting the new generation of Algerians to gain confidence in their voices and to express themselves through film. Her Bejaia documentary workshop, "Cinema et Memoir" was granted support from AFAC in 2008 and annually welcomes students interested to learn how to make films and tell share their stories cinematically.

She introduced us to a group of independent artists and they presented to us their perspectives on the current status of arts and culture in the country. "Either you are part of the government's cultural work or you are simply ignored," they explained, "independent artists are not invited to cultural meetings, festivals or funding resources that are meant to be available to the public." The Algerian Ministry of Culture has a generous budget and organizes a mammoth 250 festivals per year. Yet, artists that work independently are either marginalized or completely excluded from them.

According to some, there is a political agenda for Algeria's numerous festivals. "They are a method to absorb all cultural initiatives in order to better control them," said one of the artists. "It is like unionizing the arts."

Habiba is confident and keeps the positive side. First and foremost, she believes that art and artistic creation must remain independent of any power and any system. That is why she says "Frankly, being ignored or marginalized by the official cultural institutions does not bother us. It actually allows us to escape from their control. We are much more creative in terms of independence and it pushes us to think and find alternative solutions to exist and invent space where creation can be free and open to new possibilities."

Algeria's cultural scene is full of contradictions. Later on, we hear a different story from artists working within the public system. "We organize so many festivals all over the whole country because we want to reach out to the provinces and the places where people don't have access to the cultural activities you find in the city," said one government official. "How else can we engage Algerian culture across the nation?"

In the morning, we headed to MAMA, the Museum of Modern Art in Algeria. The museum is relatively new, inaugurated in 2007, though the building itself dates to the turn of the 20th century. The main building has a square plan with a central

MAMA Museum

atrium that brings in lots of light and spaciousness and there is currently a second wing under construction. There, we met with MAMA's General Director, Mohammed Djehiche.

Mohammed Djehiche is a well-respected figure in the Algerian culture scene who works closely with the Minister of Culture and seems on good terms also with independent art circles. During the Black Decade, when the director of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Algiers was assassinated by Islamists, it was Mohammad who kept the faculty running against all adversities, risking his life. Students would cross the country to attend the art classes, they too risking their lives. As an exception to the general way things are in official Algerian cultural circles, he is able to encourage and include the participation of independent artists in his exhibitions.

Reflecting on the Black Decade, he said: "We found that an entire generation of artists had disappeared. They were either killed or they emigrated and left the country." His description resonates with anyone who visits Algeria. It is a country where time seems to have stopped in the 1980's. Getting out of this time capsule and opening up into the present is a cultural challenge. "There are no contemporary art galleries in the country. There is no insurance for art objects or professional art movers, art storages, art packagers. All this makes it difficult for artists abroad to exhibit their work here."

Customs controls, for example, have little idea how to qualify artistic products. With no insurance and no specialized transportation, these are major deterrents to a blossoming of the arts in Algeria. Take the example of Kader Attia's work. This world renowned Algerian artist lives abroad and works on large scale installations. One of his most memorable works, 'Flying Rats', featured at the Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon in 2005, is a life-size display of dozens of mannequins in the form of children playing in a park. Fully dressed and vividly posed, as if running or playing hide and seek, the mannequins are, nonetheless, made entirely of birdseeds. Hundreds of pigeons flood the scene, cooing and flapping their wings, eating away at the bodies. Such an experiential work of art, deeply meaningful to the artist's memory of his own childhood, has left a strong impact on all who recall witnessing it. But the challenge of bringing Attia's work into Algeria itself requires a whole new cultural awareness and cultural apparatus. "How could such a project be explained at customs and brought into the country?" Mohammad asks.

Mohammad is a strong believer in the important role the government has to play in reviving Algeria's cultural expression and art scene. "The public role in supporting culture is crucial, we cannot deny that at all," he said. While supporting and developing cultural awareness and cultural expression is at the core of the government's role, he also sees the value of keeping a balance between public and private. "We also need to support the private sector and give them room to grow, not only for the arts, but on all levels of society's work."





Lunch with Mohammed Djehiche and Nadira Laggoune

Nadira Laggoune, a former AFAC jury member and an art critic, is a curator at the MAMA but also works as an independent curator. The dynamic Nadira strikes an interesting contrast with the calm Mohammad; her energy seems inexhaustible. The combination of Nadira with Mohammad is a good example of how private can connect with public. "I am not about separating private and public work," Nadira says "I am about giving and participating in the cultural development of my country in every way I can."

Meeting with Fatma Baroudi at Espace Plasti

Espace Plasti is a cultural space which was set up as an offshoot of Algerian News, an independent and alternative newspaper run by Ammar Kassar. The program coordinator is Fatma Baroudi; she is in charge of organizing the spaces events - film screenings, music performance, dance, theatre, etc. We had contacted Fatma to arrange with her a public presentation of AFAC, so this meeting was to discuss the preparations for our talk, scheduled the following afternoon. Over dinner, we got to learn more about the latest in local music and film. Documentary filmmaker Farid Ajdoud also joined us. His current project is a film about immigration between Algeria and France. His film will be a 100% Algerian production since French co-producers "do not find this subject sexy anymore."

Part of the discussion with Farid shed light on some changes in attitude taking place within the Algerian communities. He referred to conservatism emerging among the Berber, his fellow kinsmen and the indigenous ethnic group of Algeria. "I was surprised to attend my niece's wedding and find that they had segregated the men and the women," he said. "This did not exist before The Black Decade.... Society was more liberal and integrated then."



Day 3—Tuesday, March 26th

We started this day with a meeting with Abu Bakr Zammal, the director of a local cultural association called “Al-Bayt Lil Thaqafa wal Funoun,” another AFAC grantee. The association employs Algerian and regional poets and novelists to produce original contemporary works and translate contemporary

Artists within the Public Sector and without

literature and poetry from other cultures into the Arabic language.

Unlike some of the artists we had met so far, Abu Bakr is very defensive of the government’s hands-on support of the arts and does not see what independent practitioners are going on about. From his experience, “the Ministry of Culture is doing a great service to Algeria’s artists, a service to be proud of. Where else in the world do writers get the kind of support that we are able to find here? The government in Algeria is obliged to purchase the first 1,000 copies of first editions written by Algerian authors.”

While Zammal considers the government’s involvement to be the right way to encourage writing, many others we have spoken to are critical of this approach, considering it inadequate to filter out quality works and encourage creativity.

Zammal is also weary of co-production support from Europe. “They have their own agenda... We must never forget that they were our colonizers.” Culture continues to be a battle field for identity.



Lunch with Mustapha Orif, Director of L'Agence Algérienne pour le Rayonnement Culturel (AARC)

The AARC was founded in 2005 with the aim of supporting the creation, promotion and worldwide distribution of Algerian art productions. Under the directorship of Mustapha Orif, the AARC has been a key player in co-producing Algerian films; to date, 23 films. The AARC also supports music productions and live music concerts, the visual arts, literature and documentation in addition to audio-visual arts and cinema.

"The AARC reserves the right to archive and make copies of all the works we support, so long as it is not for commercial use. This is an important way to preserve the films and make them available to wider publics and future publics," Mustapha says.

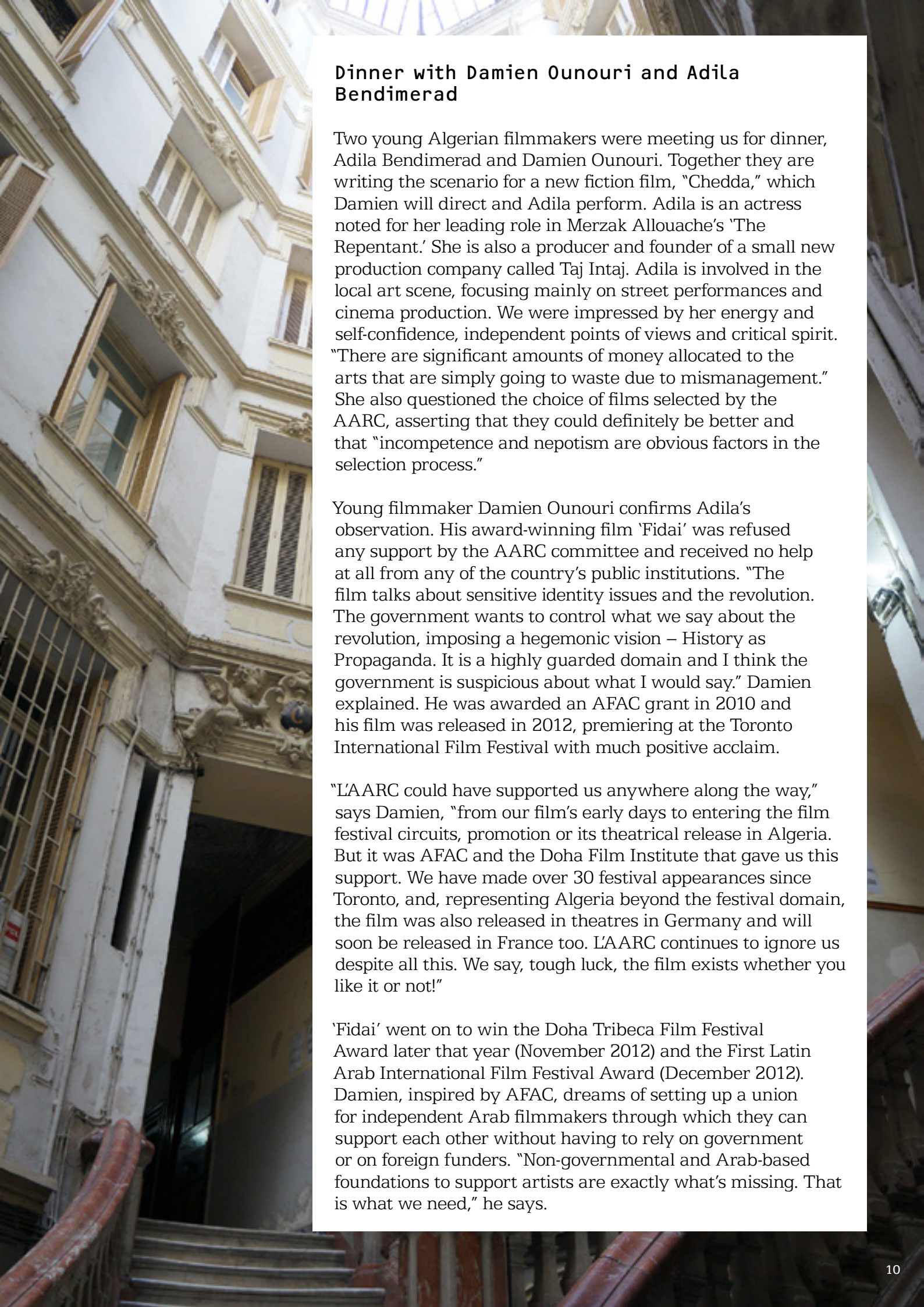
The AARC's grants range from 200,000 to 4 million Euros per film, with the granted amounts transferred directly to the producer. There are some 200 production companies (cinema and TV) all together in Algeria, of which some 25 to 30 of them are active on a high quality level. When asked about how the AARC's juror committees are formed and how they operate in selecting grantees, he was quick to respond: "Our process is fair and transparent."

In terms of screening spaces, there are 500 cinemas across Algeria, placed under the jurisdiction of their respective municipal governors. The municipalities, however, have been doing an inadequate job in making these cinemas functional and the government has recently decided to reclaim and refurbish all cinemas that are out of order. They have reclaimed 380 cinema halls to date and the plan is to open them up to the private sector. The dominant concern among the filmmakers now is how to ensure that spaces will be kept available for high quality art works and films as opposed to commercial ones.



Public Meeting at Espace Plasti 3:30

The AFAC presentation, as usual, was very well received by the local artists' communities and was an occasion to discuss the current cultural arena from a variety of perspectives. The attendees at this meeting were very focused and eager to learn about support opportunities. It meant volumes to them that such an entity as ours even exists - an Arab fund that is independent of government and that is willing to support individuals and local cultural institutions for no return. Even more impacting on them was that such a fund is also willing to come and meet them personally, on their own turf and within their own contexts.



Dinner with Damien Ounouri and Adila Bendimerad

Two young Algerian filmmakers were meeting us for dinner, Adila Bendimerad and Damien Ounouri. Together they are writing the scenario for a new fiction film, "Chedda," which Damien will direct and Adila perform. Adila is an actress noted for her leading role in Merzak Allouache's 'The Repentant.' She is also a producer and founder of a small new production company called Taj Intaj. Adila is involved in the local art scene, focusing mainly on street performances and cinema production. We were impressed by her energy and self-confidence, independent points of views and critical spirit. "There are significant amounts of money allocated to the arts that are simply going to waste due to mismanagement." She also questioned the choice of films selected by the AARC, asserting that they could definitely be better and that "incompetence and nepotism are obvious factors in the selection process."

Young filmmaker Damien Ounouri confirms Adila's observation. His award-winning film 'Fidai' was refused any support by the AARC committee and received no help at all from any of the country's public institutions. "The film talks about sensitive identity issues and the revolution. The government wants to control what we say about the revolution, imposing a hegemonic vision – History as Propaganda. It is a highly guarded domain and I think the government is suspicious about what I would say." Damien explained. He was awarded an AFAC grant in 2010 and his film was released in 2012, premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival with much positive acclaim.

"LAARC could have supported us anywhere along the way," says Damien, "from our film's early days to entering the film festival circuits, promotion or its theatrical release in Algeria. But it was AFAC and the Doha Film Institute that gave us this support. We have made over 30 festival appearances since Toronto, and, representing Algeria beyond the festival domain, the film was also released in theatres in Germany and will soon be released in France too. LAARC continues to ignore us despite all this. We say, tough luck, the film exists whether you like it or not!"

'Fidai' went on to win the Doha Tribeca Film Festival Award later that year (November 2012) and the First Latin Arab International Film Festival Award (December 2012). Damien, inspired by AFAC, dreams of setting up a union for independent Arab filmmakers through which they can support each other without having to rely on government or on foreign funders. "Non-governmental and Arab-based foundations to support artists are exactly what's missing. That is what we need," he says.



When artists complain of lack of support, however, people have trouble sympathizing. "State funds are just like our oil," said Adila, "like someone throwing sand in your eyes. A mirage!" Many filmmakers are critical of The AARC which does not seem to have a merit-based system or transparent process, though it allocates millions of Euros for films every year. Independent artists feel frustrated. Adila explains, "Some Algerian artists who receive funding from the government will tell me, with good will, 'we have to be riding on the plane if we want to change its course,' but if you are sitting on the plane, nothing will happen."

Oran is the second largest city of Algeria. It is a major center for trade and industry, especially as the headquarters of Sonatrach, Algeria's biggest oil and gas company and the 11th largest oil consortium in the world. Located on the

Flying to Oran

northwestern coast, it is also a major port that

serves as the commercial, industrial, and educational center of western Algeria.

Historically, the city was first founded by Arab merchants from Andalusia in the 10th century and it was famous for its maritime trade in the Mediterranean. During the 16th century, however, Oran fell to colonial Spanish rule for 200 years, followed briefly by a return to the Islamic fold only to be colonized by the French from 1831 until 1962. The colonial legacy and war is apparent in its architecture and its various Fort cities.

In terms of its contemporary cultural scene, however, the city appears to be largely abandoned and not a single art gallery exists in all of Oran. This is because culture is centralized in the capital in Algiers. A saving grace is the music scene. As the birthplace of Rai music, Cheb Khaled and several other Rai musicians who have gained international acclaim still make it a point to perform in Oran in tribute. Yet, all in all, Oran does feel like a forgotten city; old buildings are falling apart, the port is garbage ridden, walls need repair. Though it is the second largest and has a population of some 2 million people – is not sufficiently supplied with means of transport to connect the non-urban zones and suburbs. The feeling of neglect is expressed by one of the local artists: "We don't suffer from lack of expression here. We can say whatever we want. We can criticize the system until our throats are sore. But it's all futile. No one listens. Nothing changes."

Mamia Bretesché is a European galleryist and curator who lives and commutes back and forth between France and Algeria. She is in love with Oran and dedicated to supporting Oranian artists and Algerian art in general. Nevertheless, she finds it very hard to establish a local institution. This is where the French connection is helpful. "It is easier to have an institution based in France and be active in Algeria rather than establishing an Algerian-based institution," she explains.

Working together with Mamia is visual artist Sadek Rahim. In trying to set up his own art space, Sadek had met with Oran's representative of the Ministry of Culture. His proposal was flatly rejected.

Throughout our visit, independent artists repeatedly express the lack of support and recognition for their work, and that

they are finding ways to produce their art with limited means and within their own immediate surroundings. The lack of connectivity between artists is an apparent problem, though not surprising, given the vast size of the country. They are working hard in establishing their grassroots initiatives, but those in Oran, for example, don't know what's happening in Algiers or in Constantine or elsewhere in their region. If there was some way of connecting them together, something more thriving can emerge.





Day 5 – Thursday, March 28th

The next day in Oran, we met with Radja Alloula, wife of the regionally renowned Algerian playwright Abdelkader Alloula. Abdelkader is considered to be a Godfather of Arab theatre and was tragically assassinated in 1994 by the Islamists. Radja, together with friends, have since set up the Abdelkader

Radja Alloula Alloula Foundation to archive his

works, and has collected a library of 700 audio/visual and literary publications pertaining to theatre. The Foundation aims to connect with other theatre archives in Algeria and internationally. It also aims to perpetuate the 'Alloula school.'

"The 'Alloula school' is exactly what the country needs now," said Radja. "Alloula was a master of language. He knew how to talk to poor people, how to talk about love, sex, money, women, men, hardship, life! He knew how to connect." The deceased playwright wrote copiously during his lifetime and many young actors and creative writers come to Oran to visit the foundation and access Alloula's work. Meanwhile, Radja's efforts to connect with the Theatre of Oran, traditionally known as the Alloula Theatre since the late playwright had spent his entire career there, have not been fruitful.

Public meetings at the Sidi Al-Houari Space

The historical district is a suburb in the north of Oran. It features the Saint-Louis College as well as an old mosque from the 17th century. The famous old quarter is named after Sidi El Houari (1350–1439), an Algerian imam and highly respected Muslim scholar, theologian and Sufi. As a seeker of knowledge and divine wisdom, he travelled widely across the major cities of his time - Tlemcen, Fes, Tunis, Mecca, Jerusalem, Damascus and many others – and it is a point of honor that he selected to finally settle in the city of Oran.

There is a unique cultural initiative located in an old building that once served a nearby hospital; it has large halls for dormitory, cafeteria and underground laundry vaults. The space, known as SDH after Sidi Al-Houari - has seen been transformed into an arts and crafts school and attracts the young creative artists of the neighborhood and nearby towns. There is a creative energy among the young and the old who gather with the aim of teaching skills that revive forgotten heritage. Dozens of Algerian boys and girls can be found attending workshops for woodworking, metal welding, etc. It was a pleasure to explore this industrious space and to present AFAC's mission and programs to its community. The turnout was excellent and the attendees repeatedly expressed their appreciation of AFAC's presence, here in Oran as opposed to remaining limited to the capital. There was an animated discussion at the end of the talk with a group of young visual artists, photographers and filmmakers. We were impressed with how effective and lively this small local initiative appeared to be in encouraging local creativity and youth engagement.



Given the general lack of support that artists in Oran feel, Mamia and Sadek are courageously taking matters into their own hands and trying to come up with art-supportive venues within their own means. Each has decided to adapt their homes and transform them into hybrid spaces that are

Hopeful Spaces

accessible for
artists and
for cultural

exchange. Sadek took us to his family home to show us a space he is constructing with his own hands together with his family's support. He is eager to offer a venue where creative production and cultural discussion can take place.

Similarly, Mamia brought us to her apartment to show us her makeshift residency program. She has transformed some of the rooms to serve as a residency space and she hosts young artists to develop and share their work. In small yet hopefully effective ways, these two cultural practitioners in Oran are creating independent spaces where hardly any support exists. In such cases, the work becomes not merely a cultural vocation, but also, and probably for economic reasons, an entire lifestyle.

Later that afternoon, there was still more to come as, through some mutual Facebook contacts, we were able to set up a meeting with a small local music band called 'Democratoz'. We had never heard of them before and their founder, Sadek Bouzinou, was eager to meet us. He is a dreamer with a big vision for his band and for the children of his neighborhood.

Democratoz is all about young, raw, grassroots creativity. Sadek is the songwriter/singer/guitarist of the band and, when we asked him about his source of inspiration, he took us to a ghetto where the children and the adults alike live by sorting through piles of garbage.

Sadek is a child of these realities but they have not hardened his soul. Instead, he uses his music to uplift the spirit and to speak the truth of what most people do not see. He sings, for example, about the 'Harraga' – those impoverished young men who illegally immigrate by boat by night in the hopes of better opportunities overseas; many die en route. He sings about ideals, love and pride, hardship and hope.





Democratoz is a 7 member band, all in their 20's, living together on the roof top of Sadek's humble family home. His mother cooks for them all and has adopted them as her own children. Their producer was able to attract the attention of famous music coach, Jean Alain Russel, who is helping them record their first album.

"When I first came to see them perform, the energy they had and their interaction with the audience was powerful," said Jean Alain, "I decided to go see how they work. I discovered a small room where they live, a broken drum set, no microphone... just a tiny room with borrowed guitars, that's it. From this tiny room, they are able to go on stage and move the crowds again and again!" He has high hopes for this band.



The following day we travelled to Mostaganem, a port city in the northwest of Algeria. It has a history of being a cultural center and is the home town of illustrious figures such as playwright Abderrahmane Abdelkader, cinema director

Mostaganem

Mohamed
Chouikh,
historian Moulay

Belhamissi and lyricist Kadda Medjeded, just to name a few. It is also famous for Andalusian classical music and traditional Bedouin music.

Our visit took us to the School of Fine Arts where we met with vice director Adnan Djeflal together with local teachers and students. They showed us their premises and facilities which we found to be outdated and poorly kept. The equipment and teaching methods seemed outdated and students not too aware of current art practices: no one had heard of Kader Attia for example. All were eager to show us their paintings and share their ideas and projects. With much talent on hand, more openness and wider cultural references and sources of inspiration seemed to be in order.

A new building for the school is being constructed and is nearly completed. On visiting the site, we wondered how well versed the architect was on adapting the building for the school purpose. "It is unfortunate," says the director "they put radiators on the walls in the future gallery where we will hang paintings. We will have to relocate them, of course."





On returning to Algiers, we met with visual artist and AFAC grantee Zineb Sedira, program curator Yasmina Reggad, together with Nadira Laggoune. Zineb is a strong self-determined woman who is able to accomplish her goals against all odds. In her early career, her work revolved around

Back to Algiers

language and
storytelling
using

photography and video, whereby she presented her family experience of immigrating to France from Algeria, growing up in Paris and moving to England in 1986. On returning to Algeria after 15 years of absence due to the civil war, her artwork took a different turn and became engaged in people's "mobility and colonial legacies." Noting the sense of isolation and distance that the young generation of artists feels in Algeria, in 2011, she decided to create a new platform which would serve as on-going dynamic network between diverse international art communities together with Algerian artists. An AFAC grant in 2011 allowed her to launch her Pilot Residency Program called /A.R.I.A/ (Artists Residency in Algiers).

"Algeria is mainly known for its civil war, which is a sad misrepresentation since it ended 10 years ago... The residency program provides a framework for international artists and local artists to interact in order to help redress these misconceptions." Zineb's knowledge of the country, together with her strong international contacts, makes an ideal person to lead such a program. "I want artists in Algeria to have the benefit of meeting with international artists face to face and to learn from their diversity of experiences." The first year of the A.R.I.A program brought Alfredo Jaar and Basel El-Maqosui to interact with local artists and give talks at the School of Fine Arts.

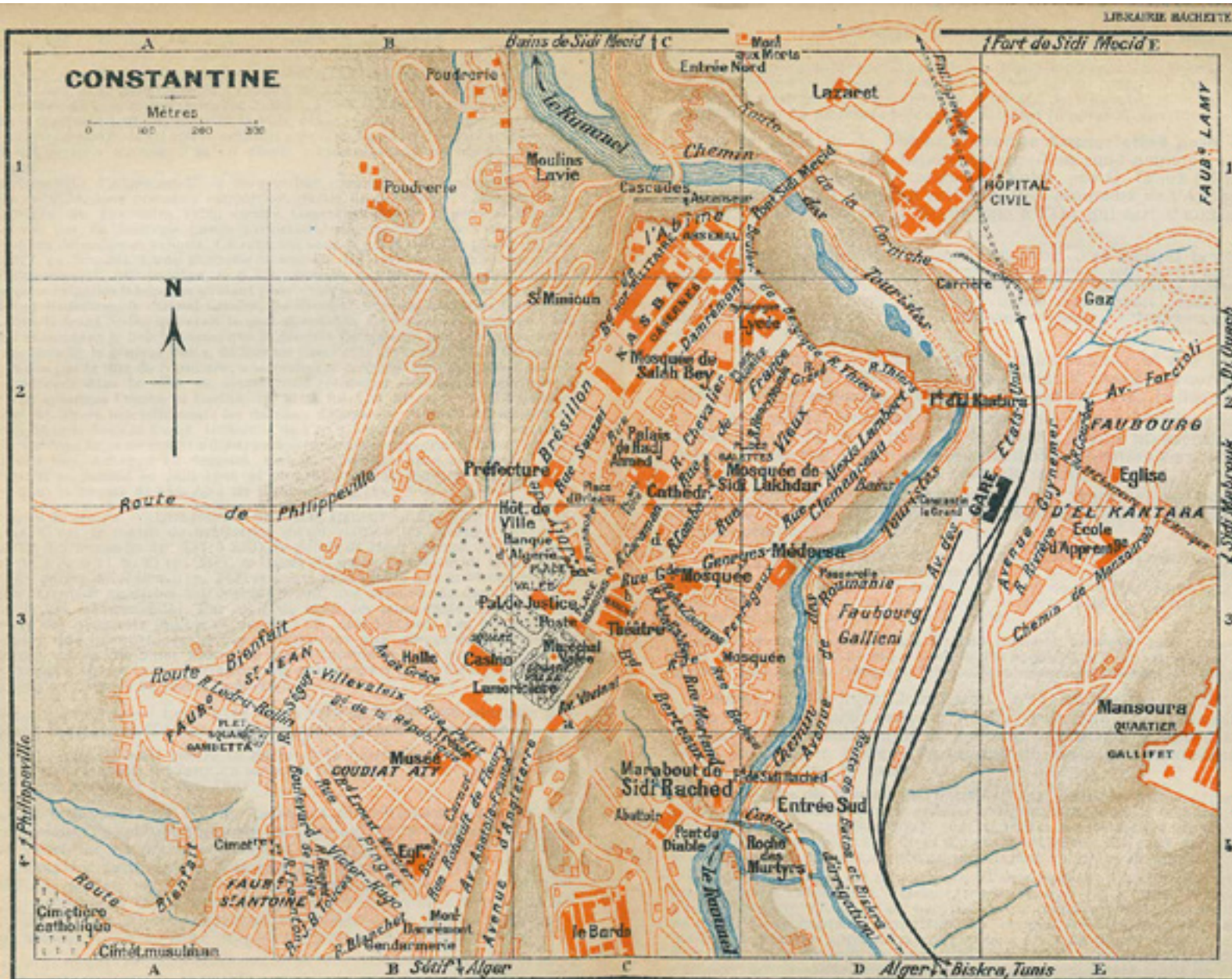
In the evening, we went to A.R.I.A and met with some of the artists there, including Djamel Agagnia, Atef Berredjem, Oussama Tabti and Amina Menia. Young independent artists have taken the habit of flocking to Zineb for her support and guidance. We could feel how important it was to create such places for connections, exchange and constructive critique. "There is such a lack of references here," she says "it is crucial to bring recognized artists, non-Algerians, to live with them, meet with them and learn new perspectives," she says.

CONSTANTINE

Mètres

0 100 200 300

N



N°221 3-36 Imp. Dufour, Paris

Constantine is the third biggest city in Algeria and has the unique position of sitting on top of a rock. It can only be reached by bridges and, not surprisingly, has a historical reputation for being rebellious and difficult to control, with its own breed of artists and thinkers. Up until the French

Constantine

colonization
in 1930,
Constantine

was the seat of the Ottoman government but it had near-independent status and played a prominent role in Mediterranean trade.

Greeting us in this venerable city is veteran artist and intellectual Ahmed Benyahia, a notable alumnus of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and a protégé of French sculptor César Baldaccini. Ahmed Benyahia is sprightly and highly energetic for a man in his 70's. He invited us to his home, showed us his work before giving us a highly informative tour of the city, tapping into his deep knowledge of local and regional history, arts and culture.

We then returned to the hotel to meet with a group of former AFAC grantees to update us on their works. Kheyer Zidani is a young Algerian filmmaker whose documentary project sheds light on the plight of construction laborers and investigates the links between working with stone and the spread of a deadly lung disease among the working class men of his town. We also met with representatives from the Association for the Promotion and Progress of Children who won an AFAC grant in 2010 for their dance training workshop and with the Association Culturelle El-Assala de la Commune de Tamza which hosts music festivals to bring together folk music performers and contemporary musicians, both in classic forms and in street forms.

Kheyer Zidani and his friends, mostly photographers, volunteered to give us their own tour of the city, and it was fascinating to experience two very different renditions of the same place. There was a lot of food for thought and it was a pleasure to meet together again, the older generation and the new, over a last supper.







Algeria is emerging from a long and troubled history that is seen by some to be a precursor of what is currently taking place in other parts of the Arab world. It is a country rich with a predominant youth bulge. They are eager to process and to reconcile the difficult realities of the previous generations and to reconnect

Conclusion with a past that has been

truncated. Nonetheless, this same youth seems to be firmly conscious of the present and enthusiastically open to new opportunities. Artistic expression will play a vital role in this matter.

Algeria is also a wealthy country with immense resources. For better or for worse, it is a country where government is willing to invest massively into funding of arts and culture. The cultural industries are at the core of the new cultural strategy in Algeria. And yet, for all its grand efforts, the public sector is drawing lots of criticism and local independent artists feel unsupported. A different approach seems to be called for.

As for those artists who are finding their own modest means to burrow ahead, being Algerian carries its challenges. The sheer size of the country coupled with the lack of the necessary artistic spaces and the heavy-handed approach of the public sector makes it difficult for artists working on their own to connect with each other. Algeria's wealth is often out of reach and there ironically emerges a situation of scarcity, both in terms of funding as well as in terms of expertise.

In spite of these challenges - geographic vastness, poor infrastructure and dominating public sector - independent artists and local initiatives are emerging with a relentless zeal for promoting self-expression and creativity.

