

ENGLISH

PIERRE BOURDIEU
In Algeria

Photography, you see, is a manifestation of the distance of the observer, who collects his data – and is always aware that he is collecting data – but at the same time photography also assumes the complete proximity of the familiar, of attention, and a sensitivity with regard to even the least perceptible of details. Details that the observer can only understand and interpret thanks to his familiarity (and do we not say that someone who behaves well, is 'attentive'?) and a sensitivity for the infinitely small detail of an act that even the most attentive of ethnologists generally fails to notice. But photography itself is equally interwoven with the relationship that I have had to my subject at any particular time and not for a moment did I forget that my subject is people – human beings whom I have encountered from a perspective that, at the risk of sounding ridiculous, I would willingly refer to as caring, often touched.

In Algeria

War and social change in Algeria

Borne by its inherent logic, the War revealed the true face of the colonial system. No more false appearances to deceive, all ambiguity eliminated. Hence the conscious or unconscious fear of peace of many members of the ruling social classes – a fear founded on the realisation that the War brought about an irreversible change which can, however, only fully surface once peace has been established; hence, also, the admitted or unadmitted wish of many people for total war, ending in total victory, that is to say, the complete restoration of the caste order. For the members of the ruled caste, the divide and contradiction between ardently revered, ideal France and colonial France, whose rule is based upon violence and discrimination, is revealed in its entirety. As a result, by dint of its logic or, if you will, the power of things, and often contrary to the intention of those waging it, the war of subjugation reveals not only its true aspect, but also the nature of the colonial system and the nature of France as a colonial power. The veil has fallen.

Révolution dans la révolution

Habitus - habitat

After the style of Roman colonisers, the officers in charge of organising the new communities begin by disciplining space, as if hoping that this will allow them to discipline people, too. Everything is subjected to uniformity and aligned neatly in a row: the standardised houses on allotted plots of land stand straight as a die along wide roads based on the ground plan of a Roman *castrum* or colonial settlement. The central square houses the characteristic triad of French villages: school, town hall, and war memorial. And we can assume that the geometry-craving officers of the SAS (Sections Administratives Spécialisées) would have centurised the surrounding country if they had had more time and resources.

Le Déracinement

The farmers driven out of their ancestral homes were taken to oversized camps, which were often arranged according to purely military principles. These 'resettled' people lived in total dependency on the SAS administration (Sections Administratives Spécialisées). The pressure created by the situation brought about by this organisation itself forced the army to look after people that it had previously sought only to neutralise and control, which led to measures of once again dividing and relocating. Apparently, then, it was not until later that resettlement ceased to be a simple, immediate consequence of evacuation and became an object of separate scrutiny, gradually becoming a focus of

systematic policy. Despite the ban imposed at the beginning of 1959 on resettling parts of the population without the approval of the civil authorities, such resettlement measures increased manifold. 2,157,000 Algerians, i.e. one quarter of the total population, were affected by resettlement measures by 1960. If we include rural exodus, the number of individuals no longer at their ancestral place of abode in 1960 is at least three million, which is half of the rural population. This population shift is among the most brutal in history.

Le Déracinement

I would never have come to study ritual traditions if the same concern to 'rehabilitate' which had first led me to exclude ritual from the universe of legitimate objects and to distrust all the works which made room for it had not persuaded me, from 1958, to try to retrieve it from the false solicitude of primitivism and to challenge the racist contempt which, through the self-contempt it induces in its victims, helps to deny them knowledge and recognition of their own tradition.

For, however great the effect of respectability and encouragement that can be induced, unconsciously rather than consciously, by the fact that a problem or a method comes to be constituted as highly legitimate in the scientific field, this could not completely obscure for me the incongruity and even absurdity of a study of ritual practices

conducted in the tragic circumstances of war.

This was brought home to me again recently when I rediscovered some photographs of stone jars, decorated with snakes and intended to store seed-corn; I took those photographs in the course of field-work in the Collo region, and their high quality, although I had no flash-gun, was due to the fact that the roof of the house into which they were built had been destroyed when the occupants were expelled by the French army. There was no need to have exceptional epistemological lucidity or outstanding ethical or political vigilance in order to question the deep-rooted determinants of a so obviously misplaced *libido sciendi*.

The Logic of Practice

The Kabyles keep their wheat and barley in large earthenware jars made with holes at various heights, and the prudent mistress of the house, responsible for managing the reserves, knows that when the level of the grain falls below the central hole, called thimith, (the navel) she must curb consumption. The 'calculation' is automatic and the jar functions like an hour-glass showing at all times how much has gone and how much is left.

Algeria 1960

Men - women

Resettlement prevents women from performing most of their traditional tasks. This is due firstly to the fact that interventionism by the authorities was primarily directed at women as, according to the military and most naive observers, the status of Algerian women was the most obvious sign of 'barbarism' that had to be fought with all direct and indirect means. Hence, the military set up women's groups and sewing circles almost everywhere; on the other hand, they took brutal action against anything that seemed to stand in the way of 'women's liberation'. In Kerkera (as in many other camps) the houses had no courtyard area; the well and public washing area were at the centre of the *quadrivium* in almost all of the camps. Generally speaking, military actions and repression were a severe test for the moral of honour underlying the division of labour and gender relations.

Paysans déracinés

Most obvious and impressive, perhaps, are the signs of abstinence that refer to traditions with a fundamentally symbolic value, for example wearing the veil or the fez. The traditional function of the veil became superimposed by another function, that indicates the colonial context. Even without detailed analysis it becomes clear that the veil serves primarily to defend one's privacy and to protect it from violation. A fact that Europeans have always vaguely recognised. By wearing the veil, the Algerian woman creates a situation of non-reciprocity; she plays an unfair game by seeing without being seen, without allowing herself to be seen. As such, by means of the veil, the ruled society as a whole refuses to reciprocate by seeing, observing and penetrating without allowing itself to be seen, observed and penetrated.

Guerre et mutation sociale en Algérie

Uprooted farmers

The day we realised
What they really meant by 'bonsoir',
It was like a blow to the chin:
We were sick of the many prisons.

The day we realised
What they really meant by 'bonjour',
It was like a blow to the nose:
There was no blessing for us any more.

The day we realised
What they really meant by 'merci',
It was like a blow to the throat:
A sheep is more terrifying than us.

The day we realised
What they really meant by 'cochon',
We were less honourable than dogs,
And the khammès* bought a mule.

The day we realised
What they really meant by 'le frère',
It was like a blow to the knee, [as they strike draught oxen]:
We are wading in shame up to the chest harness.

The day we realised
What they really meant by 'le diable',
It was the blow that drove us insane:
We cart dung [and do jobs for dirty swine].

Hanoteau, *Poésies populaires de la Kabylie du Djurdjura*
Le Déracinement

Economy of poverty

A man without work goes off in the morning, more or less early, depending on whether he really has hopes or is already resigned; all morning he walks from one building site to another, relying on the advice of a friend, a cousin, or a neighbour. He stops at a café and has a drink and a smoke with his friends. Looking for work becomes a whole occupation.

Travail et travailleurs en Algérie

The search for work is the one constant factor in an existence swept to and fro by the whim of accident, together with the daily failure of that search. You look for work 'left and right'; you borrow 'left and right'; you borrow on the left to repay on the right. 'I borrow and borrow, and float like an orange peel on water', says an unemployed man from Constantine.

Travail et travailleurs en Algérie

Work is neither an end in itself nor a virtue per se. What is valued is not action directed towards an economic goal, but activity in itself, regardless of its economic function and merely on condition that it has social function. The self-respecting man must always be busy doing something. If he can find nothing to do, 'at least he can carve his spoon'.

Algeria 1960

'Sometimes I work for 10 days, sometimes for 15, but never in a row, not regularly. I'm a construction site driver at the moment. My children need bread. Any job will do then. It is better than running around aimlessly and not bringing anything home. Look at my children, they haven't got anything to wear. Look at my house, it's not a house, it's a shed. Any job is fine with me if I earn enough to feed my children. I haven't got any other job. That's the way my life is, it's just that the money isn't OK. Everything else will work out, that's the way we are' (Driver, Oran).

Travail et travailleurs en Algérie

The authentic farmer must uphold rural values, even if exposed to life in the town: the rural community, that is usually sparing with recognition, is full of praise for those that still respect its patterns and norms, that continue to live, feel and think as farmers and 'follow the path of their fathers and their grandfathers'. They say, 'He lives there like at home', 'he hasn't become a *beldi* [townie], he hasn't become conceited yet'.

Le Déracinement

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References for quotations

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