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Bourdieu, Pierre, *Picturing Algeria*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, ISBN 9 7802 3114 8429, xvi+230 pp., A\$39.95. Distributor: Footprint Books.

French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu is best known for his ethnographic and sociological studies on such issues as the relationship between culture and politics, the sociology of art and the dumbing down of the media – a body of work that began with his reflections on Algeria, released in English translation as *The Algerians* in 1962.

Picturing Algeria presents a clear example of Bourdieu's research methodology, combining passages from his texts on Algeria with largely unpublished photographs taken between 1957 and 1961, during his period of national service in the French colony and his later voluntary return to take up an appointment as a university lecturer in Algiers.

In his foreword to *Picturing Algeria*, Craig Calhoun says Bourdieu was sent to Algeria to do his national service as a punishment for his vocal opposition to French military efforts to suppress the colony's push for independence.

The photos, which form the greater part of the book, document Algeria's traditional societies and their undermining by colonialism with its forced resettlement and urban economy, reducing landless farmers to idleness and poverty.

Bourdieu, who died in 2002, photographed the 'economy of poverty' in Algeria – from hawkers and street vendors with the resourcefulness to 'escape the shame for a self-respecting man of doing nothing' (p. 24) to people crowded in a resettlement camp on a 'swampy plain that people could not cultivate' (p. 19). In extracts from his published works, he compares traditional

rural societies where a 'self-respecting man must always be busy doing something' (p. 136) to life in the towns where 'everything bears the stamp of precariousness' (p. 157).

The book includes essays by co-editors Franz Schultheis and Christine Frisinghelli, as well as Schultheis's 2001 interview with Bourdieu for photographic magazine *Camera Austria*, in which Bourdieu said photography was 'interwoven with the relationship that I have had to my subject' and that he remembered always that his subject was people, 'human beings whom I have encountered from a perspective that – at the risk of sounding ridiculous – I would refer to as caring' (p. 32), a passage cited by Frisinghelli in her essay in the final section of the book (p. 202).

Of equal resonance is the sentence that follows the above passage: 'That is the reason I never stopped conducting interviews and observations (I always started my research with them, no matter what the subject).' (p. 202). Bourdieu compared his approach to that of 'bureaucratic sociology' that 'only has access to its interviewees through intermediary interviewers and that, unlike even the most cautious ethnologist, has no opportunity to see the interviewees or their immediate environment' (pp. 32–3).

Frisinghelli refers to the photographs as 'above all the result of scientific work', to be viewed 'in a constructive context together with the texts that he wrote at the same time' (p. 206).

Bourdieu's analysis applies equally today to traditional rural societies under pressure to adapt to an urban lifestyle. The book left me wanting to read more of his reflections on society, work and change.

– Jan Harkin, *Arts and Education*,
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