

Document Citation

Title	3 continents: spotlight on Arab and Middle East: Bab el-oued city
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Source	<i>London Film Festival</i>
Date	1994
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Bab el-oued city, Allouache, Merzak, 1994

3 CONTINENTS: SPOTLIGHT ON ARAB AND MIDDLE EAST

London '94

Bab-El-Oued City



ALGERIA/FRANCE 1994

Bab el-Oued is a working class district of Algiers, soon after the bloody riots of 1988. *Bab el-Oued City* is the chronicle of this microcosmic district where contradictions, manipulations and exclusion melt in an electrical atmosphere of intolerance, which is becoming more and more intensive. During the shooting of *Bab el-Oued City* in the Spring of 1993, the everyday life of Algiers was full of murders, arrests and reprisals. But despite all the instability, it was necessary for us to shoot in Algiers and show its working class districts, its youth etc. Sometimes we felt extremely uneasy when, while directing players, ambulance and police sirens burst into the air, recalling in our minds the rising violence of Algiers. We were really unnerved but resolved to go on until the end of the shooting. In those times, our camera could venture out into the streets, French people could join us on the set and, still, we could dream of Cinema. Unfortunately, all this is quite impossible today. – Merzak Allouache

Bab el-Oued City is to date the most lucid depiction on film of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria and its perils. It's essential viewing for anyone interested in getting insight into the people's reaction to this broad political change.... The film, directed by Merzak Allouache, an Algerian living in Paris, is set in early 1993, not long after violent clashes brought death to the streets. It forcefully condemns the violence and secret political agenda of the fundamentalists, while it separates them from other Islamic believers.... Overall, the film is a scary and accurate prediction of the rising violence that has, in the past year, swept Algerian society. Its fierce criticism makes it a film that probably would not be allowed to shoot in Algiers today. – Deborah Young, *Variety* (5 June 1994)