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Reconsidering Public Space: The Case of Turkish Associations in France

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Abstract

This article examines how immigrant culture in modern-day France is communicated through Turkish associations as a medium of the public space. Through interviews with members of various types of cultural associations, I explore how public and private space dictate how culture and identity are understood within the French context. To better explain their goals and how they fit into larger French "cultural" discussion, I develop a simple typology of these cultural associations as "localizing" or "orientalizing" immigrant culture. Pointing to the space between these categories, I show the need for the immigrant experience to be recognized as part of French history in these public spaces in order to directly confront the issue of "neo-racism."

Keywords

Laïcité; Public Space; Immigrant History; Cultural Citizenship; Neo-Racism; Rousseau; Habermas; L'Institute des Cultures d'Islam; La Maison de L'Europe et L'Orient; L'Association Culturelle des Travailleurs Immigrés de Turquie; Association of Diyarbakir; L'Assemblée Citoyennes des Originaires de Turquie; Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration

Walking into a Parisian bakery for a quick snack with a French friend in the summer of 2013, I noticed an array of special Ramadan sweets. My friend, an art student and cashier at an Algerian-owned bakery down the street, explained the different sweets: the date-stuffed maqrout maqli,[10] harrisa,[11] almond-paste-filled maqrout el louz[12] and mkhabez.[13] After selecting a bit of everything (and two pieces of baklava[14] for good measure), the young hijab-wearing cashier rang up our order and wished us a good day. My friend's smile turned into a frown as we exited, he angrily questioned the girl's right to wear a hijab while serving the public. Confused with this never-before-seen side of my friend, considering his generally unprejudiced views, I asked him whether it wasn't perfectly legal to wear a headscarf in a place of work.[15] Even so, he tersely replied, she didn't have the right to wear that "truc d'emprisonnement" ("instrument of imprisonment") because it was an affront to his own values. After grabbing another sweet from our box, he continued more calmly that it wasn't her faith that was the problem (he had a Moroccan uncle, his coworkers were Algerians who fasted during Ramadan!), but it was her blatant display of her religious beliefs in a space of French Republican values governed by *laïcité* (the French concept of secularism, stipulating a strict separation of church and state). Looking down at our newly bought box of sweets, I then asked how we could enjoy her "private" culture through sweets and food, while not allowing her to live by the religious aspect of this culture. To this point, he was dumbstruck, silently munching his Ramadan sweet.

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[10] Algerian almond cookies with dates.

[11] Middle Eastern sweet semolina cake.

[12] Algerian almond cake.

[13] Algerian glazed almond cookies.

[14] Middle Eastern filo-dough pastry.

[15] The controversial 2004 "headscarf law" banned the wearing of "ostentatious" religious symbols in public schools; the legal reasoning stated that wearing such religious symbols in a "public space" violated laïcité, a specific type of French secularism that promises the separation of church and state.

Sadly, laws limiting the public expression of private religious values have only increased in France since this conversation. Most recently, the 2021 law banning the wearing of hijabs for those under 18 in public spaces and the preventing of hijab-wearing chaperones on public school excursions has shown the French state's commitment to a public space free of cultural and religious norms considered to be in opposition to "universal" Enlightenment values, such as freedom and equality (Beardsley). Within this increasingly restrictive public space immigrants in France struggle to articulate their identity.

It is this contested public space that I examined to understand the discourses surrounding cultural associations in France, and how the private and public sphere limit articulations of culture. To do this, I typologized French cultural associations into the two categories of "orientalizing" and "localizing." While the former attempts to "orientalize"[16] the culture by putting it "on display" (Said; Casey), the latter confines immigrants to closed ethnic identities, whose presence is thus diminished in the greater public space. To develop this typology, I examined the associations' activities (including art expositions and exhibitions, shows, theater, seminars and conferences), their audiences and members, their geographic locations, and their mission statements. After an analysis of their effect on the articulation of immigrant culture, I fill in the gap left by these two types of associations by making an argument for public spaces that seek to "include" immigrant identity.

The Foundation of French Identity: The Public and Private Spheres of the Individual

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[16] I use the term "orientalizing" in line with Said's definition, but with a particular emphasis on the "orientalizing" gaze making culture "static" and essentializing it.

To understand why private and public space play such key roles in French identity and citizenship, we must go back to the French Revolutionists' desire to create a society of equals, based on the idea of a social contract as articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau). According to Rousseau, in order to create equality among men in which all are happy, they must rededicate their own personal will (termed as "private will" by Rousseau) from their own well-being to the general will that promotes the whole society's well-being. Through *voluntarily* accepting this social contract simultaneously with all others in society, equality can be assured between all men. Furthermore, after constraining one's private will to the private sphere, the individual acts only for the good of the whole, rather than for one's own individual desires. Rousseau terms this "the general will" and considers it to be the guarantor of commonly shared values (e.g. universal values), such as freedom and equality.

Today, French society is still based on these two important, intertwining aspects: "universal" ideals deemed to be shared by all (because of their commitment to the general will), and the strict separation between the individual's private sphere and society's public sphere. We can thus understand the private sphere to be the place where one can express the "non-universal" aspects of oneself. The commitment to universal values requires a distinction between the public sphere, where the polity of the citizen reigns, and the private sphere, where "the individual is sovereign and which concerns his religion, his race, and his family culture" (Noiriel 341). By confining the ethnicity of the individual to the private sphere, the individual's personal culture has no place within the public sphere, thus eliminating its need in both greater French history but also in defining a citizen of France. The importance of this distinction can be seen in the French state's decision to not ask questions regarding ethnicity on censuses.

Thus, within the French context, the immigrant became one whose "own" culture had no bearing upon his or her French political identity. Furthermore, this seemingly inherent universality of French identity also allows one to easily place the blame upon the immigrant and/or the immigrant's culture for his or her lack of integration. The people who do not integrate thus become the "excluded," or as Beth Epstein terms them, *les exclus*. *Les exclus* are socially excluded through their non-involvement within the public sphere. Furthermore, *les exclus*, she explains, "are told to 'take responsibility,' and to seek the means to 'get out of' their exclusion by themselves" (Epstein 77). For Epstein, it is not the immigrant's foreignness that determines their excluded status. Rather, it is the confusing place of identity and culture in the public and private sphere that drive the exclusionary nature of the discourse on immigrants and their culture in France. To be recognized and included in the French public sphere, immigrants have to place their culture in their private sphere.

The pressure to integrate into the public sphere at the expense of one's cultural identity manifests in what Etienne Balibar calls "neo-racism," a racism based upon the imperialist notion that certain cultures are incompatible with one another. Balibar defines neo-racism's "dominant theme not [as] biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions" (Balibar 21).

How is "neo-racism" perpetuated in the French public sphere, besides legal statutes banning religious symbols? One way to find out is to study public displays of culture. By examining public spaces where particular cultural identities are allowed to exist and are on display, we can find "sanctioned" narratives and discourses that surround culture and identity (Bennett;

Casey). In France, the space where the public and private representations of citizens can come to mingle is represented by associations. Through associations, groups of people, united by the same interest, can come together under a common manifesto and become sanctified by the state (Phaneuf). Thus, associations provide public spaces where individual citizens can claim their unique place. It seems strange then that associations are an encouraged facet of French political life, as they seem to encourage the creation of smaller enclaves of individuals, thus promoting *communitarisme*, or the creation of a community whose common good is different than that of the public space. However, interestingly enough, French associations are not seen as separating groups away from the whole but a way for the individual to express him- or herself while still maintaining political alliances to the state. By actively engaging the individual, associations are, in a sense, the physical experience of the "collective identity" (Phaneuf).

To understand how "other" collective identities can be expressed in the French public sphere, I studied cultural associations, particularly examining the ways in which immigrants and non-immigrants alike interact with the public space and the ways in which various cultures are displayed within the public space. I focused on two major paradigms related to immigrant culture in France. The "orientalizing" paradigm elevates an immigrant's culture of origin in relation to French culture, specifically seeing the two cultures as distinct and separate, yet in the process erasing the reality/experience of the immigrant (thus "orientalizing" the culture). The "localizing" paradigm, on the other hand, downplays an immigrant's culture as miniscule and foreign to the extent that the immigrant becomes closed off from the rest of the French society. Thus, despite their desires, both paradigms paradoxically "hurt" immigrants by hindering their integration into French society. Hence, I highlight the need to fill the space that lies between these two by expanding beyond a binary nature of cultural identity.

“Orientalizing” and “Localizing” Cultural Associations: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

For my study, I examined around seven associations. As I was able to conduct field interviews in Turkish, I chose Turkish associations as my examples of “localizing” associations. For my “orientalizing” associations, I was able to do interviews in French. To create my typology, I examined how each association displayed culture not only through its published mission statements, but also its activities, events, exhibits, and its target audience, including both members and visitors. I looked at websites, collected and read pamphlets, visited the sites, attended events, and, when possible, interviewed both members and main organizers. Out of this research emerged my two distinct types of cultural associations.

“Localized” associations were typically small and brought together a distinct ethnic community to bond over shared cultural ties. They were often located in a particular ethnic neighborhood, creating spaces that were mainly focused on a specific ethnic community. They were usually more difficult to find, located on small side streets with little to no signs, except for their storefronts. Their activities were mostly limited to events to meet others of the same ethnicity, though they did participate in solidarity marches. Often, these spaces were filled with members speaking their native tongue (as opposed to French). Their audiences were exclusively immigrants of the same ethnicity, and they rarely received visitors who were not fellow immigrants. In a sense, these spaces reflected a shielded private sphere, where being “French” was not necessarily enforced. In fact, stepping into these associations, one could almost forget that one was in Paris.

Meanwhile, “orientalizing” associations lay on the opposite side of spectrum. They were generally places where individuals with shared interests about a particular culture could come together in order to learn about that culture. In a way, these associations served as doors through which to “visit” another culture. As such, interviewees underlined the goal of reaching the French public through interesting events. These associations were generally easier to find, as they often had websites and were even known by the public at large. In these spaces, immigrant culture was displayed in a way that emphasized its distinctiveness from French culture. Many events and activities were educational. Interestingly, these associations did not see themselves as catering specifically to immigrants; rather, they had in mind a wider audience. These spaces were often devoid of immigrant reality, both through a lack of immigrant members as well as immigrant voices and experiences. These associations sought to define both French culture and themselves as distinct spaces typically with an emphasis on the “exotic” nature of the non-French culture.

“Orientalizing” Associations: Displays of Culture

L’Institute des Cultures d’Islam (The Institute of Islamic Cultures, abbreviated throughout as ICI) can be found by walking through a “culturally vibrant,” largely immigrant neighborhood of the 18th arrondissement. The area, known as Goutte d’Or, is home to a large African and Sri Lankan diaspora, one of the only mosques in Paris, an array of stores selling brightly-colored swatches of clothing, bakeries featuring both croissants and Maghreb treats, call centers with international call rates, and a weekend market selling everything from watches to fresh fish, and from yucca roots to halal meat. Simply put, while the area caters to immigrants, it is an area that is both French and “foreign” at the very same time.

ICI was opened in 2006 by local associative authorities. The single building contains a café and multiple rooms where art exhibits and theatrical shows are shown. The upper floor of the building is the more “educational” part of the center: it contains a library with books focusing on art of different Middle Eastern cultures, children's books and a classroom dedicated to teaching both French and Arabic. The website states that the association is “a place dedicated to the creation and diffusion of contemporary culture connected to the Muslim world" (ICI). Essentially, this association seeks to educate Parisians about the world of Islam, to discover and plunge into the cultures of Islam both in Paris and outside, respecting the heritage of their history and the diversity of their everyday life. One of its coordinators was Younes Rezzouki, whom I spoke to about the possibility of an internship. Mr. Rezzouki didn't fully grasp why I, a student interested in immigration, was seeking an internship with the center. Rather, he reiterated that the goal of the center was to show the French general public what Islam meant as a culture and thus fight against the negative connotation of Islam in French society today through artistic works of Muslims or works centered around Muslim identity. During the times I visited, ICI's displays often showed major events and cities around the Middle East, rather than highlighting French artists of Islamic background. While this association promoted the visibility of Islamic culture in all its different forms (a necessary step for both immigrants and non-immigrants alike), its heavy focus on Islam as a connecting link for the peoples of Middle Eastern origin promoted the idea that Islam, rather than France, was the connecting strand between these different peoples. Even the exhibit description of the British photographer Martin Parr[17] was painted as a doorway into the world of Islam. Though his photographs were of the surrounding Goutte d'Or, ICI's website described the exhibit as "a discovery of another reality in the heart of the quarter where Islam lives" (ICI). The description goes on to explain Parr's gaze as "unique and revealing another dimension, including the most secret, of the neighborhood of Paris" (Goutte D'Or). It is here, within this quote, that we are encouraged to see Islam as something recognizably different; definitely not as the enemy per se, but rather as a living, breathing reality *separate* from Parisian reality, even if Goutte d'Or has absorbed French culture in its own distinct way. Of the multiple times I visited, those attending events were mostly of non-immigrant background; in fact, almost no one seemed to be from Goutte d'Or. This lack of participation from the localized community was striking and further reinforced the idea that these associations were not created for the integration of these communities themselves.

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[17] Martin Parr is a world-renowned British photographer whose works often take an anthropological view of their subjects and are known for their vivid colors.

La Maison de L'Europe et L'Orient[18] (The House of Europe and the Orient) pushed a very similar agenda in that it promoted immigrant culture without focusing on immigrants themselves. This association was created in 1985 as a way to bring together "artistic creation and cultural activity related to the European idea" (MEO). The focus of the Maison de L'Europe et L'Orient was to spread awareness about the history and culture of the Balkan region through an extensive library and through theater productions. The association included a bookstore/reading space filled with a wide variety of literature on the Balkan region, a publishing company specializing in translation, a theatrical company, and a network through which different theatrical companies could connect with one another. In particular, this center seemed to promote linguistic diversity and was concerned with preserving the cultural traditions of the Balkans. When asked about the types of people who visited the center, Antony Sial, an involved member, replied "everyone," the young and the old, students and teachers. I asked if immigrants were common visitors, to which he replied no, stating that immigrants did not come in very often; they did come in sometimes to performances held by the association, specifically folk dancing and music concerts. However, its most common visitors were students of Balkan languages.

"Localing" Associations: A Home Away from Home?

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[18] Both on the association's pamphlet and website, the terms "occident" and "orient," refer respectively to West European countries and Balkan countries. However, in every day French usage, "orient" and "oriental" are used to refer to cultures of both the Middle East and the Far East.

The southeast part of the 10th arrondissement is home to many a Turkish establishment, whether it be restaurant, grocer, or kebab house. As one walks down Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, the imprint of the Turkish community becomes apparent. Bordering the other highly immigrant-heavy neighborhood of 18th arrondissement, one passes multiple Pakistani grocers before coming to the hub of Turkish stores: a travel agency's store front adorned with signs in Turkish and French, advertising cheap flights to Turkey; a *çorba* salonu (a small eatery serving only soup) advertising 3.50-euro bowls with bread baskets; and a grocer with plastic containers of baklava and salty sesame cookies. It is within these small hubs that one can find the local Turkish population working, eating, and socializing while speaking loudly in all kinds of accented Turkish. Each time I came to this street I gained friends at the local grocers and cafes, they only spoke to me in Turkish once they found out where my father was born. Indeed, the reason I had even found out about this Turkish neighborhood was thanks to my Turkish cousin who had recommended I visit the area for my research. I had initially gone out of curiosity (and a strong desire to find a good bowl of lentil soup) and admittedly seeking an experience of belonging and familiarity. While Istanbul was only my home during the summer growing up, I had always felt a strong sense of attachment to the city. Indeed, it was this attachment that inspired me to take Turkish classes as an undergraduate student, looking for a way to find out more about my family's history. But my path to learning Turkish was more reflective of my mixed background: the language came haltingly, and even after a year and a half of intensive classes it was far from perfect. Still, my abilities were good enough to chat with grocers and to ask if they knew of any associations in the area. Thus, my own ability to "integrate" or "speak the same language" as the local residents led the way to finding these localized associations.

One of these associations, found not far from the main street described above, was L'Association Culturelle des Travailleurs Immigrés de Turquie (or the Cultural Association of Turkish Immigrant Workers). When I visited this association (only accessible by a small door in a hidden courtyard), I felt as though I had stepped into someone's kitchen. Seated around a table were about seven older Turkish people, drinking tea and speaking in Turkish about the events going on the TV that hung right above their heads. As I entered with a tentative "bonjour," a greeting in French, everyone immediately stopped talking and looked at me suspiciously as if I was a foreigner. Thus, I almost immediately switched to speaking in Turkish. They all seemed to relax and offered me *çay*.[19] As the association's name suggested, it dealt almost exclusively with Turkish immigrants. I asked of their involvement with the local community and about their planned activities. The association held a few workshops for newly arrived immigrants, which mostly involved helping them with paperwork. With regards to other activities, the association planned few other events, usually marches or picnics with other organizations. Rather, it served as a local community for new Turkish arrivals to learn the ropes of the French bureaucratic system and to meet other Turkish people, as opposed to a way to become socially integrated into the greater French society.

On a nearby street, I passed a glass window covered in Turkish posters with a sign reading "Association of Diyarbakir."[20] I looked carefully at the array of posters as I plucked up my courage to walk into what seemed to be a room full of chattering Turkish men and women. One poster advertised group trips to day camps in Germany and other parts of France where people could socialize with other Turkish families. Another poster advertised May 1 Labor Day marches. When I walked in, I created a similar situation to the previous association, a room full of questioning eyes. I shyly introduced myself, again in Turkish, as a student doing research on associations in France. They immediately offered me *çay*, and I sat down with an elderly gentleman, an older woman, and a younger man.[21] I asked about the association's activities, to which the older woman explained that recently the association had been following and supporting the Gezi Park[22] protests in Istanbul through solidarity movements. Regarding other activities, she said that before the protests, nothing had been of much importance. When asked about the association's involvement with the local population, her answers were vague. Their busiest time was during the summer, when they organized "family camps" in Germany and in Turkey for the local Turkish population. The older women responded most directly to my questions about the association, while the two older men seemed to be more concerned with explaining to me the political state of Turkey. Several times, I tried asking questions about their opinions on the state of immigrant affairs in France, but no one seemed interested in discussing the topic. Rather, what was discussed in detail by the younger man was the difficulty of learning French and finding French friends.

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[19] Traditional Turkish tea.
[20] Diyarbakir is the largest Kurdish-majority city in Turkey.

These "localizing" associations provide public spaces wherein immigrants are free to express themselves as if they were in the private sphere. By making the public sphere disappear (or at least diminishing its presence), these "localizing" associations create a space in which the immigrant can "share a horizon" (Habermas 134), and thus becomes an active participant in this space, albeit at the expense of the larger, public space. This happens because although these "localizing" associations offer support (and a communal bond) to these immigrant communities, they also confine immigrant groups to specific ethnic identities, which in the French environment does not afford them access to the public sphere of rights and citizenship.

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[21] At the time of the interview, my interviewees did not wish to be named, as many were political asylum seekers.

[22] The 2013 Gezi Park protests were months-long protests against urban development in Istanbul that eventually morphed into general protests against the AKP government. The Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) is a conservative populist political party led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

However, the "localizing" tendency of these associations is not entirely their fault. In part, it has to do with the way other types of associations display immigrant cultures, which can be almost unrecognizable to the newly arrived immigrant. "Orientalizing" associations do not share a narrative with actual immigrants. Rather than emphasize the presence of the immigrant experience within French society, "orientalizing" associations separate the culture of the immigrant from that of France, thus creating an uncomfortable space in which immigrants do not truly exist—unless they give up their "past immigrant culture."

Expanding the Cultural Identity of the Immigrant: Moving Away from "Orientalizing" and "Localizing"

Interestingly, the official definition of immigrants designates foreigners who were born abroad and live in France as "permanent" immigrants, regardless of whether they acquire French citizenship or not. France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) defines the immigrant as

> a person who is born a foreigner and abroad, and resides in France. Persons who were born abroad and of French nationality and live in France are therefore not counted. Conversely, certain immigrants may have become French while others remain foreign. The foreign and immigrant populations are therefore not quite the same: an immigrant is not necessarily foreign and certain foreigners were born in France (mainly minors). Immigrant status is permanent: an individual will continue to belong to the immigrant population even if they acquire French nationality. It is the country of birth, and not nationality at birth, that defines the geographical origin of an immigrant.[23]

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[23] The original text from INSEE reads: « Selon la définition adoptée par le Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, un immigré est une personne née étrangère à l'étranger et résidant en France. Les personnes nées françaises à l'étranger et vivant en France ne sont donc pas comptabilisées. À l'inverse, certains immigrés ont pu devenir français, les autres restant étrangers. Les populations étrangère et immigrée ne se confondent pas totalement : un immigré n'est pas nécessairement étranger et réciproquement, certains étrangers sont nés en France (essentiellement des mineurs). La qualité d'immigré est permanente : un individu continue à appartenir à la population immigrée même s'il devient français par acquisition. C'est le pays de naissance, et non la nationalité à la naissance, qui définit l'origine géographique d'un immigré » (INSEE).

As such, the definition's static label of immigrants leaves little room for a more expansive immigrant identity, limiting it to one that is rigid and unbendable. What this static definition fails to capture is the individual's *own experience of living in France as an immigrant*. This is an everyday experience for immigrants, they constantly have to negotiate their "private" culture in public spaces, evidenced by the Goutte d'Or's neighborhood shops.

The rigidity surrounding immigrants and their identity is in part due to the nature of the public sphere. The public sphere, as explained previously, is the space that defines one's commitment to the social contract; it is on this basis of a common social contract that French citizenship is formulated. It is, in other words, what makes one "French" (regardless of ethnic background), while one's private sphere is what makes one emphatically not French. Thus, asserting one's differences within the public sphere endangers the universalist ideals set forth by the French state. In a speech given in May 2003, then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy stated that, "freedom is the rule in the private sphere; republican conformity is the rule in the public sphere" (Bowen 136). This republican conformity is what serves as the common identity of France and supposedly allows for citizens to come together in spite of their individual differences. What Sarkozy (and indeed, defenders of the public space as a space of Republican values) do not take into account is the degree to which participation within the public sphere is encouraged by shared culture (including ethnicity and religion) and a Habermasian shared horizon (Habermas).

It is the placing of ethnic identity into the private sphere that complicates not only the immigrant's identity within the French narrative, but also within the immigrant as well. Epstein echoes these concerns and argues that in order to properly address the issues facing "multicultural communities," we must disregard the concept of identity as "unbending" and instead, "aim to see rather how people's understandings of themselves and others are derived through their ongoing interactions, both in relation to the histories—and their understandings of those histories—that they carry with them, and as a piece of their regular engagement with the public sphere" (Epstein 6).

An example of an association that pushed this narrative through its programs was L'Assemblée Citoyennes des Originaires de Turquie (The Assembly of Citizens of Turkish Origins [L'ACORT]). In this association I found an attempt to facilitate this new language for Turkish immigrants who wished to integrate further into the French public sphere while maintaining their "private" identity. The association mainly focused on equipping Turkish immigrants with the language and social skills they would need for pursuing a life in France. At the same time, they also supported venues for promoting Turkish culture, including film festivals and the running of a bilingual radio station. These two discourses are joined together in their mission statement, which, while recognizing and acknowledging the communal "feeling of longing to return to Turkey," also states: "Our hope of returning to Turkey gave way to the will to build our life here. We have found a job, bought houses, created businesses, institutions, associations, our children are educated in France. The economic, social and political life of this country is part of us. Now we can say: WE ARE HERE" (L'ACORT). By addressing the problems of young Turkish immigrants in France while simultaneously focusing on Turkish culture, L'ACORT serves as a space for immigrants to express their Turkish identity within the context of their French life.

But associations are not the only spaces through which to navigate these complex identities. Museums represent another important space of discourse, as they choose what to display (Higonnet). Thus, museums decide what objects are endowed with communality, and it is through these objects that a shared culture can be expressed (Casey). The Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (National Museum of Immigrant History), which opened in 2007 on the site of the

Paris Colonial Exposition Building, attempts to create this narrative through its displays about the immigrant experience throughout French history (Green). Its exhibit that is particularly representative of this idea, named "Face à l'État" ("Facing the State"), displays the various identity cards given to immigrants arriving to France between the 19th and 20th centuries. As time has gone on, identity cards given to immigrants or foreigners have changed; however, "place of birth" remains a stable item.[24] As such, besides being a representation of immigrant legal status, these identity cards are a physical representation of both the public self (through acceptance of French citizenship) and the private self (the history of being born in another country). Thus, these identity cards give the immigrant two different identities simultaneously: the identity of one who has immigrated and that of the French citizen. Even the choice of building is representative of these tensions: as a building that featured real-life displays of France's colonized subjects during the 1931 International Colonial Exposition, the museum serves as a space through which one can see France's history of colonization in dialogue with its more recent history of immigration (Green).

Associations and museums can braid new strands of culture into the narrative of society. By integrating the narrative of the immigrant into the narrative of French society, associations can encourage all of French society to see the history of immigration and immigrants as their own. To further this narrative, associations and museums should promote the commemoration of immigrant rights and lead memorialization efforts about, for example, the Algerian immigrant protests in the 1960s, the Beur movement[25] of the 1970s, and discuss the contemporary issues facing many immigrants today. Through associations, members of local communities could be enlisted into the task of articulating the diverse immigrant histories that France already contains by nature of its multi-faceted citizens.

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[24] For an example of the cards on display, please see https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/collections/carte-d-identite-d-ettore-rossi. For greater details on the exhibit itself, please see https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/en/node/10092.

[25] "Beur" is a slang term coming French word for "Arab" ("arabe"); it later became the name of the Maghreb-origin youth movement in metropolitan suburbs protesting unemployment and systemic racism.

Conclusion

France longs to create the type of citizenship that is inclusive of all by eliminating the recognition of personal differences in the public sphere. Paradoxically, this emphasis on a shared universalism, rather than bringing to light the commonalities that exist despite differences, forces mainstream France to reject certain “others” (such as immigrants). Thus, the French public space, rather than deepening shared bonds between individuals, becomes closed to those who cannot leave their “private selves” outside this public sphere.

In a way, this locking of the public space reflects Balibar’s ideas about culture today. He argues that in its current state, “*culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin” (Balibar 22). By endorsing this structure in the collective, public space, we do not allow individuals to exist outside of their “assigned” cultural background. Ironically, not only have we chained the individual to a specific set of cultural standards but at the same time condemn these same individuals for sticking to their cultural roots and refusing to integrate. How can we continue to believe this static definition when the nature of identity is so fluent?

Balibar argues: “The ‘different’ cultures are those which constitute obstacles, or which are established as obstacles (by schools or the norms of international communication) to the acquisition of culture” (Balibar 25). Balibar argues that contemporary Arabophobia can be interpreted as a form of generalized anti-Semitism, “especially in France, since it carries with it an image of Islam as a ‘conception of the world’ which is incompatible with Europeanness and an enterprise of universal ideological domination, and therefore a systematic confusion of 'Arabness' and 'Islamicism'" (Balibar 24). It is this image of Islam as a world that must be "entered" (to quote the definition of ICI) which is promoted in these displays of culture in the public space. We need to redefine culture as something that does not require indoctrination into its norms to be understood. By putting a glass between viewer and immigrant culture, and by identifying immigrant culture as different, "orientalizing" associations only reflect and reinforce the notion that insurmountable differences lie between cultures.

Meanwhile, "localizing" associations only reinforce culture as an "essentialized" grouping that falls within unchanging cultural parameters (Balibar). While these communities do provide a safety net, or a feeling of home, for immigrants, they do not necessarily help the immigrant become a citizen in the public space outside the associations' walls. Furthermore, because the feeling of shared identity is stronger in these smaller enclaves, individuals may be more willing to associate with others within this smaller space, often at the expense of greater involvement in the "outside" public sphere.

It is those associations and museums that seek to bridge the divide between our private and public selves which encourage us to create a shared understanding on the basis of public articulations of our private selves. While not everyone may share the same, exact experiences, the process of self-articulation that happens every day in the public space is a shared experience (Benhabib 13). By focusing our attention on the articulation of specific experiences, we can create diverse public spaces that are accepting of all, even in societies where individuals may not share the same collective memory of the past. In facilitating the ideological change imperative for cultural growth in the public space of associations and museums, a change in our perceptions allows us to create "new associations" with others within the same space. By "uniting" people in public spaces that promote fluid belongings, the scope of the individual's identity can thus broaden to include others, expanding our ideas of ourselves beyond our own selves.

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