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**NARRATING THE FRENCH NATIONAL STORY: THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE IN THE
PRODUCTION OF FRENCHNESS**

An honors paper submitted to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
of the University of Mary Washington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Sarah Quinn Dickshinski

May 2017

By signing your name below, you affirm that this work is the complete and final version of your paper submitted in partial fulfillment of a degree from the University of Mary Washington. You affirm the University of Mary Washington honor pledge: "I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work."

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05/01/17

Narrating the French National Story: The Role of Discourse in the Production of Frenchness

Sarah Dickshinski

Anthropology 481: Honors Thesis

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Abstract

At the center of the question of alterity today lies a debate on the role ethnicity, race, religion, and culture each play in the context of multicultural societies. In France the social contract claims to extend equal rights to all of its citizens by simple virtue of their presence in the collective, yet members of minority populations living in France often do not have access to these rights. Arab Muslim immigrants in particular are treated differently than citizens who represent the white, catholic, bourgeois population whose ancestry is seen as being "rooted" in France. While Arab Muslim immigrants are legally citizens of the French Republic, they are unable to gain sufficient "Frenchness" in order to acquire full cultural citizenship in French society. Although native French citizens present this cultural identity as unchanging, it is ultimately through the debate they hold on what constitutes Frenchness that Frenchness is produced. Through the course of my thesis I address the native French population's perceptions of Arab Muslim members of society through Front National (FN) leader Marine Le Pen's Assises Présidentielles speech, Caroline Fourest's socio-political essay Génie de la laïcité, and the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration's (CNHI) permanent exhibit Repères in order to examine how Frenchness is produced in relation to Arab Muslim immigrants living in France.

Completed for the requirements of the Anthropology and Sociology Department's departmental honors

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Narrating the French National Story: The Role of Discourse in the Production of Frenchness

Dinner Time History Lessons

When I studied abroad in France during the spring of 2015 I lived with a French couple in Vanves, a town that, because of its location a few kilometers outside of Paris, was considered part of the *proche banlieue*, or “close suburbs.” The American understanding of suburban areas is generally synonymous with neighborhoods of single family homes and green, fenced-in lawns that are associated with the middle-class and these neighborhoods may be located a great distance from a major city. In the French context *banlieue* refers to a collection of municipalities that directly surround a larger city. Urban in appearance, they are filled with concrete apartment complexes flanked by supermarkets, corner cafes, and other local businesses. Squares containing the town hall and local cathedrals and mosques constitute a more open space in the town. In the Parisian *banlieue* each city sees itself as carrying a distinct identity, yet as a result of certain cities being classified as troubled zones the *banlieue* as a whole is often perceived as an isolated space that “stands for alterity, insecurity, and deprivation” (Dikeç 2007, 8).

In Vanves I lived with a fellow American and our host parents in the two floor apartment that they owned. As students, and as American students in particular, my roommate and I were always the pupils. In addition to the courses that we took at French universities during the day, whenever we were at home our host father and mother would instruct us in the French (and therefore proper) way of doing things. Speaking only in French with the two of us, rigorously preparing traditional French dinners each week, and exhibiting their strong catholic identity were some of the ways in which our parents could be considered as ideal *français d'origine*¹ citizens. As if to confirm my observations, my host father would often point out the merits of my living with such an *authentic* French family.

It was my host mother who prepared dinner for the four of us twice a week and the two to three hour meal provided an opportunity for my roommate and I to share details about the material we were covering in our classes, the sights we were visiting in Paris, and the other destinations in Europe where we were traveling. For the majority of the observations that we made regarding France our host parents would nod in agreement; consenting to my depiction of the Musée d'Orsay's Impressionist exhibit, or my roommate's account of her trip to the Palace of Fontainebleau, for instance, with hearty approval. It was as if, through our descriptions, we were successfully confirming the beauty of the country's capital city and historical valor of the *patrie*.

My host parents would also comment on our stories with specific insights based on their own experiences as French and European citizens. My host father in particular would pick out a point in the conversation and proceed to provide historic context for it. For instance, speaking of Fontainebleau, did we know that Napoleon's second wife, Austrian archduchess Marie Louise, first went to live there in 1810? And had we seen her bedchamber when we visited? Through the insistence on linking details of our daily activities in France to specific moments in French history my host parents – and specifically my host father – were able to offer an informal way of testing our preexisting knowledge of the French Republic and fill in the gaps of our social, linguistic, religious and especially our historical understanding of the country.

The way in which my host father would discuss French history at the dinner table left a profound impression on me. His accounts were in no way a simple recitation of facts, but rather

¹ *Français d'origine* is a term often used to refer to French citizens who are able to claim that the majority of the generations in their family were born in France.

an almost personal narration of historic events. He would recall specific details from moments in the lives of different figures and speak about them in a way that made it seem like the event had taken place a few days ago rather than decades prior. I was continually struck by how my host father gave the impression he had lived through many of the events he discussed. If I had not been aware of the era during which Napoleon Bonaparte lived, for instance, I might have thought that the two of them were contemporaries. This particular way of speaking about history contributed to an overall sense that events and figures who belonged to France's past were accessible in the present moment.

One instance in particular that has remained nestled in my memory was the evening that my host father asked if either of us were familiar with Charles Martel and the Battle of Tours. He had been discussing the trip he had taken to Poitiers a few days prior and in the middle of his speech he posed the rhetorical question. Looking around the table he began to elaborate, explaining that Poitiers was the northernmost point in Europe that Muslim armies were able to occupy. Consider that, the armies had been able to reach as far as central France! However, the armies were not able to stay in the area for long because Charles Martel's own army fought them off until they retreated into Spain. I interpreted this last pronouncement along the lines of "What a relief! France was rid of the Muslim armies!" His enthusiasm at this ending to the story was palpable and it seemed as though he was trying to elicit excitement from the two of us as well. During the brief history lesson we nodded along to show we understood the details of the story, yet we did not supply the animated reactions he seemed to be searching our faces for.

The prominent quality that I detected in the moment was a certain spirit of pride regarding Charles Martel's victory which was rather perplexing. For example, choosing to include the event within the French historical record and claim Martel as French was curious considering that he lived hundreds of years before the creation of the modern French State. This obsession with recalling moments from a past my host father himself did not live through and the great pride that he displayed regarding them transported an event like the Battle of Tours from its 1,200 year old dwelling place to reside within everyday discourse.

The practice of placing current-day social, political, and economic issues within a historical context is observable in the official discourse of the French State. The Republic has long memorialized figures and events regarded as having honored the nation. The Panthéon in Paris, for example, constitutes a secular shrine for the great philosophers, writers, and statesmen that the French government entombed alongside one other. The physical monuments that stand throughout the country in honor of France's heritage reflect the mental ones the State has erected in the minds of "native" French citizens. The conversations that I had with my host father regarding French history appear to be evidence of how official discourse successfully extends itself into local ones. The structure that allows this relationship to function is that of a specifically français d'origine habitus² which I posit is characterized by a historical narrative. This narrative is relayed through mythological terms³ and excludes certain French citizens, particularly Arab Muslim immigrants.

While Arab Muslim immigrants are legally citizens of the French Republic, they are consistently denied cultural citizenship⁴ in French society. They are seen as incapable of acquiring "Frenchness" to its fullest extent and thus represent an Other in the collective. While nationality,

² Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press. Distributed by Stanford University Press. First published 1980.

³ Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. Paris: Editions du Seuil. Distributed by The Noonday Press. First published 1957.

⁴ Ewing, 2008. *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

genealogy, race, and religious and cultural practices all play a role in defining French cultural citizenship and although native French citizens present this cultural identity as unchanging, it is ultimately through the debate français d'origine hold on what constitutes Frenchness that Frenchness is produced. An integral component of the production of Frenchness consists of conceptualizing it in opposition to Arab Muslim members of the population through discourses that possess a “transparency of language”⁵ that make Frenchness appear essential.

As lived experience is frequently distinct from a particular group's account of it, I explore the story that the French “tell themselves about themselves”⁶ and the ways in which it approaches questions of alterity in French society. Just as Joan Wallach Scott states that *The Politics of the Veil* (2007) is not a study of French Muslims, but rather a study of the “dominant French view of them” (10) I endeavor to position myself alongside other social scientists whose work I address throughout this piece (Alduy and Wahnich 2015; Amiriaux, 2009; Bowen 2007; Epstein 2011; Fassin 2006; Guénif, 2007; Keaton 2006; Scott 2007; Thomas 2013) who study nationalism and Frenchness in relation to the Other in France. I have chosen to engage with Front National (FN) leader Marine Le Pen's Assises Présidentielles speech, Caroline Fourest's socio-political essay *Génie de la laïcité*, and the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration's (CNHI) permanent exhibit Repères in order to examine how Frenchness is produced in relation to Arab Muslim immigrants living in France. Although these forms of discourse position themselves differently in relation to one another, the three ultimately converge in how they interpret alterity and produce Frenchness.

Multiculturalism in France

At the center of the question of alterity today lies a debate on the role ethnicity, race, religion, and culture each play in the context of multicultural societies. In a discussion on Frenchness it is crucial to distinguish between these terms because the social actors who participate in its production frequently conflate them. French society could be considered multicultural for the range of cultural practices that its citizens engage in as well as multiethnic for the collection of ethnic backgrounds that its members represent.⁷ The effort to conflate these terms contributes to the process of othering certain citizens. This conflation is apparent in the discourses I examine and it constitutes a major object of my study. Oftentimes, aspects of these different categories are exchanged for one another. In the context of Arab and Muslim citizens living in France, for instance, defining features Islam are frequently associated with Arab citizens and cultural traits that could be associated with Arabness are transferred to Muslim citizens of different races and ethnic backgrounds.

Additionally, certain aspects of citizens' identities outweigh others in society's perceptions of them. For example, in terms of native French citizens, genealogy and race constitute a greater defining factor than cultural practices. In the case of the Arab Muslim immigrant certain cultural practices that are perceived as being at odds with French ones are used to point to the overall unassimilability of these citizens. As a result, despite Arab Muslim immigrants' ability to speak French according to societal standards, their knowledge of French history, or their choice to engage in local communities, they are still viewed as incapable of fully participating in or representing Frenchness.

⁵ Wertsch, James. 2002. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York City: Basic Books.

⁷ According to the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) 7.6 million residents of France are foreign born (11.6 percent of the population). Additionally, 0.6 million residents are of a foreign nationality (<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1410693>).

In France the social contract claims to extend equal rights to all citizens by simple virtue of their presence in the collective and French universalism states that citizens' origins should not interfere with their access to these rights. Nonetheless, Arab Muslim immigrants and their descendants living in France are treated differently than the citizens who see themselves as constituting the "native" population whose ancestry is "rooted" in France and who often represent the white, catholic, bourgeois population. The concept of being rooted in a certain geographical location is very significant in French thinking and is evidenced by the presence of the term *français de souche* which translates directly to "French of the root;" referring to how the majority of one's anterior generations were born in France (Le Bras 1998). The controversial term first appeared in print in Edouard Marchand's 1892 nationalist publication *France Aux Français!* and ever since has sought to essentialize certain citizens living in France and exclude others whose origins are seen as being rooted elsewhere.

The term that French social scientists often employ to refer to French citizens who are able to trace the majority of their family's anterior generations to having been born in France is *français d'origine*. To refer to a French citizen with a longer heritage outside of the country the term *français d'origine étrangère* is frequently employed. Through my study I will refer to citizens who identify as white, of catholic heritage, and bourgeois as *français d'origine* and to Arab Muslim citizens as *français d'origine étrangère* in instances where I seek to emphasize a French social perspective. While some scholars may argue that employing these terms reinforces the idea that certain citizens are entitled to live in France while others are not, I hope to draw attention to the paradox of French universalism regarding the promise that all citizens are guaranteed equal rights. In addition, the French State's refusal to pursue racial and ethnic studies in regard to its population (Fassin 2006) impedes its ability to recognize and more profoundly interpret social conflict within its borders. As a result, citizens seen as *français d'origine étrangère* are not given an opportunity to express the mistreatment they face in French society. Anthropologists and sociologists who study postcolonial social cohesion in France often describe *français d'origine étrangère* citizens as excluded and invisible (Epstein 2011; Fassin 2006; Noiriel 1988; Sayad 1999; Thomas 2013). I argue that *français d'origine* citizens dominate the collective imaginary through varied forms of discourse that deny full cultural citizenship to Arab Muslim immigrant members of society.

Being in possession of full cultural citizenship in France equates to satisfying the conditions of Frenchness that, as I explain above, are used to evaluate legal citizens' level of belonging within the collective. There are a number of factors that can be used to determine if one may pass from legal to cultural citizenship. The way one speaks French is a large signifier of how French one is perceived to be. Being able to speak Modern Standard French without the trace of an accent constitutes an ideal within Frenchness that *français d'origine* highly value. Whenever individuals do not fulfill this expectation there is an active effort on the part of *français d'origine* citizens to point out this difference. During the time she spent in middle and high schools in Seine Saint-Denis Anthropologist Julie Kleinman (2016) describes how teachers who she worked alongside at these banlieue city schools would mock the "housing project vernacular" or the "langage des cités" of their Arab, Muslim, and African students (263). The "culture talk" these educators employed reinforced the idea that their students were fundamentally different from them and could never be fully French.

A further way by which a member of French society's Frenchness may be assessed occurs at the local level and includes the degree to which one engages in community events. In *Collective Terms* (2011) Beth Epstein describes how *français d'origine* inhabitants at her field site Cergy-St. Christophe expected all members of the city to participate in city-wide projects and events and

were seriously dismayed whenever certain residents (often identifiable as français d'origine étrangère in most cases) did not take part. Finally, the scope of knowledge regarding French history that one possesses similarly works to determine one's position vis à vis Frenchness. As evidenced by interactions with my host father, a consistent understanding of French historic events and famous figures aids in solidifying one's French identity. The signification that français d'origine citizens place on French history could be why my host father was so intent on instructing my roommate and I whenever he had the opportunity. The impression our dinner time history lessons left me with was that my host father considered himself to be a sort of guardian of French historical knowledge that he was obligated to share so as to reaffirm his position as français d'origine.

Despite a strong emphasis on successfully displaying certain practices in order to attain Frenchness, the possession of a certain "culture" ultimately supersedes the mastery of these practices. As with Frenchness, this culture is associated with the français d'origine and is produced through the ever changing discussion on its makeup. While all français d'origine should ideally display the practices discussed above, when certain individuals do not, they remain tied to the larger group of native French citizens as part of this culture instead of being considered Other. The same type of cultural stigmatization that allows Arab Muslim immigrants to be perceived as fundamentally different is evident in the treatment of *pieds noirs* in France. *Pieds Noirs* are French citizens who were born in colonial North Africa and were repatriated once each former colony gained independence. *Pieds noirs* face a stigmatization in France that is very similar to the social exclusion and negative perceptions that Arab Muslim immigrants experience even though they could be classified as white, catholic, and bourgeois (Smith 2006). I argue the treatment that *pieds noirs* receive is founded in French colonial thought that distinguished between the "civilized" and the "uncivilized."

In the French colonial context there was an emphasis on being educated through the French system and possessing familiarity with French cultural practices in order for colonial subjects to successfully gain citizenship and enter into "civilized" society. Although this process was a means by which members of French colonies could become civilized, the colonial administrators also stressed that these members maintain a certain degree of "nativeness." Emanuelle Saada (2012) posits that this contradictory practice in the French colonies was a result of the effort to preserve the colonizing mission and keep French citizens born in France as the core of civilization. I argue that this aspect of French colonial history directly influences today's belief that citizens whose origins are exterior to France can never become fully French. Similarly, when colonial administrators spent extended amounts of time with natives they were seen as experiencing the reverse of Europeanization – nativization – and in this way became "decivilized." This inverse case regarding the French-born residents of the colonies is also visible today in the way government-run institutions treat foreigners.

Through his study of administrative booths at prefecture offices in France, French sociologist Alexis Spire (2008) demonstrates that civil servants who process immigrants' requests for asylum believe that working with these foreigners devalues their position. Spire details the French civil servants' perspective below:

The devaluation of these services [immigration-related work] is longstanding. The value of an administrative booth is proportional to the rank of the people that it welcomes, the civil immigration workers find themselves somewhat relegated by the lowliness of the foreigners who crowd around the prefecture's doors (15).

As a result of the civil servants' belief that the immigrants who they are processing are unclean, a certain hierarchy emerges at local prefecture offices that is based on each employee's proximity to the immigrant body. For example, working at the fingerprint scanning machine entails direct contact with immigrants and is the least desired job at the prefecture office thus constituting the lowest point in the prefecture hierarchy. The mentality present in French bureaucratic work regarding cleanliness and uncleanliness could be seen as parallel to the civilized-uncivilized perspective that characterized the French State's relationship to its colonies. Although Saada posits that it is problematic to view colonial practices in terms of a basis for current day racial discrimination and although different historical periods do provide for varied sets of social practices, in order to best interpret current-day definitions of Frenchness it is crucial to consider all of its influences, including its colonial heritage.

As French society excludes Arab Muslim immigrants in a multitude of ways, different scholars have debated the roles of the state in relation to these citizens' collective agency. Anthropologist Paul Silverstein (2007) asserts that through its multiethnic composition French society has become a "New France" where the interplay of state influence and immigrant practices mutually construct subject formation (5). I argue that immigrant perspectives and practices work to reinforce their position of otherness instead of widening the collective French discourse. Figures in positions of power in France today wield Frenchness as a tool of divisiveness through presenting Frenchness as a natural state that non-native French are simply unable to achieve. At the same time that French cultural citizenship is interpreted as naturally occurring, its loyal guardians produce discourses that rely on specific philosophical, historic, linguistic, and religious constructions that shift and transform from century to century. French institutions, political parties, media outlets, and the French government work together to mold these constructions into a form that français d'origine citizens consume. The Front National, in particular, seeks to reinforce the idea that certain citizens are unassimilable. The way in which the current leader of the party, Marine le Pen, situates the party in relation to the principles of the State strengthens this positionality in surprising new ways.

Marine Le Pen's France

France is an act of love, this love has a name: patriotism. It is the latter that makes our hearts beat as one at the resounding sound of the *Marseillaise* or when our national colors flutter in the wind of history.⁸

This excerpt from Front National (FN) leader Marine Le Pen's Assises Présidentielles speech constitutes a reminder to her supporters that France is a nation whose specific heritage and culture make it unique in Europe, so it is imperative that its citizens defend it from the fundamentalist threat hovering nearby that seeks to destroy it. The subtle apocalyptic references that Le Pen frequently includes amidst her rallying implorations to stand in support of French values echoes the type of nationalist rhetoric that has been on the rise in the West.

In February 2017 Marine Le Pen launched her presidential campaign with an event – the Assises Présidentielles – where she declared that the upcoming election was unlike any other in French history because this election constituted a "choice of civilization." She went on to assure the attendees of the event that she represented the candidate best poised to rectify the "decades of

⁸ "La France est un acte d'amour, cet amour a un nom : le patriotisme. C'est lui qui fait battre nos cœurs à l'unisson quand retentit la Marseillaise ou quand nos couleurs nationales battent au vent de l'Histoire."

error and cowardice” that France has experienced. Unable to attend the event in person, I draw from the video that the FN published on its website.⁹ While watching a recording of the event invariably results in a different set of observations, I argue that examining the FN’s own presentation of the Assises Présidentielles allows for a particular narrative to emerge regarding the way in which the audience and the space interact. The FN’s recording of the speech includes generous footage inside the convention hall where the array of colors, symbols, and text filling the space indicate as to the particular type of Frenchness the party espouses.

The video opens with a pan of audience members seated in a stadium-style venue. The stage is draped in royal blue carpeting, framed by curtains of the same color, and adorned by three French flags. Ceiling-high, white, luminescent roses projected onto the blue velvet curtains complement the image on the screen: “Marine Présidente” written in white text with a drawing of a slender white rose separating the two words. The audience is rather luminescent itself as the majority of the members are wearing buttons that flash red, white, and blue. This blinking motion accompanied by the continuous waving of flags seems to consume the room in movement. In contrast to the collection of French flags, navy “Marine Présidente” banners, and the white signs inscribed with the campaign expression “In the Name of the People” fluttering across the crowd there is a series of fixed expressions projected on the walls above the audience that echo those written on the banners below.

Distinct from the elevated seating extending from the middle of the floor to the back of the hall is a semi-circle of chairs located between the main seating area and the stage. The people in this intermediary area are dressed formally in contrast to the throng seated behind them. The members of this group appear to be affiliated with the FN as the majority of them are wearing large clip-on badges and seem to be acquainted with one another – shaking hands and patting each other on the back. After a few minutes pass, timid strains of the French national anthem can be heard amidst the crowd and as more voices join in the group seated in the middle section rise and face the audience. When the song ends the convention hall erupts into cheers, the lights suddenly dim, and Marine Le Pen’s face and voice dominate the room from the screen at the head of the stage.

The FN’s new campaign video is playing and we are introduced to Le Pen standing on a rocky shoreline looking out over the Atlantic Ocean. She is narrating her love for France that she says she has felt for as long as she can remember. As she strolls along the beach we are confronted with the firm declaration that France is a country that does not submit and the French people are a people who never give up. Next, we see Le Pen thumbing through family photo albums as she explains the different roles that she has held in life: woman, mother, and lawyer. The emphasis on kinship at this particular point in the video underscores the concept of family as the foundation of the nation. At the close of this segment she asserts that above all she is “intensely, proudly, faithfully, and *unequivocally* French.” Through the video there are short clips of Le Pen carrying out a variety of activities such as attending conferences, speaking with reporters, sailing a boat, and, notably, riding a horse. This last image is followed immediately by a shot of the bronze Joan of Arc statue in Paris. The final image that appears on the screen before it goes dark is a shot of the Elysée (the French presidential residence) and as the video fades out Le Pen’s voice

⁹ <http://www.frontnational.com/videos/assises-presidentielles-de-lyon-discours-de-marine-le-pen/>

emphatically punches out the phrase “In the Name of the People” at the same time the text appears on the screen framed by a bouquet of white roses.

The lights turn up and slow-paced, folk music plays over the speakers. Anticipation mounts as the audience members wave their flags while awaiting the entrance of Le Pen. Suddenly there is a shift in tone as the song is exchanged for one with a faster tempo. Marine Le Pen enters the hall smiling and surrounded by her entourage of campaign staffers. Le Pen begins a quick tour of the room, shaking audience members’ hands as she moves through the space between the semi-circle of FN-affiliated attendees and the rest of the audience. Upon reaching the podium amidst cries of “Marine Présidente!” she pauses for a moment before shouting “Ladies and Gentlemen” following which there is an immediate hush. Le Pen begins to recite her prepared speech and the camera zooms out to show the form of the party leader juxtaposed against the large scope of the audience. The scene appears to cast Marine Le Pen as a humble figure in front of the hundreds of attendees – a politician close to the people – as well as to show that the event is one of great magnitude.

Arms outstretched and legs positioned in a stance as if ready to sprint, Le Pen launches into what will be an hour-long speech with gusto. Having already identified that this presidential election is unlike any other in French history and that it constitutes a “choix de civilization,” Le Pen goes on to reproach her opponents for denying that there is such a thing as French culture and promises that as president she would protect that intangible capital belonging to the French, this “capital immatériel.” Le Pen declares that she will, in fact, be defending the very walls that support the *patrimoine*. What exactly does Le Pen intend to shield France from? A few lines later Le Pen reveals what she considers to be the greatest threats that France is currently facing: globalization, mass immigration, and Islamic fundamentalism. All three menace French values or the “valeurs de civilization” and all three are linked because it was globalization that gave birth to increased immigration in France which led to *communautarisme*¹⁰ which then fostered the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

Le Pen explicitly reminds people of all origins and all creeds that have been welcomed in France that in France “there will be no other laws and there will be no other values than French ones.” In this instance it is evident how Le Pen seeks to make a distinction between members of the collective who can claim to be français d’origine and those who cannot so as to indicate which citizens have an inherent right to France. At a more implicit level in her rhetoric, Le Pen seems to be questioning the possibility of immigrants’ successful assimilation into French society. Seemingly denying the possibility of a dynamic and welcoming society for immigrants, Le Pen proposes a rigid “solution” regarding immigration which she considers to be a threat.

The audience seems to approve of Le Pen’s statement as it erupts into applause, cheers, and indiscernible chanting that lasts for multiple seconds. Following this point in the oration the audience members collectively chant “Présidente Marine” following each declaration of a specific policy that she promises to pursue as president. Some of Le Pen’s policies include sending foreign prisoners back to their home countries, relocating food production to a more local level, and holding a referendum on the issue of leaving the European Union. During the final ten minutes of the speech Le Pen seems to go off script, quickly interjecting anecdotes in a casual tone that contrast with her performative rhetoric. These side bars often began with “dear friends” and it

¹⁰ *Communautarisme*, or communalism, denotes strong loyalty to a specific group that is seen as constituting an exclusive community. The term is often used to refer to citizens who are seen as grouping together along ethnic lines.

seems as though she is endeavoring to speak more directly and personally with the audience. This style of speaking combined with the increased responses of the crowd established a less reserved tone at the speech's close.

MLP's Double Discourse on Alterity

The declaration that Le Pen makes at the beginning of her speech regarding immigration in France being linked to Islamic fundamentalism and, therefore, a cause for the terrorism that has taken place in France in recent years is an example of the double discourse that she employs in her party speeches. Through these terms Le Pen indicates the FN's position on immigration to the extent that mass immigration has negatively impacted the country and immigrants must be expected to abide by French laws. Although Le Pen does not comment further on any specific groups living in the country, it would appear as though she seeks to incriminate Arab Muslim immigrants. This is evidenced by the continual association of immigration with Islamic fundamentalism in her parole. This example of double discourse is particularly threatening and points to one of two types of nationalist discourses that Le Pen relies on to appeal to her supporters.

The first form of nationalist discourse is that of a feel-good nationalism that relies on a passionate sentiment for France and amorous, idealist depictions of the country and its timeless history, culture, and language. History frequently surfaced during the duration of Le Pen's pronouncements, yet it was less of a focal point than an underlying presence that Le Pen seemed to cite in order to provide her descriptions with credibility. When she notes that France is a "millennium-old country," for instance, she appears to be depending on a representation of French history she presumes to exist in the minds of her listeners that depicts it as ideal and incapable of wrongdoing. Similarly, when she emphasizes that it will be necessary to "defend and promote the historic and cultural homeland" Le Pen is trying to appeal to a certain conceptualization of France that includes its long history that the FN upholds as unchanging (Alduy and Wahnich 2015).

Le Pen's sweeping statements on French culture, language, and history give way to more aggressive nationalist sentiments in the second half of the oration. As terrorism and globalization are imminently threatening France, according to Le Pen, there is a need to apply strict policies in areas like immigration. In the midst of a harsh tirade concerning foreigners living in France she declares: "Those who come to France – it should be for finding France – not for changing it to the image of their country of origin. If they would like to live as if they were in their home countries, then it would be best if they were to stay in their home countries." This statement is an example of the second type of nationalist rhetoric that Marine Le Pen employs: an incendiary nationalism. This nationalism concerns the "exclusive France" that French citizens must defend from foreign danger and the ideas it contains mimics statements that Jean Marie Le Pen made at the time of the party's inception. Marine Le Pen has simply replaced her father's "Préférence Nationale" with "Priorité Nationale" and speaks through a discourse that attempts to alienate Arab Muslim immigrants disguised in republican universalist language (Shields 2014).

In *Marine Le Pen Prise aux mots* Cécile Alduy and Stéphane Wahnich's argue that the ideology of the Front National has remained unchanged between 1972 and today despite the image cleaning it has undergone since its change of leadership in 2011. Through a comparison of word choice, word frequency, semantic structure, and underlying themes in Jean Marie Le Pen's and Marine Le Pen's speeches they found there was little discernible difference between the prior and current FN presidents' rhetorics. Their conclusion indicates that Marine Le Pen relies on a discourse masked in republican language and cloaked in a certain nationalist mythological presentation of France in order to advance false conceptions of français d'origine étrangère living

in the country. The primary myth she recounts through speeches replete with French history, patriotism, and French republican values at events that visually reflect these concepts is the falsehood that Frenchness and multiculturalism oppose one another.

The mythological format of Le Pen's rhetoric has to do with the idea of a timeless France. As part of Le Pen's feel-good nationalism, this mythology centers on the FN's presentation of French culture, language, and history that find their form through a Christian heritage. As the millennium-old France comes up against forces that threaten the nation's political, social, religious, and cultural values there are certain measures which must be taken to defend the *patrie*. One object of these mythological narratives is to make them appear beyond reproach. By appealing to certain aspects of French life that the majority of français d'origine could identify with, Le Pen attempts to define Frenchness as opposed to the culture, language, and history of the Other living in France.

Semiotics of the Assises Présidentielles

Le Pen's words appear simplistic yet conceal a certain complexity that can be uncovered with signifiers based in the setting of the Assises Présidentielles event. Certain elements such as the color scheme, the auditory landscape including the music, the presence of certain symbols such as the blue and white roses, and the presentation of the event itself (the way in which the FN chose to film and edit the video of the event that it published online) all reveal a deeper signification within Le Pen's orations. These aspects point to the conceptualization of Frenchness the FN seeks to convey. With the party's attempts to demonstrate patriotic valor it is worth asking what certain symbolic acts such as collectively singing the French national anthem or presenting images of Joan of Arc signify in particular for the Front National.

The campaign video juxtaposes Marine Le Pen and Joan of Arc briefly, yet purposefully. There is a short shot of Le Pen riding a horse at an equestrian event quickly followed by an image of the Joan of Arc statue at Place des Pyramides in Paris that similarly features the hero atop a horse. Placing the two side by side signals an homage to the past and an attempt to associate Joan of Arc's ideal leadership with that of Marine Le Pen's. In this way the FN is attempting to symbolically manipulate French history so that it takes on new meanings in conformation to its ideology. Additionally, in « *La France aux Français* » (1993), wherein Pierre Birnbaum examines the historic identity of French nationalism, he explains how the FN has long relied on Joan of Arc as a dominant symbol to represent the party. Joan of Arc originally emerged as a counter symbol to the republican and secular Marianne who stood for *laïcité* in the public forum. In this way Joan of Arc acted within what Shields (2014) calls the anti-system stance of the FN that opposes itself to the left. The FN has been able to profit from this symbol further with Marine Le Pen as its president. Similarly, Le Pen chose the blue rose as the emblem of her 2017 presidential campaign because of how it "symbolizes the impossible that we make possible."¹¹ As the socialist party in France has historically represented itself with a red rose, the FN seems to have set itself in further opposition to the left with its new symbol.

Although the FN is opposed to ethnic, cultural, and religious difference, it has employed a more universalist language ("it is only together that we will all succeed") since 2011 when Marine Le Pen began to reference the republican principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and *laïcité* in her speeches (Alduy and Wahnich 2015). In the speech she delivered at the Assises Présidentielles event Le Pen carefully mentioned the core values of universalism, but in such a way so as to lend credibility to her more inciting statements. For instance, she asserts that the majority of French

¹¹ <https://www.publicsenat.fr/lcp/politique/rose-bleue-nouveau-logo-campagne-marine-pen-1564432>

citizens still recognize the “preeminence of the person and therefore his sanctity, individual liberty and therefore individual consent, the national morale and therefore national solidarity, shared equality and therefore the refusal of situations that call for submission.” Through this ambiguous statement Le Pen seems intent on elevating the individual citizen above the collective which directly contradicts the intent of the French social contract. According to Le Pen, “These principles for which we have fought are confirmed in our national maxim “liberty, equality, brotherhood” that are themselves derived from a secularization of principles produced by our Christian heritage.” Liberty, equality, and brotherhood indeed form an integral part of how the French present their political identity, yet Le Pen seems to name these values in order to confirm the FN’s own set of principles. Does this method of employing a particular discourse that seems to rely on republican universalism differ from that which other public figures in France employ?

Through a discourse that seeks to reinforce certain conceptualizations of Frenchness and seems to draw from basic republican ideas Marine Le Pen has been successful in reaching a level of transparency within her speeches. This success is evident in the increasing popularity that the FN has experienced amongst citizens who have not traditionally identified with the far right. The heightened interest in the FN could also be reflective of what appears to be a larger shift recently in Western politics towards conservatism. However, the feel-good and incendiary nationalist rhetorics that Le Pen employs also seem to confirm the presence of the “nation Thing” that Slavoj Žižek observed in the Eastern European states at the close of the 20th century. Žižek identifies the “nation Thing” as the base of nationalism and argues that it “persists unchanged” (56). This Thing (national enjoyment) is defined in relation to a collective’s relationship to an Other, for while this enjoyment is inaccessible to the Other it is nonetheless threatened by the Other (54). As a result, the expression of nationalist interest in the mainstream population is particularly worrisome for the minorities living in French society who are not seen as belonging to the national identity. Citizens who are considered français d’origine étrangère such as Arab Muslim immigrants are those perceived as this Other. They are portrayed as incapable of acquiring Frenchness due to a combination of their origins, ethnicity, cultural practices, and religion. Le Pen is one of many français d’origine voices who elevate the native population above the population perceived as foreign and the FN is one of many institutions that attempts to control the meanings of Frenchness.

The “Genius” of French Secularism and the Limits of Universalism

When I came across the book *Génie de la laïcité* by Caroline Fourest during my most recent trip to Paris I was immediately struck by its blunt title: *Génie de la laïcité* which roughly translates to “The Genius of French Secularism.” Laïcité refers to a French political philosophy that seeks to separate religious and public life and has dominated public discourse in France in recent years. In the introduction to *Génie* Fourest critiques how laïcité is commonly translated as “secularism” in English. She posits that as laïcité is distinct from American and other Western secularist systems (15-16) and is unique in the world it should retain its French appellation. A short subtext that appears below the title and next to a photo of the author reads: “laïcité is not a sword, but a shield.” Likening laïcité to a defensive tool points even further to the book’s polemic contents. Finding a publication that so blatantly declares a position on laïcité is quite useful for examining the various social debates it weaves together.

In *Génie* Fourest offers a strict definition of French republican universalism in regard to the laïque integration of religion that she defends. As an example of a socio-political essay, *Génie* constitutes an example of popular intellectual reading in French society that is widely available in French bookstores. With the understanding that French citizens consume this genre of political

writings on a large scale it follows that these texts are integral in constructing the shared national imaginary. When Fourest's book on laïcité was released in October 2016 an article¹² in *Le Monde* described it as an addition to the "innumerable texts published on the subject" including Jean-Louis Bianco's *La France est-elle laïque ?* that had been released a few days after *Génie*. The proliferation of essays and books on socio-political topics works to constantly reframe and reposition collective understandings of religion, laïcité, and history in France, for example. Ultimately, Frenchness is a product of these textual debates.

Fourest's *Génie de la laïcité* could be considered part of what the group Qui fait la France calls an "outlet for bourgeois dispositions" (Thomas 2013, 192). Qui fait la France is made up of "banlieue writers" who write about their experiences as second or third generation immigrants living on the periphery of French cities in a country that seeks to exclude them. The presence of these banlieue writers and their publications is extremely significant in a culturally homogenous society that venerates français d'origine authors like Fourest. In view of there being ample publications by ethnic minority authors living in France why is Fourest's discourse on laïcité widely available while accounts of Arab and Muslim citizens for whom laïque-based laws adversely affect are absent?

Feminist scholar Joan Wallach Scott, who analyzes the perception of Muslim women and the head scarf in French society, poses a similar question that she answers in her conclusion to *The Politics of the Veil* (2007). Scott critiques Caroline Fourest's winning of the French National Assembly's Prix du livre politique (political book prize) in 2006 for *La tentation obscurantiste* because despite the limitations of Fourest's scope and argument in the work, her overt support of the French government's nationalist agenda allowed her to win the prize. The absence of minority citizens' perspectives in textual form reveal a way in which these citizens are invisible within the national imaginary. In order to fully analyze the role a publication like Fourest's plays in the national discourse it is necessary to consider Fourest's positionality as a white, bourgeois, français d'origine as well as how she endeavors to speak for all members of society through asserting the apparent perfection of laïcité.

According to Fourest, the laïque system represents the ultimate socio-political model. In the chapter "An Exemplary History" she asserts how laïcité is "absolutely ideal for a country like France," and how it, "would be necessary to be crazy or oblivious to try and dismantle what centuries of struggle, fury, and patience succeeded to build and adjust to the exact milometer" (115). In each of the five chapters that make up *Génie* Fourest staunchly defends this claim. In the first chapter, "False Trial and Empoisoned Propagandas," she endeavors to respond to what she identifies as attacks laïcité has received in recent years; namely from western democracies that do not ascribe to the same type of secularism. In the following chapter, "The War of Ideals is Declared," Fourest discusses other countries in possession of secular systems that attempt to imitate French laïcité. Throughout "An Exemplary History" Fourest details the "correct" formation of laïcité because, as she states in the opening line, "Everyone claims to know the history of laïcité. However, there are numerous styles, "democratic" or "republican" to relay." In "Fracture Lines" Fourest provides a modern context for political and educational uses of laïcité and in "For an Authentic Laïque Politics" Fourest concludes by making recommendations for French society in terms of religious-secular separation.

As laïcité apparently is, "one of the most generous utopias, one of the most brotherly and the most brilliantly imagined in recent decades," (12) Fourest believes that laïcité is able to equally provide for all members of French society and ensures harmonious social cohesion. As an ideal

¹² De Montvalon, Jean-Baptiste. 2016. Interminable querelle franco-française sur la laïcité. 10 October.

system that claims not to recognize any one religion above another, it is only when certain institutions or governments do not correctly implement *laïcité* that it appears to fail. There are multiple politicians in France, for instance, who do not appropriately configure this ideal political philosophy though they claim to prescribe to its standards. As a result, there are public figures who refer to *laïcité* in name only and do not attempt to employ it in its true, or *natural* form.

This difference between *laïcités* often comes down to partisan lines. The right and left in France apparently see themselves as representing different versions of this socio-political philosophical system. As each side attempts to control the “official” view of *laïcité*, each arguing that it encapsulates it in its ideal state, it is evident that these debates fashion *laïcité* into its current form. Regardless of the meanings that *laïcité* has possessed through time and the ways in which it should and could function in France, the method by which political and social actors in France actually present it in discourse determines its actual role in French society. Perhaps one of the most fiercely contested issues in France that reveals this ideological division concerning *laïcité* is the debate on headscarves. Fourest discusses the issue at great length in *Génie* and unequivocally advocates for their removal from the public sphere. The headscarf debate returns to the question of differing *laïcités* and the *français d’origine* control of Frenchness.

In 2004 President Jacques Chirac passed a law banning the “ostentatious” presentation of religious symbols in public space. This particular ban has significantly affected France’s Muslim population because Muslim girls who would normally choose to veil are legally forbidden to wear a hijab or any other type of head covering in public schools. In 2010 President Nicolas Sarkozy implemented a law that banned covering the face in public meaning women could no longer wear an article of clothing like the burqa in public without being fined. Fourest argues that the law Chirac put into effect was in the spirit of *laïcité* and the 2010 law Sarkozy passed – while seeming to possess a *laïque* air – was in fact nothing more than a security measure. Fourest describes Sarkozy’s presidency as not truly representing *laïcism* (202) along with other conservative politicians who claim to employ *laïcité*, yet do not enact it as it was historically intended.

Veiling has also received a high level of attention in Europe as a whole because European states often choose to interpret women wearing head coverings as an affront to women’s rights, national security, and secular rights. In the French case, certain scholars (Amiriaux, 2009; Bowen 2007; Guénif, 2007; Keaton 2006; Scott 2007) have identified the impact that a push for equality in public space has had on individual religious freedoms. Meanwhile, Fourest asserts that only an equality that enforces an absolute separation of religious beliefs and symbols from public life is able to protect all of the inhabitants of France, especially its minority populations. Scott proposes that this separation constitutes “political radicalism” that has not led to the peaceful protection of all, but the tense alienation of a few (19). Fourest compares the French *laïque* system with America’s secularist one which she describes as threatening equality for all members of the collective because it places the religious freedom of certain individuals above the needs of the whole group.¹³ In these instances, however, if there are certain policies that encourage the othering of certain citizens, then are these not the members of society who are most in need of protection and support?

In consideration of Matti Bunzl’s (2007) discussion on historic anti-Semitism and current day Islamophobia in Europe it would appear that French veil laws are a result of the widely-held European belief that integrating Muslims into European society is not possible. While Anti-Semitism in Europe consisted of religious-based discrimination during the 19th century before it

¹³ “Seen from France, this practice of placing beliefs above the communal law is simply incomprehensible and even perceived as a threat to the cohesion and principle of equality” (81).

transformed into a racial form of discrimination during the 20th century, the present-day mistreatment of Muslims in European societies is rooted in the perspective that Islam is incompatible with the European model (13). Within this strict assessment, then, Muslims are simply unassimilable whereas European Jews are now considered to be ideal citizens because of a successful assimilation into European society.

My French host parents constitute an example of how certain types of bodies are seen as assimilable where others, are not. In the introduction I mention how proud my host father was that his family was an *authentic* French family. With the perspective that race and religious affiliation possess an essential link to a certain culture, I believed all members of my host family to be français d'origine citizens. A discovery that complicated my understanding of français d'origine was learning my host mother was born in Poland and had moved to Paris in her early twenties. In view of the genealogical component of the français d'origine identity, my host mother could not trace her ancestry through France, and was therefore not a native French citizen. Nonetheless, her white racial identity, her ability to speak French fluently and with an almost imperceptible accent, and her full acceptance of French practices allowed her to operate as a full cultural French citizen.

Fourest's polemic argument in *Génie de la laïcité* reinforces the idea that certain types of citizens are capable of effortlessly assimilating into European society at the same time that other citizens could never reach a fully "civilized" status. The crux of Fourest's staunch defense of laïcité rests on her assertion that a universalist management of French society seeks to protect all citizens from discrimination and exclusion. She concedes that racism is present in France, yet argues it is not a product of the State (48). Rather, racism results from society and universalism offers a solution to eliminate it. There are those who would argue that despite the implementation of laïque practices, French society continues to suffer from a lack of social cohesion. Fourest counters by explaining that France is a "well-mixed country" – more so than many countries in the West (22). In this context, Fourest actively conflates multiculturalism and multiethnicism. Her discussion shows the ways in which Frenchness forms and, as a result, discourses that initially seem to oppose one another begin to show numerous similarities.

Marine Le Pen's incendiary speeches and Caroline Fourest's pro-Republic literature equally cause the translation of idealist republican universalism into social stigmatization for Arab Muslim immigrants. While the FN's views not always appear to be in line with the State (the FN's first leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, decried the Fifth Republic) and while Fourest's work seems to support it (evidenced by her winning the National Assembly's book award), both reinforce Frenchness in strict and exclusive ways. The ideological principles of the right and left do differ – the left sees itself as the sole defender of French republican principles and the right as preserving the *patrie* from external forces that wish to harm the country – yet they are united through a common habitus that each helps to produce. In what specific ways do Marine Le Pen's and Caroline Fourest's discourses approach one another?

When Extremes Meet

"The totalitarianism that threatens the century aligns itself with God at every opportunity. Beneath the green, brown flag of Islamism it raves, rapes, enslaves, decapitates and kills blindly."¹⁴

¹⁴ "Le totalitarisme qui menace le siècle se réclame de Dieu, à tout bout de champ. Sous le drapeau vert-brun de l'islamisme, il tempête, viole, esclavagise, décapite et tue aveuglement" (7).

“Don’t forget...that Islamic fundamentalism is barbaric, that it manifests itself in the world each day through murdering, massacring, and notably through employing the squalid and cowardly weapon of terrorism.”¹⁵

On a first reading it may appear that these two excerpts originate from the same source. The first quote, from Fourest’s *Génie*, and the second, from Le Pen’s Assises Présidentielles speech, both express the belief that Islamic fundamentalism endangers France because of how it seeks to violently harm others as a result of its adherents’ inherent barbarity. Fourest’s and Le Pen’s perspectives further approach one another through their explicit denouncement of the recent terror attacks which serve as a point of shared fear in French society and the *sous entendu* that Islam is incompatible with the French republican system. Marine Le Pen argues that restricting immigration will protect French citizens from further terror attacks and Fourest proposes that absolute adherence to the French *laïque* system will constitute France’s preservation in the face of uncivilizedness yet both ultimately seek to portray Islam and other forms of alterity as antithetical to Frenchness. Despite their apparent ascription to different political ideologies, Le Pen and Fourest actively construct Frenchness through their extreme and exclusive discourses. With each attempt to portray French identity as unmalleable and essential they each contribute to Frenchness as it currently exists in France.

Fourest expresses that her work specifically promotes religious integration and opposes extremism (10), yet the *laïque* system for which she advocates is so strict that it can be viewed as extremist in its own right. Although Fourest attempts to distinguish *laïcité* from religion, both require their adherents to follow a certain set of conditions in a prescribed manner. It would seem that some of the very aspects Fourest decries in Islamic Fundamentalism are present in her own belief system. Fourest would have every aspect of social, communal life constantly observed so as to monitor for religious ideologies entering the public sphere, allowing French republicanism to become the dominant ideology enforcing its practices amidst its members. As a result, Fourest’s claims that complete and utter separation of religion and secularism leads to the equal protection for all citizens are not accurate.

Since taking leadership of the FN in 2011, Marine Le Pen has employed universalist language similar to Fourest’s. Le Pen claims she seeks to protect French heritage in order to provide a pristine country for future generations, yet she would do this by limiting the ability of foreign citizens to legally enter the country. Fourest similarly seeks to moderate the actions of Muslims by forcing Muslim women already living in France who veil to remove their head coverings in public. Le Pen and Fourest each view their model as the only way to successfully preserve French society in the face of imminent threats and Fourest, in particular, takes every opportunity through interviews, her blog¹⁶, and publications¹⁷ to strongly oppose her ideological principles to those of Le Pen. Despite this desire to create distance from one another – at least on Fourest’s part – each strives to “preserve” France by enforcing the notion that Arab Muslim immigrants constitute an Other in France.

While the FN on the extreme right and Fourest and her contemporaries on the extreme left each project specific images of France (France the millennium-old nation or France the refuge of all citizens) there are certain institutions in France that claim that they seek to present a counter

¹⁵ “N’oublions pas...que le fondamentalisme islamiste est barbare, qu’il se manifeste chaque jour dans le monde en tuant, en massacrant, en usant notamment de l’arme immonde et lâche du terrorisme...”

¹⁶ <https://carolinefourest.wordpress.com/>

¹⁷ Fourest, Caroline and Fiammetta Venner. 2012. *Marine Le Pen Démasquée*. Paris: Le Livre de Poche.

perspective on alterity and immigration than that which dominates society. Through analyzing the permanent exhibit on immigration at the National Museum for the History of Immigration it will be useful to examine the ways in which this claim is carried out.

The French Colonial Past at the Palais de la Porte Dorée

Attempting to orient myself after stepping off the tram at the Porte Dorée station I paused in front of an enclosed grassy area lined by palm trees and split in half by a cascading fountain. At the far end of the lawn a golden figure who appeared to be raising something toward the sky stood on a marble pedestal. Perplexed at first by the presence of a grandiose garden with this statue of Athena located in the middle of a Paris street, once I caught a glimpse of the Palais de la Porte Dorée (“Palace of the Golden Door”) the scene became more congruous.

The Palace houses the National Museum for the History of Immigration (CNHI) and during my visit in January 2017 I learned that it was originally the site of the “Museum of the Colonies” at the Exposition Coloniale Internationale de 1931 (“International Colonial Exposition of 1931”). The purpose of the Exposition during its six month running period was to showcase the cultural elements of the various civilizations that were in France’s possession. Representative of an art déco style with exterior walls covered in bas reliefs depicting exotic places and people and encircled by a series of columns, the Palace cast a commanding presence on Avenue Daumesnil. The interior equally caught my attention with its high vaulted ceilings, grand staircases, and a ball room covered in vibrant, floor-to-ceiling frescoes of dark-skinned women standing in tropical fauna gazing at a French galleon approaching from the sea. The scene thematically reflected the museums that succeeded one another in the Palace before the current one took their place.

The 1931 Museum of the Colonies gave way to the Museum of Overseas France in 1935 which in 1961 became the Museum of African and Oceania until the current institution opened in 2007. With its mission of telling the story of two centuries of immigration in France the National Museum for the History of Immigration claims it seeks to present French history differently than the previous museums in the space by showcasing immigration through ethnographic means. I explore whether the CNHI actually conveys a new form of discourse regarding immigrants and French history or reiterates the dominant perspectives on alterity from within the collective imaginary. In order to tell the story of immigration in France the permanent exhibit, *Repères*, (“Landmarks”) is broken into nine different sequences which include: “To Emigrate,” “Facing the State,” “Host Country, Hostile France,” “Here and There,” “Places to Live,” “At Work,” “Rootedness,” “Sports,” and “Diversity.” One of the museum’s intermediaries, Mathieu Nouvel, explains that the purpose of breaking the exhibit into these specific portions is to show the process that immigrants historically have had to endure in order to live and work in the French Republic.¹⁸ These nine segments are broken into artistic, historic, and ethnographic elements that fill the space and represent the particular theme of the sequence. Before arriving at the first *repère*, “To Emigrate,” I had to reach the second floor by climbing one of the grand staircases that acted as an exhibit in and of itself.

Painted along the wall going up the stairs was a timeline of inscriptions that described moments in French immigration history. The timeline began in 1789 with the French Revolution, an event that is considered to have launched the birth of the modern French State. As the Revolution redefined French citizenship and what it should consist of (it depends on engagement with the collective) the museum seemed to believe it was an appropriate place to start. Certain legal, social, and migratory monuments related to immigration in France climbed in years as the

¹⁸ [khttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-keizLUamE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-keizLUamE)

visitor climbed in steps. These moments included the passage of particular immigration laws, the creation of immigration advocacy groups, and the successive independence movements of former French colonies. For example, in 1945 France extended citizenship to the children of immigrants born on French soil; in 1954 Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos became independent followed by Morocco and Tunisia in 1956 and Algeria in 1962; and in 1958 the Fonds d'actions sociale was created to aid Algerian workers living in France. Despite this mixed collection, it seemed as though the majority of the events featured on the wall centered on French immigration policy.

The legal focus within the timeline along the wall reflects the close (and often tenuous) relationship between immigrants and the state and unequivocally displays the mediating role citizenship plays in this relationship as a hallmark of the modern nation state (Petryna and Follis 2015). In the French context in particular many scholars have remarked on the tendency in France to rely on what anthropologist John Bowen (2007) calls “statutory solutions” (243) to remedy social issues. Oftentimes the French government will officially codify measures that would otherwise be enacted temporarily, and, or at local levels. This dependency on more official forms of legislation in social life is evident throughout the entire museum and seems to force immigrants into a humble position in relation to the State and devices like the French immigration history timeline effectively serve as a reminder of one’s privilege to be a citizen.

As the CNHI is closely overseen by multiple departments within the French government, its inclusion of official State discourse is unsurprising, yet through his analysis of the CNHI mission (2013) anthropologist Dominic Thomas proposes that it seeks to fill a particular role French museums normally would not. While the majority of French museums exist to conserve, the National Museum for the History of Immigration was formed with the intent of “narrating, documenting, and recording a particular history” (46). However, I would argue that all museums seek to tell a particular story and those that conserve certain objects equally preserve certain narratives associated with them. While the CNHI may have been conceptualized with the purpose of sharing an inclusive perspective on immigration in French history (44) I argue that the discourse it espouses omits a discussion on French colonial heritage which directly relates to French immigration. As I describe my visit of the *Repères* exhibit I explore how notions of French national belonging are being constructed through the space of the museum that encapsulates its discourse, its declared mission, and its heritage.

Exhibiting Immigration, Showcasing Alterity

“Is this exhibition a legacy or a beginning?”¹⁹

This quote, attributed to Maréchal Lyautey who oversaw the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, is a question the National Museum for the History of Immigration seems to be asking itself. While Lyautey was referring to the future of the French colonial empire, his statement could easily be referencing the museum’s current positionality. How does the CNHI view its role in French society in relation to a heritage of French colonialism as well as the ongoing conversation on immigration? I argue the permanent exhibit *Repères*, as the institution’s primary form of discourse, attempts to provide a neutral assessment regarding French immigration history, so as to avoid challenging the state apparatus. As a result, the exhibit omits certain realities from the narrative regarding immigrants’ experiences in France at the same time that it fails to comment on the role of the State in the lived experiences of these immigrants. While the exhibit does present negative aspects

¹⁹ “Cette exposition est-elle un testament ou un point de départ?”

associated with living in France as an immigrant these conditions are not shown as being tied to any action of the French government, rather, they appear to constitute a fundamental consequence of immigration.

The first section of Repères, “To Emigrate,” introduces the immigration narrative that progresses chronologically as well as thematically through the course of the exhibit. The most prominent element within this first part of the exhibit was the ethnographic focus. There were multiple display cases filled with various possessions related to travel such as family photos, tickets, transportation schedules, clothing, personal items, and talismans. In one display case there was an open suitcase filled with a collection of mementos including documents, an Indian flag, a plate of incense, and other smaller items. In addition to the display cases that contained personal affects there was a large piece of artwork, Mircea Cantor’s *Like birds on high-voltage wire* (2009), that filled a corner of the room. The sculpture appeared to be a tapestry loom, but instead of fabric strands hanging from the top to the bottom of the wooden frame there were thin metal wires that stretched horizontally across the open space. Hanging from each of the seven wires was a collection of wooden and metal spoons. Each of the rows contained a different number of wooden and metal spoons with the majority of wooden ones hanging from the first row and the majority of metal ones hanging from the bottom row. According to the display text accompanying the piece, the spoons represented the fixedness that often characterizes the legal processes associated with moving across borders. According to Cantor, unlike birds, immigrants are unable to fly across country borders.

Finally, the last element within the emigration section of the exhibit consisted of display plates describing the process of emigrating from a country of origin and immigrating to France. The texts emphasized the distinction between emigration and immigration and highlighted certain reasons that members of other nations have decided to immigrate to France during the past 200 years. The sequence also pointed out the difficulties that immigrants often face through the process of migrating. Each of Repères’s sequences that followed including “Facing the State,” “Host Country, Hostile France,” “Here and There,” “Places to Live,” “At Work,” “Rootedness,” “Sports,” and “Diversity” similarly contained display cases, pieces of contemporary art that commented on immigration in some way, and display plates with text and pictures.

Diversity, as the final landmark, provided a counterpart to the first stage on emigration and focused on emphasizing the rootedness of immigrants who live in France and the unique contributions that foreign populations make to the country. The space for this portion of the exhibit seemed larger than the other ones, yet it did not appear to contain more materials. In the center of the room stood a wooden structure composed of four walls covered in colorful paintings of people. The structure possessed three openings and upon walking into the large cube I was met by a variety of objects hanging from the ceiling. Included in the array were teapots, cooking utensils, pots and pans, a hookah pipe, masks, Japanese lanterns, and woven baskets. On the wall adjacent to the structure was a large record with songs written across the grooves of the disk in bright colors. The sign hanging alongside the record entitled “Jukebox” explained that like film, music constituted a way to express and represent migration, for exile has inspired a number of artists to create based on their situations. It was possible to select and listen to songs from the collection which included “Le Portugais” by Joe Dassin, Carte Séjour’s “Douce France,” and “Les Emigrants” by Charles Aznavour among others. As a conclusion to the exhibit, the diversity portion endeavored to make integration in France appear as an ensured result of immigrating to the country and made no mention of minorities who do are not treated as first class citizens.

A Legacy of Colonialism

Although French colonization in North Africa and South East Asia provides a logical starting point for discussing historical periods of immigration in France the exhibit did not attempt to draw this connection. I did not observe any instances in the permanent exhibit where this history was being grappled with. Just as banlieue writers are largely absent from representations of the national story, Repères omits French colonialism from its representation of the French historical record. Similarly, just as Marine Le Pen claims that globalization is the cause of increased immigration to France, she fails to draw a parallel between French colonialism and modern globalization. It would appear as though the French collective imaginary purposefully excludes the French State's role in inspiring great waves of movement from its colonies at the same time that it acknowledges the necessity of its mediation in overseeing the entry of foreigners. As a result, the CNHI represents immigration as part of French history, yet removes French history from the larger historical processes that shape the national story.

Despite the CNHI's attempts to include French immigration history within France's larger historic narrative, the permanent exhibit's discourse did not indicate it was actively seeking to reshape collective discourse related to alterity in French society. Repères's sequences followed a progression from "emigration" to what could be seen as the "assimilation process" and terminating with "full assimilation" wherein a limited expression of cultural diversity was allowed for. This process reflects the model French social scientists used during the mid-20th century to describe the immigration of foreign workers and later the immigration of families in French society. The focus rested on their presence in France and ignored their ties to their countries of origin and the perpetual double absence (Sayad 1999) that characterized their existence (Bava 2010). The current view of immigration considers the process along the lines of integration instead of through assimilation and attempts to account for a more wholistic study of immigrants' lived experiences. As a result, the CNHI's exhibit seems to rely on presenting immigration through an outdated methodological framework even though it employs a terminology that is consistent with current anthropological conceptualizations of the social realities of immigration.

This distinction between the overall structure of the exhibit and the terminology that it employs is evident in the emigration section of Repères that introduces immigration as a *transnational* issue. Despite the emphasis on this aspect of immigration the sequence does not attempt to convey Sayad's observation, for instance, that this transnationalism is lived through and that immigrants carry this sense of equal absence from their home country and French society within themselves (225). It is as if the CNHI is offering a politically correct frame; an encasing that is void of a deeper signification that would signal to immigrants and descendants of immigrants living in France that the French government acknowledges their struggle. Similarly, in the sequences "Facing the State" and "Host Country, Hostile France" the discourse notes the legal hardships and physical barriers that immigrants experience in French society such as facing strenuous legal processing, being forced to live in low quality housing, and frequently working for low pay. The extent to which these sequences address the psychological hardships is the short discussion on racism that they included. Nonetheless, the Repères discourse placed the context for this racism within society without any effort to show the ways in which this social discrimination that targets Arab Muslim immigrants in particular is systematic and linked to the State.

Diversity as Object

The space in the CNHI reserved for showcasing France's diversity was overwhelmingly optimistic. The transition from sequences regarding the difficulties of living in France to one that seemed to

convey immigration in France as always successfully terminating with “full assimilation” was abrupt. The notable lack of a declared position on French colonialism and its negative impact on former members of those colonies (who make up a large proportion of immigrants who have migrated to France since the beginning of the 20th century) signaled the purposeful evasion of a postcolonial discussion. Instead, as two centuries of immigration to France has made it a “territory of meetings and of multiple cultures”²⁰ (according to the CNHI’s website²¹) it would seem that the diversity sequence in the museum was constructed to represent these cultures and celebrate them in specific ways. Epstein discusses a similar perspective in regard to the *fêtes de quartier*, or festivals, in Cergy-St. Christophe that place immigrants on display with the goal of celebrating cultural points of difference within French society for short amounts of time (142). Celebration of diversity in France seeks to convey the idea that cultural difference such as linguistic, religious, ethnic variation enrich French society, yet this appreciation of difference is limited to events that take place for very limited amounts of time. I argue the museum’s “emigration,” “incomplete assimilation,” and “full assimilation” structure set across the sequences does not provide for an adequate multicultural understanding.

In Dominic Thomas’s discussion (2013) of the National Museum for the History of Immigration he notes that commemoration and glorification are often associated in French museum settings, yet the CNHI does not engage in this tradition (45). The museum succeeds in uncoupling immigration from colonization (52), yet while colonization is not being glorified it is also not being addressed in general. In some ways Thomas seems to suggest the museum provides a counter discourse to the one which French society expresses regarding immigration. Thomas cites Jacques Toubon, the former French Minister of Culture and the leader of the CNHI project, who discusses how French society negatively views these members of society due to a “lack of historical perspective” (45) and states that the museum’s goal is to convey a certain historical narrative regarding immigration to combat this perspective (46). Despite Toubon’s acknowledgement of this stigma, the museum seems to reside within a State-led discourse that does not emphasize the role of the French colonial empire in the countries from which hundreds of thousands immigrants have moved to France during the 20th century.

As evidenced by the particular institutions that inhabited the site before it, the Museum for the History of Immigration seems to have inherited a legacy that normalizes French colonialism. As the initial institution that occupied the Palais de la Porte Dorée, the Museum of the Colonies represented the enlightenment mindset regarding the necessity of a “colonizing mission” within North Africa and Southeast Asia. It was constructed for the International Colonial Exposition of 1931, whose purpose was to pay homage to France’s colonial possessions by presenting certain cultural features from each of its territories. The exposition accomplished this by holding performances in pavilions constructed for the event and showcasing buildings modeled after structures that could be found in the regions that France occupied such as South East Asian temples like the Cambodian Angkor Vat. The architecture of the site was explicitly designed to demonstrate French dominance over its colonies and the Museum of the Colonies in particular was built with the purpose to endure after the exposition ended (Thomas 2013, 51). The integrity of the physical features of the building has endured as well as a certain general mentality regarding the role of colonialism.

During my tour of the CNHI I was aware that the frescoes and other architectural elements of the décor were features from the 1930s. However, it was not until later that I realized another

²⁰ “Deux siècles d’immigration ont fait de la France un territoire de rencontres et de cultures multiples.”

²¹ <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/l-exposition-permanente/guide-de-l-exposition/sequence-diversite>

aspect of the museum that had perplexed me at the time of my visit was similarly a vestige of a previous decade: an aquarium located in the basement of the building with a collection of tropical fish. In 1931 the emphasis of the exposition centered on conveying a certain level of authenticity in regard to the primitive savages they had on display. The aquarium possessed a very similar purpose in showcasing other forms of natural life from the French territories. The presence of the aquarium in the museum today seems to signal that the association still exists. How could an institution ever be successful in conveying the significance of human life when fish are housed in the same space? What does the continued presence of the aquarium in the basement of the Palais de la Porte Dorée indicate in relation to the subject matter that the museum presents upstairs? Thomas addresses a similar question when he proposes that French colonial power and French colonial labor present a complex relationship with the subjects (immigrants) who are presented in specific ways – mainly according to the ways in which they have contributed to French society, oftentimes in the form of hard labor (51).

As the CNHI is closely tied to the State – as indicated by the numerous government ministries that control its operation and the frequent presidential visits it receives – I argue it maintains a traditional mode of discourse regarding immigrants that limits the discussion to one of basic understanding at the same time that it limits the discussion to a specific space; removed from the everyday. The museum honors cultural, linguistic, and religious differences, in its diversity sequence, for example, without fully recognizing the colonial thread weaving together North African immigration, the poor treatment of Arab Muslim immigrants in France, and the discourse of exclusion that the français d'origine produce. Just as cultural festivals held in certain banlieue cities with the stated purpose of distinguishing foreign contributions to society and seeking to “celebrate” diversity, yet simply succeed in showcasing the domination of français d'origine citizens, the CNHI reinforces the Frenchness of the majority.

Conclusions

On my most recent trip to France that took place during Christmas celebrations I found myself at the French dinner table once more. While I did not receive any history lessons, a grandfather in the family that I was staying with would point out ways in which I neglected to act according to certain French cultural practices. The pieces of advice were small and gently given, but I felt as though he was doing his utmost to fashion me unto a proper French cultural citizen. I wondered if he kept trying to enforce a certain Frenchness in regard to my behavior because he viewed me as assimilable. I also wondered if his pointing out the best manner to perform certain practices was a way to demonstrate his own cultural capital. While the acquisition of certain types of cultural capital is a major way in which one gains Frenchness, the additional presence of certain factors that translate to a certain cultural identity determine Frenchness to a greater degree.

Through the discourses français d'origine members of the collective produce this “native” population works to control the meanings of Frenchness in such a way so that it appears essential to observers. I have examined the process by which Frenchness is produced through engaging with some of these discourses. I found the continual debate that native French citizens hold on the interplay of cultural practices and biological, genealogical, and religious factors ultimately produces the meanings of Frenchness. By engaging with Marine Le Pen's nationalist rhetoric, Caroline Fourest's staunch defense of laïcité, and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration's exhibit on French immigration history I found a disconnect between the inclusive position the Republican government communicates and society's treatment of Arab Muslim immigrants. Employing a post-structuralist anthropological lens to the relationship between

discourse and practice in France yielded a profound understanding of the mechanisms behind the production of Frenchness.

Just as scholars such as John Bowen, Beth Epstein, Didier Fassin, Danielle Trica Keaton, Joan Wallach Scott, and Nacira Guénif-Souilamas among many others have shown that français d'origine perceptions of français d'origine étrangère limit their inclusion in French society, I demonstrate the means by which français d'origine are able to create and reinforce a structure that excludes Arab Muslim immigrants. The textual domination of the français d'origine experience through the proliferation and wide availability of literature produced by français d'origine authors demonstrates a means by which certain ideologies are perpetuated within French habitus and how this reproduces itself. I am in agreement with Dominic Thomas (2007) who identifies the necessity to “relocate the origins of immigration discourse” so that a discussion that takes into account the reality of a dynamic Frenchness – one that acknowledges the mutability of culture and the possibility of unity through difference – will emerge.

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