Spaces of Inclusion and Exclusion: Algerians in Paris, France

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In the context of contemporary French republicanism, how do Algerians in Paris assert their identities and negotiate spaces of inclusion and exclusion in the public sphere?

The social and spatial integration practices of Algerian immigrants and their descendants living in Paris, France, illustrate local-level integrative practices that often involve feelings of unease related to living and working in an environment where a French/white/secular identity is normative and pervasive. French republican ideology posits a universal, neutral "public" sphere. In practice, this ideology denigrates and marginalizes communities of Algerian descent who do not share equal class, racial, or cultural status with the mainstream French population. It is their identities that are pushed out of the public sphere to ensure its supposed neutrality. This article focuses on how individuals of Algerian origin negotiate these bounded spaces of inclusion and exclusion in the French public sphere, not only in state spaces like schools, but also in parks, cafés, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

Empirical evidence highlights how Algerians structure their interactions with French society, and the geographic contexts that influence those interactions. Focusing on immigrants themselves and their experiences of exclusion or partial inclusion (both social and spatial) illustrates how they engage with the social constructs created by the dominant French group[1] by conforming or subverting the social constructs of dominant space. To understand these processes, I conducted formal, semi-structured interviews in 2016 and 2017 with 73 members of the Algerian-origin community in Paris from a variety of class backgrounds, ethnicities (i.e. Arab and Berber), generations, and cohort groups.[2] Participants' responses revealed linkages between identity and everyday sociospatial activities and behaviors. My findings suggest that while structural forces (e.g. state policies, immigration policies, capitalism) shape the city and people's place within it, individuals exercise some agency in navigating different kinds of spaces and in asserting their identities and understandings of community through their performances in these spaces.

Spaces of inclusion and exclusion

Immigrants have played a fundamental role in shaping urban space and urban life in Paris for generations; those spaces are filled with meanings and tensions for immigrants and nonimmigrants alike. The banlieues, and the discourses that surround them, influence Algerians' perceptions of their place in French society.[3] For many, the banlieues are "home," even as politicians and the

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[1] In France, the dominant group includes white, nonimmigrant, secular, middle-class French individuals. Members of this majority group are generally unconscious of their domination of space (Valentine 2001).

[2] The respondent sample includes 45 men and 28 women with an average age of 37. In total, 46 participants were born in Algeria (63%) and 27 (37%) were born in France. Of the respondents, 22 hold only Algerian citizenship (30%), 3 have only French citizenship (4%), and 48 have dual citizenship in France and Algeria (66%).

[3] According to Loïc Wacquant (2007), the term *banlieue* technically refers to a "peripheral urban county or township administratively attached to a larger urban center" (p. 32). However, since the 1980s, the term has come to denote any working-class areas with high densities of deteriorating public housing and are considered "prime breeding grounds for urban ills such as crime, physical dilapidation, economic deprivation, and immigration" (Wacquant 2007, p. 32).

media habitually denigrate these neighborhoods. At the same time, and regardless of their relationships with the banlieues, Algerian immigrants and their descendants must also position themselves within public spaces that are characteristically ordered, framed, and managed by the dominant French group. It is important to understand how migrants navigate social membership in the fragmented and discontinuous spaces of a racially and class segregated city.[4] Notably, the highest levels of segregation along ethnic lines within multicultural cities typically occur in white residential spaces (Stillwell and Phillips 2006). In Paris, the upper class is the "most segregated, followed by the lower class and immigrants, and the sociospatial gap between these two most isolated groups is deepening"—reflecting choices made by the upper class to self-segregate and reject socialized housing in their neighborhoods, not choices made by the minority (Grzegorczyk 2013, p. 22; Préteceille 2006). However, my findings indicate that minorities also exercise agency with intentional choices to self-segregate in some cases and intermingle in others within this already segregated environment.

For instance, Lina,[5] a 60-year-old Arab immigrant, living in the eastern banlieue of Champigny-sur-Marne, wanted to raise her children around other immigrants and Muslims, stating "I wanted my children to grow up without racist [treatment]." Though the living conditions in her building are lower than she desires (the elevator is regularly out of service, the hallways smell of urine, repairs take longer than they should, etc.), Lina talks about how hard she works to make her family's home comfortable. For Lina, her home in the banlieue is a place of comfort and ease. Her apartment is decorated in the style of her home in the Kabylia region of Algeria: bright maroon tapestries adorn the walls, carpets from Algeria cover the floors, and a tea set from Algeria rests on the buffet in the dining/living room. The space of Lina's home is inclusive beyond being an "Algerian" space—she is open to a broader sense of a community of immigrants and interacts with individuals from many countries. In this way, the banlieue functions as a sort of "village" of multicultural identities and relationships (Austin 2009). As Djamila, a 34-year-old Berber immigrant living in the northeastern banlieue of Bobigny, describes, "There are many people like us here…" referring to her immigrant friends from all over the world (not just Algeria) living in the banlieue.

Understanding the banlieue in this way demonstrates that Algerian immigrants and their descendants mean this space to be inclusive and multicultural, though its meaning and form have a specific meaning in the French context: it is not an entirely closed-off "cultural space" that reproduces Algerian life exactly, but, rather, a space that offers refuge from French spaces. For example, Hacina, a 24-year-old Berber immigrant who also lives in Bobigny, explains, "I like living in the banlieue… there are no French people here, only Blacks and Arabs." She describes a sense of ease that she feels, of "being at home" in the space of the banlieue: "Being here is better… there's no pressure," she says, referring to social pressures stemming from the secularist and assimilationist discourse and policy of "French space" within the city of Paris. From this perspective, "French" is very much a marked, visible category that does not include Hacina. By living most of her life within the boundaries of the banlieue, she finds refuge from more hostile French spaces such as those in central Paris.

More than just a physical space, the "immigrant" banlieue is a social construct that gives definition to France's white European society. French republicanism is based upon an imagined total equality of all citizens; these universalist pretentions are embedded in the capital city's

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4   Though a direct comparison of urban segregation between the United States and France is unfeasible due to a lack of comparability in measures, data, and concepts, scholars have found strong patterns of comparison (Quillian and Lagrange 2016). Taking socioeconomics into consideration, Quillian and Lagrange (2016) found much higher segregation in metropolitan areas in the United States than in France. Connecting socioeconomics to racial and ethnic segregation, Massey and Denton (1993) claim that racial and ethnic segregation, combined with racial inequality, contributes to the creation of high-poverty neighborhoods. Therefore, racial and ethnic segregation contributes to socioeconomic segregation by separating lower- and higher-income racial and ethnic groups (Quillian and Lagrange 2016). Tellingly, levels of racial and ethnic segregation are lower in France than in the United States (Préteceille 2011, 2012).

5   All names of research participants are pseudonyms.

"public" spaces—its "civic squares, government buildings, monuments, thoroughfares, and cultural centers," all of which convey a coherent identity and provide "citizens with common landmarks and places of collective memory" (Farrar 2008, p. 14). But this idealized citizenship relies upon the peripheralized Other that, for many French citizens, exists only through media images. Of course, the spatialized self-and-other construction of central Paris and its suburbs is complicated by the existence of a large population of Algerians living within the city limits. While there is clear evidence of residential segregation, not all people of Algerian or North African origin reside in peripheral enclaves. Of my research participants, only 15 of 73 currently live in banlieues (though many grew up in banlieues and moved to Paris as adults). The remaining 58 respondents live within the city of Paris, 50 of whom live in districts known to have significant immigrant or Algerian populations (mainly the 13th, 18th, and 20th arrondissements); but "significant" in these districts still means a minority—for example, the 18th arrondissement had an immigrant population of 27.5% in 2017 (INSEE 2020).

The questions raised here involve what residence in these more mixed neighborhoods means. Does it suggest a group of immigrants on their way to assimilation, who are comfortable interacting with the dominant cultural group? Does it signify fading differences between people of Algerian origin and dominant French society? Among study participants, those of Berber origin are more likely to live in central Paris than those who consider themselves Arab. Interestingly, Berbers tend to have lighter skin, hair, and eye color, and they enjoyed a degree of racial privilege under French colonial rule (Camiscioli 2009). They may thus find it easier to live in central Paris. Certainly, some of the Berber-identifying respondents commented on their ability to "fit in," with their pale skin, light eye color, and blond hair. For example, Soumia, a 20-year-old daughter of Berber immigrants said, "I look like them, so it is easier for me [to fit in]." Yet the openness of dominant space to particular groups of outsiders should not be understood as creating spaces that are somehow neutral or devoid of identities. Space and representations of spaces (like the banlieue) are important to these negotiations.

Relationships between place, identity, and belonging are complicated and fraught with tension, as people from immigrant backgrounds struggle to define who they are and where they belong in a national society that insists upon the neutrality and universalism of its values. Whereas some of my participants find "French" spaces hostile, others enter them freely; still others live almost entirely within the banlieue because they find the central spaces of Paris to be permeated with racism. As a result, while the central spaces of Paris are founded on a notion of universality, that only exists because these so-called "universal" spaces exclude people and cultures outside the assumed norms of a French/white/secular identity. Identities outside the norm are pushed into the banlieue.

The politics of belonging

These narratives show how Algerians in Paris balance their political existence and identity with their everyday lives. They reveal an interplay between accommodating French environments and spaces versus staying within immigrant or Algerian spaces. They illustrate a set of relationships to the urban environment in Paris that are marked by feelings of comfort and discomfort, a sense of belonging and/or exclusion. The city is a collection of different kinds of spaces in which certain people may be wholly or partially included or excluded. Algerians in the Paris metropolitan region read spaces as belonging to particular social groups. In some cases, Algerians construct safer, more accommodating spaces in the banlieue, creating multicultural spaces that at the same time embrace the Algerian aspect of their identity. In a spatial-dialectic approach, immigrants in the banlieue create diverse multicultural spaces, not exclusively "Algerian" communities. Thus, it is the space of the banlieue that embodies notions of universality and diversity. Alternatively, the spaces of central Paris that can be, and are, entered by Berbers and others, indicate that entrance is possible if the dominant identity of those spaces is not challenged—yet by their mere presence (physical and

political), Algerians are challenging the uniformly white and European character of the space as they traverse the spaces of inclusion and exclusion in Paris.

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