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Response to Minayo Nasiali's Review of Andrew Newman, *Landscape of Discontent: Urban Sustainability in Immigrant Paris.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. xliii + 253 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $105.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780816689620; $30.00 (pb.) ISBN 9780816689637.

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It is a pleasure and privilege to respond to Minayo Nasiali's review of *Landscape of Discontent*, especially since this type of dialogue is my favorite feature of H-France. It is also very meaningful to have a historian recognize the contributions made by my ethnography in a positive light. In my view, the most urgent questions that Nasiali raises are very much of the moment in France right now, and yet perennial as well: who gets to be called "French," what do people in France whose "Frenchness" is disputed call themselves, and what should they be called by others?

I will say from the outset, in writing a book on France as an American I was well aware that simply imposing what other Americans might find to be a reassuringly multicultural, twenty-first century-sounding parlance of difference onto the French context would muddle the picture, besides being a mortal sin for an ethnographer. So, I picked the best route I could through treacherous terrain. Credit is due to Nasiali for prompting me to write through this process again, as revisiting it has been fruitful for me (and I hope it will be to others on H-France.) My short answer to Naisaili's queries will no doubt sound disappointingly anthropological: I have sought to stay true to the terminology that was used in the northeast Paris neighborhoods where I work. I am, however, well aware that leaving it at that would be a cop out since, as scholars of contemporary France all know, identities and the terminology associated with them are contested, and the very terms people choose frequently betray their own positions on the matter.

On the very first day that I began my fieldwork, I walked around cafés, tea lounges, and various shops in the eighteenth and nineteenth arrondissements in classic social science fashion, asking simple questions that most people (correctly) took as provocations. Upon asking people "who lives here?", the answers I received then (and the terms I have heard many times since) are interesting. The most common answer I immediately received shifted the focus to the place from the people. People would often say this is a "*quartier populaire*" (for a discussion of this loaded term, see a recent article in *L'Humanité* [1]) or "*quartier étranger*" or a "*quartier immigré*" (at times, I chose to use this latter term, and will explain why in a moment.) Many residents were often described as "étrangers" or "immigrés" and more than few used these terms for themselves. From an older generation of people in northeast Paris (regardless of ethnicity), one could often hear the terms "les noirs" and "les arabes" though this once-commonplace racial terminology is increasingly considered crass if not offensive to many people (especially if used by outsiders). One would occasionally hear people identify by nation, as "algérien" or "sénégalais" for example. However, I noted that it seemed more common for people to explicitly say they were *from* Algeria or Senegal, rather than identifying with a nationality in the present moment. Overall, national self-labelling was highly situational. Most of the time, however, younger people and/or those are who

were more engaged in neighborhood life and politics inevitably used blanket terms such as "*africain*" or "*maghrébin.*" I also found it interesting that people frequently used the construction "*d'origine maghrébine*" for themselves and others, favoring a temporal/descent-based mode of identification (the construction I frequently favored in *Landscape of Discontent*). Finally, "*français*" was used in a manner that was mutually exclusive from the other categories mentioned here. Indeed, even if one was merely "from" Algeria but not Algerian per se, that did not make one *français* by default. There seemed to be a clear line in everyone's mind between the people called "*les Français*" and everyone else, regardless of how long one had been in the country.

Before delving further into the meanings of these terms and how I used them in the book, it is worth mentioning the terms that people avoid. No one, except for journalists or people unfamiliar with the area, describe it as a "Muslim neighborhood." Already in 2007, popular discourse was so Islamophobic that doing so was viewed as essentializing and drawing attention to one aspect of people's identities for purposes that were likely discriminatory. Instead, people tended to identify themselves and others based on religion only when the social situation explicitly demanded it. (This surprised me at first, because much of the literature on France treats the category of Muslims as almost self-apparent and even pseudo-ethnic from the outset.) Importantly, no one used the term "white" or "white people" in place of or as an alternative to "French" (something that Americans often do or ask me to do to clarify in this context). Nor did I ever hear anyone using hyphenated identities (i.e., French-Muslim or Arab-French), except for a newspaper article in the right-leaning newspaper *Le Point* that was specifically attempting to satirize and discredit local activists as corrupted by American-styled identity politics.

French assimilationism is stereotypically described in a humanistic, republican fashion, as if to be French one simply needs to adopt French culture and language, regardless of one's supposed race, religion, or ethnicity. There is now a veritable cottage industry of scholars pointing out that in actual practice this does not always happen. When I listened to people talk about themselves I found another issue at play, however. Most people I know from my fieldwork were in no hurry to explicitly claim "Frenchness" for themselves, in contrast to what most commentators seem to presume. For example, one person with whom I have spent a great deal of time is a Turkish woman who has lived in Paris since the 1960s. Outwardly, she is what many people would consider "assimilated," but only when I listened to our interviews later on did I catch that even she always refers to herself (and her friends) as *étrangers* and never as French, and she spends a fair amount of time invoking her Turkish roots.

Similarly, another person I interviewed on several occasions came from Burkina Faso at the age of two and has lived in France his entire life. He has no interest in ever visiting Burkina Faso, but he has never described himself as "French" to me, and ironically he works for a government office that deals with issues arising from integration and youth! Instead, he only describes himself as born in Burkina Faso, or as "*issus de l'immigration*" (not surprisingly, much of his interview time deals with his search for who he is, and he finds his answer, not through any national identity, but through an immersion in hip-hop subculture and political activism). It should be noted here that neither person, nor anyone else I met, harbored any hostility towards "French culture." To me, it simply seemed that explicitly claiming "Frenchness" would require relinquishing a significant aspect of who they were, and in particular leaving behind some their unique personal and family history. People seem to recognize that within assimilation there lurks, however implicitly, a colonial tendency towards erasure. At the same time, however, most people I knew had bought into the basic tenets of republicanism enough not to really show any interest in Anglo/American idioms of hyphenated identity. Rather, people seemed to have carved out a space for themselves within this zone of liminality in which they have negotiated a sense of belonging. In fact, much of the book can be read as examining the variety of ways in which people seek to do just that, by emphasizing the importance of city, neighborhood, and landscape.

So, I was not going to render people as French who in their own worldview might best be described as "not exactly" French, since doing so would erase an an important aspect who they were (and in some

cases, hide processes of discrimination and unequal treatment as color-blind discourses often tend to do). Nor was I going to "Americanize" their identities (and hence their politics). The solution I found was to pick from among the terms people used in everyday speech that expressed who they were but still captured the ambiguous, liminal space they occupied in the present. Using terms such as "origins" (as Maghrebi or otherwise) also captures the importance of deep connections between the past, present, and place (with empire mediating these connections). After all, when people speak about where they are from, they draw on temporality and the importance of history in the construction of the political present. At the same time, for all of its problems, I chose to retain the locally used terminology for "French." I never used the terms "white" (except when I referred to myself) or "non-white" because people never used the words for each other, and even more importantly, "whiteness" is an idiom deeply tied to American history. (Interestingly, as I point out in the book, many French residents were quick to self-efface their own Frenchness by invoking regional and other identities in a number of ways that is reminiscent of what "white" Americans often do.) Lastly, when referring to the neighborhood, I used a number of terms. "Multiethnic" was often a preferred adjective for me as it expressed the diversity of the place in a neutral fashion. However, "immigrant neighborhood" provided a sense of historical process and it also reflected the ambiguity that was at the heart of the place.

At the crux of the naming issue lies a profound tension between the social scientist's mission to cut through ideology and get at the heart of the issue and the ethnographic imperative to avoid transposing one's own cultural categories onto another society. I sought to use terms that emerged from the field, and I picked the ones that seemed most appropriate. To be sure, some terminology can seem problematic (for example, I still do not like to render one category of people as "French" as opposed to other people in the neighborhood, but it would be disingenuous to paper over the ways people speak in everyday life). Nasiali is right to foreground the importance of empire in the creation and continued reproduction of these categories. In *Landscape of Discontent* I sought to illustrate the continued visibility and effects of empire in everyday life in France, and I deeply appreciate her call for me to expand upon that goal.

NOTE:

[1] "Quartier populaire: qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?", *l'Humanité* (1 avril 2016), consulted 12 July 2016, http://www.humanite.fr/quartier-populaire-quest-ce-que-ca-veut-dire-603535.

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