

## REFLECTING RESPECT: TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES OF MUSLIM FRENCH YOUTH

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### Abstract

This article explores how ideologies derived from North African culture are transformed in local expressions of identity among Muslim French adolescents. Naturally-occurring interactional data were collected among adolescents of primarily Algerian descent living in a *cité* (a low-income housing project) outside Paris. The study shows that the local identity practices of Muslim French teens articulate with transcultural ideologies of identity, but in contradictory rather than wholly consistent ways. Specifically, teens in the study circulate seemingly static cultural ideologies pertaining to generation, gender, and sexuality, but also routinely challenge these ideologies in interactions with their peers. Through the innovative interactional genre of “parental name calling,” adolescents articulate their ambivalent relationship to the North African-derived cultural value they call *le respect* (‘respect’). In the process, they negotiate their own beliefs and practices regarding generation, gender, and sexuality in accommodation and opposition to their parents’ values.

**Keywords:** Muslims; Youth; French; Names; Taboo; Cultural change; Immigration; Interaction.

### 1. Introduction

The March 2004 ban on Muslim headscarves and other “ostensible” signs of religious expression in French schools demonstrated the centrality of Muslim youth, and particularly Muslim girls, to contemporary deliberations about French identity and national community (Bowen 2007: 7). In the logic of this anti-veiling law and other popular representations, Muslim religious practice, especially covering the hair, is constructed as a threat to a secular French identity. At the time the ban was issued, Patrick Weil, an architect of the law and a member of Jacques Chirac’s Presidential Commission on *Laïcité* described the underlying logic of the commission’s decision in an online article entitled “A Nation in Diversity: France, Muslims, and the Headscarf”:<sup>1</sup>

...we [the Presidential Commission] faced a difficult choice with respect to young Muslim girls wearing the headscarf in state

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<sup>1</sup> *Laïcité* does not correspond exactly to the English term *secularism* due to historical factors dating back to the French Revolution. Since then, *laïcité* has been interpreted as protection of the State from the coercive effects of religion and clergy. In contrast, secularism in the American context is usually envisioned as the freedom of individuals from a state religion.

schools. Either we left the situation as it was, and thus *supported a situation that denied freedom of choice to those – the very large majority – who do not want to wear the headscarf*; or we endorsed a law that removed freedom of choice from those who do want to wear it. [Weil 2004; my emphasis]

In this description of the law's intended effects, the Commission claims to protect passive Muslim girls from the supposedly coercive effects of the headscarf and in so doing constructs religious Muslim practice and secular French identity as in conflict and mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Muslim girls are here constructed as passive victims of their own religious culture, a stereotype that widely circulates in France and the West generally. Yet girls and boys who simultaneously occupy Muslim and French social identities challenge such stereotypes by actively (re-)interpreting these identities through innovative cultural practices.

In this article, I explore how transnational ideologies derived from North African culture are transformed in local expressions of identity among Muslim French adolescents. My goal here and generally in my research on teenagers of Algerian descent living on the outskirts of Paris is to give voice to girls and boys growing up at the intersection of Arab Muslim and French cultures. Specifically, I examine how the local identity practices of Muslim French teens articulate with transnational and national ideologies of identity, but do so in contradictory rather than wholly consistent ways. In my data, teens circulate seemingly static transnational ideologies pertaining to generation, gender, and sexuality, but also routinely challenge these ideologies in interactions with their peers.

To explore these issues, I turn to a particular communicative practice among Muslim French adolescents of primarily Algerian descent living in a *cité* (a low-income housing project) just outside Paris. Through the innovative interactional genre that I term "parental name calling," adolescents articulate their ambivalent relationship to the North African-derived cultural value they call *le respect* ('respect'). In the process, they negotiate their own beliefs and practices regarding generation, gender, and sexuality in accommodation and resistance to their parents' values. By engaging in parental name calling, adolescents subvert a name taboo - the avoidance of given names in personal address - that is widely prescribed across North Africa and that is practiced by their parents. In parental name calling, adolescents irreverently use the first name of a peer's parent in a public setting, and thereby breach the boundaries between play and insult. Apart from the public voicing of a parent's name, parental name calling is not a formulaic or codified speech event, but rather takes different forms depending upon the speakers and the context at hand. In performances of this genre, adolescents symbolically evoke *le respect* by actively subverting respectful forms of address in peer interactions.

In the simplest form of parental name calling that I observed during roughly two years of fieldwork conducted in 1999 to 2000 and then in 2004 and 2006, grade school children under ten years old shouted the first names of one another's parents back and forth. Adolescents, however, crafted more elaborate verbal contexts in which to embed the names of their peers' parents and often did so with a mixture of humor and insult. In certain cases, adolescent girls mockingly referred to one another directly by their mothers' names. The teasing, playful quality of parental name calling among adolescents also extended to the practice of embedding personal names into innovative

linguistic contexts. For instance, in one lengthy performance that I recorded in 2000, two teenaged girls and one boy used a classic 1980s French rock song by Daniel Balavoine, entitled *Le Chanteur* ('The Singer'), to embed one another's parents' names. Mimicking the song's original verse, 'I introduce myself, my name is Henry' (*Je me présente, je m'appelle Henri*), adolescents embedded the names of their peers' mothers into the 'Henry' slot, using revised lyrics replete with sexual and scatological innuendo.

Given my focus on parental name calling as a form of symbolic transformation, I would like to briefly explain the spirit in which I have entitled this article "Reflecting Respect." Although the verb *reflect* is often used to mean '(visually) reproduce', I am using the term in its more literal definition 'to throw or bend back' and thus, as with a mirror, to show a reverse rather than identical image. That is, by performing the genre of parental name calling adolescents take the social rules for respectful address and bend them to create a new type of symbolic expression among their peers.

I consider such transformative practices among French Muslim teens to be "transcultural" (Bucholtz 2002:543) or "multicultural" (Amit-Talai 1995: 223) for the ways that they combine multiple cultural referents. As much as possible, I refrain from using the more common term *transnational* because it too often implies the mere movement and replication of forms from the "home" country in a new national setting. By using *transcultural*, I wish to evoke a process whereby a new cultural form is created by transforming an original cultural practice and then applying the innovative form to new contexts. In particular, I argue that through performances of parental name calling adolescents appropriate a North African cultural practice, a name taboo, and transform it into a new expressive form that is central to identity construction within their peer groups.

The study of youth has a long history in the social sciences, but only relatively recently has research addressed the linguistic expression of identity among adolescents (e.g., Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou 2003; Bailey 2000; Bucholtz 1999; Coates 1999; Eckert 1989; Heller 1999; Lo 1999; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Pujolar 2001).<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the practice-based approach has been instrumental for conducting research on language and identity that avoids presuming membership based upon predetermined social categories (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Working within the practice-based paradigm, theorists of youth language and culture have noted that communicative styles are central organizing features of emergent identities among adolescents. Beyond solidifying group membership, communicative styles provide adolescents the means to express, re-imagine, and sometimes subvert social hierarchies of age, class, race, and gender. In this way, the elaboration of social identities among young people is a process that occurs most dynamically in everyday expressive forms. Accordingly, this article takes a practice-based approach by analyzing a particular communicative practice in order to examine identity production among Muslim French adolescents.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In this article, I alternate among *youth*, *adolescents*, and less frequently, *teens*. In doing so, I recognize adolescence as a life stage and youth as an analytic category, after Bucholtz's distinction (2002; see also Amit-Talai 1995: 223-5; Durham 2000). Both notions, adolescence and youth, are important to my research in that I analyze communicative practices among my consultants as integral both to how they experience adolescence as a life stage in ways typical of other teens and, simultaneously, to how they produce youthful cultural forms contingent upon their positioning as French Muslims living in a *cit  *.

<sup>3</sup> The study of language in ethnographic context is often missing in scholarship on French *cit  s*. Rather, studies of youth language in these contexts have often taken the form of slang dictionaries that propose to translate this mysterious new "language" to a middle-class white audience. These texts tend to construct French youth in *cit  s* as "linguistically deviant" and so reproduce popular stereotypes of these

Simultaneously, a current preoccupation of youth language research is to understand how large-scale societal changes such as modernity, migration, and globalization affect how young people experience adolescence around the world (Auer & Dirim 2003; Giampapa 2001; Hewitt 1986; Pennycook 2003; Pichler 2001; Rampton 1995; Skapoulli 2004; Vermeij 2004). An examination of the effects of global change upon young people's expressive forms reveals contradictory processes. Tracing the origins of cultural borrowing among youth is increasingly complex since, as Bucholtz (2002: 542) puts it, "many of the resources of present-day *bricoleurs* are in a certain sense self-appropriations - borrowings and adaptations of one's own cultural background to create new youth styles," but the same time, many of the "traditions" adopted by youth depend upon creative reinterpretations of the past and so involve "a kind of neotraditionalism in which elements of the heritage culture are selectively appropriated and resignified." With regard to communicative styles and their practice among French adolescents of North African descent, both innovative and traditionalizing patterns of cultural production are occurring simultaneously. Adolescents selectively appropriate and adapt a communicative form from their own background (in this case, a name taboo) and transform it into a means to express their social positioning as simultaneously young, Arab, and French. In addition to this innovation, the practice of parental name calling involves neotraditionalism in the form of *le respect* ('respect') through the selective borrowing and re-interpretation of a North African-derived cultural norm in a diasporic context.

## 2. Ethnographic contexts for parental name calling

The data explored in this article was collected during the course of a larger ethnographic project on language practices and social identity among adolescents of primarily Algerian descent in Chemin de l'Ile, a neighborhood located west of Paris in Nanterre. Central to France's industrial boom in the 1950s and 1960s, Nanterre has had a long history with immigration generally and with Algerian immigration in particular. Male Algerian workers, among them several grandfathers of adolescents in this study, were recruited by factories in Nanterre and lived in *bidonvilles* 'shantytowns' located about a mile away from Chemin de l'Ile. This neighborhood is today predominated by clusters of low-income housing projects called *cités*, and consequently the neighborhood is itself often referred to as a *cité*. The label *cité* invokes for most French listeners a few infamous low-income housing projects that the media has repeatedly represented as breeding grounds for crime and drugs, often positing immigration as the cause of the former two problems (Bonnaïfous 1991).

The intertwined histories of North African migration and public housing have produced new French subjects through shared experiences of community in diaspora as well as through experiences of racial and spatial marginalization. Second- and third-generation descendants of North African immigrants today call themselves *les rebeus*,

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speakers as un-assimilated or "foreign" (Boyer 1997; Tetreault 2002). French anthropologist David LePoutre (1997) has conducted one of the few in-depth ethnographic studies of language practices within a *cité*. This work is innovative for its description of adolescent speech genres and linguistic rituals. However, LePoutre's emphasis on obscenities and physical aggression, combined with his focus on male, non-white adolescents, serves to reinforce a dominant image of *cité* youth as socially dangerous.

phonetically altering the sounds in *arabe* 'Arab' in a type of slang called *verlan*.<sup>4</sup> Just as these new French subjects have created a label for themselves that reflects their French and Arab cultural origins, *les rebeus* have combined working-class French and North African cultural and linguistic practices to create emergent communicative styles. The adolescents who participated in this study were generally located between the second and third generations in that they tended to have one parent who had migrated as an adult from North Africa and another of North African descent who had been born or had grown up in France. Due to their varied competence in Arabic - there were very few speakers of the Algerian Berber language Kabyle (Taqbaylit) in the neighborhood - adolescents tended to speak French with one another while incorporating Arabic loanwords.<sup>5</sup>

Parallel to the spatial and social marginalization of French housing projects, academic research and journalistic publications describe an emergent, youthful *cit  * identity with attendant dress, music, and speech styles.<sup>6</sup> These new French subjects, generally called 'youth of the *cit  *' (*les jeunes de la cit  *), are depicted as overwhelmingly male, non-white - that is, generally Arab or Black - and violent. Related linguistic scholarship is equally problematic for the ways that it contributes to the notion that there is a uniform "language" emerging in *cit  s* across France whose speakers are predominantly male (e.g., Goudailler 1997; Pierre-Adolphe et al 1995; Seguin and Teillard 1996). The frequent emphasis on adolescent males' use of vernacular styles, for example slang and *verlan*, and competitive interactional genres is strikingly similar to how early American sociolinguists constructed "language varieties of adolescent male gangs as authentic or core" in African American communities in the 1960s (Morgan 1999: 29).

With regard to more complex verbal styles typical of *cit  s*, those that are often analyzed by scholars include *les vanes*, a genre that involves mother insults and which is similar in form and usage to "the dozens," an African American speech genre (Mitchell-Kernan 1971). Popularized during the 1990s in a series of books including *Ta M  re!* ('Your Mother!') and *Ta M  re 2! la R  ponse* ('Your Mother 2! The Response') by the Moroccan-born, French-raised comedian Arthur, these mother insults and their apparent appeal for *cit  * youth have received a great deal of public attention. For example, LePoutre (1997) notes the influence of African American speech genres, American rap, and American-influenced French rap upon *les vanes* in French *cit  s*. Similarly, adolescents in Chemin de l'  le engage in genres such as *les vanes* and thus participate in a global, hip-hop-influenced youth subculture.

However, in the case of parental name calling, transnational North African norms for respectful address constitute a central linguistic and cultural influence. By

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<sup>4</sup> *Verlan* refers to French slang that is composed by inverting the syllables or sounds of words; indeed, the term *verlan* derives from *l'envers*, which means 'inverted'. *Verlan* did not originate in *cit  s* and is a very old French word game that can be verified as a form of spoken jargon as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, although evidence of it as a literary device exists as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Lefkowitz 1991: 50-51). Currently, however, its use is popularly depicted as emblematic of young people living in *cit  s*.

<sup>5</sup> In some cases, adolescents spoke Arabic at home. According to my observations in these contexts, girls tended to be more fluent speakers than boys, probably due to the comparatively large amount of time spent with female relatives in domestic settings.

<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, depictions of *cit  * life are being produced by inhabitants of these communities themselves, including films, novels, and academic publications. However, most representations of *cit  s* are still produced by individuals living outside them.

engaging in parental name calling, adolescents both foreground and subvert a North African cultural value, that is, the avoidance of personal names. Norms of respect prescribe avoiding speaking the first name of a non-relative, and sometimes of a relative as well, particularly if that person is older than the speaker or not of the same gender. Euphemisms help North African Arabic speakers circumvent given names such as the common expression ‘How’s the house?’ (*Kaifa dar?*), which a man might use to ask another non-kin male about his wife. These practices point to the ways that respectful forms of address are codified in relation to cultural norms regarding gender, age, and sexual propriety.

Following these rules for politeness, speakers avoid indiscreet reference to non-kin that might offend cultural sensibilities. In parental name calling, however, teens intentionally do the exact opposite, that is, they publicly voice the name of a peer’s parent in order to playfully tease, incite anger, or exercise social control. In this regard, parental name calling constitutes a particularly important discursive genre for adolescents to articulate cultural ties to both their immigrant origins and their emergent adolescent subculture. Through practicing the genre, French adolescents of North African descent construct their peer group both in relation to cultural ideals of *le respect* and in contrast to those ideals.

Furthermore, performances of parental name calling highlight adolescents’ experiences of both cultural continuity and disjuncture in relation to their parents. These performances constitute expressions of in-group knowledge among peers that are contingent upon foregrounding the parent-child relationship. As verbal routines in which adolescents symbolically evoke and defend parental identities, instances of parental name calling are a way to both individuate from their parents and create a common feeling of belonging as French teens of North African descent. In solidifying adolescent subculture and social identity, these verbal performances are central in two ways: (1) they are public performances of knowledge about one’s peers that constitute the group and (2) they symbolically pose parents and adolescents in oppositional and yet dependent relationships.

Semiotically, kin-based name calling functions as a personalized form of deixis to symbolically “point” at an individual peer and his or her parents simultaneously. Hanks defines deixis as “the boundary between language and gesture” (1996: 5). Like more conventional forms of deictic language such as *now*, *here*, *I*, and *this*, the act of embedding the name of a peer’s parent into an ongoing interaction demands a context-rich interpretation by participants. Furthermore, like other forms of deixis, parental name calling not only relies upon context for meaning, it also creates a context of meaning for ongoing interaction.

My own introduction to parental name calling occurred one afternoon when I was teaching a voluntary English class in Chemin de l’Île at a neighborhood association. This association was typical of other neighborhood associations in *cités* because it blended scholastic help with social support - the association not only organized nightly tutoring sessions for students of all ages, but also social outings, cultural activities, vacations for members, and drug prevention campaigns.

The usual participants in my class were a group of middle-school girls (ages 14 and 15) who were friends and lived in a cluster of nearby buildings. On this particular day, however, a 13-year-old boy named Ahmed came to class, to the dismay of the girls

present.<sup>7</sup> Their relationship with this slightly younger boy was characterized by a kind of adversarial teasing typical between younger adolescent girls and boys in the neighborhood. To engage my students in a conversation in English, I attempted a session of role play, using one of their favorite TV shows, “Beverly Hills 90210,” as a model. I began to list the names of the show’s characters, eliciting help from the others: “Brandon, Kelly, Dylan, and - ” to which Ahmed decisively replied, “Habib” with a grin. I laughed, thinking that Ahmed was making a clever statement about the lack of Arabic names on the list. Ahmed looked startled and then asked me, “*Tu piges?*” (‘You understand?’). I initially said yes, but when I explained my interpretation of his joke, Ahmed shook his head and explained to me, “No, Habib is the name of someone’s father.” I only later understood that the teasing was directed at another student, Mina, whose father’s name is Habib. I had noticed that a significant look had passed between Mina and Ahmed without understanding why at the time. Knowing that responding would reveal her and her father as the target of the teasing, Mina chose to remain silent. This very brief, very embedded example of parental name calling illustrates how performances of the genre can function as covert communication in mixed adult/adolescent settings. With this type of embedded name calling, covert challenges are destined for a particular person in the ongoing context, and only those individuals with personal knowledge about the addressee will understand the reference.

At a more global level, however, instances of parental name calling demonstrate how adolescents elaborate their own cultural understandings of *le respect*, but in unexpected and often contradictory ways. In the next example, two girls both reproduce and challenge ideologies regarding behavioral norms for women in their community and in so doing actively negotiate understandings of gender and generation. The performance is interesting for the ways that the instigator discursively reinforces a conservative gender ideology even as she undermines this discourse in practice.

### 3. *Le respect* (‘respect’) and *le foulard* (‘the headscarf’)

One evening I was sitting in a playground near a group of apartments with several girls, when another girl, Djamila, age 15, walked up to chat. Djamila, like the other girls, lived in the small 1960s apartment complex, which was the first public housing built in the neighborhood. These buildings stood only four stories tall and sat cozily clustered around the small playground. Upon seeing her approach, Mabrouka (age 14) immediately reported to Djamila that her mother had burned something in her kitchen and the smoke had traveled all the way to the playground. Mabrouka then rendered a bodily pantomime of Djamila’s mother, who had supposedly used a headscarf, or *foulard*, to shake the smoke out of her kitchen. While she leaned forward and waved her arms up and down, Mabrouka added a verbal caption for the unflattering image she had created for Djamila’s mother, whose first name was Zahra: “*Zahra avec son foulard en train de le secouer*” (‘Zahra with her headscarf, shaking it out’).

Djamila said nothing but was visibly upset by Mabrouka’s account. Mabrouka apparently interpreted her look as an accusation of wrongdoing, for she responded: “*Ne t’inquiètes pas*” (‘Don’t worry’). Rather than accept Mabrouka’s mitigation of the seriousness of her teasing, Djamila said to the rest of us, ‘Mabrouka always does this

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<sup>7</sup> The names of consultants that appear in this article are pseudonyms.

kind of thing to me, so that I'll worry and everything' (*"Elle me fait toujours ce genre de truc, Mabrouka, pour que je m'inquiète et tout"*). With no resolution or further commentary, the girls' discussion about the event ended there in cold silence. This performance of parental name calling highlights the delicate balance that adolescents negotiate between joke and affront in such teasing. In this case, teasing becomes insult through its interpretation by the listener, Djamila, and not specifically by any generic codes or inherent limits to these speech events.

In spite of the lack of interpretation embedded within the interaction itself, ethnographic knowledge provides some clues as to why Djamila would think Mabrouka's story was cause for 'worry'. The verbal and physical imagery incites affront because of the public spectacle that Djamila's mother has supposedly made of herself, which might compromise her 'respect'. Mabrouka describes Djamila's mother Zahra as inappropriately crossing from the private domestic sphere to public outdoor space in two ways: first, by supposedly burning something whose smell travels all the way to the playground, and second, by hanging out of the window for everyone in the neighborhood to see.

Thus, Mabrouka's performance of Djamila's mother is a means to depict her as behaving in socially inappropriately ways and hence to call her respectability into question. In addition to Zahra's unseemly encroachment into public space by hanging out the window and spreading smoke throughout the neighborhood, her supposed use of a *foulard* or headscarf is particularly troubling to notions of *le respect*. A *foulard* (*hijab* in Arabic) is a personal item of women's clothing that among many Muslims symbolizes women's modesty before God (Abu-Lughod 1986: 108). It is quite surprising then, that Zahra would use a headscarf to shake away smoke, rather than a kitchen towel (*torchon*). Mabrouka's choice of wording is particularly notable since Djamila's mother did not, in fact, wear a headscarf, a point that Mabrouka may have been trying to highlight, since her own mother did. In this performance of parental name calling, Mabrouka draws upon religious symbolism in order to depict Djamila's mother as acting in gender-inappropriate ways.

In addition to religious symbolism, Mabrouka's performance of Djamila's mother seems to draw upon symbolism common to French anti-immigrant rhetoric. The accusation that Zahra allowed her burned cooking to infiltrate public space recalls the infamous 1991 speech by the then-Paris mayor Jacques Chirac that the 'French worker' (read "ethnically French male citizen") living in *cités* found it difficult to cope with "the sound and the smell" of his immigrant neighbors (*Le Monde* 1991). Such highly negative depictions of supposedly typical immigrant behavior circulate in public discourses in Chemin de l'Ile and elsewhere in France.<sup>8</sup> This exchange demonstrates how children of immigrants appropriate these discourses for their own in-group purposes. In so doing, they create unflattering depictions of one another's parents that draw upon ideals of *le respect* from transnational Algerian cultural models as well as upon bourgeois French notions of "appropriate" public behavior.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> However, in a demonstration of the power of discourse and its ambivalence, this particular highly negative slogan was subsequently reassigned a pro-immigrant political meaning when the multiethnic music group *Zebda* produced a CD of the same name: *Le bruit et l'odeur* ('The noise and the smell').

<sup>9</sup> At the time that the above-mentioned music recording was made, grade school children across France participated in a national education project to teach students 'civility' and the behaviors of 'good



*Le respect* is a set of behaviors that my teenaged consultants construct as commensurate with proper cultural and religious practices derivative of North African and Muslim beliefs. At the same time, the set of moral discourses that constitute *le respect* in Chemin de l'Ile and in other *cités* is central to the experience of being Muslim and Arab within the diasporic context of France. That is, *le respect* is not just a reproduction of Arab-Muslim values that are imported wholesale from North Africa but a set of moral discourses and practices that emerge in France, and particularly in the stigmatized spaces of French *cités*. Thus adolescents in Chemin de l'Ile construct 'respect' as a major axis of cultural difference between generations (experienced via both age and immigration), but also between Muslim and French values.

For example, once when I was on an outing to Paris with a group of adolescent girls, we passed by a street famous for prostitution. One of the girls present, Mina, exclaimed in disgust, 'There is no respect here!' ("*Il n'y a pas du respect ici!*"). In framing her aversion to prostitution through the cultural code of 'respect', Mina articulates her own moral standing as differential not only to the selling of sexual acts but also to a French society that legally allows such acts. In this way, Muslim adolescents like Mina who are growing up in highly stigmatized working-class neighborhoods create codes of morality for themselves and their communities in contradistinction to "French" values and cultural practices.

In adolescents' discourse, *le respect* is used to describe the behavior of both genders, although as a normative behavioral code it is applied differently to the actions of men and women as well as different generations. Adolescents in Chemin de l'Ile interpret *le respect* as a social code that prescribes adherence to behavioral standards including showing deference for one's elders. Its local practice is loosely based upon an age and gender hierarchy typical of North African and Arab culture more generally (Abu-Lughod 1986). As Abu-Lughod notes, among Arab Bedouins a similar social hierarchy is modeled on a vision of the family in which those who are socially powerful have responsibilities to protect those who are socially weak (1986:81). Similarly, in Chemin de l'Ile, *le respect* involves the expectation that supposedly less powerful groups will be protected by those who are potentially stronger or more powerful. For example, as Salima, a 12-year-old girl, explained to me, 'Muslims, they don't hit. We Muslims - the men - those they respect the most, it's the old men, the women, and the children. You can't hit women. You can't raise a hand against them'.<sup>10</sup>

In Salima's depiction, 'respect' is constructed both relationally and hierarchically; old men are the most respected, followed by women and children. Instead of exclusively depending upon others to receive *le respect*, adult men hold the power to confer it upon others; they are expected to give respect to those who are more socially vulnerable than they, namely, elderly men, women, and children. Thus the power to give respect to others (thereby marking them as socially vulnerable or weak) is a power that is unevenly distributed; men hold more power to give or withhold respect than women, just as middle-aged adults of both genders can give or withhold respect from the young or the elderly.

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neighbors', undoubtedly a response to the perception that 'new' French citizens were not learning and adopting unwritten codes of *la politesse* ('politeness').

<sup>10</sup> "*Les musulmans, ils ne tapent pas. Nous, les musulmans - les hommes - ceux qu'ils respectent le plus c'est les vieux, les femmes, et les enfants. Les femmes, tu ne peux pas les taper. Tu ne peux pas lever la main contre elles.*"

Generally, *le respect* refers to behavioral expectations that apply to both adolescent girls and boys, though again in ways contingent upon local gender ideologies. For adolescents of both genders, maintaining *le respect* dictates refraining from illicit behaviors such as dating, smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs, particularly within view of older relatives and adults of one's parents' or grandparents' generation. In Chemin de l'Ile, *le respect* involves a higher level of social constraint for girls, since they are expected by their parents and peers to attain respect by presenting a public image that they are sexually unavailable and inactive.

In contrast to the social power of granting respect to another, ideological discourses circulated in Chemin de l'Ile construct girls' and women's power as the ability to attain the respect of others, a power that is largely tied to the way that they control their own sexuality and their reputations by limiting time spent with non-kin men. Some strategies that girls and young women used to gain respect in Chemin de l'Ile included limiting time in outdoor public space within the neighborhood and avoiding or appearing to avoid dating. For example, one young woman of 18 explained to me that she had decided to attend high school in another *cité* several neighborhoods away because that afforded her more social freedom and an increased ability to control her reputation. By limiting access to observations of her behavior in her own *cité*, she was largely able to prevent the circulation of damaging rumors about her. Moreover, her parents were pleased to have her attend the other high school because it was academically far superior to the local school.

Similarly, adolescents in Chemin de l'Ile practice strategic measures in relation to dating. Although the majority of adolescents that I encountered were starting to date between the ages of 14 to 16, information about whom they were dating was highly controlled, especially in relation to parents. Thus adolescents reinterpret the behavioral code *le respect* in ambivalent ways. By covertly dating, they undermine the intention of *le respect*, that is, to prevent premarital romantic relationships, and yet refrain from overtly contradicting their parents' wishes. Adolescents thereby engage in an interesting combination of resistance and accommodation to their parents' morality and both reproduce and subvert normative notions of *le respect*. Adolescents' complicated relationship to *le respect* is evidence of the ways that they are crafting their own emergent morality vis-à-vis sexuality, which simultaneously converges with and diverges from that of their parents' generation.

One forum in which adolescents articulate their complex relationship to *le respect* is in performances of parental name calling. For instance, in the above example, Mabrouka evokes *le respect* as a set of behavioral expectations for Djamila's mother, Zahra. At the same time, through her use of familiar reference for Djamila's mother and in her description of Zahra's supposedly disrespectful behavior, Mabrouka herself flouts cultural expectations for the respect of her elders. Thus, even as she is prescribing respectful behavior for Djamila's mother, Mabrouka is subverting these behavioral norms herself. The contradictions inherent in Mabrouka's performance demonstrate that parental name calling is a way in which these adolescents may discursively reproduce conservative gender norms at the same time that they challenge these ideas in practice. In the next section, I further explore the conflicting interactional norms of adolescents and their parents that are evoked in parental name calling. In the example that I address below, the interactional expectations of teenagers are explicitly compared to the projected expectations of a parent when a parental name calling performance is observed by a nearby mother.

#### 4. Giving voice to parents, symbolically pointing at peers

As demonstrated throughout this article, performances of parental name calling constitute an opportunity for adolescents to negotiate social identity by symbolically evoking community-based ideals of 'respect' and simultaneously flouting these ideals. Immigrant parents are constructed simultaneously as worthy of respectful demeanor and as a potential embarrassment to their adolescent children. While it might be argued that adolescents in postindustrial societies generally tend to express social ambivalence toward their parents, adolescents of North African descent articulate this ambivalence in ways commensurate with their experience as second- and third-generation French Muslims.

This ambivalence can be conceptualized in terms of two contradictory elaborations of social face (Goffman 1967), both articulated through the notion of *le respect*. In one sense, parental name calling demonstrates adolescents' creation of interactional structures with which to challenge the respectability and thus the social face of others' parents while defending that of their own parents. For example, when parental name calling escalated to insulting references involving sexual suggestion, adolescent targets sometimes resorted to directly insulting the instigator or to physical fighting. And yet in instigating parental name calling exchanges, adolescents, and particularly girls, subvert a basic principle of *le respect*, namely that only the socially powerful may defend the respect of the socially weak. Here, adolescent girls and boys cast themselves in the powerful role of defending their parents' respectability even though, according to a traditionalist reading of *le respect*, such a power would normally be reserved for males, and especially adult males. Furthermore, performances of name calling construct immigrant parents as threatening to adolescents' own social face. In the previous example, by depicting Djamila's mother as clumsy (burning food), immodest (hanging out of her window for all to see), and culturally inappropriate (using her headscarf to shake out smoke), Mabrouka not only challenges the respectability of Djamila's mother but challenges Djamila's own social face.

In the following example, the theme of the socially clumsy immigrant parent is repeated. In the excerpt below, Nora and Béatrice, both 14-year-old girls, initiate a parental name calling performance directed at a boy of roughly the same age, Bilal, as he passes by on a bicycle. At the time of the episode, the girls are sitting chatting in a playground with a girl of 15, Fatima. Just after Nora and Béatrice call out to Bilal, Fatima criticizes Nora for behaving this way in front of Nora's own mother, who is sitting with a few other women at the other end of the playground. The example thus contrasts adolescent norms for interactions within their peer group with the projected interactional expectations of parents. As such, this performance demonstrates how adolescents actively negotiate divergent norms of 'respect' in relation to themselves and their parents.

In the example, Nora and Béatrice revoice the embarrassing reported speech of Bilal's parents.<sup>11</sup> They are in fact representing speech from a previous incident in which Bilal's mother, Yassina Hachani, supposedly publicly embarrassed herself by approaching two adolescents involved in an argument. Trying to resolve the situation,

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<sup>11</sup> Reported speech is a revoiced utterance from a prior interaction, which, as Tannen (1989) notes, is not necessarily a faithful rendering of the original utterance.

she reportedly uttered the words, 'My name is Yassina Hachani. Is there a problem?' Nora and Béatrice reuse the words purportedly uttered by Bilal's mother in order to embarrass him due to her supposed naïveté. In actual practice, Mrs. Hachani's use of her own name when speaking to two adolescents does not break the preference for avoiding personal names for address in that she is referring to herself rather than using a name to address another; furthermore, she is conversing with young people, who themselves are less worthy of 'respect' due to age.

And yet for the adolescents she purportedly addressed or who were listening nearby, the use of her full given and last name in public presents an opportunity to tease her son, Bilal, for her supposed lack of decorum. Again, in an inversion of 'respectful' interactional norms, Mrs. Hachani's words were considered amusing not because, in using her own name to address teenagers, she had actually broken polite rules for address, but because she had flouted adolescents' expectations that parents refrain from using personal names and thus maintain social anonymity within the neighborhood. Indeed, these adolescents' liberal interpretation of 'respectful' demeanor and its supposed infringement by Mrs. Hachani is evidenced in the revoicing of similar hypothetical speech for Bilal's father, Mr. Hachani, even though he was purportedly not present at the original dispute and so did not name himself in public at all.

The example is further enriched by another peer's negative evaluation of Nora and Béatrice's performance. As already noted, Fatima, a slightly older adolescent who is sitting nearby, critiques Nora for her loud performance of parental name calling within viewing and hearing distance of her own mother. Fatima verbally projects Nora's mother's negative evaluation of this exchange, claiming that she wonders 'what is wrong' with her daughter. The fact that Fatima admonishes her peer, Nora, to show respect to her mother illustrates the contradictions of adolescents' constructions of *le respect*, which they alternately challenge and reinforce within their peer groups.

**"My name is Yassina Hachani"<sup>12</sup>**

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| (1) Nora     | <i>Je m'appelle Yassina Hachani! Y a un problème!? Y a un problème!?</i><br>My name is Yassina Hachani! Is there a problem?! Is there a problem?! |
| (2) Béatrice | <i>Yassina Hachani! Y a un problème!?</i><br>Yassina Hachani! Is there a problem?!  |
| (3) Bilal    | [XXXXXX]<br>[inaudible speech]  |
| (4) Nora     | <i>Je m'appelle Hassan Hachani! Y a un problème?!</i><br>My name is Hassan Hachani! Is there a problem?!  |
| (5) Fatima   | <i>Shh! Shh! Ta daronne<sup>13</sup> est en train de te dire,</i><br>Shh! Shh! Your mom is telling you,   |

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<sup>12</sup> Transcription conventions: An exclamation point is used to indicate combined stress and loudness; a question mark indicates rising intonation. Periods and commas are used to indicate pauses, the first within a phrase and the second at the end of a phrase. Whispered talk is indicated by smaller font. A dash indicates speech interrupted mid-sound. Brackets indicate inaudible words. Parentheses indicate researcher comments.

<sup>13</sup> *Daronne*, slang for 'mother', is purportedly derived from Romany, the Indic language of the Romi ("Gypsies") (Goudailler 1997:79).

*“Mais qu’est-ce qui te prend? Normale toi?”*  
*“What’s wrong with you? [Are] you normal?”*

(6) Nora        *C’est vrai?*  
 Is it true?

(7) Fatima      *Bah elle te regarde.*  
 Well she’s looking at you.

(8) Nora        *Ah ouais, je croyais que c’était ta daronne qui était en train de me regarder.*  
 Oh yeah, I thought that it was your mom who was looking at me.

*Elle est en panique. Ma mère elle me regarde quand je crie.*  
 She is freaking out. My mother looks at me when I yell.

This example shows Nora and Béatrice collaboratively performing parental name calling to Bilal as he speeds by on his bike. In this particular performance, Nora uses the full first and last names and voices of Bilal’s parents in reported speech to ridicule them: ‘My name is Yassina Hachani! Is there a problem?! Is there a problem?!’ (turn 1). Béatrice joins Nora’s teasing by recycling the latter’s words, making the performance collaborative (turn 2). At this point, Bilal responds, but his words are not intelligible to me and are not captured by my tape recorder. In response, Nora quips back in Bilal’s father’s voice, ‘My name is Hassan Hachani! Is there a problem?!’ (turn 4).

In this instance of parental name calling, the construction of absent mothers and fathers through reported speech creates a complicated web linking the adolescent “self” with a parental “other.” In the case represented above, Nora and Béatrice embody the voices of Bilal’s mother and father as a way to communicate to and about Bilal himself. Specifically, through reported speech, Nora and Béatrice refer back to an earlier event involving Bilal’s mother. By creating a heteroglossic representation of this initial event (Bakhtin 1981), Béatrice and Nora are able to tease Bilal for his mother’s apparently humorous and embarrassing public display. Thus, Nora’s and Béatrice teasingly “point” at Bilal but also articulate the ambivalent relationship between second- and third-generation teens and their immigrant parents. In this way, parental name calling speech events enact adolescent interpersonal relations writ small as well as adolescent and parent social relations writ large (cf. Basso 1979 on humor in interethnic relations).

Interestingly, in addition to challenging the respect of Bilal and his parents, this example demonstrates adolescent concern for *le respect* of parents as well. The loud performance of parental name calling has drawn the critical gaze of a co-present parent watching the performance: Nora’s mother. While Nora’s mother stares stony-faced from across the playground, Fatima chooses to voice her projected wishes, significantly also through the use of reported hypothetical speech: ‘Your mom is telling you, “What’s wrong with you? [Are] you normal?”’ (turn 5). Here, as in the case of Nora and Béatrice, Fatima verbally embodies a parent, but for a different purpose. Rather than teasing a peer based upon a parent’s supposed inappropriate behavior, Fatima verbally embodies Nora’s mother in order to evoke expectations for *le respect* by prescribing more reserved behavior in front of older relatives. Thus, while this exchange involves a performance that flouts respect for a peer’s parents, it also involves an attempt by a peer

to enforce normative respectful behaviors toward parents. Additionally, as with all the data analyzed in this article, the example shows adolescents' active negotiation of *le respect*, evidenced by Nora's dismissive response to Fatima's scolding: 'My mother looks at me when I yell' (turn 8).

This example illustrates that the 'rules' for *le respect* are significantly different in the context of peer interaction than within intergenerational settings. In the previous example (and in the following example below), teens challenge their parents' normative expectations for interaction within their peer groups, but they also tend to pay more attention to fulfilling these expectations when in view of parents. In these verbal performances, adolescents demonstrate their ambivalent relationship to both *le respect* and their parents. Through parental name calling performances they verbally foreground, challenge, and sometimes reinstate normative values regarding *le respect*. In the next section, I explore this ambivalence in more detail in a discussion of how parental name calling constitutes an opportunity for adolescents to articulate their own emergent morality surrounding dating and sexuality.

## 5. Knowledge about parents as symbolic capital among teenaged peers

Performances of parental name calling can be marshaled to elaborate and enforce teen norms of propriety regarding gender and sexuality through both accommodation and opposition to parents. As mentioned above, many adolescents in Chemin de l'Île were engaged in dating, but they were also very careful to keep this information from their parents, in partial fulfillment of cultural expectations of *le respect*. By covertly dating, adolescents undermine the intention of *le respect*, that is, to prevent premarital romantic relationships. And yet by refraining from overtly contradicting their parents' wishes, adolescents engage in an interesting combination of resistance and accommodation to their parents' sexual morality and notions of *le respect*.

As evidenced in the following example, teens use performances of parental name calling to control the circulation of information related to dating. As such, parental name calling routines serve as a means for adolescents to monitor their own and one another's emergent sexuality. Specifically, the following example shows how knowledge about a peer's parents serves as a form of symbolic capital to manage the circulation of sensitive information about topics such as dating. The excerpt shows an exchange between Nora (seen in previous example), Salima (a girl of 12), and Ahmed (a boy of 13), in which they exchange threats to share sensitive information with one another's older relatives. Adolescents thus use information about kin not only to tease but also as collateral to prevent the circulation of information that is damaging to both personal and parental 'respect'.

### "Omar number two"

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| (1) Nora   | <i>Fais voir tes yeux Ahmed. Omar numéro deux.</i><br>Show us your eyes Ahmed. Omar number two.<br>(Omar is Ahmed's older brother) |
| (2) Salima | <i>Putain, il a de ces beaux yeux, le chien!</i><br>Fuck, he has some of those beautiful eyes, the dog!                            |

- (3) Ahmed *Pourquoi tu dis c'est Omar numéro deux? C'est Ahmed numéro zéro et-*  
Why do you say it's Omar number two? It's Ahmed number zero and-
- (4) Nora *Omar numéro deux!*  
Omar number two!
- (5) Salima *Ouais, nan, par contre, c'est la vérité que c'est Ahmed numéro deux,*  
Yeah, no, on the other hand, it's the truth that it's Ahmed number two,  
  
*parce que Ahmed numéro un, c'est ton daron.<sup>14</sup> (laughs) Je t'ai vexé!*  
because Ahmed number one, it's your dad. (laughs) I annoyed you!
- (6) Ahmed *Heeh, t'es contente, haaaa! Ah mais toi, t'es pas une Benhabib!*  
Heee, you're happy, haaaa! Oh but you, you're not a Benhabib!  
(Ahmed is implying that Salima is adopted.)
- (7) Salima *Va dire ça. Va dire ce que t'as dit là.*  
Go ahead and say that. Go say what you said there.
- (8) Nora *Il va le raconter à tout le monde pendant une semaine là.*  
He's going to tell that to everyone during a whole week there.
- (9) Salima *Ferme ta gueule aussi. Hé, sur le Qur'an, tu balances, sur le Qur'an, Je vais voir*  
Shut your mouth too. Hey, on the Qur'an, if you tell, on the Qur'an, I'm going to see  
  
*ta daronne et ouallah je lui dis- voir ton père. Je sais où il travaille, ton père.*  
your mom and by God tell her- go see your father. I know where he works, your father.
- (10) Ahmed *Haaaahh!*  
Haaaahh!
- (11) Salima *Il travaille à la loge taa<sup>15</sup> la fac. Hé, ferme ta gueule. Il travaille avec son frère.*  
He works at the security gate of the University. Hey, shut up. He works with his brother.  
  
*Et tiens maintenant j'te l'ai mis dans où j'pense-*  
And now that I stuck it to you where I'm thinking about-  
(or figuratively, "where the sun don't shine")
- (12) Ahmed *Moi, j'veis voir ta soeur, ouais, j'sais où elle travaille.*  
Me, I'm going to see your sister, yeah, I know where she works.
- (13) Salima *Bah, va la voir. J't'ai rien fait du tout.*  
Well, go see her. I haven't done anything to you at all.

This example demonstrates that personal information about a peer's parents and older kin is marshaled as symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) in a broader system of information exchange among adolescents. In this particular case, Salima and Ahmed each wield information about the other's relatives to prevent the circulation of rumors about themselves. The initially playful exchange between Salima and Ahmed turns increasingly combative as each threatens to divulge information about the other

<sup>14</sup> *Daron*, the masculine counterpart of the term *daronne* used in the previous example, is slang for 'father'.

<sup>15</sup> *Taa'* is a possessive form in colloquial Arabic.

regarding adoption and dating. Here Nora engages in a modified version of parental name calling by referring to Ahmed as ‘Omar number two,’ after his older brother. Salima then joins in the performance by referring to their peer Ahmed as ‘Ahmed number two’ after his father, who shares the same first name.

As the performance escalates, Ahmed threatens to circulate the information that Salima is adopted, or, in Ahmed’s words, that ‘you’re not a Benhabib’ (turn 6). Salima’s fears about Ahmed circulating this personal information is evidenced in her counterthreat to reveal to Ahmed’s mother who he is dating: ‘on the Qur’an I’m going to go see your mother and by God tell her’ (turn 9). Just prior to this recorded exchange, Ahmed had furtively called his girlfriend to warn her that a peer had threatened to tell her brother that they were dating. In the exchange below, the delicate nature of such information is evidenced by the way Salima refrains from explicitly referring to what she will ‘tell’. The referent of her threat is understood and need not be named.

In this exchange, knowledge about a peer’s parents constitutes symbolic capital for adolescents in several contexts. In the immediate context, such information provides the means to provoke a peer and to retaliate in the case of provocation. In the larger context of the peer group and the neighborhood generally, such information provides important collateral for controlling information about oneself. Specifically, details about parents and older siblings are cited by both Salima and Ahmed as evidence for why the other should refrain from sharing illicit personal information with non-present peers: ‘I’ll go see your father, I know where he works’ (turn 9) and ‘I’m going to see your sister, yeah, I know where she works’ (turn 12). As such, parental name calling is not merely verbal play but rather serves as evidence for the ability (if not the intent) to damage a peer’s ‘respect’ by divulging damaging information to parents and kin.

## 6. Conclusion

In performances of parental name calling, adolescents reinterpret and negotiate an emergent code of *le respect*. By using a the first name of a peer’s parent in public and in an irreverent manner, adolescents subvert norms for respectful behavior toward adults based upon a name taboo. Thus, adolescents foreground the cultural code of behavior they call *le respect* even as they transform this code through its reinterpretation in interactional practice. The enactment of these reinterpretations of *le respect* in parental name calling demonstrates how these French teens of North African descent reinterpret transcultural ideologies of generation, gender, and sexuality in everyday identity practices.

The varied examples addressed in this article demonstrate the centrality of constructions of kin to adolescents’ performances of personal and group identity. Performances of parental name calling indicate that French adolescents of Algerian descent experience and express peer identity as highly relational to their parents’ generation. In these heteroglossic performances, teens position each other as daughters and sons, thereby elaborating personal adolescent identities in relation to parents and older kin. Specifically, in parental name calling, personal names and other information about parents and kin are used to evoke these absent persons as foils for the present adolescent self, and these absent adults serve, in turn, as foils for the peer group.

Moreover, in the context of adolescent identity in this immigrant community, evoking a peer’s familial origins is comparable to evoking a peer’s cultural origins. As I



have demonstrated, in these performances of parental name calling, adolescents' collaborative construction of symbolic mothers and fathers create a complicated indexical web that entangles self and other, child and parent, peer and adult, as well as first- or second-generation French-born citizen and North African immigrant. Among French adolescents of Algerian descent, parental figures take on added symbolic significance due to their location in Muslim Arab cultural traditions, which are constructed as oppositional to bourgeois French cultural practices in the media and at school.

Finally, these collaborative performances exemplify the ambivalent moral positioning of these adolescents in relation to the transcultural value of *le respect*. While most teens in the neighborhood were surreptitiously dating and thus flouting the intention of the behavioral code *le respect*, they nonetheless outwardly maintained social norms of 'respect' by keeping such information away from parents and older kin. With regard to these youthful reinterpretations of *le respect*, parental name calling emerges as a means for teens to elaborate their own sexual morality and to monitor and control information regarding their own and their peers' sexual practices.

In these multiple ways, the elaboration of adolescent identity and transcultural identity occur simultaneously in interaction and are mutually informing. Specifically, the practice of parental name calling exemplifies the ambivalent positioning of these adolescents to the neo-traditionalist value of *le respect*. In these performances adolescents negotiate their own emergent youthful code of 'respectful' behavior that both reinforces and transgresses cultural norms regarding gender, generation, and sexuality.

Due to the highly central role that Muslim adolescents currently play in popular imaginings of French nationhood, youth who simultaneously embody and enact Muslim and French social identities are frequently subject to the representations and interpretations of outside commentators. This article has demonstrated that careful attention to interactional practices can help us understand how such adolescents, living in immigrant communities, represent and interpret their own social situation within peer discourse as they negotiate both cultural continuity and change.

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