Media representations and second-generation discourses: The nuanced identities of Portuguese descendants in France

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Abstract. Media images concerning migration, ethnic groups, and culture continuously provide points of symbolic negotiation for second-generation immigrant descendants. Qualitative research shows that media can, on the one hand, offer strategies for the valorization of Portuguese descendants in French society, and on the other, impose constraints on discourses about integration and difference. Articulating media representations with their own social positions and experiences, young adults of Portuguese descent negotiate their identities in the midst of a variety of multicultural components that may range from Brazilian music, to the French national soccer team, to American television programs, to elements of Arab culture, this beyond the presence of their own Portuguese heritage. Balancing between symbolic resources and limits, Portuguese descendants thus tend to construct nuanced identities that arise in the very discursive features they use to speak about themselves and that others use to speak about them. This article uses as its base of analysis the role of French media when it comes to influencing the construction of identity among Portuguese descendants.

Keywords: Identity, media, Portuguese, France

To speak of the existence of a singular Portuguese “community” residing in Greater Paris, decades after the peak of Portuguese migrations to France (1961–1973), is nothing more than an ideological assertion, given the vast heterogeneity now present among Portuguese migrants and their descendants. This heterogeneity can be observed in young adults of Portuguese descent from several social backgrounds, education levels, and class positions.

Many of these young individuals are easy to find in Portuguese associations that celebrate their cultural origins. Take, for example, Denise,1 who I found, along with other association members preparing a traditional folk dance performance while, in the background, a television transmits a live soccer match from Lisbon. Denise claims that apart from her citizenship documents, she is in no way French.

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In contrast, some young individuals shun these cultural associations, despite the “community’s” reputation for associative vitality. Such is the case of Christine who, as she sits in a Parisian café listening to soul music, expresses an attachment to the idea of “Portugueseness,” but prefers to distance herself from the local Portuguese cultural associations.

Considering these two scenarios, the scientific challenge before us is to understand the non-schematic reality—in no way limited to a dichotomy—that identifies second-generation descendants who think of themselves as both Portuguese and French. Within this milieu, in fact, it is of no surprise to find “hybrid cultures” (Back, 1996; Contador, 2001; Hall, 1991) characterized by cultural intermixing—as commonly found in the post-migration landscapes of Western Europe—that often syncretizes cultural characteristics (Featherstone, 1996) from differing immigrant groups. What is at stake here, therefore, is to understand the specific meanings involved in the particular forms of syncretism developed inside what sometimes seems to be a paradoxical second generation.

How does one interpret the fact that Daniel, living with his parents in a distant Parisian banlieue, with vegetables growing in the backyard and the sounds of a Portuguese community radio station playing in the background, is keen on showing new Portuguese music to his friends, this while also declaring himself to be fed up with the “Portuguese identity” that others impose on him? And how does one define Gil, a computer engineer and house-music DJ who also enjoys dancing to popular pímba songs at Portuguese festivities? Drawing from these examples, I set out to analyze perceptions held by young Portuguese migrant descendants in relation to what the French media has termed “Portuguese invisibility,” in this case, referring to lack of public image recognition. This analysis will thus present a careful examination of narrative discourses provided by descendants in order to give meaning to representations in mainstream French society.

Taking young adults as research subjects implies dealing with a specific demographic group, characterized by late modernity, where many, and above all those in their 20s, mix dimensions of social autonomy, typical of adulthood, with dimensions of dependency, often associated with adolescence and youth. In researching identity issues, young adults make up an interesting group due to the potential for self-reflexivity concerning their often uncertain life trajectories and their retrospective identifications (Gillespie, 1995; Khan & Vala, 1999; Santos, 2002). It should also be noted, however, that bonds between individuals and nations are complex and multi-dimensional, and do not always lead people of migrant origin to have a strong concern about their national or ethnic identities (Ribert, 2009).

Taking this into consideration, this research derives from fieldwork that took place alongside Portuguese emigrant descendants in Paris, between May 2003 and April 2004. Discussion centers on narrative excerpts taken from 20 in-depth interviews with young Portuguese immigrant descendants (born between 1974 and 1983), with debate focusing on issues of identity and media
Parallel analysis was further carried out through the scrutinization of content in two French newspapers (Le Monde and Le Parisien) on issues of the representation of Portuguese immigrants and immigrant descendants in France.

**Background on Portuguese migration to and settlement in France**

Portuguese migration movements to Paris in the 1960s and early 70s were a collective experience involving hundreds of thousands of peasants and manual workers from Portugal’s rural areas. Many settled in suburban shantytowns or other contexts where intra-community solidarity and cultural reproduction balanced out the social contrasts inherent to their integration in the French capital city (cf. Cordeiro, 1997; Leandro, 1995; Rocha-Trindade & Raveau, 1998). Throughout the 1970s and 80s, through continuous migration and practices of intra-community marriage and subsequent large numbers of children born to Portuguese parents, the Portuguese composed the largest foreign-born community in France (Leandro, 1995). At the beginning of the 21st century, there were 357,000 Portuguese nationals in the region of Île de France (includes the City of Paris plus its suburbs), a number that did not include the descendants of Portuguese emigrants possessing dual citizenship (INSEE, 2001).

In terms of employment, concentrated in specific segments of the local economy—mostly working-class jobs, which, by the 1990s, accounted for 67% of the Portuguese work force in France—such labor market clustering produced a considerably important Portuguese network, namely in the construction and service sectors. Such clustering protected young individuals from unemployment, given that the majority also tended to leave school early. During the 1990s, it was estimated that between one-quarter and one-third of the second-generation Portuguese were employed in the construction industry (Kotlok-Piot, 1997). Although in the 2000s Portuguese descendants improved their educational levels, the majority have still persisted in this industry, with unemployment rates also kept low in comparison to more vulnerable migrant descendant groups, as is the case of Afro-descendants (Chassard, 2009).

In relation to housing, geographically, gradual dissemination throughout various residential areas of Paris—by leaving predominantly immigrant social housing neighborhoods—created a web of local points of settlement and a multiplicity of Portuguese nodes in peripheral towns around Paris. As a result, during the 1990s, the once homogeneous Portuguese working class started to split up, leading to the second generation becoming divided into non-clustered segments, above all, due to the novelty of long-term education attained by a growing number of descendants (de la Barre, 1997). Residential diversity and different living experiences offered the second generation a wider range of individual trajectories which, in turn, also brought about a variety of subjective positions regarding the idea of “Portugueseness,” that not only encompassed diverse modalities of affiliation to France and Portugal, but also brought about
subtleties of meaning through self-ascribed categorization and definition. Subsequently, this led to greater importance being given to such designations as “Luso-descendant,” “Franco-Portuguese,” and “of Portuguese origin” (de la Barre, 2003).

Another element worth pointing out concerns the strategy played out by the first generation in relation to the socialization of descendants within Portuguese culture throughout the years, where associations and clubs have had a central role. The offspring of migrants were not only exposed to the reproduction of Portuguese culture abroad, but they were also placed within social networks composed of culturally homogeneous, young individuals that often forged ties among themselves. Beyond the associations and clubs, such ties were further forged via a plurality of other institutions, including extended family gatherings, relations with other Portuguese families and individuals, as well as through summer holidays in the parents’ hometown back in Portugal. Such ties have been fundamental in keeping descendants close to their “Portugueseness.”

Lastly, Portuguese migrants have also been the contemporaries of immigrants from former French colonies. The presence of these migrants has produced a frame for the second generation to be protected under what Cordeiro (1997) terms the “Maghreb lightning-rod” (“paratonnerre maghrébin”) of public attention—a metaphor conjured up by the author referring to the French public opinion’s obsessive focus on North African immigration (from the Maghreb region)—which leaves other communities relatively unnoticed and less affected by stigmatization. Still, this does not mean the absence of negative stereotypes. Given this situation, while Portuguese descendants have gone through a set of “internal” conditions within the diaspora, they have also been confronted by “external” representations of “being Portuguese” that circulate within French society, and that are often disseminated by its media.

A system of representations
The sphere of representations inhabited by second-generation immigrant descendants is quite pluralistic and complex due to the fact that it is an area where different discourses continuously cross, coming from majority and minority fields, and from hegemonic and resistant points of articulation. Media descriptions, although not to be neglected, are but one side of a vast representational sphere when it comes to defining migrants and their families. Such imagery, however, seldom contributes to forming a homogeneous “mediascape” (Appadurai, 1996).

The ways that issues such as migration or cultural differences are represented in the media also have nation-bound histories. In France there is a historically built framework for how to think and talk about migrant groups. It is within this framework that migrants accommodate and develop their own actions and discourses. To put it briefly, the French nation-state was founded under the idea of a republican community—based on a political contract
between the State and citizenship equality—which led to the building of nationalism, centralizing and standardizing identities at the regional levels. Since the 1880s, immigration from other European countries consolidated with this movement and became central in national self-representation: the idea of France as a country made up of many different contributions that merged in order to produce a unique French culture and identity, or the ability “to make French people out of foreigners” (Wenden, 1995, p. 59).

Classic approaches to integration in France (Noiriel, 1988; Schnapper, 1998; Todd, 1994) have juxtaposed the assimilation-based “French model” with the multiculturalist models found in such countries as Canada or the Netherlands. In tune with the French political mainstream, which refuses to recognize minorities, some social scientists sustain that difficulties of integration are not due to ethnic problems, but, instead, to social ones (Schnapper, 1998, p. 410). Many have thus come to defend “universalism” against what is said to be a “differentialism” that perpetuates minorities. Such is the case of the official use of racial categories in the United States (Todd, 1994). According to these visions, the French model of integration is also thought to be the one that holds the potential to fight against fragmentation (Schnapper, 1998). Indeed, the French “republican” stance, with its refusal to address the implications of ethnic or cultural categories, is believed to be what provides migrant offspring the conditions for full integration and rights to French citizenship and identification (Noiriel, 1988, p. 336).

In the last two decades, inquiries have been carried out with the aim of taking into account the cultural and national origins of migrant descendants and observing the plurality of dimensions that characterize, and may differentiate, their models of integration (Tribalat, 1995). Consequently, the debate has focused on the possibilities of “segmented integration” (Safi, 2006), defined as having potentially unbalanced cultural and social dimensions, where second generations may share a national culture but suffer systemic discrimination, or may have equal chances of advancement in the educational and professional systems, but still retain cultural particularities. As a result, whether integration is better accomplished through “assimilationist” or “multiculturalist” practices, is a topic hotly debated among the social sciences, with the latter of the two often referred to as an alternative to the failure of French “universalism” in integrating all immigrant groups, and sustaining the need to face cultural and ethnic differences (Body-Gendrot, 2002; Echchaibi, 2001; Wieviorka, 2001). As Simon (2008, p. 153) points out, “it has become difficult to ignore the salience of ethnicity and ‘race’ within social relationships and institutionalized practices.” Within this debate, a critical question that arises is what happens in the public space (Schnapper, 2007), underlining the relevance of media representations concerning the politics of recognition and/or the politics of private identities.

One particular aspect of the French image is its colonial and post-colonial history, a marked feature that produced various migration waves and generated
a double representation of immigrants—one that distinguishes Europeans from non-Europeans (Bancel & Blanchard, 1997). This distinction is operated by the ideology of cultural “integration,” or the supposed differing capacities of foreign groups to leave their “particularisms” behind and be assimilated into the French identity (Boucher, 2000). As emphasized by Silberman and Fournier (2008, p. 83), in France “all immigrants are ‘outsiders,’ but history makes some of them more ‘outsiders’ than others.”

Of course, the second generations of migrant groups are in a pivotal situation here. Expectations for assimilation have a normative force in French society, and public demonstrations of difference are seen as signs of non-loyalty towards the nation. Adopting Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical terms, we can say that there is a constraining norm for taking national roles on the “front stage” of the public sphere, with cultural differences being tolerated only in one’s private world. This, too, is relevant to the perspective on Portuguese descendants.

The image of the Portuguese in France can only be understood within a system of representations, where the various immigrant groups relate within the whole migrant population spectrum, and articulate within the conceptualizations of the French nation. Although migrant descendants have a specific place within this system, they are also frequently connected to the images of their “ethnic community” (Santos, 2002).

In giving a brief account of these images, one can affirm that Portuguese immigrants are ambivalently seen by French society as somewhat culturally similar, easy to assimilate, not worthy of much attention when it comes to differences, given that they are often limited to a reduced number of stereotypes that play on issues of social inferiority. Such symbolic inferiority, that collectively marks the Portuguese, unavoidably shapes the descendants’ biographic experiences, prompting diverse reactions as coping mechanisms, ranging from the adaptation of assimilation strategies to favoring greater proximity to Portuguese nationalism (Hily & Oriol, 1993; Leandro, 2003; Malewsa-Peyre, 1990; C. Pereira, 1997).

In the French media sphere, up until the 1970s, collectively, the Portuguese were considered to be highly visible. During the 1980s, however, this changed when French television started to give greater, more dramatic focus to certain banlieues. Images of suburban youth led to the ethnicization of French society, fueling the notion of “visible minorities,” pivotal to the idea of a black-blanc-beur France (Barats, 2001; Gastaut, 1997).

From the 1980s onward, “young Arabs,” seen as stereotypical deviants, became the strongest of all images due to their involvement in riots transmitted on television (Lochard, 1998). Although, through the years, conventional French journalism has abandoned verbal references to immigrant origins, an ever-growing number of television programs based on faits divers has come to rely heavily on crime news, frequently providing audiences with recurrent images of “visible minorities” (CIEMI, 1991). On primetime television news,
diverse accounts of banlieue-related news, often of a negative nature, are based on a faits divers approach with little or no explicative elements to the news items (Borrell, 2007). The continued reliance on images of phenotype as a prominent mode of information about migrant areas has, in turn, allowed non-visible European migrants to go unnoticed. The mediatization of the so-called riots (émeutes) that took place in Parisian suburbs in the 2000s reinforced representations of a “menacing alterity,” protagonized by young individuals from “ghettos” or “banlieues” (Garcin-Marrou, 2007).

It is essential to also point out, nonetheless, that there has been a history of evolving images specific to the Portuguese in the French media. A couple of aspects identified in the press can be summed up as follows: on the one hand, there has been a vacillating image of Portugal, depicted as a country that lies between modernization and traditionalism; on the other hand, there is a depoliticized collective representation of Portuguese immigrants and their descendants who, although they have gone through a process of individualization in the national public sphere in France, maintain traditionalist features (Carvalheiro, 2008).

**Audiences and identities as empirical objects**

Theorization focusing on a symbolic approach to communication reveals that any communicative act, whether personal or mediated, is meant to produce meaning. Representations diffused by mass media constitute symbolic forms whose reception not only implies the “decoding of the message”—a process that often varies according to the cultural frameworks of receivers (Hall, 1980)—but also interpretations upheld in specific, everyday contexts often articulated with other texts and personal experiences (Morley, 1992; Silverstone, 1994). Media images are subject to “appropriation” by concrete audiences who incorporate them within a scope of greater meaning, giving greater sense to their lives and to the world (Thompson, 1995).

In a dynamic and constructionist perspective of identity, acts of symbolic appropriation also have potential impact on people’s perspective of the self and on the way they perceive others. This is due to the fact that media texts often address individuals by representing several dimensions of their social identities, often through images, be they fictitious or realistic; be the individual young or old, male or female, national or immigrant, and so on. These dimensions of subjective belonging are what can be termed “social identities.” They may not be pure, subjective dimensions of life, but they articulate with cultural practices and social interactions.

Connecting media representations and social identities under a constructionist approach leads diaspora studies research to focus on the empirical study of minority audiences, never assuming that influences upon self-conceptions can be inferred merely by analyzing media images about the self (Bailey, 2007; Georgiou, 2006; Sreberny, 2000). Instead, there is a need for inquiry concerning which symbolic forms impact diasporic audiences’
subjectivities. This implies researching the ways diasporic communities and individuals appropriate media representations in their own discourses.

This research distances itself from traditional “reception studies” methodologies (Alasuutari, 1999), an area of study that relies on an interpretative approach that aims to comprehend which forms of decoding audiences produce and what meanings they generate within specific texts. Be it bounded to a strict text-reader model, or open to larger frames of interpretation, that may include intertextual meanings and the bridging of interpretations of broader cultural questions, the nature of reception analysis lies within media contexts that are frequently limited in scope and artificially selected for research. This study does not adopt this approach due to the fact that questions relating to identity constructions throughout one’s life course should not be bounded, for example, by a series of television news programs and their observations. It is important to point out that, on the one hand, over the last decades, media has increasingly operated continuously and ubiquitously in the background of people’s lives (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2003), while, on the other, issues, ideas, speeches, and/or images important to one’s sense of self and to the affiliations and representations of collective entities, are not restricted to one genre or medium. Instead, they travel and become accommodated within complex and dynamic systems of cross references, leading to the creation of fragmented topic narratives, both in media and in audience interpretations.

My approach, therefore, focuses on the perspectives of audiences or information receivers, and not the perspectives of media and media content. Two key steps were essential to the research: first, the interviewees were encouraged to talk about what they believe to be extraordinary issues, events, people, and television programs in the media, this from their perspective as both audience members and as immigrant descendants in France; second, conversation was guided towards specific issues identified as relevant to migrant youth of Portuguese descent.

Fieldwork was conducted using in-depth interviews with a carefully selected sample group composed of twenty young adults, ten males and ten females, from diverse backgrounds and educational levels. In selecting the interviewees, the intent was not to pick individuals who were representative of the second generation as a whole, but rather to allow for greater situational diversity and differing levels of intensity in relation to the issues. Participants were approached to participate via various channels (from family connections, to friendship networks, to Portuguese clubs and associations). Also taken into consideration were the locations of residence of the participants (from “Portuguese residential areas” in the suburbs, to dispersed residents, to specific quartiers inside Paris).

Interviews were conducted in Portuguese or French, lasting from one hour to one and a half hours; recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. As will be revealed in the following sections of this article, the main focus of analysis was
to map subjective affiliations, pointing to specific social referents (the various groups an immigrant descendant may feel he/she belongs to) and the identification of meanings assigned to them.

The questioning of informants was not intended to be media-centric but, instead, aimed to combine discussions of their everyday lives, background experience, and social interactions, while adding the topic of media and its appropriation on the part of the descendants, and how issues are received and perceived. Throughout the interviews, questions pertinent to the issue of media centered on the topic of consumption (press, radio, and television), in terms of consumption habits, content, and meaning, and how these may affect the participant's life. During the interviews, participants commented on specific situations presented verbally or through the reading of newspaper clippings identified in French media as the dominant way in which immigrants are depicted. The issues included unemployment, crime, degraded suburbs and living conditions, and racism (Prencipe, 2002). Participants were also presented with specific media references to Portuguese migrants and descendants, as well as examples taken from local ethnic minority media.

In terms of analysis, a crucial focus was the search for meaningful intersections of identity found in statements about media representations. Rather than asking for direct forms of self-identification, social identities can be better understood if we delve further than self-attributed labels, managing instead to uncover the meanings people negotiate with when using categories of belonging (Van de Mieroop, 2005).

These subject positions and their meanings can, in turn, be articulated with the way media communication is received and experienced. If media texts are appropriated by people and turned into meaningful objects throughout their life trajectory, the concept of “mediated experience” can be used to refer to objects or events that individuals will get to know and “live out” through time-space mediation, aided by technologies and specialized institutions such as mass media corporations (Thompson, 1995). Besides this mediated sphere, there continues to be the personal “direct experience” formed by life episodes, acquired knowledge, and things we observe in their settings right before our eyes.

Thus, the goal of this study is to examine patterns of discourse according to the two aforementioned axes of experience, and, above all, to observe how identity positions and meanings are dealt with when transmitted via the narratives of descendant youth in reference to their lives or through the way they appropriate mediated symbolic forms in which the mediator is the media itself.

The reception of mainstream media: Discourses of integration

Perhaps best defined as a paradigmatic case of political centralization, the French State extended its hegemony over the definition of French culture up until the end of the 20th century. Although there have been trends of cultural
“Americanization” since the 1970s, there remains a lively French cultural industry in the audiovisual field, strongly funded and regulated by the state, featuring the national language as its cornerstone. This implies that media and popular culture, today very much entrenched within the everyday lives of all residents of France, have, within the nation, very strong nationalistic elements that coexist alongside transnational ones, whether in film, in music, in television series, or in radio programs. Young members of French society, as is the case of the Portuguese descendants interviewed in this study, may opt to focus their media consumption on national mainstream television channels, notably TF1 and M6 for example, where international patterns of entertainment culture prevail, alternating between French and English-language programming. The news programs transmitted by these very same channels are also the primary news and information providers the interviewees were asked about for this study.

French mainstream television forms the main source of mediated viewing in the lives of the young interviewees. Their cultural consumption, however, also includes prominent non-French media, namely American music, films, and television series, much of which is also transmitted on French television. However, as mentioned by all the interviewees, there is very little space for Portuguese media within this landscape of transnational media flows. Thus, what echoes most in the self-identification of the second generation comes from French mainstream media, a communication channel whose predominant representations of immigration prompt clear discursive insights from the Portuguese descendants interviewed.

The most salient aspect in the discourses about French media is the topic of Portuguese invisibility. First, both migrants and the second generation find that they are given very little visibility in the media. Second, this idea is expressed as a positive factor, with no criticism levied at the lack of notoriety, the lack of cultural relevance, or the difficulties in accessing the national public sphere.

The reception of mainstream media representations fuels what can be labeled a “discourse of integration.” This discourse has two versions: cultural, pointing to a state of being indistinguishable; and insertion-based, in a normative sense. Such discourse reflects the social conditions that define Portuguese descendants, differing from predominant news-values expressed in the general representation of migrants in French media, applicable to such issues as unemployment, degraded neighborhoods, crime, and racism (Prencipe, 2002).

In the context of the predominant images of minorities, the idea that it is good not to be mentioned by the media is a general sentiment shared by the interviewees. The visibility of second generations is here understood as potentially producing greater ethnic ascription by the salience of differences. Invisibility, on the contrary, is interpreted as an implicit sign of non-existing differentiation towards dominant social traits and norms.
The discourse concerning integration is, however, not uniform, and sometimes even contradictory. In fact, various perspectives exist concerning the Portuguese second generation in France, sometimes within the same narrative, as in the following excerpt:

It is rare to find news about Portuguese people living here, because they think we are so well integrated that it is not worthwhile. There’s no difference, we’re split in half: half French, half Portuguese, and that’s the way it is. . . . When I talk to my [French] friends they can’t understand that we are proud of being Portuguese. They say that we marry among ourselves all the time, both the Portuguese and their children, and that there are too much of some things like religion or family. . . . It is very difficult for the French to understand that marrying someone is also marrying into a family, and that’s really the way it is. I am not going to leave my parents; I have to phone them every day and I’ve had French boyfriends who could never understand that. (Christine, born in 1978, superior technician)13

Acceptance of media representations concerning minorities in France is, therefore, strategically used for the construction of discourse about a specific type of integration that allows descendants to emphasize certain aspects of being Portuguese, while silencing others. Cultural differences, Portuguese “nationalism,” or the symbolic inferiority ascribed to migrants, are such examples.

While mediated experience provides the second generation the chance to develop an integration discourse that reflects the national assimilation model, there is also a discourse of difference that is meaningfully linked to direct experiences. This duality of discourses echoes quantitative studies on migrants in France which note that the Portuguese, in particular, contradict an expected linking between cultural proximity and identity integration (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2009; Safi, 2006). They are characterized as maintaining a sense of belonging to national origins, possessing no marked cultural differences (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2009, p. 85; Safi, 2006, p. 28). Although this singular mode of segmented integration has been identified in relation to the first-generation Portuguese immigrants (Safi, 2006), in the case of the immigrant descendant identities it is more complex and in need of greater in-depth examination (Ribert, 2009). By approaching identity issues through discourse analysis, one delves deeper into these questions, not only with the objective of getting closer to what might be thought of as “real” identities and their complex subtleties, but also because discourse is a way of constructing an ongoing sense of self.

Speech analysis shows that discourses on integration and difference are not necessarily incoherent with each other, but rather, they articulate with distinct axes of experience, thus being multifunctional (Fairclough, 1999). While, on the one hand, discourse on the integration of immigrant descendants comes to imply a desire not to be placed into an ethnic categorization within French society, discourse on difference, on the other hand, is a specific cultural resource to be used within family and/or community circles as a symbolic
connection to Portugal, held in esteem by community members who also expect recognition outside of the community.

What seems to be crucial in the media-based discourse of integration is the stigmatized representation of other minorities in France.

There is a lot of newspaper and television news about the integration of Arabs here in France, what are the causes of conflicts, and about religion. They report from the neighborhoods where they generally live, the cités, and we can watch this news almost every day, with young people stating why they're on the streets, why they don't want to find a job. . . . The Portuguese are well integrated. We like to meet and stay together in the community, as the Arabs do as well, and that is what we have in common. The difference is we're open to other cultures and they sometimes are not. They like to stick to themselves. (Sílvia, born in 1981, university student)

This citation suggests that in the perception of social entities, such as migrant groups, there is the existence of discursive systems where each object of representation is interlinked to others within an articulated set of objects. Dialogue on identity tends to be relational, rather than a pure representation of a social collective on its own.

If this system is fed by direct and mediated experiences, surely they do not often appear in strict distinction within speech. Appropriation of media representations is characterized by “intertextuality,” where both references may occur and discourse is easily altered (Fairclough, 1999; Gamson, 1995).

These situations don’t happen only with the Portuguese. I have friends of Arab origin that have no access to certain jobs. There’s discrimination because they’re not French, because they have other origins, and so on. In France this feeling has been created towards immigrants and it’s a pity. It’s a pity because the immigrants were the ones who brought success to the country, the ones who made the development that’s been reached in France possible. . . . The Portuguese are now keener on studying and they’re managing to do it. I see engineers, doctors, etc., and the French have nothing on us. But they feel somewhat bothered, because our parents could not help us to learn how to read or write and, yet, we made it. When we were children they [other French children] didn’t care about us, and they would even make fun of us: “oh, your father is a bricklayer,” “your mother is a cleaner”; but in high school and when we reached university, they become jealous and wondered how we can make it this far. (Sílvia, born in 1981, university student)

Even within these intertextual dialogues, again, there is a duality of discourses: on the one hand, there is a discourse about proximity between migrant groups, while, on the other, there is the salience of Portuguese differences within French society based on direct experience. This, in the meantime, runs adjacent to media-framed discourses that tend to assimilate Portuguese descendants into French society, distancing them from other minorities.
Identity discourses: Flexibility and recognition

The citations given in the previous section illustrate how individuals may change the meanings they assign to the groups and/or collectivities they feel they belong to according to differing situations. In conjunction, however, another question to consider is also that of affiliations and the identity positions in which the individuals place themselves. Second-generation immigrant descendants are expected to choose between national/ethnic identities because they move within the frames of dominant nationalistic discourses that ask every citizen to be exclusively loyal to one nation. Individuals, however, can also be seen as “border subjects” (Afonso, 1997), negotiating their place along a border over time, a process that considers communicative experiences as being key and language to be crucial for the subjects’ reflexivity.15

A dynamic conception of identity, in fact, requires that language be seen not as transparent, but rather as revealing and disclosing—a construction—reaching meaningful realities through spoken word (Taylor, 2001). To understand the identity relationship of Portuguese immigrant descendants to “Portugueseness” requires more than an evaluation of discourse frequency. It also involves an analysis of subject positioning in discourse, which can be applied through the method of examining pronouns as signs of subjective affiliation to social groups (Van de Mieroop, 2005; Yamaguchi, 2005). The pronouns “us” and “them,” as used in discourse, signal belonging, distinction, or opposition; they are linguistic markers of identity.

In linguistic terms, however, the words “us” and “them” are deictics that require the examination of their referents, which see their meaning change according to each verbal enunciation. In the discourse analysis that follows, I use a set of collective categories to detect identity positioning: the Portuguese; the French; Portuguese descendants; Portuguese immigrants; and groups of other origins.

In a generalized manner, the subjective positioning of the interviewees indicates a flexible identification. It is common to hear discourses reveal interchanges between different identity positions. In most interviewee narratives, the categorizations “Portuguese,” “French,” and “Portuguese descendant” alternate as referents, serving to position “us” in contrast to “them.” This can be interpreted as linguistic expressions of non-rigid identities, or as nuanced subjects with plural and situational affiliations. In the very same sentence the reference to “us,” as people of Portuguese origin, can be followed by another “us,” referring to people in the midst of French culture. The strict polarization of one collective group is not common, happening only with descendants whose life courses have distanced them from circles of Portuguese sociability or, on the contrary, have confined their social interactions within an immigrant community.
Another relevant element is the importance of positioning “us,” referring to the Portuguese as a collective whole in France, including both immigrants and descendants, and thus eradicating generational distinctions. If we relate the linguistic markers of identity with the spheres of direct and mediated experience, again the enunciations based on mediated experience are prominently connected to the absence of a conspicuous representation: “That’s a reason for us to be proud. We are never in the news.” This is so because the conspicuous representation of people labeled as belonging to a cultural minority can only be imagined as stigmatizing.

We are a community that adapted to the country. We don’t provide opportunities for us to be talked about, because we’re not placing bombs, or committing crimes, or robbing banks. This is not being racist, but we see very little of that involving us [Portuguese] on TV, but we see a lot of it involving others. (João, born in 1982, computer operator)

In this context, the Portuguese descendants interviewed talked about integration with a certain amount of caution, as part of a defensive discourse that aims to prevent any sort of publicly visible difference and avoid any stigmatization that is produced by the ideological structure of French society. What is relevant here is that this implies not only invisibility as being positive, but it also leads to an identity void in the midst of French society. Thus, in the French public sphere and public discourse, the Portuguese are the ones who simply “do not” and who simply “are not.”

Behind this discursive adherence to the integration-as-assimilation norm, there are other variants in the narratives of Portuguese descendants that connect to issues of recognition. The question of recognition is crucial to identity construction, not only at the level of an interactionist approach, but particularly when minorities are the ones at stake. Here, the political issue is not so much the management of plural identities, but rather the problem of social and public recognition that may be awarded to some identity variables, yet denied to others (Morley, 2001).

In the “backstages” of the descendants’ lives, however, there is also a desire for positive visibility, something that is not altogether assumed by them in their initial discourses, but which comes out when discussing concrete situations. One such example is the mediatization of the former French national soccer team player of Portuguese descent, Robert Pires:

He is always saying he is French. That’s true, he is French, but his parents are Portuguese, and I think he should say that. There are a lot of Africans on the French national team that are always emphasizing they are French, but of African origin. (Stéphane, born in 1981, university student)

I don’t like him [Robert Pires]. I think we are lucky because we live in France and we have two different cultures, and two languages. We can never forget it. (Isabel, born in 1977, commercial sector employee)
Once I was with a group of friends and he [Robert Pires] was shown on TV and I said: “That there is a fake Portuguese,” and my friends, also Portuguese, started saying that he couldn’t even speak Portuguese. (Sara, born in 1979, nurse)

The excerpts above do not imply a hidden polarization concerning Portuguese identities. These interviewees genuinely think of themselves as individuals inextricably compounded by their French and Portuguese sides, as exemplified through the use of pronouns. What they feel uncomfortable about, however, is the symbolic violence constituted by the public disapproval of one of these sides.

Such narratives divulge a criticism of non-identification with Portuguese origins. This was made known by the descendants regardless of their gender and educational levels. This points to an ideological structure held by these young descendants, highlighting a public non-image that serves to value them, but wishing to match these public non-images with singular affirmative images that, in turn, can signal the existence of a specific identity.

Soccer is an important element in this case. It plays an expressive role both in the representation of the Portuguese in French media (Carvalheiro, 2008) and in serving as a symbolic resource for the second generation. In all its dimensions of practice, consumption, and identification with Portuguese teams, soccer is a key constitutive element among Portuguese descendants in France in defining their sense of attachment to Portugal (V. Pereira, 2012). However, soccer also conveys feelings of symbolic disloyalty to France. The issue of national soccer teams led some interviewees to provide antagonistic discourses towards “Frenchness.” This antagonism seemed to result from feelings of abhorrence towards the rampant French nationalism felt in the media when covering international soccer competitions, serving to create a symbolic context, where people with nuanced identities are frequently excluded. This was the case with most of my interviewees.

Difficult identities in public: Between resources and constraints
The negotiations between “being Portuguese” and “being French,” and the use of the pronouns “we” and “us” to identify Portuguese descendants as a collective, are very unbalanced when media discourse is compared to discourses reflecting on direct personal experiences. In relation to the latter, it is as if communalities clearly exist in the world of direct experience, something that seems to disappear in relation to the media. This suggests that media representations have uncategorized Portuguese descendants. Media discourses cannot identify a nuanced identity privileging either national or ethnic affiliations among the descendants.

Public assertion of a specific identity deemed positive seems to only be possible by appropriating Portuguese symbolic elements; an appropriation that can turn differences into something valued in French society. Given that Portugal has an ambivalent image in France and that it does not produce modern media objects for a transnational market, the second generation in
France finds it difficult to gather publicly recognized resources that might distinguish them positively. The most educated individuals often try to find other media representations that may expand the idea of “Portugueseness” beyond that of Portugal, expanding such representations towards other “Lusophone” countries and the Portuguese diaspora.

I try hard to let them (French friends) know about Fado, but they don’t really enjoy it; they say it’s too sad. When I put on Brazilian music they prefer that; they say it’s a lot more pleasant. (Christine, born in 1978, superior technician)

I got them (French friends) listening to Brazilian music and now, even those who are pure French, who don’t know the Portuguese language, they now listen to a lot of Brazilian music. (Pedro, born in 1979, bank clerk)

On Seinfeld (American TV series) there was an episode in Newark, in a Portuguese pizza house, where there were Portuguese flags, and when I saw that I raised my arms up and shouted “there we are!” (Pedro, born in 1979, bank clerk)

It’s with great pride that we go to the cinema to watch a movie here in France where Portuguese is spoken (in reference to the British film, Love Actually). (Gabriel, born in 1977, salesman)

Although the quest for symbolic resources that serve to identify these descendants as a Portuguese collective is a sought-after endeavor, as the above quotes demonstrate, it is also important to point out that these individuals run the risk of being identified with old, traditionalist representations associated with Portuguese immigrants in France. In this case, “Portugueseness” might be perceived as an antiquated and non-legitimized culture, running the risk of being socially devalued and even ridiculed by French society.

There are television programs where they joke about the Portuguese and Portuguese women. I think it’s sad because we could have a better image. They paint an image of Portuguese women with hairy bodies and with moustaches. (Isabel, born in 1977, commercial employee)

I think our image is good; the only [bad] thing is this image of the Portuguese working as bricklayers and the women as house cleaners and door keepers. (Sara, born in 1979, nurse)

Cultural landscapes made of transnational flows and media diversity, where people are supposed to adopt aesthetics and choose which “tribe” to belong to, have favored post-modern conceptualizations concerning the ability to rework identities by picking up and incorporating symbols. The reality of second generations, however, has proven the opposite when it comes to cultural identities, this due to the fact that identification also involves recognition on the part of others. Migrant descendants seldom have total freedom to choose freely from a catalogue of cultural features; instead they often have to
manage more complex scenarios simultaneously composed of symbolic resources and constraints.

Portuguese descendants in France need symbolic resources when they look for public visibility, but the reality is that resources that empower them with a positive image are not always available to them. Furthermore, this population has to deal with symbolic constraints, namely a legacy of public images that imposes itself on the very conception of “being Portuguese in France,” whether they want that affiliation or not.

We can thus consider the role of media representations in structuring identities through this articulation of symbolic resources and constraints. On the one hand, symbolic elements become resources individuals use strategically to define their identity both creatively and performance-wise, the end result being the production of an often desired public recognition. On the other hand, symbolic elements may also be a constraint when they have identification labels attached to them, beyond the individual’s control. This positions the descendants within predefined categorizations defined by the host society. Stereotypes and stigmas are examples of such constraints, as is a public discourse that presses for cultural assimilation.

**Conclusion**

This research on Portuguese descendants in France set out to question: a) how it is possible that a subjective belonging to a collective identity persists in spite of its almost absolute inexistence in the media, and b) how it can persist when the actual discourses of descendants, as receivers of information, lead to the abolishment of their self-conception as a specific group. The young Portuguese immigrant descendants interviewed suggest that they can manage rather distinct identities by reference to mediated and immediate realms of experience, connecting to public and private ways of conceiving and presenting themselves in terms of social belongings.

Generally speaking, French society is alerted to cultural difference when it becomes defined as problematic. The French ideological structure, together with the Portuguese migrants’ social and symbolic strategies for accommodation, places descendants in a “position of indifference,” seldom being easy targets of discrimination and racism. This, however, comes with the price of sacrificing their “right to difference,” since the symbolic distinctions of Portuguese descendants have been unappreciated in French public opinion and the first generation has kept a low, stereotyped status.

We can therefore say that the Portuguese second generation’s experience as media audience members helps to strengthen the nuanced character of the collective identity. By reflecting on and narrating their “mediated realities,” Portuguese descendants construct themselves as not being distinct from French society at large. Although it does not invalidate the persistence of a specific social identity in a more private realm of life, the appropriation of media images erodes the language of insight that often serves to narrate
differences, and weakens aspirations for affirmative identification as a public group.

Notes
1 In this research, I have opted to use pseudonyms to identify the participants.
2 This associative vitality is made up of a web of local organizations. According to the official body of Portuguese organizations in France (Coordination des Collectivités Portugaises en France) there are now 284 associations in Greater Paris. In the 1990s, when those interviewed for this study were teenagers, there were more than 1000 associations throughout the country and soccer teams, respectively, as well as a significant number of Portuguese folk dance groups (Dias, 1995). Starting in the 1990s there was also a trend of associations led by the second generation, accommodating a wider range of cultural activities, targeting a younger demographic, and using the French language (Muñoz, 2002).
3 The concept of “second generation” has theoretical implications that will not be elaborated on in this article. It is used here to refer to an empirical condition: people born in France from Portuguese migrant parents.
5 Banlieue is the French word for suburb.
6 Pimba is a label used for Portuguese music, often connected with the rural and/or uneducated lower classes, functioning as a stigma when referred to by middle-class individuals.
7 A small sample was opted for given the intent of gathering dense knowledge on young individuals in diverse contexts. The information gathered and presented, therefore, is not done so with the intent of being fully representative of this “community,” nor is it meant to generalize conclusions.
8 For a greater analysis of these aspects see Carvalheiro (2008). Chapter 2 contains an account of the main aspects characterizing Portuguese settlement and development in the region of Paris. Chapter 3 develops a detailed analysis of the representations of Portuguese in France.
9 Beur is a slang term for descendants of North African immigrants. First coined in 1982 under the context of struggle for civil rights and equality, it was then appropriated by mainstream media which started to use it in a stigmatizing manner. The expression black-blanc-beur refers to a new configuration of the country which emphasizes ethnic or racial lines and challenges the bleu-blanc-rouge of the French flag.
10 The French expression faits divers refers to specific news items that comprise trivial facts and anecdotes, often of a sensationalist nature.
11 For example, since soccer is a relevant issue for many Portuguese descendants, and since the French national team is symbolically important in relation to questions on identity and migration in France, a picture of the former top French soccer player and Portuguese immigrant descendant, Robert Pires, was used to bring light to these questions. The aim was to understand the interpretations of the respondents concerning precise media events involving this soccer player, keeping in mind that meanings attributed by each audience member are bound to be formulated by layers of media texts superimposed over one another. Interviewees were thus asked to evoke or point out the most meaningful contents derived from each media piece from their own perspective.
12 The consumption of Portuguese media, which is beyond the scope of this text, forms another relevant axis in relation to descendants and media impact (Carvalheiro, 2008). Internet and digital media were superficially approached during the fieldwork, for, at the time period, modern media technologies did not have the same level of importance they have today.
13 All the excerpts presented in this article derive from interviews carried out in Portuguese. The translations into English are mine.
14 This initial statement refers to a xenophobic situation reported in the news, victimizing a Portuguese rural worker. After referring to the case, as acknowledged through the media, the interviewee went on to talk about a range of situations from her personal experiences.
Here, I do not refer to national languages, but to language as a general concept; the linguistic field that provides individuals the words to give meaning to the world.

References


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