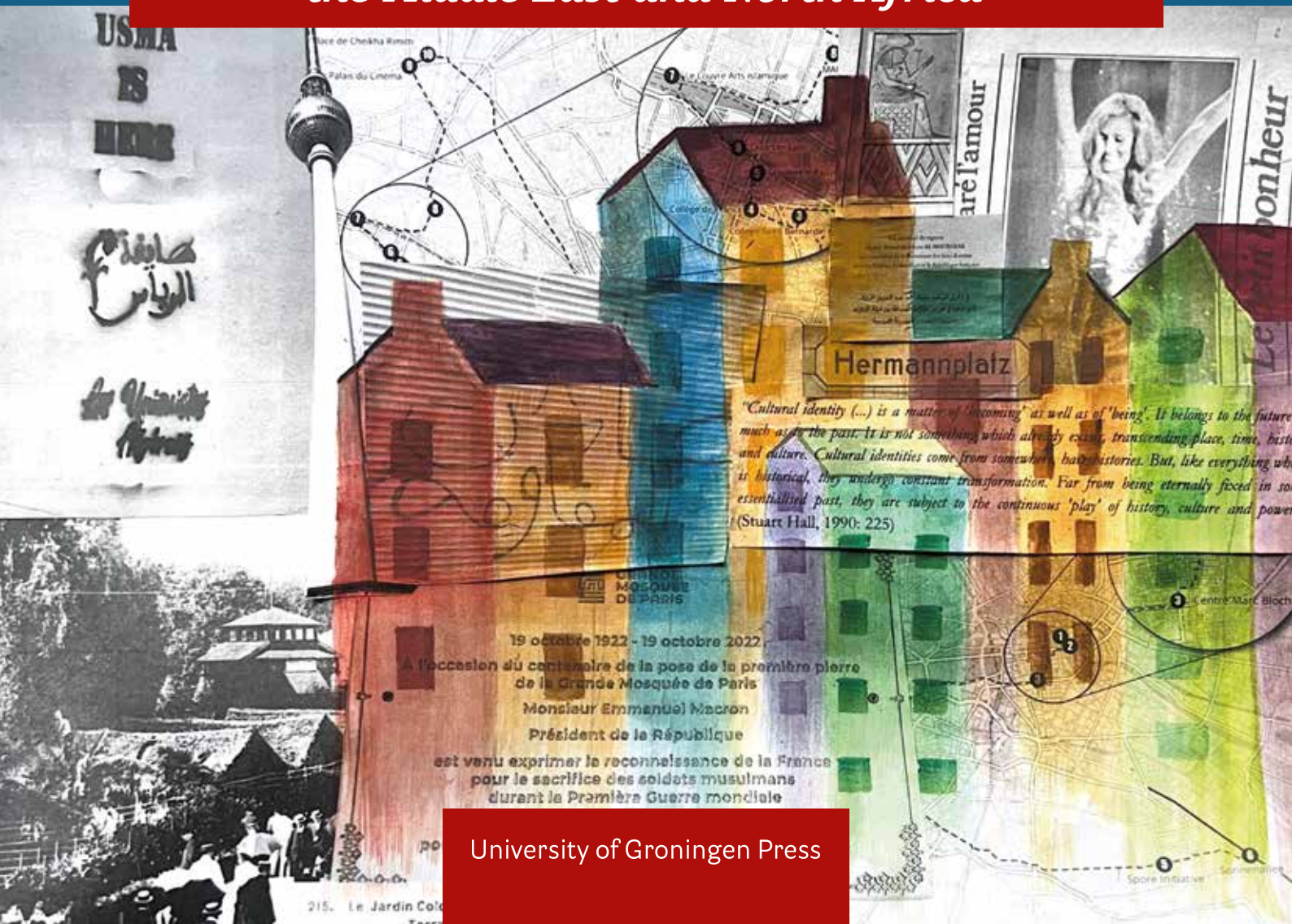


Karène Sanchez Summerer, Mayada Madbouly and Sara Vermeulen (eds.)

Cities as Cultural Crossroads

Objects, Stories, and Migration between Europe, the Middle East and North Africa



University of Groningen Press

CITIES AS CULTURAL CROSSROADS
OBJECTS, STORIES, AND MIGRATION BETWEEN EUROPE,
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Cities as Cultural Crossroads

*Objects, Stories, and Migration between Europe,
the Middle East and North Africa*

Edited by
Karène Sanchez Summerer, Mayada Madbouly
and Sara Vermeulen

University of Groningen Press

Published by University of Groningen Press
Broerstraat 4
9712 CP Groningen
The Netherlands

This publication appears in the series: Visions of the Middle East and North Africa

ISSN (print): 2950-2330

ISSN (online): 2950-2187

First published in the Netherlands © 2026 Karène Sanchez Summerer, Mayada Madbouly and Sara Vermeulen

This book has been published open access thanks to the financial support of the Open Access Book Fund of the University of Groningen.

Copy Editing Julia Zim Amaro

Cover design / Typesetting: LINE UP boek en media bv | Bas Ekkers

Photo front cover: Art by Antonina Szczerba

Photos back cover: Paris, 4 July 2025, Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sara Vermeulen, 27 June 2024.

ISBN (print): 978-94-034-3166-6

ISBN (ePDF): 978-94-034-3167-3

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21827/6a1969b89d13a>

While the author and publisher have made every effort to trace and contact all copyright holders of the material used, we invite anyone who believes they hold rights to this material to contact the publisher.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

The full licence terms are available at creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode

Acknowledgement

This project would not have been possible without the support of the University of Groningen Honours program, the University of Groningen Press (UGP, Margreet Nieborg and Martien Stege), the Board of the Faculty of Arts, LINE UP boek en media (Bas Ekkers and Peter ten Hoor) and the Middle Eastern Studies Program. We also extend our gratitude to Geodienst RUG, the Spore Initiative, Centre Marc Bloch Berlin, EUME, MAHJ, Grande Mosquée de Paris, Le Louvre and Saint Julien le Pauvre for welcoming us and George Khalil, Iskandar Abdalla, Esther Möller, and the Multaka tour guides for engaging in fruitful conversations. We are also grateful to the different persons who welcomed us, offered help, and for the genuine discussions during our walks and visits in Berlin and Paris.

We are especially grateful to all participants in the two Summer Schools of the course *Crossroads. The Middle East and/ in Europe* (July 2024 and July 2025), and to Sara Vermeulen for their invaluable assistance during the production of this book.

UGP continues to provide a vital platform for collaboration between students and researchers, for which we are sincerely thankful.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction	
Cities as Archives, Cities as Crossroads	10
Mayada Madbouly	

Chapter 1	
Circulating Knowledge and Transnational Ideas	16

Arab Tales in Boccaccio's <i>Decameron</i> : A Manuscript in Berlin Anna Pedretti	17
Paris International Entanglements in Academia, Past and Present Anna Popovics	21
Before Sonnenallee. Arab Students and German Converts in Interwar Berlin Franciszek Zowczak	25
Babylon in Paris? Métro, Memory and Cultural Heritage Karène Sanchez Summerer	28
A Corner of Heritage: The Children's Bookshelf in a Belleville Bookstore Leire Vazquez Quiroga	30
The Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA): Architecture between Identity and Diplomacy Sara Vermeulen	32
Institut du Monde Arabe's Commemoration of Khalifa Ahmad Al Moubarak Astro Dravinec	34
Egypt Through European Frames, Paintings at the Neues Museum Yağmur Yetkin	36
<i>Multaka</i> : Rethinking Museums in Context of Migration Madison Mundy	39
EUME Berlin, Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe Karène Sanchez Summerer	44

Chapter 2	
Culinary Crossroads: Foodways, Markets, and Migration	46

Wrapped Histories: The Migration of Sarma and its Power of Bringing People Together Iarina Simon	47
---	----

From Spits to Streets: The Döner Kebab's Journey—Ottoman Roots, European Reinvention Ben Rider	49
Döner Kebab in Berlin: A Dish between Integration and Identity Marlen Mertens	51
Kapsalon: A Culinary Entanglement Returning to Berlin Melle van Bolhuis	55
Falafel: A Dish of Migration, Identity, and Cultural Exchange in Berlin Fiona Majumdar	57
The Dallah: A Vessel of Hospitality on Sonnenallee's Streets Shady Gmira	59
Coffee as Connection: Bridging Cultures in Berlin's Kebab Shops Marlen Mertens	61
Glaces Bachir. Tasting Lebanon in Paris? Memory, Migration and Food Karène Sanchez Summerer	63
More Than a Meal: Arabic Cuisine and Social Integration in France Nil Deniz Üder	65
MENA Food Culture in Paris: Visibility, Commodification, and the Challenge of Representation Arthur Feeney	67
Baklava, Matcha, and the Marketing of Taste in the Age of Multinationals Marta Belogorceva	69

Chapter 3

Sonic and Visual Narratives: Music, Art, and Identities

72

From “Helwa Ya Baladi” to “5am in Paris”: How Migration has Shaped Musical Landscapes of Maghrebi Migrants Throughout Generations Nina Klačić	73
Understanding Identity Through Sound: Raï Music in Postcolonial France Celina Bannayan	75
Crossings of Music and the Mediterranean: An Exploration of Raï'n'B's Role as Narrative for the Algerian Diaspora in France Mira zu Lynar	77
Between Art and Artefact: Interpreting Arabic Calligraphy in Museum Exhibitions Dumitru Cătălin Căndea	81
Graffiti. Cultural Entanglement of Street Art Seen in the Barbès Neighbourhood Astro Dravinec	84
Projecting Identity: Arab Cinema and Europe's Cultural Screens Rebecca Fagan and Natan Gad Ghiță	86
Art and Politics: Cinema, Festivals, and the Question of Representation Iskandar Abdalla & Mayada Madbouly	89
“Shall I Compare You to a Summer's Day”/Bashtalak Sa'at: A Film by Mohammad Shawky Hassan Ines Cuțaru	93
The Commodification of Tradition. Kaftan's Journey to Paris Başak Saraçoğlu	95

What We Carried. Jewelry and Amulettes at MAHJ (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme) Leire Vazquez Quiroga	98
Museums and the Distortion of Arabness Nada Mahdy	100
Cultural Compartmentalisation Finn Gleichmann	103
Refracted Islam Behind Glass Sara Torres	106
Arab Presences in the Musée d'Art Moderne: Challenging Hegemonic Narratives in Art Sara Vermeulen	109

Chapter 4 112

Neighbourhood Stories: Postcolonial Migration and Urban Memory

Cedar and Concrete. From Lebanon to Quartier Latin, Eastern Catholic Churches at the Heart of Medieval Paris Kate van Keulen and Thomas Volker	113
In the Jaws of Colonial Power? The Grand Mosque of Paris Sara Vermeulen	118
Architecture as Tool of Memory in Paris Antonina Szczerba	120
The Moorish Style in Colonial Paris and Alger: Architecture and Colonial Ambition Greta Berardi	123
Language and Power: Decoding Colonial Narratives at La Grande Mosquée de Paris Julia Dedeu Fontcuberta	126
“La Plus Grande France”? The Paintings and Bas-Reliefs of the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (Former Ministry of Colonies) Sara Vermeulen	129
Projecting Elsewhere: Cinema Le Louxor at an Urban Crossroad Karène Sanchez Summerer	132
Archives of the Intangible: The Spore Initiative in Berlin Chrysanthi Mandraveli	135
Sonnenallee: Between a Street Like Any Other and a Piece of Home Marina Fernández Gordon	138
Beyond Institutions: Arabic as a Living Archive in the Streets of Paris Lara Hine Chinita	141

Epilogue

Pavilions of Empire, Paths of Memory. The Forgotten Jardin d'Acclimatation Colonial, a Place of Knowledge Production Revisited Karène Sanchez Summerer	144
---	-----

INTRODUCTION

Cities as Archives, Cities as Crossroads

“Cultural identity (...) is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.” (Stuart Hall 1990, 225)

Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of cultural studies, has dedicated an important part of his research work exploring the questions of identity and representation. Navigating different cultural, intellectual, and political spaces between Jamaica and the United Kingdom, Hall’s life and scholarship challenged static notions of identity. His work emphasised hybridity as a key element in understanding identity, particularly its transformative dimensions. As such, Hall defines cultural identity as the constant process of “becoming” and “being”. Drawing on his insights, this volume adopts a critical lens to rethink time, space, and the circulating ideas, objects, dreams, and hopes between both of them. This approach is particularly vital for examining the relationships between Europe and the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA).

In this edited volume, we go beyond a top-down perspective addressing this relationship through diplomacy or geopolitics. Rather, we focus on a bottom-up perspective paying more attention to everyday life objects, neighbourhoods, and stories behind foods and arts. We explore how cities narrate different (hi)stories of colonialism and migration. To do so, we walk through the histories and presents of two European cities: Berlin and Paris, and explore their living connections with MENA communities. We delve into their visible architectures, living narratives, and invisible stories. Similar to fragments (Wallach 2020), both cities are not univocal, they have multilayered readings in their street names, graffiti, and cultural institutions. We trace these readings, analyse their representations, and unpack their entanglements through the study of objects, not just as material arti-

facts, but as “fragments [that] constitute alternative stories of ‘home’ to those that script far-away homes through ideas of loss or nostalgia” (Nassar et al. 2023, 1030).

Teaching the relationships between Europe and the MENA

Cities as Crossroads emerges as a pedagogical and academic journey with students from diverse disciplines—marketing, law, economics, and computer sciences—at the University of Groningen. The journey started in 2024 when we—Karène Sanchez Summerer and Mayada Madbouly—taught an Honours class “Crossroads. The Middle East *and/in* Europe,” for two consecutive years. The class was followed by summer schools in Berlin and Paris. Drawing on our different disciplinary backgrounds in history and political sociology, we adopted an interdisciplinary approach to studying the pasts and their afterlives. We chose Berlin and Paris for their deep historical and contemporary ties to the MENA. Berlin has become a European hub for “Arab spaces of cultural co-creation” (Badr and Samour 2023, 17). Initiatives like Al Berlin, Al Film festival, Khan Al Janoub, to name a few, offer important cultural infrastructure and political commitment challenging dominant discourses on Arab diasporic communities. Paris, meanwhile, bears colonial and postcolonial histories still present in its architecture and institutions. Sites like Palais de la Porte Dorée, Mosquée de Paris, Le Louvre, and the Arab World Institute (*Institut du Monde Arabe*) narrate and commemorate histories of exploitation, cooperation, and diplomacy.

Unlike France and the UK, Germany lacks a direct colonial past with the MENA. While France is often linked with postcolonial immigration particularly from Algeria, Germany had a different system during the 1950s and 1960s. The country recruited “guest workers” from South European countries as well as from Turkey and Morocco as part of the post WWII reconstruction strategy. Yet, this does not mean that earlier mobility movements did not exist in France and Germany. Other forms of mobilities—like students—occurred before shaping chapters of exchanges between Europe and the MENA. Parallel to their entangled histories, Berlin and Paris offer social and geographical spaces to deconstruct any static view of what an Arab or MENA identity is or should be.

Contributors to this volume invite readers on a journey to scrutinize the processes of “becoming” and “being” shaped by historical, economic, political, and cultural forces.

Walking, seeing, and feeling

During the two summer schools in Berlin and Paris, we adopted walking as a pedagogical and methodological tool. As geographers argue, walking entails seeing, feeling, and questioning the social structure of neighbourhoods (Mason et al. 2023, Madbouly 2025). In both Berlin and Paris, walking (Fig. 1 and 2) helped the students to visualize the in-class discussed themes on colonialism, migration, and cultural institutions. Most importantly, it enabled them to critically connect with both cities and question its toponymies and fragments from buildings to street names and other visual representations like graffiti.



Fig. 1. Map of Berlin tracing the visited sites with the students in July 2024. Source: Geodienst.

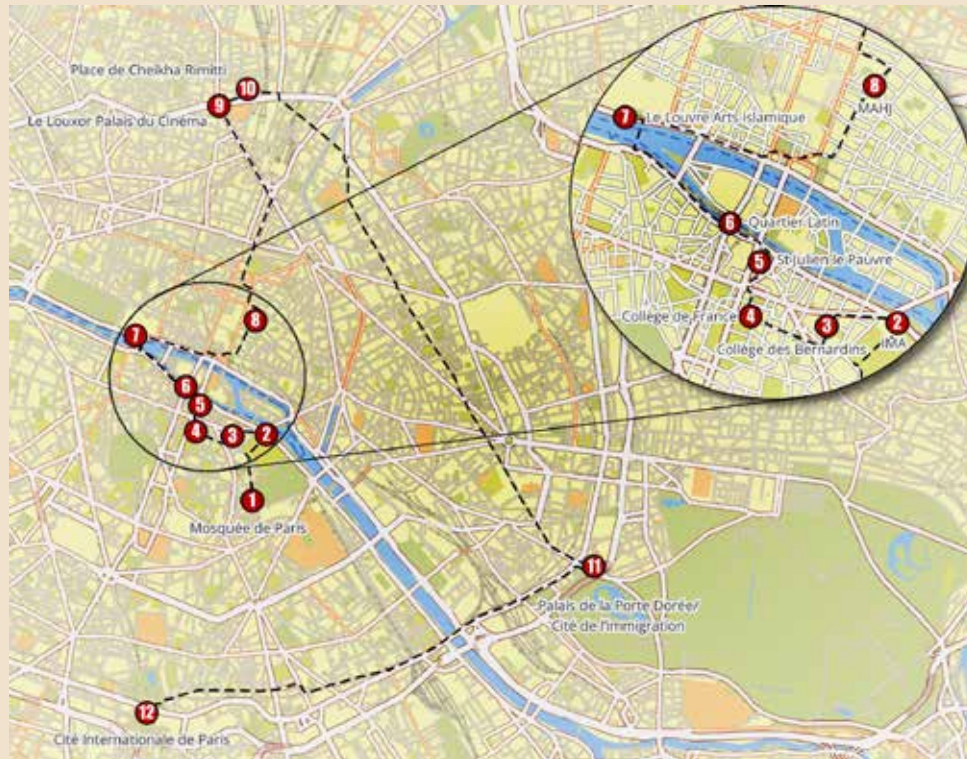


Fig. 2. Map of Paris tracing the visited sites with the students in July 2025. Source: Geodienst.

However, we should not romanticise walking as a method in social sciences and humanities. Walking and observing can easily reproduce a colonial practice when they start objectifying individuals by capturing their everyday lives as the interesting others to be studied. Guided by ethical responsibility, we took walking as a critical method to explore how the afterlives of complex pasts are constantly negotiated in the present. For instance, walking between the Mosquée de Paris and the Arab World Institute and Barbes neighbourhood (Fig. 2), as analysed in Chapter 3, reveals the multifaceted “becoming” and “being” of Arab communities. Similarly, sites like Neues museum and Humboldt Forum and their displayed narratives in Berlin, as explained in Chapter 1, present narratives that contrast sharply with those found in Sonnenallee (Fig. 1) and its MENA shops and restaurants, as explored in Chapter 4.

This edited volume comprises four thematic chapters, each of which contains between ten to fourteen short vignettes. Every vignette zooms in on a specific object selected by, engaged with, and reflected on by their author. Chapter 1 explores the transnational circulation of knowledge between Europe and the MENA. Following a chronological order, it scrutinizes the role of manuscripts, student movements, museums, bookstores, cultural institutions, and research centres in transmitting knowledge. Chapter 2 analyses foodways as a site of crossroads and entanglements. It questions how foodways narrate stories of migration as well as global marketing strategies. Chapter 3 focuses on sonic and visual narratives, exploring their roles in identity formation. It analyses a diverse range of these narratives from Raï and rap music to film screening and film festivals, and other forms of visibility like graffiti and museum exhibitions. Chapter 4 shifts the focus to neighbourhoods and their urban memories. *Cities as Crossroads* concludes with an epilogue on Jardin d'acclimatation colonial as an example of a forgotten site of French colonial memory.

References

- Badr, Hanan, and Nahed Samour, eds. *Arab Berlin: Dynamics of Transformation*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2022.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 222-237. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.
- Madbouly, Mayada. "Aesthetics of solidarity: Narrating and marketing stories of resistance in the city." *Makan. Journal of Art and Space* 3 (2025): 34-39.
- Mason, Olivia, et al. "Interventions in Walking Methods in Political Geography." *Political Geography* 106 (October 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102937>.
- Nassar, Aya, et al.. 2023. "Objects, Memories, and Storytelling: Experiments in Narrating Ideas of Home." *City* 27 (5-6): 1030-1051. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2023.2254166>.
- Wallach, Yair. *A City in Fragments: Urban Text in Modern Jerusalem*. Stanford University Press, 2020.

Circulating Knowledge and Transnational Ideas

Arab Tales in Boccaccio's *Decameron*: A Manuscript in Berlin

Anna Pedretti

A rare original manuscript of *Decameron* by the Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) is currently displayed in Berlin's Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Known as Hamilton 90, this manuscript dates back to around 1370 (Fig. 3). Initially, historians questioned its authenticity due to numerous copying errors, but in 1962, Branca and Ricci confirmed it as Boccaccio's own work.

Decameron is a collection of one hundred stories set in 1348, during the Black Death in Florence. To escape the plague, a group of young people retreat to a villa outside the city. There, they pass the time by telling stories—one each day for two weeks. The title *Decameron* means “ten-day event”, reflecting the two weeks of storytelling.

What makes *Decameron* remarkable is its connection to Arab tales. Many of Boccaccio's stories share characters, plots, and themes with traditional Arab literature, particularly *One Thousand and One Nights*. Both works use a “frame story” structure—a main narrative containing multiple tales. This similarity highlights the cultural exchange between Europe and the Arab world during the Middle Ages (Mahmood 2020, 3; Mahmood 2014, 53).

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Boccaccio admired the Arab world. He celebrated its landscapes, perfumes, and architecture, portraying Arab cities as places of prosperity and love. This contrasts with Dante's use of Arab imagery to depict hell in the *Divine Comedy*. One of *Decameron*'s most striking stories features Saladin, the Muslim sultan, and Messer Torello, a Christian knight. Despite their differences, they become friends through their shared values of generosity and respect.

This manuscript is a testament to cultural connection. Boccaccio, an Italian writer, drew inspiration from Arab stories and set his tales in the Mediterranean—a region where Europe and the Middle East meet. Today, his work is preserved in Berlin, illustrating

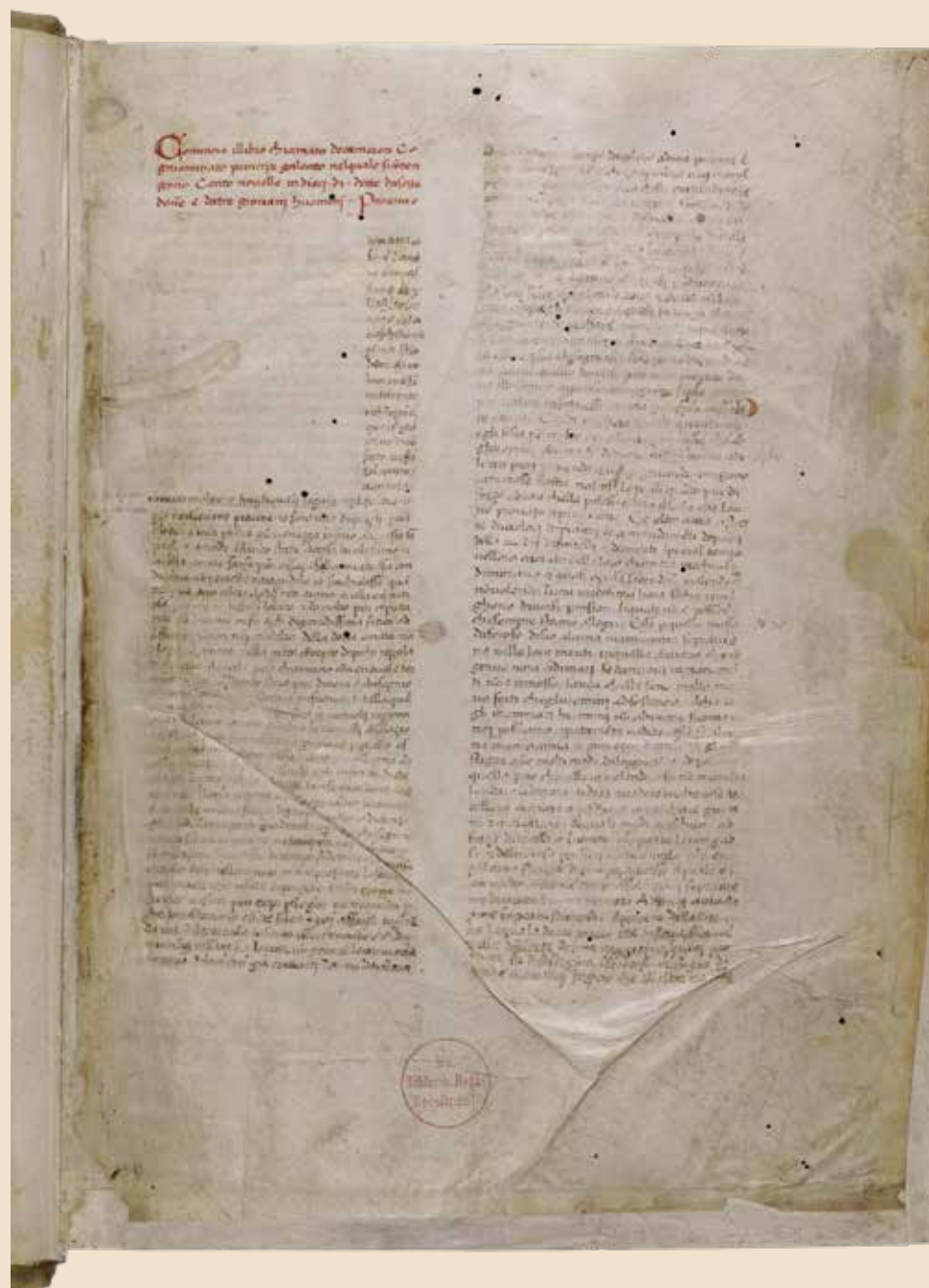


Fig. 3. *Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio. Edition curated by Vittore Branca, Utes, Torino 1956, 894 (Department of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)

how cultures have intertwined across centuries (Gorman and Irving 2022, 122). Boccaccio's stories remind us that even in challenging times, people from different worlds can find common ground (Hoseini 2015, 122).

Excerpt from Decameron (Hamilton 90, c. 1370)

Il Saladino e' compagni e' familiari tutti sapevano latino, per che molto bene intendevano ed erano intesi, e pareva a ciascuno di loro che questo cavaliere fosse il più piacevole e 'l più consumato uomo, e quegli che meglio ragionasse che alcun altro che ancora n'avesser veduto. A messer Torello d'altra parte pareva che costoro fossero magnifici uomini e da molto più che avanti stimato non avea, per che seco stesso si doleva che di compagnia e più solenne convito quella sera non gli poteva onorare.

Modern Italian Translation (A. Pedretti)

Il Saladino e i suoi compagni e familiari conoscevano tutti il latino, perciò capivano molto bene e si facevano capire altrettanto bene. A ognuno di loro sembrava che questo cavaliere fosse l'uomo più piacevole e raffinato che avessero mai incontrato, e che parlasse meglio di chiunque altro avesse conosciuto fino a quel momento. Dall'altra parte, messer Torello riteneva che quegli uomini fossero persone magnifiche, molto più di quanto avesse stimato in precedenza. Per questo si rammaricava con sé stesso di non poterli onorare quella sera con una compagnia più numerosa e un banchetto più solenne.

English Translation (A. Pedretti)

Saladin, his companions, and family members all knew Latin, so they understood very well and made themselves understood just as clearly. To each of them, this knight seemed the most pleasant and refined man they had ever encountered, and that he spoke better than anyone else they had seen until that moment. On the other hand, Messer Torello considered these men to be magnificent individuals, much more so than he had previously estimated. For this reason, he regretted that he could not honour them that evening with a larger company and a more splendid banquet.

Note: Manuscript Hamilton 90 is a 14th-century parchment codex. The manuscript was originally part of the collection of Alexander Douglas, 10th Duke of Hamilton (1767–1852), a prominent Scottish aristocrat and bibliophile. Following the dissolution of the Hamilton collection, the manuscript was acquired in 1882 by the Prussian State for the Berlin Museums (inventory number 435 from the Kupferstichkabinett, the Department of Prints and Drawings). In 1883, the manuscript was officially transferred to the Royal Library of Berlin, *Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin*, today *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*. This acquisition was part of a broader effort by the Prussian authorities in the late 19th century to enrich national collections.

The author is grateful to the Head of the Department of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin for the information provided.

References

- Branca, V., and P. G. Ricci. *Un autografo del Decameron (Codice Hamiltoniano 90)*. C.E.D.A.M., 1962.
- Gorman, A., and S. Irving. *Cultural Entanglement in the Pre-Independence Arab World: Art, Thought, Literature*. Bloomsbury, 2022.
- Hosseini, K. M. H. *Il Decameron e la Letteratura d'Oriente: Confronti e Scambi*. Thesis, 2015.
- Mahmood, B. Najem. "Narrativa in Viaggio e incontro con Boccaccio." *Al-Adab Journal* 132, (2020): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.vii132.600>.
- Mahmood, B. Najem. *La fortuna del Decameron di Giovanni Boccaccio nella cultura araba*. Thesis, 2014.

Paris International Entanglements in Academia, Past and Present

Anna Popovics

Nowadays, in the age of globalization and more open borders than ever before, student mobility is often taken for granted. Students can participate in exchange programs, undertake internships abroad, or begin their university studies in foreign countries. Yet, one might wonder how knowledge was transmitted across cultures and borders across centuries. In this regard, Paris has long been a hub for cultural and academic entanglements, particularly since the 13th century. Two key institutions in this knowledge transmission were Sorbonne and the Collège des Bernardins.



Fig. 4. The exterior of the Collège des Bernardins [Bernardins College], 20 Rue de Poissy, 75005 Paris. Photo by Anna Popovics, 2 July 2025.

While many history books acknowledge the role of Arab scholarship in the rediscovery of transmission of ancient Greek texts and the works of philosophers, scientists, artists, and writers, few provide detailed information on how this has exactly taken place. Despite the papal approval required for the establishment of most universities (suggesting a strong religious influence), scholars from the Middle East were active participants in these institutions, including the Collège des Bernardins. Although the identities of these scholars remained relatively undocumented, they served both as students and teachers, facilitating cross-cultural knowledge transfer (Gorochoy 2006).

The Collège des Bernardins, through the practice of *disputatio*, contributed to cultural encounters between knowledgeable scholars of the Middle East, who came to Paris to exchange ideas and in many cases teach as well, and their European counterparts.

The presence of these scholars underscores the early internationalism of academia. But what about contemporary education? The international character of the student life is perhaps best exemplified in the Cité Internationale de Paris. Founded in 1925, the Cité Internationale de Paris came into existence with the utopian vision of fostering cultural exchange, thus contributing to international solidarity and peace (CIUP 2026). Following the turmoil of World War I, France desperately sought to present itself as welcoming to international students and address the housing crisis of the time. It was in this atmosphere of hope and reconstruction that the Association des Étudiants Musulmans Nord-Africains (AEMAN) was established, later becoming a forum for discussions on Pan-Maghrib nationalism (Watanabe 2021). The need for such initiatives became even

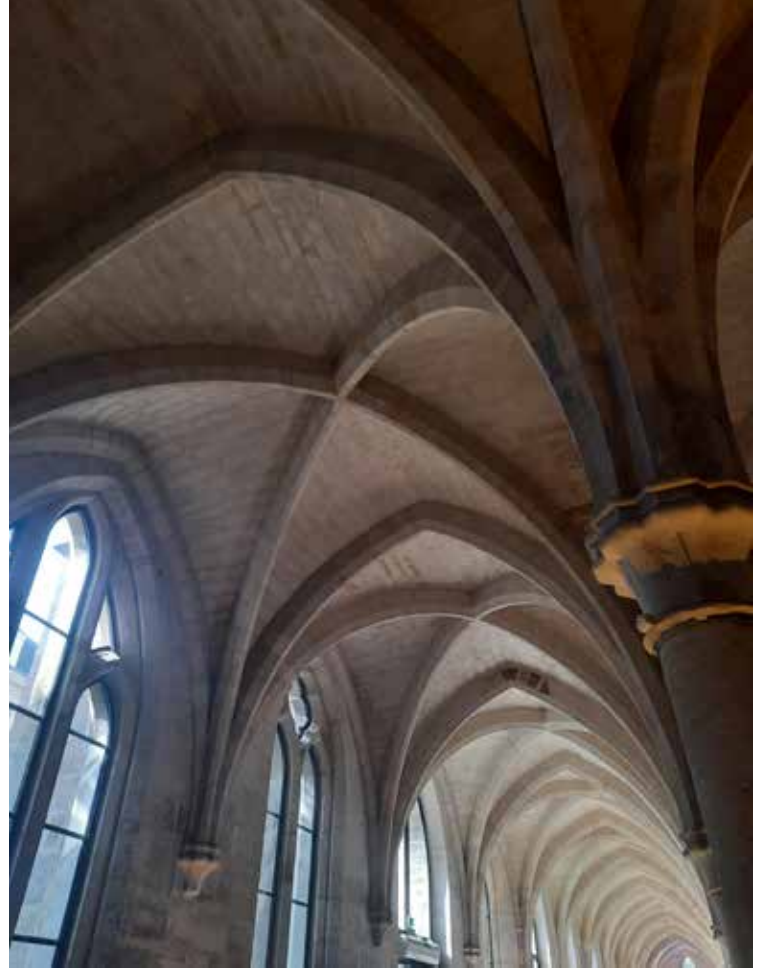


Fig. 5. The interior of the Collège des Bernardins [Bernardins College], 20 Rue de Poissy, 75005 Paris. Photo by Anna Popovics, 2 July 2025.

more pressing after World War II, when this international student housing project really took off. Although students from different nationalities were housed in separate buildings, this did not hinder internationalisation, but rather accelerated it via the exchanges between the neighbouring student houses. The Maison de la Tunisie, for example, promoted understanding between the different communities by showcasing the cultural values and customs of Tunisia and the broader Maghreb region. However, international solidarity was not the only sentiment being fostered amongst the walls of the Cité Inter-



Fig. 6. *Maison Internationale at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris* [International House, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris], 17 Boulevard Jourdan, 75014 Paris. Photo by Anna Popovics, 4 July 2025.



Fig. 7. The main building at the entrance of the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris, 45 A Bd Jourdan, 75014 Paris, Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 4 July 2025.

nationale de Paris. At places such as the Maison de la Tunisie, together with the Maison de Liban, students from the Middle East (re)discovered their Tunisian, Lebanese, Algerian identities in contrast to the French influences. Thereby, they were amongst the first cradles of anti-colonialist thinking.

References

- Gorochoy, Nathalie. "Les Obituaires, Sources de l'Histoire des Universités Médiévales. Les Fondations de Messes-Anniversaires Par Les Universitaires Parisiehs Au XIIIe Siècle." *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France* 92, no. 1 (2006): 5 - 23. <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.rhef.2.304964>.
- CIUP. "Un siècle d'histoire" Accessed March 13, 2026. <https://www.ciup.fr/histoire/>.
- Watanabe, Shoko. "Making an Arab-Muslim Elite in Paris: The Pan-Maghrib Student Movement of the 1930s." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 3 (2021): 439 - 454. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743821000337>.

Before Sonnenallee. Arab Students and German Converts in Interwar Berlin

Franciszek Zowcak

Students or Politicians?

While European colonisation sent many Europeans to the Middle East in search of ancient ruins and exotic experiences, a lesser-known but equally significant movement flowed in the opposite direction. In the 1920s and 1930s, drawn by Germany's scientific prestige and its political stance as a rival to colonial powers, many Arabs travelled to Berlin. They came for education, intellectual exchange, or business, but rather than remaining passive observers, they became active participants in the city's political and cultural life, leaving a lasting mark.

Arab students in Berlin were often seen as both “new citizens” and “troublemakers” (Nordbruch 2014, 279). Figures like Muhammad Abd al-Nafi bridged Arab and German political concerns. Through publications such as *Islam-Echo*, he aimed to inform Germans about Middle Eastern developments while familiarizing Arabs about European society (Nordbruch 2014, 286). Anti-colonial solidarity provided common ground, as seen in the 1923 protest organised by the Orient-Verein in Tübingen against the French occupation of the Ruhr (Nordbruch 2014, 289). Arab student Ibrahim Yusuf even contributed articles on Palestine and Sudan to nationalist German newspapers like *Deutschnationaler*, demonstrating Arab influence on German public discourse (Nordbruch 2014, 291).

Beyond politics, Arabs took part of Berlin's cultural and economic life. Palestinian sculptor Yussuf Abbo exhibited his work in leading Berlin galleries, while Michel Baida rose to prominence in the city's business elite (Neidhardt 2022). Despite embracing Western values, Arab students retained strong Muslim identities. They openly criticised German practices, such as the orientalist staging of Islamic prayers at the 1927 Tripoli Fair in Berlin (Nordbruch 2014, 290). While they grappled with tensions between traditional

values and modern European thought, their focus remained on universal ideals like nationalism and anti-colonialism. As Nordbruch notes, assumptions about stark cultural divisions would have seemed “strange to many Arab students in interwar Germany” (Nordbruch 2014, 295). After all, they often had more in common with German intellectuals than with “a Bedouin in the Syrian desert” (Nordbruch 2014, 278).

The Mosque: A Site of Conversion and Resistance

A striking example of Arab-German entanglements in Berlin was the city’s mosque, built in 1923 in Wilmersdorf. It became a hub for German converts to Islam, who soon formed the majority of the mosque-affiliated German Muslim Society. The mosque’s message—portraying Islam as a religion “of no colour, no origin, no nation” (Baer 2015, 153)—appealed to those disillusioned with German nationalism. Hugo Marcus, a German-Jewish convert and openly gay intellectual, found in Islam an inclusive, universalist alternative to racial ideologies and sexual discrimination (Baer 2015, 140–141).

Under Nazi rule, the mosque’s character shifted. Many German converts joined the Nazi Party, but not all conformed. The mosque’s imam, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, later helped Marcus escape Germany (Baer 2015, 163–167).

A Legacy of Exchange

The Arab presence in interwar Berlin is a complex, multifaceted story. Far from passive observers, Arabs actively shaped the city’s intellectual and cultural landscape, actively redefining its political landscape long before the post-war and modern Arab migration. Their engagement with German society challenges simplistic “us” vs. “them” narratives, revealing Berlin as a historic crossroads, a long-standing gateway where Europeans and Arabs actively influenced each other.

References

- Baer, Marc David. "Muslim Encounters with Nazism and the Holocaust: The Ahmadi of Berlin and Jewish Convert to Islam Hugo Marcus." *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 1 (February 2015): 140-171. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.1.140>.
- Neidhardt, Irit. "The Mystery of Tycoon Michel Baida in Old Arab Berlin." *The Markaz Review*, September 15, 2022. <https://themarkaz.org/the-mystery-of-tycoon-michel-baida-in-old-arab-berlin/>.
- Nordbruch, Goetz. "Arab Students in Weimar Germany: Politics and Thought Beyond Borders." *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 2 (April 2014): 275-295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009413515533>.

Babylon in Paris? Métro, Memory and Cultural Heritage

Karène Sanchez Summerer

Descending into the Paris Métro at Sèvres–Babylone, one does not expect to encounter the ancient Middle East. And yet, there it is—Babylon—named, explained, and quietly unfolding on the wall of the station itself. The green panel tells a story that stretches far beyond Paris: a city south of Baghdad, gardens suspended in myth, a tower that once aspired to reach the heavens, and a confusion of languages that brought it crashing down.

The station's name is not a coincidence, the panel insists. Babylon entered Paris not through conquest or commerce, but through words. In the 17th century, Jean Duval of Clamecy (later known as Bernard de Sainte-Thérèse) travelled through Asia and Persia, learned languages, compiled dictionaries, and helped found the *Séminaire des Missions étrangères*. On his return, Babylon followed him home, settling unexpectedly beneath the streets of Paris. Sèvres became *Sèvres–Babylone*.

What is striking, is not only the historical reach of the reference, but its placement. This story is not confined to a museum or a book; it appears in a space of transit, where commuters pause, wait, and move on. Babylon becomes part of the everyday geography of Paris, absorbed into routine movement and habitual glances. The Middle East is not elsewhere here, it is embedded in the infrastructure of the city.

The panel plays lightly with this idea. Babylon, it notes, continues to tremble. It reappears in unexpected places: in missionary routes, in porcelain from Sèvres traced back to Mesopotamia, even in a Bob Marley song that reads Babylon as a symbol of Western decadence. The métro, it jokes, might even be rasta. The humour is gentle, but the point is clear: Babylon travels, mutates, and survives through stories.

At Sèvres–Babylone, France’s relationship with the Middle East is not framed through empire or diplomacy, but through naming, narration, and circulation. To pass through the station is to participate, however briefly, in a long history of translation, movement, and reinterpretation. One enters the métro in Paris, and might exit, momentarily, into Babylon?



Fig. 8. Métro Sèvres-Babylone (lines 10 and 12), 7th arrondissement.
Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 4 July 2025.

Reference

Élise Dumont, *Petites histoires du métro parisien*, Pages Ouvertes, 2015.

A Corner of Heritage: The Children's Bookshelf in a Belleville Bookstore

Leire Vazquez Quiroga

In the heart of Belleville, a neighbourhood rich with Arab cultural influence, bookshops line the streets. Their shelves are filled with religious texts: the Qur'an in English, French, and Arabic sit beside works on the principles and teachings of Islam. Yet the most captivating aisle is where cartoons meet sacred text: the children's aisle.



Fig. 9. Stacked Qur'an in a bookstore in Belleville. *Librarie & Editions Albouraq*. 91 Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, 75011 Paris, France. Photo by Leire Vazquez Quiroga, 4 July 2025.

In the children's section of *Librairie & Editions Albouraq*, one bookstore in the area, the shelves are not filled with ordinary bedtime stories, but with narratives steeped in Islamic principles, based on the Qur'an. Prophets, moral lessons, and stories of faith sit side by side, transforming religious education into something engaging and accessible. The bookstore's owner shared that parents rarely ask for general recommendations; they arrive with a clear purpose, knowing which principle they want to introduce to their child. The role of the bookstore, as explained, is to ensure the collection is comprehensive—



Fig 10. One shelf of many in the bookstore's children's section. *Librairie & Editions Albouraq*. 91 Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, 75011 Paris, France. Photo by Leire Vazquez Quiroga, 5 July 2025.

not only a place of commerce but a space for spreading knowledge, open to anyone curious about Islam. Before I left, he insisted I take an English copy of the Qur'an as a parting gift.

Children's books are the seeds from where knowledge grows, they are where heritage takes root. In the context of Islam in Paris, these stories carry the weight of preserving religious principles from the risk of fading amid the complexities of growing up in a different country, language, and culture. Within these pages lies an effort to preserve, to ensure that faith remains alive for the next generation.

References

- Gultekin, Mehmet, and Laura May. "Children's Literature as Fun-House Mirrors, Blind Spots, and Curtains." *Reading Teacher* 73, no. 5 (2020): 627-35. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1867>.
- Janson, Torsten. "Islamic Children's Literature: Informal Religious Education in Diaspora." In *Handbook of Islamic Education*, ed. Holger Daun and Reza Arjmand, 1-34. *International Handbooks of Religion and Education* 7. Cham: Springer, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53620-0_66-1.

The Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA): Architecture between Identity and Diplomacy

Sara Vermeulen

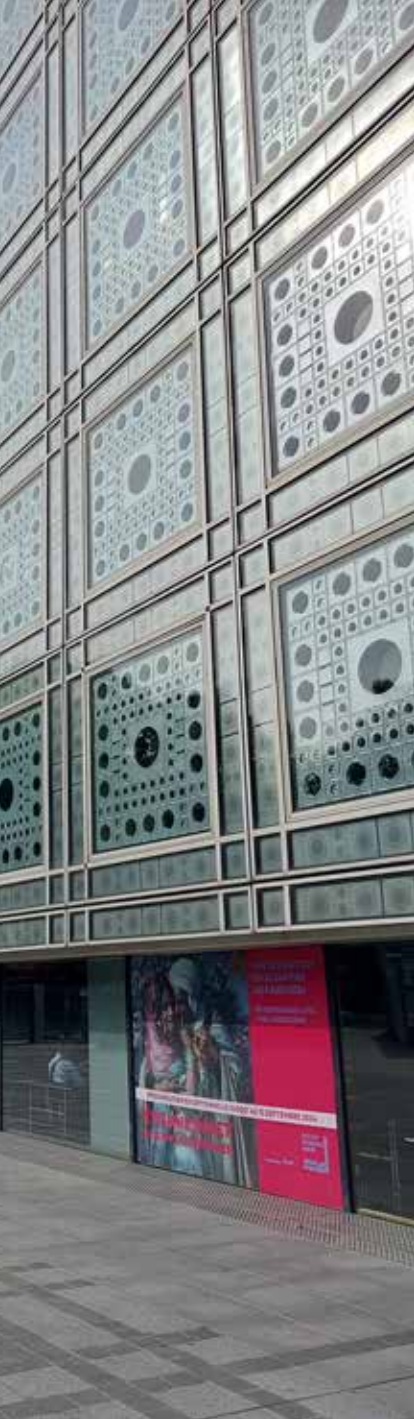
On the right bank of the River Seine in the fifth arrondissement, stands a striking yet enigmatic building. Located in a rectangular, somewhat futuristic-looking building, IMA might easily be mistaken for another office building of the business district of La Défense, home to *La Grande Arche*. This is not a mere coincidence: both buildings were part of the *Grands Projets* initiated by former president François Mitterrand in the 1980s. The chosen location is remarkable. Situated next to the Faculty of Science of Sorbonne University, the secular IMA fits well within its surroundings. However, this depends on what is considered religion and what is not. The emphasis on ethnicity—rather than Islam—reflects a broader global context, particularly the rise of Islamism in countries such as Egypt and Iran. This emphasis on Arabness offers an alternative that aligns with the French principle of *laïcité*: the separation of state and religion.

The building and its glass façade house a multidisciplinary organisation aimed at establishing and enhancing cultural connections between France and the Arab world. The building's glass façade draws inspiration from the traditional *mashrabiya*, an architectural feature common across the Arab world. Historically, the *mashrabiya* served multiple functions: water storage, daylight regulation, and climate control. At IMA however, its role is reduced to a sophisticated sunscreen that regulates daylight and interior temperature without allowing for ventilation. This reinterpretation sparks a broader debate about modernity. From a Western perspective, modernity has often been framed in a way that assumes the Arab world lacks modernity and therefore is in need of modernisation. For some, this reinterpretation of the *mashrabiya* represents an expression of French imperialism; others might see it as a blend of Eastern and Western architectural traditions. The Parisian nickname for the building is “Beaubourg Arabe” (referring to the Centre for Contemporary Art, named Centre Pompidou, later Beaubourg), the Arab



Fig. 11. Exterior of IMA.

Photo by Sara Vermeulen, 27 June 2024.



Centre Pompidou, because of its exterior, underscores this tension, suggesting that Arab architecture is only deemed modern when measured against Western standards.

Inside, the IMA continues its architectural dialogue with references to Islamic art and design. The hypostyle hall is filled with columns that resemble, to some extent, the temples in Luxor, Egypt, or the interior of the Mezquita de Córdoba, formerly a mosque but now a cathedral. The hall in the IMA, however, is devoid of colour. Additionally, the staircase in the library reminds visitors of the famous spiral minaret in Samarra, Iraq. These architectural references highlight the overlap between Islam and Arab identities, as well as their distinct, independent expressions. Through exhibitions, lectures, and cuisine, visitors are encouraged to engage with the institute. Online reviews frequently mention the architecture and the freely accessible rooftop, which offers impressive views of the city. The remaining question is whether the institute ultimately succeeds in conveying its message to its visitors or if it has become just another landmark along the Seine, a symbol of architectural innovation and diplomacy rather than cultural dialogue?

References

- Baydoun, Ziad, Marwa Baydoun, Muhammad Hadi Mustafa, Sadeq Kadi, and Azamat Khasanov. "The enduring legacy of mashrabiya in Islamic architecture and design." *Planning Malaysia* 23 (2025).
- King, Gemma., "Multiculturalism Obscured: Paris Museum Cultures and the Musée De l'Institut Du Monde Arabe," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 56, no. 2 (2019): 156-169. <https://doi.org/10.3828/AJFS.2019.12>.
- Vos Artistes. "Institut du Monde Arabe - Paris." *Vos Artistes*. Accessed March 11, 2026. <https://vosartistes.com/locations/institut-du-monde-arabe-paris/>.
- Institut du Monde Arabe. "Qu'est-ce que l'IMA ?" *Institut du Monde Arabe*. Accessed March 5, 2026. <https://www.imarabe.org/fr/qu-est-ce-que-ima>.

Institut du Monde Arabe's Commemoration of Khalifa Ahmad Al Mubarak

Astro Dravinec

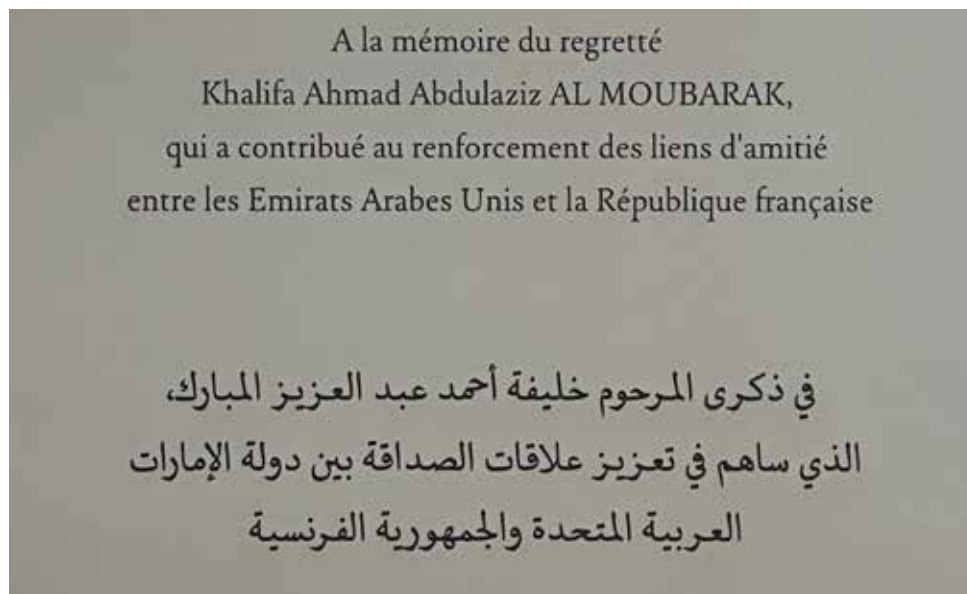


Fig. 12. Plaque in the IMA, commemorating Khalifa Ahmad Abdulaziz Al Mubarak. Photo by Astro Dravinec, 2 July 2025.

As a diplomatic institution, Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) plays a pivotal role in shaping France's relations with the Middle East. Through its museum and cultural initiatives, the IMA holds significant influence over public perceptions, as well as their historical and contemporary entanglements (King 2019). With this influence comes a responsibility: to convey accurate, nuanced, self-critical narratives that reflect the complexities of these relationships. It was with this in mind that I encountered a small plaque commemorating Khalifa Ahmad Abdulaziz Al Mubarak. It is located on a big empty wall between historical artefacts dating from the sixth century. The plaque stands out—not for its grandeur, but for its ambiguity: it commemorates Al Mubarak not because he was an ancient scribe, but for “the role he played in the diplomatic relations” between the United Arab Emirates and France.

Yet, the plaque offers little else. When I finished reading the plaque, I wondered why the IMA decided to commemorate him at all. Not only is there no historical context, the exhibit lacks a date or indication of which century Al Moubarak lived in. When, where, what, why, even who, are questions left unanswered, leaving visitors to speculate about the man and his legacy.

After some research, a complex and unsettling story emerges. Al Moubarak was a diplomat who became vice president of the IMA in 1973. Later in 1980, he was appointed as the UAE ambassador to France. Shortly after (البيان 2016), in 1984, he was assassinated in Paris (Samala 2018), shot by Palestinian activists, an act linked to the UAE's expulsion of Palestinian and Arab residents and its perceived ties to American imperialism. Decades later, in 2024, he was posthumously awarded France's highest honour, "*Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur*"—French legion of honour! (البيان 2016), "the highest and most prestigious French national order of merit". If that is not worth mentioning, what is? A detail conspicuously absent from the plaque.

The IMA's decision to commemorate Al Moubarak without context raises questions about the highly complex cultural entanglement between France and the Middle East.

References

- King, Gemma. "Multiculturalism Obscured: Paris Museum Cultures and the Musée de l'Institut du monde arabe." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 56, no 2 (2019). 156-169. <https://doi.org/10.3828/ajfs.2019.12>.
- Al Bayan (البيان). Khalifa Al Mubarak, more than an ordinary martyr (شهيد فوق العادة) (خليفة المبارك Al Bayan (البيان), November 29, 2015. <https://www.albayan.ae/supplements/restoring-hope/martyrs/2015-11-30-1.2518431>.
- Salama, Samir. "Brave Who Gave Their All for the Nation." *Gulf News*, September 18, 2018. <https://gulfnews.com/going-out/society/brave-who-gave-their-all-for-the-nation-1.1569906>.

Egypt Through European Frames, Paintings at the Neues Museum

Yağmur Yetkin

The Neues Museum, while presenting a collection of Ancient Egyptian artefacts, also frequently highlights how, historically, the Germans have been involved in the process of its collection and documentation. A relevant section of the museum regarding this is the Mythology Hall, where several paintings are displayed and, in fact, is the only location where paintings are present in the museum. Two examples of these paintings are “*Ruins of the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut*” by Ernst Karl Eugen Koerner and “*Baron van Minutoli in the Siwa Oasis*” by Louis Faure.

Ruins of the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut

Produced by German and French painters, both paintings reflect the orientalist motifs commonly present in paintings of the east at the time, and depict scenery typical of the orientalist artistic tradition. But what is more telling of the painting itself is perhaps the descriptive captioning placed next to it. The narrative built around the paintings is important, and how the painting is accentuated by text is revealing of the museum’s attitude and approach towards the vision for their displaced objects:

Ernst Koerner (1846 - 1927) was initially trained in the studio of Hermann Eschke, later by Karl Steffeck and Gottlieb Biermann. On his first study trips he visited Germany, France, Italy, England, Scotland and Spain. In 1873/74 he travelled for the first time to Egypt where he was particularly impressed by the colours and abundance of light. By painting the oriental motifs he was able to emphasise his excellent sense for capturing the beauty of scenic and architectural details in vivid atmospheric pictures. On one of his various study trips to Egypt this painting was created in 1898. His numerous works found an enthusiastic audience, including the Prussian imperial family. From 1895 to 1899 he was chairman - later honorary member - of the Berlin Artists’ Association. This painting is a donation by Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c mult. E.F.K. Koerner, the artist’s great grandson.

Here some remarkable points are the praise of Koerner for his talents and the emphasis on the Prussian royal interest in his works. Koerner is celebrated for his “excellent sense” in “capturing the beauty” of the scenery, which places him as the central focus of the text, whereas the temple becomes a subject through which the painter expresses his excellence.

Therefore, it is revealed that the placement of the painting is a consolidation of German talent in capturing what is Egyptian, similar symbolically to the museum presenting itself as an information source on Ancient Egypt, assembled through German archaeological efforts. The focus on the Prussian imperial family’s attraction towards Koerner can be seen in support of this, as it is yet another point in which the European praise of an artwork depicting Egypt is implied to be a big aspect adding to its value.



Fig. 13. Faure, Louis. 1820. *Baron von Minutoli in the Siwa Oasis*. Oil on canvas. Neues Museum, Berlin, 2 July 2024.

Baron van Minutoli in the Siwa Oasis

The second painting in focus portrays a group of people gathering under a tent in a desert setting. Once again it is useful to analyse the caption present under the painting, as follows: “*Lieutenant General Baron Minutoli in purple robe, 1820, in Siwah Oasis*”, and is printed on a bright pink, eye-catching background. Specifically describing the physical features of the lieutenant for the audience to differentiate him from the other persons present in the painting suggests that the curation places primary value on the Prussian lieutenant’s presence. Hence, the western existence in an Egyptian landscape is once more highlighted and brought to the foreground.

I found this depiction to be reflecting the general attitude that the museum adopts in presenting Ancient Egypt and Egyptology as a “crossroad” of what’s German and what’s Egyptian. The museum often tries to highlight the “German” in the artefacts presented. Whether it be a lego archaeologist inside the glass panes or texts next to the Nefertiti bust explaining how it was acquired by German archaeologists, it is apparent that the museum tries to justify the relevance of the German in presenting what is Egyptian.

This is not a mere criticism towards this attitude, as I believe this justification is even needed and crucial at times, because as attendees of the museums we must consider why and how come we are visiting a museum about Egypt, in Germany. This puts German archaeology and museum practice in an “instructor” position. This building in Berlin serves as an information point concerning Egypt. It is a narrative constructed about Ancient Egypt, not by Egyptians but by Germans and in Germany. Therefore, to a degree it is even beneficial that the museum does not present itself as an Egyptian authority, but rather as a source that acknowledges their outsider position. However, this self-positioning does not replace the need for critical reflection on the colonial and orientalist frameworks that shaped the collection and its presentation.



Fig. 14. Koerner, Ernst. *Ruins of the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut*. 1887.
Oil on canvas. Neues Museum, Berlin, 2 July 2024.

Multaka: Rethinking Museums in Context of Migration

Madison Mundy

Germany managed to avoid the topic of decolonisation longer than its Western counterparts because it held their non-European colonies for a shorter period and did not have any Middle Eastern colonies. Yet, this does not mean that they did not benefit from colonial institutions and practices. Museums were “assigned legitimacy and *raison d'être* as a national and a colonial tool” (Sauvage 2012, 108). Western powers pilfered their colonies, not just of material resources, but of cultural objects as well. These cultural items were carefully displayed in a manner that orientalist non-Western cultures and ways of living while placing, in this case, “Germanness”, as the example of progress and modernity (Sauvage 2012, 100).

Nowadays museums are struggling to “find a new social purpose outside the colonial frame” (Sauvage 2012, 100). As demographics shift, a new “postcolonial understanding” settles into Germany, and Berlin in particular, institutions are confronted with their large colonial-style museums. One way that Berlin museums have tried to embrace this new “postcolonial understanding” is through a program called “Multaka: Museums as a meeting-point” (Schorch and McCarthy 2019, 93-94). *Multaka* (meeting point in Arabic) was created in 2015 parallel to the arrival of Syrian refugees to Germany. It aims at rethinking the role of museums regarding heritage and cultural exchange in the context of migration and what is framed in the media as “refugee crisis”. Initiatives from the German government and a handful of private donors established *Multaka* and since its inception many other international organisations have joined in funding the programme, including Arab agencies. *Multaka* trains refugees as tour guides to give tours in the four participating museums (the Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, the Bode Museum, the German Historical Museum, and the Museum of Near Eastern Art at the Pergamon Museum) in the languages of other immigrants (Donadio 2016).

These museums each strive to connect the home countries of the immigrants to Germany by emphasising the transnational nature of their own objects, cross-cultural exchanges through history, the common origins of the Abrahamic faiths, and commonalities in their histories (mainly the redevelopment of Berlin after 1945 as a sign of hope for the eventual reconstruction of Syria). They embody the idea of *Multaka* by literally turning the museums into meeting-points of culture, trade, and of people themselves. They host many outreach programs to both Germans and refugees as well as making the museum itself more accessible through “the free of charge and registration tour concept, the abolishment of the language barrier as well as peer-to-peer encounter[s]” (Multaka 2024).

Multaka has changed the narrative through “the diversification of the museums’ structures” (Multaka 2024). They have chosen to emphasise the transnational character of each of the objects in the museum to show the ever-present existence of migration. Their goal is to show immigrants that they are not alone and that migration is not a new phenomenon. They believe that “artefacts can representatively demonstrate that migration is neither an exception nor an anomaly, but historical normality that constantly influences our society” (Multaka 2024).

However, little time is spent addressing the darker aspects of how these artefacts came to be in Berlin. Instead, the artefacts acquired through trade rather than conquest are highlighted and framed primarily through the lens of an economic and political relationship (Museum of Islamic Art 2024). What does help the narrative here is that Germany never had a colony in the Middle East and a lot of the objects that they do emphasise were brought to Germany through trade, though they did have operations there and worked with the Ottomans during WWI.

Multaka transforms the orientalisng narrative into one of praise. Artefacts are seen as proof of otherness and become something that resonates with the multicultural German population. Objects are no longer a symbol of the Other, but one of a shared identity. *Multaka* thus contributes to increasing the accessibility of museums and helps to create a more inclusive narrative. Guides are given very loose parameters for their tours and

are encouraged to create discourse around their museums. They are encouraged to use their various (academic) backgrounds as well as their experiences as refugees.

The programme changes the dialogue of museums but it remains an example of “the tendency of museums to incorporate critique without, however, fundamentally attending to its relevance for their own institutional status quo with regard to the politics of display, administrative structures and the museum’s engagement with its manifold publics” (Foster and Bose 2019, 48). Multaka has done much needed work in Berlin but they are simply a programme limited to a small portion of visitors who participate in their programs or speak Arabic/Farsi. They have no curatorial power and the museums themselves have not changed their structures. The “diversification of structures” (Multaka 2024) that *Multaka* aims for “disguises, rather than addresses, questions of power relations” (Foster and Bose 2019, 50). It has the potential to have an immense impact on how visitors view the four Berlin museums but the vast majority of visitors to the museum will never see their impact because they have no power over the museums themselves. For systematic and sustained change to happen, the colonial purpose of the museum has to change as well.



Fig. 15. Logo of Multaka, Berlin (<https://multaka.de/en/startseite/>).

References

- Donadio, Rachel. "Berlin's Museum Tours in Arabic Forge a Bridge to Refugees." *The New York Times*, February 28, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/29/arts/design/berlins-museum-tours-in-arabic-forge-a-bridge-to-refugees.html>.
- Forster, Larissa and von Bose, Friedrich. "Concerning curatorial practice in ethnological museums: an epistemology of postcolonial debates," In *Curatopia : museums and the future of curatorship*, ed. Philipp Schorch and Conal McCarthy, 44-55. Manchester University Press, 2019.
- Golding, Viv and Modest, Wayne. "Thinking and working through difference: re-making the ethnographic museum in the global contemporary." In *Curatopia :*

museums and the future of curatorship, ed. Philipp Schorch and Conal McCarthy, 90-106. Manchester University Press, 2019.

Multaka. "Concept and Vision." Accessed January 15, 2024. <https://multaka.de/en/concept-vision/>.

Museum of Islamic Art. "Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point." Accessed January 15, 2024. <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/syrian-heritage-archive-project/multaka-the-museum-as-meeting-point-refugees-as-guides-in-berlin-museums/>.

Sauvage, Alexandra. "To be or not to be colonial: Museums facing their exhibitions." *Culturales* 6, no. 12 (2012): 97-116, <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/694/69415135005.pdf>.

EUME Berlin, Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe

Karène Sanchez Summerer

In a sunlit room in Berlin's *Wissenschaftskolleg* (Research Institute), the sound of voices drifts across the floors of a very calm neighbourhood: scholars from Beirut, Cambridge, Cairo, Mainz and Paris, among others, unpack their questions, mapping the entangled histories and trajectories that refuse to be neatly compartmentalised. This is not a lecture hall in a university building, it is the everyday routine of *Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe* (EUME), a transnational research centre and network that refuses simple binaries (East/West, centre/periphery, origin/other...) and replaces them with something more supple, more reflective of the real world in motion.

EUME is both ideas and practice: a program that deliberately pulls at the threads of *interconnection* and *mobility* between Europe and the Middle East, not as abstract concepts only but also as lived realities. Founded in 2006 through a collaboration of German research foundations and sustained by the *Forum Transregionale Studien*, it insists that knowledge itself circulates as people do—through fellowship, dialogue, translation, and re-translation of meaning.



Fig. 16. Logo of EUME, Berlin (<https://www.eume-berlin.de/en/about-eume/profile>).

At EUME, literature is not an island. Philology (the study of texts) becomes a lens through which *translation* itself is reconsidered: what is gained, what is lost, and how meaning shifts when a story migrates between languages, cultures, and epochs. Urban comparison projects (among many others) illuminate the paradoxical currents of citizenship, belonging, and exclusion that define southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean alike. Scholars ask not only how cities absorb migrants but how cities *themselves* migrate conceptually—carrying the memory of one place into another.

In this Berlin space, ideas circulate: they accumulate, fragment, and recombine, creating new vocabularies for understanding historical legacies and shared futures. The work reframes narratives about belonging, challenges received notions of modernity, and foregrounds the fluid cartographies of culture that pulse through Berlin and beyond. In these corridors, transnational knowledge is not archived, it is *animated*, constantly in motion.

References

- European University of the Mediterranean and the Middle East (EUME). "Profile." *EUME Berlin*. Accessed February 14, 2026. <https://www.eume-berlin.de/en/about-eume/profile>.
- European University of the Mediterranean and the Middle East (EUME). "Publications." *EUME Berlin*. Accessed February 27, 2026. <https://www.eume-berlin.de/en/publications>.
- Forum Transregionale Studien. *Forum Transregionale Studien*. Accessed February 27, 2026. <http://www.forum-transregionale-studien.de>.

CHAPTER 2

Culinary Crossroads: Foodways, Markets, and Migration

Wrapped Histories: The Migration of Sarma and its Power of Bringing People Together

Iarina Simon

In Berlin's Neukölln neighbourhood, along the Sonnenallee, commonly known as the "Arab Street", the dish Sarma quietly tells a story of movement, adaptation, and cultural entanglement. Originating in the Ottoman Empire, Sarma, (from the Turkish sarmak which means "to wrap") is traditionally made by rolling grapevine or cabbage leaves around a filling of minced meat and rice. As the empire expanded through south-eastern Europe, the dish travelled with it, absorbing local influences along the way (Slavková 2019). In regions now part of Romania and Moldova, grape leaves were often substituted for pickled cabbage (sauerkraut) due to the different climate, and tomato-based sauces became a common addition. This process repeated itself across the Balkans, with different forms of Sarma becoming embedded in household traditions, especially around major Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter.

That journey did not end at the borders of old empires. Today, Sarma continues to migrate, and in cities like Berlin, it serves as a reminder of these overlapping histories. In areas like Neukölln, Balkan shops offer all the ingredients needed to make Sarma at home, whether you prefer grape leaves or cabbage rolls. Even the particular kind of rice used in the filling is often available. Many local restaurants also feature Sarma alongside other regional dishes, making it accessible to both longtime residents and curious newcomers. In this setting, Sarma becomes more than a meal. It carries stories of home, migration, and cultural memory. For those who grew up with it, having Sarma in Berlin can feel grounding, like a continuation of something familiar. For others, encountering it might open up new perspectives on the city's complexity and diversity. In this way, food acts as a soft entry point into deeper understanding, a subtle but powerful invitation to engage with the lives and histories that shape Berlin.

At the same time, it is important not to romanticise a simple dish too much. In recent years, the rise of far-right politics across Europe has intensified debates around immigration, integration, and national identity, and Germany is no exception (Berning and Schlueter 2016). In Berlin, which is home to significant Middle Eastern and Balkan diasporas, the divide between the city's multicultural present and nationalist narratives is increasingly visible. Streets like Sonnenallee, where Sarma can be found, are often caught in that tension (Sarıkaya 2023). Some celebrate them as vibrant and diverse, while others dismiss them as symbols of otherness or failed “integration”. In this climate, food can be both a bridge and a boundary. While cuisine can spark curiosity, it does not automatically undo the bias those with less favourable views about migrants might hold.

Interestingly, Sarma's lower profile, especially when compared to more widely known Turkish foods such as Kebab, might actually make it easier to accept. It is not as heavily politicised or symbolically loaded, which means it may be approached with fewer assumptions and more openness. That subtlety might help explain how some cultural forms, especially those seen as less threatening, find smoother paths into shared spaces. And as Berlin is a multicultural city built upon years of migration, food, especially traditional Turkish food that also found its way across a myriad of other European countries, might be a useful tool in bringing different communities together.



Fig. 17. Sarma served in a restaurant. Photo by Sara Vermeulen, 18 March 2026.

References

- Berning, Carl C., and Elmar Schlueter. “The Dynamics of Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preferences and Perceived Group Threat: A Comparative Panel Analysis of Three Competing Hypotheses in the Netherlands and Germany.” *Social Science Research* 55 (January 2016): 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2015.09.003>.
- Sarıkaya, Şamil. “Where Is the Street of Arabs?: Monopolistic Competition in Berlin's Sonnenallee.” Doctoral dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2023.
- Slavková, Markéta. “The Burek as a Meal and Metaphor: Food, Migration and Identity between ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’.” *Porta Balkanica: Časopis věnovaný zemím Balkánu a jihovýchodní Evropy / Journal Focused on the Balkan and Southeast European Countries* 11, no. 1-2 (2019): 62–75.

From Spits to Streets: The Döner Kebab's Journey—Ottoman Roots, European Reinvention

Ben Rider

Middle Eastern food is one of my favourite cuisines. Whether it's a cheap kebab or an elaborate lamb dish, I find it all irresistibly delicious.

But how has Middle Eastern cuisine evolved in Europe, and how has it reshaped Europe itself? How have kebab shops, often perceived as purveyors of “cheap drunk food”, influenced the way Middle Eastern food and culture are viewed across the continent? Does this stereotype limit the availability of high-end Middle Eastern restaurants, or does it have no real impact? How has the cuisine been adapted to suit European tastes, and what ingredients or dishes common in Europe would never be found in Turkey, Lebanon, or Syria? Is this adaptation a compromise on tradition, or is it an innovative evolution?

As any partygoer, night owl, budget-conscious student, or lover of greasy food can attest, the humble kebab shop is a staple of European fast food and perhaps the most visible representation of Middle Eastern cuisine on the continent. But how did a regional dish from the Middle East transform into a universally known—and often undervalued—fast food, recognised more for its affordability than its rich flavours or dining experience?

For such a seemingly simple dish, the döner kebab has a surprisingly deep history. Its origins trace back to the Ottoman Empire, where slices of meat were gradually carved from a spit-roasted sheep to reduce cooking time. Kebab houses spread throughout the Ottoman Empire, but it wasn't until the post-war years that the dish made its way to Europe and evolved into its current form.

Following World War II, West Germany faced a severe labour shortage. To fuel its economic recovery, the country recruited “guest workers”—many of whom came from Turkey, totalling over 800,000. Many chose to stay, forming a significant immigrant

community. Naturally, they brought their culinary traditions with them, including the döner kebab.

The kebab's rise to prominence in Europe coincided with economic downturns in the 1970s. As immigrants faced unemployment, many turned to entrepreneurship, opening barbershops, grocery stores, and—most notably—kebab shops. In this process, the döner kebab transformed from a cherished meal into a cheap, on-the-go fast food that could thrive even during a recession.

Yet, in this transformation, something seemed lost. The döner kebab lost its place in fine dining. Its centuries-long history was overshadowed as it became associated with late-night indulgence and budget dining. While upscale German restaurants abound, high-end kebab shops remain rare. This disparity reflects broader societal hierarchies, where migrant cuisines—and the communities behind them—are often relegated to a lower cultural status.

However, there's another side to this story. Kebab shops are local gathering places, not just destinations for a quick meal. They are warm, welcoming, and deeply embedded in their communities, often fostering a sense of familiarity between customers and owners. The vertical spit-roast is a practical innovation—space-efficient and ideal for continuous cooking throughout the day.

In many ways, the popularity of the kebab shop is a testament to shared values: affordability, accessibility, and community. Rather than being seen as inferior to fine dining, kebab shops occupy a distinct cultural space—one where food and community intersect in a way that resonates across cultures.



Fig. 18. **Döner Kebab spits.** Photo by Sara Vermeulen, 29 March 2026.

References

Işın, Priscilla Mary. "Ottoman Kebab Culture and the Rise of Döner Kebab." *PCC Petits Propos Culinaires, Essays and Notes on Food, Cookery and Cookery Books* 116 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.27891>.

Döner Kebab in Berlin: A Dish between Integration and Identity

Marlen Mertens

How does a Middle Eastern dish—the döner kebab, now a staple in Germany—reflect immigrants’ integration into German society?

During our visit to Berlin, we had the opportunity to try Oggi’s Gemüsekebab, widely regarded as one of the best kebabs in the city. The dish featured a distinctive combination of roasted vegetables layered with meat, enhancing both texture and flavour. Paired with well-balanced sauces and fresh toppings, the meal exemplified the crossroads of Turkish cuisine and Berlin’s vibrant food culture.

Success Story

First, let’s define the dish. Döner kebab is a Turkish type of kebab made by marinating meat, skewering it on a vertical rotisserie, and cooking it in a specialised döner grill (Turp and Yıldırım 2019). Traditionally, it consists of compressed beef and lamb slices, served in unleavened bread with vegetables and seasonings (Möhring 2011). While similar dishes—such as Arab *shawarma*, Greek *gyros*, Canadian *donair*, and Mexican *al pastor*—exist worldwide, this vignette focuses on the German version of the döner kebab, a Turkish-German invention (Möhring 2011). Its hybrid nature exemplifies how transcultural exchange creates new culinary traditions (Bozkurt and Arslan 2023).



Fig. 19. *Oggi's Gemüse Kebab in Berlin.*
Photo by Marlen Mertens, 3 July 2024.

The informal, accessible setting of snack bars—rather than traditional sit-down restaurants—played a pivotal role in introducing non-Turkish customers to döner kebab and other German-Turkish dishes (Möhring 2011). Its affordability, convenience, and portability, often enjoyed on the go without the need for cutlery, encouraged Germans to embrace this once “foreign” cuisine (Möhring 2011). By the early 1980s, döner kebab had spread across Germany, becoming a fast-food phenomenon by the 1990s (Möhring 2011). Today, it represents a 4-billion-euro industry, with approximately 40,000 kebab shops nationwide (Möhring 2011). In Berlin alone, there are over 1,000 döner outlets, serving an estimated 400,000 kebabs daily (Möhring 2011). Its success is unparalleled—Berlin now has more döner kebab shops than Istanbul, making it Germany’s most successful fast food, even outselling hamburgers (Bozkurt and Arslan 2023). The cultural significance of döner kebab is further underscored by the public outcry in 2022, when inflation-driven price increases sparked calls for political regulation (Bozkurt and Arslan 2023).

A Dish of Contradictions

Ironically, the globally recognised döner kebab is less common in Turkey than in Turkish communities abroad (De Tapia 2020). Originally a regional specialty of north-western Anatolia and Istanbul, it was not widely prevalent in other parts of Turkey. However, German-Turkish producers expanded its reach, exporting döner to Turkey, France, and other European countries (Turp and Yıldırım 2019). In cities with Turkish immigrant populations, döner kebab has become synonymous with Turkish cuisine, serving as a primary ambassador for Turkish gastronomy. Yet, Turkish culinary experts often lament that its global reputation overshadows the rich diversity of Turkish cuisine (De Tapia 2020).

Despite its German origins, döner kebab is closely associated with Turkishness in the German imagination (Möhring 2011). Turkish cuisine in Germany is predominantly served in small food stalls, reflecting both its culinary niche and the broader societal positioning of Turkish immigrants (Möhring 2011). During the 1970s and 1980s, a “folkloric discourse of Turkishness” was employed to appeal to German customers, relying

heavily on Orientalist imagery (Möhring 2011). Media played a significant role in portraying döner kebab as an “authentic” and “traditional” Turkish dish, reinforcing colonialist perceptions of cultural difference (Möhring 2011). Early döner kebab stalls often featured Orientalist decorations, embedding these narratives into the product’s identity.

This raises a critical question: Are ethnic restaurants and snack bars modern manifestations of colonialism and consumerism? While it is essential to acknowledge the racism inherent in consumer-oriented multiculturalism, it is equally important to recognise the agency of individuals in the döner business. They actively shape the image of döner kebab—and, by extension, their own identities (Möhring 2011).

Döner Kebab and German Identity Politics

The popularity of döner kebab does not signify the seamless integration of Middle Eastern immigrants into German society. While even neo-Nazis consume döner kebab, they simultaneously frame it as a threat to “Germanness” (Möhring 2011). Slogans like “Kartoffeln statt Döner” (“Potatoes instead of Döner”) or “Bockwurst statt Döner” (“Sausage instead of Döner”) reflect this anti-immigrant sentiment, promoting ethnic German preferences over immigrant cultures (Tolgensbakk 2018).

Such rhetoric rejects not only “the Turkish” but also the hybridisation of German identity resulting from transnational migration (Tolgensbakk 2018). The slogan’s “either-or” framing—pitting *Kartoffeln* (potatoes) against döner—creates a binary opposition between “us” and “them”, reinforcing exclusionary narratives (Möhring 2011). The word “statt” (“instead of”) emphasises substitution rather than appropriation, suggesting that German culture must remain distinct and untainted by foreign influences. This perspective reflects deeper societal tensions around migration, identity, and belonging in Germany.

A Hybrid Dish in a Hybrid Society

Döner kebab’s success in Germany stems from its adaptation to local tastes, affordability, and informal dining culture, which attracted non-Turkish customers to explore Turk-

ish-German fusion cuisine. Its composition and consumption reflect a transnational blend of Turkish and German influences, justifying its label as a hybrid dish that bridges cultural boundaries.

However, its widespread popularity does not imply unproblematic integration of Middle Eastern immigrants. The struggles surrounding döner kebab—from Orientalist stereotypes to racist backlash—highlight the complex relationship between food, identity, and migration. While döner kebab stands as a symbol of cultural exchange, it also remains a target for exclusionary politics, underscoring the ongoing challenges faced by immigrant communities in Germany.

References

- Bozkurt, A. D., and İ. K. Arslan. "The Effect of Intercultural Interaction on the Glocalization of Döner Kebab." *Journal of International Trade, Logistics and Law*, May 29, 2023. <https://www.jital.org/index.php/jital/article/view/370>.
- De Tapia, S. "De Berlin à la conquête du monde." *Anthropology of the Middle East* 15, no. 2 (2020): 194-204. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2020.150214>.
- "Kartoffeln statt Döner!!!" *Fotocommunity*, January 6, 2015. <https://www.fotocommunity.de/photo/kartoffeln-statt-doener-warth/35350243>.
- Hürriyet Daily News. "German Chancellor Angela Merkel Cuts, Eats Döner Kebab in Berlin." *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 28, 2017. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/german-chancellor-angela-merkel-cuts-eats-doner-kebab-in-berlin-114847>.
- Möhring, M. "Döner Kebab and West German Consumer (Multi-)Cultures." In *BRILL eBooks*, 151-165. 2011. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042032293_009.
- Tolgensbakk, I. "Street Food as an Ethnic Border." *Anthropology of Food*, S12 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.4000/aof.9155>.
- Turp, G. Y., and B. Yıldırım. "Geleneksel Ürünümüz Döner; Üretim Yöntemleri, Kalite Özellikleri ve Geliştirme Çalışmaları." *Türk Tarım - Gıda Bilim ve Teknoloji Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2019): 344-354. <https://doi.org/10.24925/turjaf.v7i2.344-354.2314>.

Kapsalon: A Culinary Entanglement Returning to Berlin

Melle van Bolhuis

Kapsalon is more than just a street food phenomenon—it is a living testament to the cultural entanglements that migration, globalisation, and identity politics produce. Invented in Rotterdam in 2003 by a Cape Verdean hairdresser, the dish layers French fries, döner kebab, Gouda cheese, salad, garlic sauce, and Indonesian sambal into a single aluminium tray. The name, literally meaning “barbershop” in Dutch, reflects its humble and hyperlocal origin. But its ingredients—and its journey—are anything but simple, and now it even starts to take over one of the Döner Kebab capitals in the world, Berlin.

Kapsalon exemplifies the term the “production of locality” (Smith 2018): a dish born in a specific neighbourhood context but shaped by transnational flows. Its central component, the döner kebab, originated in the Ottoman Empire but became a cornerstone

of Berlin’s culinary identity in the 1970s, when Turkish *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) adapted traditional recipes for fast-paced urban consumption, migrant cuisines often undergo transformations to become successful in their new home country.

In the Netherlands, döner kebab met local tastes and global influences. The addition of Gouda cheese anchors the dish in Dutch dairy culture. The sambal sauce, a legacy of Indonesia’s colonial relationship with the Netherlands, also shows that ingredients and cuisines carry layered, often invisible, colonial histories.

Now, Kapsalon is circling back in Berlin, the very city that helped shape one of its core components. In some Berlin kebab shops, it’s

cheekily marketed under a Germanised name: *Frisörsalon* (also “barbershop”). This return is not a full circle, but rather a new turn in a spiralling journey. Just as döner was



Fig. 20. Kapsalon.
Photo by Ella
Fitzpatrick, 29 March
2026.

adapted for Berlin's multicultural neighbourhoods, Kapsalon is now being reinterpreted for German palates, perhaps with curry ketchup, different cheeses, or vegan variants. This return signals more than geographic movement—it marks a cultural re-translation. In Berlin, a city layered with histories of migration and reinvention, Kapsalon re-enters as both foreign and familiar. It becomes a symbol of how food moves with people, how it changes with context, and how it carries complex stories of belonging, labour, and identity.

From Ottoman rotisseries to German street corners, from Dutch barbershops to Berlin kebab houses, Kapsalon is a dish in motion. And perhaps its next stop is Istanbul—or Jakarta—or somewhere entirely new.

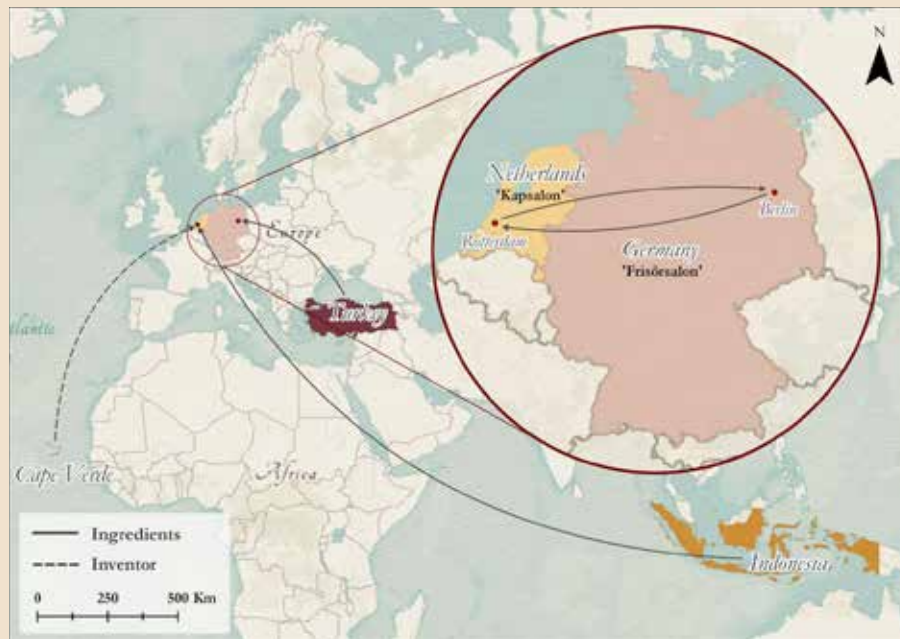


Fig. 21. A simplified map of the journey of the Kapsalon. The sambal from Indonesia, the döner from Turkey, and the movements between Germany and the Netherlands;
Source: Geodienst.

References

- Ray, Krishnendu. *The Ethnic Restaurateur*. Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Smith, Keri E. Iyall. *Sociology of Globalization*. Routledge eBooks, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429493089>.

Falafel: A Dish of Migration, Identity, and Cultural Exchange in Berlin

Fiona Majumdar

Falafel is a deep-fried ball or patty, and it has become one of the most recognisable hallmarks of Middle Eastern cuisine, particularly for international audiences. The ingredients for a falafel recipe typically include: ground chickpeas or fava beans (or a combination of both), fresh parsley, cilantro, and dill, garlic, salt and pepper, cumin, coriander, pepper and sesame seeds. The preparation process involves soaking, grinding, mixing, cooling, rolling, and frying, resulting in a crispy, flavourful dish. Falafel is incredibly versatile and can be served for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. In many Middle Eastern countries, it is a staple food that people start their day with, reflecting its deep cultural roots.

Falafel in Berlin: A Symbol of Migration and Integration

Falafel can be found in almost every street and market in Berlin, from street food stalls to fine-dining restaurants. Its ubiquity reflects its journey from a regional Middle Eastern dish to a staple of Berlin's culinary landscape. This transformation is deeply tied to post-war migration patterns, including the arrival of Turkish Gastarbeiter in the mid-20th century and more recent waves of Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese migrants. Falafel stalls, which initially served as informal gathering spaces for Middle Eastern diaspora communities, have since crossed cultural boundaries, becoming beloved by native Berliners and a prominent feature in vegan and clean-eating movements.

Falafel's story in Berlin reveals contradictory narratives. On the one hand, it demonstrates how migrant communities have shaped Berlin's culinary identity, turning falafel into a mainstream dish. On the other hand, it highlights a phenomenon known as "consumable multiculturalism" (Hage 2023), where the food itself is celebrated and embraced, yet the people who introduced it continue to face racism, job discrimination, and social exclu-

sion. Berlin's appreciation of falafel as a culinary delight often downplays the struggles of the migrant communities that brought it to the city.

The Asymmetry of Cultural Exchange

The popularity of falafel in Berlin also reflects an asymmetry in cultural exchange. While veganism and “clean eating” trends have helped to “sanitise” falafel for broader consumption, they have simultaneously erased its deep ties to migration and diaspora. The ingredients in falafel (many of which have Middle Eastern roots) have travelled across borders to become staples in Berlin's grocery stores. Yet, it seems there is often little acknowledgment of their connection to the very communities that face *othering* in German society. This raises important questions about how food and culture are consumed. Falafel's journey from a migrant community staple to a mainstream Berlin dish illustrates how cultural integration can be selective, celebrating diversity in food while ignoring the systemic challenges faced by the people who brought that diversity to the table.

Fig. 22. A plate with falafel, hummus, garlic sauce and a variety of pickled vegetables. Photo by Sara Vermeulen, 29 March 2026.



References

- Hage, Ghassan. *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*. Pluto Press, 2003.
- Ray, Krishnendu. *The Ethnic Restaurateur*. Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Zubaida, Sami. *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East*. IB Tauris, 2000.

The Dallah: A Vessel of Hospitality on Sonnenallee's Streets

Shady Gmira

The image of a man holding a traditional Dallah (the ornate Arabic coffee pot) showcases a profound gesture of hospitality amid the bustling streets of Sonnenallee, lined with vibrant stores, cosy cafés, and lively markets reminiscent of Middle Eastern life. To me, his welcoming presence invites passersby to pause, take a breath, and share a spontaneous moment of warmth and generosity. Unlike in Western contexts, where coffee often appears to me as a symbol of productivity, efficiency, or individual convenience, the Dallah embodies a deeper, collective tradition deeply rooted in Arab culture (Abraham-Barna 2013; Temir 2022).

The practice of serving coffee follows a unique set of rituals and etiquette deeply embedded in local life. Traditionally, coffee is prepared in the presence of guests, with priority given to the most esteemed or eldest guest. The cup is filled only a quarter at first, but refills are customary. It is typical to drink at least one cup, but no more than three. Offering coffee from a Dallah embodies openness, respect, and friendship, reflecting customs from across the Middle East. The simple act of sharing coffee facilitates casual gatherings, encouraging strangers and friends alike to gather, converse, and build connections. People stop by not merely for refreshment but to engage in meaningful conversation, share daily joys and struggles, and savour life's simple pleasures. This practice is part of a broader tradition of Arabic coffee (*qahwa*), recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage for its role in fostering social bonds and cultural exchange (UNESCO 2015).

In Sonnenallee, such encounters gain special significance, serving as opportunities for dialogue and intercultural exchange in Berlin's multicultural landscape. The Dallah can thus transform coffee into a powerful tool for community building, inviting residents to rest, connect, and support one another amidst life's daily challenges and successes. The informal gatherings created around the Dallah nurture a culture of solidarity, highlight-

ing how deeply human experiences, such as enjoying coffee together, can foster genuine social bonds in an urban environment. In this way, the Dallah may become not only a symbol of hospitality but also an instrument of social cohesion.

Fig. 23. **Dalleh.** Photo by Elph, Creative Commons license.



References

- Abraham-Barna, Corina Georgeta. "The Term of Turkish Coffee: A Semasiological Approach." *Journal of Agroalimentary Processes and Technologies* 19, no. 2 (2013): 271-75.
- Kroodsmā, Florian. "Coffee-pot Roundabouts: Iconic Landscapes of Arabic Hospitality and Heritage in the Arab Gulf States." In *Commensality and Cultural Heritage: Bringing the Foodways of the Middle East and Its Diasporas to the Table*, edited by Heather J. Sharkey and Karène Sanchez Summerer. Groningen: University of Groningen Press, 2025.
- Temir, Hakan. "Arabic Qahwa and Its Serving as an Element of Cultural Heritage." *Harran Ilahiyat Journal* 48 (2022): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.30623/hij1114573>.
- UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. "Arabic Coffee, a Symbol of Generosity." *UNESCO*. Accessed 18 February 2026. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/arabic-coffee-a-symbol-of-generosity-02111>.

Coffee as Connection: Bridging Cultures in Berlin's Kebab Shops

Marlen Mertens

While visiting one of the most popular kebab places in Berlin and standing in line, my friends and I were offered coffee while waiting. “So funny,” said one of my friends while smiling, “what a randomly nice combination—kebab and coffee!” I started to wonder: Why is coffee so often offered when visiting Middle Eastern food places?

Coffee in Berlin: A Cultural Crossroad

This symbolic act takes on new dimensions when experienced in a cosmopolitan city like Berlin. In the context of a kebab shop, offering coffee to waiting customers is an embodiment of cultural identity and an effort to preserve and share heritage. Within the dynamics of globalisation and migration, this gesture reflects how traditions adapt to new contexts without losing their core values. The coffee becomes a bridge and a crossroad between cultures, transforming a simple food outing into a cross-cultural moment.

Contrasting Coffee Cultures

In contrast, in Western societies like Berlin, coffee holds a very different cultural meaning. Rather than symbolizing hospitality or community, coffee in Berlin is often linked to casual convenience and individual identity. It is something people consume to start their day, enhance focus while working or studying, or take a brief break from their fast-paced routines. In Berlin's trendy cafés, especially in gentrified areas, coffee becomes part of a performative culture, where the type of brew ordered—be it an oat milk flat white or a doppio espresso—can subtly signal social status, aesthetic taste, or political leaning. This reflects a culture where coffee is less about generosity and more about personal branding and commodification.

The offering of coffee in a kebab shop in Berlin stands in sharp contrast to this Western norm. It resists the transactional logic of Western coffee culture and instead revives coffee as an act of generosity and relational meaning.

A Moment of Shared Culture

The small gesture of being offered coffee while waiting for kebab in Berlin reveals a deeper cultural contrast. In Arab traditions, coffee is a ritual of hospitality and connection; in Berlin, it often reflects individualism and lifestyle. The act of offering coffee in a kebab shop quietly challenges this Western norm, reintroducing coffee as a symbol of generosity and shared culture. In a fast-paced city like Berlin, such moments serve as meaningful reminders of the cultural crossroads of Middle Eastern and Western cultures all around us.

References

- Anastasiou, A. "Gahwa: A Quintessential Symbol of Emirati Hospitality." *National Geographic*, 2020. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/slideshow/paid-content-gahwa-a-quintessential-symbol-of-emirati-hospitality>.
- Department of Culture and Tourism. "Gahwa - Arabic Coffee." *Abu Dhabi Culture*, 2021. <https://abudhabiculture.ae/en/discover/food/gawa>.
- UNESCO. "Arabic Coffee, a Symbol of Generosity." *UNESCO*, 2014. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/arabic-coffee-a-symbol-of-generosity-01074>.

Glaces Bachir. Tasting Lebanon in Paris? Memory, Migration and Food

Karène Sanchez Summerer

At the foot of Sacré-Cœur, or a short walk from the Centre Pompidou (contemporary art centre, not far from the river La Seine), people queue not for a museum or a monument, but to “enter Lebanon”. The threshold is modest—a shopfront rather than a border, see figure 24—but the effect is unmistakable. Through taste, Lebanon becomes unavoidable in the heart of Paris.



Fig. 24. Queuing in front of Bachir. *Glaces libanaises depuis 1936* [Bachir. Lebanese ice creams since 1936], Magasin Rambuteau, 58 Rue Rambuteau, 75004 Paris. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 1 July 2025.



Fig. 25. The traditional ‘*achta*, crème de lait et pistache’ [cream and pistachio], recognisable by its dense, elastic texture and flavours of mastic and orange blossom. Magasin Rambuteau, 58 Rue Rambuteau, 75004 Paris. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 1 July 2025.

The story behind *Glaces Bachir* begins far from these Parisian streets. In 1936, in the mountain village of Bikfaya in Lebanon, the brothers Édouard and Maurice Bachir developed their ice-cream recipes in the family kitchen, assisted by their wives. What started as domestic experimentation soon turned the Bikfaya shop into a summer destination. “People came up the mountain for the air,” a family member recalled, “but they stayed for the ice cream” (from a short oral interview with the shop manager in Montmartre and their website); for some Beirutis, it became a form of social ritual, an embodied memory tied to seasonality, movement, and gathering.

The story of Bachir also mirrors trajectories of migration. For the founders’ descendants, who later grew up in France, these tastes travelled with them. They carried with them memories of these flavours as part of their family history, “this was how home tasted.”

In 2017, that memory took on a Parisian address. Produced in France with organic certification, the ice cream follows contemporary standards while, according to Glaces Bachir founders, “remaining anchored in inherited techniques”. In Paris, Bachir does not simply sell a product; it endeavours to stage a small “act of return”. The queue outside becomes a kind of *passage*, where eating is also remembering, and where migration is made tangible through flavour.

Here, Lebanon is not represented through flags or slogans, as in many other places in Paris, but through texture and flavours. To stand in line is, briefly, to cross a border—one spoonful at a time.

References

- Bachir. *Bachir*. Accessed February 27, 2026. <https://bachir.fr>.
- Le Parisien. “À Paris, la Recette du Succès des Glaces Bio de Bachir.” *Le Parisien*, July 19, 2018. <https://www.leparisien.fr/culture-loisirs/sortir-region-parisienne/a-paris-la-recette-du-succes-des-glaces-bio-de-bachir-19-07-2018-7826142.php>.

More Than a Meal: Arabic Cuisine and Social Integration in France

Nil Deniz Üder

Paris is renowned for its iconic flavours—buttery croissants, rich coq au vin—yet its culinary landscape is far more diverse than these familiar staples suggest. Visitors often overlook the vibrant Arabic flavours which simmer around the corner, contributing to the cultural essence of the city itself. Dishes such as couscous, tagine, hummus, kebab and ice cream do more than satisfy hunger; they also tell stories on migration, memory, and adaptation (Arcadu et al. 2025). This piece explores how Arabic food serves as a bridge for cultural connection, identity expression as well as community building in post-colonial Paris.

Fig. 26. The exterior of *Maison de la Tunisie* at the *Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris* [La Maison de la Tunisie], 45 A Bd Jourdan, 75014 Paris. Photo by Anna Popovics, 4 July 2025.



Following post-colonial migration, Arab cafés and restaurants became prominent around the city (Bosma, Lucassen, and Oostindie 2012). These spaces offer more than just meals; they are hubs of cultural expression and communal gathering (Ray 2014). A prime example is the Syrian restaurant called *La Rose de Damas*, located at a very central location in Paris. Beyond its delicious cuisine, the restaurant functions as a cultural microcosm, meaning that the restaurant presents an environment that is undoubtedly Syrian. This is reflected through the atmosphere of the restaurant, the decorations chosen as well as

the music (Arcadu et al. 2025). The significance of the restaurant lies within its dual nature. On one hand, it might allow some members of the Arab diaspora to feel at home, to maintain connection to their heritage. On the other hand, for non-Arab Parisians and tourists, it is an invitation to experience a new world, fostering cross cultural exchange over shared meals.

Another example of this cultural entanglement is at *Le Salon de Thé*, connected to La Maison de la Tunisie at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. Located in an academic and multicultural environment. The café goes beyond serving as a coffeehouse. It serves as a cultural ambassador for Tunisia and the broader Arab world. The scent of mint tea, the delicate pastries, and the warm, communal atmosphere offer students and visitors a chance to experience Tunisian hospitality. While the café introduces non-Arab students to new tastes and customs, creating a subtle yet powerful form of cultural diplomacy, it is also a refuge of familiarity and identity for the North African students living far from home.

However, the presence of these places also highlights the complexities related to the process of integration. It questions representations and acceptance. While Arabic food is often celebrated, the people and cultures behind it are not always afforded the same level of acceptance. Therefore, *La Rose de Damas* and *Le Salon de Thé* are not just symbols of cultural sharing; they are part of an ongoing negotiation between visibility and voice. They are more than places to eat—they are sites of cultural dialogue, where the flavours of the Arab world invite Paris to reflect on its own identity as a multicultural city.

References

- Arcadu, Martina, María Isabel Reyes-Espejo, Vittoria Romoli, and Laura Migliorini. "Food and Eating Practices in Migration Processes: A Scoping Review." *Appetite* 215, no. 1 (July 25, 2025): 108248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2025.108248>.
- Bosma, Ulbe, Jan Lucassen, and Gert Oostindie. "Introduction: Postcolonial Migrations and Identity Politics—Towards a Comparative Perspective." In *Postcolonial Migrants and Identity Politics*, edited by Gert Oostindie, 1–22. Berghahn Books, 2012.
- Ray, Krishnendu. "Taste, Toil and Ethnicity: Immigrant Restaurateur and the American City." *Ethnologie française* 44, no. 1 (2014): 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ethn.141.0105>.

MENA Food Culture in Paris: Visibility, Commodification, and the Challenge of Representation

Arthur Feeney

Paris does not appear to be hiding its crossovers with Middle-Eastern and North African (MENA) cultures. In corners central to the city's identity, be it the foot of the Sacre-Coeur or the beating heart of the Quartier Latin, even the casual observer can spot the gleaming storefront of Bachir, a Lebanese ice-cream chain, or the Grande Mosque of Paris, housing a restaurant serving North African cuisines. These establishments evoke a sense of warmth and cultural richness. Bachir, with its friendly staff and pistachio covered ice-cream, and the Grand Mosque, with its gorgeous tiles and colourful meals, seem places signifying a harmony between the MENA and Paris. At first glance, they seem to symbolise a harmonious blend of MENA and Parisian cultures. However, this sur-

face-level harmony often amplifies certain “exotic” elements; rather than mirroring the complex interaction of these cultures, they also create a sense of othering and separation.



Fig. 27. The interior of the restaurant within the Grande Mosque de Paris, featuring traditional MENA tiles and glasswork. Photo by Nada Mahdy, 30 June 2025.

The visibility of MENA food culture in Paris is a significant achievement, particularly given the historical marginalisation of migrant communities by the French government (Chemin 2023). It is no small feat that it has reached such visibility within this culinary capital. The *banlieues* (suburbs constructed to house those with economic disadvantages, placed on the outskirts of the city) exemplify this exclusion. A disproportionate number of these inhabitants are part of the migrant communities, poorly maintained and spatially segregated; they exemplify systemic neglect and rejection of the MENA identity (Safi 2018). In this context, the prominence of businesses like Bachir, serving traditional Lebanese 'achta ice cream with its distinct chewy texture and coated with pistachio alongside other flavours such as rose loukoum,

looks like a triumph in a place so central to Paris's image. Bachir becomes a bridge between traditions, challenging the spatial and social separation embodied by the *banlieues*. Yet, the celebration of MENA food culture is not without its complexities. While appreciating these establishments, we must acknowledge that businesses such as Bachir often fall prey to the claws of consumerism, which plays a role in the very Othering they combat. To exist, they must appeal to a broad audience which can entail intensifying the presence of cultural artefacts from the MENA and also placing an overemphasis on the 'exotic' nature of the meals. The Grande Mosque of Paris, for example, is covered in decorative stained glass and flamboyant lamps. It also serves dishes such as "carottes râpées à l'orientale", specifically highlighting some foreign, "oriental" mystery within the dish. While being celebratory of this culture, it also does not entirely represent the community existing within Paris. It creates an image of an exotic land to be explored and sampled. MENA and Parisian food cultures share many similarities, from outdoor seating to communal dining. The challenge lies in celebrating these intricacies without falling into the trap of othering or romanticising the "exotic".

The diffusion of MENA food businesses across Paris are part of a wider acknowledgment of the overlap between Western and MENA culture. However, in a consumerist world, there is a risk of commodifying this identity. Supporting these establishments is important, but it must be done critically—recognising when cultural representation slips into tokenism and rejecting narratives that separate rather than unite.

References

- Chemin, Anne. "Since the 19th Century, Immigrants Have Been the Scapegoats in France's Crises." *Le Monde*, February 19, 2023. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/02/19/since-the-19th-century-immigrants-have-been-the-scapegoats-in-france-s-crises_6016449_7.html.
- Safi, M. "Is There Really Such a Thing as Immigrant Spatial Assimilation in France? Desegregation Trends and Inequality Along Ethnoracial Lines." *Social Science Research* 73 (2018): 45-62.

Baklava, Matcha, and the Marketing of Taste in the Age of Multinationals

Marta Belogorceva

From trendy matcha lattes to traditional baklava, food has often been celebrated as a gateway to cultural exchange and nostalgia. Food and flavours are at the crossroads of home, migration, but also entrepreneurship and market. In the age of multinational corporations, culinary globalisation is not simply about sharing, it's also about selection and perception. This vignette explores how everyday consumer goods, from Japanese

KitKats to Turkish-inspired chocolates, reveal deeper patterns of inclusion and exclusion in global food culture. Set against the multicultural backdrop of Berlin's Sonnenallee, it traces how geopolitics, branding, and consumer psychology shape what we taste and what we ignore.

As a young German girl with Middle Eastern features leaves the store on Sonnenallee in Berlin holding a pack of mochis, she calls out, “Görüşürüz, Tschüss!”. I look around: bubble tea served at BoBoQ, trays of baklava, spices from Damascus. I walk around the store and imagine what someone from the Silk Road centuries ago would think of all of this converging one



Fig. 28. Mochi display in Düzgün Supermarkt, Sonnenallee, Berlin, Photo by Marta Belogorceva, 4 July 2024.

day on a street in Neukölln; they would probably be in awe of the cultural puzzle in front of them.

Globalisation and the Politics of Taste

Globalisation is often romanticised as cultural exchange, but its second wave—fuelled by the industrial revolution—gave rise to corporate giants like Unilever and Nestlé. These multinationals are more than just suppliers of goods. Through branding, distribution, and marketing, they determine which cuisines go global and which remain confined to local markets. In this context, cultural exchange becomes far less mutual than we might imagine.

Consider Nestlé’s Damak chocolate bar, inspired by Turkish baklava. A Swiss multinational adapts Middle Eastern most famous flavours and rebrands them for global consumers. Compare this to the global visibility of Nestlé’s matcha-flavoured KitKat from Japan. Matcha has become synonymous with sophistication, minimalism, and wellness, allowing it to travel seamlessly into new markets.

By contrast, *Damak’s* baklava-flavoured chocolate remains niche, confined to specialty stores or diaspora groceries. Why? My explanation is that part of the answer lies in geopolitics. The Middle East has long been stereotyped and associated with terrorism, threats, and political instability. Japan, on the other hand, was rebranded post-World War II as refined and technologically advanced, making its cultural products easier to market globally.

As Cruz, Seo, and Scaraboto (2023) argue, consumers are not passive recipients of global culture, they actively self-authorise their consumption of the “Other”. Some justify their choices by framing themselves as curious global citizens; others rationalise by drawing on familiar stereotypes or marketing narratives. This moral positioning shapes which



Fig. 29. Nestlé “Damak Baklava” chocolate bar. Photo by Marta Belogorceva, 4 July 2024.

cultural products are accepted, which are scrutinised, and who gets to be appreciated. Multinational companies respond by investing millions to understand these underlying consumer assumptions and curate their product offerings accordingly.

Cultural Contrast or Cultural Erasure?

In a world where everything seems available for sale, this unequal flow of cultures creates tension. For many communities, especially those historically marginalised, globalisation does not always feel like an opportunity but more like erasure. Cultural appropriation is most strongly perceived when powerful brands extract cultural symbols from less dominant groups, stripping them of context and meaning (Zhang, Wang, and Yang 2022). The risk is not that a product associated with Middle Eastern culture goes unnoticed, but that it becomes detached from the people and the histories it comes from. In response, some societies retreat into protectionism motivated by the fear of losing their cultural identity entirely.

And yet, in this divide between globalisation and protectionism, between assimilation and fears of cultural dilution, I find something beautiful. As a third-culture person, whose identity was never singular or pure, I see the representation of my daily reality where the canvas of Berlin is lit up by Middle Eastern and East Asian flavours.

References

- Cruz, Angela Gracia B., Yuri Seo, and Daiane Scaraboto. "Between Cultural Appreciation and Cultural Appropriation: Self-Authorizing the Consumption of Cultural Difference." Edited by Linda L. Price, Markus Giesler, and Hope Jensen Schau. *Journal of Consumer Research* 50, no. 5 (April 3, 2023): 962-84. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad022>.
- Lin, Jason D., Nicole You Jeung Kim, Esther Uduehi, and Anat Keinan. "Culture for Sale: Unpacking Consumer Perceptions of Cultural Appropriation." Edited by Markus Giesler and Carlos J. Torelli. *Journal of Consumer Research* 51, no. 3 (November 24, 2023): 571-94. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad076>.
- Zhang, Y., L. Wang, and J. Yang. "Cultural Appropriation and Consumer Backlash: The Role of Power and Authenticity." *Journal of Business Ethics* 183, no. 3 (2022): 789-805.

CHAPTER 3

Sonic and Visual Narratives: Music, Art, and Identities

From “Helwa Ya Baladi” to “5am in Paris”: How Migration has Shaped Musical Landscapes of Maghrebi Migrants Throughout Generations

Nina Klaić

Walking across the cobbled streets of Montmartre on a hot summer day and rushing past the heaps of tourists taking little snapshots of memories, one can stumble upon a quiet little street, almost hidden away within the hustle and bustle of one of Paris’s most famous neighbourhoods. Located at number 11 bis Rue d’Orchampt at the heart of Montmartre sits a stony four story mansion, a place that was once inhabited by one of the most significant musicians of our time: Dalida. Born in Cairo in 1933 to Italian parents as Iolanda Cristina Gigliotti, she would later move to Paris, where she rose to become one of the most renowned singers of her generation, admired both in France as well as in her homeland of Egypt. Throughout her life Dalida remained deeply connected to Egypt and according to her brother Orlando she “adored Egypt, she always remained faithful to it, and moreover, after a few years, she began to sing in Egyptian (Arabic)” (Schoepf 2022).

Following the Summer School, I felt compelled to further explore the music of Dalida. Upon recommendation of one of my peers, I listened to *Helwa Ya Baladi* (My Sweet Homeland), a song that expresses Dalida’s deep love and nostalgia for her homeland Egypt, and which originated during her time in Paris. Inspired by this, I wished to explore how feelings of nostalgia and longing for one’s homeland are reflected across different generations of Maghrebi migrants. To do so, I chose to compare Dalida’s *Helwa Ya Baladi* to Saint Levant’s (an artist of Palestinian, Algerian and French origin) *5am in Paris*, a song that I listened to during my time in the Summer School.

While *Helwa Ya Baladi* was released in 1979, *5am in Paris* was released in 2024, making for almost half a century of distance between their time of origin. Regarding the socio-political context of the songs, *Helwa Ya Baladi* has been regarded as a patriotic love song and an ode to Dalida’s homeland Egypt, and was also widely sung by Egyptian

protesters on Tahrir Square during the 2011 revolution following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak (Radio France 2021). On the other hand, *5am in Paris* was released as part of Saint Levant's album *Deira*, following the start of the war in Gaza. It deals with the themes of social alienation caused by migration, displacement, and exile, while also tackling themes of search for one's identity and the feeling of not being at home anywhere. While *Helwa Ya Baladi* is sung exclusively in Arabic, reflective of Dalida's nostalgia for her homeland Egypt, Saint Levant incorporates French, Arabic and English in his lyrics, reflective of today's digital interconnectedness and his own living experience, addressing his homeland in Gaza and his Algerian heritage. Both of these songs sound extremely sonically different. *Helwa Ya Baladi* is an example of a classical sentimental ballad, employing traditional string instruments such as viola and cello. On the other hand, *5am in Paris* serves as an example of a contemporary blend of Arabic pop, dance music, and R&B, furthermore illustrating today's process of globalisation and digital mixing of cultures.

Finally, it seems to me that the concept of "home" appears to shift across generations, reflective of the changing migrant experiences. For Dalida, "home" seems to exist in a singular, idealised place tied to her childhood and adolescence, one that she left behind, yet continued to always long for. By contrast, Saint Levant's experience reflects how contemporary migrant identities are often split across multiple places at once, shaped by globalisation and the ability granted by technology to remain "connected" to one's homeland, but at the same time not truly inhabiting it. This digital space of in-between consequently creates in a person a feeling of alienation and cultural fragmentation, resulting in the experience of not truly belonging anywhere.



Fig. 30. House of Dalida, 1 bis Rue d'Orchampt Paris. Photo by Nina Klaić, 2 July 2025.

References

- Schoepf, Lila. "Egypt's Sweetheart Dalida: A Unique Talent Born from a Rare Cultural Mix." *Arab News*, October 7, 2022. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2176851/lifestyle>.
- Radio France. "Helwa ya Baladi: Dalida et la géopolitique." *Radio France*, February 12, 2021. <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/tubes-n-co/helwa-ya-baladi-dalida-et-la-geopolitique-1317715>.

Understanding Identity Through Sound: Raï Music in Post-colonial France

Celina Bannayan



Fig. 31. Commemoration street sign named “Place Cheikha Remitti, 1923-2006, Chanteuse Pionnière Du Raï” [Pioneering Raï Singer] 3 Rue Polonceau, 75018 Paris. Photo by Celina Bannayan, 2 July 2025.



Fig. 32. Palais de la Porte Dorée [Palace of the Golden Gate] Colonial Mentality Exhibition 293 avenue Daumesnil, 75012 Paris. Photo by Celina Bannayan, 3 July 2025.

Music, particularly Raï music, has continuously served as a cultural bridge for Algerians and French-Algerians in France. It has not only been used as a tool to reflect the difficulties of being an immigrant in France, but has shaped how these communities understand identity, resistance, and assimilation in their new environment.

It is important to situate these observations within the context of colonial France. The presence of the aforementioned communities is rooted in colonial migration. The 20th century saw an influx of North African migration to France; now, their families hold an indispensable role in urban France. In this context of migration, Raï music has become a tool for expressing experiences of exile, feelings of marginalisation and the struggle of assimilation.

Raï music, originating from Oran, Algeria, was introduced to France through these immigrant communities and is categorised as a form of folk music that mixes traditional sounds with modern electric instruments (Al-Deen 2005). Raï music is rooted in rebellion, and has always been about expressing societal realities without censorship. The power of such music transcended Algerian borders, and became a way for second-generation North Africans to grapple with feelings of exile. Notable Raï artists such as Cheb Khaled, the *King of Raï*, and Cheikha Remitti, the *Mother of Raï*, used music to express the reality of simultaneously belonging, and not belonging, to two places—Algeria and France. The themes

surrounding their music follow feelings of exile, identity, racism, love, migration and biculturalism (Al-Deen 2005). In the lively 18th Arrondissement, a borough of Paris with a large community of North Africans, a street sign in honour of Cheikha Remitti is named as a historical landmark. The sign simultaneously serves as a symbol for the importance of Rai music to communities in France and a way to commemorate the legacies of Cheikha Remitti in France.



Music has a dual function in that it operates as a tool of assimilation and as a mode of resistance. Rai has progressed since its introduction in the 1920s (Marranci 2003), newer artists such as Taxi Kebab have modernised traditional Rai sounds and have used music as a tool to assert Frenchness while showing appreciation to cultural roots. Songs such as “Ya Rayah” by notable Rai artist Rachid Taha are an accurate example of this. The song touches on themes of (be)longing and exile, made apparent through lyrics like “يا الرايح وين مسافر تروح تعيا وتولي”, which translates to “Oh traveller wherever you go you will grow tired and return” (my translation). Through this lyric, Taha is expressing that there is no place like home and that no matter where you leave to, you will always want to come back. Here, we see that music is more than a form of entertainment, it is a powerful tool revealing how these communities navigate life in France and allows others to understand the struggle of identity and belonging.

Fig. 33. **Librairie internationale l'Harmattan** [L'Harmattan International Library] showcasing a book on Arab Divas 16 Rue des Écoles, 75005 Paris. Photo by Celina Bannayan, 4 July 2025.

References

- Al-Deen, H. Noor. “The Evolution of Rai Music.” *Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 5 (2005): 597-611.
- Marranci, Gabriele. “Pop-Rai: From a ‘Local’ Tradition to Globalization.” In *Mediterranean Mosaic*. London: Routledge, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315023632-5>.

Crossings of Music and the Mediterranean: An Exploration of Raï'n'B's Role as Narrative for the Algerian Diaspora in France

Mira zu Lynar



Fig. 34. Student watching the Music Video of *Tonton du Bled* by 113 (Paroles et musique de Rim'K et DJ Mehdil) [lyrics and music by Rim'K and DJ Mehdil], 1999. Exhibition *Banlieues chéries*. Le Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration. Palais de la Porte Dorée, 293 avenue Daumesnil, 75012 Paris. Photo by Mira zu Lynar, 3 July 2025.

113's song and music video *Tonton du bled* [uncle from the homeland], showcase how music and its messaging, as well as the visual symbolism, are used to explore the experiences of second- and later generations from Algeria living in the diaspora today. Raï music is a genre of folk music from Algeria, dating back to the 1920s (Virolle 2003, 297). It often deals with themes of love but also longing for the homeland, sung from the diaspora in France. The second generation of Algerian immigrants, being born and raised in France, remixed the genre into Raï'n'B, blending traditional Raï melodies with R&B and hip-hop influences, reflecting their hybrid identity.

Tonton du bled was released at the end of the 1990s, a decade when Raï was highly popular in France, with the new interpretation of the genre bringing a new perspective. It was also released at a time when there was heightened racism towards North African immigrant communities, while France was dancing to Raï songs. Far-right politician Jean Le Pen came close to winning the presidential election, head scarves were banned in schools, and Nicolas Sarkozy promised to "scrub the banlieues clean" (Le Monde 2005). Raï'n'B was therefore very important as a way for French-Maghrebi youth to express their identity, dreams and culture.

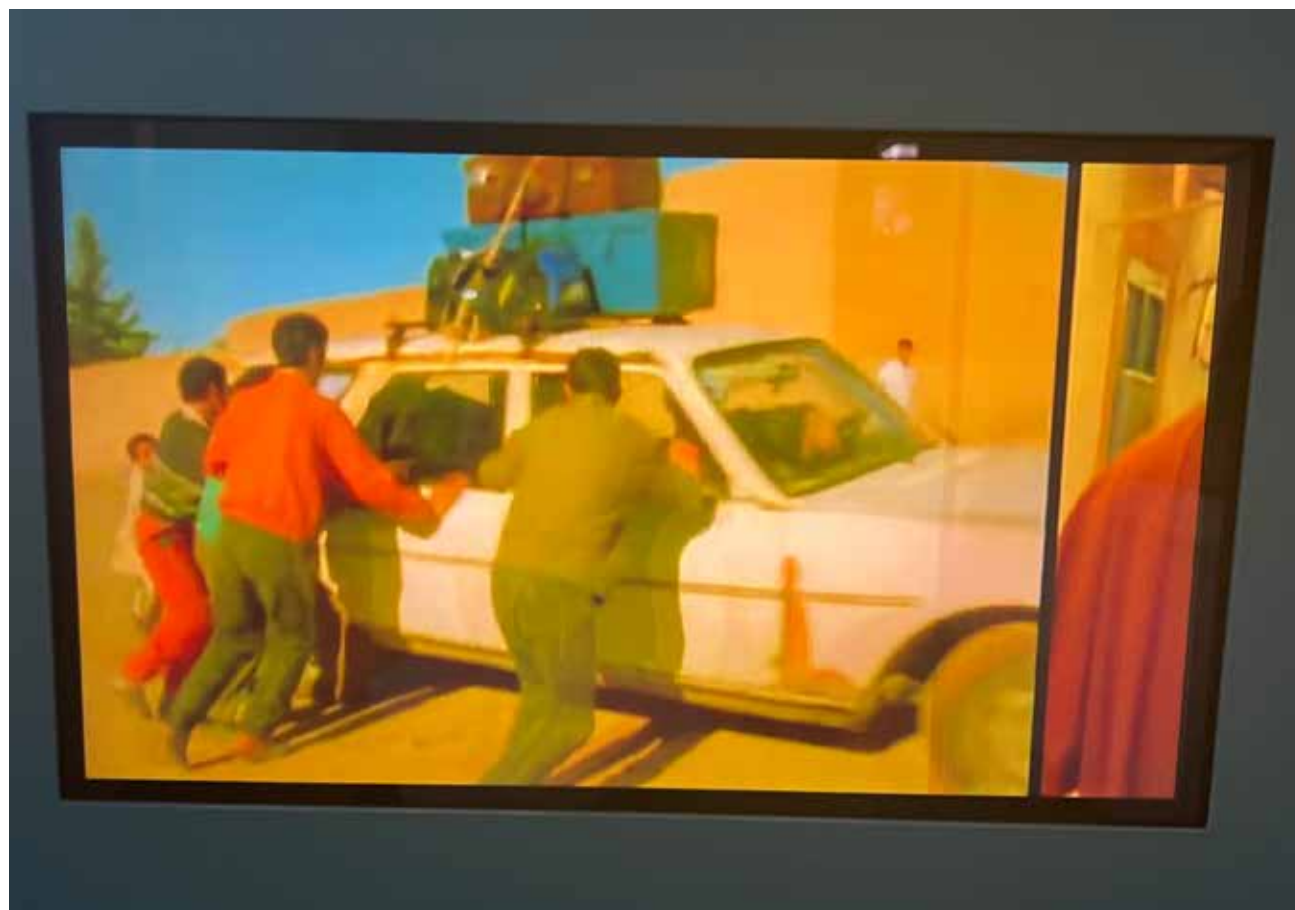


Fig. 35. *Tonton du Bled*. Scene of arrival in Algeria. 113 (Paroles et musique de Rim’K et DJ Mehdil) [lyrics and music by Rim’K and DJ Mehdil], 1999. Exhibition *Banlieues chéries*. Le Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration. Palais de la Porte Dorée, 293 avenue Daumesnil, 75012 Paris. Photo by Mira zu Lynar, 3 July 2025.

Ton ton du bled is a song from 113, a group originating from a Parisian banlieue. In the song they mix Arabic with French and include Kabyle words, emphasising the complexity of North African identities through their use of language. They rap about visiting the homeland, the *bled*, Arabic for country, nowadays used in France to mean “village”, “homeland” or “home country”, often referring to Algeria (Tetreault 2013, 1). The group narrates the drive from Paris to Marseille to take the ferry, the car loaded with gifts for relatives in Algeria, with the visuals reflecting this journey. They start in Paris, dressed

in traditionally “Western” clothing like an Adidas jacket, and reach Algeria, where the main rapper of the song, Rim K, changes into a *djellaba*, a long robe worn in the Maghreb region. Central for the visual is also the car cathedral, a term invented by dockers at the port of Marseille to designate the vehicles that cross over the Mediterranean from Marseilles to North Africa by ship (Mailaender 2025).

Central to the song’s lyrics and its visuals is the concept of migration: the idea of movement from one continent to another, the Mediterranean Sea as the border between two worlds and identities, a voyage between homes and cultures, creating an image of dual belonging.

I learned of the song and the symbolism of the cathedral car, when visiting the Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration in Paris. Walking through the exhibition it was hard to find narratives of Maghrebi migration throughout, making me wonder why this song was chosen for the exhibit. Why this specific song, and not, for example, “Partir loin” also from 113, which speaks of the struggles of migration perhaps even more explicitly (Souiah 2011). During our time in Paris, when visiting this and other institutions, we often talked about what was absent, what was named, and what consequently was silenced or left unnamed. Therefore, the song’s inclusion seems particularly significant. The institutional recognition suggests the importance of the song for capturing a moment in French society that still reverberates to this day.

Especially since, after the start of the 21st century, the popularity of Raï started to wane, perhaps also due to the rise of anti-Arab sentiment following 9/11. However, in the last couple years there has been the emergence of a “Raï-nassance”. For example, the album *Raï’n’B Fever Part 2* released in 2025, as a follow up to 2004’s *Raï’n’B Fever* features many icons from the early scene alongside new artists (HYPESOUL 2025). One such artist is Danyl, a French-Algerian rapper-singer who combines contemporary rap with Raï, as exemplified in his song *Bledi mon amour*. In a recent snippet of his song *Brouillon*, he speaks of struggling to fit in either country, reflecting a new generation’s perspective on identity and belonging (Danyl 2025).

Raï'n'B remains an important cornerstone of French-Maghrebi music, the genre reflecting the history of its people. It is a sound of migration, home, dual-presence, and influence. Today 113's songs can be found on *French Rap Old School* playlists showing their embeddedness in French culture. As I was leaving the exhibition, a teacher was playing the song to her student who sat down and started nodding along. Raï'n'B's resurgence is not just nostalgia—it is a reassertion of presence and a language of home; over generations narrating the diaspora's ongoing story of belonging.

References

- Danyl. "Brouillon (clip officiel)." YouTube video, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txl-sy9Meql>.
- HYPESOUL. "Music - Culture - Lifestyle: De DJ Mehdi à Danyl." 2025. <https://hypesoul.com/fusion-rap-rai-scene/>
- Le Monde. "Les propos de Nicolas Sarkozy sur le 'nettoyage' de La Courneuve provoquent l'indignation." *Le Monde*, June 21, 2005. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2005/06/21/les-propos-de-m-sarkozy-sur-le-nettoyage-de-la-courneuve-provoquent-l-indignation_664721_3224.html.
- Mailaender, Thomas. *Banlieues chéries*. Exhibition wall text. Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, 2025.
- Souiah, Farida. "Musique populaire et imaginaire migratoire en Algérie." *Diversité*, no. 164 (2011): 27-33. <https://doi.org/10.3406/diver.2011.3396>.
- Tetreault, Chantal. "Cultural Citizenship in France and Le Bled among Teens of Pan-Southern Immigrant Heritage." *Language & Communication* 33, no. 4 (2013): 532-43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2013.03.010>.
- Virolle, Marie. "L'épopée de la chanson raï." *Recherches Internationales*, nos. 67-68 (2003): 291-314. <https://doi.org/10.3406/rint.2003.1012>.

Between Art and Artefact: Interpreting Arabic Calligraphy in Museum Exhibitions

Dumitru Cătălin Căndea

Arabic calligraphy developed together with the Arabic script and became closely connected to the writing of the Qur'an. For centuries it was used in manuscripts, architecture, and decoration, and writing itself became an important artistic form. Today, many artists still use calligraphy, sometimes combining traditional forms with modern styles.

The exhibitions raised questions about how museums tell stories. What is shown and how it is presented shapes how visitors understand both the artwork and the cultures connected to it. The Institut du Monde Arabe hosted a small exhibition on Arabic calligraphy (IMA n.d.) that stood out (Fig. 36). The display presented works ranging from older inscriptions to contemporary artistic interpretations. Although the visual evolution was clear and engaging, the exhibition offered very little explanation. Most works were labelled only with the artist's name and date, without additional context.

The lack of explanatory material therefore produced mixed effects. On the one hand, the curatorial choice may have encouraged visitors to approach calligraphy primarily as visual art. On the other hand, the absence of historical framing made it difficult to understand the cultural, intellectual, social, and religious significance of the works. Without this background, the pieces appeared detached from the traditions that shaped them.

An additional detail was the difference in display. Traditional inscriptions were placed behind glass, whereas modern works were displayed more openly. This contrast suggested a shift in classification: calligraphy was presented not only as a religious or historical artefact but also as contemporary art. The modern works were clearly intended to feel engaging, yet without context they could easily be interpreted as decorative.

Compared to other museums visited during the Summer School, such as the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration or the MAHJ exhibition “The Jews in the Levant and the Maghreb” (MAHJ, n.d.), the calligraphy exhibition appeared less historically grounded. Those institutions connected objects to broader narratives about migration, identity, and culture. In this case, the relationship between calligraphy, Islamic art, and Arab heritage was visible but not fully explained. This contrast is clearer when compared with calligraphic objects displayed in other museums (Fig. 37), where inscriptions appear as part of architecture and material culture rather than isolated artworks.

The exhibition nevertheless suggested that calligraphy should be understood as a living art form rather than only as historical writing. Contemporary artists continue to work with the Arabic script, adapting traditional forms and techniques while exploring new visual and conceptual approaches. However, the limited contextual information meant that this continuity between tradition and modern practice remained only partially visible to visitors. The way the objects were labelled and displayed, especially the contrast between works behind glass and those presented openly, demonstrated how curatorial choices influence interpretation.

The display therefore affected not only visual appreciation but also the meaning attached to the calligraphy. While the exhibition successfully presented the visual evolution of the script, the limited contextual information left visitors to interpret the works largely on their own. This highlights how museum displays do not simply show objects but actively shape the narratives through which cultural heritage is understood.



Fig. 36. Arabic Calligraphy Exhibition [Exposition de calligraphie arabe], Institut du Monde Arabe, 1 Rue des Fossés Saint-Bernard, 75005 Paris, France. Photo by Dumitru Cătălin Cădea, 2 July 2025.



Fig. 37. Architectural and Decorative Objects with Arabic Inscriptions [Objets architecturaux et décoratifs avec inscriptions arabes], Musée du Louvre, Rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris, France. Photo by Nil Deniz Üder, 4 July 2025.

References

- "Jews of the Levant and the Maghreb." *Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme*. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.mahj.org/en/permanent-collection/9-jews-levant-and-maghreb>.
- "Derniers jours: Écrire ou calligraphier, l'alphabet arabe sublimé." *Institut du monde arabe*. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.imarabe.org/fr/agenda/expositions-musee/derniers-jours-ecrire-ou-calligraphier-alphabet-arabe-sublime>

Graffiti. Cultural Entanglement of Street Art Seen in the Barbes Neighbourhood

Astro Dravinec

The streets of Barbes are alive with the vibrant, layered identities of its residents. Nowhere is this more evident than in the graffiti that adorns its walls. This particular graffiti piece gives insight into the complex and evolving Franco-Algerian identity.

At first glance, the English text “USMA is here” appears as merely the work of a passionate fan supporting their favourite Algerian club. USMA, or Union Sportive de la Médina d’Alger, is an Algerian football club founded in 1937 by Muslim Algerians under French colonial rule. Like many sports clubs founded under colonial rule, its purpose was to unite Algerian youth (Amara 2011), and its legacy endures as a symbol of resistance and solidarity. For those unfamiliar with its history, the graffiti might appear as nothing more than the work of a passionate supporter. But for those who know, it carries deeper meaning.

The French text, “Les Unionistes Algérois”, reinforces the sense of Algerian nationalism. It challenges assumptions and asserts an identity that is distinctly Algerian, even within the French context. It serves as a reminder to the public that these Algerians are, first and foremost, Algerian. Yet it is the Arabic text, “طائفة الرياس” or “tai’fa des raïs”*, that reveals most about how these Algerians view their own identity. The slogan refers to a pirate/privateering group active during the period of Ottoman Algeria, a time before French colonisation. The USMA is not only linked to anti-colonial movements, but it is a symbol of *pre-French Algerian identity*. This shows that Franco-Algerian identities cannot be fully under-



Fig. 38. Graffiti in Barbes: text in English, French, Arabic, in support of football club USMA. Photo by Astro Dravinec, 2 July 2025.



Fig. 39. **Graffiti in Algiers.** Photo by Stefan Noël Hageman, 1 February 2026.

stood through a colonial or postcolonial lens alone. Some identities resist entanglement, reclaiming narratives that predate colonial rule. It reminds us that while history shapes identity, it does not define it entirely. The perspectives of those who resist entanglement deserve to be heard.

Note: Algeria became a French colony in 1830, and stayed under French rule for about four or five generations, until 1962 (Choi 2016).

*With thanks to Celina Bannayan for her accurate translation.

References

- Amara, Mahfoud. *Sport, Politics and Society in the Arab World*. Palgrave Macmillan London, 2011. <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1057/9780230359505>
- Choi, Sung. "French Algeria, 1830-1962." In *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, edited by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Projecting Identity: Arab Cinema and Europe’s Cultural Screens

Rebecca Fagan and Natan Gad Ghiță

The first Arab Film Festival in Europe—and globally—was the *Festival du Film Arabe de Fameck* in Lorraine, France (MAD Solutions 2018). Launched in 1989, the festival became an annual event, its early emergence in France likely influenced by socio-cultural factors such as the region’s large North African diaspora and its colonial ties to the Arab world (MAD Solutions 2018).

Arab film festivals—events dedicated exclusively to films produced by or in collaboration with Arab countries—began to spread across Europe in the early 2000s. New festivals emerged in Spain and the Netherlands during this period, such as the *Amal International Euro-Arab Film Festival* in Santiago de Compostela, founded in 2003 (Festhome 2025; RAFF 2025). This initial wave can be linked to the growing demand for positive Arab representation following the September 11th attacks in New York and the subsequent “War on Terror”.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, more Arab film festivals appeared in Germany, Sweden, and Belgium. Notable examples include the *ALFILM Festival* in Berlin, established in 2009 (ALFILM 2025), and the *Malmö Arab Film Festival (MAFF)* in 2011 (MAFF 2016). This expansion was partly driven by heightened interest in the Arab world during the Arab Spring and the migration waves that followed.

Shared Goals and Challenges

Arab film festivals are united by common objectives: fostering cultural dialogue, amplifying Arab perspectives, and showcasing positive representations of Arab culture (Scott-Anderton 2024; RAFF 2025; Festhome 2025). To achieve these goals, festivals often feature panel discussions, director interviews, and other engagement opportunities (Doeksen 2023; Grenier 2024). However, they have also faced criticism for allegedly fa-



Fig. 40. Logo of ALFILM, Berlin (<https://alfilm.berlin/>).

vouring art-house or political films, which some argue do not reflect the tastes of Arab audiences at home and limit the diversity of films presented (Fahim 2020).

ALFILM: A Case Study

Founded in Berlin in 2009 by two Palestinians and a Lebanese filmmaker, *ALFILM* is dedicated to promoting cultural dialogue and positive Arab representation (Scott-Anderton 2024; Hassan 2025; ALFILM 2025). The festival expanded rapidly, particularly after 2015, when additional funding became available (Scott-Anderton 2024).

Looking ahead, *ALFILM* faces several challenges. One is balancing themes between current regional crises and broader aspects of Arab culture and identity. Given the ongoing upheaval in the Arab world, curators may struggle to highlight Arab representation beyond narratives of war and suffering. Another challenge is Germany's shifting political climate. The festival has already encountered funding threats and increased police scrutiny due to the Israel-Hamas War (Hickley 2024; Scott-Anderton 2024). The rise of far-right politics and anti-immigrant sentiment in Germany could pose further obstacles.

However, the festival's director sees promise in the growing number of young Arab filmmakers educated in Germany (Scott-Anderton 2024). Many of these artists arrived as migrants following the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War, bringing fresh perspectives and skills that will help *ALFILM* adapt to future challenges.

References

- Doeksen, Aimee. "Arab Film Festival Returns to Rotterdam." *Arab News*, September 5, 2023. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2367906/lifestyle>.
- Fahim, Joseph. "Arab Cinema in Europe: The Gains, Losses and Challenges Ahead." *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2020. <https://www.iemed.org/publication/arab-cinema-in-europe-the-gains-losses-and-challenges-ahead/>.
- Festhome. "AMAL International Euro-Arab Film Festival." 2025. <https://filmmakers.festhome.com/en/festival/semana-de-cine-euroarabe-amal>.
- Rotterdam Arab Film Festival. "Geschiedenis." 2025. <https://www.arabfilmfestival.nl/over-raff/geschiedenis/>.
- Grenier, Elizabeth. "Arab Film Festival in Berlin Spotlights Palestinian Voices." *Deutsche Welle*, April 24, 2024. <https://www.dw.com/en/arab-film-festival-in-berlin-spotlights-palestinian-voices/a-68903329>
- Hassan, Amany. "A Look into This Year's Arab Film Festival 'ALFILM' in Berlin." *TITLE MAG*, April 24, 2025. <https://title-mag.com/a-look-into-this-years-arab-film-festival-alfilm-in-berlin/>
- Hickley, Catherine. "Berlin Senate Drops 'Anti-Discrimination Clause' in Funding Agreements after Protests." *The Art Newspaper*, January 22, 2024. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/01/22/berlin-senate-drops-antisemitism-clause-in-funding-agreements-after-protests>.
- MAD Solutions. "Six Films from MAD Solutions' List Screen at the Festival du Film Arabe de Fameck." 2018. <https://mad.film/press/Six-Films-from-MAD-Solutions--List-Screen-at-the-Festival-du-Film-Arabe-de-Fameck.php>.
- Malmö Arab Film Festival. "MAFF | Malmö Arab Film Festival." 2016. <https://www.maffswe.com/about/>.
- Rodewald, Theresa. "ALFILM: 15 Jahre Arabisches Kino in Berlin." *Berliner Filmfestivals*, April 23, 2024. <https://berliner-filmfestivals.de/2024/04/alfilm-15-jahre-arabisches-kino-in-berlin>.
- Scott-Anderton, Florence. "ALFILM Festival Director Pascale Fakhry: 'We've Always Found Each Other in Our Cinemas.'" *The Berliner*, April 15, 2024. <https://www.the-berliner.com/film/berlin-alfilm-festival-pascale-fakhry-palestinian-arabic-middle-eastern-cinema/>.
- ALFILM Festival. "Über ALFILM." 2025. <https://alfilm.berlin/en/about-alfilm/#>.

Art and Politics: Cinema, Festivals, and the Question of Representation



Fig. 41. **Portrait of Iskandar Abdalla.**
Photo by Trevor Lischka.

Interview with Iskandar Abdalla; by Mayada Madbouly

Iskandar Abdalla is an Egyptian researcher, writer, and film curator based in Berlin. He studied history, film, and Islamic studies in Germany and has served as the Artistic Director of ALFILM – Arab Film Festival Berlin since 2024. His work includes numerous personal essays and published studies on Arab cinema, sexuality, diaspora, and racism in Europe. Abdalla holds a PhD from the Freie Universität Berlin, where his dissertation explored sexuality, secularism, and representations of Islam in Europe.

We met Iskandar Abdalla on the 4th of July 2024 at Spore Initiative in Berlin, to discuss *Shall I compare you to a Summer's*

day (2022) directed by Mohamed Shawky Hassan with our students. The conversation centred on representation and the role of film festivals, especially in times of political crisis. Our discussion took place a few months after the 2024 festival program “engaging with the question of Palestine as a cause of regional and global repercussions” (AlFilm n.d.). This focus was not just a solidarity act with Palestinians in the aftermath of Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza, but also a reaction to the political crackdown in Germany. As the 2023 festival opening ceremony stated: “speaking about Palestine in Germany should not be an act of courage” (AlFilm n.d.).

Two years after our film discussion, we reflect with Abdalla on the question of representation, arts and politics, and the role of filmmaking and film festivals in it. Despite shifts in regional and national political landscapes, the core challenges remain largely unchanged.

How do you understand the role of filmmaking and film festivals in representing Arab communities, particularly Arab queer identities? And what do you think of these categories?

It is difficult to assign filmmakers a role, any role, particularly when what is at stake is to “represent”. But I believe that filmmaking as an artistic practice must retain a high degree of self-reflexivity and a deep understanding of the environment that constitutes its conditions of impossibility and possibility. Art does not emerge in a vacuum. Why, how, and for whom we make it are never simply questions of personal taste, talent, or artistic choice, but are also shaped by the modalities that structure filmmakers’ processes of thought and practice, as well as the realms in which their work is exhibited, received, and interpreted.

Art is political, and so is filmmaking. This does not mean that filmmakers must fulfil a particular role or respond in prescribed ways to political concerns, but rather that a failure to reckon with the politics that enable their practice, and with its implications, is also a failure to make “good” art from my point of view.

Being Arab and being queer in Germany, whether separately or in conjunction, are dense sites for the insinuation and formation of discourses and regulative techniques that destabilize or stabilize hierarchies of power. To bear these labels, or to be inscribed by them, is already to be entangled in forms of responsibility toward the communities they invoke.

As for film festivals, it is a different question. Festivals have to frame their artistic choices in ways that reflect their visions and values. As an Arab film festival, we are committed to bringing voices and perspectives from across the Arab-speaking region that

challenge mainstream and stereotypical representations of Arab societies and their diasporas, but that also come into tension with the very notion of “Arabness” itself—its limits and exclusions.

Furthermore, the causes of vulnerable communities that are, in one way or another, perceived to fall under the rubric of “Arab” occupy a central place in our programme: from ethnic minorities within the region, to racialized refugees and migrants in Europe, to criminalized non-heterosexual communities.

The political and social landscapes—both in Arab countries and globally—have shifted significantly since the festival’s founding. How do you see these changes impacting the festival’s mission and programming? Why is it important to continue this festival in the current political national and international climate?

Following the so-called “Arab Spring” and the subsequent waves of displacement and counter-revolutionary acts of violence and repression, Germany has witnessed an increase in migrants of diverse ages and social backgrounds from the region. In response, ALFILM’s vision and mission have evolved accordingly. The festival was urged to respond to the expectations of an expanding circle of affiliates and audiences. Our task was no longer to show non-Arabs, or those who are interested in the region and its cultures and politics, how complex and diverse this region actually is, but also included acting as a space of gathering, self-empowerment, of homemaking practices for many Arab newcomers, and of fostering compassionate encounters and building solidarity networks with allies, through the art of film.

More recently Germany’s political climate—and to a similar degree the world itself—has been witnessing profound transformation: the intensification of nationalist and racist sentiments; the rise of anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric; growing scepticism toward the very value of cultural diversity and openness to the “other”. Further, since the onset of the genocide in Gaza an unprecedented escalation of restrictive, if not outright repressive, cultural-policy measures that have suppressed or sidelined Arab cultural and

artistic practices which fall outside the narrow framework of “*Integration*” or express a critical stance toward the disgraceful position of German authorities and institutions in the face of the genocide.

Against this backdrop, the festival’s function as a place for communing and self-empowerment has risen to prominence as a key concern, prompting the festival team to rethink its positions and strategies. It has become incumbent upon us to reassess our priorities, scope, and the nature of our activities, so that the festival can grow in alignment with the new role entrusted to it by its communities.

What role can cinema play in empowering Arab migrant and vulnerable communities in these dire times? What forums and possibilities for communing, learning, and interaction can festivals create beyond the presentation of film stories and aesthetics? These questions are at the heart of our work today, as well as our vocation and our vision for the future.

Berlin has large Arab diasporic communities and vibrant cultural scenes. How do you see the significance of hosting an Arab film festival specifically in Berlin? And how do you envision the festival as a space for both celebration and resistance?

My vision is to shift the concept of “a film festival” itself into new horizons; into a space of actively reclaiming the self, of re-centring the experiences, ambitions, and lives of those who must constantly navigate marginalisation, racialization, and exclusion in Germany. It is not enough to simply *know the world* as presented to us in cinema. We must instead deploy cinema as a tool for *producing knowledge that empowers*, that makes life liveable and bearable.

Reference

AlFilm. “Here is Elsewhere: Palestine in Arab Cinema and Beyond.” Accessed April 2, 2026.
https://alfilm.berlin/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/15_ALFILM_catalouge_web.pdf.

“Shall I compare you to a summer’s day”/Bashtaalak Sa’at: A film by Mohammad Shawky Hassan

Ines Cuțaru

Shall I compare you to a summer’s day, or, by its original name in Arabic, *Bashtaalak Sa’at* (2022) is a documentary-style film directed by Mohammad Shawky Hassan, an Egyptian filmmaker living and working in Berlin. The storyline is inspired by the directors’ personal love diary, telling the love story between two men encountering polyamorous lovers through the voiced narration of a female narrator. The English title of the film is relative to Shakespeare’s infamous sonnet, where the beauty of a nameless young man is commemorated by a devoted poet.

Shall I compare you to a summer’s day has been showcased at the ALFILM—a significant film festival for the promotion of Arab cinematography in Berlin, Germany. The storyline is multifaceted, presenting a collection of memories and emotions of love that shift between the protagonists. It has been described to spotlight a “queer narrative”. Many protagonists of *Shall I compare you to a summer’s day* and the director live in Berlin, which is considered by many a safe haven for the queer community, and for the expression of queer artistry. Nevertheless, the politics of respectability are still present, as the representations of the queer, and Arab communities are subject to a set of social conditions to the point where stories remain unrepresented. The film and its perceptions show a keen interest by its makers in questioning how queer Arabs can voice their love regardless of the culturalist framings and these unspoken social narratives in cities like Berlin.

Although the film itself does not mention the existence of a specific time or region, its origin in the Arab-Egyptian culture is strongly implied. The film has been displayed in a multitude of film festivals, but it does speak to the city and people of Berlin.

“And I wonder why we keep telling stories we already know”

Shall I compare you to a summer's day invokes a female narrator—Scheherazade, played by Donia Massod, as a mythical narrator guiding the audience through entwined stories of love, through a reinterpretation of *One Thousand and One Nights*. This does seem to contradict the traditional understanding of storytelling, which might seem confusing but, ultimately, it speaks to questioning cultural and gender-based norms. The story is a collection of experiences, where the protagonists become an expression of their emotions, communicating through physical means, exchanging positions, places, times, and lovers. The audience cannot be sure where one story begins and another ends, but one thing is certain—the film refers to love and desire.

The story represents a tribute to how the Arab community shatters stereotypes under the politics of respectability in art and film, an ultimate method of expression. The film is not supposed to be political in itself, but in evoking visual language, the frames and the actions depicted speak to freedom, to an escape from the politics of respectability.

Reference

ADKDW (Artothek der Kunst- und Design-Köln). “Kinda Hassan & Mohammad Shawky Hassan in Cologne.” ADKDW. Accessed May 2025. https://www.adkdw.org/en/news/3200_kinda_hassan_amp_mohammad_shawky_hassan_in_cologne.

The Commodification of Tradition. Kaftan's Journey to Paris

Başak Saraçoğlu

In Morocco, kaftans are deeply symbolic garments, used for rituals, celebrations, and identity expression. In Parisian fashion, the kaftan is reduced to a boho-chic gown, devoid of its ceremonial meaning, transformed into a luxury leisurewear piece. This detachment reflects how global fashion markets commodify culture, especially from formerly colonised countries. The kaftan's transformation from cultural garment to Western fashion object illustrates how fashion commodifies and depoliticises cultural symbols, particularly from formerly colonised societies, while simultaneously elevating them to a luxury item. Paris, as the fashion capital of the world, presents a unique case study for exploring the kaftan's status in the West, particularly due to the influence of Parisian designer Yves Saint Laurent (YSL).

As a fashion enthusiast, I have always seen different kaftan in several magazines, designer collections, being worn on the streets and in films. Also, due to my interest in the subject matter, I have noticed it being a central piece in vintage YSL collections from the 70s. Beyond my personal interest, kaftan is an interesting case due to its postcolonial context with France and Morocco.

Yves Saint Laurent “discovered” the kaftan in the 1970s, after visiting Marrakesh and Tangier multiple times in the 1960s. He described his experience in Tangier with this statement:

“I especially noticed the light on colours ... , on every street corner in Marrakech, you encounter astonishingly vivid groups of men and women, which stand out in a blend of pink, blue, green, and purple caftans.”(Le Maroc 2025).

This romanticised description from the official Musée YSL web-page clearly shows the stance of the institute and Laurent himself. The Parisian designer did not acknowledge

the cultural and political context, projecting an aestheticised story of how this garment came to be.

French institutions such as the Musée YSL appear as if they have made it their mission to erase colonial histories or at the very least avoid confronting them. The Musée YSL has two locations, one in Paris and one in Marrakesh, both presenting the history of Laurent's "discovery" of Morocco and how it influenced his designs, the kaftan being an important example. This is evident even when looking at the online platforms of these museums. In the section "Discovering Morocco" of Musée YSL Paris, even the title suggests a colonial gaze presenting Morocco not as a place with its own culture, but as an exotic landscape to be "found" and reimagined through Western eyes of Laurent (Discovering Morocco 2025). What is absent is any mention of the historical ties between France and Morocco, which made this cultural exchange possible. There is no mention of the traditional kaftan and its function in Moroccan society. The museum therefore fails to incorporate Morocco's complex colonial history by romanticising Laurent's time there and framing it as merely an inspiration rather than being part of a larger postcolonial pattern of appropriation.

Once it reached Paris (and then the West), kaftans became detached from their cultural function and became a symbol of what the Western consumers thought of as "exotic". It was and still is a big trend with many different designers coming up with their own collections. In Paris, the kaftan almost became part of the bohemian fashion wave, which was already popular in the Western World at the time (60s-70s), solidifying its place as a trendy item even to this day. When traditional items travel to the West they have to "be part of a modern landscape given just a touch of the exotic" to be accepted (Martin and Koda 1994). This is why YSL's kaftan was so readily accepted by the Parisian consumers, it was detached from its cultural context. Once a cultural symbol of status, royalty is diluted into a fashionable item for consumption.

The kaftan shows that fashion is not only expressive and aesthetic but it is often a status sign. Unlike in Germany's history with Turkish migration, France's colonial history with

Morocco continues to shape which cultural expressions are accepted. Among the Moroccan diaspora in France, particularly in Paris, a diaspora member wearing a traditional kaftan to display cultural pride might be perceived as too foreign or out of place in everyday Parisian society. However, a “modernised” version such as the YSL one, can be celebrated as fashion on runways and events. This shows how postcolonial power continues to define when cultural symbols are embraced and when they are marginalised.

References

- Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris. “Discovering Morocco.” *Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris*. Accessed May 26, 2025. <https://museeyslparis.com/en/biography/decouverte-du-maroc>.
- Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris. “Le Maroc.” *Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris*. Accessed May 22, 2025. <https://museeyslparis.com/en/stories/le-maroc>.
- Martin, Richard, and Harold Koda. “Near East and Middle East.” In *Orientalism*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, 50-71.

What We Carried. Jewelry and Amulettes at MAHJ (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme)

Leire Vazquez Quiroga

At the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, walls of jewellery glimmer under museum lights. Metal crescents, silver Stars of David, necklaces with palm-shaped charms—once everyday objects—now rest behind a pane of glass. The large crescent fibula, engraved with the Star of David, was a pin meant to fasten fabric; today, it pins memory instead. The hands of Fatima were protective charms, often worn across North Africa by Jews and Muslims alike. These were not museum pieces when they were first made; they lived in doorways, around wrists, or pinned to clothes.

The museum does not explain everything. Were these objects religious, decorative, or superstitious? Did they belong to everybody or only to the elite? Some objects hold multiple meanings, serving as shared symbols between Muslim and Jewish cultures. In these fragments, coexistence is visible—or at least a coexistence that was lived. The record of these objects may be incomplete, but perhaps the museum is not meant to be a site of

Fig. 42. (left) Crescent fibula, a pin used to fasten fabric, engraved with the Star of David. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme. Hôtel de Saint-Aignan, 71 Rue du Temple, 75003 Paris, France. Photo by Leire Vazquez Quiroga, 1 July 2025.



Fig. 43. (right) Arab jewellery commonly worn by Muslim and Jewish Arabs. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme. Hôtel de Saint-Aignan, 71 Rue du Temple, 75003 Paris, France. Photo by Celina Bannayan, 1 July 2025.

fixed history. Instead, it can also be a space where meanings flicker, where ambiguity can momentarily raise questions of who we are, what we keep, and what we leave behind. Postcolonial migration lives on in objects—not just in those scattered throughout the city or kept in homes inaccessible to the public, but also in the way museums choose to display and frame them. Migration is not just a movement of people— it is a movement of items and the meanings they carry.

Note: The Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ) in Paris offers a rich exploration of Jewish history, culture, and art. However, a closer look at its permanent and temporary exhibitions reveals a striking imbalance in representation. While the museum's collections span the breadth of Jewish experiences, only the second floor is devoted to Arabic-speaking Jewish communities, a space far less prominent than that dedicated to Ashkenazi communities. Only two sections explicitly address the history and culture of Jewish communities from North Africa and the Middle East. This spatial disparity reflects a broader trend in how the museum prioritizes certain narratives over others, often sidelining the experiences of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in favour of a more Eurocentric focus. A review of the MAHJ's temporary exhibitions over the last decade further underscores this imbalance. The physical and thematic space allocated to Arabic-speaking Jewish communities suggests a hierarchy of representation.

References

- Everett, Samuel Sami. "Curating Commonality: Multimodal Materialities of Intercommunal Northern African Heritage." *Material Religion* 20, no. 5 (2024): 324-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2024.2424713>.
- Gonzalez, Valerie. "The Religious Plot in Museums or the Lack Thereof: The Case of Islamic Art Display." *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 281. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040281>.
- Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme. "9. The Jews in the Levant and the Maghreb." Accessed March 12, 2026. <https://www.mahj.org/en/permanent-collection/9-jews-levant-and-maghreb>.

Museums and the Distortion of Arabness

Nada Mahdy

Museums are tools of education, playing a powerful role in shaping how cultures and communities are understood by different audiences. In a post-colonial context, the representation of Arab societies and identities in European museums can influence perceptions of their history, identity, and cultural significance. Yet, when these representations are shaped by curatorial decisions, historical power structures and dominant narratives, risks of distortion exist. Thus the portrayal of “Arabness” in the Parisian Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) and the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ) must be examined, particularly in how they may contribute to such misrepresentation.



Inaugurated in 1987 to bridge Arab and Western civilizations (IMA n.d.), the IMA presents a narrative of Arab identity which appears curiously anchored in the past. Much of its permanent collection emphasises early artistic works from the MENA region such

as ceramic tiles, geometric patterned items and religious manuscripts. While artefacts such as the example in figure 44 are visually striking and historically significant, questions are raised on how the lack of more context risks framing Arab culture primarily as merely decorative traditions. This risk is materialised in the figure 45 description of the tiles reaffirming that “In the West, the adjective most often used to describe art in the Arab World is ‘decorative’”. However, the display does little to challenge this norm nor does it explore the cultural, mathematical, or philosophical meanings embedded in geometric art. Instead, the focus on ornamentation might be reinforcing a static and aestheticised image of Arab culture. Similarly, the brief presentation of the three Abrahamic religions through manuscript displays offers limited contextualisation of their origins and historical development in the Arab world. In the absence of further explanation, these objects remain detached from the intellectual and historical processes that shaped them alongside their societies. Such an absence of contextualisation fails to “bridge the gap,” leaving their origins, development, and transmission from the Arab world to Europe unaddressed. This omission or “un-naming,” as Gemma King (2019) observes, does little to challenge dominant narratives. By privileging aesthetic tiles and “decorative” pieces rather than the broader intellectual and cultural histories they represent, the IMA risks the reproduction of simplified and static representations.

The MAHJ (Musée d'Art et d'histoire du judaïsme) opened in 1998 to present two millennia of Jewish history, art, and culture, revealing a related yet different representational gap. In its presentation of Jewish family histories, explicit references to the Arabness of these Jewish identifications are largely absent. In June 2025, in the Roffé family display for example, their Algerian origins are not explicitly mentioned, the description primarily focuses on the family's later trajectory in France, leaving their Algerian environment largely unaddressed, and lacking elaboration on the cultural, linguistic or social contexts that shaped Jewish life in Arab societies. As a result, the historical presence of Jewish communities as part of Arab societies remains implicit rather than clearly acknowledged.

Such absences are significant as they obscure, to a certain extent, the long-standing relations of Jewish and Arab communities in the Gulf and North African regions. By

emphasising French trajectories while minimizing Arab contexts in which many Jewish communities lived for centuries, the exhibition risks reinforcing the perception that Jewish history is primarily European. Such curatorial choices can unintentionally fragment Jewish histories and disconnect them from their broader cultural and historical landscape of the Arab world.

Taken together, the exhibitions at the IMA and the MAHJ, illustrate different but related modes of representation. The IMA tends to frame Arab identity through historical aesthetic objects, while the MAHJ largely dilutes the Arab contexts of Jewish communities originating from the region. In both cases, Arab societies appear either distant in time or peripheral to major historical narratives. This fragmentation limits visitors' understanding of the diversity and historical continuity of Arab identities. Rather than presenting the Arab world as complex and evolving, these curatorial approaches risk reinforcing narratives that isolate Arab cultures from broader intellectual, religious, and historical developments.

References

- King, Gemma. "Multiculturalism Obscured: Paris Museum Cultures and the Musée de l'Institut du monde arabe." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 56, no. 2 (2019): 156-69. <https://doi.org/10.3828/ajfs.2019.12>.
- "Qu'est-ce que le mahJ?," *Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme*. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.mahj.org/fr/decouvrir/quest-ce-que-le-mahj>.
- "Qu'est-ce que l'IMA?" *Institut du monde arabe*. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.imarabe.org/fr/qu-est-ce-que-ima>.

Cultural Compartmentalisation

Finn Gleichmann



Fig. 46. Gate at the Grande Mosquée de Paris: The high walls of the Grande Mosquée de Paris retain the oriental experience of the mosque to its confines only. Through the entrance, the visitor steps into a different world. A world that is also part of France, even if the state's impression of Frenchness is a different one. Photo by Finn Gleichmann, 30 June 2025.

Paris is often presented as the city of corner cafés, accordion music, and artisanal cheese—a vision of French culture that is clearly defined and relatively static. Yet, this illusion is partly constructed by France's cultural institutions, which often overlook 200 years of colonial history and cultural entanglement with profound impacts on the contemporary cultures in France. For instance, Raï music, which developed among immigrant communities in the 1980s, has since gained popularity among a wider public in France (Swedenburg 2015). Similarly, the use of Arabic words in French slang has spread, even among speakers without a migratory background. However, the French language institute (*L'Académie Française*) seldom acknowledges this influence in their dictionary (Toledo 2024). Museums and public spaces often portray immigrant cultures as “foreign”, rarely acknowledging the dynamic ways they have shaped, and continue to shape, contemporary French cultures (King 2019). Instead, Arab cultures are confined to isolated spaces: a Mosque to entice “the lure of the Orient” or a museum

for *Arab* culture. In doing so, these institutions reduce France's rich, evolving cultural tapestry to a more binary one.

The Grande Mosque of Paris is intended to appear as an oasis of peace, adorned with calligraphy and full of trickling springs in the shade of the loquat trees. While the mosque is a place of worship, for many visitors it is also a space, with its famous café and restaurant, to experience an "exotic" slice of the Middle East. Just beyond the mosque's high walls, the call for prayer fades into the chatting of corner cafés. To me, the mosque's high walls create an illusion of separation, as if the life inside (deliberately styled as "Oriental") has little connection to the city outside, almost foreign enclave, despite the deep-rooted influence of Muslim cultures in France (Maillard 2005).

Another example of this compartmentalisation is the Institute de Monde Arabe (IMA), located just 800 metres north of the mosque. IMA's permanent collection is filled with objects from the Arab world free floating in their vitrines. An ancient glass window without a house, the head of a statue with its body long lost, a bowl from seventh century Cairo next to an earring from 14th century Baghdad. All objects are contained within their vitrines, disconnected from their original contexts, telling fragmented stories of a distant land and time. The visitor is not often told that this world behind the alarm-secured glass laid the foundation for Western philosophy and natural sciences (Abattouy 2012).

Yet, in the streets of Paris, these cultural boundaries blur. One can sip coffee in a corner café while enjoying Levantine tabouleh, a fusion that is undeniably part of the city's lived experience. But in the eyes of some French state institutions, this blend hardly exists. The tabouleh goes in one museum and the corner café in the other.

References

- Abattouy, Mohammed. "The Arabic-Latin Intercultural Transmission of Scientific Knowledge in Pre-Modern Europe: Historical Context and Case Studies." In *The Role of the Arab-Islamic World in the Rise of the West: Implications for Contemporary Trans-Cultural Relations*, edited by Nayef R. F. Al-Rodhan. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230393219_8.
- David-Toledo, Alessandro C., and Theresa A. Antes. "A Study on the Usage of Wesh in Parisian French." *The French Review* 97, no. 4 (2024): 15-35.
- King, Gemma. "Multiculturalism Obscured: Paris Museum Cultures and the Musée de l'Institut du Monde Arabe." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 56, no. 2 (2019): 156-69. <https://doi.org/10.3828/AJFS.2019.12>.
- Maillard, Dominique. "The Muslims in France and the French Model of Integration." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2005): 62-78.
- Swedenburg, Ted. "Beur/Maghribi Musical Interventions in France: Rai and Rap." *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 109-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2014.983737>.

Refracted Islam Behind Glass

Sara Torres

In one of the Louvre's inner courtyards, beneath a glass canopy reminiscent of a magic carpet and interwoven with golden mesh, lies Paris's representations of Islamic art. The Museum presents this as its youngest department, holding artefacts that span three continents– from Spain to India, through North Africa and the Middle East. The collection showcases the opulence and variety that surrounded the princes, sultans and caliphs of the Islamic world between the seventh and 19th centuries (Louvre n.d.). Waves of tourists admire the beauty of this mystical, mysterious world: intricately carved door frames, extravagant jugs, shiny coins and decorative tiles, all elegantly displayed for them. Yet few pause to ask: in this beautiful room, where Paris celebrates the art of the Islamic World... where is Islam itself?

The panels describe “Islamic Art” as a broad civilizational category, not a religious one. Themes of faith, prayer, pilgrimage, fasting, and charity, the key pillars of Islam, are conspicuously absent. References to the Qur'an are minimal, limited to some Iranian decorative ceramic tiles with “Bismillah”. The superficial descriptions of the artefacts, using terms like “Moorish influence” or “arabesque”, reduce their potential religious significance to mere exotic aesthetics. This framing unintentionally encourages culturally separatist ideas, sim-



Fig. 47. Arabic Scripture on white plaque in Musée du Louvre in Paris. Photo by Dumitru Cătălin Căndea, 4 July 2025.

plifying the values embedded in these objects to superficial beauty (Forstrom 2022). The incohesive collection of luxurious items is undeniably beautiful, yet it fails to capture the depth of Islam, its people and its values.

The Louvre's first Islamic galleries, first established in 1893 as "the Muslim arts", did not emphasise the religious dimensions of the artefacts or their cultural roots. Instead, the name reflected the predominance of Islam in the Middle East and North Africa (Louvre n.d.). The collection expanded as Paris became a hub of Orientalism during the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2012, thanks to donations from royals and aristocrats, an independent Department of Islamic Art was created. The histories of these items are vaguely addressed, obscured by euphemisms like "European expansion". This portrayal of France's presence in Northern Africa and the Middle East as "expansion"—rather than admitting a history of appropriation—generates a problematic disconnect between the audience and the true origins of the artefacts (King 2019).



Fig. 48. Fragments of decorative ceramic pieces in Musée du Louvre in Paris. Photo by Antonina Szczerba, 4 July 2025.

Furthermore, the exhibition's lack of a cohesive narrative—organised by groups of items rather than region or religious significance—rips the cultural context from the physical beauty of the items. When regions and people are represented solely through material artefacts, the social, historical, and religious meanings that give these objects significance are lost (King 2019). For example, an Egyptian bowl displayed beside a Syrian lamp, with no description nor context, raises the question: why frame this gallery through religion if its contents reveal so little of it?

More than just thick glass separates Islam from the Louvre's visitors; the language of the panels and the curation of the exhibit create vast gaps between the perception of Islamic art, and the faith behind it.

References

- Forstrom, Melissa M. "Islamic Art Exhibition, Orientalism, and Contemporary Socio-Politics." In *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, 123-34. February 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003170525-11>.
- King, Gemma. "Multiculturalism Obscured: Paris Museum Cultures and the Musée de l'Institut Du Monde Arabe." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 56, no. 2 (2019): 156-69. <https://doi.org/10.3828/ajfs.2019.12>.
- Louvre. "An Introduction to Islamic Art." *Le Louvre*. Accessed March 2026. <https://www.louvre.fr/en/explore/the-palace/an-introduction-to-islamic-art>.

Arab Presences in the Musée d'Art Moderne Moderne: Challenging Hegemonic Narratives in Art

Sara Vermeulen

On a warm afternoon in June 2024, I visited the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (MAM), housed in the eastern wing of the Palais de Tokyo. The monumental building was inaugurated in 1937 as part of the International Exposition. Impressive, both inside and outside. Luckily, I was welcomed by the cool air once I got inside. I could not help but notice the serenity, as there were few other visitors, unexpectedly for a Saturday afternoon. My visit was motivated by the temporary exhibition “*Arab Presences: Modern Art and Decolonisation in Paris, 1908-1988*”, a show that promised to illuminate the often-overlooked cultural entanglements between France and the Arab world. The exhibition featured more than 200 works of 130 artists, ranging from paintings, sculptures, and photographs, supported by historical sound and audiovisual archival material. These are impressive numbers. The curators wanted to display works from artists connected to Paris in some way throughout the 20th century, making the cultural entanglements of France with the Arab world more tangible. Yet, the exhibition also challenged a common misconception: that Arab presence in Paris is a recent phenomenon that has occurred only in the second half of the 20th century.

As Ian Coller (2010) describes in his work on *Arab France*, France's engagement with the Arab world began much earlier, between the French Conquest of Egypt in 1798 and the seizure of Algeria in 1830. French colonial rule extended beyond military control, encompassing soft power strategies such as the implementation of the French language and education. The field of arts was also interested in the Orient. The fascination with the Orient was so pronounced that the French Society for Orientalist Painters was established in 1893.

However, cultural exchange and entanglement was not a one-way street, it worked both ways. Arabs had long been present in France, some only temporarily for educational purposes and others permanently, long before 1908, the starting point of this exhibition. The level of interaction with Paris therefore varies, but it is not the only interaction that artists experienced. The late artist Saloua Raouda Choucair, featured in this exhibition, once rejected the idea of a European influence in her art. *“A critic once told me that my work has a European influence. No. It’s a universal influence, in fact what I experience everyone in the world experiences”* (Taan 2019). She opposed the Westernised perspective on art and art history, hereby questioning the importance Paris holds in her oeuvre and the broader narrative of modern art.

While this exhibition succeeded in increasing the visibility of Arab artists—who remain underrepresented in Western museums, particularly in modern art—I walked out wondering if the exhibition succeeded in challenging the hegemonic narratives. Either way, it is a start.

Fig. 49. Catalogue of the exhibition Arab Presences, modern art and decolonisation. Paris 1908-1988 [Présences arabes, Art moderne et décolonisation. Paris, 1908-1988]. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 2 April 2026.

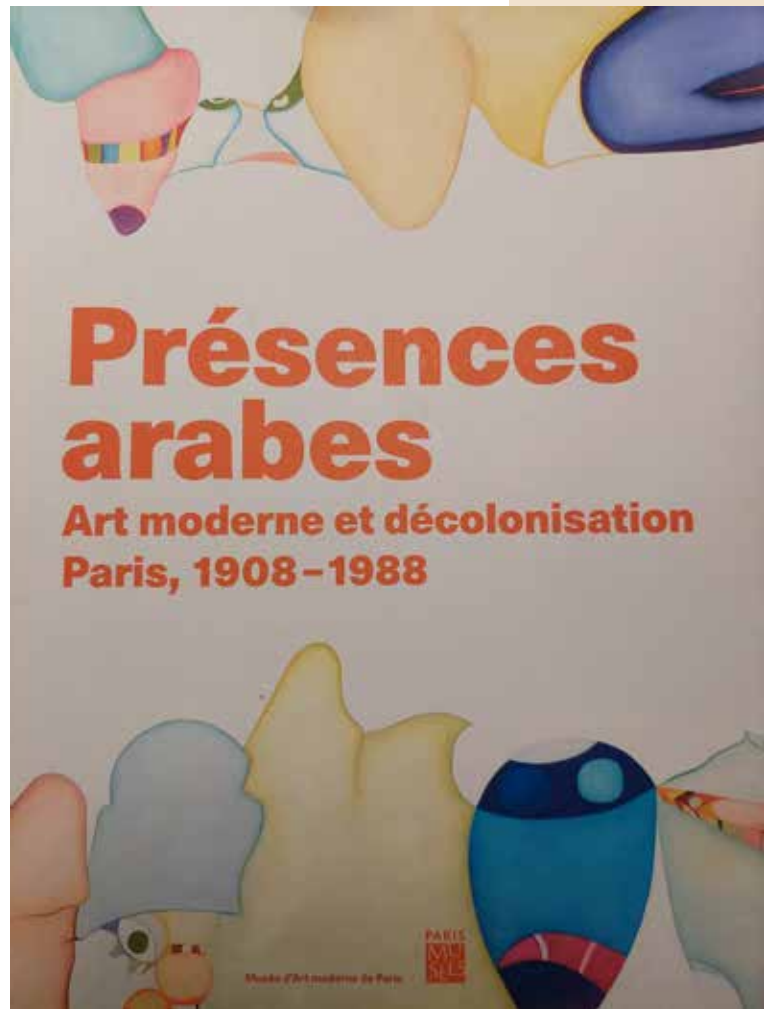




Fig. 50. Cover of the art magazine *Derrière le miroir*, featuring a painting by the Algerian artist Baya (Fatima Haddad). Her works, inspired by Kabyle folklore, were exhibited in June 1947 at the Galerie Maeght in Paris as part of the exhibition 'Surrealism in 1947', alongside the Egyptian surrealists Ramsès Younan and Fouad Kamel. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 2 April 2025.

References

- Coller, Ian. "Introduction" In *Arab France: Islam and the Making of Modern Europe, 1798-1831*. University of California Press, 2010.
- Labrusse, R. "Islamic Arts and the Crisis of Representation in Modern Europe." In *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture, 1196-1217*. 2017.
- Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris. "Arab Presences." *Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris*. Accessed March 12, 2026. <https://www.mam.paris.fr/en/expositions/exhibitions-arab-presences>.
- Taan, Yasmine Nachabe. *Saloua Raouda Choucair: Modern Arab Design-An Exploration of Abstraction Across Materials and Functions*. Khatt Books, 2019.
- Zamanbc. "Arab Presences: Modern Art and Decolonisation, Paris, 1908-1988." *Zamanbc*. Accessed March 11, 2026. <https://zamanbc.com/en/arab-presences-modern-art-and-decolonisation-paris-1908-1988/>.

CHAPTER 4

Neighbourhood Stories: Postcolonial Migration and Urban Memory

Cedar and Concrete. From Lebanon to Quartier Latin, Eastern Catholic Churches at the Heart of Medieval Paris

Kate van Keulen and Thomas Volkers

The ties between France and Lebanon are deep-rooted, stretching back long before the 20th century. French involvement in Lebanon became particularly pronounced during the extreme violence between Maronite Christians and Druze communities, where thousands of Christians were killed in what became known as the 1860 Massacre. France, invoking its longstanding role as Protector of the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, intervened militarily with help from other European powers. Under Napoleon III, French troops were deployed to restore order and protect the Lebanese Christians from the violence (Salibi 1971; Boonstra 2018, 33-34).

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, France gained control over Lebanon, framing its mandate as a mission to modernise the Lebanese state while protecting Christians, developing Lebanon's legal, political, and educational systems according to the French customs and values (Geukjian 2023). Although independence was the stated goal, many Lebanese saw the French mandate as colonial domination (Boonstra 2018, chap. 5). Lebanon finally gained independence in 1943, but the legacy of the mandate continues to shape Franco-Lebanese relations, which are visible even today in the streets of Paris.

The traces of that shared—and contested—history are more than political. They linger in stone, in language, ordinary Parisian streets, and the everyday fabric of the city. Paris has a way of hiding its secrets in plain sight. For someone unskilled in navigating its labyrinthine streets, this can be a blessing. While everyone else strides with convincing determination towards their destinations for the day, I happened upon a silent sanctuary—though, in full honesty, I followed my co-author Thomas there.

Tucked behind the Panthéon, just across from the Musée Curie, stands a concrete slab concealing Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral. The apartment complex resting atop the inconspicuous entrance reveals little of the veiled world behind it. Slipping through the narrow doorway, we entered a space that felt detached from the city outside. Our Lady of Lebanon is a Maronite church (*depuis toujours et pour toujours* [always and forever])—part of the Eastern Catholic tradition—and though the building once belonged to the solemn order of Jesuits, the spirit inside is deeply, unmistakably Lebanese. The liturgy was entirely in Arabic, which struck us after visiting the Melkite Greek Catholic Church earlier that week, where Arabic and French blended freely. For me, being raised a Catholic in the Middle East, the Maronite church felt like a homecoming. My co-author Thomas, a Protestant, soaked the novelty up in awe.



Fig. 51. The entrance of the Église Maronite Notre Dame du Liban [Maronite Church of Our Lady of Lebanon]. 17 Rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris. Photo by Thomas Volkers, 4 July 2025.



Fig. 52. The nave of the church from a height. 17 Rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris. Photo by Thomas Volkers, 4 July 2025.

The Melkite church Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre (Saint Julien the Poor) felt like a secret garden. Hidden behind standard Paris park gates and surrounded by greenery, it is an oasis amid



Fig. 53. Icon of Saint Mark the Evangelist (written on top in Arabic), a prominent figure in the Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox church, holding the Bible displaying the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, reading “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” in Greek. 1 Rue Saint-Julien le Pauvre, 75005 Paris. Photo by Kate van Keulen, 1 July 2025.



Fig. 54. The top of the altar of the Melkite church of Saint Julien the Poor, with the icon of the Holy Virgin Mary on the left, and the icon of Jesus Christ on the right. 1 Rue Saint-Julien le Pauvre, 75005 Paris. Photo by Kate van Keulen, 1 July 2025.

the bustle of the city, a few metres away from Notre Dame. One of the oldest surviving Churches in Paris (12th century), on the left bank of La Seine, in the Quartier Latin, has been a Melkite place of worship since 1889, after years of decline and secular uses (Lecompte and Ladoux 2014). This transition marked a significant moment in the history of the church, as it became a spiritual home for the growing Melkite community in Paris (and Levantine communities in Paris more generally) – a community with roots in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly Lebanon, Syria, and historical Palestine. Inside, the light pours through the windows in gold streaks, catching the gleam of Byzantine icons and the shimmer of myrrh and frankincense smoke in the air. The French and Greek liturgy with the traditionally Arabic design felt like a delicate balancing act, a bridge between cultures. It was as if the church had learned to live in two worlds at once.

Inside the Maronite church, the air was thick with bakhoor (a mixture of frankin-

cense, myrrh, and woodchips such as cedar or sandalwood). The atmosphere was quieter, focussed. Hymnal books, Bibles, and prayer cards were all written in Arabic. Icons of Levantine and Arabic Saints were sprawled about the Gospel (left) and Epistle (right) side, as well as the chapels; several crosses resembled the cedarwood tree found on the



Fig. 55. The altar of the Maronite Cathedral, adorned with bouquets of purple gladiola, African lilies, baby's breath, and sweet alyssum, and the Holy Virgin Mary overlooking the congregation. 17 Rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris. Photo by Kate van Keulen, 4 July 2025.



Fig. 56. Icon of Saint Rafqa Choboq Ar-Rayes above three cedarwood trees and two prayer candles, located in one of the chapels on the Gospel side (left side) in the Maronite Cathedral. 17 Rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris. Photo by Kate van Keulen, 4 July 2025.

Lebanese flag. We found the stone spiral staircase blocked off, and somehow we sweet-talked the lady from the sacristy into letting us bypass the blockade and take a few photos of the chapel from above. A stern warning was issued—they were not insured for that part of the church, and we were under no circumstances allowed to fall off the staircase.

Climbing the stairwell felt like a minor pilgrimage. The descent, however, tested our faith—creaking railings, wobbling stone steps, and dim lighting made us question our choices. We survived, though, and from above we saw more than the chapel. Our vantage point gave way to the rhythm of the church; the careful order of the altar, the nave, the chapels and their icons. What lay before us was the geometry of devotion and homeland.

Walking out of both churches, we realised they were more than places of worship—they were living archives. Spaces of survival, of stories, languages, losses, and lineages. They are not replicas of churches back home; they are extensions of them. Two churches, two different experiences, but both held a rootedness that is hard to put into words. Maybe that is what faith looks like in diaspora: not loud or overt, but steady, resilient, and revealed only to those who truly see. They are what happens when faith migrates but refuses to disappear.



Fig. 57-58 Interior of the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church Saint Julien le Pauvre, Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 1 July 2025.

References

- Boonstra, John. *A Mandate to Protect: Imperial Encounters and Affective Ideologies between France and Lebanon, 1860-1931*. PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018. <https://asset.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/EVTDW3BVQKDR28M/R/file-27bb9.pdf>.
- Geukjian, Ohannes. "The History and Politics of French Involvement in Lebanon (1860-2021)." *The Maghreb Review* 48, no. 1 (2023): 66-88. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/tmr.2023.0002>.
- Lecompte, Francis, and Bernard Ladoux. *Paris Rive Gauche - Quartier Latin, St Germain des Prés, Montparnasse - Les Essentiels du Patrimoine*. Éditions Massin, 2014.
- Salibi, K. S. "The Lebanese Identity." *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 76-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947100600104>.

In the Jaws of Colonial Power? The Grand Mosque of Paris

Sara Vermeulen

The idea of the French state funding a mosque seems contradictory, especially given the government's adoption of the Secularisation Law in 1905, which strictly separated state and church. Yet, only fifteen years later, the French state funded the construction of the first permanent Muslim place of worship in France: La Grande Mosquée de Paris. This is remarkable, as the 1905 law strictly prohibited such activities. This paradox becomes clearer when examined within the historical context and underlying reasoning. Was this a gesture of goodwill towards the migrant workers or did it serve a deeper, more strategic purpose?

Built during the inter-war period, the mosque was initially framed as a memorial for colonial soldiers who stood alongside the French during World War I, but also as a gesture of pacification with Morocco. The building reflects Northern African architectural styles even though the architects themselves were French, with craftsmen from North Africa only involved in providing the materials and craftsmanship. The complex includes not only a prayer hall, but also a hostel, infirmary, library, café, and hammam designed to represent a *cité musulmane*. It became a place of display and consumption of Islam. Mostly the elite, whether Muslim, French or both, found their way to the Grand Mosque, while migrant workers, often living in faraway neighbourhoods, were sometimes denied access due to their dress.

Through the *Grande Mosquée*, France brought colonialism home, a phenomenon scholars referred to as “colonial modernity”. The French state put itself forward as a “Great Muslim Power”, but on its own terms. Their control of migrants through Islam reached far. This “French Islam” was not merely a response to the growing Muslim population; it was a mechanism of control. The mosque's alignment with the streets of Paris and—not built directly towards Mecca—symbolises this structural integration of Islam into the French framework.





The control extended beyond architecture. The construction was coordinated by the French, who also appointed the mosque's leadership to avoid colonial political dissent, and established the SAINA (Service des Affaires Indigènes Nord-Africaines), a special bureau to monitor the North African Muslim populations. In 1935, the *Hôpital Franco Musulman* opened in Bobigny, a Parisian suburb. A designated hospital with Arabic-speaking staff and halal food, expanded in 1937 to include an Islamic cemetery as well. Through healthcare, the state was able to control illnesses and deaths of migrants, but also their religious practices. The Grand Mosque is a gesture after all, but one with a hidden agenda. Even after the colonies gained independence, France continued to embed colonialism from within its capital.

References

- Bayoumi, Moustafa. "Shadows and light: colonial modernity and the Grand Mosque of Paris." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 2 (2000): 267-292.
- Davidson, Naomi. "Muslim Bodies in the Metropole: Social Assistance and "Religious" Practice in Interwar Paris." In *Muslims in Interwar Europe*, pp. 105-154. Brill, 2016.
- Grande Mosquée de Paris. "Une Histoire" Accessed March 11, 2026, <https://www.grandem-squeedeparis.fr/>.
- Maussen, Marcel. "Islamic presence and mosque establishment in France: Colonialism, arrangements for guestworkers and citizenship." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 6 (2007): 981-1002.
- Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration. "The Mosque of Paris." Accessed March 11, 2026. <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/en/node/3037>.

Fig. 59. Entrance and Minaret of the Mosque. Photo by Sara Vermeulen, 27 June 2024.

Architecture as a Tool of Memory in Paris

Antonina Szczerba

The buildings of Paris tell a thousand stories: of Marie Antoinette's colourful rooms and silk dresses, of the barricades of revolution, of artists, writers, and even a small rat stirring soup beneath the Parisian sky (*Ratatouille*). Yet more rarely do we think of places such as the *Grande Mosquée* or the *Musée national de l'Histoire de l'Immigration*. These spaces hold quieter, often unspoken stories, traces of colonisation and migration, of identities overlooked. They stand as reminders that architecture does more than decorate a city; it shapes memory and speaks of belonging.

The Grande Mosquée de Paris, with its colourful tiles, geometric arches, and green courtyard, serves as a memorial and space for prayer to the Muslim soldiers who died for France during the First World War. Built in the 1920s in a Moorish Revival style, it draws on models from North Africa, borrowing their colours, carvings, and spatial harmony (Bayoumi 2000). While the mosque itself functions as a place for prayer and contemplation, the surrounding complex includes social spaces such as the Restaurant La Mosquée de Paris, where visitors gather to eat and spend time together in the heart of the Latin Quarter. In this context, any “postcolonial unity” expressed through the architecture is less a reflection of historical reality than a carefully staged image of imperial thoughtfulness, allowing France to appear tolerant and inclusive while it continued to govern and surveil its Muslim communities. The mosque thus becomes a monument to contradiction: it offers recognition and a place of worship, yet simultaneously embodies the unequal power relations that enabled its construction.



Fig. 60. The Grande Mosquée de Paris, Photo by Antonina Szczerba, 30 June 2025.



Fig. 61. Exterior of Palais de la Porte Dorée.
Photo by Sara Torres, 4 July 2025.

On the other side of Paris, the Musée national de l'Histoire de l'Immigration presents a striking contrast. Originally built for the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, its current mission, to collect, safeguard, and highlight immigration history while acknowledging its role in France's past and present, clashes with the building's imperial origins (*Palais de la Porte Dorée*, n.d.). The monumental Art Deco structure, with its imposing scale and massive sculptures of colonial subjects and empire scenes, projects French authority and dominance rather than dialogue or intimacy. A side wall inscription shows, "À ses fils qui ont étendu l'Empire de son génie et fait ainsi aimer son nom au-delà des mers, la France reconnaissante" ("To its children who expanded the Empire through its genius and made its name loved overseas, the grateful France"), listing colonists and explorers while leaving the rest blank (Scarabocchi n.d.). This deliberate void embodies France's identity as a selective narrator: it presents the conquerors as heroic "children" of the nation, frames colonisation as a civilizing gift "loved" abroad, and silences the perspectives of the colonised.

Together, the mosque and the museum reveal how architecture serves as both a mir-

ror and a mask. The mosque was built “for the people”: a space of gathering, prayer, and daily life. The museum, created “for the public”, frames history through state interpretation, inviting reflection but on its own terms. One invites lived experience; the other, guided observation and curated memory. Both, however, engage in the same dialogue: a negotiation on how France confronts its colonial past and multicultural present.

They stand not just as buildings, but as active participants in the ongoing conversation about identity, power, and belonging, where gratitude and authority, recognition and erasure, coexist in the same urban landscape.

References

- Bayoumi, Moustafa. “Shadows and Light: Colonial Modernity and the Grand Mosquée of Paris.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 267-292.
- “Palais de la Porte Dorée”. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/>
- Scarabicchi, Caterina. “Curating, Displaying, Silencing? Postcolonial and Migrant Identities at the Musée National de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris.” *Roots & Routes*

The Moorish Style in Colonial Paris and Alger: Architecture and Colonial Ambition

Greta Berardi

The Neo-Moorish architectural style, often called “arabesque”, draws inspiration from traditional Islamic art and architecture, which favours natural and geometric motifs over human figures (Hassanen 2021). With its intricate geometric patterns, Arabic calligraphy, horseshoe arches, and vibrant tilework, it left a distinct imprint on Paris, reflecting France’s long-standing fascination with North Africa and the Islamic world. This aesthetic influence was not merely decorative but deeply tied to France’s colonial ambitions and its desire to project an image of cultural sophistication and global reach.

One of the most iconic examples of Moorish revival architecture in Paris is the Grande Mosquée de Paris, completed in 1926. Designed by architects Maurice Tranchant de Lunel, Robert Fournez, and Charles Heubes, the mosque was officially intended as a tribute to the Muslim soldiers from North Africa who fought for France during World War I. Its design blends Andalusian, Moorish, and traditional Islamic elements, featuring a 33-meter minaret, lush courtyards with fountains, and ornate tilework that evokes the Alhambra in Spain. The mosque’s construction was a political gesture, symbolizing France’s gratitude to its colonial subjects while also serving as a tool for cultural assimilation and control.

Like the *Grande Mosquée de Paris*, the *Grande Poste d’Alger* stands as an emblematic symbol of the cultural and political entanglements between Europe and the Middle East. Constructed in 1910 by French architects Jules Voinot and Marius Toudoire, the building epitomises the fusion of Neo-Moorish and classical European styles, reflecting the complex dynamics of colonial power and aesthetic appropriation. The *Grande Poste d’Alger* exemplifies this hybrid style, blending European symmetry with Oriental arches, domes, tiles, and monumental doors (Chalabi and Lazri 2021, 1249; Benghida et al. 2023, 582).

However, this architectural style has been criticised as an “invented colonial tradition” (Benghida et al. 2023, 578), a deliberate attempt by French colonisers to assert control over the local population. Unlike pre-colonial Algerian cities, which were organised around the *Casbah*—a triangular division separating private (*al-Gabal*) and public (*al-Wata*) spaces—the *Grande Poste* reflects a European vision imposed on Algerian urban landscapes (Çelik 1997, 12). During the colonial era (1830–1962), architecture became a tool of France’s *mission civilisatrice*, with buildings like the *Grande Poste* symbolizing French dominance and the assimilation of Algerian society into colonial structures (Koos 2011, 161; Hewitt 2017, 4).

After Algeria gained independence in 1962, many colonial architectural symbols remained embedded in the urban fabric. The *Grande Poste d’Alger*, now repurposed as a museum showcasing the evolution of telecommunications, also serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy of colonialism.

References

- Benghida, Nassiba, et al. 2023. “A Stylistic Analysis of the Saharan French Colonial Architecture in Southern Algeria.” *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 39 (January 8, 2023): 574–90. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v39i1.8288>.
- Çelik, Zeynep. “The Casbah and the Marine Quarter.” In *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*. (1997). University of California Press.
- Chalabi, Amina, and Youcef Lazri. 2021. “Image and Signification of the Neo-Moorish Architecture in Algeria: Case Study: The Big Post Office in Algiers.” *Civil Engineering and Architecture* 9 (June 6, 2021): 1246–56. <https://doi.org/10.13189/cea.2021.090426>.
- Hassanen, Ayman. 2021. “Sunrise from the West: The Origins, Influences, and Legacy of Moorish Architecture.” *ARCHIOL*, May 1, 2021. <https://www.archiol.com/post/sunrise-from-the-west-the-origins-influences-and-legacy-of-moorish-architecture>.
- Hewitt, Liane. 2017. “Posting Power: The Algiers Grande Poste and French Colonial ‘Association.’” April 21, 2017, 1–45. <http://winstonchurchillbc.org/media/2017/12/2017-Essay-Liane-Hewitt-First-Prize-winner.pdf>.

Koos, Leonard R. 2011. "Razzia in Stone: Building Colonial Algiers, 1830-1900." In *Institutions and Power in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200806_011.

Language and Power: Decoding Colonial Narratives at La Grande Mosquée de Paris

Julia Dedeu Fontcuberta

Nations use language not only to present themselves but also to shape narratives about their history and identity. Language weaves together cultures, ideas, and histories, yet it also serves to emphasise certain perspectives while silencing others. For this reason, it is essential to analyse language not just linguistically, but also through its underlying connotations, power dynamics, and cultural silences.

Here, I guide through “La Grande Mosquée de Paris”, examining the words chosen to describe its exhibits, spaces, objects, and histories. This analysis reveals what these words emphasise, what they leave unsaid, and the implications of these choices. Built from 1922 to 1926 under the direction of Maurice Tranchant de Lunel, the mosque was intended to honour 100,000+ Muslim Algerian soldiers (primarily colonial conscripts) who died fighting for France in WWI and to symbolise Franco-Islamic “fraternity” (Grande Mosquée de Paris 2025; Maussen 2007). However, the mosque’s construction cannot be understood solely within the context of WWI. France invaded Algeria in 1830, and ruled it as a colony until the Algerian war of independence. Algerians were “subjects” (not citizens), exploited for labour and resources by the French state (Pine 2016).

After entering the mosque’s beautiful arch with white stone carvings, green tiles, and wooden doors, I was struck by a gold-bordered plaque at the entrance. It read:

“France’s recognition of the sacrifice of Muslim soldiers during the First World War and to recall the Republic’s action in the construction of the Great Mosque of Paris”
(Fig. 62).

The placement of this sentence at the mosque’s entrance feels ironic. The word “sacrifice” implies a voluntary act of noble self-giving. The Cambridge Dictionary defines sacrifice



Fig. 62. Gold-bordered plaque at the entrance of the Mosque.

Photo by Julia Dedeu Fontcuberta, 30 June 2025.

as “to give up something for something else considered more important.” However, most Algerian soldiers fighting for France were not volunteers– they were forced to join the French army (Pine 2016). Framing their death as “sacrifice” obscures the reality: these Algerians were “colonial subjects” who did not choose to fight or die for France.

As I walked further into the mosque, through the parks and prayer rooms, I encountered an exhibition room with informational panels about Muslim life and Algeria-France relations. Notably, none of the panels in the mosque were in Arabic, only in French. This raises critical questions: who is the mosque really for? If it was built for the Muslim community, why is Arabic (the language of its worshippers) absent? This absence underscores France’s over-representation and control over the narrative.

One panel explains how “France recruited soldiers from its colonies, particularly in Algeria, which was then a French department.” While Algeria was legally considered part of France, the reality was far more complex. Military service was compulsory, but it operated within colonial power dynamics: soldiers were forced to join the army, with limited rights, little choice, and faced coercion (Pine 2016).

I conclude my analysis with the welcoming message of the Grand Mosque of Paris: “An earthly building dedicated to the worship of God, [...], rejecting all deviation or violence, and enshrined in the values of the French Republic.” Even in this sacred space, the values of the Republic remain central, showing France’s omnipresence and pride. Such narratives are increasingly amplified in today’s political climate, where far-right discourses on secularism, controversies over the hijab, and the portrayal of Islam as a “threat” dominate public debate.

References

- Cambridge Dictionary. “Sacrifice.” Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sacrifice>.
- Grande Mosquée de Paris. “Une Histoire.” Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.grandem-osqueedeparis.fr/presentation>.
- Maussen, Marcel. “Islamic Presence and Mosque Establishment in France: Colonialism, Arrangements for Guestworkers and Citizenship.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 6 (2007): 981-1002.
- Pine, S. “Conscription, Citizenship, and French Algeria.” *Undergraduate Research Journal for the Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2016): 44-54. <https://doi.org/10.17161/1808.21406>.

“La Plus Grande France”? The Paintings and Bas-Reliefs of the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration (Former Ministry of Colonies)

Sara Vermeulen

In 1931, visitors of the Exposition Coloniale Internationale in Paris could embark on a “trip around the world in a single day”. The event allowed its 8 million visitors to “travel” to the far ends of the French Empire. The Minister of Colonies, Paul Reynaud, wished that visitors would feel like citizens of *la plus grande France* (Greater France), a concept that framed the colonies as integral parts of the French nation. This ideology celebrated the “unity-in-diversity” of France’s global territories, spanning Africa, Asia and the Pacific during the interwar period.

The exhibition in 1931 aimed to highlight the positive aspects of colonialism and garner public support. The Palais de la Porte Dorée was one of the few permanent buildings. After the exhibition, it continued to function as a museum, but its name and collection changed over time, from the Museum of Colonies to the National Museum of the History of Immigration. The classical architectural style of the building does not overtly reflect colonialism, but its decorative features do.

The bas-relief by French sculptor Alfred Janniot, on the building’s façade, welcomes visitors into a curated vision of French history. Covering 1,100 square metres, it depicts the produce and people of the (former) colonies, emphasising the economic benefits they provided to France. While the work represents Greater France, it erases the coloniser entirely, focusing instead on traditional methods of transportation, agriculture, and trade. Semi-nude figures are stylised to represent colonial subjects, creating an idealised and sanitised version of colonialism, one that excludes the lived experiences and marginalises any critique.

Inside, the Salle des Fêtes is adorned with numerous frescoes portraying the cultural and social contributions that France claimed to bring to its colonies. Two salons, located at



Fig 63–65. Interior of Palais de la Porte Dorée. Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 4 July 2025.

either end of the hall, commemorate Africa and the Orient through paintings, further reinforcing not only the exhibition's vision of imperial unity but also the justification of the civilising mission. Colonialism, as depicted through the building's art and ornamentation, is a two-way exchange: France extracts produce and resources while offering social and cultural "benefits".

Nearly a century after construction, the building remains a vivid testament to France's colonial past. Though its surroundings have changed, the colonial legacy endures. The museum has not yet managed to fully address its colonial legacy and controversies.

In the winter of 2010–2011, the museum became the stage for protests. Around 500 undocumented workers, *sans-papiers*, occupied the premises for about four months to protest their legal status. Suddenly, the topic of immigration had become alive and tangible. The peaceful occupation was allowed, but afterwards, the events were not included in the permanent collection. This a missed opportunity to connect the present with the past, the collection with lived experiences and to facilitate a more inclusive dialogue.



References

- Labadi, Sophia. "The National Museum of Immigration History (Paris, France), neo-colonialist representations, silencing, and re-appropriation." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 13, no. 3 (2013): 310-330.
- Wilder, Gary. "Framing Greater France between the wars." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14, no. 2 (2001): 198-225.
- Aldrich, Robert. "The Colonies in Paris." In *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories*, pp. 21-75. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005.
- Jarrassé, Dominique. "The Former Palace of the Colonies: the burden of heritage." *Museum International* 59, no. 1-2 (2007): 56-65.
- Monjaret, Anne, and Mélanie Roustan. "A palace as legacy: The former French colonial museum-perspectives from the inside." *Journal of material culture* 22, no. 2 (2017): 216-236.
- Kiwan, Nadia. "Remembering on the City's Margins: The Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 25, no. 4 (2017): 426-440.

Projecting Elsewhere: Cinema Le Louxor at an Urban Crossroad

Karène Sanchez Summerer

At the foot of the elevated métro at Barbès–Rochechouart (Métro lines 2 and 4), where trains rattle overhead North African grocery stores, the façade of the Cinéma Le Louxor rises like a mirage. Painted in warm ochres and turquoise, edged with geometric friezes and stylised lotus motifs, it looks less like a Parisian cinema than one would expect. Built in 1921 in an exuberant neo-Egyptian style, the Louxor has always performed elsewhere while standing firmly in the 10th arrondissement.

When it first opened, Egyptomania still lingered in France's imagination. Inside, beneath coloured mosaics and patterned ceilings, Parisians watched silent films flicker across the screen, the *décor* suggesting pharaohs and distant deserts while modern cinema unfolded before them. The building was a spectacle twice over: architecture as fantasy, film as transport. Empire and entertainment brushed shoulders in the dark.



Fig. 66-67. Details of interior decoration, Cinéma Le Louxor. Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 3 July 2025.



Fig. 68-69. Outside decoration and entrance of Cinéma Le Louxor.
Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 3 July 2025.



Over the decades, the neighbourhood changed and the Louxor adapted. By the late 20th century it was known for screening Bollywood productions and Egyptian films. The cinema became less a fantasy of the Orient than a meeting place of diasporas, where Arabic, French, and Hindi mingled in the queue.

There were years of decline, closure, graffiti. The building seemed destined to become another relic of a fading urban past. Yet in 2013, after an ambitious restoration by the City of Paris, the Louxor reopened. Artisans revived its painted motifs. Now it screens arthouse films, documentaries, and international festivals. Its rooftop bar overlooks the tangle of boulevards below, where kebab shops and brasseries share the same stretch of sidewalk.

Standing inside the Louxor today, one experiences how cities layer their stories. What began as an exotic dreamscape for some, has become a lived crossroads. The cinema's Egyptian façade no longer merely projects a distant destination; it converses with the cafés across the street and the métro carrying passengers from every corner of Paris. In the flicker of the projector beam, Berlin and Cairo, Casablanca and Montmartre, seem momentarily aligned. The Louxor is not simply a film house. It is a screen onto which the city's entangled histories continue to be cast.

Fig. 70. The cinema main auditorium, named after Youssef Chahine (1926-2008), the great Egyptian filmmaker. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 3 July 2025.



References

- Albaret, Laurent. "Chronologie du Louxor" *Paris-Louxor*. Accessed February 14, 2026. <https://www.paris-louxor.fr/louxor-palais-du-cinema/>.
- Fabre, Clarice. "À Barbès, le Louxor retrouve ses ors." *Le Monde*, April 17, 2013. https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2013/04/17/a-barbes-le-louxor-retrouve-ses-ors_3161005_3246.html.

Archives of the Intangible: The Spore Initiative in Berlin

Chrysanthi Mandraveli

On a quiet street in Berlin-Neukölln, just beyond the traffic of Sonnenallee, a former industrial building opens into a space filled not with objects but with voices. Inside the Spore Initiative, memory does not sit behind glass. It circulates in the air—spoken, screened, performed, debated. The question seems to hover in the room itself: should we always consider tangible objects when discussing identity and collective memory or can we, also, recognise intangible means?

The Spore Initiative is a non-profit foundation established and funded by the German philanthropist and entrepreneur Hans Schöpflin. Its key aim is to relate arts and culture to the creation of an environment that supports marginalised communities, promotes the voices of those who are often unheard, recognises the existence of historical and continued injustices and focuses on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The Initiative functions as a cultural and social platform committed to transformation through artistic and education engagement.

During the Summer School (July 2024), we had the opportunity to visit the Spore Initiative in order to attend a screening of the film *Shall I compare you to a summer's Day?* by the director Mohammad Shawky Hassan. In this context, the visit provided a practical example of how Spore serves as a lens to explore the role of collective memory and identity of marginalised communities who, despite their diaspora experience, can preserve their cultural heritage and maintain a connection to their roots through the retelling of stories. The Spore Initiative in this case represents a dynamic platform, able to remind a community of its past and present, allowing for open discussions of collective memory and identity through the usage of intangible objects. The act of retelling familiar stories can not only serve as a bridge between the past and present, but the homeland and the host country, the memory and lived experience.



Fig. 71. Image taken in the room of the ground floor at Spore Initiative. It shows how an Indian tribe interprets the creation of the world, as a plantation of seeds by the Gods, as a painting on the walls. Photo by Chrysanthi Mandraveli, Berlin, 4 July 2024.

In a city like Berlin, marked by successive waves of migration, such spaces matter. Arab Berlin is often narrated through restaurants, mosques, grocery stores—through visible signs of presence. The Spore Initiative shifts attention to the intangible: to narrative as inheritance, to performance as archive. Workshops, readings, exhibitions, and screenings become sites where heritage is not merely preserved but reimagined. Stories are retold, not to freeze identity in place, but to allow it to move—to bridge homeland and host country, past and present, memory and lived experience.

Stories are being retold throughout centuries in different ways and under different circumstances. The Spore Initiative demonstrates that there indeed exists a struggle to balance preserving one's heritage and adapting to a new environment in marginalised communities. Through storytelling facilitated by exhibitions, workshops, film screenings, readings or even performances, identity preservation takes place.

References

- Schoepflin Stiftung. "The Schoepflin Family." Accessed May 2025. <https://www.schoepflin-stiftung.de/en/about/the-schoepflin-family/>.
- Spore Initiative. "Spore's Values." Accessed May 2025. <https://spore-initiative.org/en/about/spores-values/>.
- Spore Initiative. "Participate - Activities." Accessed May 2025. <https://spore-initiative.org/en/programming/participate/?tab=activities&end=2025-07-10>.

Sonnenallee: Between a Street Like Any Other and a Piece of Home

Marina Fernández Gordon

Streets as cultural objects are not just bridges between neighbourhoods, but also bridges between worlds and histories. This is particularly the case of Sonnenallee. Located in the district of Neukölln in Berlin, Sonnenallee has welcomed many communities, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religion. Historically, the street was named “Straße 84” and thus had no initial connection to immigrant Berliners (Flakin 2024). However, the diversity of its inhabitants, from various regional and cultural backgrounds, adds a layer to the street, transforming it into a multilayered space. As an intersection of worlds, Sonnenallee becomes both an avenue and a “piece of home”.

The neighbourhood in which it is found—Neukölln—is home to a significant portion of Berlin’s immigrant communities. Thus, it is unsurprising that this area incorporates elements from their culture, language, or philosophy of life. In this way, Sonnenallee becomes a “Piece of Home”. While the meaning of home varies from person to person, this vignette defines it as a space—whether physical or intangible—where one experiences a feeling of belonging, comfort and happiness (Sixsmith 1986).

When visiting Sonnenallee, one notices additions to the landscape that could be interpreted as “nods” to non-European cultures. For example, when taking the métro M41 and stopping at S Sonnenallee station, one encounters a “piece of home” in a small yet noticeable design element. This feature serves not only as a decoration but as a physical evidence of the intersection between different worlds.

When walking through the street, another element that embodies this bridge is the language used in signs and price tags. At a first glance, this might appear as a simple means of communication. However, beyond this practical function, this language carries



Fig. 72, 73, 74 Market stall, shop owners, and shop at Sonnenallee, Photos by Anna Pedretti, Berlin, 4 July 2024.



a deeper meaning: it becomes an attempt at bringing roots from Middle Eastern and North African, and beyond.

In this short vignette, I intend to move beyond reproducing narratives presenting and representing this street as an “exotic Middle Eastern ghetto”. The meaning is twofold: first, it is a street like any other. Considering what I term a “villainisation” of the street by the media (Chase 2019), recognising the street as an ordinary one

implies letting go of preconceptions—whether romanticising it or fearing its differences. Indeed, this vibrant place is rich with activities that one would find in any other street.

Moreover, Sonnenallee is the product of many stories, people, and cultures. It goes beyond being an immigrant street or, going further, the reductive label of an “Arab Street” (Stock 169). This means that the small yet noticeable elements that make this street unique are also symbols of the community’s attempt to reclaim “a piece of home”. As such, Sonnenallee is both an ordinary street and a “Piece of Home”.

References

- Chase, Jefferson. “Sonnenallee: Germany’s Hippest Crime Scene.” *DW.com*, February 26, 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/berlins-sonnenallee-is-germanys-best-known-crime-scene-all-that-bad/a-47741907>.
- Flakin, Nathaniel. “Migration, Protest, Division: Inside Sonnenallee’s Untold History.” *The Berliner*, 2024. <https://www.the-berliner.com/berlin/sonnenallee-neukoelln-arab-community-wall-protest-palestine-nazi-history/>.
- Sixsmith, Judith. “The Meaning of Home: An Exploratory Study of Environmental Experience.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 6, no. 4 (1986): 281-98. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(86\)80002-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(86)80002-0).
- Stock, Miriam. “The Tastes of Arab Berlin: Manifestations of Arab Snack Culture in the Changing Urban Migration Regime of Berlin.” In *Arab Berlin: Dynamics of Transformation*, edited by Hanan Badr and Nahed Samour, 169-88. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839462638-012>.

Beyond Institutions: Arabic as a Living Archive in the Streets of Paris

Lara Chinita

How shops and restaurants keep migrant heritage alive through language

In Paris, we often look at culture behind glass, locked in museums, narrated by audio guides, or etched onto famous monument façades. Yet languages, like the people who speak them, cannot be confined to display cases. They spread onto streets, cafés, restaurants, menus, and shop signs. Arabic, the second most spoken language in France (Ennasiri 2022), does not merely exist in grand institutions; it thrives in these busy spaces that dot the city. Through chatter drifting among Arabic restaurant scents, grocery aisles with tins labelled in beautiful script, and bookshops where Arabic titles stand beside French editions, we see cultures blending beyond geographical borders, in specific neigh-



Fig. 75. Arabic-labelled food products in Courounnes Exo Market, Belleville: language carries memory in everyday consumption. Photo by Lara Chinita, 5 July 2025.



Fig. 76. **Librairie Al-Azhar, Muslim religious bookshop in Belleville, where spoken Arabic keeps community and tradition alive.** Photo by Lara Chinita, 5 July 2025.

bourhoods of the city. They are woven into daily life in Paris, as are the people who brought them here. Museums, churches, and cultural institutions play an undeniable role in preserving heritage, but traces of migration are most present in the places where life unfolds, daily encounters keep Arabic alive as a living record of migration, carrying memories and shaping the heart of the city. (Landry and Bourhis 1997)

This dynamic was evident in the Belleville and Barbès neighbourhoods, where the streets pulse with a significant North African presence. The urban landscape is marked by signs in Arabic, shop windows filled with Arabic books, spices, and traditional clothing, and, most of all, conversations in languages ranging far beyond French. At the religious bookshop *Librairie Al-Azhar*, the shopkeeper greeted customers as friends, helping them find the right *thawb* (garment worn by men in many Arab countries) or book. His familiar way of speaking to customers went beyond simply selling goods, as he greeted customers warmly and assisted them in locating specific garments or books.

Dining out in *La Rose de Damas* in the 18th arrondissement, we were served Syrian dishes full of rich flavours. Workers treated strangers like welcomed guests, chatting as old friends and switching easily between languages. Amongst the workers, Arabic served

the practical purpose of keeping the restaurant running smoothly. With customers, speaking their language meant that a short walk in Paris could feel like returning home for a brief moment.

In street markets, another layer of this cultural entanglement unfolded. Lebanese vendors prepared and handed out delicious sandwiches with tabbouleh on the side, the air alive with the delicious aromas and quick exchanges. Here, Arabic was not just a tool for ordering or talking—it was a bridge connecting people to each other and to the past.



Fig. 77. Sandwich toppings in Lebanese restaurant Thym-Thym near Les Halles, layering language and flavour into memory in everyday routine. Photo by Lara Chinita, 4 July 2025.

These places are not just fragments of the Middle East transplanted into the streets of Paris. They are dynamic places, where history is revealed by the stories of migration projected onto the city's old avenues. Arabic lives on in voices, flavours, and daily routines, in places of commerce and gathering. While heritage is documented in official institutions, it is in shops, restaurants, and markets that language and memory circulate daily. These are the true archives of migration: places where culture is actively preserved, identities are nurtured, and Paris is subtly reshaped from within.

References

- Ennasiri, Ali. "L'arabe maghrébin, une langue de France: sa transmission familiale et son enseignement." *Recherches En Didactique Des Langues Et Des Cultures*, no. 2 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.4000/rdlc.11090>.
- Landry, Richard, and Réal Y. Bourhis. "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1997): 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x970161002>.

EPILOGUE



Fig. 78. Entry door of the Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.



Fig. 79. Original map of the colonial exhibition of 1907, panel in the Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

Pavilions of Empire, Paths of Memory. The Forgotten Jardin d'Acclimatation Colonial, a Place of Knowledge Production Revisited

Karène Sanchez Summerer

At the edge of the Bois de Vincennes, behind an iron gate bearing the seal of the Ville de Paris (Fig. 78), the Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont opens like a quiet afterthought to the French colonial empire. The sign is matter-of-fact: created in 1899 as a colonial trial garden, transformed in 1907 to host an colonial exhibition (Fig. 79), later a military hospital during the First World War. Today, joggers pass the entrance without slowing down, people have their Tai-Chi training in front of a forgotten pagoda... Inside, the pathways curve through dense greenery, but the ground remembers.



Fig. 80. Map of the Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes.

Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

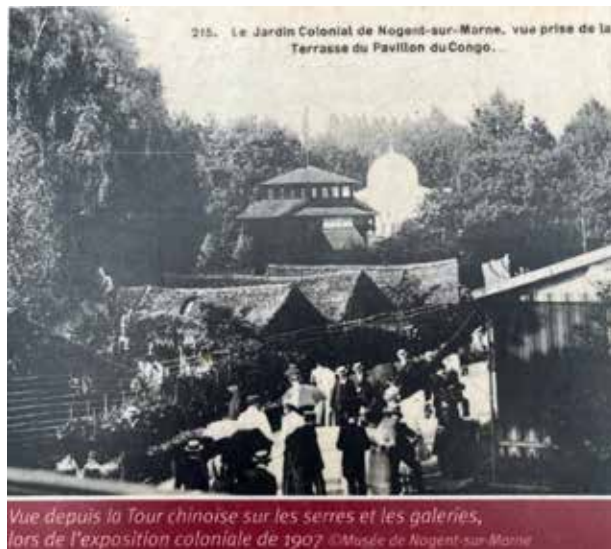


Fig. 81. Colonial Exhibition, 1907, the greenhouses and galleries, Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.



Fig. 82. Walks in the alleys, Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

In 1907, Parisians were invited to “tour the world” without leaving their capital (Fig. 81-82). They entered through a monumental Chinese gate and wandered past an “Indochinese village” edged with rice paddies, a Sudanese farm, a Dahomean hamlet, a Tunisian pavilion with its bazaar, among others. The garden staged the empire as spectacle and pedagogy at once. It was not only “entertainment”, for those who founded it; it was “instruction”. Here, the colonies were displayed as “productive landscapes”, as “sources of raw materials and agricultural promise”. Exotic plants and architectural replicas folded distant territories into the geography of Paris.

Arab and North African territories were folded into this vision as well. Pavilions evoking Tunisia and other parts of the Maghreb translated architectural motifs (arches, tiled facades, courtyards) into digestible symbols of difference. During the First World War, men from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (then called “Colonial troops”) were brought to fight on French soil; some of the wounded were treated in the garden’s military hospital. The small mosque built in 1916 (Fig. 83-84), oriented toward Mecca, acknowledged



Fig. 83. Stele of the Colonial Garden mosque (1915-1919 only), Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

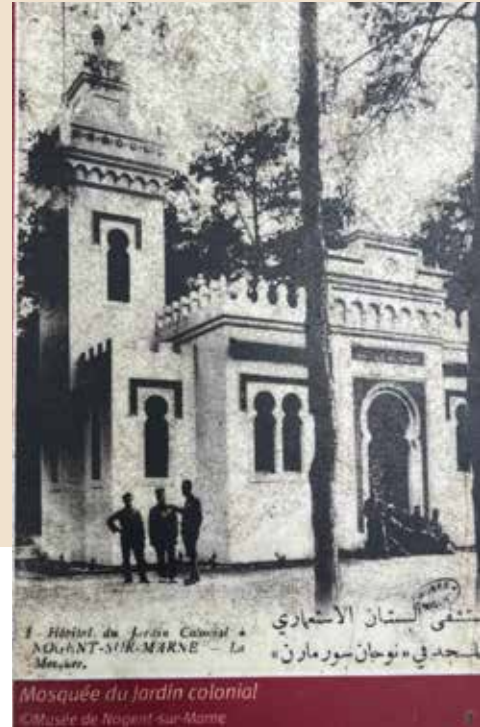


Fig. 84. Mosque of the military hospital of the Colonial Garden, Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

their presence even as it marked them as colonial subjects. Its brief existence (closed in 1919) prefigured the later Grande Mosquée de Paris (1926), while the steles and monuments raised to “soldats indigènes” fixed Arab and Muslim bodies into the commemorative landscape of the Republic. Here, the empire was not abstract. Its subjects prayed, suffered, and were mourned.

The *Jardin colonial* is a different site than the much larger western part of the Bois de Vincennes, which hosted the Colonial Exhibition of 1931. That later exposition unfolded around what is today the Palais de la Porte Dorée, formerly the Ministry of Colonies, now home to the Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration. Strikingly, as one walks through that part of the park today, there are almost no panels or markers indicating the

scale and ideology of the 1931 spectacle (some panels, at the entrance of the museum, remind visitors of the functions of the building, but none in the park itself). The architecture remains—the monumental palace with its bas-reliefs celebrating empire—but the surrounding landscape offers little explanation. Of the many temporary national pavilions constructed in 1931, only two substantial structures still stand: the former Cameroon pavilion, later transformed into a Buddhist pagoda, and the former Togo pavilion, now repurposed for cultural and religious use. The rest have vanished, leaving behind open lawns and quiet paths. Compared to that relative si-



Fig. 85. The Colonial exhibition of 1931, Museum Cité de l'Immigration (8 millions visitors in 6 months, in 1931). Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 3 July 2025.



Fig. 86, 87, 88. The Togo and Cameroon pavilions, the only ones still in place from all the temporary pavilions put in place in 1931. Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 3 July 2025.





Fig. 89. Panel about the pavilion of Morocco, once hosting the *Ecole nationale supérieure d'agriculture coloniale (ENSAC)*. Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.



Fig. 90. The abandoned pavilion of Morocco, Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes. Photo by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

lence, the Jardin d'agronomie tropicale, with its explanatory panels and surviving fragments, feels like a more explicit archive—smaller in scale, perhaps, but more legible in its layered remembrance.

Near Nogent, at the Eastern part of Bois de Vincennes, the site also housed the *École nationale supérieure d'agriculture coloniale*, founded in 1902 to train engineers and administrators for France's overseas possessions. Laboratories and amphitheatres rose among tropical greenhouses. Agronomy became a science of empire, cataloguing soils, crops, and climates, transforming colonised land into data and yield. Knowledge circulated from Dakar or Saigon to Paris, was processed, standardised, and sent back out again in the form of techniques and authority.

The pavilions remain in fragments: a facade here, a moss-covered stairway there, the pavilion of Indochina restored for exhibitions, the pavilion of Tunisia hosting a coffee today.

Walking through the Jardin today, one moves between layers of intention—exposition, instruction, convalescence, commemoration, and forgetfulness... What was once designed to compress the empire into a stroll now reveals the tensions of that compression. Plants have overgrown the didactic order. Paths meander where categories once stood firm. The garden persists as a crossroads of objects, bodies, and ideas—an enclave where colonial ambition, scientific knowledge, and the afterlives of migration continue to inhabit the same soil.

Note: Institutions changed names: Institut national d'agronomie coloniale, Institut de recherches agronomiques tropicales, CIRAD. By 2003, the City of Paris had opened much of the landscape to the public, and in 2007 the site was renamed for René Dumont, an agronomist and environmentalist.

References

- Lévêque, Isabelle, Dominique Pinon, and Michel Griffon. *Le Jardin d'agronomie tropicale*. Arles: Actes Sud; co-published with CIRAD, 2005.
- Blanchard, Pascal, Éric Deroo, Driss El Yazami, Pierre Fournié, and Gilles Manceron. *Le Paris arabe*. Paris: La Découverte, 2003.
- Reverdy, Thomas B., and Sylvain Venayre. *Jardin des colonies*. Flammarion, 2017.
- Bancel, Nicolas, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, and Sandrine Lemaire, eds. *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales: 150 ans d'inventions de l'Autre*. Paris: La Découverte, 2011.
- Paris. "Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont." *Ville de Paris*. Accessed February 15, 2026. <https://www.paris.fr/lieux/jardin-d-agronomie-tropicale-rene-dumont-1813>.



Fig. 91-92. **Jardin d'agronomie tropicale René-Dumont, Bois de Vincennes.**
Photos by Karène Sanchez Summerer, 5 July 2025.

Ministère de la Culture. "Jardin d'agronomie tropicale, situé dans le bois de Vincennes." *Base Mérimée*. Accessed February 15, 2026. <https://pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/merimee/PA00086582>.

Palais de la Porte Dorée. "The Colonial Exposition of 1931." *Monument du Palais de la Porte Dorée*. Accessed February 15, 2026. <https://monument.palais-portedoree.fr/en/the-colonial-context/the-colonial-exposition-of-1931>

Visions of the Middle East and North Africa

- 1 Life & Legacy - A Window into Jewish Life Across the Islamic World
- 2 Reconstructing Mosul - Occupation, Destruction and Rebuilding
- 3 Revisiting Palestine Illustrated 100 years after F. Scholten's visit to the Holy Land
- 4 The multiple lives of Jacob Israël de Haan - the Palestine years (1919-1924)
- 5 Commensality and Cultural Heritage: Bringing the Foodways of the Middle East and Its Diaspora to the Table
- 6 Cities as Cultural Crossroads. Objects, Stories, and Migration between Europe, the Middle East and North Africa
- 7 Sharing the Table. Culinary Journeys from the Middle East to the North of the Netherlands and the World

<https://books.ugp.rug.nl/ugp/catalog/series/VMENA>



Titles published in this series are developed in collaboration between the Middle Eastern Studies programme at the University of Groningen and University of Groningen Press.

Cities serve as dynamic archives of culture, migration, and history, captured vividly in their landscapes, monuments, street names, architecture, and diverse neighbourhoods. Such urban landscapes are not merely historical markers but living spaces, where the politics and dynamics of the present continuously reshape identity and belonging.

Focusing on two prominent European cities—Berlin and Paris—this volume critically analyzes their entanglements with colonial histories, migrations from the Middle East and North Africa, and the creation of new spaces of belonging.

By examining gendered, religious, national, and cultural identities, alongside heritage preservation and cultural representation, the book reconsiders cities as pivotal sites of intercultural exchange between MENA, the Arab World and Europe.



Visions of the Middle East and North Africa, is a collaborative initiative between the Middle Eastern Studies programme at the University of Groningen and University of Groningen Press. Volumes published in the series highlight the diversity of the Middle East and North Africa by exploring culture and society through images and text. Individual volume themes are connected to departmental research, the series is inherently interdisciplinary incorporating fields such as sociology, history, cultural studies, and political science.

