

Navigating language, identity, and belonging among second- and third-generation Algerians in France

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ABSTRACT

France largely viewed Algerian immigrants as well as their languages and culture in an unfavorable light, which was extended to their descendants who, despite being French citizens by law, were also negatively viewed as the other. Such perception places younger generations of Algerian origin in a challenging situation, resulting in feelings of confusion and uncertainty, as well as problems with identity and sense of belonging. This study aims to explore the struggles experienced by second- and third-generation Algerians in navigating their linguistic and identity duality in a context that rejects immigrants' cultural, religious, and linguistic differences (i.e. France). The methodology involved conducting 11 semi-structured interviews, including 6 with members of the second generation and 5 with members of the third. The overall results show that both generations suffer from an identity crisis. For the second generation, it is related to their ethnicity, while it revolves around religion for the third generation, especially for Muslim women. The results also show that despite a shift towards French from generation to generation, most participants appreciate their heritage culture and struggle to preserve it.

Keywords: *second- and third-generation Algerians, identity crisis, religion, shift, heritage culture.*

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Introduction

The Algerian immigration to France increased significantly after independence, mostly in search of better opportunities in a more economically advanced country (Menyier & Menyier, 2011). At first, the Algerian presence in France was never meant to be permanent, but the situation changed over time due to parents' desire to secure a future for their children. This led to growing concerns in the French government which considered the Algerian minority group to be a threat to French unity and national identity (Cohen, 2014). In order to ensure assimilation, France implemented numerous strict policies based on the principles of secularism, linguistic unity, and universalism. The principle of secularism encourages individuals to overlook their religious affiliation in favor of a secular and neutral French identity (Selby, 2011). This was particularly evident in several policies enforced by the French government, including the 2004 prohibition of religious symbols in schools which mainly aimed at undermining immigrants' religious identities and reinforcing a unified national one (Bowen, 2007). The principle of linguistic uniformity dictates that French serves as both the nation's

official language as well as a unifying force in French society. As such, it constitutes an indispensable and irreplaceable element forming the French identity. In light of this, the French language is heavily supported by educational as well as governmental institutions, which encourage French fluency and discourage any forms of multilingualism in public domains (Oakes, 2011). Furthermore, France expects immigrants to adopt French cultural and social norms while keeping those of their heritage culture private (Favell, 1998). These principles are probably best explained by the words of the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, himself the son of a Hungarian immigrant, when he said: "Once you are French your ancestors are the Gauls. If you want to become French, you speak French, you live like the French and you don't try and change a way of life that has been ours for so many years." (Bon & Lough, 2016). The president's reference to the Gauls alludes to one of France's original inhabitants and affirms the idea of strict conformity to a single identity while dropping all ties to the heritage culture, rather than accepting and celebrating diversity in all its forms.

Algerian immigrants and their children were often exposed to discrimination, inequality, and racism. In addition, the French state tightened immigration measures and introduced laws encouraging their return to Algeria (Ogden & White, 1989). In response, second-generation Algerians, along with their Maghrebi counterparts, launched a strong social movement seeking to defend their rights as French citizens. In the 1980s, the second generation of Maghrebi origin (Algerians, Tunisians, and Moroccans) started calling themselves *keur*, a French slang word for *Arabe* (Byrnes, 2008). The term was a political and cultural expression that was meant to invoke their French citizenship as well as reject the discrimination they encountered in the French society for being the children of first-generation immigrants (Begag, 2007). The term *post-keur* has been also used to refer to the third generation in an effort to redefine their identity beyond the labels given to their parents or grandparents.

More than 40 years after the protest, the national identity, citizenship and belonging of Algerian youth continue to be questioned in contemporary France. This resulted in an identity crisis among second- and third-generation Algerians who navigate a difficult societal landscape in which they are often perceived neither fully Algerian nor fully accepted as French (Silberman & Fournier, 2006). According to Hargreaves (2010), the third generation will probably be the last to face such struggles since the majority are not too familiar with the heritage language and culture. He further argues that this generational shift tends to foster a strong sense of identification with France although for many, religion may continue to serve as a symbolic link to their country of origin, Algeria.

In order to understand how the Algerian youth navigate their identity and belonging in the French society, one must first explain what is meant by these terms. Identity is a concept widely discussed in the literature on migration. According to Jenkins (2004), it attempts to comprehend the way both individuals and groups perceive themselves as well as others. It is very important therefore to recognize the distinction between self-identification, or how an individual identifies

oneself, and external-identification, or how an individual is being identified by others. Perhaps the two most discussed dimensions of identity within migration studies and diaspora research are those related to immigrants' host and origin countries. By identifying with their country of origin, immigrants lean more towards their ethnic identity and heritage culture. If they, on the other hand, align themselves with the country of residence, they are said to have a national identity. It is possible for some immigrants to successfully integrate both ethnic and national identities while others may feel detached from either (Laronde, 1993). This tension is even more pronounced in their descendants, especially the second generation who may often feel lost between the two identities. This will most likely lead to identity instability where they fail to associate themselves with one group or another (Boyer, 2022).

The urge to connect with and belong to a particular group is a fundamental human need, reflecting the social aspect of identity where individuals feel a sense of stability, safety, and acceptance (Martela, 2024). Unlike identity which addresses the question of who a person is, belonging relates to peoples' sense of connection to a place or a community and requires the social inclusion and recognition of that community (see Anthias, 2013). Identifying with a group is often associated with strong feelings of inclusion and belonging (Anthias, 2018). However, experiences of discrimination and social exclusion and rejection may severely affect immigrants' sense of belonging as was indicated by previous research (see e.g. Heath & Demireva, 2014), which will eventually result in pushing them towards their home culture.

Norton (2013) argues that language constitutes more than just a means for exchanging information, but also a social tool enabling the construction and negotiation of identity within specific cultural contexts. According to Fishman (1991), the language spoken by an individual can indicate group membership, strengthen social bonds, and unveil both personal and collective histories. In diverse societies where multilingualism is a widespread phenomenon, immigrants often navigate multiple languages, with each corresponding to a dimension of their identity.

A challenge arises though when they are forced to adopt the host country's majority language in various contexts, which can significantly affect the way immigrants and their children construct and negotiate their identities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2006). For the second and third generations, the heritage language carries a significant cultural and emotional weight, linking them to their ancestral origins even when their proficiency level in the language decreases with every passing generation (Isajiw, 1990). Lee and Suarez (2009) affirm that the heritage language tends to incite feelings of pride and belongingness to the culture of origin even when proficiency is limited. Conversely, the loss of a heritage language over generations entails severing any links with the cultural group as speakers will no longer be able to communicate with others using that language (Cavallaro, 2005). Negotiating identity through language for younger generations is further complicated by broader societal factors. According to Catama et al. (2016), social stigma can push later generations away from the heritage language and into the majority language in an effort to avoid discrimination and achieve integration within the dominant group. Furthermore, the lack of access to heritage language education in the host country can exacerbate the situation, leading to a limited proficiency and a rapid language shift (Montrul, 2023). In light of this, the role of community-based efforts is of paramount

importance in providing bilingual education through cultural initiatives, allowing individuals to form a hybrid identity which blends aspects of the heritage and majority cultures (Inan & Harris, 2025).

Although the Algerian diaspora in France has a long and complex history, research on their experiences of identity and belonging remains surprisingly scarce. Available scholarship on Algerians in France have mainly concentrated on different aspects in relation to identity formation, the dual tension of belonging to the host and heritage social groups, and challenges of integration (see e.g. Merzouk & Negadi, 2024; Nelson, 2021; Saïdani, 2023). These studies, however, failed to account for the role of language in this regard. To my knowledge, there are no studies that have explored the intersection of identity and belonging with language among the Algerian youth in France, leaving a clear gap that the present study aims to fill. Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore how second- and third-generation Algerians navigate their linguistic practices and their sense of self in a context that rejects immigrants' cultural, religious, and linguistic differences. This study will collect qualitative data to emphasize the voices and personal accounts of Algerian youth in France in order to better understand how they control their language use and negotiate their identity and belonging under the pressure of assimilation imposed by the French state.

Method

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 11 participants; six were second-generation bilinguals and five were third generation. All interviewees were born in France to at least one first- or second-generation parent and were residing in France when data were collected. Interviewees for this study were drawn from a larger sample who had participated in a broader research project. They ranged in age from 17 to 49. All interviewees received their education in France and had different levels from high school to higher education. Most of them are single, especially those of the third generation. Although there is no established

norm regarding what qualifies as a sufficient sample size in qualitative research, conducting around ten or more interviews is often considered adequate, with many researchers arguing that this number usually enables researchers to both identify recurring themes and capture various perspectives from the interviewees (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, the number of participants in this study allowed for eliciting rich narratives regarding the participants' diverse identity struggles, feelings of belongingness as well as linguistic practices. Finally, the balance between the number of second- and third-generation respondents provides a solid basis for a meaningful

intergenerational comparison, offering a better understanding of the patterns and differences between the two groups.

The research instrument

A semi-structured interview was designed for the purpose of the current study since a qualitative approach is most appropriate to explore the experiences of Algerian youth in France, focusing on their struggles to maintain their ethnic identity and heritage language. The interview included questions covering different topics such as participants' language history, proficiency, and their linguistic preferences across various domains. In this paper though, the focus will be directed towards the thoughts, perceptions, and personal experiences of younger generations of Algerian origin living in France in relation to their language, identity and sense of belonging.

Procedure

For a well-organized, ethical, and effective interview, I followed Robson's (2002) recommendations on interviewing. The data for this study were collected at different times between March 2023 and June 2024. Before every interview, I ask participants for their consent to be recorded during the process, explain the reason behind the interview, and answer any questions on the part of the interviewees. I make sure to inform all interviewees that their participation is totally anonymous, voluntary, and their withdrawal is optional at any time. The duration of the interview varied from one interviewee to another as some offered more comprehensive, in-depth responses, while others preferred to only provide concise answers. On average,

Results

Thematic analysis of participant reflections on navigating hybrid cultures identified three predominant themes: identity and belonging, language, and cultural transmission.

Narratives of identity and belonging

Second-generation Algerians in France constitute an interesting case. They are the children of first-generation immigrants who often maintain a strong Algerian identity. At the same time, they are French-born citizens who have studied in French schools and spoke

most interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Moreover, the interviews were conducted either online or through personal meetings in different settings including, the mosque, the public park, the cafeteria, or even at the interviewee's house. Concerning the language of the interview, the researcher often posed questions in Arabic. In some cases, however, it was necessary to switch to French whenever interviewees encounter unfamiliar words or when their proficiency in Arabic is very limited. Participants were allowed to respond in the language they felt most comfortable and spontaneous using (i.e. Arabic, French, or maybe both).

Analysis

The analysis of the data was carried out using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a research method that has proven to be effective in providing an appropriate interpretation of qualitative data. Interviews were first transcribed then manually coded using a table in Microsoft word in order to provide structure of the interview texts and make the data more accessible for analysis. The researcher carefully went through the interview transcripts and searched for patterns of meaning in order to identify codes that captured participants' statements on language, identity and belonging. Related codes were grouped under broader headings (i.e. themes) which were then refined to ensure they accurately represented the coded data. Following this, excerpts were selected on the basis of their relevance to the scope of the present study and its aims to support and illustrate the identified themes when reporting the findings.

French as a native language. This duality places them in a complex position, simultaneously identifying as both Algerian and French, yet often feeling neither fully Algerian nor fully French. This identity struggle was especially noticeable in a second-generation participant who, during the course of the interview identified as French, then as Algerian. When asked about his identity, the interviewee at first said the following:

"Well, I'm... Okay, fine. Honestly, I'm Muslim, alright? But in my identity, in my DNA, I feel

French. Even if they don't like us, I'm not the one who's wrong here. I'll never be like them. For me, I belong to this land, you know? I'm part of this land. Why do I belong to this land? Because, look, you belong to a place the moment you're in its soil, when you die here, you get it? And my loved ones, they're buried here. My daughter is buried here. You see what I'm trying to say? That's it." (1)

The hesitations and pauses in the participant's statement underlies an emotional struggle to express his identity. On the one hand, he does not deny his religious affiliation which is an essential part of the Algerian identity, on the other hand, he claims his French identity openly, showing pride and belonging to France. In a later statement, however, he projects a different view as follows:

"I don't want my children to lose this [Algerian] identity, because it's in our genes, it's in our DNA, it's part of who we are. Whether we like it or not. My father came from Africa, from the Maghreb." (2)

The participant's use of 'DNA' as a metaphor in both excerpts powerfully demonstrates the hybrid Algerian-French identity as well as the noticeable struggle of navigating them both. This duality may potentially at times accelerate a shift towards the French language among subsequent generations, but pride of the Algerian Muslim identity in other times may serve to support Arabic maintenance efforts. Despite the participant's attachment to France and identification with the French culture, he still does not want his children to lose their ethnic identity. The participant eventually recognizes the identity struggle by aptly describing the second-generation of Algerians in France as "the lost generation" (see excerpt 3).

"Our generation is the lost generation. That is to say, we are the generation stuck in between the two [identities]. Do you understand what I mean? This term, the lost generation, it means we are neither inclined towards the French culture, nor towards the Algerian culture." (3)

These feelings of loss and confusion are also reported by another second-generation interviewee who explained the identity conflict he underwent as a child as follows:

"Okay, here's something funny and sad in the mind of a 12 years old child. You know, growing up, my day was split between school where I felt like I had to prove I was, you know, like the other children to the people there. And then, at night, I felt I needed to be more like my parents, like, looking up to them as idols. It was, you see, like juggling two balls with no hands, and sometimes I felt like I was like the superheroes in the cartoons I used to watch, like Superman or Batman, two characters in the same person, you know. Sometimes, I felt I was both Batman and Bruce Wayne, and sometimes, I felt like neither, like I belonged nowhere, you know." (4)

The statement showcases how social realities shape identity among second-generation Algerian children, leading to feelings of loss and confusion which may linger for decades after. The interviewee draws a comparison to comic book characters, like Batman, who has two identities, one is Bruce Wayne, a wealthy businessman who oversees his corporate empire by day, and the other is the vigilante hero who fights crime by night. This duality mirrors the identity struggle that second-generation Algerians experience in France in between their desire to be accepted as French citizens and their loyalty to their origins, which reflects a fragmented sense of self.

It is claimed that the third generation are less afflicted with the identity struggles of the previous generation as they perceive themselves as fully French. Born to second-generation parents, third-generation Algerians may generally seem to have achieved full assimilation into the French society, adhering to French culture and norms and speaking the French language as their mother tongue. Nonetheless, interview data analysis depicts a far more complex picture of an identity shaped by ties to their Algerian heritage as well as by the social realities of their environment. Although they are deeply integrated into the French society and culture, they still grapple with questions of identity and belonging. When asked about her identity, a third-generation interviewee stated the following:

*"Answer: Well... I'm French, but I'm Algerian too. When I'm here [France], people ask me, 'What is your origin?' I tell them I'm Algerian. But when I'm back in the homeland [Algeria], they ask me where I'm from, and I say from France. Got it?
Question: Don't you feel lost like that?"*

Answer: Yes...it's like I'm lost at sea." (5)

The respondent displays a fluid, context-dependent identity, which shifts between Algerian and French in order to cater to the social reality of her surroundings. She is French, but she cannot escape her heritage, nor her looks, and there will always be questions about her origins, despite living in France her entire life. Similarly, when she goes to Algeria, she also feels out of place. Echoing the words of the aforementioned second-generation participant, she also struggles and feels 'lost'. The sea metaphor is fitting, given that from a geographical perspective, the Mediterranean Sea separates Algeria and France, leaving her stuck in between the two countries and the two identities.

Another third-generation respondent from Marseille provides a unique perspective on her identity as follows:

"Here, I feel closer to Algerians. Because I don't really connect with the French culture in general. I don't see myself in it. So, for me, it's a bit unique, I see myself as Marseillaise. It's a bit tricky to explain, but... the difference is, in Marseille, it's a mindset, you know? It's not like other cities in France. It's totally different. People here are close-knit; they talk to each other. When you live in Marseille, it's a whole vibe, a way of being." (6)

Although the interviewee admits to feeling more associated with the Algerian culture, she considers herself a Marseillaise. Marseille hosts the largest concentration of Algerian immigrants in France and constitutes one of Europe's most culturally and linguistically diverse cities. The participant affirms that living in Marseille allows her to be close to Algerians, which provides a sense of belonging to her culture of origin. Moreover, her statement reflects the development of a localized identity, born out of the geographical concentration of immigrant communities such as that of Algerians as well as the French culture. This localized identity blends elements from various cultures and ideally depicts the struggle between integration and heritage.

A noticeable trend among third-generation Algerian interviewees is a strong desire to return to Algeria. Despite holding French nationality and enjoying the associated

advantages of civil liberties and economic opportunities, the respondents appear to be drawn to their ancestral homeland by cultural nostalgia and a search for peace and belonging. A third-generation interviewee states the following:

"Ever since I was little, I have wanted to go to Bled [the homeland], because I need to know where I come from. It is really important, because I do not feel French... So, it is a bit complicated, but I am convinced that I will not end my life in France. I think I will end my life in Algeria." (7)

While showing the same enthusiasm to return and settle in Algeria, another third-generation respondent cites a different rationale for such a decision:

"Question: Have you considered returning to Algeria?"

Answer: Of course, I want to return and settle in Algeria.

Question: What is the idea behind such a decision?"

Answer: It is always religion.

Question: So you do not feel at ease here [France] because of that?"

Answer: Not at all. In order to be accepted at school or at work, I will have to remove my hijab. It is a very difficult situation, especially that I have to work to survive." (8)

This highlights the struggles of discrimination that third-generation Algerian Muslim women experience, which places them in a situation where they have to make an impossible choice between their economic survival and their adherence to the Islamic faith. Such reprehensible measures against Islamic symbols, such as the veil, not only undermine and violate their rights as Muslim French citizens, but also leaves them no choice but to seek religious freedom elsewhere. For them, to stay in France, would most likely mean relinquishing their Islamic identity which constitutes an integral and indispensable part of who they are. Echoing a similar sentiment, another interviewee tells one of her experiences with Hijab (see excerpt 9).

"Not long ago, I took my driving test. I was wearing a hijab, which was loose, long, very full. I drove perfectly, zero mistakes, but I failed. The examiner's report claimed I made three errors, though I had

made none. These might seem like small things, but when you add them up, they become overwhelming.” (9)

The previous excerpt underscores a deep frustration with such experiences, leading even third-generation respondents to feel that they are unable to fully integrate.

Overall, interviews with the second and third generations challenge the usual simplistic narratives which argue that later generations eventually shift towards the majority culture, forfeiting their heritage identity in favor of a new one. In numerous interviews with participants, it is shown that Algerians, regardless of their generation, still uphold at the very least, a modicum of Algerian identity.

Language choice and use

During the interview, the majority of second-generation interviewees (4 out of 6) opted to speak in French. Their choice can either be attributed to the fact that they feel more at ease using French or to a lack of proficiency in Arabic, given that some of them can understand the language far better than they can speak it. One second-generation participant stated the following:

“I prefer speaking in French. I can’t express myself well in Algerian Derja, but I understand when I hear others speak it.” (10)

The other second-generation interviewees chose to respond in Arabic. Although growing up in a French-speaking setting, they reported that they could speak Algerian Arabic without difficulty.

As for the third generation, almost all participants (4 out of 5) chose to conduct the interview in the French language. Similar to their second-generation counterparts, third-generation respondents grew up speaking French and, as such, it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of them would opt for it. It is worth noting that the only third-generation interviewee who chose to respond in Arabic displayed a keen desire to use the heritage language despite her limited fluency.

The interviews yielded valuable insights into the ways in which the Algerian youth in France use their languages. The

majority of participants maintained that their language choice primarily depends on both the person they are interacting with and the situation in which such interactions occur. This highlights the importance of considering the different contexts of language use for bilinguals, and how such contexts inform many of the linguistic decisions they make.

Most of the interviewees who took part in this research had a very limited knowledge of Standard Arabic since they can only be exposed to it through formal schooling. What they actually learned at home was Algerian Arabic, mainly through communicating with their parents or their relatives in Algeria. The majority of them understand Algerian Arabic even if they proved not to use it much. A third-generation interviewee describes her acquisition of the Algerian dialect by the following excerpt:

“I’ve spoken Derja [Algerian Arabic] since I was little, because my mom often spoke on the phone with family when I was at home, so we almost only spoke Arabic. As for Fos’ha [Standard Arabic], I started learning it at the end of last year. I’m taking online classes, and now I’ve finished preparing for the Medina volume. Already I understand, it’s fine, but I have trouble expressing myself. I’ve only been learning since the end of 2023.” (11)

Regarding interviewees’ language use at home, most of them prefer to use French with their family members, especially with their siblings. First-generation parents are more likely to use Algerian Arabic at home and to transmit it to their second-generation children who may later transmit it to their future children. According to a third-generation interviewee, the use of Algerian Arabic at home can be more complicated than it seems despite understanding the language (see excerpt 12).

“I have only one brother and two half-sisters who live in Algeria. With my brother, we sometimes try to speak the language [Algerian Arabic], but it’s a bit complicated so we end up speaking in French.” (12)

The majority of interviewees from both generations reported using the French language both at work as well as in academic settings. Such a finding is supported by quantitative

evidence from previous research suggesting that language practices in professional and educational settings are largely shaped by the environment in which they take place.

Social media constitute a particularly indicative domain of language use for immigrants. Most second- and third-generation interviewees asserted the predominant use of French on social media. Arabic is largely absent as it is not a language the majority of them understand or speak, let alone read or write. A third-generation participant clarifies this by saying the following:

"I'm only on Instagram, and the posts I see are mostly in French, sometimes in English. Occasionally I come across posts in Arabic, but honestly, I often don't understand them. And when I try to read them, I can't really read them properly

Cultural heritage transmission

Cultural heritage preservation and transmission in migration contexts can be particularly challenging. Parents often play the most crucial role in steering their children's knowledge and character. In that sense, they can contribute greatly in the intergenerational transmission of both the heritage language and culture. Relatives also provide an additional opportunity, not only for communicating in the heritage language, but also for transferring cultural aspects that shape ethnic identity. Moreover, initiatives by the wider community such as heritage language schools, cultural events, religious celebrations allow later generations to connect to their origins.

Visits to Algeria are also important for successful cultural heritage transmission. When later generation Algerians are unable or unwilling to make such visits to their ancestral homeland, the preservation and transmission of the heritage language, culture, and identity are negatively affected. A third-generation participant noted the following:

"I have never visited Algeria. I have cousins who often go to Bled. One of whom speaks Darija well, and another speaks Chaoui very, very well. Without a doubt, the fact that I've never been there plays a big role, actually. It plays a big role. That's for sure." (14)

Many interviewees expressed with a sense of profound sorrow, shame, and

because the vowels aren't written out. So, most of the time, what I actually read and understand is just French and English. That's it!" (13)

Although traditional forms of media such as television, radio, newspapers, and books are not as prevalent as they once were due to the advent of the internet, they remain an important resource for the heritage language and a link connecting immigrants to their culture of origin. For the majority of interviewees, traditional forms of media are largely considered outdated, and as such, there is little to no engagement with them. Those who do, however, preferred consuming French content. Nonetheless, many interviewees expressed a vested interest in Algerian and Arab television channels during the holy month of Ramadan.

embarrassment their inability to properly speak, read, or write the heritage language. A second-generation respondent states the following:

"When I go to Algeria, and I see, for example, a sign, a billboard, or something written in Arabic, each time I am forced to stop, to ask my friend, to ask people: 'What is this?' You see, sometimes, you receive mail in Arabic in Algeria, you receive letters, bills, things. Well, when I look at the mail, I feel like my great-grandfather who doesn't know how to read or write. I feel powerless, and as a man who lives in France, knows how to read French, English, Spanish, and somewhat involved in business, I usually manage things just fine, but when I go down [to Algeria], I feel powerless. It's something very serious for me." (15)

This excerpt reflects a deep sense of regret and frustration over the participant's lack of linguistic competence, which undoubtedly shaped his sense of belonging and identity. While disconnection with the heritage language can profoundly push later generations towards French, their feelings of regret underscore a desire to reconnect with their ethnic heritage.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of second- and third-generation respondents chose to answer in French. Although French dominated most interviews, switching to Algerian Arabic emerged occasionally in their speech. All interviewees indicated that the inclusion of Arabic words into their everyday speech is a common practice, especially when

these words carry cultural, religious, or emotional weight. While such code-switching practices may not improve heritage language

proficiency, they hold a sort of ethnic identity expression.

Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with previous research (see Saïdani, 2023). Overall, the second generation appear to struggle more with their identity and sense of belonging than the third generation. They are often lost and confused between their Algerian heritage and their French reality, especially that they are closer to their first-generation parents. This culminates in an identity crisis which impacts every aspect of their lives. Numerous studies (e.g. Brance et al., 2024) reported that second-generation immigrants usually experience unresolved identity conflicts and a fragile sense of belonging, which is strongly linked to poorer psychological well-being. Surprisingly, this crisis extends to the third generation who proved to be more attached to the Algerian heritage and culture, especially the Islamic faith which they consider indispensable. While this finding goes against classical assimilation theory which suggests stronger identification with the host culture with every passing generation (Verhaeghe et al., 2020), it is not without explanation. On multiple occasions, the participants affirm that the religious discrimination they experienced in France constitutes the strongest reason for their desire to go back to Algeria.

The data suggest a possible language shift might be occurring among second- and third-generation Algerians in France. This was evident in participants' linguistic practices in various contexts where French gradually took over. These results align with Fishman's framework (1991), suggesting that a shift away from the heritage language usually transpires among later generations. Participants from both the second and third generations reported using French more frequently than Algerian Arabic even at home, where the heritage language usually persists longer. This challenges previous research on home language maintenance which often emphasizes the important role that the heritage language

assumes in domestic and familial settings (Pauwels, 2016). One potential explanation for this unconventional trend may be that Algerian immigrants often arrive to the host country with a high level of proficiency in the French language, which is a legacy of France's colonial history and Algeria's educational system. This proficiency encourages the use of French in domestic settings, especially in the presence of second-generation children in order to foster linguistic assimilation and facilitate social integration. Beyond that, French also prevails in the academic and professional contexts. This is largely expected given France's republican policy promoting linguistic uniformity in educational and work institutions across the country. The French language also dominates media channels, be that traditional or online, a tendency similar to that observed by Ahmadi et al., (2024) in their study of Minang language use in digital contexts where users increasingly integrated English into their online interactions. Despite their linguistic shift, participants seem to appreciate their heritage culture and seek to maintain it by including different Arabic words in their daily conversations and visiting Algeria whenever the chance allows. Overall, these findings are consistent with global research on diaspora communities in which ethnic identity persists despite an intergenerational shift to the majority language. For instance, in a study examining language competence and sociocultural orientation among youngsters in the Netherlands, Extra and Yagmur (2009) revealed that even with a shift towards Dutch, Moroccans still show immense pride of their ethnic identity and heritage language. Moreover, Jee et al. (2023) found that although a perceptible shift towards the majority language has already taken place among Koreans in the Pacific region, they reported a strong sense of identity, which, similar to the present findings, fueled various efforts to develop proficiency in the heritage language.

Conclusion

The present study explores how second- and third-generation Algerians in

France navigate their identity and sense of belonging while dealing with the challenges of cultural and linguistic duality. Drawing on 11 semi-structured interviews, this research

contributes to the body of knowledge on language and identity by exploring the perspectives, struggles, and experiences of Algerian youth in France who constitute a largely under-researched case. The study moves beyond previous research by analyzing Algerians' identity in relation to their linguistic practices.

The data revealed that while participants' linguistic practices increasingly align with the French society, their affective and cultural ties to their ethnic identity remain significant. This highlights the complexity of

the situation where second- and third-generation Algerians navigate belonging between two cultures and face ongoing tensions between linguistic assimilation and heritage preservation.

The study findings bear important policy implications, suggesting that supporting the teaching of Arabic in educational and religious institutions and adopting a more flexible approach to integration can help sustain ethnic identity across younger generations, reduce feelings of confusion, and promote social cohesion and inclusion.

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