



# STREET ART

A Window Into Multiculturalism in France

NISHAT MHAMUD  
FRANCE GA 203

When I think of France I think of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Coco Chanel, fine dining, baguettes, smoking in cafés, drinking in cafés, chatting in cafés, wide-eyed petite brunettes, and of course the Eiffel Tower. After the recent global awareness trip to France new things that I never even considered come to mind. Now I think of Barbès-Rouchechouart, African music, women in hijabs, determined performers in the métro, delicious ethnic hole-in-the-wall restaurants, and countless amounts of colorful, controversial, and compelling street art (I still think of people smoking, drinking, and chatting all day long in cafés though). How can it be that graffiti, stencil art, media flyers, poster art, and basically all forms of street entertainment became the main thing I learned to appreciate in France? Maybe it was the way each artwork contained a strong message that questioned, influenced, or congratulated the environment it was created in. It's probably because the street art showed just how multicultural and diverse France has become in the recent decades and easily convinced me that contemporary France is truly a cultural mosaic.

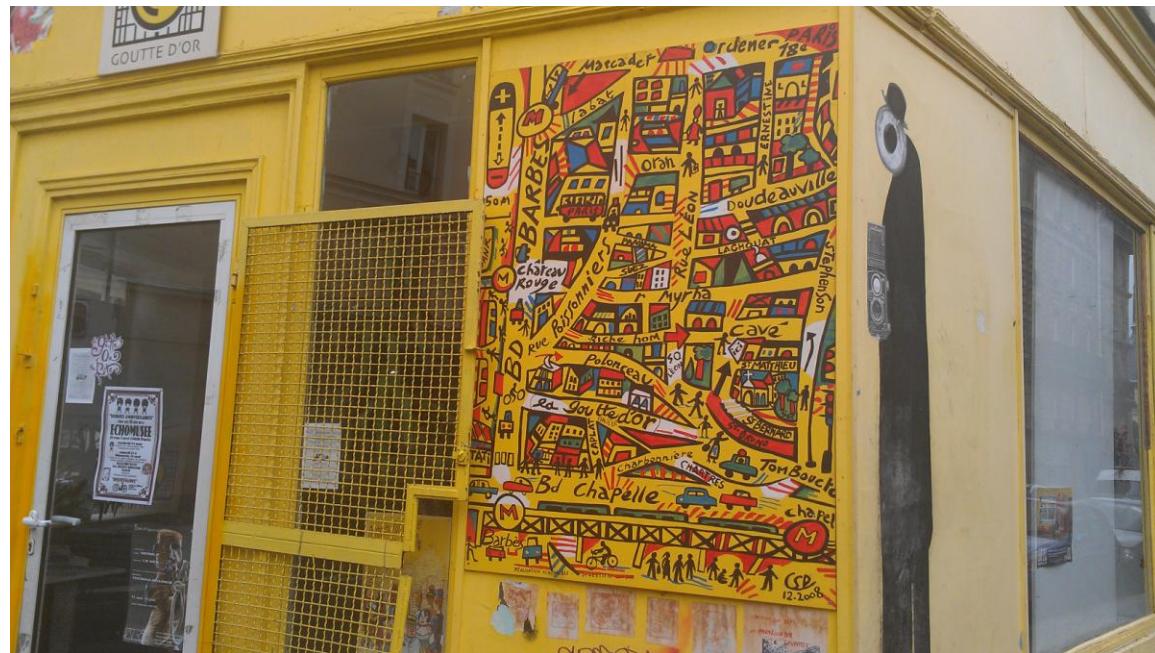
I couldn't mention street art without bringing up Keith Haring, one of the most influential street artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Luckily, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris was hosting a vast exhibition on his political works which nicely fit in with the theme of our class. Haring's *Tree of Life* (right) is certainly an interesting piece. It's depicting human forms all deriving from one source and maintaining their own space within a particular "branch" and yet it shows the people interacting and dissolving into a united massive tree. This made me think of the terms "melting pot" and "salad bowl" used to describe the assimilation of immigrants. There were times that I could say that France was a "melting pot" as I saw people of different backgrounds adopting practices of "typical" French culture like carrying around loaves of baguettes and greeting each other through cheek kissing. France could be a "salad bowl" too since Paris had numerous separated neighborhoods like Chinatown and Little India where people could comfortably maintain their home country's customs and ideals.





I furthered explored the idea of France as a salad bowl after viewing the artwork around the immigrant neighborhoods of La Chapelle, La Goutte d'Or, and Barbès-Rouchechouart. The painted cabinets (left) from the L'Omamis Café in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement show the Asian, Arab, and African influences in Paris. These immigrant groups live in close proximity to one another but were able to maintain their distinct cultural identities.

Though these paintings depict the most stereotypical forms of the immigrants (a yellow Asian and an Arab with facial





to Haring's Tree of Life each group of people have their respective street and neighborhood adorned with their native restaurants and traditional clothing stores but zooming out into a bigger picture these individual streets make up a quarter, like Haring's cluster of branches make up a much larger tree. Though the people are different from one another, their uniqueness is the main commonality that they share with another and the notion that they may not be the "typical" French person; hence their differences just make them more united. It's interesting to see just how many difference these groups of and even the sub-groups under them. This portrait of the residents of La Goutte d'Or (left) shows just how far France's diversity stretches. There are residents from practically every corner of the world living in this relatively small quarter. South Asians, Caribbeans, and even the beret-wearing Frenchman to name a few; and the most beautiful part is that they're all living together, something I personally haven't witnessed in any neighborhoods in the U.S.



hair) they do give light on the fact that many Parisian immigrants hail from France's former colonies in Indo-China, West Africa, and North Africa. France's history as a political influence really explains why France is so culturally diverse today. Within this cultural diversity I noticed an apparent sense of unity amongst the immigrant groups through the street art in La Goutte d'Or, like a map of the different immigrant neighborhoods in the La Goutte d'Or quarter (right). Going back

The idea of a "salad bowl" assimilation of French immigrants becomes more evident after seeing artwork of people continuing to hold onto parts of their home country. This image of a man in traditional clothes (left) shows him with an almost pained expression on his face as he looks down at Africa. The fact that this was hanging in a small African café tells me that the owner probably likes having reminders of his heritage around his café. There were more establishments that gave away their roots with publicly displayed art, like this Arabian restaurant (below). This vast wall

mural shows another male with a fairly sullen look looking over his city as a plane flies toward him from the corner. Is the restaurant trying to be authentic for their customers or for themselves? You can just look at this mural and feel like you're really there. Holding onto these symbols of one's roots can be a way to miss them less or maybe they'll just cause one to miss them more. Nonetheless, these images reminds me of the many Parisians I saw that took pride in their cultural heritage and the eagerness they showed to express it in the simplest forms of art. Nothing got simpler though than a wall I saw with the word "Okame" sprayed on top (bottom right). At first it doesn't even seem like anything significant. This might be a reference to Okame cherry trees. Better yet, it's referring to Okame, the Japanese Goddess of Mirth. Or it's the ancient Japanese ideal of feminine beauty. Maybe it's just an extremely rude joking taunt used by today's Japanese husbands and boyfriends. Okame sure has a lot of meanings in Japan. I should be honest, but these thoughts weren't just basic knowledge I had stored in my head. It was pretty smart for someone to plaster these words onto a wall. A curious person like myself will definitely want to research and discover it's meaning, and in the



process unexpectedly learn more about a different culture.

Images and words are all easy to bring along, but family and friends are another story. This Ortel street poster for

international calls (left) may serve as a solution. It's easy to tell which neighborhood I was in by looking at the main countries advertised on the poster: Mali, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire. This is an additional reminder of how immigrants can't cut off all aspects of their heritage and they still choose to maintain a bridge between their old home and new home.



While in France I heard from several locals that "race" doesn't exist within France and hence the concept of racism is also not an issue. Obviously, it's hard to believe that any place could be exclusive of prejudice, discrimination, and racism, especially a place with people of different backgrounds, statuses, and identities. I saw numerous street posters that called attention to level of inequality between people in France and questioned the basis of racism in France. This NPA poster (below) states that "It's not the gypsies, the Muslims, or people

without papers that there is a lot of—it's racism." It's a fairly blunt statement. The fist pounding through "racisme" shows that people are willing to fight against racism and defend themselves and their national origin. It makes a point to show that racism indeed exists in the environment and attention should be called towards it.

Foreigners in France are also determined to fight for their rights as another street poster (below) calls for the right for foreigners to vote in 2014 is urgent! It's great that immigrants understand their rights and are fighting for them. I noticed many of these foreigners are coming from countries that served as France's previous colonies. After decolonization I'm sure in hopes of





thing I came across, a nice stereotype I had of the French was that they accepted people of all sexual identities. I know this poster doesn't necessarily speak for all or even the majority but I guess I was expecting a little more from the French.

redemption France promised futures for the people of these former colonies. It's only fair that these immigrants and foreigners can comfortably live in France and the multiculturalism brought by them doesn't get threatened by unnecessary hate and discrimination. Regardless of being labeled a fairly liberal country, I noticed lots of talk and controversy over same-sex marriage. I was able to witness the spectacular protest demonstrated in the streets of Paris my last day there, but there were plenty of posters and flyers in the street that called attention to this matter too. This rainbow wave poster (below) states "against the racists and homophobes," showing that diversity in France is not limited to just national identity or cultural background, but sexual orientation as well. I think this was the most eye-opening and possibly unfortunate



A lot of immigration is propelled by war, genocide, and political crises. French immigration is no exception as I saw several signs opposing war and genocide from countries with large immigrant populations in France. Particularly these wars in France's former colonies create multicultural ties between them and France. Notably, Algeria has had a longstanding relationship with France, which became quite complex and confusing during the Algerian War for Independence. I remember learning in my Francophone and French Cultures course about Algerian-French relations. During this gruesome, bloody war people of French origin were allowed access back to France even if they were born in Algeria. However Algerians who were loyal to the French and assisted them were left to endure the violence of the war and weren't given any protection. Seeing the ads for the Vies D'exile Exposition (above and right) it seems clear that Algerians who were living in France during the war endured the same unfair treatment. Ancestry is weighed more than one's current national identity. Even if someone was just born into an immigrant family or descended from an immigrant family it seems that many would still refuse to consider them truly French as seen with the French people of Algerian origin during the Algerian Independence War. Still I noticed a very large Algerian population in France, which most definitely is the result of years of colonization and interactions between the two countries.



In more current news the War in Mali

(left) has become quite controversial with the interference of French troops. This street poster is demanding the French troops to exit Africa. After years since decolonization France is still showing interest in their former colonies. War does not necessarily fray them away but gives them an excuse to get involved again. The French were deployed there to push Islamist rebels out from the north, showing that France will always have a responsibility towards their former colonies, causing Malians to want to seek shelter in France, whether is legally or not.



openness is not well received by all as demonstrated by this poster. Just like overall racism and homophobia, it's nice to the French foreigner call attention to this issue and work towards ending it. Regardless of the discrimination one a Muslim may endure from Islamophobes I saw plenty of evidence of pride towards the Islam faith. Amongst this colorful arrangement of graffiti (below) the black letters spelling "Islam" manages to pop out. No matter what chaos may be occurring in the surrounding environment one should still be able to express their identity freely.

I know that Pondicherry, India wasn't France's most notable colonies, but after seeing the large population of South Indians in Paris and this banner on the Tamil Genocide (left) I realize that this small colony is still an integral of France's multiculturalism.

I wasn't surprised to see issues of Islamophobia in France (below). I had my thoughts about the lack of religious expression in France and was surprised to see so many women openly wear hijabs in public. Of course this





population. This drawing of a crescent and star symbols of the Muslim faith represents the population in Toulouse. I see this as another pride and resilience within a setting and time people of Islamic origins are not always favored.

It's important for France to maintain an open considering the amount of tourists they get every all parts of the world.  
a stencil art In Paris made pieces in global metropolitan traditional view of a people Caucasian



Toulouse had a significant Muslim

(left) immigrant symbol of where

mindset year from



Even the street art travels in France as I noticed from The Dude Company (below) which has Brussels, London, and New York. Paris truly is a city. Furthermore the image depicts a non-French person, showing that not all French brunettes.

In addition to city life, France's mountains and countryside have plenty to offer for tourists as well. This collection of Gite or holiday home signs in Germ (below) show that people from all over spend their holidays in France and temporarily add to its multiculturalism. The young man backpacking with the whole world on his back is my favorite. Our guide in the Pyrenees mentioned how so many youth from all over would visit the mountains after finals and the school year to hike through the mountains.

The youth truly plays an important part in France's multiculturalism as it's they can best carry on their families cultural ideals and customs and shape the future of their environment. These posters in an immigrant neighborhood in Toulouse (right) show a young man and woman looking for ideas and plans to be involved in their neighborhood. Young people really do determine change and interest, so it's important for them to insure proper assimilation of different cultures in their environment.

Even if it's a movement for the young communists (right) I notice the

French youth's stance interest in expressing an array of social and politically. In addition to national and



sexual identity, political identity is quite diverse in France. I doubt I would see a sign like this publicly flaunting



in most places in America, considering our anti-red past, so it's interesting to see just how more diverse France can be than America.

If the youth can be inspired to do good they can also be manipulated to make less appropriate decisions. These street posters (right) referencing the children's game *Jacques a Dit*, equivalent to the American *Simon Says* show people being tricked with the "Jacadi a dit: Tirez" to pull the trigger and "Jacadi a dit: Fister." The image with a foreign looking man and a Caucasian man holding guns to each other's forehead

reminds me of the problems that may arise in multicultural settings from misunderstandings and deception, in this case from saying Jacadi instead of Jacques.

A major influence I saw on the youth was the English language. English is the closest the world will get to an international language I suppose. This ad in the metro (left) is convincing native English speakers like Brian to teach in France. As much as the French love their mother tongue I learned that many do wish to learn and express themselves in English and overall practice their English, that's why it was so difficult to convince them to speak to you in French!



In addition to English there were more than enough displays of American influence in France. Oddly enough I saw images of the American West, or the American Mess shown in this banner (right). It's interesting the influence of American culture. Although it seems like America's being mocked in this image, the idea that the French were so familiar with the Old West setting is still impressive. I guess this drawing of a cowboy (left) would also offend the American West as his face is completely vandalized. I've seen plenty of drawings of tan men with facial hair and caps, and have grown to associate them with Beurs or North Africans. How is a hat so significant in determining one's origins and identity? Well it was easy to pinpoint the identity of these two men from their hats alone. It makes me think of all the stereotypes that can form from seeing street art like this. Before coming to France I didn't think this was what a working class North African man usually looks like. But now that I see it, it would be kind of hard to erase it completely from my mindset. Will the French look at that partially torn cowboy and expect all Western Americans, or even Americans to look like that? Many stores and restaurants on the streets took on American names like Café Tennessee (left). Honestly, Tennessee isn't really a state that comes to mind of a non-American when they think of America, usually it's New York or California. This sign reminded me of Café Alsace in Decatur, adopting the name of a region in France that I would assume most foreigners do not immediately think of when they think of France. I know Café Alsace tries to be as authentic as possible down to there mini teacups for coffee. I should've explored this café to see if it was the same and if there were hints of Tennessee inside.





American politics also a global influence and especially in multicultural France. To be honest I'm not the most educated in French politics but it seemed like many people I came across in France were well informed about the political atmosphere in America. This sign with George Bush and Osama Bin Laden (left) is the perfect example of differing perspective cultures. In many ways both can be terrorists if you define terrorism in the simplest terms of "one who inflicts terror." For some one is good while the other's bad. The fact that this was hanging in a quaint African café in Paris shows just how global in thought residents in France can be.

This Free Mumia poster (right) is another indication of the influence of American politics in France. The topic of the death penalty is controversial in America so it's interesting to see France get involved in this controversy. Issues don't always stay confined in the country where they're occurring, we live in such a globalized world that it makes sense to see something like in France.



American economics is also questioned by looking at this painting in the African market flaunting the concept of “decroissance” or degrowth, anti-capitalism, and anti-consumerist (left). Western society is heavily based on capitalism, but it is clear that individuals choose to stray away from the majority belief and develop their own diverse preferences for economic activity.

In addition to politics I noticed tons and tons of symbols showing the influence of American pop culture. *The Great Gatsby* movie posters were everywhere from bus stops to the metro. Although fairly small, I can still make out Leonardo di Caprio's face out clearly as Jay Gatsby. Maybe the hype around this film in France was because it was a reflection of F. Scott Fitzgerald and the roaring 20s period of American authors in Paris.

Then I see advertisements every for the Hangover





When I think about it the film/tv icons I can think Tin, and honestly I don't widely known.

I saw several references to the streets of Paris. Kids can be from any part of the world and most likely heard about Pokemon. I notice that people may have methods of dressing, eating, and living their lives, but usually there commonality in movies and television that can help them relate easily.



/// or in French Very Bad Trip 3 (bottom left) and I wonder what exactly is the appeal for this film. Maybe it's because Bradley Cooper speaks French very well and the masses are trying to support him. Nonetheless, I couldn't quite comprehend the title change. Does the word hangover get lost in translation? I guess the term hangover doesn't make much sense in the French language so it needed to replace with another ridiculous title. This all reminds me of many words that couldn't be translated between the French and English language, particularly slang words.

I thought it was funny to see this stencil art of Darth Vader and the need to "Vote Darkside." (left) I don't think American people usually use French film characters to mock their government. I notice this is all parts of the world, not just France but the impact and interest in American pop culture is so strong. Reference to movie characters continues with this superman turned Aumonerie recruiter (below). These American images are widely identifiable. The French see that and have used them to ridicule politics and promote religion.



only French  
about is just Tin  
think he's that

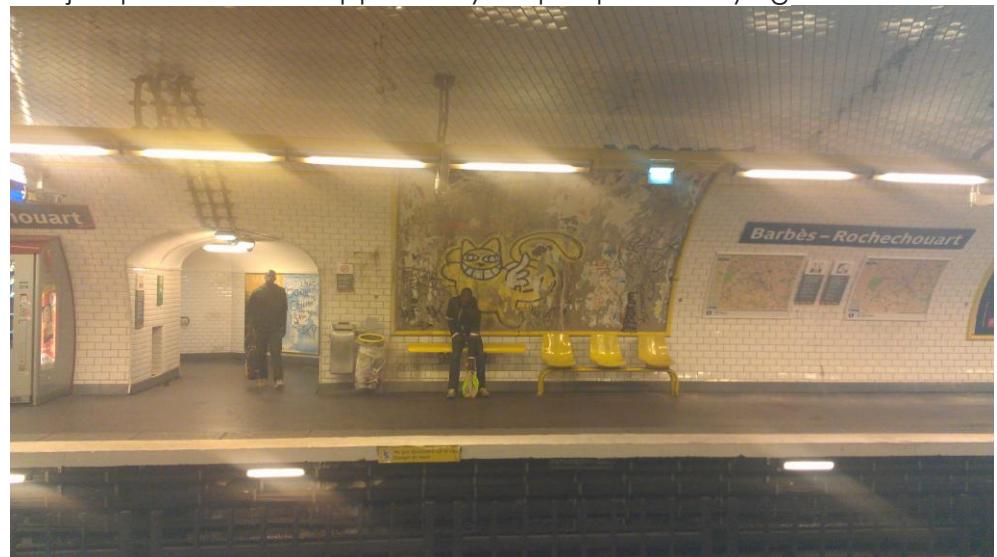
Pokemon in  
they have  
different  
is a  
to one another



film. Global, popular works from authors like Shakespeare just provide more opportunity for people of varying backgrounds to connect on the same level.

I don't know how a Shakespeare character's from *The Tempest* (left) ended up on the entrance to an African restaurant. I'm glad literature has just as much of a global influence as movies and

I noticed a yellow Cheshire-grin cat drawn in many streets throughout Paris. I knew there had to be significance since I literally saw them everywhere. I came to learn that this grinning yellow cat is known as Monsieur Chat and is a popular graffiti cat that





metro (right). I saw it in the African market (below).

I saw it in the La Goutte d'Or neighborhood (right). These different neighborhoods differ in people and cultures but they have all seemed to unite under this identity of Monsieur Chat and for this cat really had been a memorable reflection of street art in Paris.

The most exciting thing to see in France was the power of dance and music to really bring together diverse groups of people. On the Champs-Elysees I



first appeared in Orleans. I guess one can easily dismiss this as just a plain old cat, but the fact that many different artists painted, drew, and sketched this cat around Paris tells me that it's much more. I saw this cat at the Barbes-Rouchechouart



saw a varied group of street  
on a dance show (right). There  
Algeria, and even one from  
dance styles and personalities.  
and showcase there upper body



synchronization and had good  
rhythm (below).

Then there were some that knew  
all the coolest tricks (below).  
Essentially all these different  
dancers had their own  
contributions to the performance,  
but overall they used break-  
dancing as a form of expression of  
art. It was nice to see people from

performers working together to put  
were dancers from America,  
Venezuela. They all had specific  
Some were good at headstands  
strength (below).

Other's were really  
good at



different backgrounds



culture and media.

share a common talent and passion of performing. Dance is a great way for people to communicate and bond together. You don't have to worry about a language barrier or figuring out the right words to help interact with one another. Seeing this display of live street art was enough for me to understand just how culturally rich and diverse France is. There is often tension and worries about people of different backgrounds coming together. There's the concern about whether they will have things in common and dispute over differences. I can see that this isn't always the case. People can find something they all agree on and embrace the common things they do share.

The music I heard on many of the French radios, television shows, and in their department stores just showed the affects of globalization on France, since most of the music was American. I didn't understand how they could be maintaining a French identity, or even a multicultural one by playing mostly American music. I imagine that radio campus (left) most likely plays American music. The name seems youth oriented and as I realized before, there is an interest amongst the youth for American pop

Not all music becomes homogenized in France though as seen in this pop art (right) of jazz music. I didn't think France had much of jazz scene before visiting the jazz club near the Latin Quarter. This image makes me somewhat change my notion of American music not adding to diversity. I suppose there are a number of styles, genres, and types of music, disregarding the language they're in, that alone adds to the diversity and range of music out there. I should probably even remember that American music is considered foreign to the French so technically in the end of the day they are being exposed to another culture through music.





I end my reflection on street art at the beginning. When I started realizing the immense amount of street art in France. I decided to stop at a café with wifi (pronounced weefee) since I gotten lost trying to locate a consignment store in a random neighborhood in Paris. I think I sat under the warm café awning for nearly three hours with an Orangina in my hand. At this point did I really feel like I was in France, since I finally understood



why French people can spend the whole day sitting in a café. There was something about looking at the collage of graffiti and sprayed-on art in the nearby building and seeing groups of different people sitting together chatting the day away. The Louvre and the Musee D'Orsay all had enlightening pieces of works. But more me the most interesting works of art and displays of multiculturalism were on the walls, corners, and streets of France.