

Rethinking Political Community in Contemporary France: Music, Migration, and the Paris Olympics

Nadia Kiwan

Department of French, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom

Correspondence: n.kiwan@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the contemporary period, which is increasingly defined by exclusionary conceptions of the nation and citizenship, this article (re-)examines the concept of political community through the prism of music and migration. By considering how post-migrant musicians in postcolonial societies such as France throw into sharp relief the contemporary dynamics of far-right populism, racism, and exclusionary statecraft, this article offers a critical reflection on what alternatives to hostile national political communities might entail and how they might come about. Given the growth of migration-related anxiety in contemporary Europe, I claim that migration studies research must not only concern itself with the genealogical study of key political concepts that frame our public institutions and cultural worlds. Rather, I argue that it should also entail a process of re-imagining what those key political concepts and institutions could become in the future. This article therefore explores not only what a post-national political community might look like, but what it might *sound* like. I consider how post-migrant creative practices and music, in particular, can make the limitations of political concepts such as the nation and national political community more visible and more audible. I argue that the Paris Olympic Games of 2024 offers a valuable case-study as these became the locus of a series of polarized public debates about how to represent the French nation, due to the controversy that erupted around the commissioning of a French-Malian musician, Aya Nakamura, to perform at the Opening Ceremony.

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French Abstract

Repenser la communauté politique dans la France contemporaine : musique, migration et Jeux Olympiques de Paris

Résumé

Dans notre contexte contemporain qui se caractérise de plus en plus par des conceptions exclusives de la nation et de la citoyenneté, cet article examine l'idée de la communauté politique à travers le prisme de la musique et de la migration. En analysant la façon dont les musiciens post-migrants dans des sociétés postcoloniales illustrent les dynamiques contemporaines du populisme d'extrême-droite, du racisme, et des politiques publiques d'exclusion, cet article réfléchit aux conditions nécessaires pour le développement des communautés politiques qui ne sont pas fondées sur une conception hostile de la nation. Etant donné le sentiment anti-migrant grandissant dans l'Europe contemporaine, je constate que les travaux scientifiques sur les migrations ne devraient pas se limiter à l'étude généalogique des concepts politiques clés qui encadrent nos institutions publiques et nos univers culturels. Au contraire, je propose que les recherches en études migratoires devraient aussi ré-imaginer ce que ces concepts et ces institutions politiques clés pourraient devenir à l'avenir. A ce titre, cet article s'intéresse à la fois aux aspects démographiques et aux aspects soniques d'une communauté politique post-nationale. Je considère comment les pratiques créatives post-migrantes en général et comment la musique, en particulier peuvent rendre plus visibles et audibles des concepts politiques tels que la nation et la communauté politique nationale. Je constate que les Jeux Olympiques de Paris 2024 nous offre une étude de cas importante puisque les Jeux sont devenus le site privilégié d'une série de débats polarisés sur comment mieux représenter la nation française, en raison de la polémique qui s'est développée autour de la nomination de l'artiste franco-malien Aya Nakamura pour la cérémonie d'ouverture des Jeux.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of the contemporary period, which is increasingly defined by exclusionary conceptions of the nation and citizenship, this article examines the concept of political community through the prism of music and migration. By considering how post-migrant musicians in postcolonial societies such as France throw into sharp relief the contemporary dynamics of right-wing populism, racism, and their respective entanglements with exclusionary statecraft, this article offers a critical reflection on what alternatives to hostile national political communities might entail and how they might come about. The Paris Olympic Games of 2024 offer a valuable case-study as these became the locus of a series of polarized public debates about the French nation, due to the controversy that erupted around a news story that President Emmanuel Macron had reportedly commissioned the French-Malian musician, Aya Nakamura, to perform at the Opening Ceremony.

Olympic Games opening ceremonies are simultaneously national and global events. Consequently, they tend to reflect the tensions between the host nation's domestic politics and its international image. In the case of Paris 2024, as the momentum towards the Games built, the projection of France on the international scene as a modern and diverse nation gathered pace. However, on the home front, anti-migrant discourse was amplified, and was manifest in various forms, not only via an unprecedentedly restrictive immigration and integration law but also via the backlash that developed around a rumour that Aya Nakamura had been asked to perform a cover of that most quintessential of French songs – Edith Piaf's "La vie en rose."¹ Speculation about Nakamura's performance was denounced by far-right groups who claimed that a Muslim African migrant who had only recently been naturalised French should not and could not represent the French nation. But beyond her immigration status, it was arguably Nakamura's musical repertoire and lyrics that combine rap, RnB to zouk, Afrobeats as well as French urban slang, Caribbean Creole, Ivoirian, Bambara, global English and Arabic that were regarded as not "French enough" (Mencé-Caster 2024). Clearly some far-right politicians took objection to such diversity, with Marine Le Pen publicly claiming that she did not even sing in French (Cimbidhi 2024). The Aya Nakamura affair thus illustrates well a set of broader European trends beyond France whereby the increasing popularity of anti-migrant policies is part and parcel of what Mondon (2025) refers to as the "mainstreaming" of the far right. Presumably, the fact that Nakamura was also rumoured to be singing a cover of Edith Piaf's music was a "step too far" in the eyes of her opponents. This is despite the fact that in the summer of 2018, Aya Nakamura was rather ironically the first "made in France" musician to reach number one in the charts in the Netherlands since Edith Piaf in 1961 with "Je ne regrette rien" (Fnac n.d.). The far-right claims that Nakamura could not represent France also jarred with the fact that she is not only the most listened to female artist on Spotify France (2023), but is also the most listened to French-speaking singer in the world as well as the only woman to feature in France's 20 best-selling albums of 2023 (Diallo 2024).

Given the broader hostile environment for migrants in contemporary Europe, I claim that critical migration studies research must not only concern itself with the genealogical study of key political concepts that frame our public institutions and cultural worlds, such as the nation and national political community. Rather, I argue that critical migration studies research should also entail a process of re-imagining what those key political concepts and institutions could become in the future. This article therefore explores not only what a post-national political community might look like, but what it might *sound* like, too. I do this by considering how post-migrant creative practices, and

¹ A similar dynamic was visible at the 2012 London Olympic Games, whereby the opening ceremony celebrated Britain's diversity with an ethnically diverse cast and migrant heritage performers such as Emeli Sandé and Dizzee Rascal, yet 2012 also marked the official launch of the Home Office "hostile environment" immigration policy under Theresa May and the development of a broader context within which the Windrush scandal was able to develop. See Storey (2024).

music-making in particular, destabilize political concepts such as the nation and national political community – concepts invoked in reductive fashion in mainstream political and media discourses and that characterize anti-migrant hostile environments. By bringing together the epistemologies and methodologies of political philosophy and music research via the study of migration, this article thereby connects academic disciplines that do not typically “speak” to each other. On the one hand, scholarship on music and migration tends to focus on: (1) ethnographic accounts of musicians’ creative practices; (2) the transformation of music in new cultural environments; and (3) the study of music-making in acculturation processes (De Martini Ugolotti 2022; de Quadros and Amrein 2023; Pardue, Kenny, and Steele 2023; Gratzner et al. 2024). On the other hand, political philosophy scholarship relating to migration is predominantly conceptual in focus and where case studies *are* discussed, these tend to be limited to brief examples which are used to better illustrate the broader conceptual argument being proposed (Carens 2004; Chamberlain 2021; Fine 2020; Held 2000; Jaggar 2020; Kymlicka 2018; Miller 2018; Sager 2018). Bringing research on music and migration into conversation with political philosophy can disrupt some of the taken-for-granted conceptions of the nation and national political community as culturally homogenous entities. Music-making in migration contexts often challenges ethno-national bounded conceptions of community because it puts into practice a series of encounters between different cultural, linguistic, and musical repertoires. A political philosophy that is informed by a normative approach (Bauböck 2008) not only explicates how dominant conceptions of the nation and political community have developed, but it can also provide a framework within which alternative political concepts can be imagined and articulated. Such an endeavour is all the more urgent in an era where the idea of “Fortress Europe” has come to dominate political debates across the continent.

“Fortress Europe” refers to the heightened perception that since 2015, especially European Union member states have been receiving increasing numbers of migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. Whilst the terms asylum-seeker and refugee are recognised under international law and conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the UN Refugee Convention or the EU Dublin Convention (Tétényi, Barczikay, and Szent-Iványi 2019), there is no agreed international legal definition for the term migrant. According to the International Organisation for Migration, there are generally two approaches to defining the term migrant: the “inclusivist” one, which posits that all people who have left their country of origin to reside in another are migrants, and the “residualist” definition, which considers that the term migrant does not apply to those people who leave their country of origin due to persecution or war. (Sironi, Bauloz, and Emmanuel 2019: 132–133).

In this article, I use the inclusivist term “migrant” to refer to all those people who move across national borders and live outside of their country of birth, whether they are in transit or are permanently settled there. Contrary to common parlance and perceptions, my understanding of the term migrant *also* includes middle or upper class “expatriates” who take up residence in a foreign country via employment with a multi-

national corporation, for example. By adopting the term migrant, this article also asserts that the three categories of migrant, asylum-seeker, and refugee are not mutually exclusive. A migrant can be an asylum seeker, they can also be a refugee and vice versa. Furthermore, many racialised individuals with a migration background continue to experience racial discrimination despite their status as citizens. This is referred to by Yurdakul as the “persistent migrantization of racialized people” (2024: 121). In the French context, the term “issue de l’immigration” – “of immigrant origin” is widely used for such citizens. Tellingly, this term is rarely used to refer to white, European-origin immigrants and in most cases is used only to refer to postcolonial migration, thus reflecting a persistent discursive form of singling out or demarcation. Relatedly, migration can be internal to nation-states as well as taking the form of return migration. However, given the focus on the challenge of forging a sense of transnational political community in receiving countries in this article, the terms “migrant” or “migration” are used to refer to *transnational* migration from global south to global north. Transnational migration may arise from a range of push and pull factors – some of them may be economic, but more often than not, these economic factors are closely entangled with the historical legacies of colonial exploitation and contemporary forms of economic, cultural, and military neo-imperialism imposed on global south states by global north governments, international organisations, and corporations.

I will examine how the ideational landscape of Fortress Europe morphs into polarizing “culture wars” mediated through language, music, and sound as the audio-visual representations of national identity. As such, the Paris Olympic Games of 2024 offer a valuable case-study as they became the locus of a series of public debates about (1) what constitutes “French culture,” “French music,” the “French language” – in short, the French nation – and (2) how the French nation should present itself to the outside world. There is a historic tension between how successive French governments have sought to present a diverse and outward looking France on the world stage and yet, have adopted systematically “colour-blind” policies at home. This tension between the French political class’s desire to perform the role of global protector of “cultural diversity” on the world stage (against US cultural hegemony) and its simultaneous disavowal of postcolonial cultural and religious diversity within France manifested itself around the musical choices regarding the opening ceremony. The controversies surrounding the ceremony, and the choice of Aya Nakamura, demonstrated how music and the question of migration threw into sharp relief some of the long-established imagined cultural contours of the French national political community. As Irena Kozymka shows, there has historically been “an intimate relationship” (2014: 52) between the French state, nation, and culture. She argues that the top-down approach to national culture whereby it is the state that engenders the nation, dates to King Louis XIV at least, with many of today’s well-known French cultural institutions such as the Comédie Française or the Académie Française emerging under the Ancien Régime. The political imbrication of state, nation, and culture continued into the 19th century with the development of what Kozymka refers to as “an offensive cultural policy” (ibid.) whereby the French state created a network of French Institutes and Alliances Françaises around the world to promote the

French language and culture. Marc Fumaroli shows that during the post-World War II period, in the face of growing American political, military, economic and cultural hegemony, and France's relative decline, the French state placed increasing emphasis on culture as a means to ensure France's continued influence (*rayonnement*) around the world (Fumaroli 1991). This consistent stance of the French state to defend an idea of "cultural exception" has been a key driver for the French government's attempts to ensure that cultural goods and services such as cinema, television, and music were exempt from the liberalization of trade under the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in the early 1990s. Furthermore, the French state's protectionist stance on culture also meant that it played a leading role in developing the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005 (Kozymka 2014). The 2005 Convention foregrounds the principle of cultural sovereignty against the backdrop of globalization, with Article 1 stating that: "The objectives of this Convention are: . . . (h) to reaffirm the sovereign rights of States to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory" (UNESCO 2005: 3).

In relation to music, the French state's self-assigned role as defender of cultural diversity has translated into the promotion of migrant-heritage and postcolonial musicians on the world stage via a government-backed agency known as the French Music Export Office (Bureau Musique Export), set up in 1993. According to Michaël Spanu (2024: 10), such close collaboration between the French music industry and the French Ministry of Culture means that migrant-heritage and postcolonial "made in France" artists become global cultural ambassadors for a carefully curated image of France that is open to diversity and multiculturalism. Yet within France, that same French government is extremely cautious about cultural diversity in all its complexity, as demonstrated by consistently restrictive approaches to immigration, integration, and religious pluralism.² Against this background, the Aya Nakamura affair is an illuminating example of a fundamental tension between France's domestic immigration policy and foreign cultural policy. The Olympic Games, just like the promotion of post-migrant musicians abroad, has allowed the French government to maintain the outward-facing narrative of cultural diversity, whilst at home, the mainstreaming of racism, Islamophobia,

² The tension between promoting post-migrant diversity via music abroad yet its lukewarm reception within France, goes back to the 1980s at least. Barbara Lebrun discusses this in relation to the French-Algerian singer Rachid Taha, arguing that the muted success of his *beur* rock group Carte de Séjour had to do with Taha's refusal to conform to the image of the "exotic" Arab outsider or to the image of the grateful and integrated migrant, i.e., the "republican devotee" (2012: 342). Naima Huber-Yahi (2019: 10) also discusses Rachid Taha in terms of his refusal to conform to labels, as exemplified by his oriental cover of Charles Trenet's "Douce France" or his rock cover of Dahmane el Harrachi's anthem about Algerian exile, "Ya Rayah." ("Beur" was a term that emerged in the 1980s with the coming of age of the so-called "second generation" of French-North Africans who were born in France.)

and anti-migrant sentiment has come to characterise Macron's two successive presidential terms (Easat-Daas 2024; Mondon and Dawes 2023).

Despite the championing by successive French governments of cultural diversity on the world stage, domestic debates about what constitutes French national culture and who is included in the imagined community (Anderson 1991) have not been without controversy. Such discussions have been particularly prominent since the 1980s at least, when a protracted debate about the so-called crisis in Republican citizenship began to emerge against the backdrop of an increasingly vocal and politically engaged post-migrant youth movement (Hajjat 2022), the rise of the extreme-right anti-immigrant Front National, and geo-political tensions linked to the rise of Islamist extremism. These high-profile political, media and academic controversies have focused on questions about cultural integration; nationality acquisition; the visibility of Islam in a secular public sphere via the numerous "headscarf affairs"; and fears about home-grown jihadi terrorism. Running through these polemics is a concern that certain groups within the Republic could pose a threat to the imagined cultural unity of the French nation. Various terms have been employed to express this deep-seated fear, such as the near-untranslatable *communautarisme*, which was widely used in the 1990s and 2010s to refer to ethno-cultural fragmentation whereby North African post-migrant communities were suspected of rejecting the nation and retreating into ghettoised and culturally isolated "communities". Another term that was readily used in this period was *repli identitaire* – the literal translation of which suggests an identity-based *folding* in on oneself. In more recent times, and under Macron's presidency (first term 2017–2022; second term 2022–2027), political anxiety about the potential dissipation of the French national community has been articulated by the government through the notion of "separatism." To counter the alleged separatist tendencies of post-migrant French Muslims in particular, Macron's government passed legislation in August 2021 which claimed to reinforce the values of the Republic. This was undertaken via a redefinition and extension of the principle of *laïcité* – France's brand of political secularism so that the concept of religious "neutrality" was extended to include private sector employers, home educators, and sports clubs. Furthermore, in 2024 Macron's government passed new restrictive immigration and integration legislation. It is notable that this shift to the right in terms of government policy on immigration, cultural, and religious diversity occurred under a president who, when elected in May 2017, was considered by international observers to be a centrist bulwark against the threat of xenophobic populism afflicting many other parts of Europe and the United States. It is therefore productive to scrutinise Macron's past two presidential terms through the lens of the contradictory stances of the French government towards the question of cultural diversity. As the momentum towards the Olympic Games built (the 2024 Olympic Games Paris bid was announced in September 2017), the projection of France on the international scene as a modern and diverse nation gathered pace. However, on the home front, anti-migrant discourse gained ground at the highest levels, reflecting the increasing influence of the extreme-right Rassemblement National, following their breakthrough gains at the 2022 legislative elections when they won 89 seats in the National Assembly (Startin 2022).

The following discussion is divided into three parts: I turn to this broader discursive and policy landscape in Part I, where I show how the unprecedented attack on the rights of first-generation migrants through the 2024 law on immigration and integration reflects a “re-writing” of political community within the French national context. In Part II, I critically examine the controversy that erupted around the commissioning of a French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura to perform at the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony. Furthermore, I provide a detailed audio-visual analysis of her performance and its reception. Finally, in Part III, I return to a conceptual discussion of how we might rethink political community by moving beyond the nation and its narrow, exclusionary parameters. For even if the French state promotes cultural diversity via its musical exports, the motivation for doing so remains grounded in a nationalist frame – that is, to increase France’s influence across the world and to boost the economic returns from France’s cultural and creative industries. Thus, in the third part of the article, I turn to the concept of “radical hospitality” (Kearney and Fitzpatrick 2021) to outline how the idea of political community might be enriched in light of the debates generated by Aya Nakamura’s performance at the Paris Olympics. In the context of their work on migration and borders, Kearney and Fitzpatrick make the case for an ethics of “radical hospitality” which they define as one: “which takes the route of embracing complexity, diversity, and ambiguity” and which “happens, first and foremost, by opening oneself in narrative exchange to someone or something other than oneself” (ibid.: 14). Aya Nakamura’s multilingual and multi-repertoire music therefore offers a rich case study because the public opposition to her performance at the Games suggests that the French political community was not yet open to such cultural complexity, especially when it came to representing French national identity to the world. Whilst Nakamura did in the end perform – she did so whilst flanked by the French Republican Guard’s military band. This musical encounter, whilst suggestive of a certain willingness to sonically and symbolically represent the French nation as culturally diverse, was simultaneously undermined by the tameness of its political gesturing towards “diversity as inclusion” or “diversity as integration.” So, despite its playful and subversive ambitions with regards to the racist response to her nomination, the collaboration between Nakamura and the Republican Guard, was ultimately a performance that showcased the domestication of linguistic, musical, and cultural diversity. Arguing that the Nakamura performance at the Olympics was a missed opportunity for the sonic and visual articulation of a culturally complex post-national political community, I conclude with some closing remarks about what a radically open political community might look like, and sound like, in the future.

I. B/ordering the French Nation: Political Community Under Macron

Since Macron came to power in May 2017, significant anti-Islam and anti-migrant measures have been introduced. In November 2019, the government launched the De-

partmental Units for Combating Islamism and Cultural Isolationism (Cellules départementales de lutte contre l'islamisme et le repli identitaire, or CLIR). According to a government press release from May 2021, 101 local units deployed throughout France had already carried out over 8,000 inspections of community organisations and business premises suspected of financing and fomenting Islamist extremism, leading to over 500 dissolutions of such organisations and the seizure of over 43 million Euros (Ministry of the Interior 2021). Building on the momentum of the CLIR, the Macron government then introduced the so-called “separatism law” or “Law Reinforcing Respect for Republican Principles” (LOI n° 2021-1109) in 2021. This law formalised unprecedented mechanisms of surveillance and control of France’s six million strong Muslim population, affecting all aspects of social and cultural life, ranging from education, civil society organisations, and sports. In July 2025, at a Defence and National Security Council meeting, Macron announced plans for further legislation to escalate surveillance of Muslim community organisations (L’Élysée 2025). This has been part of a broader context whereby the French government has stigmatised Muslim-led organisations, with one high profile and emblematic case being the sudden dismantling of the CCIF – Collective against Islamophobia in France in late 2020, a decision confirmed by the highest court, the Council of the State, in September 2021. The reason the French government provided for shutting down the CCIF was that it incited hatred against agents of the Republic, State, and France because it identified and denounced state-led and institutional Islamophobia through its work (Bechrouri 2023).³

The hostile surveillance environment has also been increasingly evident in relation to immigration and integration. In January 2024, the government passed the so-called “Darminin Law” (after Gérard Darmanin, the Home Secretary at the time). Despite being revised substantially by the Constitutional Council for fear of France breaching its commitments to the human right of asylum under international law, the passing of the bill has ushered in a new era in terms of anti-immigration discourse and policy. Indeed, according to the migrant and displaced persons NGO La Cimade (The Inter-Movement Committee in Aid of Evacuees), the January 2024 “Law on Controlling Immigration and Improving Integration” (LOI n° 2024-42) is one of the most repressive pieces of legislation in forty years. The main problematic features of the law, according to La Cimade,

³ Bechrouri argues that since being founded in 2003, the CCIF had been the most important anti-Islamophobia organisation in France with its main activities involving the documentation of Islamophobic acts and legal support for victims of Islamophobia. The CCIF also produced annual reports on Islamophobia in France, which became a reference point for international organisations such as Amnesty International and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). However, the French state intervened when following the brutal murder of Samuel Paty in October 2020 – a schoolteacher who had shown his class cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed – the police investigation found that the perpetrator, a Russian Muslim, with no links with the school, had come across a social media video of a school parent denouncing Paty for showing the cartoons. The parent’s video encouraged other parents to contact the CCIF to complain about the teacher. Although the CCIF asked the parent to remove the video, the French government consequently accused the CCIF of “legitimising terrorism” (Bechrouri 2023: 206).

are (1) a wide range of increasingly exigent measures concerning the acquisition of the French language competency; (2) new rules regarding delivery and renewal residence permits; (3) expulsion orders; (4) a “Contract of Commitment to Republican Values” which requires migrants to demonstrate their allegiance to gender equality and secularism and to obtain a diploma in civic or Republican education; and (5) new employment rules – all of which are likely to marginalise and potentially criminalise vulnerable populations, many of whom are minors and young people. The law has raised the French language proficiency competency levels required for temporary residency, permanent residency and naturalisation, without offering more contact hours required for these higher competency levels. The law also makes extending temporary residence status more difficult, with migrants only permitted to renew their temporary residence permit three times. Migrants who apply for a permanent residence permit and whose application is refused have no right to appeal. The Republican Values Contract also requires migrant parents to bring up their children to speak French and to be “respectful” of Republican values, considered by the French state to be universal. Furthermore, foreign children and young adults no longer have legal protections if they have been issued with a deportation order. Asylum-seekers’ rights are also undermined by the law. Up to a third of asylum-seekers could find themselves in detention under new powers afforded to the French government and their refugee status could be revoked if they visit their country of origin once it is deemed safe.⁴ It is against this broader context of anti-Islam and anti-migrant policy that the Aya Nakamura controversy emerged.

II. Aya Nakamura: Domesticating Diversity and the Politics of Racist Backlash

In March 2024, a rumour began to circulate via social media that the French-Malian singer, Aya Nakamura (born Aya Dianoko), had been approached by Macron to sing at the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games, following an article about a secret meeting held at the Elysée published by *L’Express* (Dupont 2024). A far-right backlash rapidly ensued with Aya Nakamura’s name being booed at a far-right Reconquête party rally; public criticism from Rassemblement National’s leader, Marine Le Pen and, most spectacularly, from a white supremacist group known as Les Natifs. A group of Natifs activists gathered at Ile-Saint-Louis in central Paris with a large banner stating: “Y’a pas moyen Aya, ici c’est Paris, pas le marché de Bamako” (“No way, Aya. This is Paris, not the Bamako market”).⁵ The expression “Y’a pas moyen Aya” was a reference to the chorus of one of her well-known songs “Djadja” (Binet 2024). A photo of the banner was posted onto Natifs Instagram and X accounts and viewed over 4.5 million times. Their opposition to the singer stemmed from their perception of her as not being part of the national political community, commonly imagined in media and political discourse as white, even though the term “blanc.he” is not explicitly referred to due to “colour-blind”

⁴ For further analysis and critique of the 2024 law, see La Cimade (2024).

⁵ All translations from French to English are the author’s.

Republican political culture. Two anti-racist organisations, SOS Racisme and the LICRA (International League against racism and antisemitism), made an official complaint about Les Natifs to the Central Office for Combating Crimes Against Humanity and Hate Crimes (OCLCH) regarding the publication of racist and prejudicial material on 13 March. The investigation was then referred on to the French National Centre for Combating Online Hate (PNLH) which published its public support for Nakamura on its website on 19 March 2024 (DILCRAH 2024).⁶ Aya Nakamura also filed a complaint on 20 March and responded to Les Natifs post on her own X account on 10 March, claiming: “Vous pouvez être raciste mais pas sourd . . . C’est sa [sic] qui vous fait mal! Je deviens un sujet d’état numéro 1 en débats ect [sic] mais je vous dois quoi en vrai? Kedal” (“You can be racist but not deaf . . . That’s what gets to you! I am becoming a number 1 affair of state but what do I owe you in reality? Nothing!”; Nakamura 2024). SOS Racisme also organised its own counter-media stunt by staging an “anti-racist ball” outside the headquarters of the Rassemblement National on 24 March, bearing slogans claiming that it was racists who humiliated France, not Aya Nakamura. SOS Racisme activists also took the opportunity to respond to the Natifs: “Y a pas moyen Marine, ici c’est Paris, c’est pas Vichy” (“No way Marine, this is Paris, not Vichy”; SOS Racisme 2024: 0:10) – Vichy being a reference to the French Nazi collaborationist regime during World War II and Marine being a reference to Marine Le Pen (Marna 2024). Thirteen Natifs activists were consequently put on trial in June 2025 for incitement to hatred and violence based on ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion. At the trial, a spokesperson for the group argued that the choice of Nakamura for the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony constituted “un choix politique qui visait délibérément à promouvoir la dissolution de notre culture ancestrale” (“a political choice which deliberately aimed to promote the dissolution of our ancestral culture”; France 24 2025). Following the trial, ten defendants were fined for “aggravated public insult of a racist nature” against Aya Nakamura. The prosecution had sought conviction for the more serious crime of incitement to hatred based on origin, ethnicity, nationality, race or religion which carries a prison sentence. The fines for the less serious public insult conviction ranged from 1,000 to 3,000 Euros and the defendants were also ordered to pay damages of 300 Euros to Nakamura, SOS Racisme and LICRA (RFI 2025).

The fact that Nakamura was not regarded by Les Natifs as part of France’s “ancestral culture” was no doubt linked to her skin colour and her non-French origins. Aya Nakamura was born to a family of *griots* in Bamako, Mali in 1995, moved to France with her parents as a child and grew up in the working-class Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois, before becoming a naturalized French citizen in April 2021. Nakamura – whose stage surname is a homage to the NBC TV series *Heroes* time-travelling fictive character “Hiro Nakamura” – rose to fame after sharing her music on social media platforms. The rumour about her performance received extensive media coverage. But beyond the often polarising media coverage of the story, ordinary French people were drawn into the discussion, too. A survey carried out by the independent opinion polling company,

⁶ For the original Natifs post on X, see Les Natifs (2024).

Odoxa (2024), showed that a majority (63%) of respondents did not think asking Aya Nakamura to perform at the opening ceremony was a good idea and that she did not represent French music (73%), despite the fact that according to multiple sources, not least France's Centre national de la musique (2025), she is one of the most listened to "made in France" musicians in the world. Far-right party Reconquête's leader, Marion Maréchal Le Pen told radio station Europe 1 (2024: starting at 01:22) that Aya Nakamura did not represent France because her lyrics are not French, did not represent "a nation with its Christian roots, its European culture" but rather represented "African influences" and "non-European influences." In the same interview, Maréchal Le Pen went on to claim that Macron was motivated by his desire to project an image to the world of a "multicultural France," a France of the *banlieues* and *cités* (urban "outer-city" neighbourhoods where there is a high concentration of working class and migrant-heritage populations). Maréchal Le Pen's former mentor, aunt, and leader of the Rassemblement National in the National Assembly, Marine Le Pen also weighed in on the debate claiming that a performance by Aya Nakamura at the Olympics opening ceremony would be "humiliating" for the French nation.

Despite the racist outcry, Aya Nakamura *did* end up performing at the opening ceremony of the Games. On 26 July 2024, the centre of Paris became the site for a logistically ambitious Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, across a range of historic monuments along and on the river Seine itself. The show's musical performances included other major international artists such as Lady Gaga who opened the ceremony with a cover of Zizi Jeanmaire's "Mon truc en plumes." In the end, it was Canadian Céline Dion who performed Edith Piaf's "Hymne à l'amour." Thus, regardless of Dion's stature as Francophone international superstar, her whiteness was arguably more relevant than her non-French nationality, i.e., Canadian in this case, given the earlier public opposition to the idea of a black French woman singing Edith Piaf. Aya Nakamura performed a medley of two of her chart successes, "Pookie" and "Djadja," with a brief, yet pointed, excerpt from Charles Aznavour's *français* 1963 hit song "For me formidable," which is a humorous ode to the challenges of expressing oneself to a lover in a foreign language: "Je ferais mieux d'aller choisir mon vocabulaire / Pour te plaire / Dans la langue de Molière" ("I'd be wise to choose my vocabulary / to please you / In the language of Molière"; Le Figaro Culture 2024). These lines from the song reference the elegance and sophistication of the 17th century French playwright Molière, who holds an equivalent status to Shakespeare for the English language. Nakamura's use of the lyric could be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek response to the claims from far-right detractors that she does not sing in French.

Several elements of Nakamura's performance were notable. First, she sang the songs after emerging from the prestigious Institut de France on the Quai Conti, the motto of which is "Protector of the arts, humanities and sciences" and which houses the well-known guardian of the French language and thus national culture, L'Académie Française. Nakamura was flanked not only by six female dancers who emerged alongside her but later was literally encircled by sixty musicians from the Republican Guard. The 60-strong military formation of uniformed drummers, trumpetists, trombonists,

saxophonists and horn players were all dressed in full military uniform and led by their musical director Captain Frédéric Foulquier. They accompanied Nakamura as she sang her hit song “Djadja.” Significantly, it was the chorus of the song “Djadja” – “y’a pas moyen Djadja” (“no way, Djadja”) – that the group Natifs had cited and distorted in its reaction to the rumour that Nakamura had been selected to perform some four months earlier.

Second, the golden feathered dress that Nakamura wore was designed by Dior, whose stylists explain that Nakamura wanted to wear a dress that represented a phoenix – the mythical bird which rises from the ashes, thus symbolising a rebirth of sorts (Christian Dior 2024). In addition to the symbolism of her costume, and following the initial public hostility about her performance, Nakamura’s gladiator-like golden boots also created a combative aesthetic – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the attacks the artist had faced in the months leading up to the performance. In sharp contrast to the spectrum of reactions towards Nakamura’s rumoured performance in the spring of 2024, on the actual night of 26 July, significant numbers of spectators and commentators across social media delighted at the sight of the French-Malian singer dancing in front of one of the most prestigious sites of French national culture and the subsequent euphoric encounter with a musical corps of the French military. The outgoing Prime Minister, Gabriel Attal, notably tweeted: “Name a better duo, I’ll wait” (Attal 2024). Meanwhile, President Macron simply tweeted “En même temps” (“at the same time”; Macron 2024) – making reference to his political creed of the possibility of transcending left and right, and in this instance, supposedly emphasizing the transcultural hybridity of the musical encounter between a Franco-Malian urban artist and the Republican Guard’s military band.

The Republican Guard has gone through various iterations, from the French Revolution onwards. It has been known as the Garde de Paris, la Garde nationale and the Garde municipale de Paris. Over the centuries, the fundamental function of this military corps was to ensure the protection of the nation, its institutions, and the highest authorities of the state. Notably, the Republican Guard played a key role in the development of the French empire. Napoléon is cited on the official Garde Républicaine (2024) website as having claimed that: “une troupe chargée de maintenir l’ordre au dedans ne doit pas être privée de l’honneur de servir la grandeur de la Patrie au dehors” (“troops tasked with maintaining order at home must not be deprived of the honour of serving the greatness of the Fatherland abroad”). In 1848, the Orchestre de la Garde Nationale was established, whose mission was to contribute to the international rayonnement, or cultural influence, of France in the world via performances at prestigious and ceremonial events including international festivals and commemorations (Garde Républicaine 2025). The Musical Director of the Garde Républicaine, Captain Frédéric Foulquier spoke to the French media about how it was a “great pleasure” to perform with Aya Nakamura, to step out of the Orchestre’s comfort zone and to learn some of her choreography (*HuffPost* 2024).

Despite the outrage of sections of the extreme right towards Aya Nakamura’s performance with the Republican Guard, a positive consensus about the ceremony as a

whole emerged across the mainstream newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Libération* and *Le Parisien*.⁷ Indeed, there was a sense that the artistic director of the opening ceremony, Thomas Jolly, and his team had pulled off an extraordinary feat, both in terms of the sheer logistics of staging the ceremony in and across Paris, rather than inside a sports stadium, but also in terms of the image that was subsequently projected to the world of an inclusive and diverse France. So, despite subsequent critiques which referenced facile representations of the French Revolution, sexual liberation as well as claims that one of the musical tableaux appeared to mock the Last Supper, a representative survey carried out on 27 July showed that 86% of the French population judged the opening ceremony to have been a success (Lévy et al. 2024: 8). 75% of those surveyed stated that they were proud of the event, although the poll did not provide a detailed breakdown of which parts of the ceremony were particularly appreciated (ibid.: 9). As such, the overall positive response to the ceremony cannot be interpreted as appreciation for Aya Nakamura's performance in particular. One month after the ceremony, Aya Nakamura also reflected on the event in a TikTok video. She claimed that she had been shocked and taken aback by the polemic, arguing that as a Black woman, although she was aware of racial discrimination, she had never directly experienced derogatory comments based on her skin colour before. However, in the video, Aya Nakamura makes a clear distinction between her experience of being a Black woman and being a hypervisible Black woman *artist*: “Et je pense que moi en tant qu'artiste femme noire, j'ai pris pour tout le monde” (“And I think that as a Black woman artist, I took the flack for everybody”; *Le Parisien* 2024: 0:32). Nakamura's statement suggests that she saw herself as a scapegoat because as a Black public figure she became the focal point for the public expression of racism.

Aya Nakamura's lucid analysis surrounding her experience of being scapegoated suggests that despite the self-congratulatory reactions of certain politicians and the social media buzz surrounding the opening ceremony, it is possible to decode the event differently. For example, the fact that Nakamura was surrounded by the Republican Guard could be interpreted as a section of the French military providing protection to her as one of the cultural institutions of the Republic, as their remit requires them to and thus echoing the Institut de France's motto of “Protector of Arts, Humanities and Sciences.” This would not be too far-fetched a reading, given the racist backlash that had surrounded the lead-up to the performance. However, we can also see in the Republican Guard a potent expression of militarism and imperialism, especially given the historical role of the corps in expanding the French empire.⁸ Furthermore, one can also

⁷ See, for example, *Le Monde* (2024), Klock (2024), and Simon et al. (2024).

⁸ The fact that Jolly's celebrated flotilla of Olympians included the Algerian national team who pointedly threw red roses into the Seine to mark the site where approximately 120 peaceful Algerian independence protestors were drowned on the orders of police chief Maurice Papon on 17 October 1961 further suggests that amongst the spectacle of inclusion, a longer history of colonial violence both figuratively and literally lay beneath the watery surface (see RFI 2024; Brozgal 2020).

argue that bringing the Republican Guard into an encounter with Nakamura illustrated an attempt at domesticating diversity – making Nakamura’s non-French linguistic and musical repertoire more palatable and less “threatening” in its alterity. These contrasting readings of the Aya Nakamura and Republican Guard performance reflect a fundamental tension in French governmental approaches to the question of cultural diversity, as discussed above. On the one hand, President Macron and Prime Minister Attal boasted to the world about Nakamura’s performance with the Republican Guard as proof of France’s cultural diversity. Meanwhile, on the home front, and in the name of *laïcité*, French Muslim athletes who wore the hijab were not allowed to compete and hence represent the French nation, thus demonstrating a much more limited understanding of cultural diversity where visible “Muslimness” was concerned.⁹

Nonetheless, Macron and Attal’s celebration of Aya Nakamura’s performance reflects an established feature of France’s foreign cultural policy, especially as its status as a global empire waned. Indeed, in the wake of decolonisation, cultural “cooperation” between France and its former colonies and protectorates became the foundation of what was to later become the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), established in 1970. The OIF has four key objectives, the first of which is listed on its website as: the promotion of the French language, multilingualism and cultural diversity. The other three objectives concern educational, scientific, economic and political cooperation (OIF n.d.a). In an historical overview of the origins of the OIF on the official website, it is significant that the poet and former President of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, is cited in relation to the importance of the French language as a founding principle of the OIF’s identity: “Dans les décombres du colonialisme, nous avons trouvé cet outil merveilleux, la langue française” (“In the rubble of colonialism, we found this marvellous tool – the French language”; OIF n.d.b). Given the fact that French is spoken across all five continents of the world due to historical colonial expansion, the creative industries in general and music in particular has been a key vehicle for promoting the French language on the world stage. As part of the effort to promote music “made in France” on the world stage, substantial government resources have been dedicated to this, initially via what was known as the Bureau Musique Export (French Music Export Office, from 1993 to 2020) and since November 2020, via the Centre National de la Musique (National Music Centre) under the auspices of the What the France initiative¹⁰. The Bureau Musique Export received support and funding from a range of ministries, notably the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its mission was defined as follows: “to develop popular and classical music made in France on an international scale [and] a worldwide network aimed at facilitating exchanges between French and foreign music professionals” (What the France n.d.).

⁹ For legal analysis of the decision, see Pauliat (2023).

¹⁰ The origins of this name are unclear, but it could be a play on words of the common expression of surprise “What the fxxk?!” with the expletive being replaced by “France” – gesturing to the international surprise that may be generated by the diversity of music produced in France.

The successor to the Bureau Musique Export, What the France describes itself as “a recommendation brand created by CNM (Centre national de la musique) to shine a light on the finest music made in France” (ibid.). The work of What the France takes account of the increasing dominance of streaming platforms for the dissemination of music and as such, it focuses on producing playlists of music and branded events to promote new music “made in France.” Aya Nakamura features heavily on a number of these playlists such as the “French Hits Worldwide,” “French Hits in France,” the “Urban A-go-go” list, and the “Official Olympic Games” playlist.¹¹ Significantly, most of the artists featured on the What the France “French Hits Worldwide” playlist are either RnB, rap, urban, zouk, Afrobeat, or North African artists. In other words, the face of French music on the world stage is resolutely multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial. Yet, as we have seen, some of the reactions to Nakamura’s rumoured and then actual performance at the Olympic Games ceremony did not seem to relish in the choice of this type of music and musician to convey French culture. Indeed, Les Natifs as well as Marine Le Pen claimed that “French elegance” was being replaced by “vulgarity” and that French chanson (a French tradition of songwriting dependent on a strong lyrical and poetic foundation) was being “Africanised” (Les Natifs 2024; Cimbidhi 2024).¹² The polemic over Aya Nakamura’s ability to represent the French national community to the world thus raises a series of questions about how this notion is conceived in contemporary France. It also affords an opportunity to reflect on how established conceptions and mobilisations of the idea of national community might be reinvigorated in order to take greater account of cultural and linguistic diversity *within* France. The next section considers some of the key theoretical debates about political community before offering some concluding remarks about how the concept might be rethought through the prism of transnational and transcultural musical creativity.

III. Rethinking Political Community

Some thinkers have conceptualised political community as, above all, a national community which is bound together around the modern nation-state and its shared language, national citizenship and national culture (Anderson 1991). In the French context, Dominique Schnapper has claimed that the French nation must be understood above all as a political project through which citizens transcend their cultural and ethnic differences to form a “community of citizens” (2001). Schnapper is drawing here on the Republican tradition inherited from thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau who were influential on the French Revolution’s conceptualisation of the post-1789 French nation

¹¹ See <https://whatthefrance.org/listen-our-playlists/>, accessed 25 October 2024.

¹² Rachel Haworth (2018) defines chanson as follows: “*Chanson* has been variously analysed as: poetry or, more broadly, text; a popular music product; an artefact that contributes to, and through which to read, the cultural history of France; a means by which to examine the country’s contemporary socio-cultural context; and a lens through which to explore the French socio-political landscape” (Haworth 2018: 88; italics in original).

as being the expression of the “general will” (Rousseau 2002). Other theorists have focused on infra-national models of political community, e.g., focusing on regional identities as the main element of a given social bond (Keating 2021). At the other end of the spectrum, we can also move beyond a methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and think about political community as transnational, i.e., as transcending national borders and identities (Delanty 2018).

The porosity of transnational political communities is facilitated by their internal linguistic, cultural, and social heterogeneity. The idea of transnational political community that I am describing here is not necessarily interchangeable with diaspora, which implies a certain internal homogeneity in so far as one refers to, e.g., the Irish diaspora, the Palestinian diaspora, or the Armenian diaspora. Despite the proliferation of the term diaspora in migration studies since the late 20th century (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Brubaker 2017; Cohen 1997; Gilroy 2002; Grossman 2019; Hall 2019), it can be argued, as William Safran does, that diasporas “are not merely minority communities” (Safran 2004: 10). Rather they are “special kinds of immigrants because they . . . are committed to their survival as a distinct community” (ibid.). Other scholars, such as Peggy Levitt and Mary Waters have written about how some diasporas increasingly maintain a very strong connection with their homeland (Levitt and Waters 2002). So, the idea of transnational political community that I am using denotes a radically open political entity which is neither limited by national borders nor national electoral politics. A transnational political community has a certain utopian quality to it, in the sense that we have not yet encountered one on a large scale (Bloch 1986; Levitas 2013; Soniewicka 2022). However, I propose that as a concept, this utopia is an intellectually and methodologically productive one in so far as it allows us to imagine an alternative reality to the segregation of our border-anxious world. In this sense it resonates with the “no borders/open borders” movement (Carens 2013; Caplan and Naik 2015; Chamberlain 2021; Smith 2011). But rather than being mainly focused on the right of the freedom of movement, a transnational political community is also focused on what happens *after* movement or migration has occurred.

My normative conception of a transnational political community is therefore one which extends beyond the confines of the nation-state. It is founded on radical hospitality (Kearney and Fitzpatrick 2021), solidarity, and social connection (Chamberlain 2021) rather than hostility towards migrants and their descendants. Such a transnational conception of political community would not facilitate the anti-migration policies that we currently see in France and across Europe and the political weaponisation of migration in multiple European elections, such as in the European elections of June 2024, the French legislative elections in June-July 2024, and the UK general election in July 2024.¹³ Kearney and Fitzpatrick’s definition of an “ethics of radical hospitality” is

¹³ Examples of such Europe-wide anti-migration policies include but are not limited to the EU-Turkey deal, the aborted UK-Rwanda deal, the UK-France Joint Declaration on Illegal Migration 2023; the UK Illegal Migration Act 2023, and the UK-France “one-in-one out” pilot scheme 2025

one: “which takes the route of embracing complexity, diversity, and ambiguity” and which “happens, first and foremost, by opening oneself in narrative exchange to someone or something other than oneself” (2021: 14). This is a productive model for thinking about the cultural politics of representation that surrounded the Aya Nakamura polemic at the Paris Olympics. Nakamura’s cultural complexity – as a French, Malian, Muslim, and working class artist from the banlieue who transforms the French language through her extensive use of urban and multilingual slang, and whose musical style embraces a range of genres not traditionally considered to be “French,” i.e., RnB, Afrobeat, zouk, as opposed to racially “unmarked” genres of chanson, rock, or electro – certainly posed a challenge to some sections of the French political class. However, rethinking national political community in order to facilitate a cultural multiplicity that exists in a transnational frame should not simply be an ethical or discursive gesture. It also involves a breaking of the link between exclusionary conceptualisations of national political community and a neo-liberal economics which renders the scapegoating and dehumanizing of migrants and racialised groups a politically advantageous strategy in a period of extended austerity. As such, a transnational political community marks a significant rupture with the nation-state as the main institution of political governmentality, power, and control.

The concept of transnational community being articulated here thus involves a critical deconstruction of conventional understandings of the link between national political community and citizenship. If we take a political concept such as the citizen, for instance, one can argue that it has historically been closely associated with the nation. Martin Stokes’s work on music and citizenship further demonstrates the conceptual links made by Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, who had a major influence on the Republican political culture that emerged from the French Revolution of 1789 onwards. Stokes (2023: 15) notably discusses Rousseau’s claims in *Essay on the Origins of Languages* that political community could only be formed if an audience was capable of hearing and understanding what was being said by a public orator. So, from a sonic perspective, a crucial criterion for political community was the communicability of what was being said. This suggests a certain emphasis on cultural homogeneity – the audience must not only hear but be capable of understanding what is being said in any given public narrative. One can also identify such a cultural homogeneity at work in the development of citizenship in the French post-Revolutionary period. Indeed, citizenship underwent a process of “nationalisation” in France in particular, from the nineteenth century onwards, whereby the internal linguistic and cultural diversity of France was homogenised through the roll out of a national education system which suppressed France’s many regional languages (Cole and Harguindéguy 2013; Oakes 2017; Thiesse 2001; Weber 1977). Stokes also points out that this homogenising process also affected music, thanks to the emergence of the notion of the “public utility” of the arts from the late nineteenth century onwards, and particularly around the time of the

(see International Rescue Committee 2023; UK Home Office 2024; French Senate 2024; UK Home Office and Cooper 2025).

centenary of the French Revolution: “Public education in the arts would not only teach people how to be French, but also how to observe, compare, choose, and thereby develop taste and judgement” (Stokes 2023: 16).

Today, a radically hospitable – as opposed to hostile – political community would entail a de-coupling of nation and citizenship so that migrants would become part of the political community regardless of their nationality, cultural repertoire, and regardless of whether they have only recently naturalized, as in the case of Aya Nakamura. Instead, the tangibility of their presence inside the borders of the body politic would constitute sufficient grounds for substantive inclusion, access to civic rights and cultural rights, including the right to represent their “new” nation, i.e., to be regarded as part of the “historic nation” (Lauwers 2024). A notion of political community that is “de-linked” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) from a nation-centric conception of citizenship thereby opens up a utopic perspective on how migration, identity, and belonging could potentially be constructed in accordance with an ethics of radical hospitality and its attendant openness to cultural complexity as discussed by Kearney and Fitzpatrick (2021). Here cultural complexity is exemplified by the multiple cultural, linguistic and sonic repertoires used by a musician such as Aya Nakamura. A transnational re-imagining of political community sits on a spectrum whereby the policing of linguistic and cultural difference via the 2024 immigration and integration law, the 2021 separatism law, and the retreat from international legal principles regarding asylum becomes unthinkable (Agamben 2004).

A critical examination of the Paris Olympics and the Aya Nakamura Affair therefore affords an opportunity to think about an idea of political community that reaches beyond the narrow confines of the nation and into a space which not only accommodates diversity via a process of domestication and performative inclusion (Noël 2024), but one which facilitates the re-writing of the national story. Whilst the performance of Aya Nakamura at the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics suggests that elements of such a re-writing may be identifiable, the persistent and unresolved tension between the French state’s determination to perform cultural diversity on the world stage whilst enacting a domesticated diversity, or at worst, a politics of cultural homogenisation via its simultaneous focus on exclusionary secularism and immigration control, it would therefore seem that such a transnational conceptualisation of the political community remains elusive.

Concluding Remarks

This article set out to critically examine how post-migrant musicians in postcolonial societies such as France illuminate divergent perspectives on national culture and what constitutes the national political community. Through a close analysis of the performance of Aya Nakamura at the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, I reflected on the tensions emerging from the question of how to showcase the French

nation and French music on the world stage. On the one hand, selecting a French-Malian Muslim woman to represent French music at this highly symbolic and ceremonial staging of political community demonstrated an openness towards a cultural complexity which surpassed a homogenous national framing. However, the way Nakamura was escorted, “chaperoned,” and literally *encadré* (framed or curated in colonialist fashion) by the Republican Guard orchestra suggests that any apparent openness towards transnational cultural complexity was limited to a “simulacrum” (Baudrillard 1994) of diversity as inclusion and domestication. Stokes argues that in post-Enlightenment and post-Revolutionary France, the formation of a successful, that is, a democratic political community depended on its communicability – i.e. on the ability of the audience to be able to “give credence to vital public narratives” (2023: 15). The fact that Nakamura was accompanied by the culturally “legitimising” Republican Guard and that she included an excerpt of Charles Aznavour’s “For me formidable,” which refers to the need to adopt the language of Molière to seduce a lover, suggests that the performance was designed around the principle of the need for communicability. It is also significant that Nakamura sampled Aznavour, given that he is consistently constructed in the French national imaginary as a “model” immigrant – an assimilated Frenchman of Armenian origin, portrayed in both media and political contexts as “the monument of French song” (Hugues 2007: 176).

In our postcolonial era, cultural, linguistic, and musical or sonic communicability should no longer be considered a prerequisite for the formation of a successful or durable political community. The idea of communicability is premised on an assumption that there is a hierarchy of cultural creativity – a stable insider majority culture and a cacophony of minority cultures at the periphery. Tom Western’s discussion of the origins of the idea of the “barbarian,” deriving from the Greek word *bárbaros* to describe “the babbling of the foreigner” who does not speak Greek and who should therefore be excluded from “the polis” (2021: 163) is reminiscent of the Maréchal Le Pen’s claims that Nakamura’s songs were not sung in French and therefore should not be used to represent French identity. So, to return to the opening question that I posed in the introduction to this article about what a transnational political community might sound like, I argue that it would be unapologetically multilingual, polyphonic as well as embodying a “sonic superdiversity” (ibid.: 165). Musicians with a migrant background would not be required to insert culturally legitimising lyrics and musical collaborations into their performances. They would not need to represent or placate the national community but could rather be welcomed in their alterity, non-communicability and incommensurability. That alterity would also not be an obstacle to forging new “imagined communities” – ones that would no longer be defined by the nation. Examples of such sonic diversity most certainly exist, as attested to by ethnographies of creative practices at grassroots levels such as the Sarout Collective (Western 2021), which is led by Syrian refugees who enact new forms of political community through the organisation of musical and activist events across the city of Athens. However, when it comes to state actors such as the French government and state-led projections of cultural diversity, a

radically open political community which does not see the need for translation, transformation and mediation of linguistic, musical and sonic alterity has not yet materialised. Nevertheless, and despite the current state of affairs, this does not mean that a radically open political community cannot be imagined, sounded, and amplified in the future.

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Author Biography

Professor Nadia Kiwan is Chair in Francophone Studies at the University of Aberdeen. Her research examines postcolonial migration, secularism, Islamophobia, and decolonial thought. Key publications include “Decolonial Approaches to laïcité as a Mode to Re-Think Contemporary Islamophobia” (2023), *Secularism, Islam and public intellectuals in contemporary France* (2019/2022), *Identities, Discourses and Experiences: Young people of North African Origin in France* (2009/2013) and *Cultural Globalization and Music: African Artists in Transnational Networks* (2011, with Ulrike H. Meinhof).