

Post Colonial Tensions and the Paris Riots of 2005

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"He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelled of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry-shifter, but not a footballer or a filmmaker; that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshiped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country, until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized that anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands."

- Zadie Smith

Introduction

This thesis will investigate post-colonial tensions in modern day France, specifically as an explanation for the Parisian suburb riots in fall of 2005. The riots and violent clashes lasted from October to November and began with the burning of cars and buildings in the *banlieues* (suburbs) surrounding the capital in retaliation for the deaths of two teenage boys in a police chase. The civil unrest eventually spread to the rest of France including the major cities of Toulouse, Lille, Strasbourg, Marseille, and Lyon and resulted in over 3000 arrests. As a result, the country was declared to be under a state of emergency by the French government until the beginning of 2006. The rioters involved corresponded with a specific demographic in the French population - children and grandchildren of non-European Muslim immigrants, particularly from the North African *Maghreb* region of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The riots reflect the wider scope of the growing disconnect between the government and the disenfranchised Muslim minorities in France. In recent years, the French government has ratified a series of laws that were widely considered to be directed at the large Muslim population. In 2004, President Jacques Chirac and the French Parliament passed controversial bans on headscarves in schools and identification photos. More recently in 2005, then-Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy proposed to ban the

children of illegal immigrants from speaking their native language. These events, coupled with a history of economic and educational inequality, further fueled the frustrations acted out in October 2005.

This project will also delve into the effects of immigrant integration, which is a significant issue faced by all of Europe, highlighted by the fact that most methods of integration attempted by France, Germany, Spain, Austria, and Great Britain have failed.¹ The problems faced by ethnic minorities in multicultural states are a result of notions of national identity, state policies, and political-economic ideologies which are at odds with the immigrant reality. The concept of national identity is somewhat of a paradox in France, which does not encourage positive discrimination policies such as affirmative action. Thus, all citizens are considered French on paper no matter what their ethnic background. As a result, affirmative action does not exist because it would theoretically only emphasize the differences in a country striving for unity. While the theory is idealistic, the resulting reality is one of covert racism in businesses that refuse to hire minorities without giving reason, and even of the absurd scenario of Algerian schoolchildren reading from their history textbooks: "Our ancestors were the Gauls..."

This topic is relevant to modern societies because it is a lesson in economic marginalization and ethno-religious discrimination in a post-colonial situation. The majority of the riots took place in lower-class suburban "ghettos," segregated from the rest of Île-de-Paris into isolated ethnic clusters. Many rioters and their supporters were educated, some even with graduate school-level degrees, and frustrated with the soaring unemployment rate for young people and the likely possibility of rejection from a job position because of an African name or face. Although the government blames the violence on juvenile delinquency, the problem stems from a complex web of interconnected issues such as poverty, discrimination, and post-colonial tensions which need to be addressed both by the government and the French population in order to reconcile the collective memory of the country's past ethnic oppression.

In the following section, I will give a history of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as well as explain the relevant theories, including post-colonial

1. Sandro Contenta "France's Riots are Europe's Problem," *Toronto Star*, November 8, 2005, Sec. A, p. 10.

concepts of dependence, hybridity, identity, and racialization. The condition of the colonized will be examined using historical analyses drawn from colonial and post-colonial literature of different countries. I will also include philosophies held by the government of France regarding assimilation in comparison to other methods of immigrant integration prevalent in Europe. I will utilize the case study of the 2005 riots to examine the political, economic, and social subordination of African Arabs by the French government as a form of neocolonization. Literature will be drawn from historical documents, newspapers and other types of mass media at international and local levels, and studies of post-colonialism. I will also employ personal observations from my experience studying abroad in Paris and my background in human rights and social movements.

Literature Review

A History of Empire

Although the will of one nation to conquer another land and its people has existed for thousands of years, it was not until the 16th century that the concept of overseas imperialism became widely popular among the European powers. Initiated by the Portuguese with the advent of new sailing technologies, soon all the nations of Europe joined in the exploration and occupation of new lands.² European economics were driven by the popular theory of mercantilism, which encouraged the accumulation of many overseas markets.³ Many of the conflicts and wars fought between the European powers during this period were due to competition to extract wealth from the overseas colonies. Both the natural resources and inhabitants of the colonies were often subjugated and exploited for European financial benefit.⁴

Colonizing nations not only controlled the resources, industry, and finances of the conquered territory, they generally imposed socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic structures on the native population as well.⁵ European imperialism in the 17th and 18th century was often based on the ethnocentric belief that the morals, values, and lifestyle of the colonizer were superior to those of the colonized.⁶ This form of social Darwinism further propelled the philosophy of the "white man's burden," an initiative to help justify the policy as a noble enterprise in which Europeans were morally obligated to rule over and convert the cultures they viewed as "primitive" or "savage" by Western standards.⁷

The first instance of decolonization occurred in the late 18th century when the United States gained independence from the British. Gradually over the next century, the popularity of mercantilist economics diminished considerably and imperial powers relinquished their holds on a number of foreign territories. However, European colonialism did not weaken, but merely changed directions and rationale. The era of New Imperialism began, re-establishing European domination with a different motto: "empire for empire's sake." Initiated in the 1800's, this period of high colonialism culminated during the Industrial Revolution in the middle of the 19th century and led to the "Scramble for Africa."⁸

Post-industrial European nations found that capital was more profitably invested in the African continent, where cheap labor, limited competition, and abundant raw materials reaped higher rewards.⁹ Rivalry to gain African land became so intense that representatives from fourteen European nations and the United States gathered during the Berlin Conference of 1884 - 1885 to literally divide and distribute the entire continent of Africa, paying no regard to native boundary lines or divisions between conflicting ethnic groups.¹⁰ Even after the borders were carved out, without the solicitation of any African representatives, the major imperial powers of Germany, Portugal, Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy continued to dispute territory; the intense rivalries in Europe eventually contributed to the instigation of the First World War.¹¹ European powers not only took a keen interest in the economic benefits the continent had to offer, but also claimed African territories as part of their respective states, set up governmental rule, and undertook a civilizing mission to "enlighten" the indigenous people they considered primitive.¹² This involved the elimination of centuries-old ruling powers, ignoring deeply embedded social hierarchies, and completely restructuring previous educational and economic systems.

Collapse of Empire

Decolonization of Asia and Africa began after World War II, when resentment reached new heights as colonized people were coerced to fight for their colonial masters without a voice in decision-making or a promise of independence.¹³ As Europe focused on internal reconstruction from both world wars and ignored the plight of their overseas "children," the colonies fell deeper into an economic crisis complicated by violent struggles between ethnic groups forced

² Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca, 1973).

³ Harry Landreth and David Colander, *History of Economic Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

⁴ Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, *Colonial Discourse, Postcolonial Theory* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994).

⁵ Barker and Hulme.

⁶ Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race and Empire, 1815-1848* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

⁷ Emmanuel C. Eze, ed., *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

⁸ Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995).

⁹ Muriel E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (Hong Kong: Longman Group Ltd, 1974).

¹⁰ Peter Muller and H.J. de Blij, *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts*, 11th ed. (USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003).

¹¹ Chamberlain.

¹² Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: St. Martin's, 1995).

¹³ Shillington.

to live within ill-conceived European boundaries.¹⁴ Global powers began to slowly relinquish control of their overseas colonies, usually following brutal revolutions for independence and large-scale, violent protest.¹⁵

Post-Colonial Era

The effects of decolonization proved to be beneficial to the colonizers, who were intently focused on domestic economic growth and therefore became disinterested in their colonies. Relieved of the burden of overseas obligation, European countries and the United States abruptly cut off funding and aid to their former colonies in order to concentrate on internal investment.¹⁶ In the process of granting freedom, treaties were usually drafted to ensure economic domination by the former colonizer, such as in the case of the Bell Trade Act, which allowed American monopoly in the economy of the Philippines following independence.¹⁷

However, the post-colonial era often resulted in unfortunate consequences for the former colonies who struggled with political instability, economic ruin, and insurmountable debt dependence. The African continent, drained of its natural resources by its colonizers, suffered from famine, drought, and economic devastation. Caught between opposing political ideologies during the Cold War, the impoverished countries in Africa were given massive loans from rivaling Communist and Capitalist powers; these factions used the debt dependence to manipulate politics in Africa as well as devalue their currency. The borrowed money usually ended up in the hands of corrupt dictators, who further drove the masses into poverty, hunger, and disease.¹⁸

Tensions due to racial inequalities ran rampant as African nationalist groups participated in attacks on white settlers to avenge the era of oppression. Further violence ensued as ethnic groups disputed over arbitrary boundary lines drawn by European colonizers during conquest. These fiercely disputed territories continue to cause conflict between present-day Chad and Libya, Ethiopia and Somalia, and Nigeria and Cameroon.¹⁹

Theorizing Post-Colonialism

Although most official governmental ties have been severed between former empire and colony, the relationships built by years of control, oppression, and affiliation continue to exist.²⁰ The reliance on the former colonial power

begets other issues of hybridity, identity, and racialization, in which politics of economic and social subordination can combine to provoke ethnic violence. The hostilities and violent conflicts that often resulted from the legacy of imperialism have left both the colonizer and the colonized struggling for reconciliation. Post-colonialist theory involves different philosophies and literature concerning the political and cultural independence of populations formerly controlled by colonial empires.²¹

In their mission to civilize the colonies, imperial powers took control of the operation of all factions of society, including the upkeep of economy, funding for education and health care, and peacekeeping.²² European and American countries freely rewrote the history of the colonies and imposed Western ideologies, transforming the previous leadership roles of tribal councils and kinship organizations into the Western ideas of nation-state and national sovereignty.²³

When self-government was finally granted, the dependence on the Western notion of “nation” persisted, as well as the reliance on the colonizer for the operation of the state. Torn between the desire to reclaim their own cultures and the economic, financial, and social *dependence* on the European ruling nations, citizens of former colonies formed a hybrid culture based on the impact of the culture of the colonizers on the culture of the colonized.²⁴ Hybrid cultures incorporate beliefs from different established cultures and can result in conflict when opposing traditions clash. This sense of dual cultures blurs the boundaries of tradition and challenges the notion of identity. Cultural hybrids borrow aspects of multiple cultures and create a new, independent social dynamic played out in pop culture, religion, and education. The collective memory of the colonized is also adjusted to accommodate for two historical accounts—their own and the one of the colonizing “mother country.”

The effects of cultural *hybridity* and reliance on the former empire influence mass migrations to the colonial centers such as London or Paris. It is in these metropolises that immigrants from former colonies hope to find economic success and accommodation from their ex-“big brother.” Instead, post-colonial tensions and novel forms of subordination give rise to issues with *identity* as immigrants struggle with displacement and a sense of belonging neither to the guest nor to the host community.²⁵ Conflicts with identity

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Book, 2001).

¹⁵ Charles Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria: A History from 1830 to the Present* (London: Hurst & Company, 1991).

¹⁶ Alan G. Hargreaves, *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁷ Henry W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Shillington.

¹⁹ Muller and de Blij.

²⁰ Henry Schwarz, *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

²¹ Eze.

²² Barker and Hulme.

²³ Asad.

²⁴ Frederick Cooper, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁵ Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

are often demonstrated in clothing and language, which indicate their status of “otherness.” Using cultural barriers such as language and economic disadvantage as fuel for discrimination, ethnicity begins to be classified in genetic terms according to a notion of “race” instead of “culture.” This type of colonial mentality rejects ethnicity as a social construction, and instead creates “superior” and “inferior” groups of people. Immigrant populations are then *racialized* and stereotyped, resulting in a new form of economic and social oppression.²⁶ This precarious combination of political subordination and cultural discrimination can implode into modes of ethnic violence in any post-colonial situation.²⁷

In the next section, I will focus on the circumstances concerning France and its history of colonization in North Africa. I will use Algeria as the primary example because Algerians represent the vast majority of immigrants to the French metropolises compared to immigrants from other North African countries. After giving an account of conquest, subordination, and revolution, I will describe the movement of migration to France and the implications of immigrant integration in Europe. By comparing and contrasting French policies with those of other European countries encountering similar circumstances, I hope to give a clear depiction of the causes and effects of the conflict in present-day France.

Results

The vast territories of the French Empire spanned from Canada and the United States to South Asia and the Middle East. Algeria was considered the most profitable region for the French Empire because the land was especially rich in natural resources.²⁸ The French invaded Algeria in 1830 as a response to a supposed insult from the *Dey*, the ruler of Algiers, and ruled until 1962 under a variety of governmental systems.²⁹ Colonists transformed Algeria into a full-fledged department of the French Republic, restructuring its educational and political systems with governmental policies and reform programs. French governmental bureaucracy was established, and native Algerian children were sent to colonial schools to learn the language and history of the French mother country.³⁰

As one of France’s longest-held overseas territories, Algeria became a destination for thousands of European settlers

known as *Pieds-Noirs* (black feet) who moved in to farm the coastal plain. The *Pieds-Noirs* also occupied significant parts of Algeria’s cities, although indigenous Muslims remained a majority of the population throughout its history. These settlers benefited from the French government’s confiscation of native land and the application of modern cultivation techniques that increased agricultural efficiency.³¹ Algeria’s social fabric suffered during the occupation; literacy plummeted while land confiscation uprooted much of the indigenous population. Whereas the *Pied-Noirs* were offered full benefits of French citizenship in Algeria, the vast majority of Muslim Algerians, including veterans of the French army who served in World War I, received neither French citizenship nor the right to vote.³²

Gradually, growing frustration among the Muslim population due to its lack of political and economic franchisement fueled calls for greater autonomy, and eventually independence, from France. Tensions between the two population groups converged in 1954, when the first violent events of the Algerian War of Independence began.³³ The conflict, which featured guerilla warfare and modern-day terrorist techniques, concluded in 1962 when Algeria gained autonomous self-government.³⁴

The Évian Accords were signed on March 18, 1962 in Évian-les-Bains, France as an official treaty to end the Algerian War and to formalize the idea of cooperative exchange between the two countries.³⁵ French president Charles de Gaulle wanted to maintain French interests in the area, including industrial and commercial dominance and control over Saharan oil reserves. In addition, the European French community in Algeria was guaranteed religious freedom and property rights as well as French citizenship with the option to choose between French and Algerian citizenship after three years.³⁶ In exchange, Algeria received access to technical aid and financial assistance from the French government. Algerians were permitted to continue freely circulating between their country and France for work, although they would not have equal political rights to French citizens.³⁷ These terms ensured that the newly-formed country of Algeria remained dependent on France financially and economically after independence, encouraging a post-colonial relationship between the two countries in which the colonized country continued to be subordinate.³⁸

²⁷ Tahar B. Jelloun, *French Hospitality: Racism and North African Immigrants* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁹ Ageron.

³⁰ Alan G. Hargreaves, *French and Algerian Identities from Colonial Times to the Present: A Century of Interaction* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1993).

³¹ Ageron.

³² Hargreaves, Alan G., *French and Algerian Identities*.

³³ Affan Seljuq, “Cultural Conflicts: North African Immigrants in France,” *The International Journal of Peace Studies* 2 (1997).

³⁴ Hargreaves, Alan G., *French and Algerian Identities*.

³⁵ Ageron.

³⁶ Alan G. Hargreaves, *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

³⁷ Hargreaves, *French and Algerian Identities*.

³⁸ Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

³⁹ Tyler E. Stovall and Georges Van den Abbeele, *French Civilization and its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003).

Immigration to France

Following the end of French rule, more than 1 million people from the Maghreb countries of Northern Africa, including Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco immigrated to France in the 1960s and early 1970s in hopes of finding opportunity and escape from the economic devastation and poverty of the former colonies.³⁹ After a century-long dependence on the French mother country for financial assistance and operations of the educational and healthcare systems combined with strong economic incentives, migration towards the metropolises was natural. The large-scale emigration from Islamic countries sparked controversy in the traditionally Catholic, Caucasian country of France. The struggle to incorporate the influx of Muslim immigrants while maintaining the established concept of “Frenchness” became the focal point of a turbulent relationship between France and over three million French of Algerian descent.⁴⁰ In the late 1970s, due to the end of high economic growth in France, immigration policies were considerably tightened. The Pasqua laws were enacted in 1993, further restricting access to French citizenships. These anti-immigration laws created by former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua asserted that new immigrants were allowed only through family reunion schemes or as political asylum seekers.⁴¹ Illegal immigration thus developed as a means to enter the country without government permission.

As of 2006, the French National Institute of Statistics estimated that 4.9 million foreign-born immigrants live in France, making up 8% of the country’s population.⁴² However, French-born children of immigrant parents are legally considered “French” and not immigrants. As a result, the number of people from Muslim backgrounds is generally thought to be around 6 million, which ultimately represents one tenth of the country’s population.⁴³

Muslim Integration in Europe

The Muslim population is one of the largest religious minorities in the European continent. As a result of post-colonial tensions, scarce economic opportunities, and racial inequalities, some European Muslims, particularly immigrants and children of immigrants from North Africa, feel alienated and discriminated by their government. In light of recent terrorist acts such as the March 2004 Madrid bomb-

ings and the July 2005 London subway attacks, integrating Muslim populations has become a priority for European nations.⁴⁴ Many integration policies have been attempted, but none have proven successful.⁴⁵ While the European Union is a constructive arena for members to discuss obstacles and trade ideas, integration of Muslims has been mainly left to individual nations. However, the EU has endeavored to develop a framework for cooperative practices for integration into European social, cultural, and political life by publishing a handbook and adopting eleven universal basic principles emphasizing respect and tolerance. The principles also highlight key elements to successful integration, such as employment, education, protection, and inclusion in politics, but are not always put into practice by individual countries.⁴⁶

Great Britain’s approach to integration underscores multiculturalism and diversity in order to ensure maintenance of ethnic identity. Most of Britain’s Muslim immigrants come from areas in South Asia such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The British government emphasizes their policy of integration as a middle ground between segregation and assimilation. Multiculturalism seems to allow for a celebration of difference, respect for pluralism, and acknowledgment of identity politics.⁴⁷ By embracing the diversity of their immigrant populations, Britain has transformed into a nation whose national dish is no longer fish and chips, but curry and chicken tikka.⁴⁸ The British government has developed programs to encourage participation in politics and to bestow awards to members of the Muslim community who have made outstanding contributions to English society.⁴⁹ However, critics such as Kenan Malik comment that Britain’s emphasis on multiculturalism may call attention to differences and create deeper divides. He believes that the policy of multiculturalism as a political ideology has helped create a tribal Britain with no political or moral centre, where the very notion of creating common values has generally been abandoned.⁵⁰ Therefore, “many young British Muslims identify more with Islam than Britain primarily because there no longer seems to be any unique definition of being British. ‘Britishness’ has come to be defined simply as a toleration of difference. The politics of ideology have given way to the politics of identity, creating a more fragmented Britain, and one where many groups assert their

³⁹ Jelloun.

⁴⁰ Paul Gallis et al., “Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries,” *CRS Report for Congress*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service: The Library of Congress 45 (2005).

⁴¹ Hafid Gafaiti, *Cultures transnationales de France: des Beurs aux --?* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001).

⁴² Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁴³ Gallis, et al.

⁴⁴ Gallis, et al.

⁴⁵ Money, Jeannette, *Fences and Neighbors: The Political Geography of Immigration Control* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶ Gallis, et al.

⁴⁷ Kenan Malik, “Multiculturalism Has Fanned the Flames of Islamic Extremism,” *The Times*, July 16, 2005.

⁴⁸ Claudia Roden “Food in London: The Post Colonial City” (paper presented at The London Consortium of *London: Post-Colonial City*. London, March 1-13, 1999).

⁴⁹ Gallis, et al.

⁵⁰ Malik.

⁵¹ Malik.

identity through a sense of victimhood and grievance.”⁵¹

Germany and Spain have made little effort for immigrant integration until recently. Only lately have Germany and Austria begun to allow Muslim immigrants, primarily from Turkey, to become genuine citizens instead of temporary guest workers. Before Germany's citizenship and immigration laws enacted in 2000, acquiring citizenship was based exclusively on ethnic background with no consideration for skills of professionals, scientists, and specialized workers.⁵² Spain, like France, receives most of its Muslim immigrants from North Africa. The administration of Prime Minister Zapatero opted to integrate Muslims by legalizing thousands of illegal immigrants, predominantly Moroccan, and offering work contracts. This resulted in new waves of illegal immigration that have led to violence on both sides of the border. Another challenge to Muslim integration is the absence of many mosques in the predominantly Catholic country.⁵³ However, both Germany and Spain have recently begun to offer classes on Islamic culture, language, and religion in their educational systems to increase cultural awareness, which contrasts with France's hard line on secularism.⁵⁴

Muslim Integration in France

Notoriously one of the most centralized governments in Europe, the French government's approach to integration is the polar opposite of Britain's principles of diversity. The Chirac administration rejects multiculturalism and adheres to strict assimilation.⁵⁵ Immigrants to France must completely adapt to the French language and cultural norms.⁵⁶ A conceptual remnant of the French Revolution, equality of rights for all citizens was of utmost precedence in the political and social fabric of France. Therefore, the government does not provide any special consideration for different religious, ethnic, or political groups. Because all citizens are considered “French,” there is no form of affirmative action for minorities or quota systems because equality of rights implies equal opportunity for all.⁵⁷ The government does not ask for any indication of race or ethnicity for schools or businesses and prohibits the identification of its citizens on the basis of national origin, race, or religion.⁵⁸

Although in theory the notion of equality is positive, the bleak reality exposes the flaws of the system. The idealistic desire for complete integration can display notions of hypocrisy, as Algerian schoolchildren are required to recite

the first line of most French history textbooks: “Our ancestors were the Gauls...,” a blue-eyed, blonde-haired people obviously not representative of the modern diaspora. The French nationalist “Republican ideal” is not mirrored in reality, to the point where disenfranchised Arab minorities cannot recognize themselves in their own country.⁵⁹ The policies of assimilation do not allow room for expression of the hybrid culture formed by years of colonial rule, which must be masked by a fully integrated French façade. The disregard for the plight of ethnic minorities has left many French Muslims impoverished and unemployed. During my experience studying abroad in Paris, I noticed that French Arabs lived in Muslim ghettos separated from the rest of the Caucasian French population. These “projects” on the borders of central Paris featured streets covered in trash, barred windows in stores, and scarce public transportation. Inhabitants of the La Forestière estate 16 kilometers from Paris are completely isolated from the capital as they have no railway station or subway stop to link them to the main economic centers of the capital.⁶⁰ Promises of hundreds of millions of euros in investment in the banlieues (suburbs) and efforts to crack down on the endemic gang violence in public housing districts have been abandoned as families of second or third-generation immigrants are forced to live in rotting, neglected establishments where families of ten or more can be cramped in three dilapidated rooms.⁶¹

Gang violence runs rampant in these neglected ghettos as they are lacking in police stations and patrol forces. Of the 27,000 police in Paris and its surrounding areas, 17,000 policemen are assigned to protect the wealthier two million inner-city Parisians while only 10,000 are allocated to serve the six million inhabitants of the *banlieues*.⁶² There is not one police station in the whole area of Clichy-sous-Bois, home to over 28,000 people.⁶³ Overstretched and poorly funded, the policemen assigned to the banlieues are young and poorly trained. The government casually overlooks the growing police racism toward French Arabs, which breeds distrust of authority among teenagers in the suburbs.

Children and grandchildren of immigrants also suffer from work-related racism. Although statistics on ethnic background and religion are not demanded by employers in France in accordance with the strict policies of French assimilation, it is common practice for workers to submit an

⁵² Omer Taspinar, “Europe's Muslim Street,” *Foreign Policy* 135 (2003): 76-77.

⁵³ Lisa Abend and Geoff Pingree, “Morocco's Biggest European Export: People,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 29, 2005.

⁵⁴ Gallis, et al.

⁵⁵ Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan in association with the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, xxviii (2001).

⁵⁶ Jean Loup Amselle, *Affirmative exclusion: cultural pluralism and the rule of custom in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ Thomas.

⁵⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Scholarly Publishing Office, University of Michigan Library, 2002).

⁵⁹ Peter Fysh, *The Politics of Racism in France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁶⁰ John Lichfield, “Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite; the cry for redress among France's poor is constant-- and familiar,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, October 28, 2006, Discover section.

⁶¹ Mathieu Kassovitz, *La Haine*. 96 min. Norstar Entertainment: Malofilm, 1995. Videocassette.

⁶² Lichfield.

⁶³ Lichfield.

identification photo with their job applications, which serves as a visual indication of race.⁶⁴ As there is no governmental check for racial equality, employers can hire or refuse to hire based on any impulse, whether it be racial discrimination or religious bias based on pictures and names alone. Many North African immigrants and their children find themselves unemployed simply because a prejudiced employer noticed the name on the application sounded African.⁶⁵ In fact, random tests show that an applicant with a North African-sounding name has five times less of a chance of securing an interview than one with a traditionally "French" name.⁶⁶ French businesses also tend to hire graduates of the country's elite universities or *Grandes Écoles*, which usually do not enroll even the brightest of black or Arab students from the *banlieues*.⁶⁷ Even with graduate-level degrees from other local academic institutions or foreign universities, Arabs living in the suburbs are nevertheless still denied employment by French businesses. The root of the problem can perhaps be traced back to the conditions in the primary and secondary schools in suburban Paris, which are mostly underfunded and short of teaching staff.⁶⁸ Because the union laws in France allow older teachers to transfer out of the underprivileged suburban schools, the teachers forced to remain are usually as young and inexperienced as the policemen in the area. However, the French government's strict policy against positive discrimination bans any study based on racial, religious, or ethnic origin, making it nearly impossible to officially measure and analyze the degrees of discrimination in both the workforce and the educational system.⁶⁹

Another controversial national policy is the strict separation of church and state. The French notion of "laïcité" implies that religious freedom and public order must be balanced by protecting freedoms but at the same time ensuring they do not disrupt public life.⁷⁰ It was not until 1980 that the French government even officially recognized Islam as a religion. One continuing controversy in French secularism has been the 2004 ban on *les foulards*, or Muslim headscarves, worn by schoolgirls. The headscarves were banned along with large Christian crosses and Jewish skullcaps as a distraction to learning and impediment to educational assimilation.⁷¹ Officials also banned headscarves in identification card photos, citing that they did not allow for full

physical identification. Many Muslim communities were enraged because they felt that their religious beliefs were being trampled on by the ban that was so obviously directed at their demographic group more than other major religions. It was, in fact, their ethnic and religious identity that was threatened by the legislation banning clothing and symbols distinctive to their culture.

More recently, French leaders, fearful of losing their traditional national identity and anxious over their struggling economy, targeted the immigrant population once again by proposing tough new legislation against illegal immigrants.⁷² Far-right leaders such as Jean-Marie Le Pen have even proposed banning immigration all together so that foreigners who come to France, either legally or illegally, can never achieve French nationality.⁷³ While other European countries like Germany, Spain, and Italy have announced mass amnesties for illegal immigrants, France has ruled out such a move and is focusing instead on its policy of deportation to stem explosive growth in immigrant populations.⁷⁴ At the forefront of the controversy is Interior Minister and President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is responsible for accelerating the deportation of 20,000 illegal immigrants in 2005 and 25,000 in 2006, mostly back to the African continent. Most illegal immigrants to France arrive on tourist visas, obtained by citizens of former French colonies in the Middle East and Africa where cultural and linguistic ties with France remain.⁷⁵ Immigrant families work in low-end jobs cleaning houses, settling into the ghettos in the outskirts of Paris, and enrolling their children in French public schools. However, the *chasse à l'enfant* (child-hunt) instigated by Sarkozy for his deportation initiative has frequently resulted in the traumatic experience of children being snatched from schools during the midst of a lesson and thrust on a plane back to Africa. Those illegal immigrant families who have children enrolled in French public schools can avoid deportation only if they agree to abandon their native culture altogether.⁷⁶ The amnesty is only granted on a case-by-case basis to families with children born and educated in France who would only be allowed to speak French and not their parents' mother tongue. As a result, the native identity is prohibited and the French identity enforced in all levels of French society. Thus, the colonial "civilizing mission" is transformed into a post-colonial

⁶⁴ David Aaronovitch, "C'est l'économie, stupide – the real reason why the cars of Paris burn," *Times Online*, November 8, 2005, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/david_aaronovitch/article587744.ece.

⁶⁵ Elaine Ganley, "Immigrant Youths Carry List of Grievances to French Lawmakers Ahead of Riot Anniversary," *Associated Press Worldstream*, October 26, 2006.

⁶⁶ Emma Charlton, "Jobs, Race, Integration: France Yet to Break Down Barriers," *Agence France Presse*, October 25, 2006.

⁶⁷ Lichfield.

⁶⁸ Paul Silverstein and Chantal Tetreault, "Urban Violence in France," *Middle East Report Online*, November 2005.

⁶⁹ Charlton.

⁷⁰ John R. Bowen, "Muslims and Citizens: France's Headscarf Controversy," *Boston Review* February/March (2004): 31-35.

⁷¹ John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁷² Molly Moore, "With End of French School Year Comes Threat of Deportation," *Washington Post*, June 15, 2006, Section A, p. 14.

⁷³ "Far-right Le Pen Says 'Zero Immigration' will be Key Theme of Presidential Bid," *Associated Press Worldstream*, September 26, 2006.

⁷⁴ Katrin Bennhold, "Expulsion of Illegals Stepped Up by France," *The International Herald Tribune*, September 2, 2006, News section, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Moore.

⁷⁶ Angelique Chrisafis, "Sarkozy Forced to Review Plans to Deport Children of Illegal Immigrants," *The Guardian* 2, June 7, p. 17.

“integrating mission.”⁷⁷ By imposing linguistic as well as socio-cultural and religious structures on Muslim minorities, the French government’s philosophy on monoculturalism is reminiscent of ethnocentric colonialist attitudes. The “superiority” of the Caucasian, French culture is still embedded deeply into the collective memory of France. This form of discreet racism is demonstrated in economic and social subordination, played out in common encounters such as language. The French vernacular typically utilizes two ways of addressing someone directly: “vous,” used as the plural form or as a formal address of respect, or “tu,” used to address an equal or peer. During my stay in Paris, I noticed that some Caucasian Parisians addressed African Arabs in shops or on the streets in neither the “vous” or “tu” manner, but the cruder form “toi,” signifying that they were conversing with an inferior. This type of subtle racism that pervades all of French society is typical of colonialist mentality. The resentment that arose as a result of the subordinated North Africans as colonized peoples reemerges in the present-day under similar circumstances, forcing the oppressed to act, often violently and explicitly.

Paris Riots of October and November 2005

It is under these conditions of impoverishment and ethno-religious discrimination that the civil unrest began in the suburbs of Paris in October 2005. Resentment among French Arabs culminated when policemen chased two teenagers, Zyed Benna, 17, and Bouna Traoré, 15, through the working-class commune of Clichy-sous-Bois (where unemployment is four times the national average) in the eastern Paris suburbs on October 27, 2005.⁷⁸ The teenagers, heading home to end their Ramadan fast after a football game at the local stadium, heard police sirens. After fleeing to avoid customary police harassment and brutality, the boys hid in an electric station where they were fatally electrocuted.⁷⁹

These accidental deaths combined with overwhelming suspicion that the police officers “chased” the teenagers into a high-voltage area seemed to represent just one more abuse of authority by the French government against the underprivileged Muslim population. Youths from surrounding housing projects gathered in mass demonstration to protest the deaths, which ranged from peaceful marches calling for redress to throwing rocks at police, vandalizing buildings,

and setting cars on fire. Police responded by firing tear gas and detaining many youths involved in the clashes.⁸⁰ Rioters, bystanders, police officers, and journalists were all injured due to the violence. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy appeared on national television, promising “zero tolerance” for the *racaille* (scum) and assuring that he would clean the suburbs “with a power hose.”⁸¹ The evening following the national address, a tear gas grenade was launched into the mosque of the Cité des Bousquets, on what for Muslims is the holiest night of the holy month of Ramadan. Police denied responsibility but acknowledged that it was the same type used by French riot police.⁸²

A day later, the riots had spread to Saint-Seine-Denis in northeast Paris and subsequently to Hauts-de-Seine in the west. By the following week, the riots had consumed the whole of France, expanding to Dijon in the east, Rouen in the north-west, Lille to the north, and Toulouse to the south and eventually encompassing every major urban area in the country. Other countries in Europe were also affected by similar acts of vandalism, including Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.⁸³ Violence, arson, and attacks on police worsened in France, as attacks were made on power stations, causing blackouts in entire towns. A daycare centre in Cambrai and a tourist agency in Fontenay-sous-Bois were also attacked, while eighteen buses were damaged by arson at a depot in Saint-Etienne.⁸⁴ The mosque in Saint-Chamond was hit by three firebombs, Catholic churches were burned, vehicles were rammed into police stations in Romans-sur-Isère, and a junior high school in Grenoble was set on fire.⁸⁵ The French government claimed that the country was returning to “an almost normal situation” when only 163 vehicles went up in flames on the 20th night of unrest.⁸⁶

On November 9th, the French parliament declared a nationwide state of emergency. Ironically, the legislation was enacted in 1955 to curb unrest in Algeria during the war of independence.⁸⁷ This law was aimed at curbing riots by urban youths, allowing local authorities to impose curfews. The situation eventually ended in late November, resulting in 3,200 arrests in 274 towns across France, 126 police and firefighters injured, over 10,000 vehicles burned, and 200 million euros worth of damage.⁸⁸

⁷⁷ Daniel Nicheanian, “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” *Campus Progress*, August 7, 2006.

⁷⁸ Paul Silverstein, “Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot: Race, Migration, and Immigration in the New Europe,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005).

⁷⁹ Fouad Ajami, “The Boys of Nowhere,” *US News and World Report*, November 21, 2005.

⁸⁰ Silverstein, “Urban Violence in France.”

⁸¹ Lichfield.

⁸² Lichfield.

⁸³ “French Violence ‘Back to Normal’,” *BBC News*, November 17, 2005.

⁸⁴ Jocelyn Gecker, “French Government in Crisis Mode,” *Associated Press*, November 2, 2005.

⁸⁵ Ajami.

⁸⁶ Bouteldja.

⁸⁷ “French Violence ‘Back to Normal’.”

⁸⁸ “French Violence ‘Back to Normal’.”

⁸⁹ Lichfield.

French officials claimed that the violence was due to juvenile delinquency, activities of drug barons, and even polygamy in North and sub-Saharan African immigrant families.⁸⁹ Since the riots, the French government has promised financial investment in the poorer communes, an end to job discrimination against youths of African origin, and a mass crackdown on gang violence and police brutality.⁹⁰ However, the only real legislation passed has been to step up deportation of illegal immigrants, yet another disheartening blow to the already dismal morale of the banlieues.⁹¹ The French government still fails to see the riots for what they really are—a revolt against oppression and inequality. In their actions, the French Arab population declared loudly: “*You, France, you the government, you people in authority, you say that we have a chance but then you give us none. We’re going to smash up or burn the things that seem to represent something positive, but are really a lie. We are going to burn the buses that are supposed to take us to jobs we don’t have.*”⁹²

After in-depth analysis of the circumstances, it is no surprise that the events of the 2005 riots unfolded as they did. Unlike many incidents of ethnic violence, there was only one death that resulted from the destruction. Instead, the rioters directed their hostilities at objects symbolizing the specific causes of their discontent. Cars and buses were burned to protest the absence of public transportation in the poorer districts in Paris. Vehicles, which represent a link between home and work, outer and inner city, societal margin and center, served as the main icon of disconnect between the Muslim minorities and the French government. Schools were vandalized as a nod to the disparity in educational standards which disadvantages North African immigrants from the onset of childhood. Churches were attacked as an indication of the religious discrimination encountered by Muslims. Rioters crashed cars into police stations to voice their discontent with the frequent police discrimination and brutality in low-income neighborhoods. Attacks on power stations referenced the deaths of the two teenagers in a police chase. By choosing these targets, the rioters, mostly young French Arabs, were able to finally voice their concerns to the government. The rioters, disenfranchised to the point of violence, were simply asking the government for an opportunity to be truly French, a right that had been pledged to them by the government in the first place.

The vandalism and violence of the 2005 riots originate in the colonialist mentality and are results of the long history of conquest and subordination of North Africans by the French government. It is, in fact, the legacy of colonialism that is the source of many modern-day conflicts between the former colonizers and the colonized. For hundreds of years, the French ruled over Africa, profiting from the

natural resources and cheap labor found on the continent. Ethnic hierarchies first became issues when colonization developed into a civilizing mission to enlighten the cultures that Europeans considered primitive. Europeans regarded themselves as a more advanced “race,” and therefore were morally obligated to rule over Africa by imposing Western morals, values, and lifestyles on the indigenous people.

When France left its colonies in northern Africa because of brutal wars for independence, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized did not cease but continued to develop in complexity. The former colonies continued to be reliant on France for financial support, which caused the migration to the French metropolises in search of economic opportunity. Instead of welcoming the people they once proudly held custody over, France has attempted a “recolonialization by assimilation” into mainstream French culture. Immigrant identities and cultural backgrounds are ignored because there is, according to the government, only one way of being French.

Because their own cultures and identities are not represented in mainstream French culture, African Arabs once again found themselves dependent on a “foreign” government for protection, education, and employment. The disadvantaged condition of Muslim immigrants in France gives the impression of a new form of colonialism, where French Africans are once again in a subordinate position economically and socially, as secondary citizens to French Caucasians. The colonial ideas of “inferiority” and “superiority” are still prevalent in French society, which causes racism in the labor market and educational system. The actions of the rioters in 2005 were an assertion of power, a venting of anger, and a plea for notice from the government that claims them as their own but neglects their basic needs. This specific case study calls attention to issues of economic marginalization, spatial segregation, and anti-immigrant racism in post-colonial situations worldwide.⁹³

Conclusion

The plight of immigrants in France has been highly controversial and has resulted in escalating degrees of resentment on all sides of the issue. The French approach to immigrant integration and the methods of other European countries such as Great Britain, Germany, and Spain have been, for the most part, unsuccessful. The French government’s policy of assimilation has more harmed than helped the Muslim minorities in France, most of which are immigrants or children of immigrants from northern Africa. Although the government considers every citizen “French,” the declaration of “equality for all” is merely a façade. French Arabs experience racism in both the workplace and

⁸⁹ Martin Arnold, “French Minister Says Polygamy to Blame for Riots,” *Financial Times*, November 21, 2005, p. 18.

⁹⁰ Lisa Bryant, “Riot-torn French Towns Wait for Change,” *US Fed News*, January 11, 2006.

⁹¹ Angela Doland, “France Cracks Down on Illegal Immigrants,” *Associated Press Online*, August 31, 2006.

⁹² Lichfield.

⁹³ Susan J. Terrio, “Who Are the Rioters in France?” *Anthropology News* 1 (2006).

the educational system, resulting in soaring unemployment rates along with poor economic conditions. African Muslim immigrants and their children live in ghettos in the suburbs of Paris, cut off from economic and educational centers because the government neglects to connect the underprivileged areas to wealthier parts of the city with railways or subways. The impoverished *banlieues* feature dilapidated housing and soaring crime rates. Gang violence runs rampant because the police force is under-funded and the number of law-enforcement officials is disproportionately low when compared with the rest of Paris. The poor training of the police officers and general distrust of authority are a two of the key factors that contributed to the deaths of two Muslim teenagers, instigating the riots in 2005. The riots, which began in the suburbs of Paris and eventually spread to every major city in France, were a mass protest by Muslim immigrants and their progeny against the disadvantaged conditions enforced by the French government. Rioters burned cars, buses, and buildings and also destroyed schools and police stations. These acts of vandalism were focused on symbols that represented the government's neglect of French Arabs—the transportation, education, and protection they failed to provide their citizens.

The present-day situation in France can be traced back through a long, tumultuous relationship of subordination and exploitation of North Africans by the French government. The French colonizer freely benefited from African resources while subjugating the people to political and social rule for hundreds of years. After obtaining self-government, mass migration to the metropolises surged as economic ties remained. The overwhelming influx of foreign African Muslims threatened the very fabric of traditional French society, which held firm to its policies of monoculturalism. By defining French identity in one-dimensional terms, French Arabs are denied the advantages of other French citizens in terms of representation, economic prosperity, and educational opportunities. The colonizer-colonized relationship still exists in issues of subordination and inequality in the workplace, schools, and mainstream society.⁹⁴ The riots in 2005 were a means by which the rioters physically and publicly engaged themselves in French politics in an attempt to change their disadvantaged situation.

Past attempts at reconciling the French Muslim minorities with the government have obviously failed. Even after the major violence of the 2005 riots ended, around 60 cars per night still burned in the suburbs of France, signaling that resentment remained high among disenfranchised minorities. As recently as April 2007, several large groups of youth were arrested at Gare du Nord, a major Paris train station in a predominantly African Arab neighborhood, for shattering windows, looting shops, and throwing trashcans at police officers.⁹⁵ Economic and political policies must

change if the French government truly wants to unite its fragmented society. The much-debated elections in spring of 2007 revealed a country eager to choose a new leader who would resolve her economic and social problems. However, Nicolas Sarkozy, the elected president, was the biggest critic of the 2005 riots and notorious for his adversarial attitudes towards French Arabs during his term as Interior Minister.⁹⁶

Nonetheless, the new French leader must strive to truly enact past promises made to the neglected French African and Arab communities such as expanding the public transportation system to accommodate the *banlieues*, increasing and improving the quality of the police force, raising the competence of school systems in the communes to the caliber of wealthier areas, and imposing a genuine crackdown on gang violence. Also, France needs to lean away from the method of assimilation, which has so clearly failed to address the concerns of minorities. Instead, the government should place checks on employers and universities in a concentrated effort to rebuke racism. Positive discrimination methods such as affirmative action should be explored in order to examine both the benefits and repercussions of highlighting ethnic background in French society. The ban on conducting studies investigating race, religion, or culture must be lifted so that sociologists can gauge social disparities accurately. Furthermore, the actions of the government which can be assumed to be attacking French Muslims, such as the headscarf ban and the expulsion of illegal immigrants, must be stopped. Instead, the government should focus on boosting the visibility of minorities in politics, culture, and economics in order to promote representation of African Arabs in mainstream society. The top-down approach must be replaced by addressing issues from the bottom-up in order to empower immigrants and their offspring to make decisions at the local level for themselves.⁹⁷

The colonialist mentality has persisted well after independence in the French metropolises in terms of dependence, hybridity, identity politics, and racialization. The current French attitude toward its Arab communities retains remnants of colonialist tendencies, where the relationship continued to be one of subordination and domination in socio-economic spheres. While immigrants and children of immigrants still depend on the French government for economy, education, and protection, the authorities still fail to deliver on their obligation to their people. Without any institutional ways to assert power and alter public policy, the only choice of the oppressed was to physically attack the symbols of inequality. Thus, the rioters in 2005 burned the very things that represented broken promises, discrimination, and neglect by the French government. They were, in fact, demanding the rights promised to them by the national motto of France: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality, brotherhood).

⁹⁴ Tony Chafer, *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

⁹⁵ Collin Sick, "Clashes Erupt at Paris' Gare du Nord," *Info Shop News*, March 27, 2007.

⁹⁶ Elaine Sciolino, "Tensions over French Identity Shape Voter Drives," *New York Times*, March 30, 2007.

⁹⁷ Elzbieta M. Godziak, "The Week Paris was Burning," *Anthropology News* 1 (2006).

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