

**MUSLIM YOUTH IDENTITIES AMONG *BEUR*: AN ANALYSIS OF NORTH
AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS AND SELF-PERCEPTIONS IN FRANCE**

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This paper explores the identities of *Beur* youth, both in terms of ethnic French perceptions of this group, as well as the *Beur* perspective of their individual and collective cultural identities. “*Beur*” refers to second and third generation immigrant youth in France of North African origins, and has become a nominator for an ethnic and cultural minority group in France. This minority group has spurred the development of activist groups, a unique sub-genre of hip-hop music, a slang dialect of French, and an entire French sub-culture. Noting this growing presence and influence of *Beur* culture in France, I posit the question: What roles do integration and inclusion in society play in *Beur* youth’s development of individual identity and larger group identity, particularly in France? I examine this question through an exploratory qualitative research study to understand how Arab-Muslim immigrant youth, i.e. the *Beurs*, in France perceive their identity.

Tensions are rising within Muslim immigrant communities in the western hemisphere. Such controversies as the 2005 riots around Paris, the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., and the ongoing headscarf debates have given negative attention to Muslims and Arabs in the West. These events, combined with the underlying issues of unemployment, poverty, crime, and civil violence are bringing to the forefront concerns with North African immigrants in France. While researchers have extensively studied and discussed broader policy issues relating to these minority populations from an external perspective, immigrant and *Beur* youth themselves have received little direct involvement in the interview and research process. Here, I am examine

how *Beur* youth experience feelings of belonging, alienation, and a sense of personal self-worth through political and social action and popular culture.

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1.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO *BEUR*: NORTH AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN FRANCE

The riots in France in 2005 brought to light the depth of problems in the immigrant communities in France, particularly among Muslim immigrant youth from North Africa, when they resorted to civil violence to make their voices heard.¹ Tension has been building in France for years, with around 8% of the population consisting of immigrants. This includes both immigrants who have become naturalized citizens of France and other non-citizen immigrants living in France.² While France has always had a large immigrant population, for years this mostly consisted of immigrants from other parts of Europe. In recent decades, immigration has been substantially from North and sub-Saharan Africa.³ As of the 1999 census, about 574,000 Algerians, 534,000

¹ Ireland, Doug. "Why is France Burning?" The Nation (2005): 29-30. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008; Scott, Joan W. The Politics of the Veil. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007. ; Mulrine, Anna, Eduardo Cue, and Thomas K. Grose. "After the Flames." U.S. News & World Report 139.19 (2005): 35-37. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008. ; "After the Riots." Economist 377.8457 (2005): 47-48. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008.

² Edmiston, William F., and Annie Dumenil. "L'Immigration." La France Contemporaine. Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2005. 202-214. p202

³ Freedman, Jane. Immigration and Insecurity in France. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004.

Moroccans, and 202,000 Tunisians resided in France, constituting about 40% of the total immigrant population.⁴ Around one million Muslims of North African origin live in France.⁵

The *affaires des foulards* or the “headscarf affairs,” symbolize the ongoing “problem of Islam” in France, an issue that, like the riots, involves youth in particular. These affairs consisted of a series of events concerning the expulsion of Muslim girls from school for wearing a Muslim headscarf, or *hijab*. The problems began in 1989 and continued until 2004 with debates and legal battles over whether or not girls should be allowed to express their Muslim identity in school by wearing the *hijab*. Francois Bayrou, the minister of education, made a law forbidding all “ostentatious” religious symbols in French schools, targeting, among other expressions, the *hijab*. The law was soon overturned, but enacted again in 2004 after 9/11 due to rising terrorism concerns. Sociologist Joan Wallache Scott argues that France targeted Muslim female youth as symbols of terrorism breeding within France, limiting their freedoms in the name of feminism, equality, and secularism.⁶ The debate is officially over in the public sphere since the re-enacting of the law, but tension continues between the government and the Muslim population of France, regarding these issues. This has been revealed again with huge controversy over a law forbidding the *burqa*, or full veil covering the face, as the French government put a partial ban on women wearing the *burqa* in certain public spaces, public transportation, and institutions in January of 2010.

In discussing *Beur* identities today, the history behind present Muslim immigrant youth situations is important. Why did these North African Muslims immigrate to France, choosing to leave behind their past, their history, family, culture, and their whole life, to start a new life in

⁴ Edmiston, p202

⁵ Edmiston, p194

⁶ Scott

France? During the World Wars, France needed employees in its factories and other unskilled jobs, to replace French men who were fighting and dying in the wars. France recruited workers from its North African colonies. At times, the French forcefully emptied entire Algerian villages and brought young men to France to work. In the 1950's, 60's and '70s, France allowed many of these workers' families to move to France from Algeria, to settle in France.⁷ The war between Algeria and France to end colonialism in Algeria in the early 1960's fueled the flames of racism and hatred of North Africans and Muslims in France.⁸ When an economic recession hit France in the 1970's, and with growing problems of unemployment, France no longer needed or wanted the immigrant laborers from North Africa.⁹

France blamed the immigrants for the economic crisis that began in the 1970's.¹⁰ People equated immigrants with unemployment.¹¹ A law enacted in 1975 closed the borders of France to non-European immigrants. Then the French government unsuccessfully tried to bribe immigrants to leave France by offering 10,000 francs to each person to return to their countries of origin permanently.¹² Many of them had lived in France for decades and considered it their home; but the hospitality of previous years was over.¹³ Once a refuge for millions, France closed its borders and turned its back toward immigrants, including those within the country.¹⁴

⁷ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. French Hospitality. Trans. Barbara Bray. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.

⁸ Bell, David A. "The Shorn Identity: Why the French Forgot How to Assimilate." The New Republic (2005): 20+.
Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008. p28

⁹ Ben Jelloun

¹⁰ Noiriel, Gérard. Atlas De L'Immigration En France: Exclusion, Intégration... Paris: Editions Autrement, 2002.

¹¹ Ben Jelloun

¹² Edmiston, p208

¹³ Ben Jelloun

¹⁴ Noiriel, 2002; Bell

Gérard Noiriel, the pioneer historian and writer on immigration in France, has identified increasing problems with immigrants since the French Revolution.¹⁵ After the Revolution, the government integrated its own people and developed within France a national identity. Then, since World War I, immigrants who had come to France to work became visible. Though many assimilated, many of the men who had left their families behind in their country of origin lived together, segregated from French society in poor workers' housing and shantytowns.¹⁶ Problems developed as linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, and religious differences separated these immigrants from the new nationalistic and united France. The common bases of historical integration, especially the school system failed to integrate these Muslim immigrants, mainly after World War II.¹⁷ Historian Jonathan Laurence also argues that the three main institutions of integration in France, as he defines them, the school system, the military, and the workplace, have failed in recent years. The institutions that defined French national unity and identity are no longer uniting the diverse population within France. Mandatory military service ceased in the late 1990's, unemployment is rampant, with unemployment rates reaching 32% among immigrants, and problems are continually increasing in the French public school system.¹⁸ It is within this context that I address the current situation of *Beurs* in France.

¹⁵ Noiriel, Gérard. *Population, Immigration, Et Identité Nationale En France XIXe-XXe Siècle*. Paris: Hachette, 1992. p99

¹⁶ Noiriel, 1992, p101

¹⁷ Noiriel, 1992, pp100-110

¹⁸ Laurence, Jonathan. "From the Elysée Salon to the Table of the Republic: State-Islam Relations and the Integration of Muslims in France." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23 (2005): 37-64. [Academic Search Premier](#). Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008. p41

1.1 THE MUSLIM IMMIGRANT DEBATES IN FRENCH SCHOLARSHIP

The primary literature on Muslim immigrants in France surrounds the issues of the *hijab*, exposing the various arguments in the debate about the place of immigrants in France. Research on this issue has been carried out through secondary analysis of political laws and literature on the topic by prominent individuals involved in the debate, in addition to opinion polls taken about the laws and attitudes surrounding immigrants and the presence of Islam in France. In a few cases, researchers have interviewed the girls themselves, seeking the perspective of victims of the law that forbids the *hijab*. Certain social and anthropological researchers sought to gain a greater understanding of why girls wear the veil to express Muslim identity. Their findings revealed both individual religious reasons and desires for group solidarity.¹⁹ Apart from some interviews of girls involved in the *hijab* debate, very few researchers have tried to understand how the Muslim immigrants themselves perceive their situation in France. Little systematic research has been done in French or English on the larger issue of identity of the Muslim immigrant population, especially the immigrant youth, who are at the center of these issues in France.

¹⁹ Scott; Freedman, Jane. "Secularism as a Barrier to Integration? The French Dilemma."

International Migration 42 (2004): 5-27. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008

1.1.1 ANALYZING IDENTITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOCIOLOGY

How may we begin to understand the notion of “identity” in this context? Literature on “identity” is vast and differs between disciplines. This paper examines the concept of identity from a sociological perspective. Sociologists Jugé and Perez define identity as encompassing “the notion of national, racial, ethnic, regional, and local identities.”²⁰ Identity exists on each level, or when all aspects contribute to an individual, community, or larger group of identities. Identities are constantly changing, fluid across time and place, difficult to define or pin down. This research is attempting to describe *Beur* identities at a specific point in time, and describe and analyze certain identities that are representative of some *Beur* youth in certain places in France in the first decade of the 21st century.

Sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh analyzes identity in his 2007 article “Fluid Solidarities.” He builds upon Edward Said’s distinctions between “filiation” and “affiliation,” a difference between accepting the identity given to one by birth, (or the situation into which one is born, including place, religion, racial status and other life situations beyond one’s control,) versus consciously choosing one’s own identity.²¹ When one questions one’s own identity or what Bamyeh calls “solidarity,” the fundamental values of that solidarity become clear. Underlying the solidarity of every group is a set of values that are more primary than that solidarity. These are the foundations of identities with which everyone is born. As each individual questions his

²⁰ Jugé, Tony S., and Michael P. Perez. "The Modern Colonial Politics of Citizenship and Whiteness in France." Social Identities 12 (2006): 187-212. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. Feb. 2008. p200

²¹ Bamyeh, Mohammed A. "Fluid Solidarities: Affiliations Beyond the Nation." Nationalism and Global Solidarities. Ed. James Goodman and Paul James. London & New York: Routledge, 2007. 155-167. p156

or her identity, they are propelled beyond their inherited identity and become aware of themselves as individuals, developing their senses of self individually and within the larger groups or communities in which they live. Therefore, when identity comes into question, the values or underlying basis for that identity remains, while the identity itself may change.²²

But what do we understand identity to be? Homi Bhabha explains it in the post-colonial context in the following terms: “To exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness.”²³ He goes on to point out “two familiar traditions in the discourse of identity: the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature; and the anthropological view of the difference of human identity as located in the division of Nature/Culture.”²⁴ That is to say, identity can be defined both in relation to self: the growing understanding and development of self over time, as well as in relation to the Other: understanding of oneself as that which is different from the other, and made different by a compilation of nature, (that with which one was born) and culture, or the influences of the world outside of oneself.

Such dualities are important in examining the immigrant situation. Youth in particular question their identities and undergo shifts in identity. *Beur* youth are constantly being forced by others, including the French government, their French peers, their teachers, and their parents, to be aware of their own identities, because they are marked as being different. The French define them as different because of their skin color, their language, their accents, their origins, etc. These are their differences of “Nature.” Because they are told that they are different, they then are forced to question their identities and begin to create and define a set of solidarities for

²² Bamyeh, p157

²³ Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994., p44

²⁴ Bhabha, p46

themselves, the shifting of the “natural” differences from the “Other” that is France to a culturally affected, shifting set of values and solidarities as they question and are influenced by things, events, and people outside of themselves. Identities shift further due to two other major factors: time and space.²⁵ Across time, and in different locations, people’s identities are always changing, adjusting to their sense of self in different contexts and in relation to different “Others.”

In observing the changes in identity between generations of immigrants, Bamyeh’s study implies that while first generation immigrants appear to have very different identities than their children, the immigrant youth of France, the change may be in the way they express themselves.²⁶ They still have the same fundamental foundations as their parents and grandparents, and they are still perceived in France in a similar way to their families. However, they are youth of a new generation, and they use new cultural tools, such as rap and hip-hop, as well as new means of political expression, such as riots and protests, to express themselves. Over time, and after years of seeing failed attempts at acceptance from their parents or assimilation into French culture, these youth are using new tactics for acceptance or recognition in France.

Moroccan immigrant to France and well-known author Tahar Ben Jelloun delineates the difference between first generation immigrants and the second-generation immigrant youth in France. He argues that the first generation of immigrants was the “generation of silence and anger.” They didn’t react to the racism or oppression they faced in France. They accepted the racism, were silently angry, secluded themselves, and hid their identities. The younger generation, however, is being educated and raised in France. They are in the process of

²⁵ Bhabha, p55

²⁶ Bamyeh

developing their individual and group identities. They have become openly angry and express a desire to be treated as French citizens.²⁷

When the *Beur*'s rights are not respected, it may lead to a change in their solidarities. Bamyeh discusses the idea of "fluid solidarities," a concept that acknowledges the changing nature of identity. Identity cannot be described as a rigid collective ideology but rather a large set of changing and expandable universal values, differing between individuals and over time in both meaning and methods of expression.²⁸ Even when "new" identities form, they are never entirely new, but rather a new blend of lasting values and ideas, socialized in a new way.²⁹

Many researchers in both the U.S. and Europe have written about the national and ethnic identity of immigrants, discussing whether immigrants identify with their native culture and ethnicity or assimilate into the national identity of their new home.³⁰ In regards to individual identity, there are pressures to live up to a pre-conceived identity. . "People are afraid of not living up to the self-image created by themselves, by history, or by those who manipulate them."³¹ This applies especially to 2nd generation immigrant youth who have to live up to their parents' pre-conceived identity for them, along with those of society, their heritage, and their own self-expectations.

²⁷ Ben Jelloun, p67

²⁸ Bamyeh, p158

²⁹ Bamyeh, p159

³⁰ Killian, Caitlin, and Cathryn Johnson. "'I'm Not an Immigrant!'" Resistance, Redefinition, and the Role of Resources in Identity Work." Social Psychology Quarterly 69.1 (2006): 60-80. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 7 Feb. 2008. p60

³¹ Ben Jelloun, p58

1.1.2 *BEUR* POPULATION

This study discusses what is commonly known as the *Beur* population in France, that is, the youth descended from North African and Arabs in France. I am focusing on the *Beur* youth as separate from other minority groups because of a specific historical link with France, due to the earliest French colonization of North Africa, the proximity of these countries across the Mediterranean, and the reciprocal effects of French living on North African land and North Africans coming to French land, but with French dominance and oppression in both instances. Algeria is the central case, but I am including any Arab Muslim immigrant because of parallel colonial histories and racial and cultural stereotypes that extend to all Arabs, without discriminating the country of origin. The treatment stems from a particular history of France with Algeria, but extends to nearly all people of Arab-Muslim origin in France today. This is still primarily those descending from the migrations and colonial history with North Africa, including Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Yet it also includes any Arab youth, including of Levantine, Egyptian, or other post-colonial Arab descent.

The reason for the inclusion of all Arab youth is stigmatization and grouping of the Arab population together in the French setting. This sub-group in France is stigmatized based on physical features, accent, language, religion, and the Arab ethnicity in general, regardless of colonial history specific to Algeria. While these Franco-Arab youth are mixed in with the general population, and particularly mixed in with the general immigrant and immigrants' descendants' population in the *banlieues*, and their situations parallel and blend with the Black African and Caribbean experience in France, my research focuses specifically on the *Beurs*. Yet although I am distinguishing this *Beur* group as the subjects of my research, I am drawing from examples that include others of African, Caribbean, Asian, and even European descent, who live

in the *banlieues* and have participated in these common trends in France in the past decades regarding immigration, race, and religion.

The “immigrant” population in France today can be classified in three main groups: those who were born as second or third generation French, those whose parents immigrated right before their birth or shortly after when they were still young children, and those who immigrated to France older, with memories of and attachments to the *bled* [the slang term used referring to the Arab country of origin, or homeland]. The third generation immigrants are, in fact, no longer immigrants at all, but native French who happen to be the descendants of immigrants, because of the *double droit de sol*, or the right to French citizenship of anyone whose parent *and* grandparent was born on French soil. However, they are still stigmatized in French society, deal with the imposed identity of being an outsider and foreigner, and often face issues of poverty, unemployment, and racism inherited from their immigrant parents and grandparents. “Those of us who are born French, how can we talk of integration? We are French: we don’t need to integrate. Therefore, France must not forget its children.”³² Those who were born in France (most likely without citizenship as part of the second generation) or immigrated as very young children only have memories of France as their home, but they face much stronger stigmas from within France as outsiders, at the same time that they are not considered a part of the country they came from. In addition, they are not automatically citizens of France and must deal with legal and cultural ramifications of being a foreigner without the legal rights and privileges of French citizens. They do not belong anywhere. Lastly, those who come as adults or teenagers never fully assimilate and struggle between an identity rooted in

³² Interview 2

their native culture, language, and history, and the desire or need to become a part of their new country.

The term *Beur* has a negative connotation among the French, as it is a term for the minority community known for crime, violence, poverty, and unemployment. However, the term itself came from the *Beurs* themselves, and from their *verlan* or “inverted” slang dialect of the French language. It is the inversion of the inversion of the French word for Arab. In *verlan*, the French word “*Arabe*” is inverted to be “*rebu*.” The *Beurs*, who are not just Arabs, have inverted this word one more time, to *beur*, to describe who they are, creating a name for themselves based on their doubly-derived situation as third generation immigrants in France. They have named themselves in a way that shows both their Arab and French roots, the dual foundations of their identities, but in creating their own name they express who they are and their own unique identities that they are building on these Arab-French foundations. Each of these youth has a unique story, their own and their family’s history of immigration, of hardship, of integration and their search for individual and group identity. Together all of these youth with their common background, and their merged group identity form the *Beur* community in France. They are the “problem” that France is facing. They are also the future of France.

In order to arrive at a more complete understanding of this *Beur* identity from their own perspective, this study examines several key aspects highlighted in the literature, interviews, films, and other various sources. First I examine *Beurs* in the context of religion, particularly Islam within the French political and social context. Next, I discuss the concept of the French identity, comparing and contrasting that with expectations and realizations of this identity among the *Beurs*. Then, the thesis delves into the issues of immigration, immigrant (and their descendents’) self-perception, riots as a form of response to exclusion, and music and sub-culture

identity. The thesis then looks at efforts at change, before concluding with a discussion of possibilities of hope and future and the concept of identity as a whole, in light of this study on the *Beurs*. By focusing on different important aspects of and reasons behind the *Beur* identity, I then summarize and provide a more complete understanding of their identity and self-perception of that identity.

1.1.3 ISSUES OF “HOSPITALITY” IN IMMIGRANT-RELATED RESEARCH

Hospitality is an important issue addressed in much of the literature on immigration. Hospitality has been a longstanding value of French culture, as in many other cultures world-wide, but in France it has come into conflict with racism and the blame of North African immigrants for recent issues of unemployment, poverty, crime, and terrorism in France. Tahar Ben Jelloun argues that with the new exclusion of immigrants, beginning in the 1970's and 1980's, a culture of violence and racism arose in France, a previously hospitable country. He documents many violent acts committed towards North Africans during the 1980's. Ben Jelloun relies on focus groups and participant observation, as a Moroccan immigrant himself, to understand the racism and violence from a French perspective. Ben Jelloun argues in defense of historical France, “It is scarcely a paradox to say that racism in France is simultaneously deep and superficial. It has roots and a tradition in time, but not in the theories of the prevailing culture.”³³ That is to say, France is ideologically a historically hospitable country, but in reality the people and the society is often racist and exclusivist.

³³ Ben Jelloun, p52

While Ben Jelloun describes a disappearing hospitality, Judith Still defines hospitality as “a form of the gift that involves the temporary sharing of space, and the issue of temporality is critical.”³⁴ A host brings an outsider into a personal space for a limited amount of time, in a non-reciprocal relationship.³⁵ Still argues that hospitality is a false memory, a “utopia,” an idea that exists in the realm of possibilities but will never exist in its pure form. She re-examines the situation of Algerian immigrants in France, what others have argued to be a non-reciprocal hospitable relationship on the part of the French. She points out the equivalent “hospitality” of the Algerians when France entered Algeria as a colonial power. In recent decades, Algerians have entered into France, due to a post-colonial relationship in which there is an underlying expectation that France “owes” something to Algeria because of the colonial history. The Algerians immigrated to France as workers and became integral, though not integrated, members of French society.³⁶

1.1.4 RELIGION, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS IN FRANCE

Widespread literature addresses the ideas of exclusion and redefinition of French citizenship. Scholars, including Jugé and Perez, Noiriel, Laurence, and Freedman, agree that exclusion underlies the concept of modern French citizenship. Tony Jugé and Michael Perez argue that French citizenship has been redefined in a neocolonial fashion. “Whiteness” or a European

³⁴ Still, Judith. "France and the Paradigm of Hospitality." *Routledge* (2006): 703-710. [Academic Search Premier](#). Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008. p703

³⁵ Still, p704

³⁶ Still, p710

identity now defines citizenship in France, in contrast to a concept of “otherness,” or a non-European, non-white culture, religion, or identity. To be French requires conformity to the “sameness” of the prevailing culture, erasing a past that identifies one with that “other” foreign history and identity.³⁷ Citizenship has become more exclusive, giving rights only by blood or soil, to children of French citizens, based on strict specifications of birth in France, age, and parents’ birth location.³⁸

Many scholars agree that the primary barrier to integration of “foreign” immigrants into France is the idea of *laïcité* and the rules and attitudes surrounding citizenship in France. *Laïcité* is the notion of a unified secular national identity.³⁹ Each French citizen is expected to recognize first his or her French identity. Then, he or she can participate in other cultural, historical, and religious groups, seeking individual identity in these affiliations.⁴⁰ A main problem believed to prevent integration of immigrants is the concept that secularism entails equality through sameness.⁴¹ This involves the absence of, or ignoring of, all primary cultural, ethnic, and religious divisions in society, and is personified in the French school system.⁴²

French national security studies expert Jane Freedman claims that Islam is not compatible with *laïcité* and French individualistic secularism.⁴³ Scott agrees that if this demand for *laïcité* and secular individualism remains a requirement for integration and acceptance, Muslims who put their religious community, religious law and culture above the culture, laws, and especially individual secular identity of France cannot assimilate into the French nation.⁴⁴ If the French

³⁷ Jugé, p188

³⁸ Noiriel, 2002, p23; Jugé, p201

³⁹ Freedman, 2004, p10

⁴⁰ Scott

⁴¹ Jugé, p199

⁴² Freedman, 2004, p10; Noiriel, 1992, p91

⁴³ Freedman, 2004

⁴⁴ Scott

government wants to address the alleged problems caused by a large Muslim immigrant population, Scott argues that the government must work to integrate particularly the youth into the nation. They have little connection with their parents' countries and often are not "French" as defined by the French idea of citizenship and identity. Freedman argues that France must give these immigrant youth equal opportunities and reasons to be proud of their French identity, rather than alienate them from both their parent's home countries and the country in which they now live.⁴⁵

Others, including government officials and renowned European and American scholars, warn that this increase in Muslim population will change France and Europe into a "Eurabia," turning European civilization into an Islamized society.⁴⁶ Martin Walker acknowledges that the Muslim immigrant population is growing in Europe, but claims that Muslims are still a relatively small and diverse minority in Europe, only about 5% of the population. He asserts that only a very small proportion of these Muslims pose any problem to Europe.⁴⁷ He states that Europe has two options in regards to those who do cause problems: "assimilation or apartheid." Here it is interesting to note that once again immigrants are seen as "problems," rather than contributing members of society, participating in necessary ways, doing jobs that others often prefer not to do, and contributing to the culture and the progress of the nation. Walker argues that Europe has to integrate Islam into the political and social system in order to regulate the "problem groups" within Islamic society and assimilate Muslim immigrants.⁴⁸ Laurence states that with the

⁴⁵ Freedman, 2004

⁴⁶ Walker, Martin. "Europe's Mosque Hysteria." Wilson Quarterly 30.2 (2006): 14-22. Academic Search Premier. Pittsburgh. 27 Jan. 2008. p14

⁴⁷ Walker, p18

⁴⁸ Walker, p20

creation of the French Council of the Muslim Religion, in 1999, the French government both attempted to reduce foreign influence on French Muslims and to incorporate the Muslim population permanently into the French nation and government.⁴⁹

This leads to questions about the role of government policy in the development of the identity of the Muslim immigrant youth in France. These youth are struggling within a pre-conceived identity passed on from the political context of their presence in France, the history of their parents, and the perceptions of French nationals, to develop their own new Muslim French identity. The French government's attitude and exclusive policies toward immigrants have led to a rise in civil violence and growing feelings of alienation among the immigrant youth population. These youth are then finding an identity in Islam, some in Islamic extremism.⁵⁰

France, since the revolution (1789-99), has been a country that provides freedom *from* religion, or freedom to live in a secular state and not be oppressed by the outward effects of religion in the public sphere.⁵¹ However, this has come into conflict with the public aspects of religion, such as the wearing of the Muslim *hijab* or the Jewish yarmulke, prayer in schools, and observance of religious holy days. For this reason, immigrants, particularly those who are different from the Catholic or secular norms within France, are faced with stigmatization and problems within French society. This could lead to resistance, questioning of identity, and redefining of identities by immigrant youth within French culture.

⁴⁹ Laurence

⁵⁰ Ben Jelloun, 1997

⁵¹ Cesari, Jocelyne. *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*. New York:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

1.2 ANALYTICAL TOOLS AND RESEARCH METHODS

My focus is on the *Beur* youth's perception of their own identities, while examining various factors influencing the development of their identities, such as citizenship, age, gender, education, social status, Islam, national attitudes and policy, and numerous other contributing factors. My methods involved studies of the relevant literature on the topic, personal interviews, analyses of films made by or about this population, and French and Arabic rap songs written and sung by Muslim or *Beur* artists. I was a participant observer in Southern France during a yearlong study abroad at SciencesPo (*l'Institut d'études politiques*) in Menton, in the Provence-Alps-Cote D'Azur region. Particular incidents in this observation included celebrating Eid el-Kabeer at the mosque near Nice with Muslim students from Sciences Po University and Muslims from throughout the region. I also attended a protest for Gaza by mostly Muslim immigrants and Franco-Muslim youth in Nice that turned into riots. I met many Moroccan and Algerian immigrants or descendants of immigrants in the region and spoke with them in casual conversations or observed various life situations in which they participated.

I conducted six interviews of Arab-Muslim immigrant or second and third generation immigrant youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty who are students at Sciences Po University, branch campus for Middle Eastern Studies. All interviews were conducted in French during the spring of 2009, and all quotes from interviews in this paper are translated by me from the original interview transcripts. I do not use any names in the paper, but rather refer to them by number, because of Internal Review Board requirements to protect the privacy of the interviewees, since their interviews contain private information about their lives. They are first, second, and third generation immigrants, of Egyptian, Moroccan, Tunisian, and Algerian descent. They all grew up in *banlieues* or poor city neighborhoods in France, particularly in

Paris, Marseille, and Perpignan. While representative of the *Beur* culture, history, and identity, they also represent the uniqueness of each individual *Beur* story.

In terms of the population with whom I interacted, observed, and interviewed, it was a very select population not representative of all of France, and especially not all representative of the central Parisian region. Despite a majority of research which focuses exclusively on the Parisian *banlieue* region, *Beur* culture and *banlieue* identities is a much more widespread phenomenon throughout France. I was in the southeast corner of France. The students whom I interviewed were not at all representative of the young Arab Muslims of France.⁵² These were students at SciencesPo, an elite school for political science in France, at a branch campus for Middle Eastern and Mediterranean studies. Therefore, they were far more educated than the average young Arab Muslims in France, particularly on topics such as their history in France, Middle Eastern and Arab history and politics in general, and legal background surrounding, for example, the headscarf affairs or the riots. However, they do come from these communities of young Arab Muslim immigrants in France, and in a way are the voice of these immigrants in the French community. They have lived in these *banlieues* and speak from their own and others' first-hand experiences. I also will be using examples from *Beur* cinema and other key films that apply. The films are important forms of expression by and about this population, yet the films have an agenda. They are not reality, though they were created to represent a reality and a phenomenon. They are performances by actors, but they are very important contributions to the field of *Beur* identity. This research is not representative of youth everywhere, or of Islam as a whole. The sample is not representative, but it is illustrative of interesting trends among this community in France.

⁵² Included: 2 students from Perpignan, 1 from Marseille, 3 from suburbs/*banlieues* of Paris

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This research will look at who “*Beur* youth” are, how they are perceived by French society, and most importantly, how they view themselves in regards to French society. While many works have studied policy and the history around these youth, very little research has been done on the youth themselves, and their role in the recent events in France from their own perspectives. As debates continue surrounding policy affecting *Beur* youth, and unemployment and violence continues to plague their neighborhoods, questions can be asked directly to these youth. In what ways are these youth influenced by and participating in French culture, and simultaneously how are they creating their own unique culture within France? What affects do their parents’ heritage, culture, and religion have on the youth? Are many of the youth embracing Islam because of influence from their families or due to other causes, such as estrangement from French society or financial difficulties? How actively do they practice their religion? What motivates them? Are they frustrated with life, or are they eagerly pursuing careers, goals, and education? How do the youth, particularly girls, feel about the *hijab* controversy? How do both the males and females feel about the violence among their peers in recent years? What are their attitudes toward the French government?

This research addresses the Muslim immigrant youth’s perception of and role in changing and affecting their destiny in France, as citizens of France with voting rights and as a growing minority that is changing the demographics of France. They are also crucial politically as young Muslims in a time when Muslims in many parts of the West are suspected of terrorism, accused of social disturbance, and suspected of illegal behavior. These youth can affect the perception of Muslims in France and throughout Europe, and by studying their identity, the reasons behind their feelings of anger, hatred, and disillusionment can be revealed, so that these feelings that

lead to expressions of violence can be changed and situations and lives improved throughout France and in other similar minority communities elsewhere.

2.0 SETTING THE STAGE: A HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

One Friday afternoon in January, 2009, a peaceful protest for Palestine taking place in Nice, France, broke up and transformed into riots on the main streets. I participated in the protest, along with a number of other students from Sciences Po campus for Middle Eastern Studies. The group, predominately of Arab and Muslim origins, gathered in central Nice and marched *en masse* through the main streets for over an hour, united with other groups marching in major cities throughout all of France that day. People carried flags and banners supporting Palestine, protesting injustice and violence in Israel. It was a formally organized protest, carried out by citizens and residents of France who were expressing their right to free speech. But when the march ended and the speeches and chanting was over, when the masses were dispersing, not everyone left as instructed by police. A large group of youth, mostly *Beurs* from the poor suburbs around Nice, remained to confront the riot police who followed and surrounded the protest.

What began as a legal march for justice quickly turned into a disorganized mob of youth turning over cars, breaking windows, destroying storefront displays, and running angrily to challenge uniformed police decked in full riot gear, including helmets and shields. Police shot teargas into the crowds, until the air was thick with the burning smog. People ran up and down the street, groups running away from the police with tears streaming down their faces from the teargas, while other people rushed toward the police, to see what was happening and get in on

the action. I watched this scene from inside the locked-down store “Pimkie” on the *Rue Jean-Medicine*, the main shopping avenue through Nice. When the crowds finally dispersed and the chaos ended, the police and city workers quickly cleaned up the trashed streets, and within hours everything had returned to normal, as if nothing had happened that afternoon.

2.1 RIOTS 2005 TO PRESENT: THE *BEUR* RESPONSE

The *Beurs* are tied by common roots in the Middle East and North Africa, the Arab ethnicity, and historic Muslim religious affiliations. The youth I saw rioting in Nice were manifesting an interesting blend of support for Palestine and identification with their roots and Arab-Muslim “brothers” in Palestine while exhibiting their own anger and dissatisfaction from within the French system with desire to overturn the system and attack the police of Nice, symbols of the French government and policies.

The situation of the *banlieues* has led to much despair, hopelessness, and anger. A series of problems including unemployment, poverty, discrimination, poor education inflicts the youth of the *banlieues*. Anger caused by other problems is often taken out on police, symbols of France, of the government, of power that restricts and controls and impedes the lives of these youth. This was evident in the riots I witnessed in Nice, where youth took out anger on local police about Palestine, and the situation of Arabs whether in France or Israel or around the world, and anger and frustration from numerous other life factors, even though these local police had no direct involvement with Israel and Palestine issues but were simply carrying out their daily job in France. The riots of 2005 reflect the repercussions of this on a grander scale,

sparked when two *Beur* youth died in a suburb of Paris, believed to be victims of French police racial aggression and violence. One youth I interviewed recounts:

“I lived in the center of the action...I saw how it happened, I was there...they were victims of discrimination, of jobs they couldn’t access. As soon as teachers get their diplomas, they send them to the *banlieues* to test them. The teachers never have experience.”⁵³

These youth were rioting against disadvantaged, unfair conditions in their lives and communities. They live in a country where they are guaranteed equal rights, but they observe discrimination and open inequality in their treatment, education, and living situations. Another youth I interviewed, who is part of the Muslim Arab population from a poor urban community in the south of France and who therefore did not grow up in one of the *banlieues* around Paris, explains his understanding of the causes of the riots. He depicts them as the failure of an old temporary system that was not meant to last and has crumbled around those forgotten inside of it.

“It is failure. It is not the first failure, but it is the failure of the French policy vis-à-vis the youth who live in the *banlieues*. In the 60’s and 70’s the French constructed these *banlieues* to house the immigrant laborers. They brought their families, but they thought it wouldn’t last...This new population that arrived, they didn’t know where to lodge them, so they constructed these banlieues. City projects after city projects. This is what the *banlieues* are. The French said that it’s temporary, that they will find elsewhere for the long-term. At the beginning, it was only Arabs and Blacks, completely excluded from everything. It was like the Black Ghettos in the United States. Leave it, let it boil, it comes together, and voila, here is what has happened. These riots [in 2005] are not the first riots. This has been going on for a long time. Complete integration is necessary... In a ghetto, one is discriminated against. It’s the principle of the American ghetto: it accumulates... discrimination, lack of integration, lack of work. The first generation, when they are not French, then we must talk about integration. But we are French. The state must not forget its children...neglect causes problems.... It is necessary to understand the problems of these youth. There are also those who do their studies, but they are still discriminated against: discrimination of address, of name, of color....they aren’t given a chance. In

⁵³ Interview 1

certain banlieues, the unemployment is 40%. The riots of 2005 were predictable. It is not a surprise; it's a consequence."⁵⁴

He is comparing the *banlieues* to the American ghettos and years of racial and social discrimination notorious in the United States. As a student of Sciences Po, one of the elite “*Grandes Ecoles*” of France, which produces many of the francophone world’s leading politicians, he is more educated than the average *Beur*, and so he is making a comparison for me as an American to help me understand their situation. His analogy is very important, of a ghetto phenomenon that is occurring in France, resulting from years of labor migration associated to colonization, though not from slavery as in the U.S. When the years of labor are over, the discrimination and stigmas still exist. The riots were a reaction to this discrimination, to the racial stigmas and social exclusion of the *Beurs* in France. They were a reaction to neglect and failure.

In the midst of the riots, youth were discriminated because of their religion. Already angry at discrimination of Muslims in France, many were particularly sensitive to and reacted more strongly to what were considered targets of Islam during the riots. Islam is not the source of the problems, according to the *Beurs*, and many were angered at French fear and targeting of Islam at this time. According to one interviewee,

“I have a friend who, during the riots, was at the mosque praying. The police arrived, and believing that the youth had an organization in the mosque, threw smoke bombs into the mosques to force out the people inside. The police bombarded them with teargas.”⁵⁵

By rioting against the French police and the French system, the youth from the *banlieues* were placing the blame for their conditions and their problems on the French people and

⁵⁴ Interview 2

⁵⁵ Interview 1

government. The riots were carried out as a reaction to what they perceived as abuse, discrimination and inequality. They were physical, violent demands for rights and equality, justice and social acceptance.

“The youth feel cornered. Subtle violence transforms into direct violence. It is largely because of France, problems in French society. The riots are an example for those who don’t like foreigners. For me, this comes from the French society.”⁵⁶

Again and again these youth accuse ethnic French of self-contradiction. They are demanding equality and recognition. Their parents and their grandparents were not heard, so now they are using new methods, methods that attract the attention of the media, of the French government, and of the world.

“I was there. I participated. Near Paris. What do I think about it? It’s a pity. But we can’t hide the reality, and there is a problem in France. France does not recognize her children...the Muslims, the others...and the Muslims of France who feel imprisoned in France. When they return to Algeria, etc, they are considered miniature French people, but in France, they are considered foreigners. There are social, economic, and other difficulties. A Turk with a Senegalese, with an Algerian, all in the same building. There is no work. Human equality does not exist in France. France is a very beautiful country...But these youths are excluded. They can’t participate in this system. It was not just Muslims. Those who revolted are those who no longer believe in France, in the Vote. It’s to show that we exist, because you feel like you don’t exist. When you break something or you burn... you show that you exist. Even better, you throw the stone, you yell ‘Allah u Akbar’ (God is the Greatest). I didn’t throw stones. I participated in the mosques. Instead of revolting, we said to go vote. You want to hurt things.....”⁵⁷

While riots are a condemned means of demanding attention, they effectively accomplished at least one of the goals of the rioters: the world heard and saw. People woke up to the reality of the problems around French cities. France is known for its beautiful language,

⁵⁶ Interview 4

⁵⁷ Interview 6

classy lifestyle and perfect fashion. This was a wakeup call to the realities behind the show, underneath the class and style, hidden away in projects outside the cities.

“This showed that there is a huge problem in France. It showed the world that France is not just the Eiffel Tower and the Champs Elysees. France has problems...has blacks, and has Arabs. It showed that France has problems, and it must deal with them. A serious internal problem is coming to France...it is the young French of tomorrow. I’m afraid for France. The power struggle will be in our favor if France continues like this.”⁵⁸

This interviewee is prophesying a bad future if France does not address the underlying issues. Whole generations of discontented, underprivileged youth are growing up in the margins of French society. This struggle in the riots is one between government and under-represented youth. It’s a battle, a revolt by the youth against the system, the police, the government, anyone they can hold responsible for their situation:

“The political question: it’s...always the same problem. We are not represented. They [*Beurs*] are less engaged than other French people are. They don’t vote as much as others...Sarkozy said harsh words... “*racailles*” [called them scum]. He is not welcome in these areas.”⁵⁹

The *Beurs* have given up on working through the system, on voting in French elections. Instead they became politically disengaged, but physically, violently engaged. They are frustrated, and they are tired of waiting for change. BBC News interviewed some residents of the banlieues around the time of the 2005 riots. One Algerian man, Ahmed Belmokhtar, a taxi driver, stated:

“My parents came from Algeria and could not read or write, so they could only do menial jobs. But the kids now don’t want to suffer like their parents and grandparents did. The state is being tough at the moment but later it will have to listen. In the long-term, these riots will force the government to act. Otherwise,

⁵⁸ Interview 6

⁵⁹ Interview 2

the next round of violence will be even worse. The police are very rude – they don't understand our problem.”⁶⁰

The police and government could work with people inside the *banlieues* for change, or they can all continue to work against each other, escalating the conflict that already has been breeding in the *banlieues* for decades. Mehmet Altun, a fifteen-year-old from the *banlieue* stated to a BBC reporter that,

“The police come and hassle us all the time. They ask us for our papers ten times a day. They treat us like delinquents – especially [Interior Minister at the time, Nicolas] Sarkozy. That's not the answer. It would be good to have youth clubs and other places to go – then there would be less trouble. It's not good to burn cars but that's one way of getting attention, so people can come and solve our problems.”⁶¹

In this quote, Mehmet speaks of “people” solving “our problems.” While this might be a necessary factor for lasting improvement, it also shows a placing of responsibility on others, on those outside of the *banlieue*. While many of the causes stem from problems and mistreatment from France and other outside sources, an interior sense of responsibility to the *banlieue* by the *banlieuesards* themselves could start the process of change. The victimized feelings of those in the *banlieue* have escalated the problems. Bilal, a twenty-nine-year-old (*Beur*) civil servant discussed with a BBC reporter the inequalities even in government jobs:

“Even in the civil service, we are victimized. We have to work twice as hard as white French people. That's the problem with France – institutional racism. I don't approve of the violence but it's the only way of sounding the alarm. We demand equality of opportunity. The police did nothing to stop those kids

⁶⁰ "In Pictures: Paris Riot Suburb Residents." *BBC News*. 2005. Web. 12 Oct. 2009.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/europe_paris_riot_suburb_residents/html/1.stm>.

⁶¹ BBC In Pictures

running 1,000 meters to their deaths at an electricity sub-station. If they want peace, we need justice. Respect must be mutual.”⁶²

The *Beurs* have been victims, but self-empowerment will help to move them out of this cycle of victimization. Efforts at self-empowerment are beginning as individuals and groups struggle for change in the *banlieues* and in French society as a whole.

2.2 ISLAM

Islam is a very important facet of the *Beur* identity. While not all *Beur* youth are Muslim, more and more of these youths are practicing Islam or reviving the Islam of their parents and grandparents in new, modern, and often more conservative ways. All the youth whom I interviewed were practicing Muslims. They were raised Muslim but chose for themselves how they would express Islam in their lives. None of the females wore the headscarf though, which is an interesting note in respect to the headscarf affairs and their thoughts on these affairs which will be discussed in the following sections.

One of the major prejudices toward the *Beurs* in France is regarding Islam, particularly since 9/11 and other major terrorist attacks in the last decades. Muslims are feared as terrorists, or seen as a threat to France, to *laïcité* [secularism], and to the French national identity. Some of the interviewees commented on France’s perception of Islam and of them as Muslims. This first interviewee talks about the very common issue of Islam being confused with terrorism. Many Muslims have been upset by this phenomenon, as individuals have been harassed for the

⁶² BBC In Pictures

misconception presented by the media and lack of education leading to stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists. He points out a lack of education or knowledge about Islam in the general population, which mixed with anger, racism, historical conflicts, and prejudices, can lead to many problems for the Muslims of France. Even though France has a council on Islam, a council of Muslims who work in the political sphere, it is not well-known and has little influence in the actual Muslim community.

“Since September 11, there is a lot of confusion between Islam and terrorism, from the bad image of the media. People are afraid of Islam, because of the media, the state, the new press... It stigmatizes the [whole Muslim] community... Islam is misrepresented. There is the French Council of the Muslim Religion, but it is poorly organized, and even the Muslims don't know that it exists.”⁶³

From the opposite perspective, some remarked on France's tolerance in comparison to the Muslim countries from which they originate. While France has had many problems with Muslims and does not necessarily live up to the French Republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, some Muslims do acknowledge that they are, by comparison, far more free and have many more religious rights in France than elsewhere, even their countries of origin.

“For me, personally, it's weird that everyone doesn't agree with me, but I find that France is incredibly tolerant. In France, we have more rights than in Tunisia. As for the headscarf, even in Tunisia you can't enter the university with a headscarf on. There's more understanding on the part of people, but also prejudices. In the *banlieue* there is a big Muslim population, so you don't have to explain what Islam is. But when you leave the *banlieue*, they don't know what Islam is, and not everyone makes the distinction between Islam and terrorist.”⁶⁴

Here she notes the Headscarf Affairs, pointing out that while France may be seen as unreasonable in this, other countries, including the Muslim country of Tunisia is far stricter and

⁶³ Interview 2

⁶⁴ Interview 1

less accommodating of religious requirements. Yet again, she notes a lack of education in the general French population, which has led time and again to fear and prejudices associated with these fears. Another points out that France's secularism really facilitates Muslims' practice of their religion.

“France is unbelieving. So they are all tolerant. They don't believe anything, so you can believe what you want. As for the holidays, it's more cultural....for all the Catholic holidays, it's a cultural thing that is integrated into the culture. There is of course the debate about missing school for Muslim holidays.”⁶⁵

While there are cultural issues regarding religious holidays and religious clothing, France's secularism and a general spiritual apathy in the population of the *français de souche* enable Muslims to believe and practice Islam as they wish. Yet although France may be tolerant of the private practice of various religions, many Muslims think that Islam is treated as inferior in the French system. In this way, France upholds its value of liberty but not equality. For example, “French television is required to air a program each Sunday for each religion. Islam is given a half hour at 6:30 am, while Christianity is given 2 hours or more...”⁶⁶ This is an opportunity for the French government to be educating people about Islam, but instead they are putting the programs about Islam at a time when no one will watch them. Again, France shows an upholding of liberty in allowing the airing of Muslim programs, but equality is undermined in the discrepancy between Islam and Catholicism. In a similar way, everyone has freedom to express themselves through music, but *Beur* rap is not aired on the public radio stations in the same way that other more mainstream French music is played. Laws exist regarding how much of the music played on the radio must be with French lyrics, making certain *Beur* music with Arabic and *verlan* lyrics not acceptable. There are issues as well of censorship of certain *Beur*

⁶⁵ Interview 5

⁶⁶ Interview 3

music and frequenting of police and security at these rap performances in a way that could be interpreted as discrimination.

Concerning the French state's position regarding religion, interviewee number 4 says, "There, too, there are problems, because in fact France has at the base a goal to be secular and all that... Not knowing how to be a secular country, they bash everything religious."⁶⁷ Many of the Muslims in France, although given more freedom in France than elsewhere, are upset by the French secularism. They see it as an attempt to destroy religion, and therefore a threat to their own freedom of religion. Another youth I interviewed was passionately against France's policies regarding religion. Yet his response shows a contradiction even within his own beliefs:

"France refuses to recognize Islam as the second religion of France. France is ashamed to say it, and the biggest ramification will be for France. They are always considered Muslims of France, not French Muslims. These are people who knew their countries of origin, but now they know nothing but France. They are children of France. Jews are now French. The Muslims must be known as French Muslims. I am against this system. I am for the secularism as a French Muslim myself, because it permits me as a Muslim to practice my religion in France. But as a Muslim I am against this secularism. But I must obey the laws. As I chose to live in this non-Muslim country, I must obey. I must move if I want a Muslim country. I am in France for other reasons as well."⁶⁸

He shows a conflict within his identity as both Muslim and French. While politically agreeing with the system, he disagrees on an ideological, even spiritual level. He admits that the system of secularism works and is fairer than many Muslim countries. However, for himself he desires a more religious state. This is a conflict that must be addressed when a group of people transition from a religious state to a secular state. These immigrants are forced to undergo a change in identity in order to become a part of the new secular system, at the same time that they are possibly able to more freely practice their religion and express their traditional religious

⁶⁷ Interview 4

⁶⁸ Interview 6

identity in this way. It is a question of tolerance from both sides: the French towards Islam, and the Muslims toward the secular state of France. France may not be demonstrating equality in regards to Islam, but is equality what the Muslims themselves desire? To what extent does this true (and secular) equality fit within the confines of Islam? Some would differ in their responses to this question.

Interviewee 6 has also acknowledged the immigrant's position as a sort of guest, or at least someone who has moved, by choice, into a system and republic that was already existent, with set laws, traditions, and values. The reasons to come, for him or his relatives, out-weighed the negative aspects. They are not in their former homes and must, to a certain extent, accept the system into which they have come. While they can fight for change, they ultimately have to accept and obey the laws of the country in which they now live. This includes laws regarding religion, culture, lifestyle, and education.

Yet many youth of the current generation are rebelling against the system. Many of their parents or grandparents chose to come, not the youth themselves. Or they came and were unable to return. Some have rebelled through the riots and social violence, through peaceful forms of protest, through their own individual success in spite of the system, or through failure. The rebellious youth that incite the most fear and pose the greatest future problems to France are those who are taken in by religious extremism and get involved with terrorism. While this is a small minority of the youth in the *banlieue*, there is a need to be pro-active to prevent growing hatred and extremism in this community.

Many factors cause some youth to get involved with extreme forms of Islam. One young man I interviewed explained some of the causes and possible ways to curb this process:

“Some youths who go there [to certain mosques] find themselves manipulated and enter into terrorism. They [France] leave the mosques alone, they [France] don't

know who is leading them, and it's for this reason that we have problems of terrorism, of bad influences. It's the problem of imam's who come from outside, who don't speak French who are the bad influences. French imams are necessary, but not like those now who don't know Islam. We must build buildings, educate the imams, and supervise the mosques and then you will have good Islam, without these problems."⁶⁹

Neglect in addition to prejudices and stigmas are major factors that could push youth in this direction. Not only are their religious institutions, the breeding grounds for thought and ideological and identity formation, left neglected for outsiders to influence the youth, but the *banlieues*, the schools, the entire lives of these *Beur* youth are neglected by France, leaving others to mold and influence their identity.

The question of Islam, and the Muslim identity expressed outwardly came into question in France with the Headscarf Affair. Many saw the Headscarf Affair as offensive. They argued that it was in contradiction to French values and previous laws of the Republic. They say it contradicts their freedom of expression, a right upheld within France. "To wear a headscarf is part of freedom of expression. So I find this law against the wearing of the Muslim headscarf to contradict freedom of expression."⁷⁰ Here are some other thoughts on this affair from the perspective of a male Franco Algerian student:

"I felt insulted both as a Muslim and as a French person by the Headscarf Affair. Secularism permits me to live according to my religion. But this law does not permit me, and particularly my sister, to live according to her religion. I feel insulted by this law, because France is not respecting her own values: freedom of choice, freedom of religion. Muslim women who make the choice to wear the headscarf must be able to do it. I myself put something on my head and the principal told me to remove it. A youth from my school ran naked in the school...and the principal laughed. The people who say that it's the mark of submission...as for me, I'm against obliging a woman to wear a headscarf. But a woman who chooses to wear a headscarf, she has the right. If it's her choice, I

⁶⁹ Interview 2

⁷⁰ Interview 5

will accept it. I feel insulted by this law as a Muslim, as a French citizen, and above all, as a French Muslim. I am against it.”⁷¹

Here he illustrates the contradiction he sees in France through a story of his own actions and the repercussions. He makes the politically correct disclaimer that he would never oblige a woman to wear a headscarf as a sign of submission. Yet in being insulted by the law as a Muslim, he to a certain extent supports the wearing of the headscarf by women as a sign of Islam and of, at the very least, submission to God regardless of gender issues.

A female student from a suburb of Paris whom I interviewed, however, looked at the issue from the French point of view and understood the French perspective, even if she did not agree with it. “I find the law about the headscarf understandable. It’s very difficult for a Muslim...but I can understand what they want to do.”⁷² She is looking at the issue from outside her own perspective, trying to understand how France perceives Muslims. As a Muslim herself she finds it difficult to get beyond what she believes, but in doing so she is gaining understanding of France’s side of the conflict. By attempting to understand the issue from both perspectives, agreements can be made and the issues can be addressed with the goal of working together for improvement and positive change.

One female *Beur* explained that, while the headscarf is clearly an issue in France, it could be addressed in a different manner. The method of addressing it by schools and the French government has exacerbated the problem instead of fixing it.

“I understand that you can say that the headscarf is a sign that can cause disturbances at school. We focus on the headscarf, and now the headscarf has become something that brings fear, and this is not permissible. I am against the law. Instead of forbidding the headscarf, it’s better to make a religiously open-

⁷¹ Interview 6

⁷² Interview 1

minded class and to talk about why you wear a headscarf or a cross. But it has all become negative.”⁷³

A major issue is the definition of equality and secularism. Does equality mean uniformity or does it mean access to the same rights? Also, secularism, or the French term *laïcité* is a key term. Does this secularism require uniform (secular) behavior in society or is it an allowance to do as one pleases? Is it a requirement of sameness so as not to offend by differences, or is it allowance to be different as one pleases in a world with secular liberties? One youth of Egyptian origins whom I interviewed showed the conflict in the expression and enforcement of secularism. When carried to its full extreme, it requires either a strict enforcement or a total laxness of standards to provide equality and secular freedoms for all.

“It [the headscarf law] is bullshit....In real life, it’s not because you have a headscarf that you will be different. Either they go the whole way and impose school uniforms, or they allow the headscarf. It’s not efficacious. Their goal is to get rid of differences, but they’re not going to do that [with this law].”⁷⁴

Another claims that the headscarf issue is a new debate that has come to light since recent terrorist attacks, but that laws against headscarves in schools go against fundamental French values in addition to previous laws that provide for freedom of expression. While *laïcité* in France is enforcing secularism, though, it is enforcing public secularism. People are still free to practice religion as they choose in private. In this response, the interviewee is explaining different forms of secularism, defining the secularism of France as “active” secularism versus neutral secularism, a state secularism that directly regulates and involves itself in people’s lives.

“The headscarf affair is a ridiculous debate. In schools, this debate didn’t exist before. Since September 11, it’s fear. It’s the idea that the headscarf restricts the rights of women. It’s her choice. It’s her choice to wear what she wants. In

⁷³ Interview 4

⁷⁴ Interview 3

France, we make secularism active. Normally, secularism is neutrality, but here it's not neutrality. It's a pretext. It doesn't upset me that there's a law like this. If we have a law like this, then the girls must obey the law. For me, the law is made, and we must respect it. Yet the law contradicts the 1905 law about separation of church and state. The state doesn't intervene in religion. We don't have the right to express religion publicly. Religion is private. This is active secularism. It is legal to wear the headscarf, but not at school and certain other places. For those who put this law in place, one doesn't have the right to express religion except in private. At school, they see the wearing of headscarves as a religious influence, and they don't want that. It's a point of view."⁷⁵

Secularism is normally defined by a lack of intervention, a separation between state and religion. In France, regarding Islam, France has directly involved itself in religious issues in order to promote secularism, to actively and artificially create a secular environment.

2.3 IMMIGRANT CULTURE AND FRENCH IDENTITY AMONG *BEURS*

As immigrants and descendants of immigrants, there is a division between the *Beurs* and the *français de souche* [the French phrase referring to historically French citizens, of French roots, in contrast to the new descendents of immigrants within France]. The *Beurs* feel like they are seen according to certain stereotypes as immigrants and outsiders in French society, while they stereotype various groups within the French *de souche* society. It is a division of insider versus outsider, of foreign versus native. As immigrants or "outsiders", these *Beurs* hold a unique status within French society and face particular life challenges unknown to the general French population. However, in recent decades the *Beurs* are increasingly blending into a wider

⁷⁵ Interview 2

population of immigrants and French minorities. *Beurs* are just one sub-group, one minority among many “outsiders” in French *banlieues*. While their history and particular relationship with France is unique, they are also part of a much larger organism of racial relations, sub-cultures, and minority issues in France, particularly rising from *banlieues* of major French cities.

These young *Beurs* perceive the *français de souche*, according to four general, broad categories, in terms of how these French regard them. As explained to me in my interviews, there are genuine French: true friends, not racist, truly accepting of their Arab classmates, friends, colleagues, etc. Second, some French are artificial or fake: they are nice but not genuine, accepting of Arabs in public but racist and often hateful in private and among themselves. Third is the group that openly dislikes Arabs. This includes many members of the extreme right political party, the “National Front,” or FN, known for its open racism and stereotyping of the Arab immigrant. Lastly, a few *français de souche* actually live in the *banlieues* among the immigrant and minority population. In spite of their traditional roots in France, they face stigmas because of their location and social status. Because of this, they are often grouped with the minorities, face similar issues, and relate to and even consider themselves at times a part of this group. This is shown in the film “Tea in the Harem of Archimedes.” The main characters are a French boy and a boy of Algerian descent who grew up together in a *banlieue* in similar low-class social circumstances. What began as housing projects for immigrants and their families has become a mix of many varieties of immigrants as well as poor underprivileged French, such as the character Patrick in this film. “There is also stigmatization of

*banlieuesards*⁷⁶, those who come from the banlieues, more than Muslims. Even a native French person who comes from the *banlieue* is seen poorly.”⁷⁷

Immigrants in general are stigmatized and treated as foreigners and sub par in the French community. They live challenging lives, as they struggle to learn a new language, start from scratch to earn a living, and make a home for themselves in a completely new place. Immigrants and their descendants often feel detached from their community, cut off from the mainstream culture. They are “different” and their lives tell a story that is very different from the “typical” French story. One young man I interviewed has a particularly interesting personal history: the classic story of immigration, yet an interesting and unique individual story:

“My grandfather came to France in the 60’s after the 1962 war for independence in Algeria. After, he worked as a mason. Most of the immigrants came to France to build France. France needed laborers: to construct buildings, bridges; in brief, because the French didn’t want to do these jobs. My grandmother came several years later. At first, the men came alone. She was already married [when he went]...they had married very young.

My grandma adopted me to bring me to France when I was ten, because of the problems in Algeria. I wasn’t doing well in school and my parents were worried about me, so my Grandma brought me to France, and my parents came a year later. My mother had French citizenship and wanted to live in France. My dad came later when he got his papers, and I left my Grandma to go live with my parents.”⁷⁸

The childhood of an immigrant can be difficult and involve personal and family struggles that most children do not deal with this early in life. Immigration often involves family separation and leaving behind of loved ones. This is depicted in the heart-wrenching opening scene of the film *Inch’Allah Dimanche* (Sunday, God willing.) An Algerian immigrant’s mother, wife and children are leaving their country, their home and their family to take a boat across the

⁷⁶ Slang term referring to those who come from the poor *banlieue* neighborhoods in France

⁷⁷ Interview 2

⁷⁸ Interview 2

Mediterranean to France, where he has been working and awaiting their arrival for years. The departure is a traumatic scene of the wife saying goodbye to her own mother, wailing, crying, kissing her mother, and ultimately being physically dragged onto the crowded boat full of immigrants to leave for France.

Children often struggle socially and academically, particularly when they have to learn a new language while undergoing a complete life change. Their families frequently struggle economically, which leads to other social and physical challenges in a new society. All of these factors affect the *Beur* youth or have affected their parents and grandparents. While many were leaving behind difficult lives and political problems in Algeria, beginning life in France may not have been any easier. Even generations later, they are still often treated differently even in their own neighborhoods and schools, and more so when they leave the area where they are known. When I went to Paris with students from SciencesPo, we got off the train at the station, where police immediately came up and questioned a dark-skinned student who had Arab-*Beur* features. They asked for his passport and his reasons of travel, letting everyone else pass unquestioned, even though he was a French citizen while many of the other students in the group were foreign but with more European features. “Immigrants are always considered foreigners, even in the high schools. The teachers say ‘yes, you are French, but what are you really?’ This is the general attitude.”⁷⁹

The political situation in France has made it even more difficult for immigrants and their descendants. In addition, many social stereotypes and prejudices against immigrants make life difficult. Immigration is neither an easy choice nor a guarantee of an easy life. It is a struggle

⁷⁹ Interview 1

for the possibility of hope, the idea that a future and success is possible with hard work and suffering.

“This is not the way to stop immigration. It’s a hard, painful, and terrible choice to leave your home....it’s horrible to immigrate. It’s because of misery that one decides to immigrate. This is what motivated immigration. It’s the hope of a better possibility of existence elsewhere and for future generations.”⁸⁰

Many *Beurs* and other minority residents and citizens of France have strong feelings about the current President Nicolas Sarkozy. This stems particularly from harsh words he has used referring to immigrants, beginning when he called them *racailles* or “scum” in a speech after the riots while he was Minister of the Interior of France. He has also pushed for hard-line policies towards immigrants, especially illegal or questionably legal immigrants who were already in France. The creation of the new Minister of Immigration and National Identity has brought strong reactions too, as immigration and French identity are admitted in this post to be contradicting terms which must be reconciled. The goal of this minister seems to be to reconcile immigrants as an obstacle to the idea of “national identity” or true “Frenchness.”

“Since Sarkozy, France’s immigration policies are very mediocre, very harsh.... There is fear of immigrants even though the immigrant can bring a lot to France. The immigrant can participate a lot. There is a Minister of Immigration and of National Identity. It’s the idea of this against that. How can you give this name to a minister? It’s very controversial in France. How can you associate these two? Is immigration an obstacle to national identity? This is because of Sarkozy. He incites fear. It’s because of the creation of this minister that we’re losing. But it’s better in other countries, like Spain. In France there are many social debts.”⁸¹

France installed this minister of integration and immigration under the auspices of helping immigrants integrate into French society. But many people question the tools of integration and the values that define a person as “integrated” or “French” verses non-French.

⁸⁰ Interview 5

⁸¹ Interview 2

Integration is not only a vague concept, but if established as a specific reality it requires conformation to a set of cultural, social, and political norms. In a society that promotes freedom of expression, liberty, equality, and fraternity, to a certain extent is not clear-cut state-imposed integration contradictory? Even the idea of forced integration enrages many, particularly those targeted by the new policies and efforts.

“The new policies on immigration are horrible. I am completely opposed. I was truly shocked that there can be a minister of integration and immigration. This is the idea that there is a preconceived identity: the concept of nationality in France is a unique idea. To live together with certain values in common. There were fears that they [the immigrants] could endanger national values.”⁸²

Many of North African origins claim that France treats its immigrants and their descendants inhumanely, unequally, or unfairly. France coerced immigrants to come in the beginning when they needed laborers because of the World Wars. Once they were in France, they treated them poorly and gave them treatment that, while possibly better than that of laborers in Algeria or their home countries, was despicable for French standards. Many of the immigrants contributed enormously to France over the years. They rebuilt France after the World Wars. But when France hit an economic crisis, they were the first to lose their jobs. They were promised improved housing, but they were kept in the housing projects that soon became the massive *banlieues* of France.

One interviewee believes that France’s immigration policies are “incoherent. It’s not logical. It’s not effective. They attack the personality of the human being. It’s not a history of justice. You can’t just open your doors like this, say that you need them, and then close the doors. They’re human beings.”⁸³

⁸² Interview 5

⁸³ Interview 3

France's immigration policies appear inconsistent. France invites, and then they do not treat the immigrants as guests. They extended hospitality in a way, but did not keep their promises. They used the immigrants, and then they no longer needed them. They offered to host them as temporary workers, kept them as permanent workers, invited the families, and then want to send them all away again once they have become rooted in France. It is an abusive relationship, and a relationship of fear. This fear, or apprehension of anything strange or foreign, leads to stigmatization of all that is foreign, all that is "Arab."

"I think France has huge problems with its immigration policies. France needs immigration, but they don't like foreigners....this is contradictory. They need them, but the immigrants come and are stigmatized."⁸⁴

Interviewee number 6 tells his own story regarding France's immigration policies. He was born with French citizenship because of the historic colonial relationship between France and Algeria that gave French citizenship to some Algerians at that time. He himself is a first generation immigrant who came to Algeria as a child. Therefore, his identity blends across the lines of identity defined in terms of citizenship and immigration. In this recounting of his story, he speaks of the ambiguity of his identity, the gray lines between being French and being an immigrant, between being integrated or not. Integration is not a solid definable concept. Integration is an ambiguous concept to explain progress towards assimilation and acceptance within a society and culture.

"I immigrated to France. I was not born in France. I am a product of these policies. I came to France because my mother is French. The policy of integration in France is like all the policies of integration. I understand it very well. The French think there are too many immigrants in France. With the economic crisis...the policies on immigration conflict with the policies on integration. I recognize these immigrants. I am French. But the immigrants are my people. I lived it. I do not agree with the policies of integration. France has

⁸⁴ Interview 4

the right to create policies on immigration as it wishes, but the policies on integration collide with the concept of secularism in France: liberty, equality and fraternity. About immigration, I have nothing to say. It's a problem among the French politicians. It's rather normal for a country that has a border with poor countries...if the rich country wants to preserve it's wealth, laws are necessary. It's just the policies on integration. It's false that in France we are all integrated."⁸⁵

Again, it is an issue of neutrality verses active policy. In the same way that secularism is active in France, integration has become an active state initiative. Included are national education initiatives, language laws, requirements on clothing in schools and prohibitions on *burqas* and other head coverings in certain public spaces, and laws on religion and *laïcité*. France has made a flexible concept and idea into an austere requirement to which immigrants and foreigners must conform themselves or face discrimination within France.

2.4 CLASSIFICATIONS OF SELF-PERCEPTION AMONG *BEURS*

The *Beur* youth also classify themselves and each other in terms of what they become. I have identified some main categories from my fieldwork in France. The primary categories used to describe the products of *banlieues* from the *Beur* perspectives include sellouts, cultural role models, community representatives, those who never leave the *banlieues*, and extremists. The first result or categorization of "future" for a *Beur* is for him or her to become a sellout. While they are success stories to the world, these sellouts are known in their own community for leaving behind their history, their values, their community, and rejecting their hereditary Arab or

⁸⁵ Interview 6

Beur identity. Some famous soccer players, musicians, and politicians have been classified in their own communities as sellouts in spite of their public successes. One star comedian, Jamal Debbouze is considered a sellout by one of my interviewees. Sellouts are loved by the French, but rejected by the other *Beurs* for leaving behind their historic roots and cultural upbringing, such as by associating only with *français de souche*, moving out of the *banlieue* and forgetting those they left behind, rejecting Islam, forgetting their language and origins and history and cultural traditions in exchange for becoming culturally and mentally assimilated as a French person. According to some of the interviews, the French love those who break out of the *banlieue* via individual success, rather than relying on group identity and family and historic affiliations.

“The French don’t like us. For them, we’re not French. In France, there’s something well known: They like an immigrant when he succeeds. It’s individual success.”⁸⁶

Cultural role models are success stories that carry with them their identity, their values, and their history. Many rappers including Kery James, Medine, and Zebda have been known to represent Islam, their community, the Arab people or history, or the immigrant and minority community in general in their music. They bring success to their *banlieue*, their friends, their families, and they inspire and bring hope to other youth growing up in similar situations to their own. Athletes, comedians, and other “stars” have also provided this kind of successful role modeling in France.

Community representatives also play an important role as a product of the *banlieues*. Many scholarships now in France target *banlieuesards* to use their intelligence and skills, and to target the best and brightest in the *banlieues*, offering them a future but removing the best

⁸⁶ Interview 3

students and leaders from their communities. My interviews were of students that fall into this category, as *banlieuesards* who were offered scholarships by SciencesPo to come study at this top political science school of France. This is a form of positive discrimination, drawing the brightest students from the *banlieues* and providing them with educations that they could not otherwise afford. They are then capable of success that normally requires money to achieve. These programs enable them to achieve group success and bring change and future to others in the *banlieue* while achieving individual academic and employment success as well.

The two last categories are the major concern of the media and the policy regarding these youth. The youth stuck in the *banlieues* have no perceivable future. They struggle with unemployment and poverty. This is primarily the group involved in the riots, and it is the group that French President Sarkozy, before his election, called “*racailles*” a very derogatory term for “scum,” leading to uprisings in the *banlieues*. “Many of these youth are not capable of expressing themselves in French. They have lived their whole lives in France, and they can’t express themselves, except in the language [dialect] of the *banlieue*.”⁸⁷ Even linguistically, they are not a part of French society. They have expressed themselves within France by creating their own French language, the slang “*verlan*” or vulgar inversion of the French language. The last group, which is sometimes a subgroup of the previous, is that of religious extremists. They respond to their situation by involving themselves in radical forms of Islam and direct their dissatisfactions with the state in France into fundamentalist religion.

In a similar way, Franco-Algerian author and politician Azouz Begag defines the youth in terms of three types of identity based on location and future prospects. He discusses those who stay in the *banlieue*, those who are successful and get out of the *banlieue*, and then a third group

⁸⁷ Interview 6

of intermediaries. Those who stay, or the “rusters...people who rot where they are,” are outside traditional French society. They tend to be seen as having no religion, no morality, no civic responsibility, and no fear. Drugs and violence often become a part of this lifestyle.⁸⁸ Sometimes they are “successful” within the *banlieue* if they come into “new money,” usually from means outside the accepted economic system, such as drug money. An example of this is when one youth, Balou, comes back to the *banlieue* in style in the film “Tea in the Harem of Archimedes.” He is in a fancy car, loaded with cash displayed all over the car, with a prostitute in the back seat. Yet they discuss how he does not even know how to read, and it is inferred that he obtained this “high-class” lifestyle through illicit means. There are no limits to this lifestyle, which is defined by getting money or success by whatever means necessary in order to survive, be well off, or gain respect.⁸⁹

The “movers,” those who get out, are those who find stable jobs, have a “future,” value education and a stable family, work for an income, and have a sense of citizenship. They tend to become a part of the middle class in France. Therefore, they mingle with and are invisible within the French community. In spite of their invisible position, they are important to the immigrant community because of their success and stable social status in France.⁹⁰ This group can include both what was discussed earlier as being “sell-outs” and “cultural role models.” They overcome their fear of leaving their family, friends, or community behind for their own success.

⁸⁸ Begag, Azouz. Ethnicity & Equality: France in the Balance. Trans. Alec G. Hargreaves. Lincoln: University of Nebraska P, 2007. p43

⁸⁹ Begag, 2007, p46

⁹⁰ Begag, 2007, p47

And yet they often live with feelings of guilt for their individual success while others are stuck in the *banlieue* life.⁹¹

The intermediaries, Begag says, have a choice to make, between leaving and staying. This choice can be swayed either way based on their major outside influences, the opportunities they are given, and their perception of what they are capable or not capable of. This is affected from within the *banlieue* by those around them, as well as everything they see of the world outside their *banlieue*. A majority of the youth fit into this category. They are searching for stability, work, education, but are wavering between the success of movement or the futureless life in the *banlieue*, between faithfulness to family, friends, and neighborhood, or rejection by seeking their own success.⁹² This group is receptive to change. Begag defines them as “moldable: desiring success but not individually capable of achieving it.”⁹³ Because of their vulnerability, this group can be targeted and is the most susceptible in programs of inclusion and opportunity, programs for change within France. SOS Racism, Sciences Po, government programs, and other social awareness programs, scholarships, internship and job opportunities are targeting this intermediate group to give them opportunities and awareness so they can pull themselves up out of their problems in the *banlieue*, and change the system for themselves and their children.

The two groups with the most distinctive identities are the “rusters” and the “movers.” They “no longer share a common spring from which to build a shared narrative.”⁹⁴ They lose their common ground by the completely different lives they live. This often leads to violent rejection of the movers by the rusters, according to Begag, because of jealousy. The movers are

⁹¹ Begag, 2007, p79

⁹² Begag, 2007, p48

⁹³ Begag, 2007, p49

⁹⁴ Begag, 2007, p80

“perceived as doubly foreign: they are outsiders in the world they have newly entered, and they are no longer accepted where they came from.” Azouz Begag has himself, as a leader of “movers” describes his own identity in relation to France as follows: “I am a French citizen, born in the third arrondissement of Lyon, and regard myself as the spiritual son of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. I loathe racism and discrimination, and I want to live free from such scourges.”⁹⁵

Expectations also exist within French society for Muslim immigrants. These immigrants are expected to fall into a certain place in society, to accomplish traditional duties and jobs while remaining peripheral to *français de souche* society. Common expectations include cooking, dancing (belly-dancing), sports, and music. One example is kebab shops. Kebabs are loved throughout France as an inexpensive Arab-run fast-food. Many young Arabs feel pressure to learn to cook and start a kebab shop or take over a family members’ shop. This is a low-class but successful endeavor, but does not enable young *Beurs* to escape and rise out of the racially stereotyped place where they are expected to remain in French society.

⁹⁵ Begag, 2007, p5

3.0 FROM *BEUR* TO *BANLIEUE* CULTURE: MUSIC, FILM, AND CHANGE

Three important tools available to help us understand *Beur* culture are provided for us by the culture itself: music, social organizations, film, and literature. In this chapter I look at music as an expression by the *Beurs* about themselves on a very public and mass-produced scale yet through very intimate words and stories told in the lyrics and feelings expressed in the rhythms, tunes and styles of music. Then, I discuss representations of the *Beur* population in literature and film, social organizations to promote change in the culture and society, and the expansion of “*Beur*” as a fluid, changing concept that encompasses more and more of other immigrant and minority communities, evolving into a much larger concept of *banlieue* identity throughout all of France instead of an exclusive *Beur* identity within Parisian *banlieues*.

3.1 MUSIC (HIP-HOP) IN IDENTITY

Rap music has played a large role in expressing the feelings, thoughts, and desires of the minority communities in France. Home to the biggest hip-hop culture outside the US, France’s

hip-hop, similar to the US's, has come from the poor urban minority groups.⁹⁶ A variety of sub-genres exist in French rap, particularly three main groups that I will highlight in regard to *Beur* hip-hop culture: hardcore rap, religious rap, and socially conscious rap which reaches a more mainstream population. Rap developed in France throughout the 1980's, with a second wave in the 90's, and a huge increase in production from the end of the 90's until the present, as rappers gained validity in their communities and grew in popularity in the wider culture and music industry.⁹⁷ This growth in popularity and success of *Beur* and other minority rappers parallels the time frame of growing dissatisfaction, unemployment, and other problems in immigrant and minority communities in France.

The concept of the merging identities of the immigrant is also expressed in the music. The rap music in France is a blend of sounds, languages, and artists of different backgrounds. Hip-hop culture in France is representative not only of the *banlieues* but also of what "real" French is becoming: a blend of cultures, identities, and peoples who all mix together to create a new French identity and people.⁹⁸ Through hip-hop, oppositions and differences fade. Music brings unity. And this new hip-hop culture brings unity within France by establishing a new universal subculture that unites all the groups of immigrants, and unites them with France,

⁹⁶ Durand, Alain-Philippe, ed. *Black, Blanc, Beur Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World*. New York: The Scarecrow, Inc., 2002. p. ix

⁹⁷ Durand, p14

⁹⁸ Durand, p28

through a French hip-hop identity. Also, unity is formed between minorities and French *de souche* through rap. Integration comes through creation, newness, and development.⁹⁹

Included also in the hip-hop cultures are dance, clothing, and art, primarily expressed in graffiti artwork. All of these are visual expressions of identity, or ways through which the viewer can perceive aspects of individual self-expression and self-awareness and community solidarities. Rap in France expresses linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and minority affiliations. As hip-hop scholar Duran argues, “Hip-hop is an idealized ‘limited’ community around which part of contemporary youth, both urban and multiethnic in nature can identify itself, protest, contest, propose, act, and create. For these youths, the ‘hip-hop community’ allows them to leave the anonymity of a mass society, while at the same time finding a place for themselves within it.”¹⁰⁰ In this way hip-hop culture, messages, lyrics, and community provides a core around which the *Beur* youth can build their sense of self and integrate themselves into a community and culture with which they can identify and to which they can attach themselves as an active and accepted member. Rap builds a community defined by insiders and outsiders, through use of first person “I” in the lyrics, groupies and sub-cultures that expand outwardly from each rap artist and sub-genre of rap, and other socio-cultural divisions such as gender, class, ethnicity, and religion, that are defined in the music and can either include or exclude people from hip-hop communities.

Rap is a particularly vivid expression of personal identity. Not only do the rappers express their own concerns and social issues that prevail in their communities in their works, but

⁹⁹ Helenon, Veronique. "Africa on their Mind: Rap, Blackness, and Citizenship in France." *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and Globalization of Black Popular Culture*. Ed. Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle. London: Pluto. 151-66. p161

¹⁰⁰ Durand, p69

their music often becomes engrained in their listeners. Rappers are often supported by a *posse* from their home neighborhood, their friends and buddies who grew up with them and go with them on their rise to fame and success. They are groups of mutual support who work with, sing with, or are groupies of the rappers.¹⁰¹ Gang mentality is important with these posses of the rapper: rappers and members of the rappers' posses and larger sub-culture draw strength from numbers, from the power of the group with the rapper, all fighting together against France. These groups and rappers origins strongly influence the music, and thereby influence those who listen to the rap.

Most *Beur* hip-hop in France originates in these *banlieues*, publicizing everyday life of the *banlieues* and bringing pride to their neighborhoods. Hardcore rap music is particularly popular and representative of the anger and despair in these communities. It is harsher than other rap, uses a faster beat and cruder lyrics including talk of violence and rough language.¹⁰² One interviewee remarked that nothing of importance had come from his *banlieue*, *Banlieue 93*. Later in the interview he stated with pride that the rap group Tandem comes from *Banlieue 93*, and produced a famous music video, "93 Hardcore" in his neighborhood, with locals acting.¹⁰³ This music video shows images of the housing projects, the streets in this *banlieue*, gang-like groups, violence and guns, and the "brotherhood" of these guys on the streets.¹⁰⁴ The music video brings together this *banlieue* in a demonstration to viewers and listeners of the tight-knit underprivileged disadvantaged community. The music video depicts Tandem, with a posse on the streets of *banlieue 93*, outside of Paris, showing their strength in the violent lyrics, the dance

¹⁰¹ Durand, p55

¹⁰² Durand, p8,9

¹⁰³ Interview 3

¹⁰⁴ Tandem. "93 HardCore." *YouTube*. Underposition, 16 July 2006. Web. 12 Dec. 2009.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd92CYKoU70>>.

moves, and the force of the group of guys together in the streets. It's a violent song of anger and yet a statement of power from within this community.

Their point hits home with the direct, harsh vulgarity of their lyrics. Take, for example the line in 93 Hardcore "*Je baiserais la France jusqu'a ce qu'elle m'aime.*" Quite literally "I will f*** France until she loves me," or translated to me by my interviewee from this *banlieue*, "I will f*** France until I succeed."¹⁰⁵ The comparison of the literal translation and his translation of the meaning is interesting. Ultimately, it is "until I succeed in making France love me." It is a song of desperation from this third generation of *Beurs* in France, the youth who are desperate for recognition and will do whatever it takes. Interviewee 3 mentioned this song, and this specific lyric to me in the interview to exemplify points he was making about anger in the *banlieues*. This is a clear example of how those who listen to the rap music personally identify with the lyrics because of the first person "I" being used. People draw their own meanings from the lyrics and music they listen to and impose their own feelings on the music. In addition, gender is crucial, highlighted by this line. "I will f*** France..." is a violent masculine line, targeting angry males in the *banlieues*. In this way, certain rap excludes females from the audience, while including and speaking as the voice of each individual, discontented male from the *banlieues* of France. Gender issues are foreground in many of the issues associated with the *banlieues* including the *hijab* controversy which centers on female Muslims, riots and violence which are typically associated with males, and music which targets males and females in different ways, such as through these afore-mentioned lyrics.

This song and music video all show the gang or "brotherhood" phenomenon of the *banlieues*. It is a bond formed because of their social position, as well as in differentiation from

¹⁰⁵ Interview 3

the mainstream French culture and in contrast to groups of other *banlieues*. It is defined by location: by address within France.¹⁰⁶ It is also defined by a shared culture and status as “outsider” in France. Skin color, hair color, and facial features are included in this. They are different; they are “outsiders” because they look different, because they are not white Indo-European French. As outsiders, they are marked by darker features, by accent, by class, and by cultural and religious differences from France. This group bond among the “outsiders” of France is accentuated in music, particularly in the hip-hop community of the *banlieues*. “The hip-hop movement functions enormously in a relation between Them/Us, which reinforces a feeling of belonging to a group and forges an affirmed identity.”¹⁰⁷

Music is strongly associated with violence, and a lot of rap music incites violence through lyrics and images in music videos. A well-known rap group from the *banlieue* is a group whose very name is vulgar and expressive of anger is “Nique ta mere” or “F*** your mom.” Another is “Assassin.” A group called LIM is renowned for the violence and vulgarity of their lyrics and music videos. Yet all of these music groups represent popular sentiments of their audiences: anger at French society, frustration with the system, and violence towards others and oneself. They provide an outlet for the anger of the youth, and yet influence the *Beur* and other minority youth through their music, in the lyrics and images they use.

In stark contrast to the violence and harshness of hardcore rap, religious rap music seeks to convey a more optimistic message. Rappers bring hope to the *banlieues* through their religious lyrics of future for these *Beurs*. Escape from the problems of the *banlieues* and hope can be found through Islam. Kery James is a popular rapper, and, though not *Beur*, an example

¹⁰⁶ The neighborhoods of Paris are numbered outwardly with *Ile de France* at the center according to *arrondissements*. *Banlieues* are outer *arrondissements*, farther from the center of Paris and therefore higher numbers.

¹⁰⁷ Durand, p70

of the common bigger *banlieue* identity as he represents the Muslim conversion story from within the *banlieue* community in France. In his song “If I had it to do over,” he tells the story of his life in the *banlieue*, his conversion to Islam, and the transformation of his life. His story has become the story of many youth. In this song, he lists his regrets, then talks of the change Islam has brought in his life:

“And when I look at my past
I almost didn’t make it
If I hadn’t had Islam maybe I would have gotten myself killed
Or I would have spent half of my life in prison
For those who have gone before, here I have a thought
How many have died without having had time to prepare themselves?
Burdened with sin and injustice to make up for,
Before death comes to me, I must atone for my own
If I want to harvest the good, I must sow good...”¹⁰⁸

Diverging from the anger and violence that was his life, and that fills so much of the hardcore rap music, rapper Kery James preaches an alternative to violence, prison, and hate in his music. He speaks of peace (*salaam*) and doing good in order to receive good both in this life and the next. He is a testimony to the influence of Islam in changing lives, particularly of those raised in difficult conditions and struggling with anger and sense of identity and future within France. Again, the first person singular pronouns in his lyrics help youth relate personally to his music and take his words as their own, relating to their own stories, life experiences, and understanding of themselves.

¹⁰⁸ Kery James. "28 Decembre, 1977." Warner Music France, 2001. *YouTube*. Ske13, 21 Aug. 2007. Web. <12 Dec. 2009. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jg_RcgWFxwQ&feature=related>

Medine is another well-known rap group, named after the word for city in Arabic, and the holy city Medina. These Muslim artists rap about Islam, religion's role in their life, and provide spiritual inspiration through their lyrics. Their songs compare stories from the Qur'an to a struggle, or battle in this life, problems great religious figures faced in comparison to issues in daily life in the *banlieue*. These religious rap groups show one side of the "new Islam" of the *banlieues*. It is no longer the Islam of the first generation, the Islam of Algeria or Tunisia. There has been a religious renaissance among the *Beur* youth. Many now actively practice Islam as a spiritual identity choice, an active decision rather than a cultural set of norms established by their parents and grandparents. This has paralleled the increase in the wearing of the *hijab*, as well as an increase in demand for mosques in France, popular religious music like Medine and Kery James, and increasing prominence of the Muslim minority in France.

Socially conscious rap is more popular in the mainstream music market of France, made popular by artists like M.C. Solaar, an immigrant to France from the predominantly Muslim country of Senegal, another former French colony. Some rappers argue that they simply reflect what is happening in the minority communities of France through their words, without acting or leading. M.C. Solaar, famous internationally for his music, depicts himself combating social problems through his rap.¹⁰⁹ While some see themselves as just "chroniclers of the rage," other rappers see political and social power in their rap. They see it as social engagement by influencing the youth as well as speaking through their lyrics to politicians and voters alike.¹¹⁰ Zebda is a socially and politically active rap group comprised of rappers of diverse immigrant backgrounds in France. Their name, Zebda, is the Arabic word for butter, or "*beurre*" in French, making a play on words for the name "*Beur*." This music group from Toulouse has been

¹⁰⁹ Durand, p57

¹¹⁰ Durand, p58

politically active since its formation in 1985, working for social and political change for immigrants and minority groups. One of their song titles is “*On est chez nous*” or “we’re at home,” inferring that France is theirs, and the immigrants’ home, and “wherever we go, we’re at home there...”¹¹¹ Rap can be representative of the youth identity; it can also impact their understanding of their identity and perhaps change the way they see themselves or influence their actions.

3.2 MOVEMENT TOWARD CHANGE

Despite the violence and upheaval in France’s minority communities, there are desperate efforts to bring change, through music, as discussed above, as well as in other social and political movements within France. Many individuals and groups have made peaceful efforts, particularly one group called “SOS Racism.” This group, founded in 1983 to combat racism and bring equal opportunity for minorities in France, has brought together the French minority community for two and a half decades now, working through the system for change.¹¹² This involves regular peaceful protests and marches, strikes, letters, petitions, goal-setting, and political movements. Individuals have protested through similar means, in addition to hunger protests, writing, getting an education for personal empowerment, and working through the political system individually for change. One such individual is Azouz Begag. He has written several books, including a

¹¹¹ Zebda. “On est chez nous.” *Essence Ordinaire*. 1998.

«*Nous, on est chez nous ; la ou on va on est chez nous.* »

¹¹² *SOS Racisme*. Web. 12 Oct. 2009. www.sos-racisme.org (see appendix 2)

novel called *Le Gone de Chaaba* [The boy from the hood]. In this novel he tells the story of his own struggle as a victim of racism, his childhood as an outsider and Arab in the *banlieues* of France, and how he rose above and found success in spite of and because of this life of his. He is now the French Minister for Equal Opportunities, working in the French government to represent and advocate for the minority community from which he came and inspiring other young *beurs* in France to get out of the *banlieue* and find a future within the system in France.

While riots as described in the previous chapter brought these issues to light on an international level, peaceful processes have proved far more effective in addressing and dealing with issues on a regular basis. One interviewee told me of how she and her friends successfully worked peacefully through the system for change:

“I had a friend who didn’t have her legal papers. She was supposed to graduate soon. Sarkozy looked for all the illegal immigrants and gave them a month before expulsion from France. After eight years in France, she had done all her studies in France, and they were going to expel her. All because of the political reforms against illegal immigrants...we went on strike. We protested for her, so that she could have legal documentation and finish her studies in France. She was a refugee. Now she has paperwork...they let her stay.”¹¹³

That story is an extreme, urgent situation. Many groups work regularly for change in the *banlieues*. The same interviewee, in high school, participated in a community group in her neighborhood known as the General Council of Youth, who get together and discuss ways to improve the conditions among the youth in their city.

“We performed plays to express the troubles of the youth in the *banlieue*: the difficulty, for example, of mixed marriages...Arabs marry Arabs, Blacks marry Blacks; to consider ourselves French in France, for immigrants, etc.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Interview 1

¹¹⁴ Interview 1

She was also involved in “*Les Restos du Coeur*,” a specific charity for the poor similar to a soup kitchen. In addition, this same interviewee tutored other students in her *banlieue*, as she was one of the top students in her school and could help those in her own community who had fewer opportunities than she did. In this way, success and change can be initiated from the inside of the *banlieues* as well as from outside political efforts.

Numerous groups and individuals are working toward a successful future regarding these young Arab-Muslims in France. SOS Racism, mentioned previously, has been working for awareness and acceptance of this population in France, and for the rights of these minority individuals particularly for employment, in schools, and in the government. SOS-racisme.org published an article titled “You are victim.”¹¹⁵ It explains what racial discrimination is, describing discriminatory practices, and asks people to report discrimination in order to stop it. This acknowledges victimization, addresses it, and seeks to stop the cycle. It decries silence and demands verbal and physical action to stop racism and discrimination, whether religious, ethnic, racial, or other.

3.3 REPRESENTATIONS OF NORTH AFRICAN MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS IN FRENCH FILM

The attitudes and expressions of the Arab immigrant populations have shifted through the generations. As Bamyeh stated that identities are “a blend of lasting values socialized in a new

¹¹⁵ SOS racism, see Appendix 2

way,”¹¹⁶ so we can understand more completely the identities of these youth by tracing the pattern of identities through the generations, expressing themselves in new ways in each generation. Begag defines the self-perceptions of each of the three major generations in his book *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance*. The first phase of immigrants is defined by indifference.¹¹⁷ They came to France to work. They had a purpose, France was providing them with job opportunities, and they intended to return to their countries. They were generally indifferent to their treatment in France, because it was temporary. The film “*Inch’allah Dimanche*,” set in 1974, exhibits a little of the identity struggles of this 1st generation.¹¹⁸ Important to the film is also the chronology of representation. The gap between the time depicted in the film (1974) and the film release (2001) explains the gender issues addressed in the film and the angle from which immigrants, women, and Arabs are portrayed in the film. The film highlights the family reunification at the beginning of permanent settlement in France during the 1970’s. It visually traces the connection to the *bled*, the physical ties broken and sustained, and the painful trials of immigration. Most importantly, it shows the desperate effort of many in the first generation to sustain those ties to the *bled*, to guard the Algerian language and culture, practice the traditional Islam of Algeria, and prevent integration in hope of return. In contrast to the general efforts to stay separate from French culture, particularly enforced by her husband and mother-in-law, Zouina, the main female character in the film is attracted to the lifestyle, the makeup, the shopping, the styles, and the rights of French women. This raises an interesting question of gender differences in terms of preference of Algerian ways verses assimilation to the French life. While Zouina fought to stay in Algeria with her own mother and in her old life,

¹¹⁶ Bamyeh, p159

¹¹⁷ Begag, 2007, p39

¹¹⁸ This is regarding the first generation as portrayed in the film, not as Bengigi, the film-maker as a representative of the first generation of film-makers.

once she is in France she is attracted to French culture against the will of the male role in her life, embodied by her husband and his harsh, if not cruel mother.

The second generation is defined by frustration. In the economic crises of the 1970's and 80's, they were plagued by unemployment, poverty, and distinct social disparity. The temporary shantytowns and poor housing projects of their parents had become theirs, and they were neither a part of France nor of their countries of origin. Because of the system of double right of soil to citizenship, they were not citizens in France, yet had often never seen or seen very little of their country of origin. "*Le Thé Au Harem D'Archimede*" (1985), considered one of the first examples of *Beur* cinema, is a classic film of this frustration among the youth of the *banlieue*. The question of identity based on citizenship is addressed, as the young *Beur* Madjid tries to find jobs but is told time and again that he must apply for citizenship. Yet at home, his mother is telling him that he is not French, preventing him from taking on the French identity. A boy born in the *banlieues* of France, with no physical connection to Algeria, he struggles in an in-between place, neither part of the French system nor part of Algeria. His frustration leads to the life depicted among him and his friends, on the streets, without jobs, without a future, the ruffians who pick pockets and prostitute girls in order to make a buck, have some fun, and appease the anger of their mothers. Their hopelessness is essential. It is a struggle torn between two identities, and resulting in anger, failure, and desperation. The destruction stems from frustration and struggles to prove their existence within France.

The current generation, the third generation, is defined by rage.¹¹⁹ It is a violent reaction to what has become a system of exclusion. In addition to rage against the system, their rage is often self-destructive, as seen in the riots in which they burned cars and buildings in their own

¹¹⁹ Begag, 2007, p39

neighborhoods and destroyed their own property in their anger. They are citizens. They are French. And yet they are not included, they are not considered French by the *français de souche*. They are excluded within their own home, their own land. The 1995 film “*La Haine*” depicts the beginning of this third generation, now mixed in with other immigrants, and filled with desperate anger. It is desperation to be recognized, to be seen as equals, as the French citizens that they are. In rage at the system, they respond with extreme violence, and loss of any care about life or future. This film reveals an expansion of the *Beur* identity which, though still existent, is more blended in a larger emerging *banlieue* culture, comprised of underprivileged minorities in France. *Banlieue* culture is much wider, more encompassing of French regions beyond Paris, and inclusive of non-white, non-ethnic European such as Africans and Asians. The film shows this in a portrayal of 24 hours in the life of three youths: a Jew, a *Beur*, and a Black African. It begins with riots, during which one youth steals a police officer’s gun. By the end of the film, the rage progresses from the rowdy riots in the streets to an escalation that involves guns, police, arrests, and brutal deaths.

Identity is a broad concept, encompassing all of a person’s understanding of himself within both a group and individual setting. The major spheres of identity include ethnicity, nationality, religion, origin, and various subculture identities. Arab is an ethnicity, French, the primary nationality, Islam the religion. The origin can be broken down from North Africa, to Algeria for example, to the city, to the *banlieue*, to the community or housing project within the *banlieue* from which one comes. It can include one’s parents’ or ancestors’ origins, as well as other cultural and group origins. The primary subculture identity, though there could be many others, that I am examining in this paper and appears to be the most predominant in this community is the hip-hop identity. This subculture includes music, dance, artwork (graffiti),

clothing, and lifestyle.¹²⁰ All of these spheres of identity are unique but often overlapping or confused, but they should be differentiated in defining a person's identity.

A person's understanding of him/herself can also vary between locations and over time. People change, and the facets of their identity that they reveal change based on their location, their life situation, and the community in which they are exposing their identity. When in Tunisia, interviewee number 1 reveals a different side of herself than she does in France. People also perceive her differently, changing her own understanding of herself while in Tunisia. In France, the identity can vary based on her understanding of herself in the French context, and based on French and other people's perception in general of who she is in that context. Again, it could change based on smaller divisions of location and even within one location but between communities or groups within that location. That is to say, even within the *banlieue*, a *Beur's* identity may differ from the home with family, to the mosque, to school, to an organization in which he or she participates, to a group of friends which he or she is seeking to impress. This variety of sides or parts to one's identity can be merged into an overall picture or description of one's general identity, or the big picture of *Beur* identity as a whole.

The term integration is often a goal but rarely explained in realistic terms. Integration can be seen in terms of physical degrees of becoming more and more outwardly a part of a culture and common way of life. This can be observed in terms of language, food, dress, use of time, and overall conforming to a set of cultural values and a lifestyle. Some of the interviewees expressed how integrated they personally feel in French society:

“In terms of cuisine, [I feel] 100% Tunisian. I never ate French food except at the school cafeteria. At home, with my parents, I speak Arabic. With my brothers

¹²⁰ Durand, pxiv

and sisters, I speak French. I am a Tunisian in France and French in Tunisia. In Tunisia, I identify myself as Tunisian, but they see my behavior as French.”¹²¹

This interviewee is describing a multi-faceted cultural identity that includes both French and Arab-Tunisian culture and values. Underneath these visual aspects such as food and spoken language lies a struggle, a grayness, and a questioning of her identity by others and herself. She does not have one defined national, cultural or ethnic identity but rather a blend of two or more, constantly evolving and changing based on her age, location, and other constantly changing life factors. Another speaks of a stronger tie to his Algerian heritage even from within France, while claiming that he has found and even chosen a balance for himself.

“I identify culturally more to Algerian than to French culture. We eat Arab, Algerian cuisine. We watch Arabic television (Aljazeera). Therefore split...I found an equilibrium between the two. I neglect neither French nor Algerian. French culture is very, very beautiful. And today I made the choice to live in France. I want to work in France, to work for France.”¹²²

Another has chosen to identify with the Arab culture. Although he was educated in France, he claims the Arab and Islamic identity for himself.

“I have trouble identifying with French culture....not my parents’ culture. I can’t identify with French culture, and I don’t want to. I am not of this culture. My culture is an Arab-Islamic culture. Even if I know more about French culture than about Arab culture.”¹²³

In another interview, he speaks about his friends’ feelings of integration in France. Instead of feeling integrated, they feel segregated from France, as if the *français de souche* pushed them away from the French identity.

¹²¹ Interview 1

¹²² Interview 2

¹²³ Interview 6

“My [*Beur*] friends don’t feel integrated. There is a huge divorce between the two communities...The *français de souche* have the effect of pushing others away. There are rich and poor neighborhoods....it’s very divided.”¹²⁴

Another youth stated, “I have the mentality of a Muslim. I find myself integrated....but...” Then he went on to tell the story about how he feels integrated and to be a part of France, but is questioned by *français de souche* regularly. He is a citizen and has all the same legal rights of a French citizen. But when he goes places, people question his French rights. He went to a doctor’s office for an appointment. At the desk, they asked him for his papers. He said that he had the French social security medical card. They questioned him repeatedly before believing that he was actually French with the French medical benefits.¹²⁵ While he feels integrated, others still do not perceive him as integrated.

Interviewee 1 feels similarly about the issue: “I am a very integrated person in France. I speak French well, I consider myself French....second zone French. But when I say my name [a very Arab name], they ask me where I’m from.”¹²⁶ He feels that he has assimilated, or integrated himself linguistically and culturally, but he is still questioned within France.

“The French know that we’re French....that we have French papers. We are with them, but... You see, for example, I introduce myself to someone and they know I’m French. They don’t ask that question. They just ask, ‘of what origin?’”¹²⁷

Even if these youth want to choose a more culturally French identity, they are often questioned by others, causing them to again question themselves and their place in French society. Situations at home and pressure from parents and relatives also make it more difficult for these youth to integrate themselves in French culture.

¹²⁴ Interview 6

¹²⁵ Interview 3

¹²⁶ Interview 6

¹²⁷ Interview 1

“At certain moments, [I feel detached from my own or my parents’ culture], not always. Sometimes either French culture or Tunisian culture: for example, in the cultural domain, it’s really hard...sometimes I feel more Tunisian, sometimes more French. Above all in the culture. Sometimes my family reproaches me for being too open. I do things that Tunisians don’t do, for example.”¹²⁸

Others said that they easily identify with both cultures.¹²⁹ Another has no trouble relating to his parents culture but struggles sometimes to relate to French culture.

“In France, when your parents don’t speak the same language, when you’re little, it’s a little weird. Also, French culture has some things I don’t agree with. I’m a *bledare* [someone who loves/is attached to the *bled*, or country of origin], and each summer I go back to the countryside [Egypt]. But anyway, I am French after all. I’m at home in France.”¹³⁰

While integration can be seen on the exterior through lifestyle, another crucial aspect is whether someone *feels* integrated or not: his or her interior sense of identity.

“I have some difficulty integrating in myself a distinctive identity...it has nothing to do with my parents. It’s me who’s asking myself these questions. It’s interior. For my parents, I’ve very integrated in their culture, and for my friends I’m very integrated in France.”¹³¹

Integration and identity are both exterior and interior. They include other people’s perception of the individual, as well as an individual’s self-perception. It begins at the individual level, but expands up to group and even national levels. It is rarely clear-cut and for these *Beur* youth it has become a struggle, wavering among various sets of expectations, individual choices, and reactions to outside and inside factors. Trinh T. Minh-ha, an Asian-American film-maker, describes this concept of torn identity, a marginalized minority identity caught between inside and outside, between belonging and not belonging. “Not foreigner, yet foreign. At times

¹²⁸ Interview 1

¹²⁹ Interview 2 and 6

¹³⁰ Interview 3

¹³¹ Interview 4

rejected by her own community, other times needfully retrieved, she is both useless and useful.”¹³² *Beurs* often fit this description well. They are not foreigners in France, but they are still seen as foreign. They are caught in this identity crisis, neither insiders nor outsiders in France, neither linked to their parents and their heritage nor to their own country.

“To sum it all up, we are in an identity crisis. For the French we are not French enough, and for the Arabs we are not Arab enough. We have incredible potential for France.”¹³³

The potential is there. Their identities are undergoing changes and being defined and established in modern France. The *Beur* youth are critical players in France’s future, and the direction they take, the choices they make are hanging “in the balance,” depending on so many factors which could swing France’s future and the lives of so many youth in any direction.

¹³² Minh-ha, Trinh T. "No Master Territories." *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991. 215-18. Print. p216

¹³³ Interview 4

4.0 THE FUTURE OF *BEUR* IDENTITY

The youth whom I interviewed all believed that there is at least some hope for change in France and future for their *Beur* peers. Some stated French society has the potential for change, possibly not under Sarkozy; but it can change. “France’s core values are good, it is just France contradicting itself, going against its values that is destroying itself and causing these problems.”¹³⁴ One believed firmly that change is possible and necessary:

“France must remember her own values. I acknowledge the French values: quite simply: justice, equality, liberty, fraternity, human rights, diversity. France has the strength to struggle for this. France must adapt herself to her era...they say that Islam has not adapted, but also France has not yet adapted. It is necessary to reform...”¹³⁵

She is optimistic, but still possesses a thought process dividing “Us” from “Them.”

Ethnic French versus the *Beurs*. Both are waiting for the other to take initiative and fix the problems. Ethnic French and the French government want the *Beurs* to change, and the *Beurs* want France to begin with political and social reform. Others remain dubious of any dramatically different future:

“A profound change is necessary. Even if there’s a politician who wants to change, we need a change at the heart of society; not at the political level but at the daily level. I’m not pessimistic, but I’m doubtful.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Interview 6

¹³⁵ Interview 6

¹³⁶ Interview 4

This is more than a demand for political change. This is requiring change of people, of citizens and residents of France. The only way to really address and stop racial stigmatization is through the society, through education and social movements for change. Efforts have been made in France in recent years to improve relations with these young people. One primary example is Sciences Po, who now try to recruit the most talented and intelligent students from the *banlieues*, giving them scholarships so they can get an education at Sciences Po, one of the top educational institutions of France. This enables them to get involved in French politics and make changes from the top down in French society.

“Our generation is going to achieve in politics, etc.; at every level we will change things. Our generation, we are going to change...it is the people who reach important levels in society that are going to change it.”¹³⁷

“At the core, they all really adore France. Between us and France exists a very passionate story. It could end well...”¹³⁸

Some *Beurs* have written about this story. Several writers of this Arab Muslim origin in France have played a major role in shaping and defining the identity of these youth. Two primary examples include writers Taha Ben Jelloun and Azouz Begag. Examples of success while representing their values and backgrounds, they promote the success of these young people and provide a voice in mainstream France and throughout the wider academic community of the problems growing in the *banlieues*.

Beur youth are in the process of creating a new culture, and forming newly shaped identities within the French state and culture. While they are integrating into France in many ways, they have kept relics of their past, their Arab and Muslim heritage, and are simultaneously blending French with Arab, secular with Muslim, old with new to construct new identities. These new

¹³⁷ Interview 5

¹³⁸ Interview 5

identities are constructs fashioned from the old, incorporating ideology, tradition, worldview, cultural norms, practices, and values. People express themselves in music, film, religion, clothing styles, thought, and all the public and private displays of identity and group and individual forms of expression. In this way they hold more or less tightly to religion, express certain things such as Islam more strongly than their parents or escape entirely to secularism and various degrees in between. Many *Beurs* have defined themselves on various degrees of the spectrum in relation to France as their Other, and their participation in and affiliation to both their French identity and their parents' identities, while merging these together into the more comprehensive *Beur* identity. By becoming active in society, through politics, religion, music, social movements, or other ways, the *Beurs* can influence change while empowering themselves and each other as key actors in their communities, on small local and larger French, European, and even global scales.

In light of French and Arab colonial and post-colonial history, we have seen the relation of *Beurs* to French culture and society and current political and social issues. After examining the influence of parents, French secular culture, and new forms of Islam on youth, we have explored *Beurs*' self-expressions particularly as seen in music and film. Questions remain to be examined in the research, including questions about the political and social ramifications of these youths' understanding of their social positions and their future. How can their perceptions of themselves in the context of France and the history of immigration influence changes in France in the future? If the concept of *Beur* is defined by exclusion, by "Otherness" that separates them from mainstream French culture, then once the exclusions disappear, once they win the fight against racism and inequality in France, will the *Beur* identity still exist? Already the *Beur* culture has expanded and is blending into a broader *banlieue* culture, uniting various minorities

and underprivileged groups in France. Is *Beur* a disappearing concept, an identity claimed by a group that is achieving their goals, gaining awareness and support in the larger community, and by so doing, will eventually disappear? By looking at these youth and working with these *Beurs* and other key immigrant groups, France can move towards change, integration, blending and molding of French culture into a new culture that includes people from all backgrounds and cultures, of all religions, worldviews, and ways of life, while still maintaining French unity, values, tradition, and culture.

APPENDIX A

RAP LYRICS

Lyrics to *93 Hardcore* :¹³⁹

Tout le monde veut s'allumer tout le monde veu se la metre
c'est la fin des haricots ya plus d'lové 93 HARDCORE
Levez les bra si vous etes forts ma balnieue nord veut des gros sous
Pourtant nos mais sont dans la boue
tout le monde veut s'allumer tout le monde veu se la metre
c'est la fin des haricots ya plus d'lové 93 HARDCORE
Levez les bra si vous etes forts

Dans mon 93 gro, on est trop dans le diese
Quand on baise c'est des putes a 100 feuilles pas nos 5 doigts
Departement du bon-char
Nous on veut s'en mettre plein les fouilles
Mais petit j'te l'ai dit 100 fois personne est sans failles
Lucifere t'es trop bonne vien qu'on s'envoie en l'air
Infidele, madame misere est trop frele et beaucoup trop laide
Faut qu'on s'entraide faut du profit
Frolo pour qu'on reste au beau fixe
Fautrai moins d'flingues et plus de fric
Carséral vécu chez nous ya pas d'sécu
Rien quon nous persécute
Mais tu vas perdre face a belzebut
Si t'a fais de belles etudes
C'est mieu qu'une grosse peine sais tu

¹³⁹ "Forum RAP FRANCAIS : 93 Hardcore - Forums 2KMUSIC." *Musique, Pop, Rock, Folk, RnB, Rap,*

Blogs Et Vidéos - 2Kmusic.com. Web. 23 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.2kmusic.com/fr/topic/93-hardcore/10789>>.

que faire du bitume
C'est voir des freres qui s'entube ou qui s'entretuent
Enculé moi j'ai grillé ton plan macabre
Plus de jeunes a la morgue ca fait moins de jeunes a la barre
La vie qu'jai tu la connais par coeur vu qu'c'est partou la meme
J'baiserai la france jusqu'a c'quelle m'aime
Meme condamné on sort en condi
On trouve des combines
On est combien a vouloir compter des sse-lia par centaines
Nos vies sans paix et trop d'peine
Vas y garde la peche
Trop d'peres en babouche regardent leur fils tomber a Boboche
Les poches vides on abbat les traitres
On bat les cartes de nos vies en bas d'la tess
SEINE ST DENIS FALLAI PAS TEST
Ya des cadavres devant les bars
Et des geuch un peu tou-par
Tu flipes mais c'est mon 93 tout ca
C'est des mecs morts sou des becs a nourir sans un incompetete
Les dek sont vraiment sans respet
Mais j'emmerde les teur-inspect
Ici personne est vierge comme nos casiers judiciaires
Imbecile tu fais qu'une mere décue quand tu niques la justice
Gros la rue n'est qu'un cerceuil ambulant
Il suffit d'un coup de feu pour qu'on appelle l'ambulance
Ouragan de violence pour un peu d'opulence
Je n'en peu plus
Me dit pas ou tu planques ton cofre ou jte sortirais mon gun

*Chorus

Dans mon 93 rien qu'ca marque a la testosterone
Alé viens goûter au serum si tu débines on t'derobe
Si tu rechigne protege ton sternum
On est tous des hommes et tu pouras rien y faire
J'viens d'la ou si t'es faible c'est a coup de barres de fer
Quon traîne paranoyaque juvenil
On s'endurcie parmi les impulsifs
On prend pas de racourcis
Vu qu'ils peuvent reduire ton esperance de vie
On reve tous de tirer a 40 millions d'dollars
Et pouf cooperatrice qui aura surement pas son mot a dire
Alors pour y parvenir tous les moyens sont bons
Dans cette course au bifton faut pas ralentir
Avant qu'tu puisses un jour t'ammortir
T'imagines bien qu'dans mon 9-3 on sait y faire

Qu'ce soit dans l'sport ou l'ter-ter
 Dit toi bien qu'on T'NIQUE TA MERE
 On est tous fiers en bas d'nos tours
 Mais c'batard veut nous foutre au trou
 Maintenant comment son p'tit va pe-cho son bout
 On est pertinament concient d'touts nos echecs scolaires
 Mais tout serai different si la sorbone serai domiciliée a Auber'
 Mais non putain d'merde tu voulais m'la metre a long terme
 Viens faire un tour dans mon 9-3 si tu l'aimes tellement
 La ou les montagnes de coke viennent droit de la colombie
 La ou les zombis sont plus presents qu'en Haiti
 Elle est hardcore cette vie
 Mais j'l'aime a mort cette pute
 Peux tu t'permettre d'etre abatu sans qu'tai fait une tune
 A mort la vertue
 En temps qu'vacateur et acteur actif de mes déboirs
 J'ai eu trop peur quil ai fallu qu'jme mette a boire
 Toujours pas disque d'or mais toujours trop d'choses a dire
 Trop d'choses a fuir
 Que j'dort meme plus quand j'dort
 T'as vu dans mon département c'est comme partout
 Ya des fils qui virent mal et des filles qui finissent dans des boites a partouses
 Heureusement qu'c'est pas general ya aussi des gens qui taffe
 des ptits freres qui metent des baffes au bac
 et des noich' qui taff au black
 93 hardcore levez les bras si vous etes forts
 c'est pour ceux qui ecoutent aux portes et ceux qui mangent pas d'porc
 *Chorus

Partial translation to English :

Chorus :

Everyone wants to provoke, everyone wants to fight,
 It's all over, there's no more love "93 Hardcore"¹⁴⁰
 If you're strong, put your arms in the air, my ghetto north wants big money even though
 our hands are in mud.
 In the 93 we're so cool, we f*** everybody
 All we want is lots of money
 We've got to associate to make more money
 To be happy we'd need less guns but more bills
 We all experienced prison, no security here, we are always persecuted but they are going to loose
 against beelzebub
 In these streets you see your brothers abusing each other, killing each other

¹⁴⁰ 93 is a "département" in "la région parisienne" these rappers are proud of...like gangs in the US are proud of their streets/ neighborhood...

I know life : it's the same everywhere I f*** France until it loves me
We live with no peace, government says stay happy, but I see too many dads watching their sons
falling.
Our pockets are empty and we're playing the last cards of our lives.
Corpse at each block, ugly faces, it's scary but it's my 93.
The streets are just moving coffins
Hurricane of violence for a little opulence

Lyrics to "28 Decembre, 1977"¹⁴¹

28 décembre 77, au Abymes j'suis né
D'une famille plus proche d'être pauvres que d'être fortunés
Mes parents sont originaires d'Haïti
Terre indépendante que mon coeur a choisit pour pays
La plupart de mon enfance, je l'ai passé auprès de ma mère
Je peux pas ne pas mentionner quelle surmonta beaucoup de galère
Et elle continue à ramer, trimer, jusqu'à cette heure
Sur une main je peux compter le nombre de fois que je les vu en pleure
On nous fit venir en France, au prix de nombreux sacrifices
Pensant que la France était terre de réussite
Octobre 85, dans ce pays j'atterrissais
Le temps était gris et j'ignorais ce qui m'attendait
Souvent les parents ont pour leurs gosses de l'ambition
Ainsi ma soeur et moi on s'est retrouvé en pension
Loin de ma mère, tu le sais, enfance amère
Loin d'ses enfants, pour une mère à vie amère

Éloignés d'elle, le temps qu'elle construise ses repères
Jusqu'à ce quelle nous récupère
Puis ont a quitté la pension pour venir vivre à Orly
Et ce que j'ai vu ce jour là, a sûrement changé ma vie
Dans un pavillon ma mère louait une seule pièce
Qu'un rideau séparait 30 mètres carré au plus
Dans ce truc là on était 5, vivant dans la promiscuité
Ouvrir un frigidaire vide, me demande pas si je sais ce que sait
Mais maman nous a jamais laissé crevé de faim
Maman a toujours subvenues à nos besoins
Pour notre bonheur, elle a sacrifiée le sien
Étonnant ce que l'on peut faire par amour pour des gosses

¹⁴¹ "Forum RAP FRANCAIS : 28 Decembre 1977 - Forums 2KMUSIC." *Musique, Pop, Rock, Folk, RnB,*

Rap, Blogs Et Vidéos - 2Kmusic.com. Web. 22 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.2kmusic.com/fr/topic/28-decembre-1977/20766>>.

Avant je ne portais pas de Nike Air, mais plutôt des Jokers
Mon style vestimentaire, provoquait des sourires moqueurs
Ce qui développa en moi, très vite la rage de vaincre
La rage d'exister, l'envie de réussir
Influencé par les Orcas , Little Jay et Manu Key
Avec Teddy et Harry , Idéal J on a formé
À l'âge de 14 ans est sortie notre 1er disque
Alors j'ai espéré pouvoir vivre de la musique
Mais mon rap était trop sincère, trop dur, trop franc
Conséquence succès d'estime, mais trop choquant pour votre France
Idéal-J , Teddy , Harry , plus tard Dj-Medhi, Boubakar
Le rap je suis tombé dedans
Y'a bien longtemps, j't'expliques en 2-3

C'est donc tout une période de ma vie, et ici j'ai une pensée pour ceux
Qui ont partagé beaucoup de moments avec moi:
Housni, Samir, Titi, Yezy, Jason, Manu Key, Saidou, Karim, Johan, Mokobé,
L.A.S. Montana, M-S, Hakim, D.R.Y, Karlito, Alariana
Puis l'école contre la rue, peu à peu j'ai échangé
Sont arrivés les premiers joints,
Du lycées, j'ai pris congés, j'étais de ces gosses qui auraient pu réussir
Mais légèrement trop féroce pour que le système puisse me contenir
Issus des blocs de béton, la rue m'attendait au tournant
Elle m'avait toujours guetés, mais jusque là je l'avais feinté
Et avant que je puisse me rendre compte, elle m'a emportée avec elle
Est venu l'époque que j'appelle entre rap et business
Entre rap et business, mes potes et moi, grosse équipe
Veux tu que je te raconte la suite ?
Skunks, popo et shit, transactions illicites
Sur le terrain ont prend des risques
Ont prétend devenir millionnaire
Sans jamais rien donner au fisc
Sans même s'en rendre compte on s'enfoncé dans la violence
Le plus souvent sous défonce, tout ce qui bouge on te le défonce
Une embrouille, on bouge à 10
À côté ça vend des disques, jusqu'à croire réellement que
Tu peux pas tester Mafia d' Afrique
Les ennemies se multiplient, jusqu'à ce qu'on puisse plus les compter
Vu que la vie n'est pas un film
Le kifry sort enfouraillé
On le sait et on sent, on le sait et on sent que ça part en boulette,
Ça parle de se ranger mais qu'après avoir
pris des pépètes
C'est ce que j'appelle la rue et ses illusions
Derrière lesquelles se cache la mort ou la prison
La prison mes potes y rentrent, y sortent, reviennent
Et moi j'échappe à leur justice de justesse

C'est dans la rue, que j'ai appris à connaître L-A-S
Et su que derrière tout dur, se cache un peu de faiblesse
Aujourd'hui tu es avec un pote et vous vous charriez,
Mais t'attend pas à ce que la mort t'envoie un courrier
L-A-S, nous a quitté subitement
Que Allah le préserve du châtement
Dans ce bas monde, les actes et pas de comptes
Dans l'au-delà les comptes et pas d'actes
Je me suis réellement senti en danger
J'ai su que je risquais de me noyer, si jamais je plongeais
Les vagues de la violence, tôt ou tard m'aurai submergé
Victime de mon insolence, de la rue je suis un naufragé
Et j'ai nagé, alourdis d'un fardeau de mes regrets chargé
Et même à ce jour ne croit pas que j'ai émergé
Je t'assure, je garde les traces de mon passé
Tu sais, ces choses qu'on ne pourra pas effacer
Puis j'ai appris l'Islam cette religion honorable
De transmission oral auprès de gens bons et fiables
Elle m'a rendu ma fierté
M'a montré ce qu'était un homme
Et comment affronter les démons qui nous talonnent
J'ai embrassé le chemin droit et délaissé les slaloms
Ceux qui m'ont éduqué je remercie
Je passe le Salam
À tout les musulmans de France, de l'occident à l'orient
Ceux qui de ce bas monde voudraient quitter en souriant
Mais yeux se sont ouverts, mon coeur c'est épanouie
Me fut dévoilé, peu à peu tout ce qui m'a nui
Jusqu'à ce que je devienne de ceux qui s'inclinent et se prosternent
Voudraient aimer pour leur frères
Ce qu'ils aiment pour eux même
J'ai une vie et j'en connais le sens
Je ne pars plus dans tout les sens
Ne soit pas étonné si au rap conscient je donne naissance
A la précipitation, je préfère aujourd'hui la patience
Aux paroles inutiles, la sauvegarde du silence
A l'intolérance et au racisme l'indulgence
Et à l'ignorance j'aimerais rétorquer par la science
Ce bas monde, terre de semence
Que plus tard tu récoltes
Le jour où l'âme te quitte, subitement qu'la mort t'emporte
Sois intelligent et sème y ce qui t'es utile
Ceci est l'enseignement de l'Islam et il hisse l'âme
Loin de tout extrémisme
La voix de droiture, l'unique voix à suivre
Et si le système te sature

L'Islam ramène l'amour, rassemble les gens de tout les pays
De toutes les origines, toute les culture, toutes les ethnies
Y'a pas que des riches et des pauvres, y'a des gens mauvais ou bien
J'ai réappris à vivre, compris les causes de notre déclin

Et quand je regarde mon passé
J'ai faillit y passer
Si je n'avais eu l'Islam peut être que je me serai fait repassé
Ou la moitié de ma vie en prison, j'aurai passé
Pour ceux qui y sont passé, ici, j'ai une pensée
Combien sont partie sans avoir eu le temps de se préparer ?
Chargé de pêché et d'injustice a réparé
Avant que la mort, ne me vienne
Faut que je répare les miennes
Si je veux récolter du bien, c'est du bien qu'il faut que je sème
Un jour je partirai, et je serai enveloppé d'un linceul
Au mieux de mes vetements ds un modeste cerceuil
Et lorsque je serai mort, et que cette chanson tu te remémore
Sûrement quelques larmes viendront émettre ta mémoire
Maintenant tu sais d'où je viens, qui je suis et où je vais
Et pourquoi mes textes de sagesse sont
 imprégnés
D'une famille plus proche d'etre pauvres que d'etre fortunés
28 décembre 77, au Abymes j'suis né
Et a une date que j'ignore un jour je partirai...

On nait, on vit, on meurt mais ce qu'on ignore c'est comment
Et là une date que j'ignore, un jour j'partirai
Certains ont dit que l'exemple de l'etre humain sur
Terre est telle un commercant
Il a pour capital sa vie
 Pour bénéfices, ses bonnes oeuvres
Et pour pertes ces mauvaises actions
28 décembre 77, j'suis né et un jour j'partirai
Si c'était a refaire assurément j'ferai
 autrement
Mais les choses sont telles sont
Et ca ne sera jamais autrement.

English Translation

28 December 77, in Abymes I was born
To a family closer to being poor than to being fortunate
My parents originate from Haiti

Independent land that my heart chose for country
Most of my childhood I spent with my mother,
I can't mention that she overcame the nightmare
And that she continues to row, to slave away up till now
On one hand I can count the number of times that I saw them cry
We came to France at the price of numerous sacrifices
Thinking that France was the land of success
October 85, in this country I landed
The weather was grey and I ignored what awaited me
Often parents have ambition for their kids
Thus my sister and I found ourselves in boarding school
Far from my mother, you know, a bitter childhood
Far from her children, for my mother a bitter life

Far from her, the time that she finds her bearings
Just until she takes us back
Then we left the boarding school to come live in Orly
And this that I saw that day, surely changed my life
In a house my mother rented a single room
That a curtain separated 30 meters square at the most
In that thing we were 5, living in promiscuity
To open an empty fridge, I don't ask myself if I know what it is
But mom never left us starving
Mom always met our needs
For our happiness, she sacrificed her own
Surprising what one can do for love of one's kids
Before I never wore Nike Air, but rather Jokers.
My clothing style provoked mocking smiles
What developed in me, very quickly the race to conquer,
The rage to exist, the desire to succeed
Influenced by the Orcas, Little Jay and Manu Key
With Teddy and Harry, Ideal J we formed
At the age of 14 came out our first disc
Then I hoped to be able to earn a living from music
But my rap was too sincere, too harsh, too frank
As a result: critical success, but too shocking for your France
Ideal-J, Teddy, Harry, later DJ-Medhi, Boubakar
The rap that I fell into
A long time ago, I explain to you in 2-3 times, 10 years

It is therefore all a period of my life, and here I have a thought for those
Who shared many moments with me
Housni, Samir, Titi, Yezy, Jason, Manu, Key, Saidou, Karim, Johan, Mokobé, L.A.S.
Montana, M-S, Hakim, D.R.Y, Karlito, Alariana,
Then the school against the road, little by little I exchanged
The first joints arrived

From highschool I took breaks, I was among these kids who could have succeeded
But lightly too ferocious for the system to hold me back
From concrete blocks, the road waited for me at the turn
She always had me ambushed, but up to there I had tricked it
And before I could realize, she had brought me with her
Then came the era that I call between rap and business
Between rap and business, my buddies and me, big team
Do you want me to tell you the rest?
Skunks, police and shit, illicit transactions
On the field we took risks
We pretended to become millionaires
Without ever giving anything in taxes
Without even realizing we were digging ourselves deeper and deeper into violence
The more often high, you get high on whatever moves
A confused bunch, we moved by 10
Beside this selling discs, until you really believe that you can't test Mafia of Africa
The enemies multiply, until you can't count them anymore
Seeing that life is not a movie,

.....
We know it and we feel, we know it and we feel that this is becoming a blunder

Taken from cash
It's what I call the road and its illusions
Behind which is hidden death or prison
Prison: my buddies return to, get out of, and return again
And me, I just barely escape from their justice
It's in the street that I came to know L-A-S
And knew that behind all hardness is hidden a little weakness
Today you are with a friend and you go too far
But it's not waiting for death to send you a message
L-A-S, left us unexpectedly
God (Allah) preserve him from punishment
In this low world, the actions and not the numbers
In the hereafter the numbers and not the actions
I really felt in danger
I knew that I risked drowning if I ever dived in,
The waves of the violence, early or late would have submerged me
Victim of my insolence, of the road that I am a shipwreck
And I swam, weighed of a load of my heavy regrets
And even that day I didn't believe that I had emerged
I assure you, I keep the traces of my past
You know, these things that one can't erase
Then I learned about Islam, this honorable religion
Of oral transmission according to the good and faithful people
It made me proud
Showed me what a man was

And how to confront the demons that torments us
I embraced the straight path and abandoned the slaloms
Those that educated me I thank
I send out a "salaam"
To all the Muslims of France, of the West and the East
Those who from this low world want to leave smiling
But eyes are open, my heart is lightened
I removed, little by little all this that had harmed me
Until I became among those who bow and prostrate themselves
They wanted love for their brothers
Those that love for themselves
I have a life and I know the meaning of it
I no longer head off in all directions
Don't be surprised if I give birth to conscious rap
Now I prefer patience to rushing things
To useless words I preserve the silence
To intolerance and racism, indulgence
And to ignorance I like to respond with science
This lowly life, of earthly sowing
That later you harvest
The day the soul leaves you, suddenly takes you away
Be intelligent and sow what is useful for you
This is the teaching of Islam and it lifts the soul
Far from all extremism
The voice of rightness, the unique voice to follow
And if the system drowns you
Islam brings love, brings together people from all countries
Of all origins, all cultures, all ethnicities,
There are not just rich and poor, there are bad people or good
I relearned to live, understood the causes of our decline

And when I look at my past
I almost didn't make it
If I hadn't had Islam maybe I would have gotten myself killed
Or I would have spent half of my life in prison
For those who have gone before, here I have a thought
How many have died without having had time to prepare themselves?
Burdened with sin and injustice to make up for,
Before death comes to me, I must atone for my own
If I want to harvest the good, I must sow good
One day I will leave, and I will be enveloped in a shroud
In the best of my clothes in a modest coffin
And when I am dead, and you remember this song
Surely some tears will come to activate your memory
Now you know where I'm from, who I am, and where I'm going
And why my words of wisdom are impregnated

From a family closer to being poor than to being fortunate
28 December 77, in Abymes I was born
And on a date that I ignore, one day I will leave...

One is born, one lives, one dies but what we ignore is how
And that date that I ignore, one day I will leave
Certain people said that the example of the human being
On earth is like a businessman
He has for capital his life
For benefits, his good works
And for losses his bad actions.
28 December, 77, I was born and one day I will leave
If I had it to redo surely I would do it differently
But things are as they are and it will never be different

APPENDIX B

DISCRIMINATION AS DEFINED BY SOS RACISME

“A racial discrimination is a difference made between several people according to their skin color or their supposed origin. It is translated more literally as the refusal to give employment or housing to someone because of the color of their skin. The discriminatory practices are numerous and touch several domains: employment, housing, leisure activities, public services, sales... The discrimination is sometimes clear but more often it is insidious. It even occurs sometimes that people are discriminated against without being aware. This is why it is important, when one is a victim of discrimination, to make a complaint and to not let it go in silence. SOS Racism is present to aid you and counsel you in your endeavors.

In the sense of the law, discrimination is ‘all distinction operated between people because of their origin, their belonging or non-belonging to an ethnicity, a nation, a race, or a determined religion (art. 225-1 of the penal code) Reminder: The association SOS Racism was created with the intention to struggle against racism, anti-Semitism, and discrimination. This is why our association cannot intervene in a case outside this primary purpose.” ¹⁴²

¹⁴² SOS-racisme.org

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