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Immigration in France: How French Perception Affects Muslim Integration

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Introduction

Modern-day France is wrought with social tensions surrounding the issue of immigration and what it means for the country's national identity. As a country of strong nationalism, with cultural unity at the center of that sense of nationalism, the French are finding themselves at odds with a large population of immigrants that cannot help but stand out: the Muslims of North African descent, the region the French refer to as the Maghreb. France is not the only country to experience a recent heavy influx of Maghrebi immigrants, but it is the European nation who can currently claim the most.¹ Of course, this is not a new occurrence. France has been both recruiting and receiving heavy flows and stocks of immigrants since the nineteenth century, making it one of the oldest European destinations for immigrants.² The main instances of heavy immigration to France include the first wave during the Industrial Revolution, when the state recruited Belgians, Poles, and Italians for work in French factories. In the 1930s and again in the 1960s, France recruited large numbers of North Africans from its colonies in the Maghreb to supplement the labor force. The immigration stream continued until today. The legacy of those same immigrants is very present in France. Some citizens of North African descent are second or third generation and new immigrants come every day as part of familial reunion or in search of asylum. In fact, a 2006 statistic from a French bureau declared that over 8% of the French population is foreign-born, with less than half of those immigrants coming from Europe and about 60% emigrating from Africa.³

With all of these new immigrants, the people of France are faced with changing demographics, and an infusion of foreign culture. This has prompted the recent debate centered on what exactly is the national French identity. While some have dismissed this debate as a political gesture aimed at securing more votes come election time, others have

¹ Alex Derry. "Pray-but not outside." *Maclean's* 124, no. 38 (October 3, 2011): 34.

² Virginie Guiraudon. "Moroccan Immigration in France: Do Migration Policies Matter?." *Journal Of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 2008): 368.

³ Virginie Guiraudon. 368-369.

become genuinely concerned with the subject. In the face of globalization, assuming such a phenomenon exists, can a nation truly hold on to a static national identity? What procedures should be put in place to preserve such an intangible concept? The French government has put many new measures in place regarding both immigration and assimilation in the hopes of countering some of the effects of the heavy Muslim presence in the country. From lessening numbers of immigrants let in the country each year, especially regarding those from Africa, to a signed affidavit promising adequate assimilation into the nation and its culture, France is striving to control the influx of immigrants, as well as the presumed assault on French culture.

In particular, several scholars argue that the trademarks of the Muslim religion make it difficult for its followers to blend in to Western society, especially one such as France, where the principle of *laïcité*, or secularism, has been an important part of public life since the French Revolution. However there are some examples of integration, for instance immigrants who have assimilated, participate in civic life by becoming lawyers, voting during elections, or participating in unions. They do not give up their religion, but they merge their traditional beliefs with the ideas of the state. An example would be the Berber, or Amazigh, activists.⁴

But the perfect examples of assimilation are eclipsed by the instances of car-bombings, riots, and even murders that have plagued France's *banlieues*, or low-rent suburbs, committed by immigrants of Muslim origin. As the immigrant population, especially the young, who are already more subject to indignant outbursts, find it increasingly difficult to be accepted in French society, from finding employment to peacefully interacting with police, they are more and more likely to act out against their perceived oppressors. In response to the violence, the French government has tightened its policing of the *banlieues*, which, according to some observers such as Paul A. Silverstein, Virginie Guiraudon, and Elisa T. Beller, probably causes more harm than good. But what is the right answer? While the French Muslim youth are searching for their cultural identity, France is intensely fighting to protect hers. Is it true the two are so incompatible?

⁴ Paul A. Silverstein, "The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France," *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 1 (February 2008), 24.

In this paper I examine the process of Muslim immigrants' integration, probing into the negative French perceptions of immigrants and how these perceptions may affect the process of integration and assimilation. I begin with a brief overview of French history as related to Muslim societies and how French culture and policies have evolved to their current state, such as the new strict policy on identity card renewal and the promise to integrate if accepted into the country. Next I deal strictly with immigration in France, including the policies and procedures of the French government and the perceptions of the French population. In addition I examine the perception of North African immigrants in particular, especially North African Muslims, and their sense of security. I close with a section on French identity, how it has evolved and how it has room to continue its evolution. Citations from French sources are translated by myself.

A Brief History of France

To better understand the relationship between the French and immigrants, as well as between Christians and Muslims, an overview of brief selected history is required. As Marc Bloch said, regarding the symbiotic relationship of the past and present, "men resemble their times more than they resemble their fathers."⁵ From the Crusades of the Middle Ages to the French colonizing mission and later two World Wars, French history is wrought with struggles and clashes between civilizations. And as history shapes cultures and nations, it is important to understand it.

Starting with the Crusades, the French, who were once almost entirely Christian, and Muslim nations have endured a rocky past. While the Crusades were certainly not the sole reason for the enmity between the two, they made a substantial contribution to it and the effects on Christian-Muslim relations was "profoundly destructive", as one expert puts it.⁶ Both sides viewed the other in stereotypical and negative ways that were full of dislike and contempt. And although the Crusades did not begin as an attack on Muslims, per se, it certainly concluded as such, for once they were named enemies of Gods, heretics, polytheists, and other derogatory, slanderous names, finding common ground

⁵ Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire, ou métier d'historien* (Paris : 1949), 57-58, quoted in Carol Symes, "The Middle Ages between Nationalism and Colonialism". *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011), 39.

⁶ Norman Housley, "The Crusades and Islam," *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 2 (July 2007), 190.

between Christians and Muslims was useless.⁷ Eventually, in order to better understand their enemies, the Christian knights were urged to learn about their Muslim foes, but even then much misunderstanding occurred, likely due to the decades of mistrust and hate, as well as the convenience provided by an evil foil. And it was completely feasible to fight, and even negotiate with the Muslims without truly understanding their beliefs. A stigmatization of the Muslims as enemies of God was ultimately more conducive to fighting, as it is easier to battle a religious enemy that is inherently in the wrong than one who worships a god almost identical to one's own. Therefore, the Muslim threat was characterized as evil and idolatrous polytheists, creating an image of the "wicked other" or *imago inimici*.⁸ The description of Muslims ranged from "the incorrigible and militant enemy of the Christian religion" to "enemies of Christ's Cross and faith, destroyers of churches and relics, torturers, killers and enslavers of Christians", as well as heretics and hedonists who followed a deceptive, clever magician.⁹ By depicting the Muslim people as essentially evil agents of Satan, the Christian crusaders dehumanized their Muslim foes thus justifying the massacre of them, all in the name of the Christian faith.

The legacy of the Crusades did not end with the thirteenth century, though. The confrontation with the Turks in the fifteenth century marked the continued ill perception Christians held of Muslims. Although in this new instance, the Turk was not only an enemy of the faith, as all Muslims are, but also a barbarian. Genetic coding was popular in the Middle Ages, and this denomination came from the Turks' origins as steppe dwellers. Such concern for genetics also formed the premise for the Spanish suspicion of Moors and Jews in the sixteenth century, which ultimately led to their expulsion.¹⁰ The theme of crusading continued on even into the nineteenth century, however, with the influence of Sir Walter Scott's tales and the prominence of Orientalism, a cultural movement concerning an interest in the East.¹¹

Coinciding with these events and perhaps because of them, France and other European powers began expanding their influence and power into the Muslim near east, beginning with France's invasion of Algeria in 1830. Many saw the Crusades as a

⁷ Housley, 195.

⁸ Housley, 197-198.

⁹ Housley, 200-201.

¹⁰ Housley, 206.

¹¹ Jonathan Phillips, "The Call of the Crusades," *History Today* 59, no. 11 (November 2009), 10-17.

precursor, which was further emphasized when Syria submitted to French control in 1920. One man, Jean Longnon, wrote in 1929 that “The name of Frank has remained a symbol of nobility, courage and generosity...and if our country has been called on to receive the protectorate of Syria, it is the result of that influence.”¹² The parallels between colonialism and the Crusades are evident in such a light. Clearly, some French still saw themselves as reclaiming land that was lost to their ancestors centuries before. The Muslims, for their part, seemed to agree, most definitely during the First World War when General Allenby captured Jerusalem in 1917. While Allenby and the Allied governments denied it having anything to do with religion or the Crusades, the connection was too strong to be denied.¹³ After the legacy of the Crusades, leaders from strongly Muslim nations often saw a link between European colonialism and the spread of Christianity. In the 1950s, the president of Egypt, President Gamal Abdel Nasser, used Saladin, one of the most famous Muslim leaders of the Crusades, as an inspiration in response to European imperialism. He called upon his citizens to remember that “the whole region was united for reasons of mutual security to face an imperialism coming from Europe and bearing the cross in order to disguise its ambitions behind the façade of Christianity.”¹⁴ Saddam Hussein was another fan of Saladin’s and sought to invoke his image.

There was more to colonialism than simply the legacy of the Crusades, however. The French colonization of North Africa was both a military expedition and an understanding as part of France’s duty as a civilizing mission.¹⁵ Although this mission was instated in the name of universal citizenship, it actually began to play out as what Jean-Loup Amselle termed “a war between the races.”¹⁶ This was emphasized by the fact that in the French colonial Maghreb, the colonial administration made a point to distinguish nationals, or Europeans, from the natives. This was a legal division called the *code de l’indigénat* that lasted until 1870 for Jews in the region and 1958 for Muslims. It

¹² Phillips, 10-17.

¹³ Phillips, 10-17.

¹⁴ Phillips, 10-17.

¹⁵ Paul A. Silverstein, “The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 1 (February 2008), 6.

¹⁶ Jean-Loup Amselle, *Affirmative Exclusion: Cultural Pluralism and the Rule of Custom in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2003), quoted in Paul A. Silverstein, “The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France,” *patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 1 (February 2008), 7.

refused citizenship to the natives and subjected them to a separate court system and legal codes that were put in place by the French administration. The natives were seen as inferior, and it was France's duty to enlighten them by bringing them the principles of universalism so popular in France. Their inferiority was highlighted by the colonial discourse of the time that attributed several characteristics to the "Arab personality...its 'bellicose', 'hostile' nature, attributable to religious 'fanaticism'; and...its 'inveterate laziness', resulting from a reverent 'fatalism'."¹⁷ The Arab, and particularly Muslim, fatalist characterization was attributed to their supposed "laziness, dishonesty, suspicion, unpredictability," etc, all which weakened their intellect and made them unable to move towards modernity. Essentially, they were inassimilable. Although in contrast to this view, most French scholars of the period treated the minority populations of Jews and Berbers as more similarly to the French citizens, mostly due to their assumed lack of religious fervor.¹⁸ On the part of the North Africans, a complex relationship was built with the French based on "domination, subordination, but also cooperation."¹⁹

Although the colonial administration did not view its North African subjects as equals or citizens, that did not stop the French from calling on the natives in times of war. As Mahamet Timera wrote, of the four different waves of immigrants from the Maghreb, the first substantial one came due to the First World War when France mobilized her colonies, using the North Africans and Black Africans for the infantry, a process which continued during the Second World War and the colonial wars that followed. And although most returned home after the war, some chose to remain in France, marking some of the original North African immigrants in France.²⁰ For the Maghrebis, though, the experience in the wars was an equalizing one, making them feel truly French. As one

¹⁷ André Servier, *L'Islam et la psychologie du musulman* (Paris : Challamel 1923), 345-346, quoted in Paul A. Silverstein, "The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France," *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 1 (February 2008), 7.

¹⁸ Paul A. Silverstein, 8.

¹⁹ "des relations complexes de domination, de subordination, mais aussi de « cooperation »." Mahamet Timera, "L'immigration Africaine En France : Regards Des Autres Et Repli Sur Soi", *L'immigration Africaine En France*. 44.

²⁰ "La filière militaire qui s'est mise en place dès la première guerre mondiale (1914-1918) avec la mobilisation des colonies par la France (bataillons de tirailleurs sénégalais et d'Africains noirs participant aux combats en suivi). Si la plupart des survivants sont rentrés à la fin de la guerre, certains sont restés et se sont installés en France", Mahamet Timera, "L'immigration Africaine En France : Regards Des Autres Et Repli Sur Soi", *L'immigration Africaine En France*. 43

man explains, "There was only a kilo of bread for ten men. I felt hunger, like the others. And I was a prisoner for three years in Germany, with the rest of my regiment. At that time, I was like the French, all the same, like friends."²¹

France and Immigration

The end of both World War I and World War II, after many North Africans fought for the French, marked the first large wave of immigration. France sought workers to rebuild the country after the destruction of warfare and restart the economy, so a labor force was recruited made up of Belgians, Poles, and Italians.²² To replace the European labor force, recruiters later selected an abundant, uneducated and underpaid African workforce that was easy to employ and able to return home when finished.²³ Although, according to Francois Ceyrac, an administrator for Peugeot and former president of C.N.P.F., the recruited workers were not considered Muslims, but citizens of France.²⁴ That did not necessarily make them equals, however, as the jobs offered were in factories and mines and other blue collar fields. The men were recruited on short-term basis, paid very little, and were not permitted to form unions. If they became ill or were injured, they were not paid, and were often sent home. Essentially, they were treated as second-class citizens only in France to work. They were even shut off from the rest of society, in the beginnings of the all-African *banlieues* or slums that still exist today.²⁵ This was a shock for the African immigrants, who thought themselves close to the French nation and French people.²⁶ There was a closer relationship, but between the governments to provide labor to France and eliminate unemployment in the African

²¹ "Il n'y avait qu'un kilo de pain pour dix hommes. J'ai crevé de faim, comme les autres. Et je suis resté trois ans prisonnier en Allemagne, avec tous ceux de mon régiment. A cette époque, on était comme les Français, tous pareils, comme des amis." Yamina Benguigui, *Mémoires d'Immigrés : L'héritage Maghrébin*. Paris : Canal + éditions, 1997. 61.

²² Virginie Guiraudon, 368.

²³ "Puis j'ai rendu visite aux peres, venus seuls dans les années 50, à la demande expresse d'entreprises françaises recrutant une main-d'œuvre abondante, pas très qualifiée, sous-payée, facile à employer et à renvoyer chez elle, pour remplacer l'italienne et la portugaise." Yamina Benguigui, 10.

²⁴ "Ce n'étaient pas des musulmans, c'étaient des citoyens français." Yamina Benguigui, *Mémoires d'Immigrés : L'héritage Maghrébin*. Paris : Canal + éditions, 1997. 15.

²⁵ Yamina Benguigui, 15-67.

²⁶ "Du fait d'une décolonisation relativement paisible et de près de trois décennies de « coopération » avec la France, le traitement actuel des immigrés d'Afrique noire en surprend plus d'un, convaincus qu'ils avaient avec la France une relation privilégiée, en tout cas plus proche que les immigrés d'autres régions du globe." Mahamet Timera, 44.

nations, not between the two cultures.²⁷ Joël Dahoui, a recruiter for the Moroccan Office of Immigration (l'O.M.I.) from 1962 to 1980, explains "I was the recruiter for the workforce, a brute workforce...At the time, there was an accord between the Moroccan office of employment and the Moroccan Office of Immigration for selecting from certain areas. One would take three hundred workers from Marrakech, two hundred and fifty from Fez, etc. In other words, we had a cake of immigration. In general, we preferred to select from rural areas, for reasons of their mentality."²⁸

During the Algerian War of Independence, between 1955 and 1962, the French enterprises did not stop recruiting as workers were still needed. During that time, however, in light of the war, the workers suffered from a hostile, suspicious environment that has not yet ceased today.²⁹ Others left Algeria in order to escape the fighting and warfare and make use of their French citizenship (granted to Algerians of Muslim and black African descent in 1958).³⁰ Altogether, by war's end, there were over 400,000 North Africans living in France, most in large cities such as Paris, Lyon, and Marseille.³¹

In 1974, the French government passed a ruling allowing the reunion of families in France. In other words, women and young children could join the men who had left them to work in French mines and factories. This new flow of immigration quickly increased the number of North African immigrants in France, and, now that the wives had been reunited with their husbands, French-African children began to be added to the mix. As Mahamet Timera says, "the arrival of the wives began a process of feminization as well as the rejuvenation of African immigration which gave birth to a second generation

²⁷ Yamina Benguigui, 20.

²⁸ "J'étais sélectionneur de main-d'œuvre, ce qu'on appelait des manoeuvres, donc une main-d'œuvre brute...A partir de là, il y avait un accord entre le ministère du Travail marocain et l'Office d'immigration au Maroc pour sélectionner dans certains zones des contingents. On prenait trois cents travailleurs dans la province de Marrakech, deux cent cinquante dans la province de Fès, etc. Autrement dit, on a partagé le gâteau de l'immigration. D'une façon générale, nous avons préféré sélectionner en zone rurale, pour des raisons de mentalité." Yamina Benguigui, 16-17.

²⁹ "La guerre d'Algérie, entre 1955 et 1962, n'empêche pas les entreprises françaises de continuer a recruter la main-d'œuvre algérienne. Les attentats gagnent la métropole et engendrent, à l'égard des Maghrébins, un climat d'hostilité et de méfiance qui, depuis, ne s'est jamais démenti." Yamina Benguigui, 19.

³⁰ Yamina Benguigui, 15-67.

³¹ Paul A. Silverstein, 10.

of black Africans, French citizens by right (according to the right of land).³² In response to the sudden increase in immigrants, as well as a time of economic crisis, the French government issued a law that would provide ten thousand francs in aid to families who wanted to return to their original country. They could not be forced to leave, although they were certainly pressured to do so.³³ Even so, by the 1980s, there were approximately 1.5 million North African immigrants residing in France, a phenomenon that the French people observed through a “lens of violence” and referred to as an invasion.³⁴

Although the waves of immigration may not be as forceful as they were in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1970s, the number of immigrants in France is still constantly increasing today. Family reunification is still a strong cause of immigration, as well as those seeking asylum from war and tyranny. For example, in 2003 out of the 22,339 residence permits granted to Moroccans in France, 7775 were due to family reunification.³⁵ Moroccans are one of the most prominent groups of foreigners in France, as well as Algerians, Turks, Portuguese, Chinese, Italians, and Americans. As for immigrants seeking asylum, most come from Turkey, the Congo, Mauritania, Algeria, and China.³⁶

What is the French Identity?

Faced with the perceived threat of immigration, French nationalism has increased, and intense debate has centered around the issue of French identity—what it is and how to protect it. Such nationalism has inspired the requirement that French schools are now ordered to fly the French flag, have a copy of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in every classroom, and provide a “young citizen’s manual” to students.³⁷

³² “L’arrivee des femmes entraine un processus de feminisation, mais aussi de rajeunissement et de « familialisation » de l’immigration africaine qui donnera naissance à une seconde generation d’Africains noirs, citoyens francais de droit (par le droit du sol).” Mahamet Timera, 43.

³³ Yamina Benguigui, 74-75.

³⁴ Paul A. Silverstein, 10.

³⁵ Virginie Guiraudon, 369-370.

³⁶ Virginie Guiraudon, 370.

³⁷ Steven Erlanger, “French ‘Identity’ Debate Leaves Public Forum,” *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/09/world/europe/09france.html> (accessed 2 Sep. 2011).

This practice coincides with the belief, increasingly prominent since the 1980s, that over the centuries since the Revolution, France has maintained a relatively stable idea of its national identity, and until the recent waves of immigration it maintained a cultural homogeneity.³⁸ This fierce sense of nationalism and the desire to protect the “national identity” has been directed at Muslims recently as well. As of September 16, 2011, the French government passed a law outlawing the increasingly common habit of praying in the street, a practice *Front National* leader Marine le Pen has equated to the Nazi invasions of World War II.³⁹

However, many scholars argue that French has never been a culturally homogenous country. From the melding of Franks, Celts, and Romans hundreds of years ago, to the steady immigration from other European countries such as Portugal, Italy, and Poland, the population has always been a melting pot.⁴⁰ In addition, French universities and hospitals have long had a teaching history, attracting immigrant scholars for centuries.⁴¹ Regardless of the country’s melting pot status, at least one cultural aspect has been of importance since the Revolution, that of *laïcité*, a core principle in France’s meritocratic system as well as necessary for the practice of the Rights of Man, which decree no person or establishment may force their beliefs on another, nor make anyone feel uncomfortable in their beliefs.⁴² Of course, what is interesting in that approximation is that France is essentially forcing her beliefs on all immigrants. The French government, however, takes the stance that citizenship is based on a trade-off. The citizen is granted citizenship on an entirely voluntary basis, but in so doing they must promise to adhere to the values of the state.⁴³

Although critics have had their say as to whether or not France can even claim to have a viable “national identity”, a forum was launched online by France’s minister of national identity, Eric Besson, in November 2009 to access what the French believe about their national identity. While supposedly most of the comments were tame, there was an undeniable segment that was racist and xenophobic. Some examples include: “France

³⁸ Elisa T. Beller, 586-587.

³⁹ Alex Derry, “Pray-but not outside,” *Maclean’s* 124, no. 38, (3 Oct. 2011): 34.

⁴⁰ Elisa T. Beller, 587.

⁴¹ Mahamet Timera, 44.

⁴² Elisa T. Beller, 589.

⁴³ Liav Orgad, 719-737.

has irrevocably become an African colony,” “In adding violence and the renunciation of their immigrant parents to the education of their children....No French person asked to be overrun by foreigners,” “How can one say they are French and declare they want to be entombed in their original country?”⁴⁴ On the subject of French identity in particular, some responses were: “To be French, it’s to be born in France, by two French parents,” “It’s the blood right, to be French, it is necessary to have French blood,” “France and our national identity, it’s a cathedral in the center of Paris, not a mosque.”⁴⁵ Clearly there are strong anti-immigrant sentiments within the country, although the exact numbers or percentages are difficult to estimate. It is evident, however, that although much of the population may not feel unduly threatened, there is a strong vocal minority who do.

The feeling of being threatened by a perceived “other” is not new. Philosophers have long probed the idea of identity, and how one’s identity can come into conflict with another’s. This can be seen in Camus’ *The Guest*, when his protagonist is faced with transporting a criminal to the police. Although relatively untouched by the rumors of a popular revolt, his introduction to the criminal alters his life and challenges his world view. He does not condone what the man has done and wants no part in his crime, but he also does not support his being put to death.⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida describes a similar theme in his use of the term *roué*. A *roué*, or generally translated, a rogue, is someone society has placed outside the realm of the norm, making them the other, and classifying them as dangerous to society. As Derrida describes, “In the idea of the *roué* there is thus an allusion to debauchery and perversity, to the subversive disrespect for principles, norms, and good manners, for the rules and laws that govern the circle of decent, self-respecting people, of respectable, right-thinking society. *Roué* characterizes a leading astray that calls for exclusion or punishment.”⁴⁷ Because the rogue characters introduce an

⁴⁴ “La France est devenue une colonie de l’Afrique de façon irrémédiable,” “En ajoutant la violence et la renonciation des parents immigrés dans l’éducation de leurs enfants...Aucun Français n’a demandé à être envahi d’étrangers,” “Comment peut-on se dire Français et déclarer vouloir se faire enterrer dans son pays d’origine,” Soren Seelow, “Sur le site d’Eric Besson: le pire du débat sur l’identité nationale,” *Le Monde*, 4 Dec. 2009, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2009/12/04/sur-le-site-d-eric-besson-le-pire-du-debat-sur-l-identite-nationale_1275894_3224.html (accessed 2 Sep. 2011).

⁴⁵ “Être Français, c’est être né en France, des deux parents français,” “C’est le droit du sang, pour être français, il faut avoir du sang français,” “La France et notre identité nationale, c’est une cathédrale au centre de Paris et non pas une mosquée.” Soren Seelow, 2009.

⁴⁶ Albert Camus, “The Guest”, *Exile and the Kingdom*, (London: Vintage, 2007).

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, 2005), 20.

atmosphere of disorder, they are “picked out, denounced, judged, and condemned...as those accused and pursued” by both the police and the common man.⁴⁸ They represent everything that is bad or needs repaired in the state. They take the form of the unemployed who roam the streets.⁴⁹ What is interesting is that the *roué* are considered to be people outside the common convention, who act outside of the law or traditional custom. But one could argue that the French Republic started that way, with the overthrow of the monarchy.

Secular France

Perhaps the recent focus on immigration in France has less to do with conservatism, as it does in most countries facing the same issue, and more to do with the French Republic’s focus and foundation of secularism, the concept of *laïcité*. After the conclusion of the French Revolution, during the birth of the First Republic, France’s founding fathers laid down several laws and ideals of French citizenship, including the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. It was the Third Republic, however, that spawned the idea of *laïcité* and the separation of church and state.⁵⁰ The idea was to eliminate the heavy influence of the Catholic Church in matters of state. The Church has historically been very active in politics, and not only in France, whether by counseling rulers or planting ideas and emotions in the minds of its followers. The concept of secularism was instated not to outlaw religion, but to free the people of undue influence from any one sector so that they may be able to make their own decisions. This did not create a type of militant atheism by any means, but mandated that religion “remain a wholly private matter, that it not intrude into public debate or public view in any way.”⁵¹

The separation of church and state had much to do with the Dreyfus Affair shortly before the turn of the century, in which a Jewish army captain was falsely accused and convicted of spying for Germany. The military tribunal, as well as others involved in the case, were later revealed to have falsified evidence as well as committing many other injustices. During the controversy, however, the church sided with and supported its

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, 63-64.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, 65.

⁵⁰ Elisa T. Beller, “The Headscarf Affair: The Conseil d’État on the Role of Religion and Culture in French Society,” *Texas International Law Journal* 39, no. 4 (Summer 2004), 589.

⁵¹ Elisa T. Beller, 589.

longtime ally, the military. It publicly maintained that the case should not be reviewed, which appeared suspicious after the truth was brought to light. "Extricating the church from all involvement in governance (there were even some restrictions on individual Catholics' opportunity to become civil servants) was a way of asserting that the old sources of authority, including the church and the military, had no place in the Republic of meritocracy and individual freedom of belief."⁵² This concept has remained a celebrated aspect of French government and society ever since, and is placed in the same esteem as the ideas of fraternity, equality, and liberty.

Therefore, the recent issues being faced by the state such as the wearing of the hijab or praying in public, which will be discussed later, likely has less to do with racism or the dislike of Islam, and more to do with maintaining the secularism of France. Shows of religion in public, regardless of the creed, infringe on the country's secular idea, as well as on the individual freedom of belief for each citizen. The state is not requiring Muslims to abandon their traditional religion or beliefs, but to follow them in the privacy of their own home or place of worship, out of the eyes of those who would feel offended by it. The same is true for Catholics, Christians, Buddhist, etc. Those of the Muslim faith feel singled out, but Islam is only the most recent religion to be in the crosshairs.

The Concept of Integration/Assimilation

Even before the various waves of immigration the French nation received, there existed distinct rules and expectations for immigrants who desired to be citizens, although those regulations have changed somewhat overtime. Beginning with the French Revolution, and the start of the First Republic, the new French government created a system of guidelines that applied to every citizen, including and especially immigrants. From the French Revolution through each regime change, the French ideal of citizenship has evolved, but not as much as one might think. In fact, the most drastic changes have occurred over the last few decades, largely in response to immigration.

Elisa T. Beller describes the period between the Revolution and the late twentieth century as a time where France actually retained a fairly stable idea of "itself as a nation whose residents, in order to be worthy of the title 'citizen,' must actively take on its

⁵² Elisa T. Beller, 593.

culture, including the all-important French language, and participate in its political life.” She continues by explaining that although the idea of citizen may have evolved over time, it retained the importance of participating in both French culture and political life.⁵³ However, this definition of citizenship allows, in theory, anyone with an affinity for French culture to become a citizen. Because the tide of North African immigrants stood apart from French culture (namely white Christianity), this conflicted with the French reckoning of citizenship. Some scholars, however, such as Virginie Guiraudon, reject this opinion, stating that the French culture has undergone substantial evolution over the past few centuries, and that France is in fact a melting pot with a blend of cultures resulting from a long history of immigration from other European countries.⁵⁴

During the French Revolution and the period following it, less focus centered on the amount a citizen participated in culture and instead emphasized the importance of the rights of all men, especially French citizens. While all of the articles listed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen are relevant and necessary, some of the most important in the light of immigration and the question of what makes a citizen are articles two, four, five, and ten. Article two states “The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.” Article four promises that “Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.” In continuation of the former article, article five states, “Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.” Finally, of particular importance in the issue of cultural practice and assimilation, is article ten, “No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.”⁵⁵ These articles state that every man, not just a white Christian Frenchman, is

⁵³ Elisa T. Beller, 586.

⁵⁴ Elisa T. Beller, 587.

⁵⁵ “Declaration of the Rights of Man”, *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp (accessed 7 Jul. 2012).

guaranteed the rights of “liberty, property, security, and the resistance to oppression”, maintaining that liberty entails anything that does not hurt others or break the law, which can only outlaw behaviors harmful to society. And of course, there is the freedom of one’s views and beliefs, one’s opinions, so long as they do not disturb the law. Nowhere in those rights does it state that culture must be adhered to above all else. In the words of Emmanuel-Joseph Sièyes, “What is a nation? A body of associates living under *common* laws and represented by the same *legislative assembly*.”⁵⁶ It is legal authority on which citizenship depended; ethnic similarity was of no import. While the Revolutionary state was opposed to “foreigners”, this term did not necessarily take the word in the literal sense, it could also be applied to opponents of the new regime. Jean-Lambert Tallien, a famous revolutionary leader, claimed, “[t]he only foreigners in France are bad citizens,” so clearly the new government was not intrinsically opposed to the foreign-born.⁵⁷ Instead, good citizenship has traditionally been emphasized, regardless of one’s origin.

Very little changed in the idea of citizenship until the Third Republic, where several new doctrines became a part of the republican ideal. Two important ones included the introduction of mandatory primary education, which was launched in 1882, and the separation of church and state in 1905. The separation of church and state, coined *laïcité*, marked a move away from the influence of the Catholic Church in favor of a government ruled more truly by the people. However, even after the Church was cast out of political affairs, it remained an important aspect of French culture. *Laïcité* maintains that religion stays in the private sphere of one’s life and does not encroach on public matters or the public view. And as Beller explains, “Education became the single most important point of contact between state and citizen: it was the prime way that French culture and active citizenship were to be conveyed.”⁵⁸ Unlike the American education system, which is governed on the local level, the French system maintains a structure that is run by the state. Because schools are state-run, and secularism is of such high importance, that is especially emphasized in the classroom, where teaching professionals are in the process of creating young citizens.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Emmanuel-Joseph Sièyes, *What is the Third Estate?* (1789), 58, quoted in Elisa T. Beller, 590.

⁵⁷ Jean-Lambert Tallien, quoted in Elisa T. Beller, 592.

⁵⁸ Elisa T. Beller, 589.

⁵⁹ Elisa T. Beller, 590.

The focus on cultural unity and the assimilation necessary for citizenship became more important in the latter half of the twentieth century. Even though Article 22 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted in the aftermath of World War II, states that “Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and culture rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.”⁶⁰ After the Algerian War of Independence, however, the French tended to see immigrants in a different light, and wanted to make sure they were loyal to France and not their home country. The best way to accomplish that was cultural assimilation. There was an outbreak of both popular and police violence against immigrants suspected of participating in the Algerian nationalist movement, although all persons of North African descent were indiscriminately targeted in these attacks.⁶¹ Suspicion of Algerians and French people of Algerian descent continued during the economic crisis of the 1970s, as some French citizens placed the blame for the recession on the immigrants, a habit that is as old as history itself. It was because of this that the law was passed in 1976 to aid immigrants in returning home. If France could not assimilate its mass quantity of immigrants, they would be shipped home “voluntarily”.⁶²

At the close of the French-Algerian War, however, in response to the many children born in France or who had spent the majority of their life in the country, it was decided that any children born after 1962 (the end of the war) would have dual citizenship. Although this was intended as a measure to decrease the distinctly African culture being pressed upon the youth, that was not the case. Many French people still attributed a North African nationality to the children. As one man said, “And my children, who were born in France, who do not speak Arabic, who speak French, who think French, why do people impose upon them the nationality of the country of origin of

⁶⁰ Thomas M. Adams, “Universalism in One Country: La Protection Sociale over the Longue Durée,” *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 434.

⁶¹ Paul A. Silverstein, 11.

⁶² Yamina Benguigui, 21-22.

their father? It complicates life and gives an easy argument to racists.”⁶³ In response to their children’s ability to essentially choose their nationality, many parents wanted to give them enough information about the Maghreb for them to make the right choice, pressing even more North African culture upon them. One father remarked, “Double nationality. That means they can have a choice. That’s why I took all my children to Algeria, one month, two months, until they were seventeen, eighteen years old. Because I did not want to be shocked, I wanted them to understand life there, the mentality of Algerian people.”⁶⁴

Women often had a different view, however, because after the wives of immigrant workers were brought to France for family reunification, they were held in transient cities, supposedly for only a few months. During such time, they were expected to learn the French language and be acclimated to French culture, and after they were settled they could relocate. Unfortunately, many women spent up to twenty years in a slum-like environment, where instead of becoming more French, they were isolated from French culture and therefore recreated their own.⁶⁵ But the government presumed assimilation to be the solution, creating new policies and procedures for the immigrant men, women, and children.

The 1980s marked the first drastic evolution in the ideal of citizenship, starting when another economic crisis hit and popular opinion once again blamed the immigrants, resulting in the parents and children sometimes being cast out of the country for alleged misbehavior, often on the grounds that they had two passports anyway. Yamina Benguigui states, “the economic crisis amplified unemployment, delinquency, and drug use... Popular opinion began to see immigrants as responsible, without realizing that the youth, born in France, were neither foreigners nor immigrants, and that they were little by little becoming a new facet of French society. That didn’t stop the politicians from

⁶³ “Et mes enfants, qui sont nés en France, qui ne parlent pas arabe, qui parlent français, qui pensent français, pourquoi leur impose-t-on d’avoir la nationalité du pays d’origine de leur père ? Ça complique la vie et ça donne des arguments faciles aux racistes.” Yamina Benguigui, 33.

⁶⁴ “La double nationalité. C’est-à-dire qu’ils peuvent avoir le choix. Et c’est pour ça que tout petits je les ai emmenés en Algérie, un mois, deux mois, jusqu’à ce qu’ils aient 17, 18 ans. Parce que je ne voulais pas qu’ils soient déphasés, je voulais qu’ils soient au courant de la vie, de la mentalité des gens en Algérie.” Yamina Benguigui, 47.

⁶⁵ Yamina Benguigui, 71-76.

issuing a systematic expulsion.”⁶⁶ And despite the perception that these young people were not French, when faced in a strange land so far from France, the country they felt they belonged to, many died by either committing suicide or by trying to get on a boat to go back to France.⁶⁷ Heated instances of violence began occurring in the *banlieues*, either between the Muslim youth and police, or as acts against society. Tired of being singled out and subject to strong prejudices, a group of children of North African heritage, often called *Beurs*, organized a peaceful march from Lyon to Paris in order to draw attention to their struggle. This walk in 1983 became known as the *Marche des Beurs*.⁶⁸ And interestingly enough, despite the history of controversy between the two religions, the *Beur* activism was heavily supported by Catholic social service organizations.⁶⁹ Immigrant and Muslim advocacy was not limited to the *Marche*, however. A wealth of different groups began to spring up, forcing the government to take notice of a new trend of ethnic politics.⁷⁰

For many scholars, the violence and animosity against immigrants, as well as the strong call for assimilation, was initiated by latent tensions over the loss of France’s North African colonies. “Some French citizens, particularly on the far right, regarded the loss of Algeria and Morocco as a betrayal of France’s mission to bring its culture to the rest of the world.”⁷¹ This view led to the belief that the presence of perceived “inferior” North Africans in France was their attempt to colonize their former “civilized” colonizers. Therefore the general dislike of cultural difference in general, as well as the insult of the loss of French colonies, led to an animosity aimed at anything about the immigrants that was not “French”, which was almost everything.⁷²

The demand for assimilation continued to grow, however, and by 1989, France’s *Conseil d’État* ruled that wearing religious symbols to school was allowed as long as they

⁶⁶ “la crise économique s’amplifie avec son cortège de chômage, de délinquance, de drogue...Une partie de l’opinion commence à rendre les immigrés responsables, sans réaliser que ces jeunes, nés en France, ne sont ni des étrangers ni des immigrés, et qu’ils constituent peu à peu une nouvelle composante de la société française. Cet état de fait n’empêche pas les responsables politiques de pratiquer l’expulsion systématique,” Yamina Benguigui, 134.

⁶⁷ Yamina Benguigui, 135.

⁶⁸ Yamina Benguigui, 203-209.

⁶⁹ Paul A. Silverstein, 13.

⁷⁰ Elisa T. Beller, 598.

⁷¹ Elisa T. Beller, 590.

⁷² Elisa T. Beller, 594.

are not “ostentatious”. This, of course, was directed at the case of three young Muslim girls who wore headscarves to school. Their principal tried to expel them, and the case was brought to the *Conseil*. The *Conseil* is the country’s highest administrative jurisdiction, in charge of the management of administrative tribunals and courts of appeals, and it both advises the government on bills and ordinances as well as judging cases related to public administration and authority.⁷³ While it initially sounds as if the ruling was in favor of the girls, its declaration that ostentatious meant anything that could “constitute an act of intimidation, provocation, proselytizing, or propaganda; threaten the dignity and freedom of students or other members of the educational community” was incredibly ambiguous in nature and was essentially left up to educators to decide.⁷⁴ Also, the *Conseil* specifically stated that the purpose of a state education is to allow the child to “acquire a culture” that prepares them to be a good person and ideal citizen.⁷⁵ So by that logic, a traditional culture that is not French runs up against the state’s central mission to bestow culture and make students ready to be active citizens. Between 1989 and 2003, several similar controversies erupted in what has become known as the *affaire des voiles*. Miriam Feldblum, a scholar familiar with these events, states that the *affaire* raised four issues dealing with the concept of French identity and the need for assimilation: “the role of secularism in the public school system; women’s rights; ‘the spectre of a fundamentalist, aggressive Islam proselytizing France’; and the integration of North Africans and other non-European immigrants”.⁷⁶ The French saw the wearing of the veils to be evidence of the immigrants’ and second and third generation to retain their own culture and religion, which conflicted with the French idea of national identity and especially of *laïcité*, which mandates religion be relegated to the private sphere. Muslim North Africans for the most part, however, did not deny their Frenchness, in fact they did not want to maintain a separation between themselves and French culture at all, they only wanted to be treated as a community within France. They asserted their *droit à la différence*, right of difference, emphasized by the Mitterrand government which legalized immigrant associations banned since 1939, based on the French ideals of individual

⁷³ Conseil d’Etat, “Home.” Accessed August 6, 2012. <http://www.conseil-etat.fr/en/>.

⁷⁴ Elisa T. Beller, 584.

⁷⁵ Elisa T. Beller, 610.

⁷⁶ Elisa T. Beller, 585.

liberty.⁷⁷ Unfortunately for them, however, the French system of government deals with individual rights, not group rights, since the latter are considered incompatible with the French constitution. Instead, each citizen must stand alone with their one vote, as an individual whose allegiance to the State supersedes any group or segment of the population with whom they share interests.⁷⁸

Proponents of the *droit à la différence*, however, attempt to demonstrate, both to fellow Muslims and to other that Islam and France are not contradictory at all, in fact they are so complementary they are almost “mutually reinforcing”. This synthesis, or blend of the two cultures, is most prominent in second generation immigrants who try to integrate their parents’ culture with that of their surroundings.⁷⁹ Others disagree with their approach. For example, Gaston Defferre, a former socialist interior minister said in an interview in 1984:

“When Poles, Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese live in France and decide to naturalize, it matters little whether they are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, or atheists...But the rules of Islam are not simply religious rules. They are rules of living that concern...marriage, divorce, the care of children, the behavior of men, the behavior of women...These rules are contrary to all the rules of French law on the custody of children in case of divorce, and they are contrary to [French rules on] the rights of women with respect to their husbands. What is more, in France we don’t have the same habits of living.”⁸⁰

This quote simply alludes to the nationalist feeling, in existence since the Crusades, that Islam and the West will always be in conflict.

Some argue that the principle of *laïcité*, however, does not mean that it forbids the expression of one’s religion, even if it is different than the established norm, but rather that it tolerates all religions. In that light, because of its very secularism, France as a State is tolerant to all faiths.⁸¹ However, because of the long-term stigma of Islam, the

⁷⁷ Elisa T. Beller, 594.

⁷⁸ Elisa T. Beller, 599.

⁷⁹ Elisa T. Beller, 594.

⁸⁰ Gaston Defferre in a 1984 interview, quoted in Elisa T. Beller, 595.

⁸¹ Elisa T. Beller, 611.

insult of the end of colonialism, and the feeling of being infringed upon by the “other”, as well as an historical call for cultural unity, *laïcité* is sometimes overruled by *solidarité*.⁸²

In the midst of the assimilation debate, another issue dealing with citizenship, one that dates back to the Revolution, crept into conversation. There was much political pressure to require French citizenship to be a personal choice. Jacques Chirac’s political party, the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), referred to attaining French citizenship as “a solemn pact based on mutual recognition and the will to live together.”⁸³ In other words, to be allowed to attain French citizenship, a person must be able to prove significant participation in French civic life, which includes speaking the language, enrollment in military service, lack of a criminal history, etc. This again brings the discussion back to culture, as always, because although the concept of French nationhood is political, it is expressed through cultural unity. Thus, “Political inclusion has entailed cultural assimilation, for regional cultural minorities and immigrants alike”, despite the fact that, as Henri Lefebvre stated, “man is a complex being with multiple connections, which are his memberships”.⁸⁴

The many memberships, or at least one, became a concern, especially after the incidents of 9/11. The native French population worried that the Muslims’ decision to wear the headscarf signaled their unwillingness to integrate, which piggybacked on the fear that a fundamentalist Islam is trying to infiltrate the French state, even though most Muslims do not recognize radical Islam as part of their religion.⁸⁵ That radical groups do exist in Europe in general and France in particular, however, cannot be denied. It appeared anxieties were confirmed after the arrest of French-Moroccan Zacarias Moussaoui as the “20th September 11th hijacker”, as well as the discovery that the Taliban counted several French citizens of North African heritage among its forces in Afghanistan and its “foreign fighters” in the Iraqi insurgency.⁸⁶ These discoveries only added to the fears that the *banlieue* youth would give in to the “temptation of jihad”.⁸⁷

⁸² Thomas M. Adams, 433-471.

⁸³ Elisa T. Beller, 595.

⁸⁴ Elisa T. Beller, 596-597.

⁸⁵ Elisa T. Beller, 613.

⁸⁶ Paul A. Silverstein, 17.

⁸⁷ Paul A. Silverstein, 17.

The headscarf issue, as well as the issue of assimilation, was effectively settled on February 10, 2004, when the French National Assembly voted with a striking majority of 494 to 36 to pass legislation illegalizing the exhibition of the hijab, as well as any other “conspicuous” religious symbol, inside French schools. The legislation was passed in the French Senate less than a month later.⁸⁸ This complete exclusion of private matters from the public realm, following a strict secularist approach, effectively homogenizes the public sphere, which discriminates against those who wish to exhibit any culture other than that of the dominant French culture promoted by the state.⁸⁹ In the words of Mahamet Timera, “If integration can merge with the type of immigration signified by the loss of one’s origins, the promotion of ethnic identity disrupts the French republican project of integration. In contrast to what one observes elsewhere, the promotion of ethnicity is being systematically stigmatized.”⁹⁰

Today, the process of integration has become even more stringent than in the past. Immigration in general is becoming more and more regulated by criteria such as public health, public order, and public safety.⁹¹ New and redesigned immigration laws have demonstrated a move away from voluntary to mandatory cultural assimilation. Also, cultural assimilation is now a prerequisite not only for citizenship but also for admission into the country for any prolonged amount of time. Such cultural assimilation has evolved from the goal of social inclusion to a means of the exclusion of undesirable immigrants, in order to socially engineer the French demographic.⁹² While this may seem extreme, it is in response to an explosion of immigration over the past few decades. The effects of technology and globalization facilitate integration. For example, the easy airline travel, inter-state highways, and communication avenues such as cell phones and the internet which, through the use of satellites, can cross continents. Thus the world in general, and France in particular, is experiencing the largest wave of immigration in history. Worldwide, there are over 191 million immigrants in the world, which is over

⁸⁸ Elisa T. Beller, 581.

⁸⁹ Elisa T. Beller, 622.

⁹⁰ “Si l’intégration peut épouser la forme de l’assimilation qui signifie l’oubli des origines, les mécanismes d’ethnisation bouleversent le schéma républicain français d’intégration. Au contraire de ce que l’on peut observer sous d’autres cieux, ce processus d’ethnisation est systématiquement stigmatisé.”

Mahamet Timera, 47.

⁹¹ Liav Orgad, 719.

⁹² Liav Orgad, 720.

three percent of the world's population, and this number will only increase.⁹³ In France in 2008, immigrants made up nineteen percent of the total population.⁹⁴ In addition to the incredible number of immigrants, the demographic of the current wave of immigration is different. Most people who immigrate to France come from non-European, non-liberal societies, bringing with them their culture which stands to challenge France's liberal values. These immigrants are also generally geographically concentrated and maintain close ties with their home country, creating an "inside out community" that exists outside of the predominant French culture.⁹⁵

Also alarming for the French system of immigration and integration is the problem of religion. France has the highest minority Muslim population in Europe, and with an increase in Muslims come the increase in fear of radicals. The French scholar Olivier Roy observes that radical Islamism is usually not actually a product of the religion, but due to a collision of tradition and modernity. The obligation to accept foreign liberal ideas and policies creates a crisis of identity. In fact, studies show that second and third generation French Muslims more strongly identify with their religion than their parents.⁹⁶

The current French Civil Code requires that one must demonstrate a sense of identity with the French Republic, some level of civic participation, or both. In other words, demonstrative assimilation into the French national culture is mandated. If those requirements are not met, the government reserves the right to refuse citizenship, because "no one may be nationalized unless he proves his assimilation into the French community."⁹⁷ This forced assimilation required to immigrate to France and become a naturalized citizen, stems from the perceived failure of Maghrebi immigrants to integrate into French culture, as well as the consequential tensions that resulted in the riots and civil unrest of 2005. As of January 1, 2007, in order to receive a permanent residence permit, every immigrant must sign a *Contrat d'accueil et d'intégration* (Reception and Integration Contract), which obliges the immigrant to respect the historic and fundamental values of the French Republic, as well as take language lesson to learn

⁹³ Liav Orgad, 720.

⁹⁴ INSEE (2008).

⁹⁵ Liav Orgad, 721.

⁹⁶ Liav Orgad, 722-723

⁹⁷ Liav Orgad, 723.

French and participate in a one-day civic training program. Refusal to adhere to the contract's terms can result in the state's refusal to issue or renew a residence permit or a fine.⁹⁸ Included in the values of the Republic is the idea of secularism. Immigrants are expected to respect the rights of man as prescribed by the state, including each individual's freedom of belief and freedom from religious influence. Therefore, ostentatious displays of religion are perceived as an inability to comply with the fundamental value of secularism (*laïcité*).

The crackdown on immigration has affected others as well, though. Since the mid-1990s, France has been strengthening the verification requirements necessary to renew passports and ID cards due to the suspicion that a substantial amount of foreigners had falsified claims in order to receive French passports. In light of the recent tightening of immigration requirements, the rules have become even more strict. In 2008 alone, about 18,000 people were refused the renewal of their passports or ID cards because they did not have unquestionably proven proof of nationality. As a TIME magazine reporter states, "people born in former French colonies to nationalized immigrant parents or to French families abroad are being subject to a paper chase that often leads to dead ends. Many fear they may lose their French nationality altogether."⁹⁹ French officials often ask for the provision of official birth certificates for several family members, including parents and sometimes even grandparents.¹⁰⁰ However, the process only applies to French nationals born abroad or those born to immigrant parents, creating what seems to many to be a biased system.

Students wishing to study in France have also experienced a harder time obtaining a visa and temporary residence permit, especially those from African countries. A new "filter" was added in 2005, the *Centre pour des études en France* (CEF). This organization, which works in union with the French embassy in Morocco and other African nations, was put in place to ensure only high school graduates are selected for

⁹⁸ Liav Orgad, 724-725.

⁹⁹ Bruce Crumley, "Now the French Must Prove They're French," *TIME*, 17 Jan. 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1953382,00.html> (accessed 02 Sept. 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Bruce Crumley, 2010.

study, as well as to verbally discourage less financially stable applicants from applying.¹⁰¹

The European Union has not yet established admission criteria for immigrants. However, member states have decided upon a common integration policy for those who wish to join any of the participating countries. The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy include “basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history, and institutions, basic values of the EU and fundamental human rights, and participation of immigrants in the democratic process.”¹⁰² The Pact on Immigration and Asylum, a more recent document adopted by the EU, deals with formatting the basic principles of integration. However, the Pact allows member states to decide on the conditions of immigrant admission, as well as set their number and regulate admission criteria, stipulating it contain the respect for EU values “such as human rights, freedom of opinion, democracy, tolerance, equality between men and women, and the compulsory schooling of children.”¹⁰³ France includes all of those in the values of the French Republic, as well as French culture. Essentially, this requires for admission based on the policies of national constitutionalism, or the practice that any immigrant seeking citizenship or asylum must become familiar with the state’s constitutional rights and principles and accept them. They do not have to openly agree with them, per se, but they must accept and respect them.¹⁰⁴ In so doing, the immigrant consents to become a citizen, no one forces them. By becoming a citizen, that person enjoys all the benefits of citizenship, so it is only fair they accept the country’s constitutional measures in return. Therefore, the state protects its constitution, the rights of its citizens, and in so doing, a large part of the national culture.

French Perception of Immigrants

In light of the riots during 2005, many people are now aware of the civil and cultural unrest present in France, due almost entirely to the dynamic between national French citizens and immigrants, as well as the children of immigrants, who are of African

¹⁰¹ Virginie Guiraudon, 371.

¹⁰² Liav Orgad, 729.

¹⁰³ Liav Orgad, 730.

¹⁰⁴ Liav Orgad, 732.

descent. Most of those immigrants are black or Arab Muslims, a fact which comes in conflict with the predominant white Catholic French culture. Starting in the 1970s and gaining speed in the 1980s to today, a strong policy of assimilation was put in place in order to better integrate the immigrants to French society. A policy which started out voluntary has since become mandatory in light of a perceived failure to assimilate on the part of the African immigrants. It can be argued, however, that such a failure was in fact caused by the French citizens who refused to accept the cultural difference the immigrants brought with them, as well as the immigrants themselves. For various different reasons, the French population in general has treated the last few decades of immigration as an invasion, and assumed that Muslim immigrants are inassimilable.

As was mentioned earlier in this work, many scholars attribute at least a part of the animosity felt for African immigrants to France's loss of its North African colonies. The appearance of African immigrants on French soil after independence added insult to injury, and many felt as if it was an invasion by a culturally inferior people.¹⁰⁵ The sense of invasion continued as more and more immigrants entered France, especially when the immigrants were *sans-papiers*, literally without papers, or illegal. In fact, a lot of media and political attention centered on illegal immigration, a focus which brought different political factions to a consensus regarding foreigners.¹⁰⁶ Racism and prejudice against North Africans and black Africans, however did not begin with Algeria's victory and independence. Rather it dates back to pre-colonial times, when France felt it was her mission to colonize and civilize the inferior African peoples.¹⁰⁷ The animosity between Christianity and Islam dates back even further, all the way the Middle Ages and the Crusades.¹⁰⁸ But that is not the only reason for the current debate. The French are more concerned with assimilation and adherence to the ideas and values of the state.

The devoutly secular French oppose "ostentatious" shows of religiosity, especially when that religion is culturally different than the French majority. Such a demonstration both draws attention to difference and causes the French to feel

¹⁰⁵ Elisa T. Beller, 594.

¹⁰⁶ "Cette focalisation sur l'immigration clandestine en particulier a permis de construire un large consensus entre plusieurs courants politiques aux conceptions parfois divergentes sur la question des étrangers." Mahamet Timera, 41.

¹⁰⁷ Elisa T. Beller, 594.

¹⁰⁸ Norman Housley, 189-208.

proselytized or subject to propaganda.¹⁰⁹ The fact that Muslim immigrants retained obvious signs of their cultural heritage, such as wearing the traditional headscarf did not help their cause, especially since it was an overt symbol of Islam. For many, Arabs and black Africans were “too different, not European. Too Muslim, not Catholic. Too black, too visible. In short, they lacked the qualities that made the former migrations acceptable: European, white and Catholic.”¹¹⁰ In contrast to those “ideal” qualities, recent headlines discussing the war on terror and the *affaire des voiles* has emphasized all immigrants as Muslims.¹¹¹ And the Muslims have been told so often that they are not French that they are beginning to adopt that view as well. In an interview with middle school children, Yamina Benguigui discusses the subject of citizenship. Though all of the children were born in France, and some are even fair haired or fair skinned, they do not believe they are truly French because they are Muslim. One boy replied, “You know very well that to be French means to eat pork, practice the French religion, be Christians!”¹¹²

Also, as is often the case during times of economic trouble, many French citizens blamed their troubles and the nation's on the influx of immigrants. In the words of Mahamet Timera, “Illegal immigration is far from a new phenomenon. It has been tied in with the history of immigration. Forgotten and tolerated, it became a more marked concern during periods of crisis by giving free reign to diverse fantasies: exaggeration of the number of illegal aliens, fear of an invasion by inassimilable people, etc”.¹¹³ And this trend has not abated. Virginie Guiraudon remarks that “Longitudinal survey data collected annually for the *Commission nationale consultative des Droits de l'Homme* since 1989 and qualitative studies also reveal that negative attitudes towards immigrants

¹⁰⁹ Elisa T. Beller, 611.

¹¹⁰ “Trop différents, pas européens. Trop musulmans, pas catholiques. Trop noirs, trop visibles. Bref, il leur manque les « qualités » qui faisaient le propre des migrations antérieures : européens, blancs, et catholiques.” Mahamet Timera, 46.

¹¹¹ Paul A. Silverstein, 4.

¹¹² “tu sais très bien qu'être français ça veut dire manger du porc, faire la religion française, être chrétiens,” Yamina Benguigui, 170-173.

¹¹³ “L'immigration irrégulière est loin d'être un phénomène nouveau. Elle est intrinsèquement liée à l'histoire de l'immigration. D'oubliée et tolérée, elle devient une préoccupation plus affirmée dans les périodes de crise pour donner libre cours à des fantasmes divers : exagération du nombre de « clandestins », crainte de l'invasion par des « personnes inassimilables », etc.” Mahamet Timera, 42.

prevail and that the least accepted groups are North Africans and Moslems.”¹¹⁴ In recent years, the far right party called the *Front National* (FN) has stirred up feelings of negativity toward minorities and immigrants. The party gains more electoral votes with every election, demonstrating a growing trend of dislike and suspicion of cultural difference.¹¹⁵ In the 2012 presidential election, the FN’s candidate, Marine Le Pen, the daughter of the party’s founder, received 17.9% of the vote, the highest number the party has ever seen, and its membership numbers over 50,000.¹¹⁶

The treatment of immigrants, though, did not inspire them to integrate themselves into French society. Although most French citizens were far from welcoming toward immigrants, the 1980s marked the beginning of outright injustice and violence against them. Acting out against the unemployment that would otherwise put them on the same footing with immigrants, disenfranchised white Frenchmen, called *beaufs*, (a term equal to the English term “good ol’ boys) initiated a series of attacks on immigrant men and children, referred to by them as *ratons* (rats).¹¹⁷ These instances, as well as the almost constant occurrence of police brutality went unpunished. In response to these acts, while many *banlieue* youth participated in the *Marche des Beurs*, many others resorted to a riot culture of violent acts against the police and society at large.¹¹⁸ This created a public persona of violence and “ethnic territorial gangs” that further polluted the immigrants’ image in the eyes of the French public.¹¹⁹ However, Frenchmen of the Revolutionary period such as Voltaire and Beccaria advocated “that public authorities must take the blame for crimes that could have been prevented by wise legislation,” such as anti-hate laws, adequate housing and employment.¹²⁰ Even the educators of the *banlieue* children exhibit signs of prejudice, despite the ruling of the *Conseil d’État* that the classroom should be an area of tolerance. In François Bégaudeau’s critically acclaimed novel, *The Class*, he describes several instances where teachers complain about the ethnic students, as well as make racist and stereotypical remarks. For example, he describes students as

¹¹⁴ Virginie Guiraudon, 372.

¹¹⁵ Virginie Guiraudon, 373.

¹¹⁶ Wikipedia, “National Front (France).” Last modified 27 Jul 2012. Accessed Aug 6, 2012. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Front_\(France\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Front_(France)).

¹¹⁷ Paul A. Silverstein, 11.

¹¹⁸ Paul A. Silverstein, 15.

¹¹⁹ Paul A. Silverstein, 16.

¹²⁰ Thomas M. Adams, 446.

“hoodlums”.¹²¹ He also includes a monologue of a fellow teacher that includes sentiments such as “they’re absolutely so low, so dishonest, always looking to make trouble, but go ahead, guys, go ahead stay right there in your crap neighborhood...I tell you, they’re like animals.”¹²²

Besides violence and prejudice, a history of neglect has surrounded the immigrants and their children. Relegated to slums since the first heavy wave of immigration after World War II, those of African heritage are subject to unemployment; poverty; inadequate housing, transportation, and schooling; unsanitary conditions, and the general aura of “shattered dreams”.¹²³ Also of concern is the ever-growing trend of segregation in both housing and education.¹²⁴ This treatment of immigrants, which is certainly not new, is in direct contradiction with the spirit of Montesquieu and the ideas of the French Revolution. Montesquieu said, “[the state], which owes to all its citizens a secure subsistence, suitable food and clothing, and a manner of living that is not contrary to good health.”¹²⁵ Although all of the above-mentioned aspects of *banlieue* life are undesirable, perhaps one of the worst is the unemployment. Not being able to obtain viable employment creates a vicious circle from which the immigrants and their descendants cannot escape. According to the 1999 census, compared to the national average of 13%, of the active foreign population, 24.1% were unemployed, as well as 22% of foreign-born workers. The percentage increases for young Maghrebi men. “The percentage of unemployed men of Maghreb origin in the 16-29 age group oscillates between 34% to 45% meaning of all men of Maghreb origin between 16 and 29 years of age, 34 to 45% are unemployed (20 to 25% for women between 16 and 29 that are of Maghreb-origin are unemployed).”¹²⁶

This, among other things, has caused many Franco-Maghrebis to identify first as Muslim, then as French.¹²⁷ Yamina Benguigui explains, “Some young people think they will find in Islam the answers to questions that neither their parents nor society can

¹²¹ François Bégaudeau, *The Class*, trans. Linda Asher (New York : Seven Stories, 2009), 193.

¹²² François Bégaudeau, 195.

¹²³ Dominique Malaquais, « Imagin(IN)g Racial France : Envoi,” *Public Culture* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2011), 233.

¹²⁴ Virginie Guiraudon, 372.

¹²⁵ Thomas M. Adams, 439.

¹²⁶ Virginie Guiraudon, 371-372.

¹²⁷ Paul A. Silverstein, 1.

resolve. In the search for identity and recognition, they define themselves as Muslims before anything else.”¹²⁸ Between inadequate living conditions, constant animosity received from national French citizens, and the rules of forced immigration, it is small wonder people of African heritage would choose to identify with the part of their identity that did not discriminate. This tendency only added fuel to the extreme right belief that the Muslim immigrant subculture resisted the central values of the Republic, especially that of *laïcité*. This concern was present during the *affaire des voiles* as well as during the 2005 demonstrations and riots that took place in the *banlieues*. “Islam posed a competing claim to universality, like that once posed by the Catholic Church. Analysts of the [2005] outbreaks agreed that the frustrations of immigrant youth revealed their sense of isolation from French society, reinforced by then Interior Minister, and later Président de la République, Nicolas Sarkozy’s denunciation of them as *racaille*, or scum” that should be cleaned out of the *banlieues*.¹²⁹ The fact that famous public officials, even ones who become president, publicly voice their estimation that immigrant populations are “scum” is incredibly indicative of the unstable environment in which immigrants and their descendants currently find themselves.

The sense of isolation and neglect felt by second and third generation children most certainly is one of the reasons behind the recent violence. Yamina Benguigui expands upon this by saying, “Unbeknownst to their parents, unbeknownst to France, who seems astonished by their existence, they are there. Their cries, their violence is the most powerful type of legitimate claim: ‘We are a part of this society!’”¹³⁰ While some turn to violence and acts of protest, others turn to Islam. Still others, so disrupted by the inability to find a social or psychological equilibrium and plagued by both scholastic failure and the inability to obtain employment, turn to drugs.¹³¹ Such a lifestyle also eventually leads to the contraction of AIDS or *le sida*.¹³² But all it takes for the youth to

¹²⁸ “Certains jeunes pensent trouver dans l’islam les réponses aux questions que ni leurs parents, ni société ne résolvent. En quête d’identité et de reconnaissance, ils se définissent avant tout comme musulmans.” Yamina Benguigui, 137.

¹²⁹ Thomas M. Adams, 467 and Dominique Malaquais, 234.

¹³⁰ “A l’insu de leurs parents, à l’insu de la France, qui semble s’étonner de leur existence, ils sont là. Leurs cris, leur violence sont la forme la plus poussée d’une revendication légitime : « J’appartiens à cette société ! »” Yamina Benguigui, 11.

¹³¹ Yamina Benguigui, 137.

¹³² Yamina Benguigui, 175.

feel wanted and to feel like they belong, is to bestow just a little kindness upon them and treat them like everyone else. In one of Yamina Benguigui's interviews, she spoke with a Maghrebi teacher who acts as a cultural advisor to the youth of one of France's many *banlieues*. He described an outing where several teenagers went to a restaurant for a night out. After receiving several declinations from establishments, he finally found one that would take them. The proprietor was a traditional French citizen, but he treated them as equals and included them in the fun atmosphere of the *resto*. By so doing, he made them feel so welcome they did not want to leave.¹³³ If more French persons could be so accepting, this debate may not even exist.

Conclusion

Clearly the subject of their identity is very important to the French, but is it truly a stagnant, never changing phenomenon as some observers seem to believe? While the citizens of France may hold strongly to ideals such as liberty, equality, solidarity, and secularism—ideals that certainly form the backbone of the French public sphere—that is not all that France is. France is a cultural epicenter, and always has been. No one stipulates, however, that culture cannot change and evolve, in fact scholars such as Jan Nederveen Pieterse argue quite the contrary.¹³⁴ All countries are evolving at a faster rate due to the effects of globalization. This new changing global environment is most visible in the presence of immigrants. In France, the most prominent example is the growing Muslim community. The conflicts in the nation arise daily due less to the clash of cultures than to the resistance toward change. Yes, there is a conflict between the long history of Catholicism and the new presence of Islam, and the arising issues are to be expected. Added with the presence of economic recession and unemployment, it is not abnormal that social tensions will rise and the “outsiders” will be blamed. Those outsiders, for the most part, are French citizens, however, and they have the same rights as they're white French counterparts.

¹³³ Yamina Benguigui, 176.

¹³⁴ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange* (Rome: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

France, like any other country, has evolved until today and many observers, as we have seen, feel that the recent multiculturalism, particularly the influence of Muslim immigrants, is affecting the core of the French values, especially the concept of secularism. However, in this global environment, where a mother in France can instantly send an email to her son in Australia, and he can call her moments later or board a plane to see her, it is ridiculous to believe cultures will not change and meld with each other. And who is to say that is a negative? Traders and explorers have been bringing theories and advancements from other cultures for centuries. Now the process has only been quickened and more normalized. There is sign of a move in the positive direction, however, especially with the recent creation of the *Cité nationale d'histoire de l'immigration* (Museum of National Immigration History). This museum not only educates the population about the long (and not recent) history of immigration, but also includes facts concerning all the immigrant groups, all in an effort to combat racism and promote the integration of second-generation immigrants, diversifying cultural identity.¹³⁵ And of course not all of France is opposed to immigration or immigrants. It is the very vocal conservatives who are creating most of the fuss.

In the words of socialist Martine Aubry:

“Where is liberty when the fruit of one’s labor does not allow one to be suitably housed and leads sometimes to being unable to send one’s children to the school *cantine* after the twentieth of the month? Where is equality when a worker’s child has only half the likelihood of completing his studies as the child of a *cadre*? Where is fraternity when one starts envying one’s neighbor his overtime at work and fearing immigrants, if not the young generally?”¹³⁶

France’s current debate is certainly wrought with friction and conflict, and even the most liberal of citizens can find themselves agreeing with conservative ideas. As with any period of change, France is currently conflicted, and may be for some time yet. What is sure, though, is that a resolution will come. It remains to be seen what that will be, however, and both white Christians and Muslim North Africans are finding cause to worry that they stand to lose rights, culture, and tradition.

¹³⁵ Géard Noiriel, “The Historian in the Cité: how to reconcile history and memory of immigration”, *Museum International* 59, no. 1/2 (May 2007): 13-17.

¹³⁶ Thomas M. Adams, 468.