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### Dual Identity in the Context of North African Assimilation in France

Jessica Brooke  
*Fairfield University*

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## INTRODUCTION

France has historically been a country of immigration. It has welcomed and assimilated such varied European groups as the Italians, Polish, and Spanish (Ribert 2009, 571) into its population for hundreds of years. Though not always welcomed at first, today these former immigrants and their children have completely assimilated into French society. Since the 1970s, however, the majority of France's immigrants have been North Africans from the Maghreb. It was during this period that tension first began to arise between Muslims and the native French. This tension has both worsened and transcended second and third generations as well, leading to questions about the success of the French assimilation model. What makes these immigrants different from their predecessors? Has the French assimilation policy failed North African immigrants?

As a part of the French colonial empire, North Africans have been immigrating to France since before World War I. After the Maghreb countries, which include Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, gained independence, still more North Africans flocked to France, attracted by its post-war booming economy in the 1940s through the 1970s (Haddad 2006, 26). These workers proved to be a boon for France's economy because they took the manual labor jobs that most French citizens did not want, and in addition, these migrant workers spoke French fluently (therefore there were no language barriers). Most workers were content because they found more employment opportunities in France than in their home countries (Ngolongolo 2008, 29). The Evian Accords of 1962 also contributed to the economic prosperity because it allowed for the free movement of people between France and Algeria (Weil 2004, 250). In some cases, these "new" immigrants have been living in France for decades. During France's period of growth, these North Africans were "invisible," but when the petroleum crisis broke in 1973, and unemployment became rampant throughout France, these immigrants suddenly became visible and consequently, "undesirable" to the French (252).

Because of the longstanding North African presence in France, the lack of integration is perplexing for many French. Within the past ten years, the media has focused its attention on the failure of the Republican integration model. Controversial events such as the head scarf affair in 2003, the riots in 2005, the long history of French citizenship, and the more recent debate on national identity in 2009 seem to be manifestations of this failure. Though these specific events garnered worldwide attention, it may come as a surprise that similar events have been occurring since the 1980s (Laachir 2006, 61).

This paper aims to analyze the obstacles to the assimilation of North African immigrants into French society from the 1970s to the present. The 1970s was the end of France's economic boom, and the beginning of the visibility of France's immigrants. Therefore this time period is critical to understand the challenges North Africans faced integrating into the French Republican model. This paper argues that assimilation has partially failed because of the dual sense of identity that has emerged from these immigrants. The dual identity of French versus ethnic has been influenced by the obstacles to assimilation. Racism, Islam, and the legacy of France's colonial past all play a role in determining immigrants' identities as well as influencing the attitude of the "native" French. Because this paper focuses on North Africans specifically from France's former colonies who are mostly Muslim, the terms 'North African' and 'Muslim' will be used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The French model of integration is through assimilation (Weill 2004, 66). The historic "French model" advocates civic nationalism, but ignores the reality of its ethnic content. Political and cultural identities are also intertwined, as with the French concept of *laïcité*, or secularism. *Laïcité* is a fundamental part of French national identity (Freedman 2004, 10). This republican ideal has historically been and continues to be very important in French culture, as shown by the violent reactions towards the headscarf affair (12). *Laïcité* is a political attribute, but it has entered French culture because of its history and has consequently become a source of pride. Education has traditionally been the method of successfully integrating immigrants.

There are various theories surrounding the different definitions of assimilation and the methods for attaining it. Many theories focus on assimilation as a process. Waters and Jiménez, in their study on European immigrants' assimilation into present American society, give a time frame to mark the success of assimilation. It takes three generations for immigrants to completely assimilate to their host country, with each successive generation achieving better integration than the last (110). Alba and Nee give their own definition of assimilation as "the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences" (1997, 11). This definition is vague in terms of a time frame, and in fact delineates time slowly, as a simple "decline". How is one to know when enough of the cultural and social differences have been erased, in order to be completely assimilated? Waters and Jiménez claim that the success of assimilation is governed by four main characteristics (2005, 107): an immigrant's socio-economic status, spatial concentration, language assimilation,

and intermarriage. The level of education, salary, and type of work combine to form an immigrant's socio-economic status. Spatial concentration refers to the distribution of immigrant homes compared to where the non-immigrants live (107). The increasing knowledge of English while simultaneously losing use of the mother tongue constitutes language assimilation (109). Though their study refers to American society, these factors are applicable in assessing North African assimilation into French society. These four main categories break down into more specific characteristics as well. Besides the assimilation of the host country language, other variables such as the time spent in the host country, the level of political participation (do the immigrants vote?), the practice of a religion similar or different to that of the dominant host countries', and the community surrounding an individual (are the friends mostly immigrants or natives?) capture key dimensions of assimilation (Walters 2007, 27 and Berry 1997, 12). All of these forces will influence an immigrant in his/her decision to consciously adopt their host culture's identity.

Berry, in his definition of assimilation, puts the desire and the effort of shedding identity on the immigrant (1997, 5). The immigrant must desire to shed his/her cultural identity in favor of an identity with the host culture, and thereby become analogous to the majority through the adoption of the social customs and values of that host country (5). Similarly, Gordon claims that complete assimilation can only come about once the immigrants have entered core institutions of their host country, such as clubs and social cliques (Alba and Nee 1997, 830). If the host country natives reject immigrants, it is nearly impossible for the immigrant to become successfully integrated (Gans 2007, 153). Since one of the previous criteria for complete assimilation is having native friends of the host country, rejection makes fulfilling this goal impossible. Rejection, in fact, may be one of the first signs of the racist and discriminatory attitudes of the host people, further limiting possibilities of assimilation.

Theories of assimilation also examine assimilation as the end result, which should demonstrate an assimilated society. In an assimilated society, intermarriage will occur more frequently, the immigrants' ethnic or cultural identities will have disappeared, and racism and discrimination will also cease (Alba and Nee 1997, 830). Economic disparities and discrimination in the workplace should also disappear. In fact, some equate intermarriage with complete assimilation; for intermarriage to occur, economic and labor equality must have been achieved between immigrants and natives of the host society in order for them to interact (Xin 2009). In place of ethnic identities, the immigrants will forge a homogenous identity that matches that of the host

citizens. These qualities support assimilation as an outcome rather than a process.

Throughout the rest of this paper, assimilation will be defined as a process in which successful assimilation is characterized by the adoption of the host country's identity by immigrants. Immigrants who show a dual sense of identity constitute a partial failure, while immigrants who retain their ethnic North African identities demonstrate a total failure of assimilation.

What factors contribute to the success or failure of assimilation? An immigrant's identity, whether ethnic or cultural, is a key factor in successful assimilation. In the definition of assimilation used in France, successful assimilation is defined as North Africans adopting a "French" identity. What constitutes an identity? There are two important identities in the context of assimilation in France: that of the host people, and that of the immigrants. In terms of the host nation, France, national identity is both political and cultural. Politically, one part of national identity is citizenship (Holm, 14). Political participation is also an important factor, so that voting is a sign of assimilation (Ribert 2009, 582). Within the past 20 years, France has struggled to find a place for its ethnic populations as the Far Right continually tries to limit citizenship for immigrants, thereby making it more difficult for them to truly assimilate (Thomas 2006, 240). France's cultural identity includes the French language, culture/patrimony, and *laïcité* (Weill 2006, 64). The education system has historically been the vehicle that provides and molds one's national identity (Adelman 2008, 49).

On the other side of the discussion is the identity of North African immigrants. Many scholars claim that Islam is at the core of a Muslim's identity, and this constantly visible religion poses a threat to the French national identity, and especially, *laïcité* (Brown 2007, 189 and Freedman 2004, 16). Amiraux and Simon claim that beginning in the 1980s, Islam has become elemental in the failure of the French integration model (2006, 202). Brown, however, states that French and Muslims are almost equally religious (2007, 185). This means that French Muslims are much less religious than the native French society thinks they are, and therefore scholars cannot construe Islam as a cause for the lack of integration.

Freedman recommends that citizenship be founded on cultural cohesion, and so Muslims must adapt to their new home (2004, 20). However, "Islamophobia", especially in the wake of numerous terrorist attacks worldwide has become prominent in research (Adelman 2008, 46). Perhaps the idea of

religion is not unsettling, but rather the Islamic religion itself is what troubles many French (Hanson 2006, 42). Geisser claims that France is not islamophobic, and instead wants to institutionalize Islam, to make it more palatable to the Republic (2010, 42). President Nicolas Sarkozy's government wants to accomplish this by having imams trained in France and in French, rather than in Arabic. However, the reality, as shown by quantitative studies, is that there is religious discrimination, which does not improve the chances of success for assimilation (Adida 2010, 4).

The colonial legacy has also put its stamp on North Africans' cultural identities. The domination of French colonists in North Africa between 1830 and the 1960s can still be felt today, by both the French and the immigrants. While researching Caribbean immigration to France (from another former colony), Giraud claims that "the social image of the immigrant stems from the French colonial experience" (2009, 46). Even more dramatic, he states that the master/slave relationship, remnants of the colonial era, still pervades French society (46). Superiority is felt on the French part, and humiliation on the part of the immigrants (Brown 2007, 189 and Laachir 2006, 59 and Fulton 2009, 30 and Haddad 2006, 25). It is important to realize also that France still retains "neo-colonies", such as Réunion, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Therefore these feelings are not a part of the past but continue to exist in the minds of the French and its colonists. New research has revealed links between the Republican model of integration and the former French colonial policies (specifically, in regards to the amnesia that the France has felt towards its colonial history) (Amiriaux and Simon 2006, 207).

Racism is another integral issue that has inhibited integration. Racism, according to Fanon, is "the destruction of cultural values, of ways of life. Language, dress, techniques are devalorized" (1988, 306). He claims that racism is a cultural element and that it is one element in the "systemized oppression of a people" (306). The Republican law does not accept that racism exists, since the French model of assimilation claims that differences lead to divisions in society (Laachir 2006, 64). The lack of research on racism and its effects in France upholds this view (Amiriaux and Simon 2006, 192). "The syndrome of the self-fulfilling prophecy leads to a prohibition on naming things for fear they will occur. The fear of giving legitimacy to ethnic and racial differentiation in a united and republican France dominates the research [...] (201)". Simply the act of studying immigrants points out their differences and highlights their race and ethnicity (204). Therefore in a society that does not recognize racism or discrimination, how is one to treat racism? Giraud, in his study on Caribbean immigration remarks that those immigrants who are seen as having a different

lifestyle and manners from the majority of the population are “unquestionably being treated in racist terms and discriminated against in consequence” (2009, 44). Similarly, Laachir notes that in the French context North Africans are treated as the “Other” or the foreigner who fails at being “French” (2006, 63).

In the case of France, the trials of North African assimilation began with first generation immigrants, but continue with second and even third generation, many of whom are French citizens. Therefore this paper will seek to understand the challenges of assimilating North Africans into French society by examining how racism, Islam, and the French colonial legacy contribute in determining an immigrant’s identity. The identity of the immigrant (whether ethnic or French) will then determine the success or failure of assimilation.

## MANIFESTATIONS OF TENSION

To determine whether assimilation has been successful, a failure, or a partial failure, it is necessary to discuss more fully the definition of a French identity. What is a French identity? There is both a cultural and political construction. As noted earlier in the literature review, Weill claims that the social security system, language, culture and patrimony, and laïcité are four important aspects of constructing a French identity. Since this paper only discusses legal immigrants, participation in the French social security is therefore not a problem. Most immigrants, especially second and third generations speak French fluently, having been raised in France. Culture and patrimony, however, pose problems for many immigrants. The culture of many Muslims has been influenced by their history, religion, and ethnicity, among a variety of other factors. The history of Muslims, from their Golden Age when Muslims dominated North Africa and southern Europe, to the colonial era when the Europeans dominated the Muslims in North Africa, is a completely different history than that of France (Brown 2007). Until now, the French and North Africans have always been on opposing sides. Therefore, how can the French expect a Muslim to wear a French identity when the Muslim cultural and ethnic identity is so different? Laïcité is related to this cultural aspect since religion plays a key role in a Muslim’s identity (Brown 2007). Citizenship and identity should be founded on “cultural cohesion” (Freedman 2004). Yet there is no cultural cohesion between North Africans and the native French. School is supposed to be the molder of national identity through teaching France’s history, culture, and above all, the principals of the French Revolution and ideals of the Republic. In theory, this should work, except that once again, how is an Algerian student supposed to identify with the French ideals of *liberté, égalité,*

and fraternité when his/her family did not experience that at all during the colonial era?

The political aspect of a French identity concerns French citizenship. The history of French citizenship and nationality can be traced back to the French Revolution in which a French “citoyen” is described for the first time in “The Rights of Man” (Weil 2004, 317). Patrick Weil enumerates three steps leading to today’s modern conception of French nationality. The first is the civil code of 1803 in which nationality was deemed to be the right of the person, but only to men born in France exercising *jus sanguinis*. A law in 1889 allowed French nationality to be given to the descendents of immigrants, exercising *jus soli*. The law of 1927 allowed for the naturalization of any immigrants who so desired. Though this is the history of a native French national identity, this was not the case for North Africans. The immigrants considered in 1889 and 1927 were European immigrants, and therefore more “assimilable” (214). North Africans during the French colonial era were considered French subjects, but did not have all French rights (unless they were descendants of French colonists living in North Africa). Full French citizenship for Muslims did not arrive until the 1960s after France lost Algeria, and granted citizenship to those who wanted it from its former colonies.

With this definition in mind, it is now possible to examine some of the more recent events that demonstrate the discord of North Africans in French society. Riots have been occurring since the late 1980s in which young Arab men torched cars and vandalized private property (Brown 2007, 183). These riots became international news in 2005 when thousands of young Muslims took to the streets torching thousands of cars across France (184). Crime is most prevalent amongst young North Africans than with their “French” counterparts (Freedman 2004, 27). Even the headscarf affair, which in 2003 culminated in a law prohibiting the wearing of all religious objects, began in 1989 (Adelman 2008, 47). Most recently in 2009, the French minister of immigration, Luc Besson, opened a debate on the French “*identité nationale*” (Erlanger 2009). What does it mean to be French? Some thought that this was directly pointed toward the Muslim immigrants. The colonial legacy, a period of French domination over Muslims in North Africa, has inculcated the superior attitudes felt by the French and the inferior attitudes felt by the Muslims. Each generation has adopted these attitudes from the previous one since that time period. The French have seen and felt these attitudes, but they continue to ignore them. Only within the last ten years has this societal conflict become part of an open national debate.



The debate on the headscarf in 2003 riled many French. They perceived its visibility in schools, the molder of national identity, as a direct threat to their identity. In 1989, “l’affaire du foulard” ignited when three girls living in the town of Creil (outside of Paris), were expelled from their school for refusing to take off their headscarves (Gafsia 2008, 440). Their refusal to remove their headscarves signified to the French state and its authorities their defiance of la laïcité (Adelman 2008, 48). In court, the French judge ruled that religious symbols could be worn at school. Even more explicitly, the judges decided that wearing the headscarf, or hîjab, did not defy the ideal of laïcité (50). Despite this ruling, more opinionated school officials continued to expel girls. Because of the unrest and tension that this issue continued to cause, President Jacques Chirac created the Independent Commission of Reflection on the Application of the Principle of Laïcité in 2003 in order to ascertain the place of the hîjab within the French ideal of laïcité (50). The result of this Commission’s recommendation was the 2003 law that banned the wearing of ostentatious religious insignia in public places (including schools and work places) (51). This seemingly simple incident caused a slew of debates, protests, and controversy, showing the cracks in France’s model of assimilation.

A tragic incident with the French police was the catalyst for the next turbulent phase in North African assimilation. On October 27, the French police were pursuing a group of young Muslim boys in the suburbs of Paris for allegedly having stolen some equipment (Brown 2007, 183). Three of the boys ran into a power station where two died by electrocution, and the third was critically hurt. This incident caused an uproar among North Africans all over France (183). Beginning on October 27, 2005, France endured three weeks of rioting and car-torching (184). By the end of the crisis, the rioters had torched over 9,000 vehicles and police had arrested 3,000 people (Brown 2007, 184 and Haddad 2006, 23). The overwhelming majority of young people who vandalized French private property were Muslim North Africans, and many were heard crying “Allah Akbar” (God is Great) (Haddad 2006, 24). This incident brought to the forefront the supposed failure of integration of these North Africans, and also the role of Islam during these riots. The Swiss newspaper “Le Temps” published the political cartoon [see image below] which shows the irony of the situation. The protesting second-generation Muslim immigrant chants, “I want a cushy job like Papa’s.” Since the 1970s, most Muslims have taken the most difficult, degrading, dangerous, and poor-paying jobs (Ngolongolo 2008, 29). Now second generation immigrants are rebelling against the status quo (of taking poor-paying jobs) in favor of better jobs than the ones their parents had.

*French Youth Protests*



Source: Le Temps (2006)

## POSTCOLONIAL ATTITUDES

The attitudes of the French and the Muslims have been inculcated since France's colonial era. During this era, which lasted from 1830 to the 1960s, the French were taken by the idea of the "mission civilisatrice" (the civilizing mission) (Haddad 2006, 25). The French believed they were helping the North African natives by introducing education, health care, infrastructure, and civilization to the "uncivilized". The French felt a feeling of superiority that affected and continues to affect all aspects of society. Even the legal system supports this sense of superiority. In 2005 President Jacques Chirac's administration supported the creation of a new law in which the fourth article encouraged the teaching of French colonial history in a positive light by emphasizing all of the benefits that the French brought to North Africa and dismissing all of the negative outcomes that the colonized peoples endured (26). School teachers and people living in overseas departments (such as Martinique) violently protested against this article (Ngolongolo 2008, 74). These demonstrations eventually led the Constitutional Council to suppress article 4 at the request of President Chirac (75). However, the fact that the government even

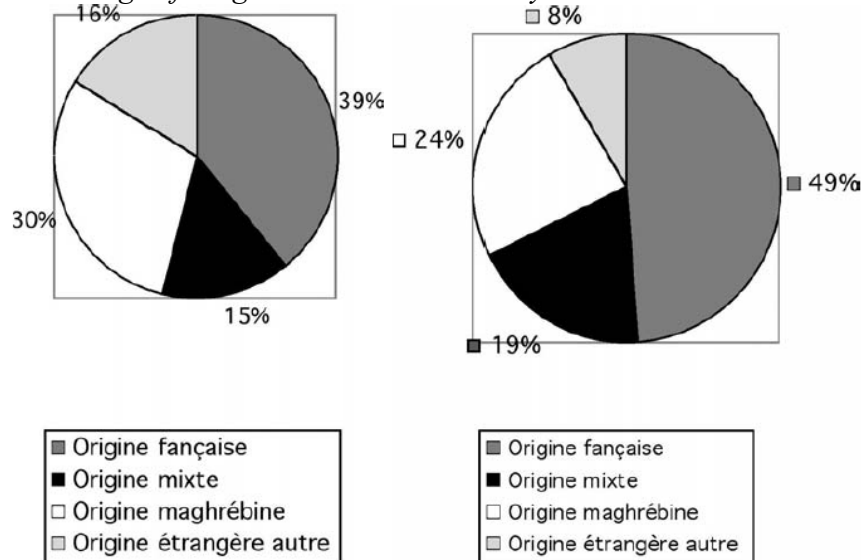
attempted to cover up the unsavory actions of France's colonial history shows its refusal to take responsibility for its actions. It is no wonder that North Africans today generally retain the sense of humiliation felt during the time of colonialism while the French instead, feel morally superior (Laachir 2006, 62).

Even today, the living situation of many North Africans mimics the segregation of the colonial era. Many live in the banlieues, or suburbs, of big cities where the education systems are usually poorer and the crime rate is higher (Freedman 2004, 27). The schools located in banlieues generally have lower test averages and have high drop-out rates, compared to schools within cities. In 1981 the French government created "Zones of Priority Education" (ZEP) as an act of positive discrimination. The goal of the ZEPs was to bring more resources and teachers in to help those students from lower social classes (and immigrant backgrounds) who were constantly failing in school. It is part of an overall attempt by the government to redress the areas of social disparities in French society. However, despite the influx of resources, there are no noticeable changes in test scores from the time before the implementation of ZEPs and after their implementation. Results show that students in the ZEP schools continually underperform. In 2009, studies demonstrated that 76.6% of ZEP students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade had mastered French language as compared to 89.8% of those students outside of ZEP schools. The mastery of math shows a similar result: 81.1% of ZEP students compared to 92.1% of other students (Quelle 2011). The ZEP schools that are located in the banlieues are extremely difficult for teachers to work in because they encounter children who sometimes don't speak French as their first language and are resentful (Observatoire 2011). Teachers also tend to rotate out of these areas very quickly; as they gain seniority, many of them request to be moved out of ZEP areas to "better" areas. This means that there are few relationships between students and teachers. Many students in these situations compare themselves to their more successful (academically) French counterparts and feel resentment (Observatoire 2011). Many scholars suggest not only that these students are not improving academically, but also that school is failing as a vehicle of integration. This is due in part to the fact that students who are able, leave the ZEP schools in favor of non-ZEP schools.

Crime is also prevalent in these areas where ZEPs are located, and where immigrants tend to live. Complaints made by North Africans against the French police for violence and poor treatment have increased in recent years in these banlieues (Ngolongolo 2008, 71). As of 2004 30% of people incarcerated for petty crime were North Africans, while of those incarcerated for graver crimes, 24% were North African [see image below] (Eric 2011). This exacerbates the tension between the French and its minorities because the French

are able to easily distinguish North Africans in jail, as opposed to other European immigrants who share similarities.

*Percentage of Maghrébins in the Penal System*



*Graphique n°1 La proportion de délits commis suivant l'origine ethnique (a- délits peu graves; b- délits graves).*

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Source: Forumfr (2011)

## LEGAL INSTABILITY FOR CITIZENSHIP

There is also a turbulent history behind North African immigrants' efforts to attain French citizenship. Since the 1970s when immigrants became "undesirable," the Far Right has been attempting to limit their rights. These political battles have caused even more tension between immigrants and the "native" French. This instability has more than likely undermined the successful outcome of assimilation.

In the 1980s, the extreme right political party, Front National, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen began to gain notoriety, and votes, as it advocated stricter laws in regards to immigration (Holm, 9). In its politics, the extreme right made culture the essential characteristic of one's identity (9). Culture entails a common past, memories, and traditions. This is in obvious opposition to the "culture" of both North African immigrants-and any other immigrant. The cultural identity of North Africans was very different from that of the French

from the metropolis. North Africans came from an era of colonization in which the French colonizers felt very differently as compared to the colonized Muslims. The opposing histories of French domination and Muslim submission do not make for a unified cultural identity (Brown 2007, 187). The extreme right also made the weak link between the “*patrie*,” or fatherland, and Christianity, in an attempt to discredit Muslims even more (Holm, 10). At the peak of the Front National’s popularity, 12 to 17 percent of French voters supported Le Pen. In fact, in the 2002 presidential elections, Le Pen received 16.86 percent of the French vote. This brought him to the second round of presidential elections, and succeeded in stunning France (Ngolongolo 2008, 26).

Before 1993, French citizenship was granted based on “*jus sanguinis*” or blood lines, and “*jus soli*”, or birth on French soil, as well as naturalization through residency and marriage (Thomas 2006, 240 and Weil 2004, 372). However, those born in France, but not to native French parents, would automatically acquire French citizenship at the age of 16 or 18 (Thomas 2006, 240). In 1987, President Jacques Chirac appointed the Nationality Commission to research the possibility of changing the citizenship requirements (241). The recommendations of this commission led to the Pasqua Laws in 1993 in which immigrants’ children had to actively request national citizenship between the ages of 16 and 21 in order to demonstrate their desire to be French (Holm, 20).

However, many North Africans were not aware of the change in law and consequently many immigrants and their children remained aliens without knowing or wanting to in some cases (Weil 2004, 272). In 1997, however, with the change of government (to the socialists), the law was again amended so that citizenship would automatically be granted at 16 or 18, unless specifically rejected (Thomas 2006, 243). Children who had the consent of their parents and had lived in France for at least five years could also request citizenship at the age of 13 (Weil 2004, 272). Another method of becoming a French citizen was to marry a Frenchman or woman in a “mixed marriage”. In the past, a non-French spouse had to wait only two years to gain French citizenship. Now, however, that time period has doubled to four years (Ngolongolo 2008, 72). The history within the last twenty years of French citizenship in regards to immigrants shows the tension and conflicted feelings about the assimilation of Muslims into French society.

The French government and politics have had diverse roles throughout the course of immigration. In 2009, the minister of immigration, Luc Besson unveiled the new debate on national identity (Erlanger 2009). What does it mean to be French? President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed that the debate had nothing to

do with immigration (2009). However, many North Africans and other immigrants, took offence because they felt that this debate was directed towards them. One European deputy born in Morocco claimed, “To be French is to have a French identity card. And the rights that go with it. Period” (Erlanger 2009). Others who were born and raised in France but do not have French “blood” feel that this debate was a waste of time, and even feel betrayed by France. All political parties participated in the debate, though many felt that it was an attempt to deter attention from real problems like unemployment and the retirement age (2009). Nonetheless, themes which all parties agreed on were the importance of a French education, and the level of the immigrant’s ability to speak French (Identité 2009). As this debate only recently ended in 2010, the government has not taken any official steps to implement any of the findings, except to require copies of the Rights of Man in each classroom. The fact that the government even found it necessary to open a debate on national identity shows the tension, and need to define what is “French” in order to exclude those who do not fit in.

## POPULAR CULTURE AND ASSIMILATION

Popular culture, including sports, music and the film industry, are perhaps the most visible instances of North African immigrants and their descendants gaining notoriety in these fields. These people have broken through the limitations placed on them as immigrants. Some of them embrace their cultural identity, while others embrace their “French-ness”. In sports, the most visible sign of integration is that of the soccer team. Since the 1930s there have been soccer players of immigrant descent from Europe and North Africa (Jourdain 2010). The year 1998 was the peak for the French soccer team when they won the World Cup against Brazil. The team that brought home the victory was a diverse team composed of players from all over the former French colonial empire. Zinedine Zedan, born in Marseilles to Algerian immigrants became a national star, along with players from Guadeloupe, Senegal, and Ghana, among others. This diversity earned it the name “black, blanc, beur” (black, white, Arab North-African) (Jourdain 2010). Today this tradition continues with the soccer team being composed of many diverse peoples, though it has not retained the same notoriety as the “black, blanc, beur” team.

Besides the soccer team, there are many more instances of success by North Africans. Actors, entertainers, and even politicians of North African descent have become household names. Gad Elmaleh, an actor and comedian was born in Casablanca, Morocco. He immigrated to France to study drama, and became very successful (Gad 2011). Actor Tahar Rahim, of Algerian descent is

an up and coming actor who has garnered world-wide notoriety (Scott 2011). Yet another example of success can be seen in the political administration of President Nicolas Sarkozy. Rama Yade, a Senegalese born woman who moved to Paris at age 11, became undersecretary of human rights, then junior sports minister, and in January 2011, she was nominated to be the permanent French ambassador to UNESCO (Rama 2011). She even changed her name from Ramayoude Yade, to Rama. This could signify her dropping a part of her ethnic identity in favor of a more French identity. Another famous example is Rachida Dati, a woman born to a Moroccan father and an illiterate Algerian mother. She is now a senior official in Nicolas Sarkozy's government which is the highest post that a person of North African descent has attained in the French government (Chrisafis 2008). These are just a few examples of the success of a plethora of ethnic minorities in the public spotlight. However, the question remains to be asked: are these the exceptions, or does everyone have a fair chance to be assimilated?

#### CAUSES OF DUAL IDENTITY

The public evidence for the seeming failure of assimilation is great, shown by the notorious incidents of the headscarf debate, the riots in 2006, and the turbulent history of French citizenship law, among other incidents. However, the debate on national identity in 2009 raised the question of what does it mean to be French? This question implied that the "others" did not feel French, but rather related to another identity. Popular culture has given the French many North African idols, from Zinédine Zedan to Gad Elmaleh, both of whom are adored by the public. Do these celebrities represent a successful assimilation into French society? Or is there perhaps a dual identity, in which these immigrants retain an ethnic identity as well as their acquired French identity? With this in mind, what are the causes of such a dual identity? Racism is one of the most influential factors in both the debate on successful assimilation, and the formation of dual identities. As noted earlier in the literature review, the French government does not officially recognize racism, or the various ethnic minorities (Haddad 2006, 26). This is in keeping with the French integration model in which everyone is "French" and nothing else. The theory is that any recognition of differences will divide society (Laachir 2006, 65). Ethno-racial polls have been prohibited for this very reason since 1978 (Identité 2009). In fact, some argue that France really has a communitarian model of white males (Grosfoguel 2008, 156). However, everyone is supposedly equal under French law (Weil 2004, 372). It is impossible to know exactly how many Muslims currently live in France. Most scholars agree that about five to seven million

Muslims reside in France, though these estimates cannot be confirmed by the government (CIA 2011).

Racism has many dimensions, including spatial, employment, criminalization, and attitudinal. The *cités* and the *banlieues* (the suburbs) are a form of social exclusion for many immigrants (Haddad 2006). It is in these poorer *banlieues* that crime, poorer education, and high rates of unemployment reside. Unemployment for youths fluctuates between 30 and 85 percent, depending upon the *cité* in question (Haddad 2006, 27). French Arab unemployment (for all Arab immigrants) is at 20%, which is double the national average (28). Crime is generally higher in the poor *banlieues*, where about 70% of armed hold-ups are committed by African immigrants (Brown 2007, 191). This criminal behavior antagonizes the French and creates fear in many cases, thereby increasing the feeling of racism towards immigrants. The riots of 2006, though not the first, were an explosion of anger on the part of immigrants toward this racism. North African immigrants are thought of as the “Other” in the French context (Laachir 2006, 63). The French perceive these “others” as foreigners, and thereby completely foreign to French values and culture. In the 1980s the extreme right group Front National, used anti-immigration rhetoric to incite xenophobia. This culminated in the 2002 presidential election when the leader of Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen won just under 20% of the vote (Ngolongolo 2008, 40). It is obvious that racism plays a role in the success or failure of integration.

The attitudinal dimensions of racism are related to the colonial legacy of the French empire. Frantz Fanon wrote, “In reality, a colonial country is a racist country” (1988, 309). France invaded Algeria in 1830 and remained there until Algeria’s independence in 1962 (Stora 2001, 34). In 1881 France gained Tunisia as a protectorate, and over the course of the next several years, established its empire over much of Northern and Western Africa (Abun-Nasr 1975, 56). Though the colonial era is over, the mentalities of both the French and the former subjugated colonists has survived through the years. That is, North Africans retain the feeling of domination and humiliation (Brown 2007, 189). This is in opposition to the French view of “mission civilisatrice” in which they “helped” the native peoples (189). The colonial ideology at the time of colonization was that of French racial “superiority” and the “inferiority of the colonized” (Fanon 1988, 308).

This colonial mentality persists, as evidenced by the February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005 law in which teachers and educators in the French school system were encouraged to teach the positive role of colonialism (Haddad 2006, 26 and



Adelman 2008, 49). This law shows an active will to forget the past and ignore its critics. It is evident that colonial ideology and its legacy fostered and continues to encourage racism (Laachir 2006, 60). The fact that France retains neo-colonies like Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion, supports the view that attitudinal racism persists. The political cartoon which “International Herald Tribune” published [see image 2 below] shows not only the conflict, but also the open sore that France retains regarding its lost colonies.

*French Suburbs on Fire*



Source: International Herald Tribune (2005)

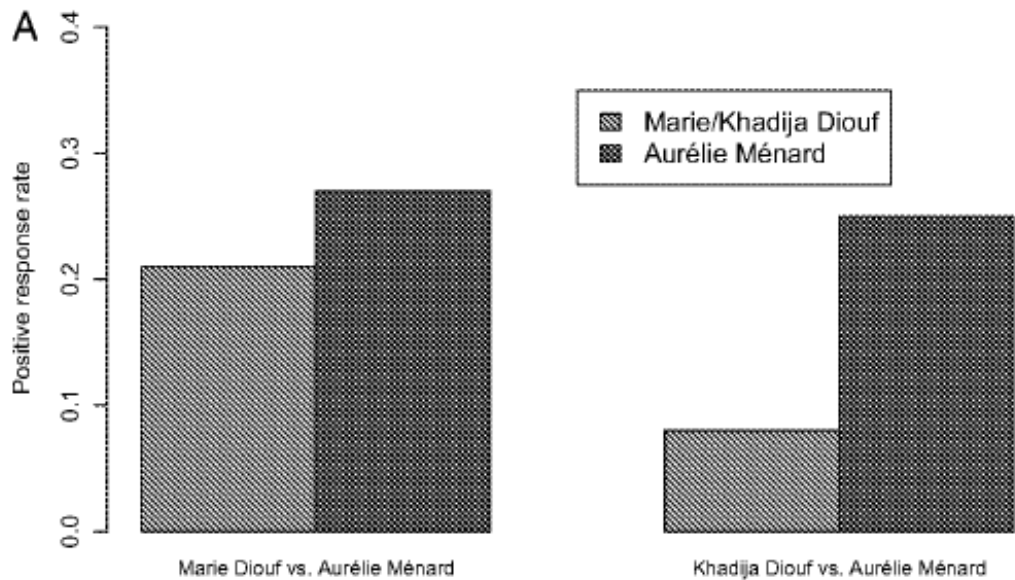
## ISLAMOPHOBIA AS AN EXPRESSION OF RACISM

Another expression of racism comes in the form of Islam. One of the main questions in the debate surrounding Islam in France, is whether Islamophobia exists. “Islamophobia” a neologism, came about in the 1990s (Martin-Munoz 2008, 15). Hostility towards Muslims is generally because prejudiced Westerners believe Islam is opposed to evolution and comes across as the “other” in which there are no common values with other cultures (16). Scholar Gema Martin-Munoz states that islamophobia does exist, and is on the rise (17). She claims that many Westerners think the best Muslim is the one who ceases to be a Muslim (through assimilation) (28). A relatively small proportion of the French population is thought to be Muslim: between five and ten percent, of a population of 65, 102,719 people (CIA 2011). However, Muslim women are one of the most visible practicing women as a result of the headscarves they wear. Secularism, or *laïcité*, as it is known in France, is one of the cornerstones of the French Republic. As one of the principles in the revolutionary discourse, it is almost considered “sacred” and untouchable (Adelman 2008, 46).

Therefore, the introduction of Islam into a very secular society has worried many people, as evidenced by the headscarf affair, and the chanting of “God is Great” by many of the rioters in 2006. Many claim that Muslim women who wear head scarves present a danger to French society because they represent the opposite of *laïcité* (Freedman 2004, 10). On April 11, 2011, the French government passed a law that prohibits women (French or foreign) from wearing a veil covering their faces. If they are caught, these women face a fine of 150 euros, as well as a mandatory citizenship course (France 2011). There have been many protests to this new law by Muslims, though they have not stopped the government from fining protesting women wearing the veil. The government passed this law in the name of secularism, though many believe it to be islamophobia.

Religious discrimination is also present in the work place. In a study conducted on the barriers of Muslim integration in the labor market, the researchers found evidence of significant religious discrimination (Adida 2010). In this study, the researchers created three comparable curriculum vitas for three different women. The first, a CV with Catholic activities on it, was for a Marie Diouf, who had a Catholic first name but a Senegalese last name. The second, a CV with Muslim activities, was for Khadija Diouf, a woman with a Muslim first name, and a Senegalese last name. The third was the control CV for an Aurélie Ménard with no religious affiliation who received a positive response of 27% from the companies to whom her CV who reviewed her application. In the results, Marie Diouf received a positive response of 21% while her Muslim counterpart received only an 8% positive response rate [see graph below]. This religious discrimination has an effect on immigrants’ unemployment rate which was 20%, for all Arabs. This is a multiplier effect since religious discrimination not only affects the unemployment rate, but also affects the racism and fear felt by the French towards youths involved in criminal activities instead of gainful employment (Adida 2010).

*Comparison of Positive Response Rates of Three Catholic and Muslim Candidates*



Source: Adida (2010)

However, another view is that that despite the recent barrages against Islam, France is not islamophobic; in fact, it is relatively tolerant, compared to many other European countries (Geisser 2010, 42). France is the most deeply involved country in institutionalizing Islam and wants to create a French Islam in which imams are educated in France and in French, though many French are skeptical of this (Fernando 2005, 12). On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, President Sarkozy's government hosted a three hour debate titled "Secularity" (Islam 2011). This debate questioned the place of Islam in France's society. Muslims refused to join the debate. Only politicians and representatives of other religions were involved in discussing such issues as women escorting children on school field trips who wear the veil, the wearing of religious symbols in day care, and whether parents should be allowed to take their children out of mandatory classes like biology (Islam 2011). Sarkozy's government claims that it is important to discuss the changes that its Muslim population is having (or forcing) on French society, while others claim that it is an election tactic to keep his party in the news until elections. Because this debate happened so recently, the government has not taken any official action.

#### NORTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE OF DUAL IDENTITY

How can one reconcile a French identity that clashes with one's ethnic identity? Many second and third generation Muslims have been raised as French, but they are not perceived as French by their French countrymen

(Adelman 2008, 35). Racism, the colonial legacy, and Islam all inhibit the level of assimilation to some degree. However, these three characteristics also shape the sense of dual identity that many of these immigrants have (Freedman 2004, 25 and Brown 2007, 15). The numerous controversies and manifestations of tension that have arisen in the past twenty years are related to the immigrant's search for identity. The headscarf affair showed the world and the French how sensitive Islam is for everyone involved. In a Republican model that acts as though racism and ethnicity do not exist, and pretends to be fine with its Muslims, the addition of Islam into an already tenuous scene has disrupted the balance (Grosfoguel 2008, 156). It produces a clash between *laïcité* and Islam. However, Islam must be at the heart of the identity of Muslims—otherwise what does it mean to be a Muslim (Brown 2007, 27)? Many girls claimed that wearing headscarves was a sign of their identity, their Muslim identity. For the majority of these immigrants from North Africa, Islam has been a cultural and historical part of their identity, which is not so easy to let go. Many scholars saw the riots that occurred in 2006 as a “crisis of identity” (Brown 2007, 22). Since the schools are one of the most important molders of a French national identity, laws such as the 2005 law endorsing a positive view of colonialism repel immigrants from acquiring a French identity.

The colonial legacy has left its mark on the North Africans' sense of identity as well. Giraud claims that “discrimination depends less on law, and more on social image that presents them [immigrants] as foreign and threatens the integrity of national identity” (2009, 45). It is obvious that Islam and the attitudinal legacy of colonialism, according to the French, have irrevocably tainted North Africans' social image. How is a North African immigrant to work among the “native” French when he/she still retains a sense of inferiority and while his French colleague still retains a sense of superiority? Perhaps it is this condition which makes North Africans in France romanticize their origins, thereby holding on even more to their ethnic identities (Hanson 2006, 25).

Second and third generation immigrants tend to romanticize their origins and ethnicities because of the discrimination that they perceive in France. In a survey conducted on a group of students with immigrant backgrounds (North African and European), French researcher Evelyne Ribert found that only 25.6% of people born with one foreign parent felt French, as compared to 47.5% of children born to two French parents who identify as French. However, Ribert stated that identifying with one's origins does not exclude also identifying as French. In an interview with a Moroccan girl, Khadija, she told him, “Je suis en France, bien sûr, je poursuis mes études en France, je vis en France avec mes parents, mais je me considère comme marocaine, même si je parle mieux le

français » (586). Roughly translated, Khadija stated, “I am in France, I study in France, I live in France with my parents, but I consider myself Moroccan, even though I speak French better”. Ribert found this sentiment to be true of many second and third generation immigrants with whom she spoke. Young people are prouder of their origins than of the French society in which they live (Brown 2007, 23). Many immigrants think of their parents’ homes as a refuge because of the rejection that they feel from the French community (Ribert 2009, 585). Many of the people interviewed felt that from the moment one became an immigrant, they were in between two countries, not really a part of either (590). Factors such as racism, colonial legacy, and Islam all play a role in determining either the rejection or acceptance that one feels from the host country, as well as a sense of dual identity.

Racism is another cause of dual identity which in turn determines the failure or success of assimilation. As noted earlier Frantz Fanon states that racism is the destruction of a certain way of life, including customs, dress, and language” (1988, 306). If this were to happen, assimilation (according to the French model) would be successful because North African traditions would have been eradicated. It is this struggle between French and Muslims that brings out the need on the part of immigrants to remain tied to an ethnic identity. Oppression is visible in all tiers of French society—from the past and continuing to the present. Economic oppression is visible because many immigrants are relegated to the banlieues of cities where it is less expensive to live. As a consequence, there are high rates of poverty, high rates of unemployment, poor education, and high crime rates. All of these elements combine to teach a student not about French national identity, but more about their own identity, and their place in French society. Immigrants have already begun to question why they are relegated to the outskirts of society. Discrimination, similar to racism, is felt throughout society, seen mostly in religious discrimination to access of good jobs, which simply reinforces the poverty cycle. The government wants to assimilate people to become “one” with the French identity, yet it points out immigrants’ differences everyday through national debates and laws, and prohibits them from attaining the same level of economic security as their French counterparts. The racism and discrimination enhances the feeling of rejection felt by many second and third generation immigrants, and causes them to romanticize their parents’ countries even more. This romanticization of their origins enhances the ties to their ethnic identities, and at the same time, it leads them to either rejection or indifference about their French identity, despite the fact that they have been brought up in France. This creates an inner conflict among many immigrants with regards to their identities.

Is this inner turmoil present among the examples of supposed integration in popular culture? The soccer team displayed a well integrated team, supposedly representative of France. However, based on the examined recent events, it seems that the soccer team is an anomaly. The integration of the soccer team has only been remarked upon once (“black, blanc, beur”), in 1998, leading one to assume that it is not the case today. Being a celebrity also does not mean acceptance on the part of the host country. The politician Rama Yade for example, shortened her name from Ramayoude, presumably to make it more palatable to her constituents (Rama 2011). This is a sign of assimilation, but it also shows non-acceptance by the French for her ethnic identity. Mustapha Kessous, a reporter for *Le Monde*, introduces himself as M. Kessous, because of the discrimination he encountered when people heard his first name. He felt like he had to “amputate” a part of his identity (Kessous 2009, 1). In order for North Africans to be successful and “accepted” by French society, they must detach themselves in public from part of their ethnic identity.

## FRENCH PERSPECTIVE

The headscarf affair demonstrated the cracks in France’s secular Republican model and the conflict within the French psyche on how to include these people who are French, but a “different” kind of French. France’s attempts to create a space for Muslims within French society have estranged many people. From the French point of view, creating the headscarf ban was not meant to enrage people, but instead to ease the process of assimilation for Muslims. In this way, Muslims would look more like the native French, and perhaps become more indoctrinated at school and understand the importance of *laïcité*. In this sense, assimilation can also be seen as a type of cultural racism which obliterates the traditions and values of Muslims by forcing them to assimilate to the French (Grosfoguel 2008, 153). Even France’s attempts to create an “Islam of France” shows France’s theoretical desire to integrate Muslims (if not because they want to, but because they are already in France). However, the French have failed to take into account the cultural identity of Muslims. Islam is tied in many cases to North African identity. The French should understand this from their own history: though France is considered a secular country, most French would identify themselves as Christians. French and Muslims could find common ground in how religion is traditionally tied to one’s cultural identity.

Despite France’s half-hearted attempts at integration, there are also signs of islamophobia within its society. The law banning all religious wear in school came about as a direct result of the headscarf debate. More recently, the new law

prohibiting veils everywhere in France exhibits islamophobia (though the French would say it exhibits laïcité). This new law points to the French desire to hide all the outer signs of Islam in order to aid in the farce that France really is uni-ethnic and mono-religious. The swiftness with which people blamed the 2006 riots on Islam because some youths chanted “God is Great” again shows how uncomfortable Islam makes the French. The French were willing to make Islam the scapegoat rather than examine their own society. The history of France’s citizenship law also shows how every law created has been to the detriment of Muslim immigrants.

The colonial legacy has one of the more lasting effects on assimilation and identity because it affects racism, the view of Islam, and the culture of North African immigrants. The French domination of its colonies, some for over 100 years, affects the psyche and mentality of both the colonized and the colonizers. The dominated are inculcated with a sense of inferiority, while the dominators grow up feeling superior. These feelings on both parts, which are nurtured for generations, remain with the people, even if subconsciously. In today’s world, these relations dominate every aspect of French society in relation to its immigrants. It is also reinforced by the fact that France retains neo-colonies today. How much of an impact does the colonial legacy have on one’s identity? The colonial legacy is at the root of the relations between France and its immigrants. France’s North African immigrants might never have decided to immigrate to the metropole if France had not colonized North Africa. After 1830, Algeria’s history and country were forever altered by the French invasion. This was the same for Morocco, Tunisia, and West Africa. Because of French colonization, North Africans were given many advantages: people in these former colonies learned French, came to study in the metropole, immigrated for work, and eventually became naturalized French citizens. However, this does not mean that these immigrants cut all ties to their former ethnic identities. Because many North African immigrants and their descendents have French citizenship (despite the efforts of the extreme right parties), they are automatically guaranteed a French political identity-if not a cultural one. Many immigrants do elect to retain their ethnic political identities as well. The colonial legacy may have also made them closer to their ethnic identities: though France may be the land of opportunity for immigrants and their families, the discrimination felt towards them as a result of colonialism has reinforced the ties to their ethnicity where discrimination is not felt.

## CONCLUSION

Has assimilation failed, partially failed, or succeeded? This paper reviewed cases which demonstrated tension between the native French and its Muslim population. The headscarf affair, the riots in 2005, and the history of French citizenship law, among others, were all manifestations of this tension. This paper also looked at some instances in popular culture where assimilation seemed to have succeeded. Some examples include North African politicians such as Rama Yade and Rachida Dati. However, after also examining some of the causes for dual identity, it is clear that these “integrated” examples are exceptions.

Based on the evidence that this paper examined, there is strong support for dual identities, which indicates that assimilation has partially failed in France. As mentioned earlier, assimilation was defined as a process in which the immigrant sheds his ethnic identity in favor of the host country’s identity. The majority of Muslims not only retains its ethnic identity, but nurtures it as a means of defense towards hostile native French citizens. The native French have shown that they are not comfortable with Muslims in their society, and this encourages Muslims to romanticize their origins, while maintaining their French identities. French society demonstrates racist and islamophobic tendencies toward its Muslim population. Lasting evidence of the colonial legacy has also proven to affect the mentalities of both Muslims (as inferior) and the French (as superior). These three elements cause much tension and antagonism between them.

Another question to be asked is whether having dual identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is actually a sign of success. Today, it is fairly common to have political dual identities (even in France), usually shared between a country of origin and the new host country. There is always a cultural identity for every political identity, and so logically, it would make sense to retain both. This idea does not imply that the French assimilation model cannot be improved, nor that the present situation of North Africans in France is acceptable. The government must examine its traditional model of integration and all of its policies relating to immigration with an eye towards revision and evolution in an era that generally accepts multiple identities. If immigrants retain their ethnic identities as a result of French hostility, then assimilation in this case will still partially fail or completely fail in the future. However, if immigrants retain ethnic identities out of love and ties to their home countries, then there should be no issue, as long as they are still able to relate to the native French.

In order for any kind of assimilation to occur properly, the native French must abandon their hostility towards Muslims. Education regarding France’s colonial legacy in North Africa would help educate the French, and dispel the



rumor that the French have amnesia in this area. Positive discrimination may also be another avenue to explore in trying to even out social disparities between Muslims and the French. The secular character of the French Republic will be perhaps the most difficult area to reach an agreement on within society. This may force the French to re-evaluate its values in order to welcome these immigrants who have in reality been “French” for decades.

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