

Migration sans Assimilation: Muslim Immigration in France

Cadet Andrea Walton

*Faculty Mentor Dr. Alan Farrell, Professor of Modern
Languages and Cultures*

ABSTRACT

In an effort to understand the reasoning for the past riots in Paris, my research uncovers the origin of the main social issue in France today: the assimilation of Muslim immigrants into French culture. Here, I present the historical aspects of the colonization, decolonization, and migration of many Africans to France and their struggles to be accepted as citizens of France while still embracing their heritage and religion. I show evidence of these struggles with many examples throughout French literature and media and reveal that the social strain caused by Muslim immigration is not a sudden and sporadic issue that has arisen in France, but an ongoing struggle that was not given the global consideration it deserves until actions of violence grabbed the world's attention. This research displays the social as well as governmental aspects of France's immigration policy and the conflicts resulting from a rigid secular policy and a vast xenophobia within it that cry out for reform and change to better accommodate the country as a whole.

French Policy: How the Secular Principle Came to Be

The foundation for the Secular Principle in France lies in the Preamble to the French Constitution, derived from the Constitution of the United States, but elaborated by French revolutionaries into the social principle of the French government: "None shall be allowed to suffer wrong in his work or employment because of his origin, opinions or beliefs" (Baubérot 1). This declaration protects religions, origins, and cultures—such as those of the Muslim immigrants of France—guaranteeing new citizens the rights and opportunities of any other French citizen. To stipulate the detail of this principle, the French established *Laïcité* or "Secularism," the firm and absolute Separation of Church and State as a policy of government and of society.

Although the Principle of Equality guarantees complete rights of immigrants in France, the essential idea within the Preamble creates a paradox, by the establishment of separation in the name of integration. The French Preamble identifies "fundamental principles recognized by the laws of the Republic" (Baubérot 1). These principles, the Separation of Church and State, Freedom of Education, and Freedom of Conscience, create a narrow fulcrum for the French government to balance upon: citizens can exercise personal beliefs, but zones such as public schools allow no belief. The French have for centuries juggled this irony. The 21st century appears to have weakened their capacity to reconcile this paradox.

Jean Baubérot, professor of sociology and religion at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, insists: "[T]he French notion

of secularity appears as a means of grounding the social bonds in values recognized as universal” (Baubérot 1). This French policy of separation of church and state, by tradition and policy, affords all citizens freedom so long as they do not practice it. Secularism is the idea that anyone may claim a separate belief in private but that everyone must embrace one value in common: the agreement not to impose private belief upon others by display of faith in public. Within Article 9 of the European Convention, “two fundamental rights dominate the French courts”:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

2. Freedom to manifest one’s religions or beliefs shall be subjected to only such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interest of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others (Baubérot 2).

Beginning with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789, derived from the Declaration of Independence of the United States, France soon added her own passions to define her new future. The religious stipulations within the Declaration stemmed from the particular history of French thought. From the beginning, revolutionary France, a non-sectarian nation, asserted that “human rights stemmed from the ‘Creator’ and entailed no major conflict with a particular religion” (Baubérot 2). But the Declaration of Rights of Man bristled with religious language and soon found itself in conflict with the resurgent Catholic Church. In fact, the text was said to be written by the “Supreme Being” and “was to be disavowed by the Pope” (Baubérot 2) because of its Theist tendency:

[French Law] tried first to control

Catholicism (1790), then turn itself into a religion (the revolutionary cults of 1793, accompanied by politico-religious persecution,) before establishing a short-lived separation of church and state (1795), which, coexisting with the maintenance of quasi-religious revolutionary fervor, did not in the end resolve the conflict. (Baubérot 2)

After the religious struggles of the 16th and 17th centuries, France feared repeating the past and reawakening doctrinal turmoil among her people.

Even Bonaparte, known for his fierce attacks on neighboring lands in the name of France and whom the Pope allegedly crowned, believed in a secular nation. In fact, he first developed the secular policy. To purge the French Civil Code of religious undertones and vestiges “the registrations of births, deaths and marriages were secularized and a civil marriage was the required preliminary to any religious wedding ceremony” (Baubérot 2). By passing this law, the regime required all French citizens to register their status by one standard recognized by the state. All religious ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals and baptisms, needed no official civil status. Thus, Secularism sprang up with modern France.

However, Secularism did not enjoy a steady development. Beginning in 1815, the “conflict between two Frances” threatened. Two political parties emerged: one, the “clerical camp” (believing that France should return to the Catholic Church) and the other, the “anticlerical camp” (believing that France should hold to the “values of 1789” by keeping religion out of the government). This conflict over power eventually led to the modern separation of church and state in France. Although a less strict policy from the 1880s secularized education, a “hate campaign” against Jews, Protestants, and other religious minorities by “a strain of intransigent Catholicism” finally inspired the Act of the Separation of Church and State in 1905 (Baubérot 3), which soon became the governing principle for the policy of secularism: “freedom

of conscience and worship, free organization of churches... non-recognition of churches and their equality before the law, and freedom to express religious beliefs in public” (Baubérot 3). Freedom of conscience includes the freedom of a French citizen to choose no religion at all: “No one should be obliged to express his religious or philosophical beliefs” (Baubérot 4).

Further to protect those who choose atheism or those who adhere to minority religions that may arouse prejudice from members of dominant religions, the government established rules to protect privacy. For this reason neither the French census nor ballots may record religious affiliation. Another law sterilizes the appearance of public buildings: “The religious neutrality of the public domain, even churches, implies that there should be no religious emblems on public buildings constructed after 1905” (Baubérot 4). Not only does this neutrality seem extreme to Americans, who tolerate religious emblems on the outside of churches at least in the United States, but it also seems contradictory, particularly since so much of France’s religious history still shines through government settings: “Not until 1972 were jurors in assize courts relieved of duty to take the oath ‘before God and before men’” (Baubérot 4). Even today, public calendars announce Christian holidays while the government recognizes other religious days of importance, such as Jewish or Muslim holidays. For holy days of these religions, one must take a “leave of absence” from school or work. Furthermore, citizens’ religious affiliations, or lack thereof, do not remain in complete secrecy: “In practice, authorities do indeed have to take account of the size of religious groups” (Baubérot 5). Baubérot cites the size of religious groups taken into official account to calculate a proportionate number of religious channels available for each religion on state television. These contradictory responses to separation erode even French support for the policy of *Laïcité*. For Muslims and others the paradox can only appear starker.

In summation Baubérot asserts: “The

paradox is only on the surface...the benchmark ideals driving [secularism] include respect for freedoms and the commitment to democracy” (1). Contradictions in policy produce extreme interpretations in France today, such as the Veil Law, which not only prohibits the wearing of religious scarves in public schools but also Jewish skullcaps, displays of the Cross, and Star of David. This inconsistency remains deeply troubling, particularly to immigrants, who see in such policy not historical irony but fresh social insult and new cause for violent reply. Secular policy in France stems from good intention and historical evolution but may now prove harmful to the French people for those very reasons.

Background

The dilemma of France follows the history of Muslim migration. In *Breaking the Silence: French Women’s Voices From the Ghetto*—the English translation of Fadela Amara’s book, *Ni putes ni soumises* [Neither Whores nor Slaves]—Helen Harden Chenut sheds light on the historical background of France’s Muslim immigrations: “France has the largest population in Europe, largely drawn from former colonies on the North African coast”(1). Muslims in France, she adds—nearly eleven percent of the French population—come mainly from the former overseas colonies along the North African coasts: “Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco; collectively the Maghreb” (Chenut 5), for which first generation Muslim immigrants received the nickname, the *Maghrébins*.

In 1789, on the eve of the French Revolution, Algeria thrived as a primary coastal trading region. By 1830, France had conquered it and begun colonization of the Sahara, with Algeria as the economic center. By 1912, after a military standoff with Germany over territorial rights, France finally extorted a treaty from the Sultan of Morocco under which Morocco became a protectorate of France (Chenut 1). In Algeria, meanwhile, peasants faced poverty

after “expropriation” of their land and produce and ultimately faced the “destruction of their traditional economy and society” (Chenut 6). To survive, the peasants began emigrating first to Algerian cities, then to continental France as cheap labor to replace men sent to fight WWI, but they remained unassimilated since “they were widely perceived as a foreign community whose values were at odds with secular French society” (Chenut 6).

After 1947, when Algeria became an “integral part of France,” Algerians at least gained access to French citizenship, with the right to bring their families into the country under the “regroupement familial” or *Family Reunification Act*. But by 1954, the war for Algerian independence had poisoned life in Algeria, launching a new wave of emigration to France. However, sympathetic Algerian independence groups such as “Front de libération nationale” and “Mouvement national algérien” (Chenut 1) within the Muslim communities of France led to government suppression of immigrants. At the close of the war in 1962, the next wave of immigrants arrived in France: the “harkis,” Algerians who had fought for France and now looked for security along with former colonial French returning home. Algerians who applied for naturalization got citizenship but had difficulty assimilating into French society because of the hostility of the French government (Chenut 7).

They faced poor housing and dangerous low-paid work, as well as discrimination and surveillance owing to the “political suspicions” stemming from the war. In 1973, France found the growing population of North African immigrants spiraling out of social control and promoting unemployment, which led to “racist attacks against its nationals,” that is, French non-Muslims. Consequently, French policy halted immigration from Algeria (Chenut 9). To “win the Algerian immigrants’ loyalty away from the nationalist movement,” French policy extended welfare programs and social services to the remaining Muslim immigrants to “promote their integration as immigrant

workers” (Chenut 15). Labor unions and human rights organizations, such as the “Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l’amitié entre les peuples” [Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between the Peoples], surfaced. These organizations flourished until the 1980s when another economic recession overtook France, at which time they lost the funding they required to maintain their effectiveness (Chenut 10).

A sudden xenophobia against Algerian immigrants burst into French politics and not solely within working class neighborhoods. This fear of Algerians sprang from their supposed reluctance to embrace French culture and their persistence in religious and cultural fidelity to Islam, also known as “l’inassimilabilité” (McNeil 2). Jean-Marie Le Pen, an ex-paratrooper, fueled public fear and hatred through his extreme right-wing political party, the “Front National,” arch nemesis of the current French president, Jacques Chirac, also a veteran of the Algerian war (Chenut 10). Le Pen appealed mainly to the French working class, who were more closely exposed to Algerian and other North African immigrants and therefore more bitter toward them and fearful of “l’invasion”—the invasion of France by hordes of immigrants creating competition for skilled jobs (McNeil 2). The working class despised these “briseurs de grèves” [strike breakers] for pushing down the wages of the “Français de souche” [native French] and threatening the French social order (McNeil 2).

This political scuffle pitted the right-wing traditionalists against the left-wing socialists of France. The Right pursued anti-immigration to the point of demanding that airlines return immigrants to Algeria (often not even to their place of origin) and condemning immigrants accused of petty crimes to harsh sentences such as long imprisonment or immediate deportation, a frowned-upon practice known as “double peine.” The Left wanted to “regularize the situation of illegal immigrants through a temporary amnesty,” a policy curiously the reverse of the American immigration policy.

Meanwhile, the president during this crisis, socialist François Mitterand, authorized the creation of private associations to provide financial assistance to those immigrants participating in the arts such as theater, dance, and music (Chenut 11). So hope for the lives of Muslims in France grew less bleak.

Throughout the 1980s violence provoked “racially motivated murders” (Chenut 11) of North African Muslim immigrants as a second generation of Muslims fought for a place in French society. Males—known as “beurs” (the females as “beurettes”) from suburban slang known as “verlan”—organized their first protest in 1983, “la marche des Beurs,” that began in Paris and ended in Lyons under the slogan: “Première, deuxième, troisième génération: nous sommes tous des enfants d’immigrés,” [First, second, third generation: we are all the children of immigrants]. This march aimed mainly to gain the recognition and cooperation of the French working class (Chenut 12-13), but also to demand recognition as citizens of the French nation.

The *beurs*, both male and female, had adopted much of French culture, more than their parents, but they still risked deportation, poor housing and living conditions, relentless harassment by French police, and constant injustice under a biased court system: “Beurs living in France [were] faced with mounting intolerance and as a consequence, [were] adopting more and more rebellious attitudes” (Jacomard 4). Throughout the 1980s, they struggled toward “reconciliation with the Maghrebin’s cultural background, values and expectations” (Jacomard 4), forming groups to combat racism such as “France Plus” and “SOS Racisme”—organizations that received socialist government funding by which they flourished. Unfortunately, a split soon developed between supporters and members out of fear by militant leaders that they could be “co-opted by outside political forces” (Chenut 14). Suspicion created tension and distrust within these organizations, causing the organizations to crumble and leaving members

with only the ghettos to return to: “This negative legacy and a worsening economic situation in France in the late 1980s turned immigrant youth inward to their own communities” (Chenut 15). Islamic fundamentalist groups then infiltrated French Muslim neighborhoods where they remain today, spawning social unrest while widening the cultural gap between the Muslim immigrants and French citizens.

The Veil Controversy

In October 1989, three young Muslim girls wore veils into their public school in France. From this simple act of defiance, multiple issues surfaced: What was the status of Muslim women in France? Were “Beurs” accepted in French Society? Why didn’t the French government recognize the customs of their Muslim population? The debate still rages today, with President Jacques Chirac attempting to appease his nation while remaining attached to the stringent policy of Separation of Church and State. France’s policy on *Laïcité*, or Secularism, duplicates in a far more rigid form the American Separation of Church and State. So it comes as no surprise that the French government views wearing veils to school as “une atteinte à la laïcité et à la neutralité de l’école publique,” [an attack on the neutrality of public schools]. In October 1990, the French Board of Education released the following statement: “L’école est faite pour accueillir les enfants et non pour les exclure” (Chikha 8). [School is established to accommodate children, not to exclude them] Yet by denying the girls entry to their school, the French fell into a contradiction: “La vraie question n’est pas d’être pour ou contre le foulard à l’école publique, mais de savoir à quelle école iront ces enfants et comment réussir leur intégration” (Chikha 8). [The real issue is not for or against the veil, but to decide what school the children will go to and how to make their integration successful] This apparent concession reveals ambiguity and indecisiveness among school officials on the issue, a reflection of sentiment

among the rest of the French population.

Kramer addresses the paradox of opposing stances on the veil in her essay "Taking the Veil: How France's public schools became the battleground in a cultural war," indicting the ambiguity of Chirac's policy of Secularism. France, she suggests, "is an idea of citizenship, an identity forged in the neutral space of its public schools," a "sanctuaire" (60). [school is a sanctuary] But Kramer probes deeper into this neutrality, noting that the Muslims of France—eleven percent of the population—"demand" freedom to express their religion in all schools: "[the Muslims] are part of a vast post-colonial diaspora, uprooted, often recruited and for the most part, unwelcome, unassimilated and poor, and in France today are also a part of a social revolution: 'the war between Islamic fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism,' as both sides say" (60). This widening cultural gap threatens France despite "the application of the principle of *Laïcité* in the Republic" (Kramer 60). Chirac formed a commission for whose chairman he selected his go-to-man for secularism, former French Cabinet member, Bernard Stasi, who, in turn, "selected nineteen members, among them three Muslims, three Jews, and six women" (Kramer 60). But despite the politically correct appearance of this board, Stasi chose all for their support of the Separation of Church and State. Obviously Chirac would enjoy the support he needed when time came for this "diverse" board to "determine whether the laws on [secularism] were sufficient or needed to be clarified" (Kramer 60). To accompany this reinforcement, Chirac encouraged the Parliament to pass what is officially known as Article 141-5-1 of Law No. 2004-228 of the National Code d'Éducation:

In public elementary schools, it is forbidden to wear symbols or clothes through which students conspicuously... display their religious affiliation. Internal rules require that a dialogue with the student precede the enforcement of any disciplinary procedure. (Kramer 61)

This law also applies to "overtly" religious

crosses, the Jewish skullcap, and the Sikh turban, additions that had the result of enraging everyone.

Neutrality backfired. As Kramer points out, a lot of Muslims are "young, angry, alienated, impressionable, and demanding in their particular French 'identity' in ways that not even the great prestidigitator of French identity, Charles de Gaulle, would have been able to accommodate" (61). Sure enough, the Muslims do not accept the solution. When nothing changes, chaos follows:

In France itself, there were demonstrations of veiled women, demonstrations of unveiled women, endless television debates, rap wars on the Muslim hip-hop circuit, and windy discussions in all important papers... There were threats of schoolgirl strikes, threats of huge sympathy strikes, threats of mass lawsuits... serious threats of violence- terrorist threats, threats of Islamic reprisals- as well as warnings that came in the form of carefully coded messages to the country's Muslim women's rights activists." With the passing of this new law, as Jane Kramer put it, "revealed a basic incapacity of the system to integrate our immigrants. (Kramer 61)

Although Kramer condemns the French government's half-hearted reconciliation with the Muslim population, she does recognize the source of the government's unwillingness to change: "France was savaged by wars of religion for hundreds of years and... those wars have left most of the French, the President among them, with a dread of mixing government and God" (61). Her empathy finds echo in a statement by Chirac later defending his stance on veils in public schools: "The state does not put a foot in any belief. It is a very French conception and we hold to it... Religion is not a subject we impose on French children. The law is because of that." He goes on to say, "The time we imposed our values is over... We made bad mistakes, we did many good things, but it's over" (62).

Revolution wracks the Muslim culture of France even now: "In much of Europe today, a

veiled girl in a public school classroom is considered a provocation, and not always by her own choice” (Kramer 65). A sudden spike in “radical indoctrination of young French-born Muslim men” has triggered this defiance, also known as “communitarian recruitment” (Kramer 65). These Muslim “brotherhoods”—radical religious groups often funded from outside Europe—train Algerian and Moroccan preachers who then infiltrate the poor areas of Muslim France, *les cités* or *les bidonvilles*, to recruit young men into their revolt: “They stalked the North African schoolboys, demanding recruits for their after-school Koran classes—threatening and often beating the ones who refused, but always offering free textbooks to the ones that came and ‘protection’ to their parents” (Kramer 65). These “recruitments” have infested the Muslim ghettos in France, but have been ignored by French police and the government, who view the recruitments as “serving a useful purpose: policing their own neighborhoods, keeping them quiet, and keeping violence contained and crime ‘disciplined’” (Kramer 65). Like the “colors” of gangs in the streets of the United States, who, in this way, advertise their membership, the veil stands as a symbol for religious faith and solidarity. Muslim girls wear veils not merely to affirm their modesty and dedication to Islam but because they are often forced by their brothers and other male family members. “It isn’t God,” one woman whispers to Kramer, “It’s men who want it” (Kramer 69). For many Muslim women, the veil has “nothing to do with diversity and everything to do with isolation” (Kramer 66).

The veil issue within French society has become paradoxically “an emblem of feminism.” Muslim feminists around the world have taken the position that the veil frees rather than oppresses them. Resisting the pressure to conform to “anarchist” Western culture, where half-naked women smirk from billboards, out of television commercials, or on magazine covers, these women claim they protect themselves from perception as sex objects

rather than as intelligent human beings with ideas, emotions and opinions. Nevertheless, the veil: whatever its social or political meaning, derives ultimately from religion, forcing the French government to forbid its wear in public institutions for fear of reawakening the religious hatred from the past (Kramer 68).

However, when recruitments of “French Muslim men into the terror network feeding Chechen and Afghan and Iraqi insurgencies picked up in earnest,” suddenly, Muslim girls began attempting to enter public schools, according to Kramer, “draped in clothing that had less to do with the places their families came from than with a kind of global ur-Islam, which may be why it was dismissed, for a while, as some sort of adolescent fad” (66). Many Muslim men and boys alike throughout France consider it a “*rite de passage*” to make the modern women of their families “docile and observant ‘Muslim’ virgin(s)” as required by fundamental religious texts. During the American invasion of Iraq, incitement of French Muslims increased along with incidents involving veils in school (Kramer 66). Fundamentalist doctrine not only forced the veil upon these young French girls but also drove them into a sort of internal exile. French Muslim girls suddenly could not engage in sports or study science. Violence against women exploded: “Girls who did not conform were excoriated, or chased, or beaten by fanatical young men meting out ‘Islamic justice.’ Sometimes the girls were gang raped” (Kramer 66-67). These disturbing acts of violence have even resulted in the death of Muslim girls: “October 2002, [Sohane Benziane,] an 18 year-old Muslim woman was set on fire for her rebellious behavior by a local gang leader in Vitry-sur-Seine, a suburb of Southern Paris” (Chenut 16).

The Muslims of France insist that the French government inadequately represents them. This impression is certainly not illusion. As Kramer reminds us, “No Muslim candidates from any of the big parties have been given a shot at election districts they might actually

win,” and “there still isn’t a French Muslim in the National Assembly of the Senate” (67). Although “French Catholics [are] already represented by the Church hierarchy, and... Protestants and Jews [have] independent consistories to represent their interests,” Muslims have only “Dalil Boubakeur, the aging rector of Paris’s Grand Mosque, and a group of state-vetted imams,” who have supported the French government’s interest by “monitor[ing] Islamic activity” (Kramer 67). While the French ruling class ignores the rage in *les cités* and the inadequacy of social networks within the French culture for Muslims, those who follow Islam have resorted to violence in the streets of Paris, desperate to wake up the French. On August 20th, 2004, Islamists kidnapped two French journalists and their driver and threatened the lives of their hostages unless Chirac revoked the newly passed veil law (Kramer 67).

Evidence in Literature

The struggle toward assimilation for Muslims in France has gained wide attention not only among political and social critics and essayists but also among French-language novelists and poets, notably African writers who appropriate French language as their weapon. Novels and poems or dramas illuminate the paradox of France’s policies. The authors bring social conflict and personal struggle to life through literature of suffering, shame, and frustration from the viewpoint of the “other.” Racism, government policies, the ghetto, terrorism, the veil, and the fight for equality by the young and passionate “beurs” all take on life and color in these fictions. The dilemmas in storybook form animate the struggles and hopes of failed integration and offer possible solutions.

Le gone du Chaâba

Azouz Begag, today French Minister of Equal Opportunity, has written the tale of a young boy from the “Chaâba” or ghetto in

Lyons in the 1960s. The boy, “Azouz,” lives with his family and the other Muslims in this isolated community, where each day he suffers as a child of poverty, despite the “assimilation” the French world invites. He longs for acceptance by his non-Muslim peers in school as well as by his teachers, but the cultural barriers between them and Muslims of the “bidonville” (another word for the ghetto) perpetuate friction. Not only must Azouz try to get outsiders to accept him despite his different skin color and culture, but he must also bear the humiliation of his poverty.

Azouz’s family does not even have the luxury of running water to bathe in. When Azouz has an accident in the outhouse one night and returns to his “shack” soaked with urine, all his mother can do is cover the smell: “Ma mère finit de me frictionner avec de l’eau d’colonne” (243). [My mother finishes by rubbing me with cologne] To Azouz and the rest of the children of the Chaâba, the garbage truck at the dump near their homes seems “un camion de poubelles majestueux, plein aux as, débordant de trésors de tous côtés” (37). [A majestic garbage truck, full to the top, with overflowing treasure on all sides] The garbage from the French city offers these children their only source of “new” clothes or toys. *Alors*, arriving at school in dirty, second-hand clothes full of holes worn through them while long overdue for a bath makes it difficult to hide the social status of the Muslim children from the French children.

Azouz’ father encourages him to work hard in school so that he may one day live outside the ghetto: “Je préfère que vous travailliez à l’école. Moi, je vais à l’usine pour vous, je me crèverai s’il le faut, mais je ne veux pas que vous soyez ce que je suis, un pauvre travailleur” (22). [I prefer that you work at school. Me, I go to the factory for you, I will break my back if I must, but I do not want you to be what I am, a poor worker] But precisely because he excels in school, doing far better than any of the other Arab children, he finds himself neither accepted by the Muslim children, owing to his embrace

of French culture and language, nor the whites. After the teacher, despised by his Algerian classmates, cites Azouz to prove that he is not racist since he is willing to praise an Arab student for his essays, Azouz is threatened by Ahmed Moussaoui, a fellow “gone” or *child of the ghetto* who is also the story’s bully: “T’es pas un Arabe! T’es un Français! Faux frère!” (107). [You are not an Arab! You are French! False brother!] Thus he receives his most ferocious indictment to hand.

Béni ou le paradis privé

Like little Azouz, Béni Abdallah struggles with acceptance into French society, facing the racism of outsiders and coping with his desire to be like them. In school he faces racism not only from his peers, but from his teachers as well: “Les profs n’arrivaient jamais à prononcer correctement [mon nom], soi-disant parce qu’ils n’avaient pas l’habitude. Moi, je crois plutôt que c’était pour faire rire la classe” (40). [The professors were never able to pronounce my name correctly, saying they lacked the familiarity (with Arabic pronunciation). Me, I believe they did it just to make the class laugh] Unfortunately, Béni also endures the suspicion of present-day Muslims among local officials, notably police. He lives in the French neighborhood, the ghetto, but has constantly to prove his residency because of his skin. When he plays with other neighborhood children at a park where non-residents may not enter, a police officer interrogates Béni. After he swears he resides in the neighborhood, the cop snaps at him in insulting pidgin French: “Allez fissa! Fissa! Toi et tes amis y’en a déguerpir de là sinon toi payer pour les autres sous de l’amende” (63). [Go on! You and your little friends got-um go bye-bye! Else pay-um fine] The cop speaks to him in baby talk the way many French speak to foreigners.

Still, at home, Béni longs to celebrate Christmas like the French. His father, a devout Muslim not open to French culture, refuses.

When Béni presses him for money to buy a Christmas tree, his father becomes furious: “Tiens le sapin, gratuit celui-là, prends-en tant que tu veux... Mange ton sapin” (23). [Get your tree, take all you want...eat your tree!] This dilemma of wishing to be a part of the French culture and yet being denied that wish by the rest of French society and one’s own Magrhebin parents torments unwelcome Beurs today.

“Fille de harki”

Fatima Besnaci-Lancou’s story, “Fille de harki: Le bouleversant témoignage d’une enfant de la guerre d’Algérie,” [“Daughter of a Harki: The Shattering Tale of a Child of the Algerian War”], recounts a family journey begun in 1962, when eight-year-old Fatima and her family flee the violence and death around her home, 1,000 kilometers deep in Eastern Algeria: “[M]enaces, tortures, exécutions, enlèvements, humiliations des anciens harkis faisaient désormais partie de ma vie quotidienne” (26). [Threats, tortures, executions, abductions, and humiliations of the former harkis became part of my daily life] They trek to the other side of the Mediterranean toward a military camp, Zéralda, setup for families of “harkis,” Algerian soldiers fighting on the side of France, like Fatima’s father.

Upon arrival, the “harki” families meet a far from hospitable welcome among the French. As Algerian families flow into the camp, the French greet them, despite their loyalty, with intolerance. Shelter and education are meager: “dans ma famille, personne n’est allé à l’école. L’accès à l’enseignement était réservé aux Français” (54). [In my family, no one went to school. Access to education was reserved strictly for the French] Fatima and the other “harki” families cannot even celebrate the independence of Algeria when it finally comes on the 5th of July, nor is it a time of celebration for those who have stood by the French:

Les réjouissances parfois hystériques du 5 juillet ont constitué pour les Algériens un rite de passage qui leur a permis de quitter leur peur de dominés. Mais nous les harkis, qui n’avions

pas eu le droit de participer aux réjouissances nationales, nous n'avions jamais été décolonisés. (72) [The occasionally hysterical rejoicing of July 5th constituted a right of passage for the Algerian people, permitting them to no longer be dominated. But we, the harkis, who didn't have the right to participate in the rejoicing, were never decolonized]

The flight from their homeland to these camps severely depressed the refugees Fatima travels with. Some even find it unbearable: "Durant la traversée, deux personnes dont une vieille dame se suicidèrent en se jetant à l'eau" (63). [During the crossing, two people, including an old woman, killed themselves by jumping into the water] Fatima's suffering cries out for the many silent voices of harkis, the paradox of French indifference to the families of Algerian soldiers who defended the French regime!

Ni putes ni soumises

Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices From the Ghetto, is the English translation of Fadela Amara's *Ni putes ni soumises*, [Neither Whores nor Slaves] a record of her militancy over Muslim women's rights in France. She has organized peaceful marches of both men and women, French and Arab, to alert the government, as well as the rest of French society, to the pressure within Muslim neighborhoods and the frustration that can only explode in time. She observes the origin of Muslim women's issues and the sudden popularity of the veil among Muslim girls, which she regards as female constraint, the result of male oppression, adding ironically: "...as social injustice increased during this period, young men were its first victims" (67). In the early 1990s, the French government took less interest in the Muslim issues: "Little by little, the state reduced the number of youth workers, put an end to public service in certain projects, and withdrew from the neighborhoods" (85).

As the government neglected housing and

labor opportunities for the Muslims, "more young men became radicalized" (65) when recruiters for radical Islamic teachings infiltrated the neighborhoods. The males of the community felt pressure to conform to the radicalism or abandon their manhood within the traditional Muslim value system. They sought power in their communities as their only means of earning respect and regaining male status, a dignity France has denied them: "Today, almost all of the boys have retreated into the only space where they have some control, the housing projects" (67). To affirm their masculinity, males exercise control over the women in their families through constraint on where they go, when they speak, and of course, what they wear. Although Amara regards religious practice as "legitimate when it is a personal choice, without pressure of constraint but above all when it respects the norms of a secular society" (73), she laments the threats of violence toward Muslim women who resist the new Islamic order of the neighborhoods by their refusal to wear the veil. Women who refuse to obey are considered whores and are often beaten or raped. This brutality has even coined a new term; "tournante" (79), gang rape bound to violence as a tool of repression, inspiring Amara's movement, "Ni Putes ni Soumises."

Racisme expliqué à ma fille

In *Racism Explained to My Daughter*, Tahar Ben Jelloun has assembled essays aimed at a young audience facing the hardship of a multi-racial world. In fact, his "explication" answers the series of questions his daughter asks him about racism. By its deceptive simplicity, it also addresses potential questions from adults. When his daughter asks, "Daddy, what is racism?" he responds lamentably yet not without intelligence: "It consists of being mistrustful of people, even looking down on those who have physical or cultural characteristics different from your own" (12). Each question the daughter asks stems from the answer her father gives her to the preceding one.

Eventually the questions bring the father to politics. When his daughter cites Jean-Marie Le Pen, the head of the anti-immigrant party the “Front National,” Ben Jelloun explains to her why Le Pen’s racist politics make no sense:

Le Pen heads a political party that is based on hating foreigners, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, and so on (35). He tells them that immigrants come to France to take French people’s jobs, collect welfare, and get free health care. It’s not true. Immigrants often do the jobs French people don’t want to do. They pay taxes and social security; they have a right to medical care when they get sick...If God forbid, they expelled all the immigrants from France tomorrow, the economy would crumble. (16)

The economic importance of immigration Ben Jelloun notes with passion as he defines for his daughter such words as “impulse,” “genetics,” and even, “anti-Semitism” (the hatred of people from Western Asia, mainly the Jews). Ben Jelloun, clear and comprehensive for a child, simplifies a complex human dilemma. The little book explains racism in France, but also racism the world over, including perhaps racism and immigration in the United States.

The Paradox

Despite an open border policy and a historical invitation, France struggles to assimilate her immigrant Muslims who bring aggressive piety with them. Recent looting and rioting in Paris—violence that the world does not condone yet that does compel attention—has awakened France to the threat of cultural war. Now even French policy makers admit that a cruel irony constricts freedom within their liberal democracy. Vandalism and violence by young Muslim immigrants, desperate for the recognition of the French government, alienate even the formerly indifferent among the French. Extremism among these immigrants, out of frustration over the lack of promised services and absence of assimilation into French culture

consistent with their beliefs and rich heritage, thwarts the stability of a major European power.

Unfortunately, only such desperate acts alert the world to injustice, despite strident outcries through literature and journalism indicting France’s hypocrisy toward the Muslim populations whom she invites from the lands she administered, subjugated, and plundered, and whom she claimed she had a “mission to civilize.” Ever since the North Africans and other former colonial Arab migrants began flocking to France in search of new opportunity, though with few skills appropriate to a technological state, a paradox has separated France’s five to six million Muslim immigrants from her larger population.

Although France has met immigrant complaints with peaceful, if slow, shifts in policies within her Constitution in the hope that an already troubled socialist economy can solve its problems through pure statism, France has nevertheless revealed a flaw in her national character that hinders full embrace of her immigrants. France cannot forget the shame of her colonial past, yet she chooses daily to evoke the glory of that past. To put aside the darker consequences of colonial brutality challenges collective repentance. Bloodshed and intolerance surrounded the assimilation of Catholicism and Reform in France with the consequence that the state rigidly separated Church and Faith, far more fanatically even than the deist United States. As a result, a mistrust of religion within French society subjugates belief, creed, custom, or rite by traditional secular policy in that country.

Can French society repair the fault? Does France deliberately or self-deceptively pursue false objectives? Does she actually advertise or merely tolerate diversity as a consequence of modern industrial development with its hunger for cheap labor? Does France offer a new life and better opportunity to Muslim immigrants? Does she assimilate inhabitants from former colonies or does the economic reality beneath showy advertisements for Western culture betray the promise for arriving

Muslims who must relinquish their cultural and religious heritage or pose a threat to France?

But is this the policy of the original French revolutionaries? Did they plan to exploit unsuspecting immigrants while removing the veil from their heads? Evidence from the French Constitution confirms the liberal intent of the French nation to endorse sincerely "assimilation" as a humane, rational, and expedient national policy. Unfortunately, well-meaning utopian policies have spawned the very chaos they aimed to prevent. Thus the paradox: revolutionary popular invitation to assimilation for Muslim immigrants provokes suspicion and perpetuates outdated public policies that deny immigrants complete entry into their new home. France is working diligently to remedy this injustice as her policymakers probe this cultural divide. Surveys, polls, interviews, panels, debates, and editorials have furnished and continue to furnish endless data, but the outcome remains clouded, that is, *human*. Literature and the media evoke emotional responses to immigration in France. Where does the truth lie? Can any compromise accommodate both poles? Can a people who share a religious law that binds even economic relations reasonably integrate a society where secular law trumps all religion? It remains to be seen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Alan Farrell for the many hours of hard work he put in as my Academic Advisor for this research.

WORKS CITED

- Amara, Fadela, and Sylvia Zappi. *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto*. Trans. Helen Harden Chenut. Berkeley: Berkeley UP, 2006.
- Baubérot, Jean. "The Secular Principle." University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Department of European Studies. <[http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Veil2000/articles/the-secular-](http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Veil2000/articles/the-secular-principle.pdf)

- [principle.pdf](http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Veil2000/articles/the-secular-principle.pdf)>.
- Begag, Azouz. *Béni ou le paradis privé*. Paris, France: Éditions du Seuil, 1989.
- . *Le gone du Chaâba*. Saint-Armand, France: Bussière Camadien, 1986.
- Ben Jelloun, Tahar. *Racism Explained to My Daughter*. Trans. Carol Volk. New York: New York P, 1999.
- Besnaci-Lancou, Fatima. *Fille de harki : Le bouleversant témoignage d'une enfant de la guerre d'Algérie*. Paris: l'Atelier, 2003.
- Chenut, Helen Harden. "Introduction." *Breaking the Silence*. Berkeley: Berkeley UP, 2006. 1.
- Chikha, Elisabeth. "The Veil: La chronologie." *L'ADRI*. February 1990. University of North Carolina-at Chapel Hill, European Studies Department. <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Veil2000/chronol1.htm>>.
- Jacomard, Héléne. "French Against French: The Uneasy Incorporation of *Beurs* into French Society." 2006. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, European Studies Department. <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Veil2000/articles/french-against-french.pdf>>.
- Kramer, Jane. "Taking the Veil: How France's Public Schools Became the Battle Ground in a Culture War." *The New Yorker* November 22, 2004: 59-71.
- McNeil, Tony. "Immigration in Postwar France." *The University of Sunderland, GB*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, European Studies Department. <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Veil2000/articles/immigration-in-postwar-france.pdf>>.