

THE CLASH OF TWO WORLDS: A STUDY OF NORTH AFRICAN IMMIGRATION
INTO FRANCE

By: Jon Blake Bake

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelors of Arts of International Studies of French

Presented on June 4th, 2008

Commencement June 15th, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jon B. Bake for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in International
Studies in French, presented on June 4th, 2008.

Title:

THE CLASH OF TWO WORLDS: A STUDY OF NORTH AFRICAN IMMIGRATION
INTO FRANCE

Abstract approved:

Dr. Nabil Boudraa

The purpose of this thesis is to provide the reader with an understanding of the history of North African immigration into France and explain how the current conditions were formed. A further objective is to decipher how the circumstances for North Africans in France have improved or worsened in comparison to its beginnings. Emphasis is put on the cultural and political events that have happened in recent years and how they have molded the current state into what it is today. Findings will show that the beginning of the *Beur* movement sparked the creation of Islamic-xenophobia in France, but also generated a new awareness of problems with assimilating North Africans into French culture.

© by Jon B. Bake
June 4, 2008
All Rights Reserved

Bachelor of Arts in International Studies in French

Thesis of Jon B. Bake

Presented on June 4th, 2008

Approved:

Nabil Boudraa, Ph.D., Advisor, Assistant Professor (French & Francophone Studies)

Guy Wood, Ph.D., Acting Chair (Foreign Languages & Literature)

Joseph Hoff, Ph.D., Director of International Degree Program

I understand that my thesis will become part of the collection of Oregon State University. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request. I also affirm that the work represented in this thesis is my own work.

Jon B. Bake, Author

Table of Contents

1.) Introduction	1
2.) Wars, Soldiers, Aftermath	6
3.) Mass Immigration Begins	10
4.) Formation of Modern-day Situation	13
5.) 1980s: Beginning of <i>Beur</i> Movement	16
6.) Responses to the <i>Beur</i> conditions	19
7.) Demographics & Main Roots of the Problem	22
8.) <i>Laïcité</i> in French Society	25
9.) The Headscarf Affair	27
10.) Riots of 2005	29
11.) Caricature Controversy	31
12.) Conclusion	33
13.) Bibliography	40

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Nabil Boudraa, my thesis advisor, for his invaluable assistance and inspiration throughout this process. His passion and knowledge of this topic gave me the encouragement I needed to complete this thesis. I also wish to thank Dr. Joseph Hoff and Renee Stowell for their guidance and support throughout the years. Lastly, I must thank my parents for allowing me to receive such a wonderful education, as well as helping me stay focused and concentrated on my goals.

Introduction

The region of North Africa has perhaps one of the most diverse backgrounds in history. While relatively little is known about the true indigenous people of North Africa, the Imazighen (formerly known as Berbers¹), we do know that this area has experienced conqueror after conqueror. The arrival of the Phoenicians around the 8th century B.C. would mark the beginning of this diverse historical journey. Since the destruction of Carthage (modern-day northern Tunisia) in 146 B.C. by the Romans, North Africa has seen the successive invasions of the Romans, Byzantines, Vandals, Arabs, Ottomans and the French.² The Arab Empire began calling Africa Minor, "The Maghreb" (The West). Also spelled "Maghrib," this term is a commonly used expression describing the contemporary nations of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.³

While the impact of the abovementioned ancient empires was both culturally and politically vast, the arrival of the French army in Algiers in 1830 laid down a foundation that would lead to an enormous social phenomenon of immigration and integration in twentieth and twenty-first century France. Before the French, it was the Ottoman Empire, not Western Europe that had

¹ The term *Berbers* is currently considered a pejorative term for the Imazighen people; it is derived from its Greek counterpart meaning "barbaric."

² A large part of the first two sections have been paraphrased from, "A Short History of North Africa" by Jane Soames Nickerson

³ Although some scholars include the country of Libya in this definition and considering the goal of this thesis, all references made to the Maghreb will be alluding to the three aforementioned countries.

been overseeing this region. During this period, ensuing Arabization and Islamization of North Africa made this region fundamentally, culturally and linguistically dissimilar to the French Empire to the North.

During the reign of French king, Charles X (1824-1830), the phenomenon of worldwide colonization by European nations had already been taking place for hundreds of years. Great Britain, Portugal, Spain and others had all imperialized colonies around the world and were fierce competitors in this race for land, power and military strength. Consequently, when Algerian Dey Hussein (1765-1838) slapped French Consul Duval with his fan in anger, retaliation was more than inevitable. Known in French as "le coup d'éventail"⁴ (the blow of the fan), this scenario could have easily been dismissed, but it was immediately relayed back to Charles X in France. This gave the French an easy excuse to invade its neighbors to the south.

Despite general public disapproval of French military occupation in North Africa, Charles X sent a fleet of 37,000 soldiers from Toulon to Sidi Feruch in May of 1830. Under the command of General Bourmont, who was viewed as a traitor for defecting to the Prussians during the Franco-Prussian war, French troops took over Algiers and several coastal cities. Though overtaking the Algerian coast was a difficult task, it

⁴ The Algerian Dey's frustration was due to the fact that France owed Algeria ten million francs for shipped goods and was blatantly denied payment.

was soon realized that occupying the Kabylia region⁵ and the inlands would be an even more arduous undertaking. One should note that while Algiers was taken in 1830, the Kabylia region was not controlled until the 1850s. Algerians began to put up resistance to its visitors and were also being helped from their friends to the west. Algerian nationalist Abdel Kader led a vigorous resistance movement using guerilla warfare against French occupation until 1847, when the French government made a deal with the Sultan of Morocco to forbid Kader immunity. Eventually, an official constitution was written in 1848 that declared Algeria a part of the French Republic and it was divided into three different departments. In 1870, a law was created that deprived Algerian-Muslims from certain property-rights as well as full French citizenship. However, the considerable Algerian-Jewish population was granted full French citizenship and all the ensuing benefits that came with it. This law inherently caused a bitter animosity between the French, Jews and Maghrebians.

In *A Short History of North Africa* by historian Jane Soames Nickerson, she mentions a native Maghrebi proverb that states, "A man cannot beat his donkey in Morocco without its protests

⁵ About sixty kilometers (~38 miles) east of Algiers, this region is populated by the Berber speaking peoples of Algeria. It extends from the Mediterranean coast and takes up approximately 44,000 square kilometers in area. This region and their people have a history of resistance against invaders and governments, both foreign and domestic.

being heard in Tunisia.” This statement attests to the solidarity and invisible boundaries felt in the Maghreb. There were no obvious cultural or political characteristics that divided itself vis-à-vis Europe. Therefore, after Algeria had officially come under French rule, it was only inevitable that Morocco and Tunisia follow. On May 12th, 1881, the French military landed in Northern Tunisia and met with Bey Muhammad III as-Sadiq and signed the Bardo Treaty, making Tunisia a French protectorate. There was little resistance to this acquisition due to Tunisia’s small population and lack of economic power.

Morocco, conversely, was not taken with as much ease as was Tunisia. While Algerian acquisition was considered to be violent and forceful, Morocco was dealt with rather diplomatically in comparison. Morocco had always been the least touched by occupation compared to its eastern counterparts, but had now found itself with its last independent ruler, Sultan Abdel Aziz, who was young and susceptible to European corruption. Because of this, Germany, Italy, Great Britain and Spain all had to be appeased before France could truly make its claim over Morocco. After the Conference of Algeciras in 1906, the stipulations had been confirmed: France would cede Egypt to Great Britain, Libya to Italy, and Atlantic Islands and Mediterranean fortresses to Spain. In the end, France signed a

protectorate treaty with Morocco; they now possessed the entire Maghreb, touching the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea and the Saharan desert.

Wars, Soldiers and the Aftermath

After the debut of the twentieth century, three important events occurred that significantly affected the rapport between France and the Maghreb: World War I, World War II and the Algerian War for independence in 1962. With France's fairly recent acquisition of three new countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), their military forces were being spread thin between continental France and her colonies. As a result, it was only inevitable that the French government recruit soldiers from the newly claimed Maghreb. Beginning in the early 1900s, volunteers and draftees comprised of Arab and Berber men were being recruited to form supplementary armed forces for France; three main groups of Maghrebi soldiers were created.

Goumiers, coming from the Arabic word *qum*, were originally created as police officers to control the newly conquered tribes and keep public peace. With approximately 200 *Goumiers* in one *Goum*, these forces generally stayed in the Maghrebi region until after 1911 when they were used for colonial expansion in Morocco as well as both World Wars. It is estimated that between 12,000 to 22,000 *Goumiers* lost their lives on the Western Front and outside of Europe fighting side-by-side with native French soldiers by 1922.

Tirailleurs, or skirmishers, were soldiers who played a large role in pacifying local tribes as well as risking their

lives in the World Wars and in Indochina. *Tirailleurs* assistance was also vital in working with the Allies to occupy Germany after World War I. Slightly different from the *Goumiers* and *Tirailleurs*, the *Spahis* (created in 1911) fought principally in the Atlas Mountains, Syria and Europe during the World Wars. Furthermore, *Spahis* consisted of both Maghrebi and French soldiers and were responsible for the construction of thousands of kilometers of roads and railroad tracks across Africa Minor. While the cooperation between colonial soldiers and the French military demonstrates a certain level of teamwork and mutual respect, it would be inaccurate to say that revolts and nationalistic movements were subdued. Building up to and during the War for Independence in Algeria, stability was exactly not ubiquitous. Because of the high tension at that time, the "with us or against us" ideology was created and native Arabs and Berbers were seen as either French loyalists or Resistance supporters.

After World War II, the trend of decolonization was seen worldwide and generally supported by most European populations (Britain, Spain, Portugal, and the Dutch granted autonomy or at least ceded to most liberation movements). Consequently, when France abdicated their protectorate agreements from Morocco and Tunisia in 1956, Algerian sentiments for liberation augmented even more. Prior to 1945, relations between Algerians and

European settlers (*colons*) were relatively calm compared to what was about to happen. On the celebratory day of European Victory on May 8th, 1945, the first attack on *colons* occurred, killing approximately one hundred *pieds-noirs*. Inevitably, French retaliation resulted in the deaths of thousands of Algerians, further fueling the fire for independence. The Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the French government had entertained the idea of a diplomatic solution until the events of August 20th, 1955.

When a group of FLN guerrillas infiltrated the suburb of Phillipeville, they attacked and killed 123 *colons*. In retaliation, the French military responded by killing 12,000 members of the civilian population. Cruelty and terror from both sides continued and eventually peaked in 1956 when the war was brought to metropolitan Algiers, where cafés and public buildings were bombed. Eventually, Charles De Gaulle came into power in 1958 and quickly realized that a military solution was not realistic. With increasing attacks and civilian casualties, De Gaulle verbalized his intentions to emancipate Algeria. After secret negotiations in Evian, France between the FLN and French officials, a cease-fire was declared and the Algerians formally voted for independence on July 1st, 1962. It is estimated that Algeria suffered between 500,000 and one million casualties, whereas France lost around 27,000. In time,

Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella was appointed and ensuing French emigration transpired.

Mass Immigration Begins

After the start of the 20th century, several major waves of immigration into France occurred that would eventually lead us to our current situation. However, it is important to mention beforehand the happenings of the 19th century to fully understand the state of France's population. The Napoleonic Wars between 1799 and 1815 left France in constant war and cost them nearly 1.7 million lives between soldiers and civilians. Following the French Revolution of 1848 (which caused much bloodshed), the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 took roughly 24,000 soldiers and 47,000 civilian lives. As if France had not already suffered enough losses already, around 20,000 French men and women died just within a week during the revolt of the Paris Commune in the spring of 1871.

In a time when other Western nations were developing and booming from the introduction of the Industrial Revolution, France had been involved in war, reformation and turmoil. This inherently left them at the end of the pack regarding industrialization and building a strong economy. France was also still very much a rural nation based on agriculture, not industry. Most of the large metropolitan cities seen today were small towns at the time. Due to the severe lack of manpower and the necessity to transition from agriculture to industry, future immigration from other places was a necessity.

While America had seen its peak in immigration around 1920, France was essentially just beginning this journey. After World War I, 1.4 million men, ten percent of France's male population, had died from battle and disease; double that number had been wounded. This resulted in a decreased birth rate and severe lack of workforce. Financially, France quintupled its national debt, weakened the Franc and was still war-torn. It was therefore no surprise when the government opened the gates for temporary labor-driven immigration. Over 400,000 foreigners from Italy, Spain, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Asia, Hungary, Chile and North Africa were brought to rebuild this newly industrial nation. This influx of laborers went from 1.5 million in 1921 to almost 3 million 1931 until the advent of the infamous economic crisis, where workers were deported or placed in camps.

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, France suffered over 500,000 deaths between soldiers, civilians and Holocaust victims. Again, the nation was destitute, destroyed and in need of outside personnel assistance. However, instead of calling upon neighboring European countries as they did after the First War, French authorities and employers summoned aid from former colonies in North Africa and former French West Africa (Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, etc). With the creation of *l'Office National d'Immigration* (ONI - National Immigration Office), foreign labor generally increased steadily from a modest 50,000 *émigrés* in

1950 to over 400,000 in 1965. After the Algerian War for independence ending in 1962, approximately 850,000 repatriated French nationals returned to France due to civil uncertainty. Other than the occasional fiscal speed bump in the mid 1950s, this rate of immigration continued to grow until an economic slowdown materialized in July of 1974.

Beginnings of the Modern-day Situation

Similar to most European countries in the 1970s, the French government officially halted labor immigration. Due to the oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent economic decline, foreign labor was unneeded as employment rates decreased. In an attempt to reduce foreign population, monetary incentives were given to immigrant laborers who repatriated to their countries, but this was generally taken advantage of by intra-European immigrants, not Maghrebians. By prohibiting labor migration, the number of North African immigrants did anything but shrink. Instead of workers returning to their native countries as many thought, they established themselves in France and, through the family reunification policy, their wives and children were able to join as well. Needless to say, the French did not anticipate such a polar outcome and its ramifications were about to be seen in everyday French society.

In the post-war era, most migrant laborers lived in rundown communities known as *bidonvilles* (shantytowns) that were severely overcrowded and lacking necessities. However, during *Les Trente Glorieuse* (The Glorious Thirty)⁶, these areas were bulldozed and high-rise complexes were built to accommodate this growing population. Nonetheless, more affluent residents who

⁶ Describes a period of approximately thirty years that marked a high standard of living and strong economy in France. It began after the Second World War and ended after the 1973 oil crisis.

profited from the boom-years eventually moved away and lower-class Maghrebi residents found themselves stranded in a suburban desert, geographically isolated from the rest of society.⁷

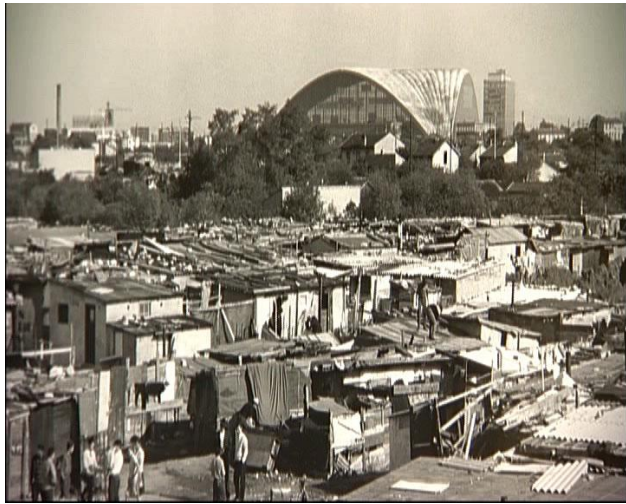


Figure 1: Shantytowns (*bidonvilles*) of Nanterre, France in the 1960s.

The living conditions in these suburbs, or *banlieues*, began to dwindle for several reasons. Because many of the well-off, educated tenants had moved away, less public attention was given to these suburbs. Even in modern day France, there are many successful, prosperous Maghrebi families who live in metropolitan France. However, the *banlieues* remain untouched and forgotten for the rest of the *Beur* generation. Additionally, the wages given to most of the North African *main d'œuvre* (workforce) was hardly enough to sustain a decent

⁷ McNeill, Tony. "Crisis in the French Suburbs(2002), <http://www.well.ac.uk/cfol/lesannees.asp>. (accessed April 21, 2008).

⁸ Source: <http://pics.centerblog.net/pic/caawe/4oirht9d.jpg>

⁹ Source: http://bp3.blogger.com/_Cm7cKCLhQDU/RgwiTwV-DVI/AAAAAAAAAB0/o4NFqKWdWs/s1600-h/rueboue.jpg

lifestyle, so funding for regular upkeep was scarce. There was a serious lack of infrastructure in these districts; typical things such as schools, employment, cultural centers and the like were absent. Furthermore, these suburbs were physically secluded from the proper metropolitan cities, so railway access and communication were oftentimes nonexistent. Eventually, these deplorable conditions caught media-attention and consequently, the public-eye. In time, poverty and dysfunction began to be directly correlated to the ethnic groups who inhabited these outskirts. With the influence of conservative political parties such as The National Front and selective media-reporting, the general public perception towards Maghrebians started becoming xenophobic. The French populace began to realize that the Maghrebians were here to stay; immigration suddenly changed from an economic matter to a socio-cultural issue.¹⁰

¹⁰ McNeill, Tony. "Immigration in Postwar France (2002), http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/francophone/Muslim_women/eng/Immigration_lecture2.pdf. (accessed April 21, 2008).

1980s: Beginning of the Beur Movement

The 1980s were a decade of significant social and political change for North Africans in France. The period in office of President Francois Mitterrand (1981-1995) marked the establishment of a plethora of pro-immigrant policies, laws and reformations. The late 1970s and early 80s saw numerous uprisings, riots, racially-motivated murders and unnecessary police violence in the *cités*¹¹ of metropolitan France. In light of this, President Mitterrand proposed new ideas of a multicultural France in his 1981 speech, *La France au Pluriel*. He preached about the "right to difference" and a "one and diverse France."¹² These principles were manifested in public programs such as *banlieues* rehabilitations and the ZEP Program, (Educational Priority Zones) which promoted academic success for immigrant children. Mitterrand also abolished former laws regarding deportation and even overturned 1938 legislation that forbade government funding to immigrant organizations. More importantly, the former President displayed public acknowledgment of the young minority citizens known commonly as the *Beurs*.

The term *Beur* is a name that has come to represent a multitude of ideas and sentiments in France. Literally, the

¹¹ Housing projects and/or high-rise apartment complexes in suburban France.

¹² Silverstein, Paul A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. 1 ed. Indianapolis & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

word *Beur*¹³ means "Arab" in a vernacular version of the French language known as *Le Verlan*. This colloquial speech works by inverting certain syllables of words and rearranging their order; it has become commonplace among French youth. However, the word *Beur* has a contextual significance whose effects are still strong in today's age. In essence, the *Beurs* are the second and third generation children of Maghrebi parents who migrated to France during the boom years. Because most of these offspring were born in France or have lived there long enough to obtain residency, they are officially French citizens. However, their ethnic backgrounds and family situations make integration into traditional European society very complex. Not only is their assimilation into "traditional" French culture difficult, but maintaining ties to their Maghrebi lineage is also a demanding task. This idea of a cultural dualism and being stuck between two worlds is known as *hybridité* (hybridity).

A young *Beur* citizen may very likely be forced to live a double life throughout their youth. At home, these individuals generally comply with the culture of their parents and grandparents. They speak Arabic or Berber languages (depending on their background) and commonly eat traditional Maghrebi meals. Concerning religion, most *Beurs* will practice Islam behind closed doors and the respective customary values that

¹³ It should be noted that since the 1990s, this expression has become decreasingly unpopular and is not viewed as being politically correct.

belong to Islam are probably followed. For daughters of these first generation North African immigrants, the situation may be even more precarious. While many *Beurettes* are able to receive an education, some are still expected to perform traditional roles at the house or return home after achieving a certain level of education. Furthermore, many young *Beur* females are discouraged to join immigrant associations because their parents believe that such a thing could decrease their chances of integration.¹⁴

When a *Beur* youth steps outside of their homes and into society, they assume an entirely different identity. They now take on the "French" side of their personality and therefore speak a different language, surround themselves with western culture and interact with a presumably diverse group of people. In other words, these Maghrebi adolescents are constantly switching from a Muslim to a French way of life, which happen to be complete fundamental opposites. Unfortunately, sometimes they are found excluded from both sectors and, consequently, in a world of their own. Understanding the identity crisis and confusion that the *Beur* generation has been experiencing is the key to understanding their plight.

¹⁴ Silverstein, Paul A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. 1 ed. Indianapolis & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004 (166).

Responses to the *Beur* Conditions

The fact that the *Beurs* were socially marginalized in France was beginning to be seen by all. In fact Nacer Kettane, President of *Radio Beur* in 1986, described them as "the rejects of a globalizing world; mutants torn from the McDonald's couscous-steak-fries society."¹⁵ Eventually, the voice of these youths needed to be heard. On the 15th of October, 1983, 60,000 people started a march from Marseille to Paris in a peaceful protest known as *La Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*.¹⁶ Two successive demonstrations occurred in 1984 and 1985, both peacefully requesting that recognition of the *Beur* problem be addressed. In an attempt to demonstrate their predicament to the public, many *Beurs* in the 1984 march painted their faces half black and half white to show their torn identities. According to Silverstein, "...they stood in marked contrast to both the first generation of their fathers locked in the traditions of the past and to the potential next generation of Muslim fundamentalists feared as the anathema to the French republic."¹⁷

Marches and demonstrations were not the only methods of expression for the *Beurs*. Literature, music, radio and film

¹⁵ Silverstein, Paul A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. 1 ed. Indianapolis & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004 (166).

¹⁶ Translation: "The march for equality and against racism."

¹⁷ Silverstein, Paul A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. 1 ed. Indianapolis & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004 (168).

served as new, expanding mediums which gave the *Beur* movement a giant boost in the 1990s. For instance, Azouz Begag's 1986 release of *Le Gone du Chaâba*¹⁸ gave readers a first-hand narrative of *Beur* life in the Lyons ghettos of France. In addition to literature, radio stations such as *Radio Beur* (currently known as *Beur FM*) gave these youths a means of self-expression and sense of community. The former president of this station, Nacer Kettane, was also the organizer of the third *Beur* March for equality in 1985. Complimenting this social-radio phenomenon was a new trend of *Beur* music that infiltrated the airwaves and reached all classes and ethnic groups in French culture. Perhaps one of the most well-known and influential groups of this genre is a group by the name of *Zebda*¹⁹. As most of its members are of North African descent, their lyrics speak mostly about the social issues and inequalities regarding *Beur* youth; the band has even organized political rallies to improve conditions around Toulouse, their hometown.

While the aforementioned artists and authors have made an immeasurable contribution to the *Beur* progression, perhaps the most controversial and impacting piece of work is Mathieu Kassovitz's, *La Haine* (Hate). Released in 1995, this film depicted the lives of three minorities in the *banlieues* of Paris

¹⁸ Translation: "The kid from Chaâba." Chaâba refers to an Algerian slum in the outskirts of 1960s Lyon.

¹⁹ Zebda is the Arabic word for butter, or *beurre* in French. Hence, the group name is a reference to the French slang word *beur*.

and demonstrated the discrimination and hardships that each faced. Because the movie portrayed police violence and racism towards French minorities, *La Haine* received much criticism, while at the same time showing the general public the severity of the situation. Despite the condemnation that the film received from many conservatives, *La Haine* received several awards from various committees such as the Cannes Film Festival in 1995. As far as its modern-day effects, this film has been the subject of many university courses and has provoked engaging discourse amongst the general public.

Demographics and Causes of the Problem

Obtaining completely concrete statistical information regarding the number of North African Muslims in France is not only difficult, but technically against the law. According to French legislature, distinguishing citizens or residents by their religion is forbidden to avoid discrimination.²⁰ However, several private studies have offered the public some very strong rough estimates. With a current population of just over 64 million people, upwards of 5 million of that population are Muslim.²¹ Additionally, 70 percent of the Muslim populace lives in primarily urban areas such as *Ile-de-France*, *Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur* and *Rhône-Alpes*. What we can officially decipher regarding demographics is the country of origin of French citizens and residents. The overwhelming majority of immigrants in France come from the Maghreb, followed by Turkey, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. This gives France the largest Muslim population in all of Western Europe; subsequent integration has proven to be a challenge to its longstanding republican values.

Understanding the aforementioned population details is the basis for understanding the current issue. With the

²⁰ "Country Profiles: France(2007), 2, http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php3?id_article=1753. (accessed May 18, 2008).

²¹ "CIA World Factbook." May 15th, 2008.<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html> (accessed May 18th, 2008).

increasing public recognition of the *Beur* movement in the nineties and the beginning of the twenty-first century, French citizens started to realize that the roots of these *Beur* uprisings and marches ran much deeper than simply ethnic origins. France's strict policies of integration, firm beliefs in egalitarianism and republican idealism have inadvertently (and ironically) made Maghrebi assimilation a challenge in almost every sector of society in the country. Taking a deeper look into the issue at hand will give an explanation for the modern-day conflicts that the *Beur* generations are facing regarding education, employment, politics, religion and xenophobia.

The following statistics from the annual reports of Euro-Islam regarding the French labor market give a closer look to the employment inequalities that the *Beurs* face. French-Muslims are reported to have the highest unemployment rates compared to the rest of the population in France and have more difficulty finding long-term careers. A 2005 survey by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) claims that unemployment among citizens of French origin is roughly 9.2 percent, compared to over 14 percent for foreigners. It is stated that Muslims are underrepresented in executive positions, but are twice as likely to work in low-level factory positions. Furthermore, a staggering 26.5 percent of university graduates

of North African origin are unemployed in France. Conversely, the employment rate for Muslim women has increased, primarily in part-time, entry-level positions. To make things even more challenging for immigrants, the 1993 Pasqua²² laws forbade foreign graduates from seeking French employment. However, this law was amended in 1998 upon the arrival of Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who felt it was the best interest for France's market to have specially-skilled residents. Such statistics speak on the difficulties that these youths are experiencing. Even after higher education, many feel that their skills are not being used and that they remain professionally unsatisfied.²³

²² Charles Pasqua is a conservative member of the Rally for France party and has served as Prime Minister twice throughout the 80s and 90s (BBC).

²³ "Country Profiles: France(2007), 3, http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php?id_article=1753. (accessed May 18, 2008).

Laïcité in French society

Perhaps the most important concept in explaining the conflict between the *Beur* generation and French assimilation is a small, but significant term known as *laïcité*. There is no direct translation into English, but the closest interpretation is "secularism" (also known as the separation between church and state). This idea of *laïcité* first appeared at the beginning of the century in 1905; it guaranteed the free exercise of religious worship and that the French Republic would not recognize, pay or subsidize any form of worship.²⁴ However, *laïcité* has a stronger significance in France compared to other Western nations. Not only does it enforce secularism, but also the idea that when any citizen is in a public sphere, they should show no signs of ethnic or religious affiliation. This philosophy has been the centerpiece of French government and society for over one hundred years. However, even though the purpose of *laïcité* was equality and anti-discrimination, it has paradoxically been the cause of the various riots and scandals that will be soon discussed.

Throughout the twentieth century, Islam has generally been an exception (or at least a special case) regarding *laïcité*. Throughout decolonization and beyond, Algeria had been exempt

²⁴ "Country Profiles: France(2007), 4, http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php?id_article=1753. (accessed May 18, 2008).

from the rules of secularism. However, as author Alexandre Caeiro states, "Islam has been at a unique disadvantage because the Muslim community [in France] lacks cohesion and institutional mechanisms for developing consensus and organizing advocacy against the state." To remedy this lack of unity, Muslim groups and organizations have been created to give a voice to the *Beur* generation. Perhaps the most famous and influential of these is the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*²⁵ which was strongly supported and ratified by former Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy. Furthermore, Sarkozy, current President of France, helped establish the "Foundation of Islam" in 2005 that would actually use government subsidization to build mosques and train imams²⁶ in hopes that such entities would reduce the Muslim problem²⁷ in France. This became a quite controversial policy, considering that Sarkozy and his committee amended a law that had been so central to the French Republic for one hundred years. While the previous governmental attempts to assimilate North Africans seemed to be having an effect, an event occurring between 2003 and 2004 would eventually take over the media and public attention: the headscarf affair.

²⁵ Translation: French Council for the Muslim Religion.

²⁶ A prayer leader/mentor in the religion of Islam.

²⁷ Many scholars felt that Muslim extremism was due to the fact that *Beur* youths were taught by poorly trained imams who were preaching radicalism.

The Headscarf Affair

In 2003, former President Jacques Chirac created a commission to review the current status of *laïcité* in France and appointed Bernard Stassi as the chairman.²⁸ After months of research, the committee recommended that changes be made in French legislature to ensure the integrity of *laïcité*. By September 2nd of 2004, it became illegal to wear any type of religious symbol in French schools. Such symbols included large crosses, kippas and most importantly, headscarves (hijabs). While the Stassi commission claimed that this new ban was not aimed at Islam, people throughout France were angered and argued that the law singled out Muslims.

Even though this new law appeared to limit not one, but all religions, many felt that it was a response by the political right to the growing fear of French "Islamization." It could be argued that Catholics, Jews and other denominations can hide or go without their religious symbols much more easily than Muslims. Even after several appeals, the law remained enforced and the Islamic community felt slighted. People's objections to the law were felt the following year, as 639 religious symbols were reported in schools the first day of the school year in 2004. Contrarily, only 12 incidences were reported in 2005,

²⁸ "Country Profiles: France(2007), 13, http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php3?id_article=1753. (accessed May 18, 2008).

showing a slight acceptance of the ban. Although there was large social controversy vis-à-vis the headscarf ban, there was surprisingly little to no violence caused by the new law. However, France was about to be subjected to one of the worst social uprisings it had seen in the past 50 years: the riots of 2005.

Riots of 2005

On October 25th, 2005, Nicolas Sarkozy (Minister of the Interior at the time) visited the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil to check up on the status of suburban violence in the region. Upon his visit, he made a claim that would haunt him to this day saying, the suburbs should be "cleaned with a power hose" to get rid of the "scum."²⁹ Two days later, teenagers Zyed Benna (Tunisian origin) and Bouna Traore (Malian origin) were allegedly fleeing from Policemen and were electrocuted to death by an electric substation. These events triggered riots in over thirty French cities and towns and put mainland France in a state of emergency for the first time in history. Approximately eight thousand cars were burned, over two thousand arrests were made, hundreds people were injured and several fatalities occurred. The estimated damage including buildings, monuments, vehicles and more was estimated at over two-hundred million Euros. These riots lasted until late November, just as the then President Jacques Chirac and the government pledged to improve conditions in the *banlieues*. While this scenario was disastrous and costly, it was perhaps the only way that the minority population in France could truly open the government's eyes to the isolation, racism, hopelessness and anger that were being experienced in the *banlieues* of France.

²⁹ "In French Suburbs, Same Rage, but New Tactics *NY Times* (2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/28/world/europe/28france.html?pagewanted=print>.



30

Figure 2: Burning cars in Gentilly, France



31

Figure 3: Riot-Police shown near high-rise *banlieues* projects.

³⁰ <http://meridien.canalblog.com/images/jeudi11.jpg>

³¹ <http://f2.img.v4.skyrock.com/f2f/emeutes2005/pics/270380911.jpg>

Caricature Controversy

Just when the world thought that emotions couldn't get any higher regarding Islam in Europe after the 2005 riots, the world was shaken yet again by a newspaper publication on the 30th of September, 2005. A Danish newspaper by the name of Jyllands-Posten released a publication of twelve cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, some of which contained bombs and captions mocking Islam. While this was offensive to the vast majority of Muslim nations, it was not what triggered the widespread anger and uproar throughout the world. In the beginning of 2006, many European countries decided to reprint these caricatures, in spite of the repercussions. In France, reprints of these cartoons in *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and *Le Soir* newspaper were made in support of the Danish paper. This ignited anger and resentment from the large Maghrebi population in France, primarily because it was a blatant disrespect from the media. In his weekly cabinet meeting, former President Chirac responded by saying, "anything which hurts other people's convictions, particularly religious convictions, must be avoided. Freedom of expression should be exercised in a spirit of responsibility. I condemn any overt provocation that could dangerously fuel passions."³² While the government clearly voiced its disapproval

³² Penketh, Anne. "Chirac condemns 'overtly provocative' cartoons(2006), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/europe/chirac-condemns-overtly-provocative-cartoons-466018.html>. (accessed May 25, 2008).

of the events, it was apparent that complete Muslim integration into French culture was still a difficult issue.

In the last two years, there have not been riots or scandals as severe as those previously mentioned, but periodical violence and arrests in the suburbs still occur on a regular basis. Perhaps the most significant occurrence was after November 25th, 2007 when two minorities were killed after a police car collided with their motorcycle. Immediately after, a police official was hospitalized by a group of suburban adolescents who were angered by the deaths. After the ensuing riots and over one hundred injured police, it was clear that the tension in the *banlieues* was as sensitive as ever. Clearly, dramatic change must take effect. Taking a look at the new laws and initiatives that have been put in place will give us an idea of how this serious issue will be improved in the future.

Conclusion

Measuring the improvement or decline of the immigration phenomena in France can be difficult to quantify concretely. There are certain intangible qualities of this issue that cannot be summed up with statistics or graphs. However, what we can do is look at what has been recently changed in France regarding politics, laws, media and social reformation. From there, a conclusion can be drawn as to if progress has been made and what we can expect in the future.

When dealing with an issue like this that concerns the discrimination of ethnic minorities, economic inequality and disarray in the French nation, the real change must come from the Government. Therefore, it is only natural to base our analysis on the nation's current leaders. Due to the recent social upheaval, there has been a great amount of governmental discussion about what adjustments can be made to assure that the events of 2005 do not recur. Fortunately, since the appointment of Nicolas Sarkozy and his respective administration, there seems to be serious changes for the better on the horizon. The French have realized that a huge reason for the minority uprisings stems from the fact that there has been little legislative representation for North Africans. In other words, they have had no way to voice their frustration to the State. In light of this, two politicians of Maghrebi descent and one of

Senegalese origin have been appointed to Sarkozy's presidential cabinet. This is only the second time in French history that Maghrebi personnel have been a part of a governmental cabinet (the first being Azouz Begag who also belonged to the Union for a Popular Movement Party). While there still are no Muslims in the national parliament, the number of candidates has jumped from just 12 to 250 in the year 2007. Undoubtedly, ethnic-minority involvement in the current presidency will play a huge role in the push for social equality.

Even before Sarkozy's inauguration, he had advocated for governmental recognition of Maghrebi minorities by supporting the Foundation of Islam. This organization has received state funding for the building of mosques (which now exceeds 1,500) and the training of imams. President Sarkozy feels that appointing French-speaking, properly trained imams will help the *Beur* generation integrate into French society and avoid the risk of fundamental extremism. Additionally, in February of 2008, Sarkozy set forth a "rescue plan" for certain troubled suburbs of France. He plans to send a half-billion Euros to troubled areas to rejuvenate the dwindling conditions and is deploying over 4,000 police to troubled areas in hopes of keeping stability. Not only does he propose the rebuilding of the rundown outskirts of Paris, but also promises to help the minority population find over 100,000 jobs. Sarkozy hopes that

the influx of employment in the suburbs will give minorities the chance to buy property and set a trend of a better quality of living.

Another policy proposed by the President is France's "war without mercy on drugs,"³³ something that has plagued the *banlieues* with crime and violence. Other propositions include transporting Maghrebi students out of the suburbs and into primarily white schools to promote integration and denounce xenophobia. Sarkozy expresses, "I want to tell these kids, who are French, nobody will be judged by their skin color, or by the address of their district." He strongly supports the creation of an affirmative action law in France that would require certain employers to meet a quota of minority hiring. Sarkozy has received quite a bit of criticism from both the political right and his own party regarding this issue because it goes against the French constitution which claims that all French citizens will be treated equally, regardless of ethnicity or religion. However, when there is a 40 percent unemployment rate amongst minorities, it is obvious that intervention is required.

Though Sarkozy and the current legislature have made efforts to improve the conditions and equality for Maghrebi residents, they have conversely begun to make it harder for foreigners to enter the country. In May of 2006, the "selective

³³ BBC, "Sarkozy's rescue plan for suburbs (2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7234088.stm>. (accessed May 25, 2008).

immigration" law was passed by the Senate and National Parliament. Essentially, this new law gives preference to immigrants that have special skills or education that are conducive to the needs of the French economy. Furthermore, it requires that after 18 months, workers demonstrate that they have the resources to support themselves and their families. The former policy that gave long-term residency permits to migrants who have lived in France for over ten years is now abolished. Immigrants who are married to French nationals must now wait three years for a residence permit and four years to obtain French nationality. The law also makes deportation of the *sans papiers* (immigrants without papers) much easier than before. Sarkozy promised to deport 25,000 illegal immigrants by 2007, but the actual number fell short at around 11,000 deportees in the first seven months.

This new law is being criticized by many human rights groups and leftist parties, but another immigration crackdown in 2007 has stirred up even more debate. The French Parliament recently passed a bill that requests DNA sampling from foreign immigrants that are seeking reunification in order to prove biological relation. Another part of the bill requires that all immigrants must demonstrate proficiency in the French language, as well as respect for the values of the French Republic. The passing of this bill has sparked street protests by thousands

and is seen by its critics as blatantly discriminatory. Sarkozy and his administration point out that twelve other European nations have already been using this law and that it is in the best interest of the French economy. Latest reports have shown that between 60 and 70 percent of the French prison population consists primarily of North Africans.³⁴ While the government is largely to blame for this statistic, it also shows that perhaps stricter immigration screening is necessary to get the country under control. As of 2008, the government has made it clear that they are not only aware of this integration problem, but that they have also taken steps to improve it. However, the other factor in gauging the progress of this issue is analyzing how the public perceives it through the influence of the media.

Looking at the timeline from the seventies to modern day, certain key events have influenced public opinion regarding Maghrebi presence in France. Up until the seventies, North African presence was generally accepted because it was viewed as a necessity to build the economy. However, during the eighties, the deteriorating employment rates and economic decline was being blamed on young Maghrebians; support for politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Pen and his extreme, conservative party (the National Front) was gaining popularity. The media in the

³⁴ Moore, Molly. "In France, Prisons Filled With Muslims (2008), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042802560_pf.html. (accessed April 29, 2008).

nineties also started to question the likelihood of true Islamic integration when scandals such as the headscarf affair and *Beur* marches took place. After the events 9-11, 2001, "Islamophobia" peaked as the United States and Europe feared extremist terrorist attacks. The proceeding incidents of the hijab ban, riots of 2005 and the caricature scandal further augmented public fears. Surprisingly, the nonstop public exposure of these North African integration issues finally appears to be having a positive effect on the nation. The National Front party has lost much support from the French since 2002 and a recent study claims that, "among the national daily print media, there seems to be a graduation in the level of Islamophobia."³⁵

Solving a problem that has so much historical, cultural and complex roots is not something that can be accomplished overnight. However, after analyzing the current governmental administration, the change in media and the seeming decline of xenophobia, it is my contention that the Republic of France will experience less conflict between the North African population and the rest of French society. I feel that the moderate tendencies of President Sarkozy, along with stronger Maghrebi presence in the government will sufficiently appease both sides of the spectrum. Even though Sarkozy has proposed tougher immigration policies, his rejection of both political and

³⁵ "Country Profiles: France(2007), 18, http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php?id_article=1753. (accessed May 25, 2008).

religious extremism, along with his willingness to restructure such a traditional, nationalistic country such as France is exactly what is needed. I believe that the French are starting to realize that it is necessary for them to adapt to a world that is continually globalizing and assimilating. France's philosophies of equality and *laïcité* are admirable, but the strict interpretation of these philosophies have not served every French citizen as well as planned. Although new inclinations towards affirmative action and pluralism may ruffle the feathers of some conservative traditionalists, it very well may be an undeniable necessity to assure that France truly lives up to their proud motto of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*.

Bibliography

Nickerson, Jane Soames. *A Short History of North Africa*. New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1961.

McNeill, Tony. "Crisis in the French Suburbs (2002),
<http://www.well.ac.uk/cfol/lesannees.asp>. (accessed April 21, 2008).

McNeill, Tony. "Immigration in Postwar France (2002),
http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/francophone/Muslim_women/eng/Immigration_lecture2.pdf. (accessed April 21, 2008).

Silverstein, Paul A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. 1 ed. Indianapolis & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

"Country Profiles: France (2007), 2, http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php3?id_article=1753. (accessed May 18, 2008).

"CIA World Factbook." May 15th, 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html> (accessed May 18th, 2008).

"In French Suburbs, Same Rage, but New Tactics *NY Times* (2007),
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/28/world/europe/28france.html?pagewanted=print>.

Penketh, Anne. "Chirac condemns 'overtly provocative' cartoons (2006),
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/europe/chirac-condemns-overtly-provocative-cartoons-466018.html>. (accessed May 25, 2008).

BBC, "Sarkozy's rescue plan for suburbs (2008),
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7234088.stm>. (accessed May 25, 2008).

Moore, Molly. "In France, Prisons Filled With Muslims (2008),
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042802560_pf.html.
(accessed April 29, 2008).