
By Suzanne Lamoreaux

An Honors Thesis submitted to the History Department of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Written under the supervision of Professor Judith Surkis

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
New Brunswick, New Jersey
April 2014
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................................. 3
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................... 4
Chapter 1: The *Fonds d’Action Sociale* and the origins of discrimination ................................................. 10
Chapter 2: Unemployment, anti-immigrant legislation, the beginnings of racial discourse ...................... 17
Chapter 3: Family reunification, the HLM, and immigration as a social issue ........................................... 30
Chapter 4: The *seuil de tolérance*, institutionalized racism, and the creation of the ghetto .................. 40
Epilogue: French-Immigrant Relations from the Beur Movement to today ............................................... 57
Acknowledgements

It is necessary that I express my deepest thanks to all of the people who contributed to this project. I would like to thank first and foremost my advisor, Professor Judith Surkis, for all of her knowledge, help and encouragement through the researching and writing processes. The work, especially the research, was at times quite difficult, but her advice always challenged me to work harder, think more critically, and not give up despite certain setbacks.

I must also thank several other professors whose help and advice was integral in making this thesis a success. Professor Richard Serrano, my second reader, provided perceptive comments and criticisms to my first draft, helping me hone in on weaker aspects of my argument. Professors Catherine Healey and Jennifer Jones were essential in the very beginning steps of my thesis research: last spring semester, Professor Healey encouraged me to begin thinking about potential thesis topics, even though, because I was spending the semester in Paris, intensive research work was the last thing on my mind. Professor Jones, with whom I had kept in contact after I had taken a course with her my sophomore year, recommended several books for me to read and research over the summer. My neighbor, Dr. Isabelle Genest, also lent me dozens of books and articles on the Headscarf Affair and postcolonial France.

The Aresty Research Center awarded me a grant that I used to fund both trips to the New York Public Library and an online subscription to Le Monde, which became the most integral source for my primary document research. I thank them for their generosity.

Last, but certainly not least, I need to thank my family and friends for their support, wisdom, and guidance throughout this nine-month process. They are the best.
Introduction

Colonialism, it can be easily argued, is racist by definition, for it is in its nature to subjugate one civilization or society under another. Every European country that has colonized a people in Africa, Asia, or elsewhere did so with the belief that it had the right to control and influence different cultures, races, and religions for it maintained it was culturally and racially superior. In 1830s France, the idea was no different, and in order not to contradict its republican values, France colonized and continued to keep Algeria under French control until 1962 under the guise of “civilizing” the society, or restructuring it to appreciate the beliefs for which the French so viscously fought in the 1790s. One paradox, however, is that these same ideals which France wanted to share with Algeria advocated liberty, equality, and self-determination; three values completely contradictory to colonization.

The battle for Algeria in the 1950s and 60s represented what historian Todd Shepard calls “the tide of History,” the inevitable process of progress through decolonization and towards “national self-determination and its corollary values: liberty, equality, fraternity, and the Rights of Man.”\(^1\) Though France had long held Algeria as its most prized land, by the 1950s, government officials often had difficulty explaining the importance of French Algeria (or at least France’s importance to Algeria). When faced with the possibility that Algeria would gain independence from its colonizer, many believed that the two countries and peoples would no longer have anything in common. When asked for his opinion on potential outcomes of Algerian independence, President Charles de Gaulle said, “those who push for integration are pea-

brained… [Algerian] Muslims could not be French. Try and combine oil and vinegar, Shake the bottle. After a minute, they separate again. Arabs are Arabs, French are French.”² This sentiment begs the question: for what reasons did France colonize Algeria and expressly wish to keep it French for so long? What was the purpose of colonizing an entirely different culture if integration had never been expected?

For over 150 years, France hid behind republicanism in order to perpetuate imperial and racial control. The Republic touted itself as being “race-blind” because it claimed to be advocating the same universalist tenets in Algeria as it did in the metropole. France, however, only practiced this until the tide of History washed away its grip on the Maghreb; after Algerian independence, there was no sign of universalism uniting France and its former colony. In fact, its official break with Algeria (as well as with Tunisia and Morocco in 1956) allowed France to argue that, because of fundamental socio-cultural differences between the two regions, integration of one into the other was neither desired nor possible. The result of this claim was the bitter debate on immigration into France that began in earnest in the 1970s and still rages today. Rhetoric of “France for the French,” fears of unemployment, insecurity, and, most recently, Islamic fundamentalism highlight how France and some of its people ascribe to a certain kind of republicanism that is exclusive to French citizens. The connection between citizenship and “Frenchness” in the context of Algeria (and, to a lesser extent, Morocco and Tunisia) then, is very interesting, and has had a very complicated past.

The relationship between Algerians and the French government during the colonial era was never static; despite the claim that all its people were “French” and living under French rule, the metropole often changed the legal and civil statuses of those living under colonial rule. Depending on its approach (whether it was carrying out a policy of assimilation or one of

² Ibid, 77.
“coexistence”), the “Muslim French” were either under control of either local Berber or Koranic laws or under official French jurisdiction. To highly simplify the ever changing – yet always subordinate – status of Algerians, it was not until 1958, in the middle of the war, that the French government finally granted Algerian men and women full citizenship. It is worth underlining the date of this event for a few reasons: firstly, even though France claimed that it and Algeria were the same in political terms, France did not grant full political equality to all its people until almost 170 years after its own revolution. Secondly, it was not until France felt threatened by its own people, specifically those whom it subjugated and those to whom France felt it was doing a service, that it ceded to popular sentiment and finally gave to its people the very liberties and ideologies it had been so famous for establishing.

Even more interesting than the long-delayed granting of citizenship to the Algerians is that the government still maintained and believed in distinguishing French Algerians from both French and European settlers as well as the French in the metropole. The citizenship decree of 1958 targeted “French Muslims,” the official term for Algerians living under French rule. The word “Muslim” was used as the modifier with the belief that Islam was what most distinguished Maghrebis from Europeans. [I should point out that, although Al-Maghreb is Arabic for “Morocco,” “Maghreb” is used in both French and English to encompass all of North Africa, and while the French prefer to use the term “Magrebin” over “Nord africain” and English speakers do the opposite, I will use the term “North African” and “Magrebi” interchangeably throughout my thesis.] Islam as a religion brought with it cultures, as well as social and political ideologies, that were totally foreign to the French people. French Muslims were seen as fundamentally different, therefore, because they were literally defined by what made them different. This difference is how the French government came to institutionalize racism: Shepard writes that

---

3 Ibid, 22.
“more than just failing to efface existing factors that made them different from other French nationals, the state had produced novel distinctions in the guise of pursuing republican universalism.”

For all the republican rhetoric that attempted to justify France’s hold on Algeria, it was this religious categorization – in which racial, social and cultural differences were implicit – that set up France for future decades of discrimination that was mostly racial but has in the past few decades become increasingly focused on Islam. There is, of course, an inextricable link between racism against Arab North Africans and the fear of Islam in France, but during the 1950s-1980s, religion was subsumed into the bigger “problem” of the Arab race in France.

The main reason why race or ethnicity, rather than religion, became the biggest point of contention between Algerians, Algerian immigrants, and the French is that it was colloquially recognized based on origin rather than nationality or *jus soli*. In the 1950s, one living in Algeria was identified as either *Français de souche européen* (a pied noir) or *Français de souche nord africaine*. By making a distinction between European and North African Algerians, the French government both “codified” and “‘racialized’ ethnicity.”

With this idea, one’s origin overrode his or her legal status. This is why, in the following decades, discrimination would be based on ethnic identity rather than on citizenship. This is also how many on the political Right are able to justify their seemingly racist politics: when origins are considered more important (or more telling of behavior or cultural and political allegiance) than actual citizenship, it is easier to both assume and argue that certain groups of people are not or cannot be “French” simply because of their heritage.

France’s defeat in the Algerian War forced the government once again to address the subjects of identity and national belonging, and immigration and repatriation became the most

---

4 Ibid, 47.
5 Ibid, 53.
A problematic issue of the late 1950s and early 60s. One of the most interesting aspects of these processes was how Algerians, who were formerly considered “French,” were now actually labeled “refugees.” This term implied that the “Muslim French,” more than any other group, needed help acclimating or assimilating to French society, and that, for cultural reasons, simply could not arrive in France and adapt naturally, and therefore needed government intervention. De Gaulle himself said of Algerian immigrants: “‘As these Muslims are not prepared for European life, it would be inappropriate to give them the aid reserved for repatriates as individuals.’” He would later say that “‘the term “repatriates” obviously does not apply to the Muslims. In their case, we are only dealing with refugees.’”

The treatment of “Muslim French” as “refugees” is archetypal of the argument that France has perpetuated its imperialist policies far beyond its decolonization of Africa and Asia. When dealing with North African immigrants (or “refugees”), the government first ignored its long-standing belief in “the rejection of ‘corporations,’ ‘subnational groupings,’” and “‘particularism’” in favor of state monitoring and establishing programs catering specifically to the particularities of Maghrebis: during the period of decolonization and into the 1960s, the government set up associations like the Social Action Fund and SONACOTRAL (Société Nationale de Construction pour les Travailleurs Algériens) to assist Algerians in repatriation and integration. When the integration of North Africans was deemed a failure, however, France abandoned its role as aid-giver and attributed immigration difficulties not on socioeconomic inequality or French racism, but rather on the unassimilable nature of the émigrés. Conversely, the republic could claim “republicanism” as a justification for not further assisting – if not ignoring – the plights of non-natives.

---

6 Ibid, 232.  
7 Ibid, 231.  
8 Ibid, 234.
From the period of decolonization through the 1980s, French officials, pro-Algerian nationalists, immigrants, second-generation Beurs, and the National Front would all use republican rhetoric in order to legitimate their own interests. It can be said that throughout this period, the government enacted certain policies that were arguably both republican and imperial: the State would use republican language (most often concerning certain “rights” and freedoms) while attempting to preserve its colonial control over the inferior Arab/North African race. The first example of this comes in the middle of the Algerian War, when the French government established a social action fund to maintain control of Algerian “refugees,” no matter which way the “tide of History” decided to go.
The Fonds d’Action Sociale and the origins of discrimination

Founded in 1958, at the birth of the Fifth Republic and the midpoint of the Algerian War, the Social Action Fund, or FAS, was a program “for Muslim workers from Algeria in the Metropole and for their families”\(^9\) designed to “promote familial social action.” Amelia Lyons explains that the FAS’s “main political objective was ‘to eliminate terrorism’ through ‘social, educational and cultural action,’”\(^10\) in both Algeria and the metropole. It is therefore clear that the ultimate goals of the FAS were not as ethical as they were advertised, and that the program itself was an archetype of the paradoxical nature of French social welfare: the political and imperial ends were disguised by means of creating new opportunities via social, cultural, and intellectual improvement. It was in this way that the FAS was actually antithetical to the “tide of History:” by “eliminating the nationalist threat,” the FAS could continue to work as a colonial program disguised as a republican one. Its motives were, in this way, counter to what was advertised: the program claimed it was liberating the Algerian people through social and cultural action, but in doing so, it intended to keep Algerians French, stubbornly resisting the inevitable processes of colonial independence and autonomy. Furthermore, the FAS championed a “liberated” French lifestyle to Algerians during a war in which Algerians themselves were fighting for liberation from France.

---

\(^9\) http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jopdf/common/jo_pdf.jsp?numJO=0&dateJO=19590101&numTexte=&pageDebut=0003&pageFin=

The *Fonds d’Action Sociale* is important for understanding France’s subsequent treatment of North African immigrants because the program ushered in a new era of Algerians as quasi-equal peoples. Though Algerians were legally French, they were categorized as “Muslim French,” because of their distinct legal and implicitly religious status. The FAS is the first example I will give of a 30-year period that demonstrates how France’s approach to effectively dealing with its immigrants oftentimes had contradictory and subversive results. The FAS was so important because “providing welfare…became a way for the state to exert colonial control over Algerians’ becoming French”\(^{11}\) and to assist their integration. The FAS is therefore the project that started the idea of North African integration into metropolitan France. Soon after its implementation, however, the program’s lack of visible results led many to regard Maghrebi integration – rather than the FAS itself – as a failure.

One of the biggest contradictions of the early FAS was how its funds were allocated. In 1959, 58 percent of its budget went to constructing housing for Algerians in the metropole.\(^{12}\) A majority went to building housing for families rather than for single male workers, though only 10-20 percent of the Algerians arriving in France were women and children.\(^{13}\) 11 percent of the FAS’s budget went to education, 9 percent to youth services, and 20 percent to job training. While the association was founded to provide social, cultural and educational programs to Algerians, only one fifth (the combination of education and youth services) was allocated as such. The FAS’s budget [unsure how much] was partially funded out of Algerian workers’ salaries. This portion of money was used to fund social welfare programs. The alternative was to continue giving workers lump sums, which would then ideally go back to their families in

---

\(^{11}\) Elizabeth Caitlin Sloan, “Welfare and Warfare: Social Action for Algerian Migrants in Metropolitan France during the Algerian War” (PhD diss, Stony Brook University, 2012), 2.


\(^{13}\) Ibid.
Algeria. FAS architects, however, feared that this money would instead go to the FLN (the National Liberation Front), and therefore quickly rebuffed the idea. It was better, then, that the program take its immigrants’ money and use it to invest in programs that “would help alleviate Algerians’ widespread poverty and demonstrate France’s good will.”\textsuperscript{14}

The FAS was thus, as historian Amelia Lyons has suggested, “a quintessential example of the larger imperial-republican project.”\textsuperscript{15} Although the program was founded in the middle of the war, it seems as if its organizers assumed (or at least hoped) that Algeria would remain French. Because “the political needs of the 1950s required that the republic and the empire be considered officially one in the same,”\textsuperscript{16} FAS measures to “liberate” and “educate” Algerians were backed by imperial intentions.

The establishment of the FAS was also the first time immigration and integration policies took on a racial character expressly related to colonial policy. Indeed, colonization itself has a fundamentally racial character: colonialism is impossible without a belief in cultural superiority, one which can be most easily determined by outward appearances such as race.\textsuperscript{17} I would argue that the FAS was created not only to assist the very refugees the French subjugated, but also to control as best they could their inevitable arrivals in the metropole. [As I will explain later, the ideas of “integration” and “control” worked both alongside and against each other throughout the time frame of my thesis.] Of course, France had neither been at war with or had ever colonized Portugal or Italy, yet there was never a question \textit{if} or fear \textit{that} those immigrants, as Europeans, could effectively integrate into French society.

\textsuperscript{14} Lyons, Social Welfare, 72
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 67.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 68.
Shepard writes that these first attempts to integrate Algerian “refugees” and harkis [Algerian soldiers fighting on the French side who had a particularly difficult time integrating because they were resented and alienated by their Algerian compatriots] into metropolitan life “attempted to break the tight connections between colonial oppression and France’s self-proclaimed universalism.”\textsuperscript{18} I would argue, however, that integration only fortified this connection: as will be explained in a later chapter, “integration” was merely a synonym for living in France legally. To integrate the former “Muslim French,” then, was not to eliminate former colonial bias, especially because there is little known about what, if anything, the FAS actually accomplished. Meanwhile, the tenets of “universalism” generally only applied to those who were either repatriated or born French. Incoming refugees (from a country that ironically had universalist principles forced upon it) were therefore not granted these liberties as freely, mainly because, as “Muslim French,” they were already categorically inferior to their French compatriots (though technically equal all the same). As Shepard explains, the long-standing legal differences between metropolitan French and “Muslim French” “institutionalized discrimination.”

French officials would also have to justify the FAS’s efforts by acknowledging that its colonial influence had seemingly rendered North Africans as particularly hard to integrate. Contrary to France’s tenets of universalism and individuality, the FAS defended their continued assistance to the Algerian immigrant group as being “a special case in need of particular attention” that “would require ‘an indispensable transitional step’ in the form of social welfare programmes [sic].”\textsuperscript{19} These “first steps” were indeed the first steps toward a half-century long battle over the legitimacy of immigrants – particularly those from the Maghreb – as French

\textsuperscript{18} Shepard, \textit{The Invention of Decolonization}, 47.
\textsuperscript{19} Lyons, “Social Welfare,” 68.
citizens (or better, “welcomed inhabitants”). What made this “transitional step” even more difficult was that the process of integration had been hampered by years of “applied assimilationist theory” which in fact “had pushed most Algerian ‘Muslims’ farther away from other French people.”

While the end of the war created two separate nations – France and Algeria – the FAS nonetheless endured beyond Algerian independence. No longer a colonial power, France had to justify its assisting of specific groups of immigrants, especially because “exceptional promotion” was otherwise contradictory to France’s belief in universalism and integration on an individual basis. Maxim Silverman notes that the continuation of the welfare programs was inevitable because “the ‘post-colonial’ era is not a clean break with the colonial past; it is thoroughly determined by it.” Indeed, as much as France would have liked to and as much as it can sometimes seem this way, the post-colonial government did not treat its North African citizens and immigrants as fairly as it did European immigrants: legislation and social policy remained influenced by the republic’s former position as an imperial power over the North African peoples and their cultures. France’s colonial past conflicted with its republican ideology, yet the two could never seem to achieve a compromise. France’s roles as both an imperial power and a bastion of republicanism was perhaps its most disturbing fundamental contradiction, and from this sprung perhaps the most paradoxical conflict of the Fifth Republic that persists through today: the French imposed French nationality onto all Algerians in the colonial era, yet as free and independent people, French citizenship became extremely difficult.

20 Shepard, The Invention of Decolonization, 47.
21 Ibid, 234.
In terms of immigration to the Hexagon, Michael Massenet, the highest-ranking official in French Algeria, acknowledged the dichotomy between what was appropriate (to treat Algerian immigrants as former French subjects) and what was ideologically sound: to treat Algerians like other foreign nationals (although that is, as will be explained, not very accurate, but was in any case the official position). Massenet advocated the continuation of the FAS, otherwise, “should France abandon this distinct group, the resulting problems would be” costly. As we will see, Massenet argued for the FAS’s survival in order to guarantee that the nation’s “labour [sic] needs would be met.” At the same time, Massenet agreed that “Algerian independence had ‘greatly modified the perspective through which’” the problem of immigration “‘should be approached.’” He thus agreed that, “after July 1962, Algerians became foreigners and the laws governing other foreigners no applied to them.”

Despite this concession, Massenet maintained that Algerian immigrants into the metropole “would need monitoring and possibly protection because of the intense animosity among parts of the general population.” He framed this thought around “Algerian resistance to integration,” and argued that without the FAS’s efforts to socialize and educate them, they “would isolate themselves from the rest of the population.” This is the first indication one sees in this historical relationship between France and independent Algeria in which it is posited that Algerians might not fit in harmoniously with the French, and that if this was the case, it was more the fault of the immigrant than it was the natives, whose racism Massenet describes as a simple fact rather than a problem. [We will see this idea of “latent racism” appear time and again throughout this period; indeed, it is one of the major issues in the conflict between the native French and France’s immigrants.] The FAS again became necessary after decolonization because

---

24 Ibid, 82.
France’s future – both in economic and social terms – depended on the thorough integration of Algerians. The FAS’s work did not, however, produce the desired effects. It sometimes even worked against the immigrants’ favor. It is through these examples, as well as others not involving the FAS, that I will try and make sense of France’s complicated and discriminatory immigration policies.

The FAS set up a system of control that perpetuated France’s otherwise extinct imperialist reputation and mindset. By claiming to aid Algerian “refugees” from the war and shrouding itself in benevolence and republican ideology, the FAS subverted Algerian nationalist goals in an attempt to keep Algerians “French” (or, at the very least, win over their allegiances). What made the program especially problematic is that, although the FAS was established in 1958, when Algeria was still officially part of France, it endured through the 1960s and continued to exist in a broader sense (i.e., its services were open to all immigrant workers) throughout the 1970s. The FAS therefore became the first instance in a series in which North African immigrants were singled out as the foreigners requiring extra attention; it was as if they were still a colonized people rather than an autonomous group.

The FAS was a first in a series of actions, policies, and attitudes that highlighted the complicated relationship between the French and the Maghrebis, and it is this complicated relationship that was at the roots of both the conflicts between the two groups and the contemporary debate on immigration. The attention paid to the typical Algerian as a “special case” in need of aid integrating and assimilating to French society both justified and inspired future discrimination, especially during the economic crisis and family reunification, when North African immigrants were scapegoated as the reasons for political and socioeconomic problems.
Unemployment, anti-immigrant legislation, and the beginnings of racial discourse

In the late 1950s and 60s, both during and immediately following the Algerian War, official French policy was to treat North African immigrants as “refugees” and to pay them particular attention. The Fonds d’Action Sociale targeted Maghrebs as the immigrant group that, without government-sanctioned assistance, would have the most difficult time adapting to French life. The treatment of Maghrebs as the exception to France’s universalist and anti-particularist approach to immigration was born in the era of the FAS, yet remained – in a new iteration – throughout the 1970s. Whereas the State had authorized a sort of “exceptional promotion”\(^5\) for Algerians as a means of maintaining their imperial grasp, the economic and unemployment crises of the 1970s would reverse this concept of “exceptional promotion” and replace it with “exceptional deportation.”

Unregulated immigration from the Maghreb, Portugal, Yugoslavia and Turkey during the 1960s had a profound impact on politics, economics, and social issues in 1970s France. This period of “wild immigration”\(^6\) during the Trente Glorieuses, France’s period of postwar economic prosperity, set up France for a decade of debate on immigration, integration, and national security. For reasons that will become clear in the coming pages, these new immigration laws, set up to combat the economic and unemployment crises of the 70s, seemed to target North Africans in particular, thereby racializing immigration and economic issues. Between 1973 and 1980, a series of legislative measures would transform the process of immigration in such a way that a paradox between “integration” and “deportation” would quickly form: as immigration

\(^{25}\) Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 234.

reform dominated the national conversation, the word “integration” and what it meant to be integrated took on a meaning of “being legal,” while “exclusion” came to mean “fit for deportation” and “illegal.” In trying to address and solve the issue of immigration, however, the French government actually made the lives of foreigners harder by targeting racial minorities as the problem while simultaneously failing to acknowledge its own shortcomings of actually integrating and ameliorating the lives of immigrants who held legal status. By clearly defining what “exclusion” meant, “integration” also gained a much simpler meaning: those who were not breaking the law were integrated, regardless of their socioeconomic situations. [As I will discuss in later chapters, this same issue would next become what distinguished the “integrated” from the “non-integrated.”] This chapter will illustrate how France, by spending so much of its energies seeking out those who legally did not belong, created discrimination and exclusion among its legal inhabitants within its own borders, thus engendering the socioeconomic problems between Maghrebis and French natives that have lasted through today.

In the 1950s and 60s, immigration was relatively unregulated. The French government celebrated the period’s economic gains rather than acknowledging its potential long-term problems. Policy was so relaxed, in fact, that in 1966, only 18 percent of immigrants came to France legally;27 the rest went through a process of “regularization,” receiving valid working papers without any real penalty or ill consequence. That same year, the Minister of Social Affairs, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, aptly captured the feelings of the French government when he said, “Illegal immigration itself is not without a certain value, for were we to pursue a policy of

---

strict enforcement of the rules and international agreements governing this area, we would perhaps lack the manpower we need.”

Whether they did so legally or illegally, immigrants arrived in France with little acknowledgement from the government because they were treated as sources of labor rather than as fellow inhabitants. The idea that immigrants were exploitable workers was acknowledged in a December 1969 article of Revue Politique et Parlementaire, which stated that “by underplaying its demographic potential and constituting itself instead as an immediate economic resource, foreign labor has clearly been an important factor in economic stability.” In this context, the origins and ethnicities – even the very lives – of the workers did not matter as long as they were fortifying the French economy. This reference to a potential future demographic upheaval also underlines the idea that immigration had taken up a racial character: the immigrants concerned in this report were not fellow Europeans, but rather people who could be outwardly distinguished as “different.” By “underplaying” wild immigration’s “demographic potential,” there was an indication and a foreshadowing that these same race issues would need to be addressed at a later date because they could seriously affect the national fabric.

The Republic’s laissez-faire attitude allowed immigrants to feel as if they were needed, yet their services were catered to those very same managers, employers, and politicians who would soon discriminate against them: by treating immigrants as commodities rather than humans, the era of “wild immigration” set the stage for future discrimination and inconsideration toward Maghrebi workers and their families. Within six years, immigration policy would change so completely, and most, if not all, of the blame would be put on the immigrants who were

28 Judith Surkus, “Lecture 26” (PowerPoint presentation, 2012). Retrieved from https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/452e0486-0580-4bb1-ab59-9d7fd5b9c44/page/7a9a8dd4-5059-4510-a511-d72008432362
29 Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 47.
allowed in via lax governance. Of course, the easiest groups to point out as not belonging were the North and West Africans who, racially speaking, could not pass as Europeans. [It is worth mentioning that blacks from the Antilles had full citizenship; but of course their rights to “liberty, equality, and fraternity” were forcibly imposed on them at the end of the Second World War.] Within 10 years, these same anonymous workers would fall into two categories: those who had their work visas were deemed “integrated”; those who had yet to go through the regularization process were ripe for “expulsion.”

The mid 1970s marked the beginnings of a change in the discourse surrounding immigration. Just as France was beginning to feel the effects of a slowed-down economy and rising levels of unemployment, it changed its views on immigration. In 1974, after 14 years of economic growth and rising GDP, the French economy fell into crisis, the result of which partly stemmed from the oil crisis in the Middle East. As a response to the falling economy, the right-wing French government decided to halt worker immigration in order to secure jobs for native French citizens who would thus re-stimulate the lagging economy. By the end of June, one month before worker immigration was ordered to stop on July 5, 1974, the unemployment rate was at 1.5 percent. The economy would hit its lowest point in 1975, when the unemployment rate doubled to 3.1 percent and the GDP dropped to -1 percent.

During this economic downturn, politicians tended to blame the foreigners – whom had been allowed in by the thousands – for France’s rising unemployment rate. Instead of holding the republic’s own immigration policy accountable, many on the Right would use (and repeat for the

next two decades) a rather propagandistic yet convincing rhetoric, that “1 million unemployed is 1 million immigrants too many!”\textsuperscript{34} At the end of 1974, the year work immigration was halted, France’s unemployment rate was at 2.3 percent.\textsuperscript{35} The efforts to replace immigrant workers with unemployed Frenchmen, however, would prove to be difficult. As one journalist would explain in 1977, due to an “incompatibility between the level of education” of the French “and the level of available jobs, the French continue to refuse the repetitive, unhealthy, and poorly-paid tasks that the ‘drudgers’ accept willy-nilly.”\textsuperscript{36} The immigrant as a willing yet unwanted worker presented a paradox to France’s perception of economic immigration: despite the growing number of posts available for unemployed Frenchmen, there was an almost unanimous refusal to accept positions considered well beneath them and thought better suited for those of other races or origins. France therefore needed its immigrants more than ever during this crisis, yet fears of ethnic tensions led the State to maintain a policy of expulsion throughout and beyond the downturn.

In the late 1970s, the need to combat the lagging economy and high unemployment transformed the previous immigration policy of “generosity” to one of “restriction.”\textsuperscript{37} Two politicians, Interior Minister Christian Bonnet and Secretary of Manual Labor Lionel Stoléru, were the main architects of the austere immigration policies of the late 1970s and early 80s. As we will see, promises to extend visas for what was termed \textit{regroupement familial} (family reunification) had lasted less than one year before it was temporarily suspended in May 1975. Although the Conseil d’État quickly ruled the stoppage unconstitutional,\textsuperscript{38} one year later, the government modified the policy, again making the process of gaining a visa much more

\textsuperscript{34} Surkis, “Lecture 26.”
\textsuperscript{35} Unemployment rate as per i/o definition - all men - sa series - stopped series, INSEE.
\textsuperscript{38} Silverman, \textit{Deconstructing the Nation}, 53.
difficult. A decree written November 11, 1977 stated that no member of an immigrant family besides the adult man was allowed to work. He who wished to rejoin his family could still do so, but neither his wife nor his children under 18 were permitted to join the workforce.

Despite the ever-hardening stances on immigration into France, there was a strong opposition to the Right’s proposals. The Groupe d’information et de soutien des immigrés (commonly known as GISTI), an immigrants’ rights organization, took action against the decrees of April 29 and November 11. Citing the Preamble to the Constitution of 1946, GISTI proclaimed “foreigners residing regularly in France have, like French nationals, the right to lead a normal family life.” The decree was annulled on December 8, 1978.

The GISTI case was the first successful fight against controversial legislation that seemed to victimize immigrants and render their place in French society in an even more precarious position. The two most high profile and controversial of these laws would come in 1978 and 1980. These laws permanently changed the perceptions and treatment of immigrants in France by establishing a division between those immigrants who were to be “integrated” and those “clandestins” who could be legally expelled.

One of the co-authors of the disputed November 11, 1977 law was Christian Bonnet, the Minister of the Interior from 1977-1981. His most notable contribution to the fight against immigration is known as the Bonnet Law. According to this law, which was proposed January 11, 1980, the Interior Minister (Bonnet himself) could “pronounce by decree the deportation of a foreigner from French territory” for several reasons:

---

1. “If the presence of this foreigner constitutes a menace to the public order;
2. If the foreigner claims to have a visa that is counterfeited, falsified, altered, or created under a name that is not his own
3. If the foreigner cannot justify having entered into France legally or at least that his situation has not been regulated after his entrance
4. If the foreigner has stayed in the territory three months past his visa’s expiration date without being the holder of a primary residence permit
5. If the foreigner has objected to a definitive suspension for not having left the French territory despite the to renew his visa
6. If the foreigner for whom the visa renewal had been refused has stayed in the French territory”

The Bonnet Law created the problem of the clandestin by explicitly defining who he or she was. The strictest rules, which were also the rules that targeted the most people because of their wide-reaching criteria, were numbers 4 and 6. With this law, Bonnet also created a new definition of “irregularity,” or the grounds on which expulsion was encouraged. According to Silverman, “irregularity” was used to create a “logical connection between unemployment of immigrants, their ‘illegal’ status and their consequent expulsion from the country;” in other words, one may assume that an unemployed immigrant would also be illegal. [What was much more likely, of course, was that unemployment was the result of job discrimination, not illegal status.] The Bonnet Law therefore made the search for “clandestins” easier by honing in on unemployed “others.” Because the idea “was cemented in law,” it was not seen as discriminatory against certain races, but simply as a necessity based on fact.

The Bonnet Law made it much easier for an immigrant to be deported from France. Liberal journalists recognized this as a crackdown on North Africans in particular, who, facing deportation, would only fall into a worse situation than the one which they were already in.

---

43 Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 57.
the left-leaning *Nouvel Observateur*, Irene Allier and Kathleen Evin wrote of the law, “Everyday racism from men on the street is met by racism from the State.”⁴⁴ The facility of deportation was supposed to make the lives of French citizens easier, especially for those who were unemployed. Like the right-wing politicians of the time, prominent politician Lionel Stoléru, who with Bonnet in 1977 launched an operation of “large-scale questioning in certain neighborhoods” as a means of “not only stopping immigration” but also “to decrease the foreign population living in France,”⁴⁵ also saw a connection between immigration and unemployment, saying, “When there are 1.4 million unemployed in France, we must show ourselves to be inflexible.”⁴⁶

The Bonnet Law put into focus just where these illegal immigrants were coming from and how they managed to live in France without detection for so long. Most came under the guise of being tourists, then just never left, opting to establish their lives there. When the three-month tourist visa expired, these “faux touristes” became the “sans-papiers,” or those “without papers.” By 1981, there were an estimated 400,000 *sans-papiers* in France. In August of 1982, when 200 *faux touristes* were arrested, more than half were from the Maghreb.⁴⁷

Alongside the Bonnet Law, Stoléru and Bonnet put into place in 1977 a joint plan for the voluntary *aide au retour*, a “policy of control and repatriation...aimed especially at Algerians.”⁴⁸ The government offered a standard 10,000 francs (no matter how many years the immigrant had lived or worked in France)⁴⁹ as “encouragement” to any person who wished to return to his homeland.⁵⁰ In one candid speech, Stoléru explained, “If the immigrants who are not happy want

---

⁴⁶ Allier and Evin, “Veut-on expulser les immigrés?”  
⁴⁸ Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 57.  
⁴⁹ Benoit, “Le ’volant de travail’.”  
⁵⁰ Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 57.
to return to their native country, we will not keep them here.” The fact that the government offered money to unhappy immigrants only underlines how desperate the country was to lower its foreign population. And, in the early stages of the plan, Stoléru toured the Maghreb, making speeches in “the three capitals” (Rabat, Algiers, and Tunis) in order to gain support for foreign repatriation. In other words, “foreign” was essentially code for “North African.” Not surprisingly, Stoléru “was coldly received, notably in Algiers.”

When Stoléru returned to the Algerian capital one year later to discuss immigration politics, he “remarked that the Western economies had entered into a long period of stagnation,” and that “consequences,” namely the deportation of North Africans from France, must be taken from this reality of European economic peril. The most interesting part of this speech was Stoléru’s admission that the aide au retour to the Maghreb was different from how it was in Portugal, the country of origin of 21 percent of the entire immigrant population (Maghrebs composed 35.4 percent). He “observed that it was not possible to adopt” a similar strategy in Portugal because, unlike the countries of the Maghreb, Portugal “intends to put in place a policy of reinsertion by herself.” This statement, along with the fact that the FAS funded 50 percent of the aide au retour efforts, illustrates how immigration came to be seen as a racial and post-colonial issue.

[Though Stoléru’s initial goal was to eliminate 1 million foreigners from France in five years, the efforts were abolished on December 21, 1981 after only 57,953 foreigners participated.]

51 Allier and Evin, “Veut-on expulser les immigrés?”
53 Ibid.
56 Benoit, “Le ‘volant de travail’.”
It bears noting that most of those who took advantage of the program were Portuguese and Spanish.\[57\]

Not only did Bonnet’s and Stoléru’s laws at once create and crack down on illegal inhabitants, they also forced France’s former colonies to again work in close contact with it, thereby reconnecting colonial ties. Writing in *Le Monde*, Alain Lebaube notes that an agreement between Algiers, Rabat and Tunis would help facilitate a more cooperative, less menacing immigration policy. He writes that this idea was first espoused in 1982, and yet, because of the “difficulties that had arisen” from the process, the project was “procrastinated on” through to 1983 and the time of this article’s publication.\[58\] This “system of control based on cooperation between countries of origin and France”\[59\] is interesting, as France and its former colonies were both independent, autonomous, and democratic, yet there was still a sense that France controlled many aspects of North African affairs. The French government dictated how many of North African origin could stay in France and how many would be forced back to their home country, putting the obligation on its former colonies to deal with the repercussions of disgruntled, deported immigrants. As a means of gaining some leverage over France, the Maghrebi countries argued that the *aide au retour* should work in their favor, too: if North African workers were to be repatriated, their governments wanted only the best and “most qualified” workers to return.\[60\]

Another piece of legislation targeting illegal immigrants was the “10 Measures,” created by the Council of Ministers and funded, in part, by the FAS. The measures included steps to “‘promote’ associated life, ‘facilitate’ participation, ‘develop’ cultural activities, make the public sensitive to administrative ‘agents,’” and to “‘allow,’ ‘incite,’ and ‘better’ the foreign

\[57\] Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 57.
\[59\] Ibid.
\[60\] “Nous n'avons pas l'intention de pratiquer la moindre discrimination affirme M. Lionel Stoléru.”
What is interesting about these 10 Measures is the FAS’s participation. Despite exhausting its initial purpose – to facilitate the installation of Algerians into France – a decade earlier, the FAS was still involved in “integration” policies aimed at immigrants who were perceived as otherwise unable to adapt to French life. Different integration policies had been put into action since the establishment of the FAS in the late 1950s, yet throughout the decades, the integration “problem” never seemed to get solved. Despite championing insertion into French society, many of the programs designed for immigrants actually prevented full integration. 

Regroupement familial and the building of the Habitation à Loyer Modéré, or HLM, [i.e. social housing] relegated immigrants to a completely separate part of French life. The HLM, especially those situated in the banlieues, gave rise to racial segregation and racial tensions, especially in the 1980s and onward.

Interestingly enough, the French Left and socialist François Mitterrand’s administration would construct very similar plans to those under President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, who served from 1974-1981. In 1983, the “Million Immigrant” plan proposed “an aid to those who would like to create a small enterprise in their home country and a return allowance of 16,500 francs.” Like Stoléru’s aide au retour, the Million Immigrant plan was designed to facilitate Algerian emigration from France: the proposal “attached itself” to a separate “Algerian agreement;” in other words, it was a project added on to an already existing post-colonial contract.

A 1982 article in Le Monde nicely captures the seemingly excessive preoccupation the French government had with deporting illegal immigrants in the late 1970s and early 80s. During this time, other controversial yet important proposals, such as the right of association and family

---

6¹ Allier and Evin, “Veut-on expulser les immigrés?”
6² Bonjean, “L’Affaire des immigrés.”
reunification, were “no longer commented on.” Instead, all the governments’ energies were “concentrated on a single measure, the most symbolic…the decision to prevent the arrival of any more illegal immigrants into France.” Despite a regime change from Right to Left, François Mitterrand’s administration, too, implemented austere immigration rules that affected “Africans” above all others. The journalist Claude Bonjean described the racism implicit in frontier policies: “One would think the customs agents were evil if they asked American or Japanese tourists to show them three copies of a signed letter of invitation in good and due form.” The end of the article has a cynical, yet hopeful, tone. Though Mitterrand’s presidency had so far proved very similar to Giscard d’Estaing’s, there was hope that the government and the French people would soon face the reality that “these foreigners will remain very visible” and that, according to Socialist François Autain, “‘the theme of the return is a myth.’” The solution was to accept the new social and demographical norms and “accelerate” the “integration” of established foreigners. The author warns of any rash decisions, like giving immigrants the right to vote (as was attempted in 1981). Any action like that, he writes, would only “awaken our latent racism.”

This admission is fascinating: Autain acknowledges that the French are profoundly racist, or – perhaps more understandable in this context – nationalist. However, he invoked this lurking racism to justify the contemporary mistreatment and discrimination of (non-European) immigrants. He warns that if any measures were taken to pacify the ever-growing discontent of the foreign population, there would be a counter-reaction more violent and more hateful than had already been seen. Autain therefore argues that any rash, pro-immigrant legislation was not only in the best interests of the latently racist French, but of the foreigners, as well. These non-white

immigrants, therefore, were actually better off with fewer freedoms than with having legally equal status.

The 1970s completely transformed France’s approach to immigration. The government responded to slow economic growth and escalating unemployment by enacting a series of austere policies against immigration as a whole but that in any case seemed to target North African migrants in particular. Where immigration was once generous, it soon became restrictive: politicians like Stoléru and Bonnet attempted – and often succeeded – in passing acts like the Bonnet Law that defined in explicit terms those immigrants who belonged in France and those who did not. Where in theory this should have reassured legal (or “integrated”) North Africans of their safe status in France, the racist assumptions that Maghrebis inherently did not belong, and that the “irregular” situation in which they often found themselves was due to clandestinity rather than job discrimination, blurred the lines between the “integrated” immigrants and the immigrants fit for deportation.
Family reunification, the HLM, and immigration as a social issue

Despite stopping worker migration in 1973, France did not want to lose its reputation as a terre d’asile, or “haven” for the less fortunate. The government therefore continued to admit immigrants into the country through the policy of regroupement familial, or family reunification. Women and children were allowed to reunite with their husbands and fathers who had come over previously to find work. The enactment of family reunification forced both the government and its people to acknowledge “une France plus métissée.” Yet the North Africans’ newfound legal establishment in France did not put a stop to their discrimination: their permanent residency in France simply redefined their “problematic” nature wherein the idea of “immigrant as clandestin” shifted to “immigrant as delinquent.” The perception of the Maghrebi immigrant as either “integrated” or “clandestine” was rephrased to accommodate the new fact of permanence, and those who were once targeted as clandestins were now assumed to be delinquents. Moreover, because North Africans were so easy to distinguish as “different,” there really was no distinction between the integrated and the clandestine immigrant, and therefore there was also no distinction between the integrated and the delinquent immigrant. Despite this definitional shift, what remained constant was that immigrants were often seen as wholly responsible for their socioeconomic misery rather than as victims of it.

Though Maxim Silverman argues that the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s heralded a “shift from temporary to permanent and economic to social forms of immigration,” I would argue that this shift occurred several years – perhaps even a full decade – later. The social effects of immigration only came about once immigrant families established themselves as permanent

---

64 “Une France plus métissée.”
65 Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 72.
residents of France in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Just as the Maghrebis were blamed for the republic’s economic troubles, they were faulted for its social problems, and in turn became the social problem themselves. As a result, the process of family reunification and the idea of “permanent” immigrants in France racialized issues such as poverty, delinquency, and social mobility/quality of life. With the advent of family reunification, racism against North Africans expanded to target not just young male ouvriers, but also women and children.

This new, social form of racism was fostered in the HLM, where the majority of the problems attributed to immigrants persist to this day. Although the HLM would become notable for their high concentrations of foreigners and were understood as designated spaces for immigrants, they were not necessarily the causes of French socioeconomic problems, but rather were symbols of it: the HLM were structured (both in the literal and broader senses) in such a way that poverty and delinquency easily festered, and thus the “immigrant problem” came to take on a meaning of insalubrity, insecurity, and a threat to social cohesion. These immigrants, now officially cemented in French society, were no longer viewed as potential clandestins, but rather as delinquents who either refused or were incapable of assimilating fully into a culture that, for its part, did nothing to foster such an exchange. Instead, North African immigrants were relegated to a separate part of French society, where they then suffered from poverty, unemployment, and discrimination from neighbors and local authority figures. This chapter will underline how family reunification and the subsequent formations of the HLM, though seemingly benevolent, had little to no effect on integration and in fact worked expressly to segregate North Africans from natives, relegating them once again to the peripheries of French consciousness.
The effects of *regroupement familial* were varied, but as Amelia Lyons has pointed out, the policy was as self-serving as it was benevolent. Lyons suggests that an unofficial idea of family reunification was first realized in 1959, when the FAS moved from constructing housing for single male workers to housing designed for families. Fearing that the war in Algeria would breed pro-FLN sentiments and conspiracies against France among communities of single male workers, the FAS decided to shift its focus toward “family settlements that would stabilize and depoliticize the population,” while also ensuring that “Algerians did not intermarry with metropolitan women in large numbers.” It could be said, then, that like the FAS before it, family reunification had contradictory goals that reaffirmed and racialized the perceived fundamental differences between the Algerians and the French. The policy furtively assuaged fears that single, Algerian men would not marry French women. This itself is interesting: for all of the discourse on integration during this time period, what went unchallenged was that mixed marriages were probably the most effective way to integrate Algerians into French society. It can be understood, then, that despite its rhetoric, France wished to “integrate” its foreigners without much assistance from or interaction with native French people, as if not to integrate them at all. In fact, by keeping foreign families intact, the country was able to keep a literal distance between the “French” and the “other,” connecting space with the issue of race.

The first step of family reunification was to commence building the HLM and eradicate the *bidonvilles*, or shantytowns. French authorities wanted the *bidonvilles* gone not so much because of the danger and poor health they posed to their inhabitants, but more so because they were an eyesore: most *bidonvilles* were located just outside of city peripheries. Before families could be moved from the *bidonvilles* and placed into HLM units, however, the government and

---

the FAS made sure that they were “qualified” enough: judgments as to whether an immigrant family could move into state-funded housing were “based on the behavior of the woman” (the wife and mother of the family) and if she could “keep a ‘proper’ home.” While the idea of what exactly a proper home is varies, what it certainly was not was the maintenance of “Muslim customs.” During this period of movement from bidonvilles to HLM, “Muslim” was a synonym for “North African.” During the Algerian War, the French government distinguished pro- and anti-French Algerians by categorizing Algerians living under French rule as “Français musulmans,” or Muslim French. This was their official name, and was used to describe their legal status as well as recognize their allegiance to their colonizer yet also implied colonial inferiority in religious terms.

Aside from the desired results described above that France hoped would undercut the effects of *regroupement familial*, the practice had many other repercussions that would contribute to the anti-immigrant – specifically anti-North African – sentiments of the late 1970s through today. As previously stated, the FAS had prepared for the arrival of immigrant women and children when in the late 50s it began building HLM on the peripheries of France’s major cities. The combined salaries of an immigrant man and woman, who often found a job as a maid, made any idea of upward mobility largely illusory. The average immigrant family was thus relegated to the HLM without any real prospect of ever leaving. The HLM were relatively affordable (in one instance, a unit outside of Paris cost 1,200 francs per month in 1970; in 1979, a 6 m² unit cost 5,200 francs), conveniently located to factories and construction sites (as a process of expanding the major cities and urbanizing rural areas), yet they were cut off from

---

67 Ibid, 77.
68 Dominique Audibert, “Algérie: le retour des frères prodigues,” *Le Point*, July 18 1983 [also in *Jeune Afrique* and *The Invention of Decolonization*]
the rest of society. In fact, HLM complexes were often called “cités” because they were, effectively, their own separate civilizations. Many inhabitants did not have much of a life (if one at all) outside of the HLM complexes, further underlining this idea of forced isolation from the cosmopolitan city centers.71

Though immigration had already changed dramatically between 1958 and 1974, *regroupement familial* further redefined what it meant to immigrate to France and be an immigrant there. The discourse on immigration also continued to change: concerns no longer focused around FLN-sympathetic Maghrebi males, but instead around their female counterparts and new issues of “families” and “fertility.”72 Family reunification changed the demographics of the entire republic, creating further divisions between immigrants and French citizens, especially in the HLM. In 1982, it was reported that 24 percent of North African families had three or more children, compared to the three percent of French families that did.73 This often resulted in overcrowding, which led to poor living conditions and thus heightened tensions between French citizens and Maghrebis. As Irène Allier pointed out in *Le Nouvel Observateur*,

Immigrants have a right to family reunification, an indisputable factor of integration, but on the condition that they have housing that is up to standards with every candidate for social housing, 35 square meters for three people. But as we have seen, immigrants often have large families. The first difficulty: we have been building many more F3s than we have F6s74 [three-room rather than six-room apartments].

One could never expect the Maghrebis to be able to integrate if their living situations were so precarious.

How the HLM fostered and perpetuated the widespread poverty among immigrants is the first indication of shifts from immigration as an economic problem to a social problem and from

---

72 Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 73.
74 Ibid.
immigrants as *clandestins* to delinquents. As we have seen, immigrant workers usually had the lowest-paying jobs and the largest families. This combination, along with other factors that I will discuss later, made poverty almost unavoidable and perpetual. What made poverty particularly miserable for Maghrebi immigrants is that they often faced racial discrimination when looking for jobs. Just as it had affected native French citizens five years earlier, unemployment incited immigrants and their children to anger, violence, and, most commonly, delinquency.

The relationships between poverty and delinquency and delinquency and clandestinity in the HLM were cyclical: one factor led to the other and back again. Though some French might have said otherwise at the time (and even today), there were no other reasons for delinquency among immigrants except that it was a reaction to unemployment due to racial discrimination and the suspicion that any Maghrebi could be a *clandestin*. In communities with high immigrant populations, as many as 50 percent of young immigrants were unemployed.  

Maghrebi immigrants were scapegoated as job-stealers during the economic crisis of the mid 1970s, but they were also the group the least likely to be employed. To underscore how North Africans in particular were getting the short shrift, a 1978 IFOP survey of 208 Portuguese and 217 Algerian young men and women shows that 90 percent of Portuguese men had jobs, while only 66 percent of their Algerian counterparts did. For women, the statistics were around the same: 58 percent of Portuguese women have jobs compared to only 25 percent for Algerian women. Only 15 percent of Portuguese men and women said that an employer had refused to hire them, while 39 percent of all Algerians surveyed had the same experience.

---

75 Allier, “Immigrés: les nouveaux visages de la France.”
77 Ibid
The press and media played a very important role throughout this era of family reunification and the concretization of the HLM as a strictly immigrant environment. Indeed, they were most responsible outlet for creating and perpetuating certain images and ideas about France’s immigrant population. Sympathies varied depending on the source: when reporting on social issues involving immigrants, rightist sources like Le Point and Le Figaro often seemed to side against the foreigners, who were always responsible for problems of noise, crime, and insalubrity. More leftist sources, like Le Nouvel Obs and Jeune Afrique often sympathized with the immigrants. Le Monde, arguably France’s best, most reliable, and most centrist newspaper, often allied itself with its more liberal competitors when discussing immigration.

The IFOP survey cited on the previous page illustrates the press’ varying reporting styles and approaches to reporting on immigrant issues. The study was published in both Le Monde and Jeune Afrique, but each presents the report differently. The Monde article simply presents the survey’s findings, while Jeune Afrique contextualizes them into a larger article on discrimination of Algerians. While it tended to be more liberal than Le Figaro, L’Express, or Le Point, especially concerning immigration issues, Le Monde was a principally centrist newspaper, favoring facts over opinion. Jeune Afrique, however, introduces the survey with more humility, writing, “Yet, despite the deportations, unemployment, and racism, many young émigrés, when given the chance to speak, express their desire to further integrate into French society.”

Another interesting difference between the two articles is that, in terms of intermarriage, what Jeune Afrique describes as an “overwhelming majority” being in favor is actually 65 percent of Algerians. It seems as though Jeune Afrique, by contextualizing these numbers into the broader

---

79 Ibid.
80 “Un quart des jeunes Algériens et Portugais immigrés souhaitent rester définitivement en France indiquent un sondage de l’IFOP.”
picture of immigration and racism, tries to victimize Algerians not so much by explaining how much they are discriminated against, but rather how much they would still like to become “French” in spite of racism.

As described by the media, young immigrants, angry and disheartened by job discrimination, often resorted to lives of crime as a means of earning money. In Les Minguettes, a “wretched neighborhood” in the eastern town of Vénissieux, 60-70% of the population was either an immigrant or the child of immigrants. Poverty and crime were so rife that one newspaper, Le Progrès de Lyon, described the town’s metaphorical “prince” as being a “thug.”81 The local young men were frustrated with their status as unemployed immigrants but did not see a realistic way out. It is not for lack of trying, either: one young man describes the scene at a local temp agency, recounting how the employers called all those waiting in line “Mohammed,”82 a common Arab name.

As was common with the liberal media, this article from Le Nouvel Observateur presents a world in which Maghrebi immigrants suffer a great deal, but also notes that they are the targets and recipients – rather than the perpetrators – of their miseries. Resignation to a sad fate was common among young men in the banlieues, and Le Nouvel Obs, as well as Le Monde and Jeune Afrique, took it upon themselves to illustrate these hardships. Mokhtar, aged 22, who has eked out a living through trickery and petty theft, considers “taking the plunge into common delinquency at greater risk.” Describing his decision to fall deeper into crime, he explains, “Double or nothing. Unless a bullet lands in my chest.”83 Journalist Pierre Blanchet notes that Mokhtar “is not the only one to use this language. The ‘enfants terribles’ of Minguettes are often

---

82 Ibid, 45.
83 Ibid.
fascinated by death, weapons, and suicide.” In Minguettes, like in other cités, racism, fear, and suspicion only exacerbate the social problems facing immigrants, and only add to the argument that they themselves are the social problem. If the HLM signified permanence and legality in France, French racism was no longer legitimated by the idea of the clandestin, but instead by the belief that delinquency symbolized the North Africans’ rejection of social norms, thus producing a “problem.”

Of course, clandestinity was still a fear, and the authorities often cited it as the initial reason to patrol, harass, and assault the inhabitants of the banlieues. Polices’ demands to see banlieuesards’ papers deepened the mistrust between Maghrebis (second-generation Beurs in particular) and authority figures and underscored the idea that, despite being born in France, many people in power questioned the very existence of the “other.” In fact, if the attempt to stamp out clandestinity was the primary justification for the strong police presence in the banlieues, the police only stayed thereafter to suppress the delinquency, which itself was a reaction to police brutality. It is in this way that clandestinity and delinquency in the HLM became so intertwined. Those who were once thought to be clandestins were never truly free of suspicion, for even after repeatedly presenting their papers to the police, their outrage at being racially profiled only led to reactionary violence and crime.

Family reunification shifted the discourse on immigration. The family, especially youth males, replaced the adult male as the face of immigration, and with this new image came a new set of issues, most notably delinquency, poverty, and housing. Immigration therefore came to be interpreted as a social and societal matter rather than an economic matter, and, unlike when young men were the vast majority of émigrés, these were matters that would not go away within a few years, and would in fact only continue with future generations. North African families
were singled out as the biggest harms to and most valid justification against family reunification for several reasons. Compared to the French, Maghrebis had traditionally large families. This cultural difference became a socioeconomic problem when neither parents nor children could find jobs, a fact that some natives – especially those who lived among them in the banlieues – blamed on their nature, while the liberal press blamed it on racial discrimination. These families were thus forced to resort to other ways of making ends meet, like carrying out petty crimes. Criminality and delinquency were also ways for Maghrebs (and second-generation Beurs in particular) to fight against police discrimination and brutality, the police assuming that Maghrebs were clandestins and therefore delinquents and vise-versa. These social concerns, coupled with the new sense of “immigrant as permanent,” justified a need to address the issues of space and place of foreigners in French society, and the discourse on the “threshold of tolerance” would do just that.
The *seuil de tolérance*, institutionalized racism, and the creation of the ghetto

As we have seen, the implantation of immigrant families in the HLM was a turning point in French immigration policy. *Regroupement familial* allowed North Africans to establish roots on French soil, but the lack of any opportunity for upward social mobility kept them stuck in a never-ending cycle of misery, beginning with discrimination and resulting in poverty, delinquency, and additional discrimination. And although discrimination was somewhat legitimated through the “proof” that Maghebis were prone to lives of crime, the best justification for institutionalized racism – and one that was legitimized through academic and social scientific expertise – was the idea of the *seuil de tolérance*. The *seuil de tolérance*, or the threshold of tolerance, was one of the biggest obstacles facing the integration of immigrants into the republic. The *seuil* was an abstract sociological concept that had no specific definition, and in fact had various meanings. It could be best described as a quota of any establishment – whether a city, school, or apartment complex – that “‘cannot be fixed in numerical terms. It all depends on the exact nature of’ an establishment’s “collectivity, its history, of the current economic situation, the foreigners’ origins…etc.’”

The field of sociology came into prominence in the 1950s, introducing new ways of thinking about different races, ethnicities, and the relationships between different demographics. Alain Girard and his research partner Joseph Leriche were the most prolific and important sociologists of the postcolonial era, and their œuvres were largely responsible for the implementation of the *seuil de tolérance* in 1970s and 80s France. Leriche was the director of the

---

North African Social Studies program as well as the editor-in-chief of *Cahiers nord-africains*, a journal “created for the promotion of knowledge of the Maghreb in France,”\(^{85}\) and whose contributors sought, through their research, to investigate the “‘complex social problem’”\(^{86}\) of the Algerian presence in France. Together with Girard, the two published a series of studies and surveys, including several focused on the adaptation of Maghrebi immigrants in France and their reception vis-à-vis the French. Girard and Leriche sought to understand the Algerians in France (and more generally the North Africans) because, as they claimed, “‘history had linked the destiny’” of the two cultures, and because it was France’s obligation to help “‘a population less evolved than our own.’” This is an important statement, especially because the men considered their research to be “disinterested” and “scientific.” There therefore seemed to be an intrinsic – even latent – racism present in this new trend of French sociological research: how could social scientists claim transparency and produce unbiased, authoritative research when the scientists themselves truly believed the French were culturally and anthropologically superior to the Algerians? If their work was indeed “part of a much larger push toward professionalization through ‘new, quasi-governmental, quasi-academic institutions,’” then this underlying prejudice was indeed part of something larger and more influential than just the academic realm. Once it began to be used in politics, sociological concepts like the *seuil de tolérance* became official, state-sanctioned ideologies that would work to produce discrimination in institutions throughout the Hexagon.

What was most harmful – and effective – about the idea of the *seuil* was that it was a widely used sociological and academic term. For example, in the journal *Ethnologie française*,


the foremost anthropological revue in France, Girard explains that coexistence between foreigners and natives in France is very difficult, and faults both populations. He writes that immigrants “do not disperse themselves equally throughout the country, but have a universal tendency to regroup,”[87] yet he also acknowledges that “hostility towards immigration is most manifest among those who maintain a fundamentally and traditionally Malthusian mindset.”[88] Girard believes that the best solution to racial discrimination is, in fact, this seuil de tolérance. The seuil “suggested that the social fabric was threatened if the number of foreigners surpassed a certain threshold.” To Girard, the threshold is the only way to “simultaneously avoid a too large concentration or visibility of foreigners, and not to place them in a situation that isolates them and prevents them from dissolving little by little from the national community.”[89] In most cases, in communities, housing establishments, and schools, the quota was anywhere between 10 and 30 percent the total population.[90]

Other academics supported Girard and Leriche’s research. Geographer Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier believed that a too-highly concentrated immigrant population resulted in “social ‘inconveniences.’”[91] In a 1979 issue of the Revue de Géographie de Lyon, one social scientist wrote that “‘foreign schoolchildren are poorly integrated’” if their presence at a school exceeds 30 percent. Sociologist Marcelle Stroobants, who himself is a critic of the threshold theory, writes that many of his colleagues explain the seuil unapologetically scientific terms. They claim

---

[88] Ibid, 223
[89] Ibid, 224
[90] Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 55.
that exceeding the threshold triggers a kind of impulsive rejection of the “other;” it is the sociological equivalent of an immunological rejection in medicine and biology.\textsuperscript{92}

The concept of the “threshold” as a tool to combat racism paradoxically justified its inherently racist practices: by “controlling the migration flows into France,” i.e. applying the austere immigration laws both at the frontiers and within the metropole, France could concentrate on “the integration of those 3.5 to four million foreigners already in the country.”\textsuperscript{93} In this way, the \textit{seuil de tolérance} was an iteration of the paradoxical concepts of “control versus integration” and “integration as control”: to control was to remain wary of the immigrants granted legal status while expelling the rest, and to “integrate” by filling quotas was to control who could live in France as French. At the same time, those immigrants who were allowed to be French remained statistics, bodies whose accumulation would bring a day when a French institution would lose its “Frenchness.” Just as there was a paradox between the “integrated” and the “clandestine” during the unemployment crisis, wherein the explicit definition of who was a \textit{clandestin} actually worked to make every non-white immigrant a suspect, there was a new (yet similar) contradiction (yet close relationship) between the “integrated” and the “other.”

Politicians used the rhetoric of the threshold to demonstrate benevolence concerning immigration policy, yet time and critical eyes have shown that it is hard to prove this concept is anything but discriminatory. It was believed that, by maintaining a large concentration of native French in every municipality and institution, the Republic would always maintain its original character and would not be overtaken by other cultures, races, and ideas. Having a strong French majority meant that the immigrant population could never gain too much power. At the same


\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 53.
time, it guaranteed a kind of peace between natives and immigrants: ideally, by keeping the North African population at a minority level, French natives would feel less threatened and would thus be less likely to resort to violence. Political figure Alain Peyrefitte provides a fascinating look into this ideology, explaining in Le Figaro that the threshold is worth defending because “racist urges do not come from any one philosophy, but from an instinctive reaction – probably when the seuil de tolérance is exceeded.”94 This statement is interesting because it legitimates the use of the seuil as an inhibitor of racism, but also essentially presumes French racism as inevitable, instead defining discrimination as an “instinctive reaction” to a large foreign presence. The idea of the threshold understood the Maghrebi immigrant not as the victim of social problems, but as the embodiment of the social problem itself.

Academic discourse legitimated and institutionalized the implementation of the seuil. In fact, in 1969, “certain institutions like the Conseil Économique et social proclaimed that the ‘seuil de tolérance’ was scientifically established.”95 Lionel Stoléru, who in 1977 was the Secretary of State to Immigrant Workers (Sécrétariat d’Etat aux Travailleurs Immigrés), supported the use of the seuil by championing its integrationist effects, arguing, “Control is a duty to ensure the future of immigrants in France.”96 This statement is very telling, and poses a few problems. First, it describes control as being necessary, yet not for reasons previously discussed, such as unemployment or economics. Control is necessary, rather, because it guarantees established immigrants a “future” by turning away fellow relatives and countrymen: their loss is the others’ gain. Second, this statement shows just how little France did to actually assist acclimation to French life by equating “control” and denial into the Metropole with ensuring “the future of immigrants.” Here is where integration comes into play with the idea of

96 Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 83.
control: as stated in a previous chapter, being “integrated” meant nothing more than being in possession of a visa. In the Secretary’s statement, “control” is juxtaposed with “future:” those who are subject to control have no future in France, yet those who do have futures would not have one without control. Maxim Silverman probably puts it more articulately: “The fundamental contradiction of ‘integration and control’ springs from the message contained in the formula: successful social relations can be achieved only through the implementation of ethnic/racist controls.”

In his landmark 1971 study entitled *Attitudes des Français a l'égard de l'immigration étrangère: Enquête d'opinion publique*, Girard surveyed French citizens on many aspects of French immigration, including intermarriage, assimilability, and the *seuil de tolérance*. On the topic of the threshold, the French were asked, “In a locality with 5,000 inhabitants, what percentage of foreigners is too many?” 20 percent responded that 500 foreigners, or 10 percent of the entire population, was too many. The next largest response (17%) responded that more than 1,000 foreigners, or 20 percent the entire population, was too many. These results fit well with the loosely agreed-upon definition of the *seuil*, which was defined as the immigrant population not exceeding 15 percent of any institution. That the survey’s results corresponded so closely with the academic standard further validated the *seuil’s* implementation in institutions throughout France: the public’s response substantiated expert opinion, and because this could be taken as a measure of public support for the *seuil*, the ideology behind it was allowed to live on.

In this same survey, Girard asked participants which immigrant group they believed had the easiest and most difficult time adapting to French life. North Africans were deemed the hardest group to integrate with 46 percent of those surveyed believing their adaptation was

---

97 Ibid, 84.
“difficult,” while 23 percent believed their adaptation was “impossible.” What is more is that the French sympathized with North Africans the least; Girard cites the contemporaneous oil disputes between Algeria and France as the reason behind this lack of sympathy. To add to these sentiments, 53 percent of those surveyed believed that foreigners “always remain foreign” despite integration and/or repatriation. 24 percent argued that foreigners stay foreign because of “objective difference,” including language, ethnicity, and religion. All of these sentiments relate directly to the importance of the seuil de tolérance: the “objective difference” that hampered Maghrebis’ integration and also kept them from ever being considered “French,” combined with the contemporary dislike for them, seemed to necessitate the threshold. Without it, it would be even harder for North Africans to ever feel like they belonged (and to be accepted as belonging) in France.

[It is interesting to note that, as I have stated before, although the seuil had no set definition but was instead an abstract idea, it was nevertheless enacted throughout organizations across France. As early as 1976, Le Monde drew attention to the vague threshold theory, writing in an editorial that “the formula, ‘fixed by sociologists,’ evokes a utopia” in which scientists have control and power over demography. The article also accuses “a certain press” (it is hard to determine exactly to what or whom he is referring here) of using seuil-ist rhetoric to cater to certain political aims. And despite the fact that “to this day, no sociologist has demonstrated” the effectiveness of the threshold, it was the very aspect of the seuil’s academic nature that made it seem legitimate: the government was able to speak on the benefits of the seuil because it was created by demographers. The author(s) of this article critique this idea, as well, which alludes to the “latent racism” discussed in previous chapters. The author(s) write(s), “The idea of a seuil de tolérance implicates (…) that one takes into account the characteristics of the welcoming

---

population. A threshold based solely off the characteristics of the welcomed population can only be a threshold of tolerability, that is to say, one based off when a foreign group ceases to be tolerable."

In a way, the *seuil de tolérance* was in and of itself latently racist: a true *seuil* would take into account certain characteristics of the natives. Instead, the type of *seuil* the *Monde* journalist refers to seems only to concern itself with those foreigners coming in. This essentially says it all about the “welcoming” population: they absolve themselves of their latent racism by claiming that they have no responsibility to accept or welcome the foreigners, and rather the onus is on the foreigners to integrate on their own, even in spite of discrimination. Indeed, for all its popularity and assumed validity, the *seuil* was never actually proven to work because of rapid “white flight” as a response to (and cause of) increased ghettoization.]

Another important aspect of the use of the *seuil de tolérance* was the fact that the concept was created years before it ever truly needed to be or could be used. *Seuil-*ist rhetoric first seems to have appeared in 1969, before both the end of male worker migration and the onset of *regroupement familial*. Because it was not until family reunification and the idea of “immigrants as permanent” that native-foreigner coexistence became an issue, the fact that Girard and others promulgated and defined the seuil – albeit in very loose and varying terms – so early on is problematic: the demographics of the foreign populations in 1969 would not resemble those in 1974 and onwards. The threshold was therefore institutionalized based on theory and/or old data rather than in-depth experimentation. Once the threshold had been set, there was such an effort to maintain/lower it that the very thought of a community having a native minority and a foreign majority was either impossible or intolerable…
In its ideal form, the *seuil de tolérance* maintained a peaceful coexistence between the French and immigrant population of a certain community, yet as family reunification progressed, the government and local institutions were forced to rethink their policies. As the presence of immigrants increased in the *banlieues* in the late 1970s and into the 80s, the threshold’s greatest threat was realized: the large population of foreigners, combined with the diminishing population of natives, was creating ghettos in urban areas throughout the republic. It is important to note that, in these urban communities, who was deemed “foreign” was not limited “to those who did not possess French nationality.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, it seems that “foreign” was applied to any large family (who, as I explained before, were traditionally Algerian), and was used “to target a category of the population that included the descendants of immigrants.” As was common, even second- and third-generation North Africans were labeled “immigrants.” The ghetto, therefore, was not considered a product of socioeconomic inequality, but of racial composition. Had these “foreigners” been considered French (and most were legally French), it is plausible that ghettos would not have been so stigmatized, or at least would have been combated in a different, more effective way. Yet because most *banlieuesards* were North African, the country’s approach to fixing the ghettos was to “whiten” them, or at least spread out the “otherness.” “The fear of ghettos,” Silverman writes, was “at the heart of the theory of the ‘seuil de tolérance.’”¹⁰¹ The very purpose of the threshold, then, came into question during this period: could communities prevent “ghettoization” without seeming xenophobic, especially when the natives willingly moved elsewhere? Because the ideology behind the *seuil* was so strong and had been justified through several years of implementation and social scientific research, the support for it continued, though more so in theory than in practice. It was no longer realistic to maintain a

¹⁰¹ Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 74.
certain ratio of foreigners to French; however, the idea of the threshold persisted through the discourse on ghettoization, communitarianism, and the banlieues.

Family reunification threatened the seuil de tolérance and the peaceful maintenance of French-dominated urban communities. Though the government did its best to establish “control,” many institutions were faced with a dilemma: they could either refuse all foreigners in the name of the threshold, or accommodate them in the name of generosity. It was common for schools and housing authorities to choose the former. Entire communities “refused to house more than” what the seuil dictated. In order to garner support for and legitimate the use of the seuil, advocates correlated high densities of immigrants with crime, delinquency, and racist incidents, claiming, “coexistence is less and less peaceable where the concentration of immigrants compared to the surrounding population is strong.” In 1980, neighborhoods of Le Val-Fourré and Francs-Moisins had foreign populations of 39 and 30 percent, respectively. Shortly after family reunification began, however, communities could no longer defend their refusal on the basis of the threshold; there were simply too many immigrants in need of housing.

The threshold of tolerance became obsolete not only because the influx of foreigners necessitated its discontinuation, but also because this same movement of immigrants drove native French people out of the very communities into which immigrants were moving. Facing ever-worsening conditions of insalubrity and general quality of life, many native French inhabitants were able to move out of these areas. Immigrants were not as lucky, and many saw no way out of the HLM and the banlieues and were therefore left to despair in their own poverty and precarious social situation. Paris’s Goutte d’Or, once a working-class neighborhood, had become a haven for immigrants in recent years (they comprised 80% of the population in

---

102 Ibid, 54-55.
103 Allier, “Immigrés: les nouveaux visages de la France.”
1983\(^{104}\). After having been “deserted by the French,” the area “became more and more a neighborhood of high insecurity.” So while there were indeed some cases in which the seuil had to be ignored because immigrants were so numerous, it also had to be ignored because the housing that had previously been reserved for French whites were now sitting vacant and vulnerable, and HLM authorities were losing money. A manager of an HLM bureau in the southeastern town of Saint-Priest describes how her office “did not have enough French families to fill the F5s. At the same time, businesses were asking us to house their Maghrebi workers,”\(^{105}\) [signaling that cheap, immigrant labor was still in demand, despite the persistent complaint that non-nationals were taking away jobs from unemployed French people]. The mayor of Saint-Priest explains that despite efforts to make the HLM more appealing to the French, “cohabitation is increasingly difficult,” and “no European wants to come” to Saint-Priest.

The Point journalist takes a very sympathetic view of the native population, unfairly reporting on only the French viewpoint while ignoring the biggest victims. The only example the author gives of why convincing French or Europeans to move in is “difficult,” however, is that over the summer, “we came close to having an incident, one night when firecrackers ‘avaient échauffé quelques tympans’ [could not find an exact translation of this].” This reason does not come close to justifying why Saint-Priest, like many towns throughout France, has such a dearth of natives. It is much easier, however, to attribute this dearth to the fact that high concentrations of non-European foreigners simply made the French uncomfortable.

It is clear that the idea of the “banlieue as ghetto” stems from French xenophobia, but proof of how ghettoization related specifically to North Africans can be further substantiated. As

\(^{104}\) “Sexualité: un quartier très réserve,” Le Point, October 10, 1983.
\(^{105}\) “Logement: la commune qui dit non,” Le Point, October 10, 1983.
the HLM manager explained above, racism in her community “progressed in rhythm with”\textsuperscript{106} the arrival of the Maghrebi workers. In noting that “no European wants to” live in the district, the mayor, the representative and voice of the community, makes a distinction between who belongs and who does not. It is not simply “the French” who do not want to live in the \textit{banlieue}; it is also the Italians, the Spanish, and the Portuguese. To all Europeans, the Maghrebi is the least desirable neighbor. The \textit{Point} article, not interested in a Maghrebi immigrant’s viewpoint, reinforces this sentiment. There is no mention of the socioeconomic difficulties and discrimination facing the immigrant \textit{banlieuesard}; he remains the scapegoat rather than the victim of this ghettoization. As Silverman points out, “immigration” had become “a euphemism for non-Europeans (particularly North Africans),” and that the “transformation” or redefinition of this term “delegitimized it”:\textsuperscript{107} Once immigration became centered around North Africans is when it became an issue, a “problem” framed specifically in terms of integration and levels of tolerance. The situation in Saint-Priest was just a microcosm of what was happening throughout France in this period: the \textit{cités HLM} were now being associated with the pejorative \textit{banlieue}, which were viewed as “ghettos.”

The ghettoization of the \textit{banlieues} in the 1970s and 80s was the product of several factors, including government policy, public opinion, and migration patterns, but the idea of the \textit{banlieues} and HLM as existing separate from French cosmopolitan society first originated in the 1950s, when Algerian \textit{ouvriers} came over for temporary stays. As I explained in the chapter on the \textit{Fonds d’Action Sociale}, Algerian men moved into housing built specifically for them, far from city centers and natives. This was done in part to keep them away from French females, for Arab men were viewed as overly sexual; they possessed “a perversion tolerated by their religion,

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Silverman, \textit{Deconstructing the Nation}, 73.
inscribed in their customs, passed on and inherited.  

This separation set the stage for the institutionalized spatialization between “Muslim” immigrants and the native population that began in the early 1960s, when the FAS and SONACOTRAL rushed to build more HLM than single-worker dormitories. This construction was done in part to maintain the separation between immigrant men and native women; without family reunification, male ouvriers might have looked to the local population for marriage.

A report from the right-wing magazine Le Point repeats the popular conservative sentiment that stigmatized North African men and legitimized their spatialization from the native population. The journalist writes that in the Goutte d’Or neighborhood of Paris, “the sexuality” of young Maghrebi men “is not the most sordid aspect of their existences;” the neighborhood, itself, is.  (The Goutte d’Or was so notoriously run down that it would undergo drastic renovations beginning just one year later, in 1984.) This (rather candid) comment is shocking, but it typifies what many French assumed to be a racial and ethnographic fact: even before France colonized Algeria in 1830, it was a common stereotype that North African men were naturally perverse, that they were “sodomites and…rapists” and that “Islam was at once a symptom” of it as well as “the cause of it.” It is important to note, however, that the Point article does not once reference Islam, and therefore racializes perverse sexuality and subsumes religion into Arab/North African identity. (This subsumption can be traced back to the colonial era when the French government, needing to create difference between Algerians and French, labeled Algerians as “Muslim French.”)

---

108 Nacira Guénif-Souilamas and Éric Macé, Les féministes et le garçon arabe (La Tour-d’Aigues, France: Aube, 2004), 60.
111 Guénif-Souilamas and Macé, Les féministes et le garçon arabe, 61.
The sexual deviance of Arab immigrants was yet another justification of both the seuil de tolérance and “white flight” from the banlieues. After a period of latency post-decolonization, this idea was rejuvenated in the progressive era of May 1968, when straight women and gay men used images of hypersexual Arab men as a means of destigmatizing female sexuality and male homosexuality. The aim was to take what was most scandalous to the French and reclaim it as “revolutionary.” On the other hand, the movement also worked as a way of defining what were in fact acceptable forms of sexuality: by designating Arab sexuality at the extreme end of the spectrum, these “revolutionaries” were able to make their causes seem less egregious. Labeling Arab males as having the most perverse and shocking form of sexual habits was one way to spatialize North Africans from native French citizens. Indeed, the fear of “sodomites” and “rapists” living among the French was enough to advocate both the need for immigrants to have their own, designated places of living as well as adhering to the seuil.

When one questions why and how such horrid living conditions were allowed to persist in these communities (which could be argued is the reason they were labeled “ghettos” – a word that, before 1975, had only been used to describe Jewish neighborhoods and the inner cities of the United States – in the first place), a few conclusions can be drawn. One is that the absence of native French people meant the areas mattered less to the general public and politicians at every level of government. First-generation immigrants, of course, did not vote (unless they had repatriated). The second conclusion is that, by being isolated to a ghetto, the very idea of an immigrant presence in France could be forgotten and the social problems they posed (the problems posed usually affected themselves rather than the French, thanks to the ghettoization of

114 From doing a search on the Monde website, the word “ghetto” does not begin to appear regularly in terms of North African immigration until 1975, the year after worker immigration was stopped.
the HLM) could be ignored for other, more pertinent, more “French” problems. In Marseille, the social problems both posed by and affecting immigrants were ignored in the hopes that they would eventually go away. A shopkeeper said of the social problems in Marseille (which included the “Red Summer” of 1973 and a bombing of the Algerian consulate that same year), “Before, it was simple. The immigrants were relegated to the ghettos, and everyone was happy. Everyone except for them, evidently…”

In 1980, Bernard Granotier, a prominent sociologist, proposed a solution to the ghettoization of immigrants antithetical to the seuil de tolérance. He suggested building HLM in city centers rather than on their already bleak peripheries, thereby encouraging daily interaction and cultural exchange with the native population. “A few dozen apartments in a large ensemble, housing juxtaposed to the interior of the French tissue/fabric. Perhaps that is the solution.”

Pierre Thomas, the mayor of Aulnay-sous-Bois (a banlieue outside of Paris), too, believed that if France wanted to combat racism, it must actively integrate its foreigners. Like Granotier, he believed one solution was to build new housing for immigrants where there was not already a large foreign population, thus ending the reality of the ghetto: “The racists are not the ones who fight against the ghetto, but who encourage their creation.”

Immigrants in France had often joined together to form smaller communities of those who shared the same ethnicity or nationality. It was a normal reaction to the discrimination most faced from natives, and a natural effect of economic inequality, which forced most immigrants to move into the most affordable housing available, some of which were built especially for them in the first place. These articles seemed to suggest that if the government instead took a proactive approach to integration and

---

abandoned their interpretation of integration as simply being synonymous with legality, it is less likely that the matters of communitarianism and ghettoization would be as divisive as they are today. Moreover, as is the case in this article, it was common for the liberal press, while not manifestly supporting the elimination of ghettos, to take a more sympathetic stance on immigration issues. Most articles from *Le Monde, Jeune Afrique*, and *Le Nouvel Observateur* seem to address not only their own liberal readership, but potential dissidents as well. In doing so, these journalists both raised certain fears pertaining to immigration and then did their best to allay them, or at least give human faces to a group that had been arbitrarily labeled a “problem.”

On the whole, the press was much more open and less fear mongering than certain political figures. Throughout this era, the press generally worked to disprove small but very vocal minorities, like the “nostalgérie” and the French New Right.  

The *seuil de tolérance* was integral in institutionalizing racism against North African immigrants, especially once *regroupement familial* was in full swing. The academic and social-scientific nature of the *seuil* legitimated its use in schools, housing complexes, and entire communities. But the conditions of the HLM and immigrants’ meager salaries or total lack of employment combined to create a volatile situation in which delinquency was common and racial tensions were heightened. As a result, the natives who could afford to leave what were increasingly being considered “ghettos” did so, while immigrants had no choice but to stay put. At the same time, from the outside looking in, no French – or European, for that matter – wanted to move into these areas, citing the fundamental nature of the Maghrebi as “delinquents” and “perverts” as their reasons not to move there. The voluntary exodus of Europeans out of the *banlieues* and the forced stay of the immigrants rendered the *seuil de tolérance* obsolete, and created veritable “ghettos” out of the *banlieues*.

---

Epilogue: French-Immigrant relations from the Beur Movement to today

Up until now, my discussion has mostly focused on the French government and its people as the group active in both the social and political spheres and the Maghrebi immigrants as the passive group. This would change in the 1980s. The 80s was arguably the most significant decade for immigrants’ rights and Franco-Beur (first- and second-generation French citizens of Maghrebi origin) relations. During this ten-year span, the Beurs and their allies, often called “antiracists,” took great steps towards recognition and acceptance. At the same time, anti-immigrant groups used nationalist rhetoric to delegitimize everything the Beurs were fighting for, namely the “right of difference.” What is most interesting about this conflict is that both the antiracists and the nationalists used republican rhetoric to justify their respective movements. The decade would culminate in one of the biggest scandals in contemporary French history: the Headscarf Affair. It is no coincidence that this infamous event once again targeted the most “problematic” racial (and religious) minority, the Arabs/North Africans. The Headscarf Affair sparked the transition from immigrant discrimination based on race to discrimination based on religion, where one was part and parcel of the other.

The early 1980s brought the Beurs to national social and political prominence. Second-generation immigrants adopted the term “Beur” to describe their mixed identities. “Beur” is verlan, or backward slang, for “Arabe.” The term perfectly captures their mixed identities as French nationals of Arab descent. [It is also worth noting that the Beurs defined themselves as Arab rather than North African or Muslim, signaling the desire to achieve a pan-Arab unity that could effectively extend all the way to France.] Throughout their lives, the Beurs were discriminated against because of their “otherness.” As I discussed in my second chapter, the anti-
immigrant legislation of the late 1970s early 80s generated fears that any foreigner could be a *clandestin*. Moreover, those who grew up in the *banlieues* were oftentimes assumed to be delinquents, even criminals. The *seuil de tolérance* and subsequent ghettoization of the HLM in *banlieues* only created further distance (both literally and figuratively) between them and their white compatriots. Indeed, one of the most interesting things about the Beurs is that they were legally French: they were born in France and therefore had full citizenship. What makes this interesting is that much of the literature about the Beurs and by the Beurs themselves describe an identity crisis. All of the factors that contributed to their spatialization from other French citizens created this conflict: they did not feel “French” because they believed the French did not see *them* as French.\(^\text{119}\) Many Beurs also failed to find a genuine connection to their parents’ origins, especially if they did not speak Arab,\(^\text{120}\) their parents’ native tongue.

This new hybrid identity – part French, part Maghrebi, part neither – inspired the Beur identity, its movement, its political organizations such as SOS Racisme, and events like the March for Equality and Against Racism. Politician and sociologist Catherine Wihtol de Wenden writes that the 1980s was an era in which the Beurs experienced “a dual movement towards demarginalization and politicization.”\(^\text{121}\) By constructing a political platform through groups like SOS Racisme, second-generations gained recognition as a legitimate subgroup of French society. These same people “had, but a short while ago, been confined either within specific struggles or limited by the culturalism of their local associations in urban suburbs.”\(^\text{122}\) The Beur movement was able to politicize itself in part because the Mitterrand administration was much more liberal

\(^{121}\) Wihtol de Wenden, *Les immigrés et la politique*, 100.
\(^{122}\) Ibid, 106.
than Giscard d’Estaing’s: VGE had actually prohibited immigrant groups from forming associations during his septennat.  

By forming associations, the Beurs and their allies could organize, share their views and ideas, and spread their messages further than had ever been possible before. The biggest event the Beurs organized was 1983’s March for Equality and Against Racism. The idea for the March was born out of tragedy, after 40 or so young immigrants had been either killed or seriously wounded in the past two years. Conflicts between the police and the inhabitants of the banlieues were almost always the cause of these violent events. The March started out in Marseille and moved from city to city, and debates and discussions on immigrant issues were held along the way. The objective, marchers said, was the refusal of a “French apartheid” and the hope to create a “more just and fraternal France.” The march, which started out with 30 or so participants, ended on December 3 in Paris with tens of thousands of supporters.

Political organizations like SOS Racisme and MRAP (Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié entre les Peuples) advocated that Beurs and immigrants had the “right to difference,” meaning they sought to be treated as political and social equals to the French, yet also wished to acknowledge their mixed cultural backgrounds. Silverman uses the term “cultural distance” to describe the insurmountable differences between the Beurs and the French, and writes that this distance “hampers assimilation and threatens social cohesion.” SOS Racisme’s

---

128 Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 74.
insistence that the French support an individual’s “right to difference” was perceived as a serious flaw of the antiracist movement. This was (and remains) a controversial issue because conservatives argue that particularism directly conflicts with universalism. In recent years, rightist pundits like Éric Zemmour and politicians like Rachida Dati have denounced the antiracist movement, claiming that the antiracists’ advocacy of the droit à la difference actually works to aggravate racism. In the 1980s, the National Front, headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen, used the emergence of antiracist groups as an opportunity to pose his party as the antithesis to the Beur movement, and in doing so, launched the extreme Right into the forefront of the political sphere, a feat it had not managed to do since its foundation in 1972.

Like the seuil de tolérance and other latently racist aspects of France’s standpoint on immigration, the National Front disguised its discriminatory ideology by trumping up its strict allegiance to republican values. It advocated a “France for the French” and proposed incredibly strict restrictions on immigration. In a television interview with Jean Louis Servan Schreiber, Le Pen is asked to respond to a statement in the right-wing magazine Le Figaro that perpetuated the fear of an immigrant invasion. The FN founder says that there is indeed a “veritable invasion… ‘villes étrangères’ impermeable to authority, to taxes, to the police.”

Needing to further defend his “racist” remarks, he argues, “I consider every French person, without distinction of color, race, or religion, like brothers of the nation. I am not a xenophobe. The fact that I like the French and France better does not mean that I hate foreigners or that I hate other countries.” Here one can clearly see Le Pen hide behind acceptable nationalist/universalist rhetoric to justify his

---


political platform. Le Pen could claim that his aversion to immigrants’ rights movements was not because of any personal racist sentiment, but rather that he was willing to treat every French person as a French person. That is to say, if, for whatever reason, a citizen rejects his identity as a Frenchman, Le Pen can choose not to respect him because this person does not see himself as a “brother of the nation.” It does not matter that the State has traditionally been the one to deny minorities the benefits of citizenship – the fact that a person does not fully submit to the benevolence of the state makes feeling excluded his own problem.

For the remainder of the decade, both antiracist organizations and the FN continued to fight against each other, hoping that their rhetoric of republicanism and equality would delegitimize the other. The antiracists were unsuccessful: with Le Pen’s personality and the ever-increasing problems in certain banlieues, the FN won seats in municipal governments throughout France, most notably in the city of Dreux. Dreux’s elections gained national attention: before 1983, it would have been unthinkable that such an extreme Right-wing party could win an election of any significance.

From its beginnings in the 1950s and through the 1980s, immigration had been figured as a “male” issue: young men came in droves to find work in the 50s and 60s, and in the 70s and 80s became the targets of suspected clandestinity and delinquency. The Headscarf Affair of 1989, however, shifted attention and suspicion from male Arab immigrants to their female counterparts. On October 6, 1989, three young women were expelled from their high school after refusing to take off their headscarves. The school argued that under the tenet of laïcité, or state secularism, the teens were not allowed to express their personal religious beliefs within the confines of a public school. This “Headscarf Affair” sparked a serious debate that remains

131 Ibid.
132 Gaspard, A Small City in France.
extremely controversial today, and marks a shift in how female immigrants were perceived in France. As Silverman noted, beginning in the late 1970s, “immigrant” became synonymous with “North African.” What was also assumed about North Africans was that they were Muslim, which is why, during the colonial era, French Algerians were labeled as “Français Musulmans.” Before 1989, religion had been subsumed into race, and therefore any person of Arab origin was assumed to also be Muslim. In the 1970s and 80s, Islam was indeed one contributor to the Maghrebi’s perceived inferiority, yet it was their outward appearance that gave them away as “others.” With the Headscarf Affair, one’s outward appearance showed “otherness” in terms of religion rather than race, yet the issue was still considered to be an “Arab” [i.e. not French] problem because the true French are secular Catholics. With this scandal, the State and its citizens were forced to figure out just where laïcité fit into republicanism, and if it did in fact stand on equal ground with liberté.

The issue is the most current iteration of the decades-long conflict between the French government, the native French people, and its North African immigrants and their offspring. In this iteration, however, the focus is on Maghrebi women rather than men. This shift in focus has also turned the headscarf hysteria into a feminist issue, which has only worked to further attack Islam. Feminists like Elisabeth Badinter argue that the Islamic religion is fundamentally oppressive toward females, that the veil is a form of “civil automutilation,” and that, in the Western world, the face is not considered part of the body. What is interesting about her argument is that, despite being “feminist,” it is also xenophobic and intolerant of non-Western

133 Silverman, Deconstructing the Nation, 73.
cultures. This is important because it shows that even liberal advocates can use republican rhetoric to disguise their sense of cultural superiority.

Since the colonial era, the relationship between France and her colonized peoples has been one in which true intentions and beliefs are shrouded in more innocent and benevolent terms. In the late 1950s and 60s, when France sensed it would lose its prized Algeria, it set up the *Fonds d’Action Sociale* to advertize the Republic’s benevolent nature, even as the French army tortured and killed thousands of its own citizens and reallocated Algerian immigrant workers’ funds to the program in order to subvert the nationalist movement and keep its colony subjugated. In the mid-1970s, as a response to the faltering economy, the government put a stop to the immigration of adult males, the majority of whom were Algerian. As a result of the Stoléru and Bonnet laws, these young men would become the faces of the “clandestin” and the “delinquent,” which only made their situations in the metropole more precarious.

Not wanting to mar its benevolent nature after halting worker immigration, the government enacted a policy of family reunification, although this was shoddily done: immigrant families were relegated to the most destitute areas of the metropole in the hopes that this would a) deter Algerian men from marrying French women, and b) that, after claiming to have housed these families, their spatialization from the rest of society would allow the government to ignore them.

As family reunification grew and Maghrebi families moved into housing inhabited by natives, the Republic sought to diffuse this “threat” of too many immigrants with the rhetoric of the *seuil de tolérance*, a social scientific theory that had never been proven but whose very nature as an academic term legitimated its use in institutions throughout the Hexagon. As a reaction to the ever-growing presence of immigrants in the *banlieues*, most natives left, leaving

---

these communities to turn into “ghettos.” It is in the ghettos where racial discrimination, poverty, and crime all fell into an inescapable cycle of misery.

The politicization of antiracist groups sought to disturb this sane cycle, and in 1983 the Beurs conducted the March for Equality and Against Racism, a largely successful campaign that drew lots of publicity to the Beur and antiracist movements. On the other side of the spectrum, however, the National Front gained an equal amount of support from those affected by the immigrant “problem,” and as a result, continued to win influence throughout the decade.

The Headscarf Affair at the end of the decade ushered in a new era of immigrant discrimination based on religion rather than race. Despite this shift, North Africans are still the most targeted minority group, the group most seen as “other.” In terms of achieving real and lasting equality among all French people, it is evident that the “tide of History” still has a long way to go.
Selected Bibliography

Primary sources


Secondary sources


