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The Identity Crisis in France: A Study of Alienated Immigrant Populations

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The Identity Crisis in France:

A Study of Alienated Immigrant Populations

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Abstract

The following thesis will examine the current identity crisis experienced by North-African communities in France. The French nation has witnessed a divide between native citizens and naturalized immigrant populations that have felt excluded from the privileges that the French identity offers. The object of this thesis is to locate the source of the identity crisis by specifically focusing on immigrants' economically vulnerable living conditions in the poor suburban areas of France. To answer the question of how the socio-economic conditions of the suburbs have created the grounds for the identity crisis, the thesis will evaluate the type of housing, education, and career opportunities these immigrants are offered. The evaluation of these factors will bring light to the inherent disparities faced by North-African communities, which ultimately generate feelings of exclusion, and of non-belonging. The analysis will also reveal the stereotypes generated by the precarious neighborhoods, which in turn constrain immigrants to the prescribed identity of the poor, uneducated, foreign, criminal. Unable to belong, nor to be perceived as part of the national fabric, immigrants experience a crisis in the midst of attempting to construct a sense of self. The thesis will thus examine the implications of these injustices, in the context of the values of the French Republic, which supposedly promise equal treatment to all citizens regardless of origin and religion.

Introduction

“France is an indivisible republic, assuring equality for all citizens without distinction of origin, race, and religion.” Here is the promise of the first article of the French constitution of 1958. The fundamental values of the French state resonate behind the words, “indivisibility” and “equality.” One cannot think of France without picturing the engraved letters of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” on the walls of town halls or schools. The very pillars of the French nation promulgate the idea, or perhaps the dream of a united, free, brotherhood. French citizens are not just individuals bound to each other by terms of legality, they are all the children of the Republic, “*les enfants de la patrie.*”¹ They are promised equal recognition under the law, regardless of their ethnicities or religious traditions. Their French identity derives from their respect, and protection, of the rules of their mother, the Republic.

The turn of the 21st century revealed an unexpected, or maybe long-overdue, turn of events— the Republic had been fractured. Suddenly, the notion of the French identity ceased to depend on the supposed adherence to republican values. The late 1980s and early 2000s demonstrated a saddening reality: what it meant to be French, and to benefit from French privileges, largely depended on the very factors condemned by the first article of the constitution, race, origin, and religion. Indeed, the arrival of immigrants in France in the 1960s and 70s, shed light on the collapse of the praised brotherhood. French citizens ceased to be a united “we” and became divided by a war between the “us” and “them.”

¹ National French Anthem: La Marseillaise.

To trace the origin of this national shattering, a quick overview of the history of immigration is necessary. The industrial wave of the late 1950s and early 1960s opened the way for foreign labor, namely from North-Africa, to fill positions in suburban industries like textiles, construction, or public works. It is important to keep in mind that immigrants did not settle in wealthy metropolitan areas, but in suburban areas comprised of industrial sectors. Furthermore, the concept of immigration at the time still included the notion of the “return.” The immigration of workers was understood to be temporary, and strictly financial. Foreign men immigrated to France to generate sufficient income in the hope of returning home to support their families. The ‘70s brought a change to immigration dynamics.² Not only did immigrants intend to permanently reside in France, their wives and children also joined them from abroad. By the ‘80s, immigrant families had been French residents for multiple years, and their children had either been born on French soil or had arrived in France at a very young age. The political focus of immigration thus shifted to this “second generation” that had been brought up and educated in the midst of French republican values and yet could not secure a place amongst the children of the Republic. The unravelling of the ‘80s revealed the deliberate discrimination and marginalization of immigrants as well as their systematic depiction as not belonging to the national fabric. The weakness and volatility of immigration laws led to recurrent deportations of Algerian men (Beaud 814).³ Moreover, the French state had failed to build adequate infrastructure to welcome the growing number of immigrants, who thus found themselves residing in shantytowns or “transit-suburbs”, or low-quality housing projects (Beaud 814). In 1983, the “March for Equality and Against Racism” constituted a national upheaval, as the whole of the second generation gathered to

² 1974: Law suspends the immigration of workers. 1976: State’s authorization for families to regroup in France.

³ Algerian families were not included in the 1976 law, and could not secure their residency in France.

demand residency permits from the government to grant them political recognition, as well as the social dignity they had been refused (Beaud 813).

Twenty years later, the flames of burning cars and the screams of angry men revealed that the fight for justice had not yet been victorious. In 2005, the death of two young immigrant men shook the second generation to its core (Beaud 809). The story of these men, dying, after fleeing from a police pursuit, was certainly not the first encounter with institutional racism and police brutality. Yet, some hoped it would be the last. Tales of police harassment in economically vulnerable suburbs needed to end.

The 21st century brought a new face to the discussion of immigration. The “immigrants” of the 2000s weren’t the foreign factory workers accompanied by their families. The “new” immigrants were men and women who had been born in France and had attained French citizenship by their 18th birthday. The tragic deaths of Zyed Benna et Bouna Traoré, became the cause of the notorious 2005 suburban riots, which brought radical visibility to the despair of immigrants, asking to be treated with the respect that their French citizenship supposedly guaranteed them.

Following these events, the French identity now seemed arbitrary and volatile. The question of who was French and who benefited from the protection of the constitution did not appear to be explicit. How could these immigrant men and women identify themselves to the French nation with such obstacles in their way? What exactly caused their alienation to even infect the boundaries of the self? The golden letters of “République Française” on immigrants’ passports unfortunately weren’t accompanied by the promises of equality and indivisibility. Clearly, the deaths of the two young immigrant men as well as the previous March for equal

rights demonstrated the undeniable division of the French people, which was accompanied by discrimination and injustice, proving the exclusion of immigrant populations from the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The following thesis will thus attempt to discover the root of this identity crisis. In light of the previous historical events, namely the March of 1983 and the riots of 2005, particular focus must be brought to the socio-economic backgrounds of these alienated immigrants. Specifically, readers' attention must be pointed towards the immigrants' place of residence, home to injustice and marginalization. The present investigation will concentrate on answering the question of how the sociological and economic conditions of vulnerable suburbs have constituted the ground for the identity crisis. This study will argue the imprisoning essence of the neighborhoods in which immigrants currently reside in. The reviewed literature will present evidence of the discriminating and stigmatizing nature of the suburbs, by targeting the unfair practices of the French state, in providing substandard resources to immigrant-dominant neighborhoods and harassing its inhabitants through the police forces. The authors, ranging from sociologists to politicians, will introduce the overarching themes of precarious housing, inadequate education, delinquency and police brutality. Certain works will also encompass the diverging political opinions regarding the integration of immigrants in France, as well as the essentially restrictive notion of the French identity.

To support the claim that the precarious suburbs' living conditions are ground for the emergence of an identity crisis, the case study will firstly, determine the high prevalence of immigrants in the outskirts of metropolitan area. To perceive the feelings of alienation and "not belonging" that these second and third generations experience, it is crucial to map their

geographical isolation. Secondly, the unsatisfactory living conditions of North-African communities will be presented to reveal the low-quality housing immigrants are offered. The study will then shift to the inherent restricted access to high quality education, found in precarious suburbs. The substandard programs to which children of North-African descent are subjected, will be evidence of their marginalization. Deriving from this inadequate education, are the limited career opportunities, as well as the probable practice of discrimination from employers, which will also provide proof of exclusion.

Using these factors, I will prove that the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable suburban areas constitute the origin of the identity crisis. The agglomeration of immigrants into precarious neighborhoods will reveal its double-edged nature. Their physical exclusion and unequal access to opportunities first distances them from the idea of “being French.” Due to the government’s inherent lack of legal, social and economic protection, North- African men and women do not experience a sense of belonging to the French citizenry. The second issue arises from the prescribed identities, that native French citizens have assigned to their fellow North-Africans. The image of the vulnerable suburbs reflects badly on its inhabitants who are portrayed as poor, uneducated, criminals; strangers to the Republic. Ultimately, North-African communities find themselves isolated and stigmatized, unable to climb the ladder to social recognition.

Literature Review:

The literature used in this thesis encompasses the studies of French and American sociologists, journalists, and politicians, who have thoroughly explored the issues of immigration, discrimination, ethnic division of space, identity, as well as the inherent struggles

of the youths living in the suburbs. Each work will be placed in one of three categories: the socio-economic conditions of the vulnerable neighborhoods of the suburbs, the link between delinquency and immigration, and finally, the concept of the French identity and the varying opinions placed around it. Each work will highlight the disparities found in vulnerable suburbs, the consequences of living in substandard conditions, and the issues arising from France's Republican Model of identity.

A. Socio-Economic Conditions of the Suburbs

It is impossible to comprehend the existential struggles of immigrants in France without first depicting their place of residence as one of exclusion and economic difficulty. Brigitte Bertoncello, specialized in urban development, chose to focus on the way that identities could be constructed based on the physical territory that people occupied. In her article *Suburbs: A Territorial identity*, she outlines the history of the suburbs as a place of exclusion, and isolation: "The suburbs were, since the 19th century, considered to be an unknown land, obscure, symbolic of misery and marginalization [...] the suburbs were marked by the recurring arrival of 'the exiled' of the capital" (Bertoncello 73). Her perspective helps to illustrate the isolating nature of the suburbs. In French, the word suburb translates into "banlieue" which indicates the inherent isolation perfectly. "Ban" - to banish, is exactly the concept that has to be kept in mind in order to understand the alienating nature of the suburbs. At their inception, suburbs were a place to which people that did not fit, could be banned. Bertoncello goes on to describe the living conditions of the suburbs by presenting the way in which the government labeled and organized the construction of housing projects: "In 1958 the government uses the term "Urban Development Zone" to serve as a legal framework in the construction of housing projects [...] In

1977 new political measures are taken: the program “Housing and Social Life” allows the rehabilitation of degrading social housings [...]” (Bertoncello 74-75). Although at first glimpse the government’s efforts to better the conditions of the suburbs could be recognized, Bertoncello indicates the intrinsic alienating nature of these efforts: the different labeling and designation of suburban territories as “sensible zones”, “zones to urbanize in priority”, incite the inhabitants to realize their difference, and their exclusion. Metropolitan areas like Paris are not built with the mindset of “cheap and fast,” and neighborhoods aren’t given special names, like they are in housing projects (Bertoncello 74). This difference is in itself, alienating.

Eric Marlière, a sociologist specialized in the study of working-class neighborhoods, also addresses how the suburbs are a place of exclusion in his article *The Feeling of Injustice of the Youth of Housing-Projects*. The purpose of his work is to outline how the youth of foreign origin have come to feel persecuted and backed into a corner. The constant clashes with the police constitute a major point of interest in understanding how the youth in these areas feel alienated. Police harassment and brutality has generated the impression that young Muslim and Arab men are the primary targets of the force: “the police are apprehended as a violent and racist institution [...] the Muslims of the suburbs are designated as the new enemies of the state” (Marliere 8). Indeed, Marlière gathers testimonies to understand how the youth feels harassed by the police. Most young men interviewed all shared a similar discourse in which they believed that there was a “plot” set against them. The state is perceived to be this controlling device opposed to the presence of these immigrant men in France, and thus constantly scheming against them (Marliere 13). Marliere also outlines how their life in the suburbs - particularly in the housing projects - excluded them from the political and social life of France. Most of the young men Marlière

interviewed were unable to find a stable position in the current society. Ranging from their inability to find job opportunities to their misrepresentation in political parties, immigrant men living in these suburbs feel as though there is no room for them in France (16).

Dominique Duprez, and Mahieddine Hedli, researchers for the National Center of Scientific Research in France, further explore the themes of inequality and injustice in the suburbs. Their book: *The Wrong of the Suburbs: Feeling of Insecurity and Identity Crisis*, touches upon the prevalence of immigrants in precarious neighborhoods, the racism and violence that is often encountered in these areas, as well as a lack of educational investment. Placing their focus on the suburban town of Roubaix, approximately 15 kms from Lille, the authors attempt to illustrate the struggles of a predominantly immigrant population. Duprez and Hedli present the high percentage of immigrant students in a neighborhood of Roubaix called “Cul-de-Four”:

“They represent 51.17% of students in public schools, and 35% of private schools, that are often also Catholic” (64). Numbers like these are extremely important in understanding how prevalent the presence of immigrants is in the suburbs. Furthermore, the authors also bring relevant insight as to the physical conditions of the buildings found in these areas: “the tower was 10 stories-high, in between garbage disposals [...] people don’t want to live here, they consider it to be a punishment” (Duprez 61). The authors also mention the way in which the immigrant youth perceives recurrent racist treatment from institutions, particularly from the police forces: “This culture of exclusion is also perceivable through institutional racism. Police intervention is often controversial. Young men often complain of being mistreated and of enduring racist comments from the police: “they hit me... they’re all racist” (Duprez 118). Duprez and Hedli finally mention the way in which education isn’t sufficiently prioritized in these precarious

neighborhoods. Teens are often unmotivated by the general topics taught at school and often orient themselves towards “vocational sectors”- sales, accounting, electronics, hotel business, etc (Duprez 129).

The authors presented in this subsection clarify the inherent feeling of exclusion that the North-African community experiences, in terms of housing, education, and institutional racism. The conditions of the suburban areas are inherently unequal compared to wealthier metropolitan areas. The immigrant population has to face its alienation in every aspect of daily life. The labeling of housing projects as “sensitive zones,” or similar terms, only perpetuates the alienation as immigrants realize that they live in different areas with different obstacles. Obstacles ranging from the violent altercations with the police forces, to substandard schools leading to limited job perspectives.

B. Immigration & Deviance (delinquency)

Eric Fassin, a sociologist specializing in the study of contemporary racial politics, and author of *Immigrants and Delinquency*, focuses on the way in which immigrants in France are often perceived to be inherently prone to criminal behavior. Indeed, the article sheds light on the media’s recurrent portrayal of immigrants as socially deviant and its contribution to their exclusion from the rest of the native French population. The article begins with President Sarkozy’s accusatory remarks regarding immigrants, who, “due to their lack of integration, have become delinquents” (Fassin 1). The French president even went as far as to threaten to revoke French citizenship of any underage immigrants who indulged in any form of criminal behavior, a sort of sentencing that would never befall a native French (Fassin 2). Fassin then goes on to present other racist discourse that have been prescribed by influential men in French politics like

Eric Zemmour, who allegedly could “bet that amongst the statistics of under-age delinquents, between 90 and 95% must be Arabs or blacks” (Fassin 2). Others have even dared to impose an ultimatum “either be French, or a thug” (Fassin 3). Fassin chooses to focus on the work of another sociologist, Hugues Lagrange, who between 2006 and 2010, switched from describing delinquency as a form of response to discriminations, to depicting it as an inherent cultural flaw in immigrants. Lagrange used to actively defend the immigrant youth’s criminal behavior: “the use of fire indicates that they are trying to captivate attention [...] even if school fires are deliberate, schools are considered to be a place of inequality and frustration [...] similarly, the burning of cars appears to be a telegenic act to provide a sense of visibility to their anger” (Fassin 79). Four years later, Lagrange’s opinions had changed: “The issues [of delinquency] are not the signs of a revolt but the symptoms of an origin” (Fassin 80).

Stephane Beaud and Olivier Masclet, two sociologists, presented an analysis of the 2005 urban uprisings of the suburban youth. Their article “From the Marchers of 1983 to the rioters of 2005,” concentrates on the violent protests that occurred in Clichy-sous-bois, a poor suburb of Paris, in which young men of North-African descent engaged in violent protests, in response to the deaths of two teenagers attempting to escape a police pursuit. These acts of rebellion were immediately perceived to be acts of delinquency by the government. The home minister at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy, called them “scum”, other political personalities affirmed that these “teens are not defendable, they’re aggressive and violent” (Beaud 810). This article thus attempts to explain the reasons behind these acts of violence, reasons that will resonate with the poor conditions of the suburbs explored above.

The 2005 uprisings were rooted in anger, frustration, and a desire to be heard: “The teens that revolted in November 2005 wanted to manifest their presence in the public sphere, and gain what society was refusing them: the legitimate and to benefit from the same social and economic privileges” (Beaud 842). The angry youth was rebelling against multiple wrongs, the harassing presence of the police, was definitely one of the triggering factors: “We cannot neglect the responsibility of the police in the rise of urban violence, the harassment of the police allows the inhabitants of these neighborhoods to join against this institution perceived to be brutal and unjust” (Beaud 830). The youth’s relationship to education is also grounds for anger and rebellion: “They abandon their education because they go to schools that they consider to be “sub-schools”, that lead to undervalued diplomas, only offering low-paid professional perspectives” (Beaud 833). Beaud and Masclet perfectly draw the connection between this youth’s exclusion and their response anchored in violence. The teens’ confrontation to institutional racism, inadequate education and physical harassment from the police has led them to these “deviant” behaviors.

Our previous authors, Dominique Duprez and Mahieddine Hedli, also elaborated on the issue of delinquency and immigrants, and attempted to outline the economic reasons behind these deliberate infractions of the law. As was previously mentioned, young male immigrants in France have been branded as delinquents, but what the media has forgotten to ask, is *why*: Why do these teens fall into paths of deviance? Duprez and Hedli also attempt to address this concern. For them, one of the most obvious reasons stands in inadequate schooling, and unemployment. As the authors demonstrated in the previous section, kids fundamentally lack the motivation to educate themselves and thus follow vocational career paths that do not resonate as permanent

career choices: “they often follow paths in mechanics or electronics but without any personal conviction, they don’t see themselves doing these jobs in the future” (Duprez 132). What motivates instead, the authors suggest, are their personal projects, their dreams of building a business, opening up a store, a restaurant (Duprez 133). But of course to accomplish their goals, savings are necessary, and thus their resort to delinquency is explained by the need to generate capital: “Delinquency could be the starting point of a ‘savings account’, friends often shared the money they acquired illegally to save it for future projects” (Duprez 133).

What is to be retained from these authors’ work is the political significance of the acts of delinquency committed by these young North-African men. These deliberate infractions are not to be regarded in a superficial way. One needs to consider these acts as direct forms of rebellion against an unjust system. The lack of economic perspectives surely contributes to these men finding jobs outside of the “legal” sphere. Nevertheless, the ground of this social deviance is the anger and frustration generated by the injustice and constant marginalization that these men confront in their daily activities. Delinquency stems from the resentment of living in buildings that are unpleasant to look at and to live in; it stems from the anger generated by the violent treatment they receive from police officers, and from the dissatisfaction of their faulty education which traps them further into this biased system.

C. Immigrants and the French Identity

This last section will provide insight on the different perspectives under which French identity has been analyzed: the republican model of identity, and the varying opinions of the right and the left in dealing with immigrants and their place in French society. To evaluate the

significance of the republican model of identity, Graham Murray, ventures to assess the impact of Republican values on the immigrant population, in his article *France: The Riots and the Republic*. Murray describes French republican values as anachronistic and xeno-racist. Indeed, France's emphasis on the *indivisibility of the republic* has generated "an apparent unwillingness to acknowledge that modern France is multiracial and multicultural" (35). France's lack of recognition of ethnic groups stems from its desire to keep the republic united and intact, free of distinctions and discriminations. Nevertheless, as Murray points out, this had unwarranted effects on immigrants who thus had to "assimilate by embracing the culture, language and traditions of La Republique" (36). The ideal of the indivisible republic cannot be hindered by competing identities. France has firmly rejected Britain's model of multiculturalism: "the French declare proudly that their modèle d'integration is the antithesis of Britain's multicultural society [...] the term 'communautarisme' is routinely used to ascribe negative connotations to multiculturalism and their recognition that minority ethnic communities may have distinct identities [...] they will always strive for *assimilation*" (Murray 37).

The term assimilation is one that resonates strongly in the debates about immigration, but it isn't the only one. Francoise Gaspard, a French politician attempted to articulate the ways in which immigrants were asked to become part of this united republic, ways that vary of course, from right-wing parties, to the left. In her article "Assimilation, Insertion, Integration: The Words to Become French" she analyzes the impact of each of those words on the place that immigrants are supposed to occupy in France. In her opinion, the fact that there had been three different terms to describe the immigrant's endeavor of becoming French, isn't an innocent coincidence. Gaspard begins her analysis by pointing out that the term "assimilation", which

connotes the process of becoming similar, of being the same, hasn't been used in the discourses since the end of the 70's. Instead, new words had appeared - "insertion" for the socialists, and "integration" for the right. The socialist government of the 80's attempts to socially insert immigrants into the French society: "immigrants must be recognized in the social and economic life of France [...] insertion begins with literacy, education, formation, housing, social services, culture and information" (Gaspard 15). The goal of this method was to "respect individual identities while progressively reaching equal rights and opportunities" (Gaspard 15). In this respect, immigrants could allegedly "become French" by being a part of social, political and economic life. In the late 80's, discourses shifted again, and the term "insertion" lost its spotlight. As immigrants were not returning to their home country, the government thought that the recognition of individual identities might hinder the cohesion of the republic: "the right to be different now appears to be a danger to national unity" (Gaspard 21). Consequently, integration and assimilation, which targeted the adoption of French cultural values by immigrants, were now being used.

Lawrence Kritzman, an American scholar, also joins Murray in the critique of the French Republican values. In his article "Identity Crises: France, Culture, and the idea of the Nation" Kritzman provides an evaluation of the notion of universalism, inherent to the French Republic. Indeed, France presents itself to be a nation supported by the unity of its people in respecting and protecting the *universal* values of the Republic. The term universal, entails a sense of general acceptance of, and identification to, the French culture. In other words, French citizens, regardless of personal convictions or backgrounds, must blend into the universal "will" of the nation. Evidently, this theory presents a problem for immigrant populations, who, generally, do

not hold French values and culture, to be universal. The question therefore becomes, as Kritzman puts it, “How do we displace the orthodoxy of the universal in order to uncover a multiplicity of discrete and singular truths?” (8). In a simpler form, how does the French government acknowledge the existence of varying cultures and ethnicities in a constraining “universal” system? By attempting to promote the unique sense of homogeneity of the French nation, the government has created this “othering” category of foreigners, who fail to fit into the universal model. Kritzman specifies that the othering phenomenon even occurs to French citizens of North African background who have never traveled outside of France (16). The branding of the term “immigrant” of all individuals seeming to resist the “universal subconscious” of the French state, alienates entire communities of diversified backgrounds and traditions: “The ideology of homogenization and the artificial notions of authenticity, limit the very parameters of true diversity. We need to be able to analyze the multiple spaces of culture within and external to the nation so as to provoke a crisis in the representation of a unified national subject” (Kritzman 17).

The works of these three authors reveal how problematic the notion of the French identity is. On one side, the alleged indivisibility of the republic should serve as ground against any type of discriminatory practice. However, the side effects of this “united, free of differences” state, is that immigrants are not considered as individuals with different cultures, and different needs. The dilemma that arises lies between uniting the French citizenry, while at the same time, recognizing the diversity that it encompasses. What is expected of them constantly changes according to the political discourse of the moment. Sometimes immigrants are asked to participate economically and socially, other times, the demand is that they integrate fully to French values or even assimilate and completely let go of their traditions. Either way, the

political discourses are inherently unwelcoming to immigrants who lose track of where they should stand, and how they should identify themselves.

Case Study

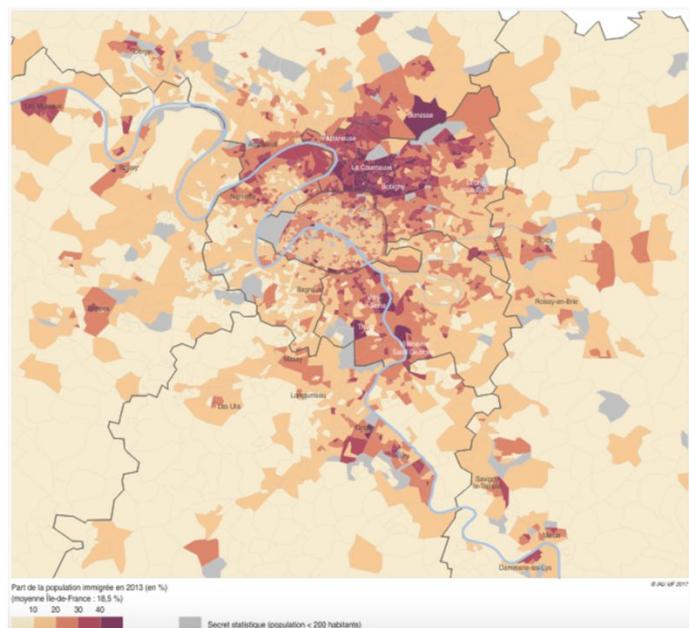
To accurately depict the source of the identity crisis in France, this case study will focus on the ways in which North-African immigrants residing in precarious suburbs have gradually felt excluded from the opportunities and privileges that native French citizens benefit from. To demonstrate these disparities, the case study will focus on the city of Paris and analyze how the resources and institutions found in vulnerable neighborhoods have alienated its residents. The examination of Paris will procure an average understanding of the geographical disposition of immigrants in major metropolitan areas in France. The study of Paris will also reflect the treatment of immigrants on a national scale. Three factors will be taken into consideration, the differences exhibited in the quality of schools, the diverging opportunities to find employment, and the significance of housing facilities. Evaluating these variables will evidently shed light as to how the conditions found in poor suburbs have precipitated an identity crisis for immigrants. Living in these areas has not only generated a feeling of exclusion for these immigrants but has also enticed a negative perception of them in the eyes of the native French.

Physical Exclusion

The database INSEE (Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques) offers statistical insight as to what kind of neighborhoods immigrants reside in metropolitan areas like Paris. Figure 1 below, shows the growing disparity between the percentages of immigrants living in Paris itself, and the ones residing in the suburbs to the north and the south. The variation of color signifies different percentages. Pale yellow represents less than 10% of

immigrants residing in these areas, light orange represents between 10 and 20%, dark orange, 20 to 30%, light purple, 30 to 40% and finally dark purple, 40% and above. As one can observe, the most striking colors are located beyond the Parisian city lines, in the northern and southern suburban areas, in Bobigny, La Courneuve, Creteil, etc. These numbers are evidently significant as they set the baseline for affirming that there is indeed a disparity between immigrants and native French citizens. This high concentration of immigrants in the periphery demonstrates an undeniable physical exclusion. Evidently, these statistics only constitute the surface of a deeper issue, which this case study will elucidate. Not only is there a high concentration of immigrants in certain suburbs, some exceeding 40%, but these areas also reveal themselves to be precarious and lacking resources in schooling, housing, and employment.

Figure 1



Education

To bring the focus to the unequal opportunities found in precarious suburbs, the evaluation of schools and education is fundamental. Understanding the learning environment of

North-African immigrant students will support the claim that their exclusion and alienation begins at an early age. Using the information presented on the map above, we will turn our attention to the conditions of schools found in the dark orange and purple areas. As these neighborhoods are considered to be economically vulnerable (i.e., unemployment, crime, lack of accessibility) most of the cities like Créteil, la Courneuve, or Bobigny represent what France calls “Z.E.Ps,” Zones of Educational Priority. As the name entails, these “zones” had been created by the government in the 1980’s to provide additional support to schools that encountered educational or social difficulties. According to France’s Ministry of Education, there are a total of 132 schools that fit the criteria for ZEP in the purple and orange areas shown in the map above, compared to only 30 in Paris (Ministere de l’Education Nationale).

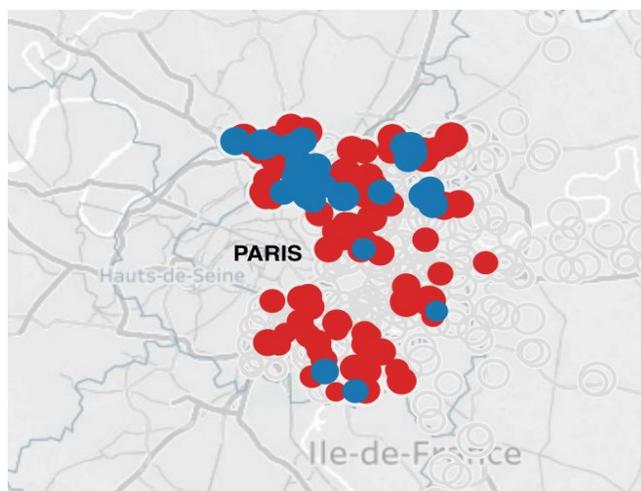


Figure 2

The Ministry of Education also provides a map (figure 2) of the Parisian region and highlights the locations of these ZEPs in blue and red dots.

Let us now demonstrate how exactly these educational priority zones play a role in the exclusion of these North-African students. In the early 2000’s, Patrick Simon, a sociologist focusing on ethnic discrimination, published a study in which he emphasized the percentages of

immigrant children found in ZEPs, at 22%, compared to the number of immigrants found in regular schools, 5% (49). Other researchers, like Gérard Chauveau, have even described this phenomenon as a social apartheid, where certain ZEPs are comprised of 80% or 90% of immigrant children. Moreover, Patrick Simon brings insight as to the type of injustices these children suffer from in these schools. Although created to substantiate the lack of educational progress, these schools have achieved the exact opposite aim. Children do not seem to be adequately guided towards stable career paths. Instead, most of these ZEPs seem to practice a form of “internal” segregation, in which children who are considered to be “disturbing” and “behind” are placed in other classrooms, classrooms that deviate from the official curriculum and offer less-valuable programs, mostly vocational (Simon 51). What’s also striking about these classrooms is that they are often filled with young men of Algerian and Moroccan descent (Simon 51). Indeed, the categorization of students as “good” or “bad” seems to be largely dependent on ethnicity. The alienation doesn’t stop here. These schools seem to have developed a negative image over the years and are often perceived to be “ghetto.” More parents have become reluctant to send their children to schools with low graduation rates and filled with immigrants (Simon 50). Avoiding these schools has also become a concern of teachers. These schools witness an internal instability as more and more teachers ask for their transfer (Chauveau 19). France’s well-known Republican model has also proven to impede immigrant children’s efforts to integrate and to feel welcomed in France. The alleged indivisibility of the Republic and the union of the people under a “higher” culture has prevented the ministry of education from granting additional attention to kids who were culturally distant from France (Van Zanten 353). The sociologist Agnes Van Zanten focuses primarily on how the reluctance of the government to

divide groups into ethnic origins has inhibited a stable learning path for immigrant children. Having a homogenous curriculum may not always work to the advantage of all children. The cultural and language gaps, as well as the poor socio-economic background of these children necessitated extra attention from teachers, which they often did not receive (Van Zanten 358). If immigrant children did experience different treatment, it was perhaps in a discriminatory way. As Simon pointed out, teachers often classify immigrant children as disturbing and insolent. Van Zanten acknowledges that factor as well and demonstrates how existing stereotypes have contributed to the exclusion of these students into “dustbin classes”, where teachers were often inexperienced and unmotivated (367).

Housing

We briefly touched upon the kind of neighborhoods in which immigrants reside in. The previous section mentioned that the concentration of immigrants in the northern suburbs like La Courneuve and Bobigny was in precarious areas. Jean-Louis Pan Ké Shon, a sociologist, reveals relevant statistics pertaining to the accumulation of immigrants into sensible zones of the Paris region. He first analyzes the number of immigrants in neighborhoods depending on their rate of unemployment. He divides the areas into five categories: Wealthy (1st and 2nd deciles), higher middle class (3rd and 4th deciles), middle class (5th and 6th deciles), modest (7th and 8th deciles), and poor (9th decile). In the wealthiest areas, the proportion of native French to immigrant residents is 25% to 8% . For the poorest neighborhoods, the numbers reveal that there are more than 40% of immigrants residing in high unemployment areas, compared to only 10% of native French citizens (3). The study also reveals the ethnic division of residents in urban sensible

zones, where public funding is low, and housing is degraded. The results are as follows: 36% of residents are native French citizens, compared to 64% of immigrants and children of immigrants. What exactly does that entail in terms of housing? In what kind of environment do these immigrants live? Claude Taffin, a statistical economist working for the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, focuses on the housing conditions specific to immigrants. Immigrants are, more often than not, living in overcrowded and deteriorated places. The numbers speak for themselves. Immigrant families, although bigger, possess on average 69 m² of apartment space, compared to 86.5 m² for French families, which contain fewer family members. Immigrant families are also prevalent in housing projects and comprise 48% of tenants (Taffin 64). Immigrants, and in particular, North-African families, are also more likely to live in substandard conditions. Here are the percentages Taffin presents to highlight the substandard living conditions of immigrant families: 17.4% of North-African families live without hot water, compared to 4.6% native French families; 20.1% live without toilet facilities in their apartment, while this is the case for only 6.3% of French families. Finally, 55.7% of North-African families live in overcrowded housing, compared to merely 9.7% of French families.

Jacques Barou, a researcher focused on migration, published a study pertaining to the insertion of immigrants through their housing conditions. By evaluating the type of housing immigrants were subjected to, Barou was able to analyze whether immigrants were able to connect to their host society, or to feel excluded from it. His article, published in 1989, presents the disparities faced by North-African populations as less likely to own their apartments or houses, living in overcrowded spaces, and lacking access to proper sanitary resources. The difference between a native French citizen and an immigrant is thus found in the type of housing

each one resides in. According to Barou, 23% of immigrants lived without toilets or showers in their apartments, compared to 12% of French people. Overcrowding percentages were also higher for immigrants 30.9%, than for native French citizens - 12.2%. Degraded living conditions like these do not entice a sense of belonging to a community, but rather one of exclusion.

For more recent findings, Yves Breem, a migration politics analyst, published a short study in 2006. Although the results did improve since the late 90's, immigrant populations are still subjected to lower quality housing. Compared to 20.5% of native French citizens, 52% of North-African communities live in overcrowded apartments. In terms of quality of housing, the percentages of satisfaction also vary from native French to immigrant populations: 65% of French citizens are well-satisfied with their homes, and only 2.9% find their living conditions unsatisfactory. Statistics for North-African communities are not far below, but the numbers are nevertheless, lower: 54.6% think their housing conditions are satisfactory, while 8% find them inadequate.

Employment

Finally, the last variable that I evaluated for this case study pertains to the discrimination that most immigrants from sensible neighborhoods endure while searching for employment. Although discriminatory practices are illegal in the French constitution, there is evidence that young men residing in the precarious suburbs of Paris were not always considered to be reliable candidates for employers. Roxane Silberman, a sociologist, observed the increasing number of unemployed North-African men from 1975 to 1990. In 1975, the percentages varied between 9%

and 15%. In 1982, between 19% and 34% of Algerian or Moroccan men were unemployed. The percentages then escalated in 1990, to 45%. Silberman goes on to highlight the reasons behind such difficulties, namely the cumulation of obstacles that these men had to encounter during their youth and at the beginning of their adult lives. The inadequate education they received evidently restricts the type of careers these men could pursue. The geographical distance separating certain suburbs from the center of cities also imposes limits to the physical mobility of these men. The social origin of this population therefore proves to be a determining factor in their attempt to find employment.

Studies were conducted to test this phenomenon, two of which will be presented for this case study. Both investigations place their focus on one of two variables: the effects of the place of residency in applying for a position, as well as the impact of “foreign sounding names” on candidates’ CVs. The first study published by the *Economics and Statistics Journal* of the INSEE in 2016, organized a “testing,” in which the researchers created twelve fictional candidates, amongst 3,684 applications, for a job in computer science in the Parisian region. The candidates resided in one of three suburbs: Enghien-Les-Bains, a wealthy area with high income, low unemployment and higher education rates; Villiers-Le-Bel, and Sarcelles, considered to be disadvantaged neighborhoods in terms of income and employment and where 60% of residents live in urban sensible zones. Villiers-Le-bel is also notorious as it was a place where urban riots emerged in 2007. There were four candidates per suburbs, men and women, two of which had French sounding names and two others with North-African names. The researchers also chose computer science field for a specific reason, as it is considered to be an “under pressure” career, where the rates of opened positions are higher, and where employers are less inclined to reject

applications or to discriminate. The applications were all similar, all applicants had bachelors and master's degrees and lived at equal distance from the job situated in center-Paris. Overall, 52% of applicants had a positive response, which was an expected result due to the lack of IT filled positions in Paris. However, there were still evidence of discrimination against North-African applicants residing in precarious neighborhoods. For example, 22.1% of French women applicants residing in Sarcelles received a positive response compared to 13.7% of North-African women. North-African men and women residing in Villiers-Le-bel also experienced more negative responses: Only 17.3% of men and 15% of women were retained by employers compared to 18.6% and 17.9% for French men and women.

The second study published by the Center of Economic Political Studies of the Evry university in Paris also focused on the effects of the place of residence as well as the origin of applicants. The researchers created 16 fictional profiles amongst 1,097 applications for two positions in accounting; one that was well paid and the other low-paid. In each category there were four applicants with North-African sounding names, either French or Moroccan by nationality, two applicants with North-African last names and French first names, and two applicants with French sounding first and last names. Half of the applicants resided in wealthy suburban towns like Nogent-sur-Marne, and half were residents of precarious suburbs like Bobigny. Researchers then sent out 1,097 applications to 139 job offers in the Parisian region. Overall, only 3% of applications were retained by employers. Out of the 274 Moroccan applicants, only 0.4% received positive responses, compared to 7.3% of the 275 French applicants. Researchers also cumulated the effects of nationality, first name and last name, and found out that if candidates changed their names to French ones and their nationality to France,

the rate of positive responses from employers would rise to 7% for all candidates. Concerning the place of residency, the results did not seem significant, as there was overall a 0.34% difference in the rate of successful applicants from wealthy suburbs and poor areas.

Although reaching different results in the type of discrimination endured, the two studies demonstrate the inherent difficulties presented by either the place of residence, or the North-African sounding names. The studies accurately depict the favoritism attributed to either native French candidates or to applicants of wealthier backgrounds.

Analysis

This section will analyze the consequences of housing, education, and employment in the lives of North-African immigrants and will provide answers to the question of how the socio-economic conditions of precarious suburbs constitute the foundation for an identity crisis. How do these immigrant men and women, sometimes also born and raised in France, come to find a place in a society that excludes them? How do they construct their identity in relation to an environment that is often hostile to them? Sociologists have attempted to provide guidelines to better understand how immigrants construct their sense of self based on the social interactions they experience. Most of the time, the attitude of native French citizens constitutes a primary foundation in the construction of ethnic identities. Immigrant communities will form their identity based on the way in which the host society welcomes them (Camilleri 60). This is evident in the case of immigrants residing in poor suburbs around the Parisian metropole, who have built their identities in relation to the treatment they received from French people and institutions.

A. Precarious suburbs – Prescribed identities

The case study section of this thesis demonstrated the prevalence of immigrants in precarious suburbs, as well as the high percentage of immigrant students in low-quality schools, the poor conditions of housing facilities, and evidence of discriminatory practices of employers towards North-African men and women. The summation of these factors points towards a systemic exclusion of immigrants which ultimately generates a feeling of not belonging, and of not being accepted by the host society. Their seclusion into poor neighborhoods, their lack of education, and their struggles to find stable employment, exemplify the unequal treatment immigrants receive from French institutions, and the inherent disparities they suffer by lacking the same benefits and privileges as native French citizens living in all white neighborhoods.

The accumulation of immigrants and their children in the vulnerable suburbs of Paris has generated a negative image of them in the eyes of native French citizens. French-Algerian men and women often have to confront the “assigned identity” they received from native French people. Indeed, it is often the case that men and women from precarious suburbs like Bobigny, and Aubervilliers, are branded as poor, uneducated, and sometimes as criminals (Camilleri 116). The stereotypes generated from their living conditions causes a hinge between native French citizens living in metropolitan areas and immigrants residing in the outskirts of cities. The physical distance that separates the two groups causes immigrants to not fully be accepted as French citizens. The term “othering” fits well in this situation. Immigrants living in precarious suburbs are often confined to the “foreigners” box. Although a high percentage of immigrants are French citizens, their “Frenchness” is still immensely questioned, based on the immigrants looks, skin color, accents, surnames, etc (Simon 14).

B. Identity Strategies

a. A return to North-African roots.

Facing this two- fold exclusion from French citizens, firstly, in terms of territorial distance, secondly, in regard to their “assigned identities” immigrants find themselves unable to identify with their host society. Consequently, North-African men and women experience a return to their original traditions. Their exclusion into immigrant dominant neighborhoods generates an inevitable preservation and affirmation of the culture of origin. As their neighborhoods often comprise of other immigrants, with similar traditions and practices, North-Africans will try to affirm their identity by belonging exclusively to this community. If immigrants cannot fully belong to France and its people, they find refuge in the culture that they feel welcomed in, and that doesn’t exclude them. They thus build an identity “by distinction” or “opposition,” following the logic that if they are continuously branded as “foreigners,” they have to remain that way and distance themselves from the French culture (Camilleri 90). Even if some of them were born in France and have no direct ties to their North-African roots, they will attempt to preserve this distant origin by speaking Arabic, eating traditional meals, or upholding Islamic traditions (Camilleri 63). This phenomenon could also be described as a kind of internalization of the prescribed identity. If North-Africans are branded as foreigners, and differentiated from native French citizens, they will, consciously or unconsciously, accept this identity and affirm themselves as immigrants, as not belonging, and alienate themselves from the French identity. Multiple interviews have been conducted with immigrant youths living in these suburbs and similar responses resonated: “I don’t feel French because at my house, my parents don’t speak French, or don’t cook French meals [...] we (immigrants) are all grouped together,

so we can't feel French" (Infrarouge 2016). There are evidently no real prospects for integration as immigrants can only maintain social relations with individuals of similar backgrounds. A French politician, Fadela Amara, who grew up in these precarious neighborhoods, illustrates the case of her father, who immigrated to a suburb filled with other Algerian families, and who was unable to adapt to French customs as he was never confronted with them (16). This phenomenon nevertheless creates a scenario for an identity crisis as immigrants find themselves stuck between the official culture of France, and the personal traditional culture they uphold at home. Being confronted with both French institutions in their daily lives and Algerian values in their personal households, North-Africans experience a crisis by being conflicted between opposing cultures. They belong to two worlds but also to none. They have to be French when they go to French schools and interact with French institutions, but their inherent exclusion from equal opportunities pushes them towards their Arab heritage, which only exists within the four walls of their apartment.

b. Hostile environment – Hostile response

Concerning the degraded housing, the inadequate schooling and the limited job perspectives, immigrants come to perceive these inequalities as signs that the French government has no intention of supporting them. The only interactions that immigrants maintain with the French society can be described as hostile and discriminatory. At school, their teachers have biased approaches because of the existing stereotypes and the prescribed identities that were mentioned previously. North-African kids are therefore already branded as disturbing, insolent, and placed in sub-standard classrooms, unable to benefit from an adequate education that will lead to better job prospects. At a very early age, these children realize their difference and the

negative characteristics that have been attributed to them. Before being able to prove their worth, these students are already left aside, excluded. Already the identity crisis forms, as these youngsters discover that they are not offered the same opportunities as native French students.

The struggle continues after high school where job opportunities are scarce, and evidence of discrimination discourages North-Africans men from pursuing “legitimate” activities. Falling into a path of delinquency is a common trajectory for men in these neighborhoods as there are sometimes no alternate ways to gain stable income. One must remember that unemployment rates are high in the neighborhoods where these immigrants reside, and that statistically, the chances of finding a job after having obtained undervalued diplomas from schools with faulty reputations, are low. The case study demonstrated how job applicants from poor suburbs are avoided by employers because of the stereotypes and reputation of these neighborhoods. The world outside these suburbs has already constructed a negative image of these areas and their inhabitants. The struggle for immigrants lies thus in this attempt of constructing a notion of self despite the prescribed identities, but also in response to their hostile environment. How do they create their identity based on their exclusion from society but also despite the boxes they have been confined in?

Sometimes, escaping the prescribed identities isn't an easy task. The socio-economic conditions of these vulnerable suburbs become barriers in the attempt of existing beyond the stereotypes. How can one avoid the image of the poor, uneducated, delinquent immigrant, when poverty, inadequate schooling, and crime are immutable realities of their lives? Growing up in these neighborhoods excluded and marginalized, North-Africans either gradually fall into the prescribed identities, without consciously desiring it, or find them themselves accepting and

claiming these stereotypes as their sense of self. As the works of Eric Fassin, Stephane Beaud, and Dominique Duprez illustrate, the criminal activities that immigrants fall into is often a choice made in response to their hostile environment. The factors found in the case study present further evidence and understanding of *why* the anger and despair of these immigrants translates into crime. Existing through the stereotypes of the “criminal” or “delinquent” is either a response to the lack of legal economic opportunities or a consequence of the mental frustration of feeling isolated and stigmatized. The identity crisis thus also encompasses the inevitability of being confined to conceptions of selves that were not *endogenously created, but rather socially imposed*. These immigrants do not seem to have choice in deciding who they are. They live in circumstances that force upon them a certain way of life that they cannot seem to escape. If their place of residence constitutes a hostile environment, not equipped to foster their education and careers, they are bound to fall down the pit of imprisoning stereotypes, which then contributes even more to their isolation and their depiction as “others.”

Conclusion

Immigrants living in the precarious suburbs of the Paris region are confronted with injustices that native French citizens do not have to face. Since childhood, they are confined to schools with low rates of graduation, inexperienced staff, and substandard education. They pursue educational programs that are mostly vocational, thus leading to under-valued diplomas and very limited job prospects. Their homes tend to be in worse conditions than those of native French citizens, in terms of overcrowding, inadequate plumbing, and heating. Immigrants also face forms of institutional discrimination and racism coming from teachers, employers, or police forces. The summation of these factors leads to an inevitable sensation of

rejection, and of not belonging. The vulnerable neighborhoods these immigrants reside in constitute a two-fold crisis. The first pertains to the native French citizens' image of the suburbs, and thus of those who reside in them. Indeed, due to the poor living conditions, the high rates of unemployment, and the "second-class" schools, immigrants living in these areas are perceived negatively. The stereotype of the poor, criminal, unemployed immigrant leads to a rejection of the North-Africans' "frenchness." Immigrants living in these suburbs are not considered to be part of the national fabric. Though most of them were born and raised on French soil, their belonging to the nation is constantly questioned and doubted. They are the "others," they are not "us." The second crisis occurs when immigrants realize their exclusion, and thus attempt to create a sense of self in response to the obstacles of the prescribed identities and their hostile environment. Realizing that they are not welcome in France, and that their living conditions are sub-standard and unjust, immigrants will respond by opposing themselves to French culture and reconnecting with their North-African roots. As the suburbs are mostly filled with immigrants of similar backgrounds, maintaining Algerian or Moroccan traditions is a relatively accessible task. Eating North-African meals, speaking Arabic at home, and upholding Islamic traditions thus become ways of identifying and belonging to a community. Furthermore, the second stage of the identity crisis also comprises of the inevitable fall into the prescribed identities. The case study's demonstration of the substandard socio-economic conditions of the Parisian suburbs provides an explanation for the aggression and criminality of which immigrants are often accused. The marginalization and discrimination that they endure generates anger and frustration that can only be expressed in physically violent ways. The 2005 riots that were introduced by Eric Fassin in

the literature review are nothing but the consequences of years of inadequate schooling, degraded households, and institutional discrimination.

A vicious cycle is thus created. On one end, the suburbs' negative image reflects badly on its residents who are thus marginalized and branded as "others." On the other end, the poor socio-economic conditions of these suburbs make it almost impossible for immigrants not to internalize the stereotypes and claim the prescribed identities as their own. How can one escape the image of the poor, unemployed, criminal, if one has not received a proper education that would lead to a stable career, and thus an avoidance of criminal activities? How can society expect these men to lead stable and regular lives when they have been excluded from the opportunities that native French citizens enjoy? Immigrants are thus confined to identities that they never chose. Their place of residence constitutes the ground for an exclusion that impacts every aspect of their lives and from which they can never truly escape. Being at the mercy of their environment and surroundings, these immigrants are confined to identities they never created on their own, but that were imposed upon them because of their place of residence.

This analysis has brought to light the element of responsibility that the French state holds in welcoming and allocating its immigrant population. Further research should concentrate on the means through which this identity crisis could be eradicated. The native French citizens need to understand that if they wish to see immigrants fully integrated into their nation, it is their responsibility to adequately offer them equal opportunities so that their flourishing as individuals might not be hindered by discrimination, marginalization, and injustice. If the suburbs constitute the foundation for the crisis, further investigations should exclusively focus on ways to remediate the degrading socio-economic conditions of these areas. No citizen or resident

should feel imprisoned by his conditions, and hence be unable to evolve without being confronted with the inescapable impositions of the prescribed identities. This identity crisis calls into question the very pillars of the French republic that deems itself united and free of differences. The French government prides itself in never distinguishing between races, cultures, and religions, but this analysis has provided direct evidence that it does. The fact that entire immigrant communities, sometimes comprised of French citizens, live in secluded areas, with inferior schools, degraded housing, and limited access to employment proves to be in contradiction with the first article of the French constitution. The values of the French State need to be reevaluated with the utmost urgency.

This past summer, the French assembly voted to amend the first article of the constitution by erasing the word “race.” Debates have been unravelling since 2013 when President Hollande had introduced this possible change. The justification of such an amendment stems from an attempt to affirm the scientific fact that races do not exist; only the singular human race can encompass the diverse ethnicities of individuals. The French state therefore made an attempt to align itself with scientific claims, and to proclaim the “political correctness” of the French constitution. Critics nevertheless affirm that this move was far from being the rationally “correct” one. Although originating from a noble thought, the erasure of the term “race” will not eradicate the prevalent forms of racism that still exist in France. Changing the words will not change reality and will not change the fact that racism still impedes individuals’ chance to flourish in society, and that while race is not a biologically supported construct, it is a very relevant ethnic and cultural construct. The fact that darker skin does not entail biological signs of inferiority does not mean that darker skinned individuals will not suffer from

discrimination and persecution. The difference between ideology and biology is crucial. Scientifically, races do not exist, but ideologically, and socially, they very well do. Racism exists not because people deny biological findings, but because they perceive individuals of different skin colors to have different characteristics. The plausible consequences of such a retraction can only lead to loopholes in discriminatory practices. If racism is not condemned by the constitutions how will individuals be protected against it?

France must try harder and must do better. Taking away the legal protection against racist practices will not solidify the bonds between citizens, on the contrary. The prospect of a reunification of the French citizenry should provide legitimate protection and recognition to all citizens, regardless of *race, origin, religion, or place of residence*. Let all French citizens feel like they belong to their republic and let none be excluded from the promises of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

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