

Thus the economic, social, and racial causes of the November 2005 uprising are directly reflective of the burgeoning diversity of France's population—and the refusal to recognize the implications of this pluralistic demographic shift for the discursive articulation of a wider, more inclusive vision of *francité*. In other words, given the failure of the French political powers to integrate their Muslim and black populations into the larger framework of the French economy and culture, the resulting sociocultural fractures engendered in their turn the deep-seated but unacknowledged racism that is the double marker both of the so-called *français de souche* and of the minority populations of colour of the 'cités', caught, as they all are, within the double bind of exclusion and *intégrisme* that constitutes the national framework of which they are legally citizens. In a recent work, Evelyne Ribert acknowledges the pressing nature of this French conundrum of (non-)belonging; she frames the challenge as 'l'intégration des jeunes issus de l'immigration en France', and points to 'la faible identification apparente des jeunes à la nation française' while pinpointing the twin tensions of 'une allégeance étrangère et un sentiment communautaire' on the one hand, and 'des troubles identitaires' on the other. Ultimately, the nation must contend with this paradox of self-definition, one that can be framed thus: 'Citoyen français et d'origine étrangère: comment cela peut-il se concevoir? Il y a là une contradiction dans les termes.'<sup>17</sup> From this perspective, as France's universalist self-fashioning is increasingly disturbed by the perceived ethnic and cultural contradictions of migration in a globalizing world, the construction of a discursive framework that would encompass the intersecting ethnic and

---

<sup>17</sup> Evelyne Ribert, *Liberté, égalité, carte d'identité: les jeunes issus de l'immigration et l'appartenance nationale* (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2006), pp.25, 28; emphasis in the original.

cultural axes of metropole and periphery is an issue of ever-increasing urgency.

Over the long term, then, while French colonialism's praxis of assimilation and universalist integration were part and parcel of its national discourse and its accompanying *mission civilisatrice* long before the advent of overseas departmentalization in 1946, the threat posed by the 'foreign' ethnic presence engendered by this last clearly has long been perceived as one capable of dissolving the putative traditional and intrinsic uniformity both of the nation-state and its people. The carving out of public positions on such issues reflects perhaps public awareness and concern at the increasing numbers of immigrants being absorbed by France since the turn of the century, and extends as far back as the 1930s and beyond, as the following quote from Georges Mauco makes clear: 'the influence of foreigners [...] manifests itself especially as the opposite of [that] [...] which characterizes the French people.'<sup>18</sup> The material realities of departmentalization, not to mention its implicit articulation of demographic difference and dislocation resulting from the growing migrant presence on the mainland, would simultaneously challenge and subvert the layout of the French national landscape, unveiling national attitudes that would reinforce both the fictive and narrow character of a presumed French ethnic and cultural identity and the conclusion that, ultimately, nations and peoples are constructed through the forgetting of difference and the acceptance of an exclusionary, strategically adopted sameness.

The paradoxical presence of these expressions of ethnic otherness on the French mainland—together embodying a simulacrum of Frenchness that was, *pace* Bhabha's well-known

---

<sup>18</sup> Georges Mauco, *Les Etrangers en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1932), p. 558.

phrase, 'almost the same but not quite'<sup>19</sup>—would work ineluctably to maintain its separateness from the larger whole as a result of practical divergences in cultural, historical, and political experience. The mid-to-late 1990s saw the promulgation of increasingly restrictive laws regarding immigration and settlement, all betraying a growing tendency to perceive Frenchness and belonging through the superficialities and stereotypes of race. One might begin, perhaps, with the Pasqua laws of 1986 and 1993; the first made it easier to expel foreigners and restricted the process of naturalization by marriage. The second Pasqua law (22 July 1993, revised 24 August 1993) extended to two years the waiting period for a foreign spouse to gain French nationality by marrying a French citizen. Further, children of foreign nationals born in France were no longer automatically entitled to French citizenship; they were now required to express the desire to acquire French nationality. The same restrictions now also applied to children born in France to French nationals who were themselves born in formerly French territories. Although the term xenophobia might not strictly apply here, it was becoming increasingly clear that the category of Frenchness—and the terms and conditions defining it and allowing subjects to qualify for it—was rapidly and inexorably narrowing.

This wide range of restrictions underwent even further tightening as a result of ongoing legal developments; more specifically, by the *loi Debré* (Debré law) of 1997. October 1996 saw the first reading of this law, a bill aimed at restricting the right of immigrants to stay in France regardless of their length of residence. Through its sponsorship of such xenophobically tinged legislation, the 'Republican' right-wing government gave incontrovertible evidence of the extent to which race-based

perceptions and definitions of *francité* had entered the political mainstream. On 26 March 1997, this new French immigration law was approved by Parliament. In his announcement, French interior minister Debré said that the new law and related new integration measures made it clear that France welcomed legal immigrants while adopting a tougher policy toward illegal immigrants. But the law, and its socio-legal ramifications, were certainly not without controversy; indeed, in a certain way, the subsequent passage of the *loi Guigou* (4 March 1998) soon thereafter both acknowledged the divisiveness its predecessor had caused and placed the issue in some perspective, since it restored the right of foreigners' offspring who were born and had lived continuously in France to gain French citizenship.

Yet neither interest in nor the controversy surrounding these issues of belonging has abated in contemporary France. In late 2005, for example, a challenge to the venerable *droit du sol* was promulgated by none other than François Baroin, the French Minister for Overseas Territories. Baroin claimed that this centuries-old right to claim French citizenship was being taken advantage of, if not subverted and undermined, by what amounted to a 'crisis' of illegal immigration in French overseas departments. In particular, he singled out the 'relatively wealthy' territories of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Mayotte, in the Indian Ocean, as increasingly subject to plans and plots involving false claims of French paternity hatched by pregnant women from neighbouring territories, with the aim of securing a raft of French social benefits such as social security and healthcare, along with citizenship for their children.<sup>20</sup> It is not without significance that the apparent

<sup>19</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> See 'End right to citizenship by birth, says French minister', *The Guardian*, 21 September 2005. Please note: most of the newspaper/magazine sources (*The Guardian*, *L'Humanité*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*) for this article were accessed via the internet, and are thus given without pagination.

scapegoats in this international scheme to undermine the presumed purity of *francité* were once again the inhabitants of the DOMs, and here, in a sense, the argument comes full circle; having diluted, if not polluted the discourse as well as the materiality of French subjectivity in the past, i.e. having taken advantage of the right of free entry to the metropole afforded by the 1946 departmentalization law, these 'outsiders' (or *immigrés*, as we recall all such people are to the French) now were implicitly facilitating the expropriation of French rights and privileges by any means possible, up to and including conniving at such schemes to benefit illegal aliens.

From this perspective, the ongoing patterns of difference, fragmentation and exclusion within the metropole itself reflect the conjoining of transnational movement and postcolonialism into a multifaceted paradigm encompassing the shift from the simple singularities of *intégrisme* to complex new ethnocultural patterns and pluralisms; the shifts they denote in identity formation and allegiance, and in the sociopolitical frameworks and enunciative strategies that engage and articulate them, engender an alternative set of discursive norms through which the French nation is now to be described and defined. Given the heightened attention now being paid to the category of the *immigré*, particularly since in France the term is used to refer not only to those residents who have migrated from another country, but also to those who might have lived in the metropole for generations with ethnic origins in France's ex-colonies in Africa and the overseas departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique, the previously stable nationalist categories of 'France' and 'Frenchness,' and of the term 'postcolonial' as it applies to the nation, its subjects who are *de souche* and its relationship with its others both within the Hexagon and drawn from and residing overseas, must undergo radical and sweeping change.

One way to view the intractability of this challenge is to recall

that France is shaped by a secular ideal that refuses to recognize ethnic and religious differences in the public domain. Yet, at the same time, it may be difficult for some to acknowledge that this implicit fissuring and segregation of the country along ethnic lines has clear origins in the social engineering at work in France's not-so-distant colonial past; indeed, some of these strategies of control were quite visible in several means used to combat the November 2005 uprising, their re-animation amounting to a tacit admission on the part of the powers that be of the implicit prism of colonial 'otherness' and unbelonging through which many of the rioters, and the socio-ethnic subgroups from which they were drawn, were perceived both by politicians and by the public at large. Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin's announcement of a 'state of emergency' across more than a quarter of the nation's territory some weeks into the crisis granted prefects the right to establish curfews within their regions and the interior minister the power to close public spaces and order house arrests and press censorship; even more important, however, was the fact that such powers derived almost *in toto* from an April 1955 law crafted to cut off material support for the nascent Algerian war of independence. While such repressive policies of social control were characteristic of the colonial era, their tacit transfer to the Hexagon as a way to keep the citizenry in check speaks volumes regarding the troubling tensions undergirding France's sub/urban spaces.

In yet another legal confrontation, these unspoken tensions, and the unacknowledged, unaddressed colonial traces that lay at their core but remained veiled by this wall of silence, would culminate in the contested, controversial Law of 23 February 2005. In this remarkable legal document, Article 1 states that the French government 'exprime sa reconnaissance aux femmes et aux hommes qui ont participé à l'œuvre accomplie par la France dans les anciens départements français d'Algérie, au Maroc, en Tunisie et en Indochine ainsi que dans les territoires placés antérieurement

sous la souveraineté française'; and Article 4 goes even further, insisting that '[l]es programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l'histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l'armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit'.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, while there was little debate in the *Assemblée Nationale* on the law's implicit resonances and ramifications, its very existence was considered by left-leaning scholars, writers and activists in the metropole and in the former colonies at large as a tacit, if not an overt denial of the racist crimes of colonialism. It elicited national and international protests and accusations of historical revisionism until its repeal at the beginning of 2006 by President Jacques Chirac, who had declared on 9 December 2005 that 'ce n'est pas à la loi d'écrire l'histoire', adding that 'dans la République il n'y a pas d'histoire officielle'.<sup>22</sup> Support for the law was decried as a resurgence of the so-called 'colonial lobby', and more than a thousand professors and thesis students signed the petition 'Colonization: No to the teaching of an official history' in April 2005. As an act of simultaneous historical erasure and national self-justification, the links between the implicit affirmation of the historical rectitude of colonial domination and the social domination and exclusion of colonial descendants inhabiting today's metropole were made clear. If, as historians like Benjamin Stora have pointed out, colonialism is a major *lieu de mémoire* that increasingly influences the ways in which various communities and the nation itself represent themselves, then any

<sup>21</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 24 February 2005, Loi no. 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.

<sup>22</sup> See 'Les principales prises de position (concernant la loi du 23 février)', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 26 January 2006.

act that envisages 'la valorisation d'une mémoire sur une autre' risks eliciting 'une fragmentation de la mémoire nationale collective', providing a chilling concatenation and confirmation of the axes of power and enunciation as already articulated by Stuart Hall.<sup>23</sup>

The knock-on effect of the law and the riots on the former colonies and the DOMs was both predictable and not long in coming. For example, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, president of Algeria, refused to sign an envisioned treaty of friendship with France because of this law. On 26 June 2005, he declared that the law 'représente une cécité mentale confinant au négationnisme et au révisionnisme'.<sup>24</sup> When Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy, (in)famous for his 'racaille' remark during the uprising in the *banlieues*, announced a brief visit to Martinique in late 2005, a cursory nod to the existence of the DOMs that always came ahead of an expected presidential bid, a number of things happened. First, elder statesman Aimé Césaire, on whom every visiting dignitary made sure to pay a courtesy call, announced *avant la lettre* that if Sarkozy landed at Fort-de France, he would not meet with him. Public reaction also included a discursive outburst from *domien* intellectuals; in an open letter to Sarkozy in the newspaper *Libération*, entitled 'De Loin', Martiniquan authors Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau mounted an excoriating and eviscerating attack, steeped in the differential experience(s) of colonial history and aimed at the blindness of the neocolonial policies and attitudes still extant in France, which were, they claimed, what allowed such a law to be debated and promulgated at all:

<sup>23</sup> See Benjamin Stora, 'Début d'une dangereuse guerre des mémoires', *L'Humanité*, 6 December 2005.

<sup>24</sup> See 'Les principales prises de position'.

La Martinique est une vieille terre d'esclavage, de colonisation, et de néo-colonisation. Mais cette interminable douleur est un maître précieux: elle nous a enseigné l'échange et le partage [...]. Il n'est pas concevable qu'une Nation se renferme aujourd'hui dans des étroitesse identitaires telles que cette Nation en soit amenée à ignorer ce qui fait la communauté actuelle du monde [...]. Il n'est pas concevable qu'une telle Nation ait proposé par une loi (ou imposé) des orientations d'enseignement dans ses établissements scolaires, comme aurait fait le premier régime autoritaire venu, et que ces orientations visent tout simplement à masquer ses responsabilités dans une entreprise (la colonisation) qui lui a profité en tout, et qui est de toutes manières irrévocablement condamnable [...]. Une politique d'intégration (en France) ou une politique communautariste [en Angleterre] [...] dans les deux cas, les communautés d'immigrants, abandonnées sans ressources dans des ghettos invivables, ne disposent d'aucun moyen réel de participer à la vie de leur pays d'accueil, et ne peuvent participer de leurs cultures d'origine que de manière tronquée, méfiante, passive [...]. Aucun des choix gouvernementaux ne propose une véritable politique de la Relation: l'acceptation franche des différences [...].<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See 'Lettre ouverte au Ministre de l'Intérieur de la République Française, à l'occasion de sa visite en Martinique', *Libération*, 7 December 2005.

Sarkozy cancelled his visit, but more to the point, the separate inscription in *francité* of the inhabitants of the DOMs, both at home and in the Hexagon, was affirmed and reinforced, in an intervention whose implications underscored the critical role of identity's plural possibilities in the national *schéma*.

The challenge of self-representation posed by these new communities continues to engender increasingly complex theoretical and fictional discourses, exploring and expanding principles of marginalization, fragmentation, otherness and in-betweenness that undermine, in their turn, traditional metropolitan descriptions and definitions of identity, belonging, and discursive praxis framed in purely nationalist terms. But if we are to succeed in reading France differently, as Dominic Thomas proposes in *Black France*, such a reading must integrate the 'collective memory of those people for whom the Hexagon now represents *home*'; in so doing, an alternative set of issues comes to the fore, ones that place colonialism front and centre:

A study of 'Black' France inevitably finds itself at the intersection of these issues, since to explore France from such a perspective is to embark on a journey across the arbitrary lines of demarcation that distinguish the colony from the postcolony and the colonial from the postcolonial period, in order to engage with immigration and identity politics, and to question the origins of the French Republic and challenges to its foundational principles (such as the headscarf and veil affairs).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 2; emphasis in the original.

Finally, if, as seems inescapable, we conclude that France is a nation that has consistently problematized its ethnically distinct others, its burgeoning migrant and minority populations increasingly form new classes and categories of Frenchness whose multiple intersections and transformational interactions with the French social whole can potentially usher in a new, Francophone transnational space of hybridity and renewal.

**H. Adlai Murdoch,**  
**University of Illinois at Urbana-  
Champaign**

## **Understanding the French Riots of 2005: What historical context for the 'crise des banlieues'?**

### **Introduction**

In November 2005, when young people were rioting nightly in nearly 300 French towns and cities, the press in France and abroad was filled with alarmist predictions about the collapse of French society, the failures of French political institutions, and the imminent demise of an identifiably 'European' French culture.<sup>1</sup> Seen now, in the aftermath of Nicolas Sarkozy's election as the sixth president of the Fifth Republic in May 2007, the riots have receded to the margins of public discussion.<sup>2</sup> During the campaign, the candidates used tactical references to the unrest in 2005 to score points against one another, but there was little substantive discussion or even disagreement expressed between the more conservative Sarkozy and his socialist opponent, Ségolène Royal. Sarkozy, who as Minister of the Interior called himself France's 'First Cop', cast himself as the first line of defence against what he called the 'scum' in the streets, and in so doing was able to poach

---

<sup>1</sup> Anyone familiar with the historical literature on social revolt, in works by historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, Charles Tilly and Georges Rudé, will recognize the stakes in choosing to use the word 'riot' to describe the events of 2005 in France. Because press reports often use the word 'riot' within accounts that minimize the political content of these moments of urban violence, some critics have sought to avoid the term. I have chosen to retain it as the most convenient translation of the French 'émeute', which connotes a spontaneous and unorganized popular uprising. I hope it is clear by the following analysis, however, that by using this word I do not mean to imply that such moments of protest are simply nihilistic expressions of asocial rage, without a political coherence of their own.

<sup>2</sup> On the fore-ordained nature of the presidential election and its relation to depictions of the French 'crisis' see, for example, William Pfaff, 'In Sarkoland', *The New York Review of Books*, 14 June 2007, pp. 34-39.

votes from the right-wing extremist, Jean-Marie Le Pen. Royal, more surprisingly, took a similarly harsh line, calling for young 'delinquents' to be sent to military-style boot camps where they would learn the self-control necessary to become productive members of society. More than a few commentators have attributed Sarkozy's victory to the fact that this tough stance seemed more plausible when embodied by a young and (self-consciously) virile man of the right instead of a young and (self-consciously) photogenic woman of the left. The fact that the riots of 2005 were so quickly relegated to a minor paragraph in a longer narrative about the election of a new president stands in stark contrast to the atmosphere of anxiety and discomfort expressed in public comments about the riots while they were taking place. In the space of eighteen months, an outbreak of violence—that many thought might bring down the government, spark a race war, or worse—was now rendered as a simple background element in a different story about one politician and his confident new government.<sup>3</sup>

The quickness with which the most alarmist interpretations of the riots of 2005 receded might have something to do with the fact that the riots themselves were never seen as particularly mysterious. Here again, the storyline was simple. Take one western European nation whose social welfare spending since the Second World War has increasingly and disproportionately benefited the prosperous middle class, males, public sector employees and the elderly at the expense of the young, females, the unemployed and the unskilled.<sup>4</sup> Mix in a long history of racial

<sup>3</sup> Some alarmists have not conceded so easily, however. See, for example, Walter Laqueur, 'So Much for the New European Century', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 May 2007, p.B3.

<sup>4</sup> For a dramatic portrait of the shortcomings of the French social welfare system and the problems faced by those who seek to reform it, see Timothy B. Smith, *France in Crisis: Welfare, Inequality and Globalization since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). A more sanguine view of the French crisis,

discrimination against those descended from former colonial subjects in Africa and Asia, a discrimination that was above all reflected in employment, wages, and housing.<sup>5</sup> Reinforce the psychological and material effects of this racism by minimizing the extent of or even denying the existence of such discrimination, and rally around a governing ideology that prohibited procedures that might measure its consequences.<sup>6</sup> Justify the maintenance of a rigidly tracked educational system that effectively reproduced class and status hierarchies from one generation to the next with self-serving bromides about meritocracy.<sup>7</sup> Add to this a well-intentioned but ultimately disastrous policy of urban planning,

---

including the 2006 student protests over changes to rules regarding labour contracts is George Ross, 'Myths and Realities in the 2006 "Events"', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 24.3 (2006), 82-88. Ross argues that contrary to popular perceptions, the French state has actually been quite active and even successful in its many attempts to reform its social welfare system.

<sup>5</sup> For a prescient account of the ways in which the social and spatial isolations of marginal populations in France are related to exclusionary practices that implicate all levels of French society, see Eric Maurin, *Le Ghetto français: enquête sur le séparatisme social* (Paris: Seuil, 2004). For a longer history of the relationship between colonial migration from North Africa and racism in France, see Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism: Algerians in France, 1900-62* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> On the history of France's 'colour-blind' anti-racist policies see Erik Bleich, 'Anti-racism without Races: Politics and Policy in a "Color-Blind" State', in Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (eds), *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), pp.162-88, and Alec Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race' and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London: Routledge, 1995). On the challenges facing demographers in France who wish to use ethnic categories for different social groups in their analyses, see Michèle Tribalat, *De L'Immigration à l'assimilation: enquête sur les populations d'origine étrangère en France* (Paris: La Découverte/INED, 1996), pp.13-14, 34-38.

<sup>7</sup> On the history of France's educational system, see two books by Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, 1800-1967* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), and *Éducation, société et politiques: une histoire de l'enseignement en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

whose solution to one dramatic housing crisis only produced another with equally serious social repercussions. Sprinkle with political leaders of both the left and the right who will not speak openly about any of these failures, and who instead seek to blame outside influences, such as immigrants from abroad, or the evils of globalization and American-style capitalism. Stir. *Voilà*. Spontaneous combustion.

Since this story seemed so familiar—in fact, the diagnosis of the illness was widespread before the violence of 2005 even happened—commentators moved rather quickly from the subject of the violence itself to the well-trodden debates about social policy that have pitted the Socialists against the Gaullists since the 1980s. The left largely resorted to tired-sounding arguments about strengthening the bonds of community at the local level, which would have sounded more sincere if the Socialist Party had actually done more to give voice to neighbourhood associations at the grass-roots level in the last two decades.<sup>8</sup> The right trotted out equally familiar and more harshly worded arguments about public order and security. Since the violence was largely held to be merely an intensification of a kind of conflict that had been quite common, even routine, on the margins of French cities since the early 1990s, the facts were largely taken for granted, as was their relation to the more general sense of French *malaise*. In spite of the rehearsed quality of the debates, however, some commentators did succeed in posing real and pressing questions, though not always in a form that made them easy to answer. Did the revolt of

<sup>8</sup> On the inability of the French left to represent democratically the voices of recent immigrants and their families, especially those from North Africa, see Olivier Masclet, 'Des Quartiers sans voix: sur le divorce entre la Gauche et les enfants d'immigrés', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 24.3 (2006), 5-22; and Driss Maghraoui, 'French Identity, Islam and North Africans: Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Realities', in Tyler Stovall and Georges van den Abeele (eds), *French Civilization and its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), pp. 213-34 (p. 227).

these alienated young people reflect, as some appeared to fear, the dismal end of the 'French model' of universal citizenship and integration?<sup>9</sup> If so, what model of social and political belonging might replace it? Was the government's draconian response a powerful example of the return of a colonial dynamic in the relationship of the French state to its most disadvantaged subjects?<sup>10</sup> Or was the *crise des banlieues* best understood as a continuation of a characteristically French tradition of socio-political contestation, in which marginalized groups resort to violence in order to claim, with more or less success, the attention of political elites?<sup>11</sup>

It is telling that the positions embodied in the questions given above—which might be summarized as the arguments of rupture, return and continuity—assume that the origins of the French crisis lie essentially in a characteristically 'French' history of social and cultural 'integration' and that the solutions to this crisis are to be found in the political realm, that is, in the relationship between state institutions and civil society. If one subscribes to the rupture thesis, believing that the 'French model' of social integration and

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the arguments made by Pierre Rosanvallon, in an interview from November 2005, while the riots were still going on. 'Pierre Rosanvallon: "La société est ensevelie sous un épais vernis d'idéologies"', *Le Monde*, 22 November 2005. Please note: the newspaper sources (*Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Agence France Presse*, *Le Figaro*, etc.) for this article were accessed through the LexisNexis Academic database, and are thus given without pagination.

<sup>10</sup> This was the position taken by the manifesto of the *Indigènes de la République*, an organization that published this text in February 2005 asserting that the republican tradition in general, and the institutions of the Fifth Republic in particular, were inescapably linked to France's past as an imperial power. The riots of 2005 brought widespread media attention to these arguments. See for example, Laurence Chabert, 'Le choix d'une loi liée à la guerre d'Algérie risque de rouvrir une plaie', *Agence France Presse*, 8 November 2005; and Jacques de Saint-Victor, 'La République désintégrée', *Le Figaro*, 3 November 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See the arguments of Emmanuel Todd, 'Rien ne sépare les enfants d'immigrés du reste de la société', *Le Monde*, 13 November 2005.



citizenship is hopelessly broken, then presumably the solution lies in finding another model and applying it with more success. If one believes that the riots are a symptom of a return of a colonial dynamic in the relationship between the French state and those on the margins of French society, then the problem can only be addressed by political confrontation with the postcolonial state, perhaps modelled on the anti-colonial movements of the past. Of course, if one believes that the riots are simply a continuation of a distinctively 'French' tradition of political protest, then one might conceivably do nothing, beyond what is already being done in the name of social solidarity and neighbourhood security, under the assumption that French society will find a way to adapt to the present crisis, as it has done in the past. The first two options probably over-estimate the ability of one or the other side of the political equation—state institutions or elements within civil society—to impose their will on the polity. The third almost certainly minimizes the depth of the fissures that have opened up between those who are protected by France's current social welfare system, and those who are not.

My goal in this article is not to answer any of these questions definitively, but rather to examine why all of them were posed so urgently in November 2005, and to suggest what kinds of historical context might be most helpful in understanding why the riots appeared to be both so obvious in their origins and so insoluble as symptoms of a larger social and political crisis. The French are undoubtedly correct in thinking that the solutions to their problems might be found in an expanded form of political dialogue that includes both those on the inside and those on the margins of French society, but for reasons that are interesting to investigate further, it has been extraordinarily difficult to find the ground on which such a dialogue could take place. It may be that the impasse is as much conceptual as it is economic or political, and that part of the problem arises from a tendency to treat all aspects of the many problems facing French society at the dawn of

the twentieth century as if they were part of the same problem, and thus treatable within one coherent framework that could be applied, top-down, by the state. Such a reading of the French situation encourages reductive readings of the French past, as well as over-confident assumptions about the ability of any particular set of ideological principles to guide successful policies. It also discourages more pragmatic responses that might do much to lower the temperature of public debate.

### The Riots of 2005

The trouble began on the night of 27 October 2005 in Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb to the northeast of Paris. Three adolescents, believing themselves to be chased by the police, climbed the barriers surrounding a high-voltage electric installation to find a hiding place. Bouna Traoré, aged fifteen, and Zyed Benna, seventeen, were electrocuted and died immediately. The third, Muhittin Altun, also seventeen, was badly burned and hospitalized in serious condition. In the hours that followed, angry young people ran through the streets of Clichy and neighbouring Montfermail, setting fire to cars and attacking several buildings. Nearly 200 police battled the rioters until 3am. The next night, in spite of the presence of heavily equipped anti-riot squads, more street battles broke out. Fourteen people were arrested, twenty-three of the 400 police officers active that evening were injured, and twenty-nine more cars were burned, along with dumpsters and public phone booths. In Montfermail, the rioters attacked a police station, attempting to set it on fire. The prefect reported that a bullet had been fired at a police car, and the police themselves reported using over fifty tear gas grenades and firing 150

'flashballs'—non-lethal rubber bullets—in the course of the evening.<sup>12</sup>

The violence took on a new urgency on 30 October, when somebody fired a tear-gas grenade at a mosque in Clichy. The police claimed that the grenade was not theirs, but those inside the mosque were convinced that the grenade came from the police lines.<sup>13</sup> On succeeding nights, the violence spread to other neighbourhoods throughout the Paris region, and by the end of the week, the list of affected areas began to look like the index to the Michelin guide; eventually nearly 300 communes were affected.<sup>14</sup> The rioters attacked schools, daycare centres, recreation halls and grocery stores. They set fires to attract firefighters, whom they then attacked in turn. They attacked municipal buses and their passengers. Schoolteachers in the *banlieues* spent their nights on the phone, calling every parent in their address books, pleading with them to keep their children at home and out of harm's way after dark. Others occupied their classrooms, spending the night inside the empty buildings with the lights on, armed only with fire extinguishers. The press published daily counts of the number of

<sup>12</sup> '14 gardes à vue après deuxième nuit de guérilla urbaine à Clichy-sous-Bois', *Agence France Presse*, 29 October 2005.

<sup>13</sup> 'Clichy-sous-Bois: situation apaisée après des affrontements', *Agence France Presse*, 30 October 2005.

<sup>14</sup> The list included: Ile-de-France (Yvelines, Essone, Seine-Saint-Denis, Paris, Val d'Oise); Haute-Normandie (Evreux); Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Lille, Tourcoing, Valenciennes, Dunkerque, Soissons, Beauvais, Nogent-sur-Oise, Creil); Aquitaine (Pau, Bordeaux and its suburbs, Brive, Limoges); Centre (Orléans, Montargis, Blois); Auvergne (Clermont-Ferrand); Pays de la Loire (Nantes, Saint-Etienne); Bretagne (Rennes, Quimper, Brest, Saint-Malo); Lorraine (Guenange, Thionville, Metz, Nancy); Alsace (Strasbourg, Colmar, Mulhouse, Illzach); Franche-Comté (Belfort-Montbéliard); Rhône-Alpes (Lyon, Vénissieux, Bron, Meyzeiux); Midi-Pyrénées (Toulouse and its suburbs); Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (Avignon, Nice, Aix-en-Provence). Conspicuous by its absence from this list is the most Mediterranean of French cities, Marseilles, not usually known for its lack of urban problems.

cars burned: by the time the violence subsided after nearly three weeks, the total had surpassed 10,000. Over 5,000 people were arrested, leading to over 800 prison sentences. One man died after being beaten while attempting to protect his car.

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, boxed in by his government's previous positions on urban violence and his own presidential ambitions, opted for a combination of the carrot and the stick. Villepin announced a restoration of support for neighbourhood associations in the *banlieues*—support that had been cut by his own party's government—and the creation of an apprenticeship programme which would allow students to leave school at the age of fourteen to prepare for a trade.<sup>15</sup> Discussion of these 'carrots', such as they were, was overshadowed by the 'stick', Villepin's announcement on 7 November of a 'state of emergency' based on the long-forgotten law of 3 April 1955. This law, originally written to help the government deal with the outbreak of armed rebellion in Algeria in November 1954, declared that in exceptional circumstances the ordinary liberties granted to citizens could be obstacles to the state's ability to protect itself. The law thus granted prefects the right to declare curfews, imprison people without charge, place them under house arrest without trial, prohibit people from travelling or gathering in public, and enter people's houses at any time of day or night. Normal judicial procedures could be suspended and replaced with military justice. The same local officials could also institute

<sup>15</sup> Renewed support for neighbourhood associations came as a complete reversal of the government's previous priorities, although in effect it simply amounted to a restoration of the *status quo ante*. The education proposal was potentially even more significant, as it marked a total abandonment of the governing philosophy behind primary education in France since the 1970s, based on a notion of the *collège unique*, i.e. the same for all, until the age of sixteen. Renaud Dely, Emmanuel Davidenkoff and Thomas Lebègue, 'Trois mesures phares: entre bâton et carotte, les trois points forts de l'intervention du Premier ministre hier soir', *Libération*, 8 November 2005.

controls on the press—print media as well as radio and television—and they could close cafés, restaurants, theatres, cinemas and other public buildings.<sup>16</sup> Predictably, Villepin's announcement of the state of emergency set off a firestorm of protest and worried editorials in the national press, and the law remained in effect until 3 January 2006.

Meanwhile, from the procession of young people before their local tribunals, a portrait of the individuals caught up in the violence began to emerge. Most were between 14 and 20 years old. In spite of much loose talk about 'immigrés', the vast majority were born in France and possessed French citizenship. Frequently they came from families who had come to France some time in the past from North and West Africa but this was not always the case. In some areas the majority of those arrested was not 'issu de l'immigration' as the common—and misleading—phrase would have it.<sup>17</sup> The majority had no criminal record.<sup>18</sup> The one thing that they had in common was residence in the *banlieues*.

<sup>16</sup> My discussion of the law of 3 April 1955 is based on an unpublished paper by Sylvie Thénault, in the author's possession. Only five prefects chose to implement the extra security measures, in spite of the fact that twenty-five departments were eligible by the terms of the law itself. Ironically, the departments that did implement the curfew provisions—Alpes-Maritimes, Seine-Maritime, Somme, l'Eure and Loiret—were not the ones where the most violence had occurred. It appears that the authorities in the most troubled areas were afraid of adding to the tension by appearing to rush to the most repressive options. See Nicole Penicaut, 'Les couvre-feux, pétards mouillés de Matignon', *Libération*, 10 November 2005.

<sup>17</sup> France has been a nation of immigrants for the last two hundred years, and, as Gérard Noiriel and others have pointed out, an estimated one out of four French people have a grandparent who was born in another country. To refer only to those descended from France's former colonized subjects from North and West Africa, the Indian Ocean or Indochina as 'issus de l'immigration'—without acknowledging the foreign origins of previous waves of southern and eastern European immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both stigmatizes the most recent arrivals and obscures the history of immigration in France. See Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français. Histoire de l'immigration*.

## The Arguments

In the widespread public discussion that took place in the wake of the violence, commentators lined up initially along two poles, in a classic opposition that social scientists will instantly recognize. On the one hand were those who sought an explanation on the basis of social causes. These observers looked to larger impersonal forces of urban development, economic conjuncture, population movements and long simmering antipathies between different groups in society. On the other hand, were those whose discourse operated in a mode of moral condemnation and who singled out the individuals they deemed responsible for the violence, whether it be the rioters themselves, the alleged leaders behind the scenes, or even the political figures who seemed to profit from the instability and emotions raised by the confrontation between rioters and the police. These surface differences, however, hid some rather fundamental agreements about the terrain of the debates, and this unacknowledged consensus is a useful indicator of how limited the initial discussion of the riots actually was.

A good place to begin looking at this opposition might be the arguments put forth by Justin Vaisse and Alain Finkelkraut. Vaisse, a former speechwriter for socialist Defense Minister Alain Richard who had also spent time at the Brookings Institution in Washington, gave a concise summary of the social argument in an article that circulated widely via the internet among French historians in the United States. He argued that over the past 150 years, the French had succeeded in integrating newcomers to France in three fundamental ways: public schools, universal (male) military conscription and employment. Schools, argued Vaisse, are

*XXe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), and Patrick Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un Français? Histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution* (Paris: Grasset, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> 'Le ministre de la justice prône la fermeté', *Le Monde*, 7 November 2005.

still largely doing their part in this task, but with conscription abolished in the 1990s, and structural changes in the labour market since the 1970s diminishing rates of employment, the other two pillars of the system are currently in default. The result, he implied, has been a breakdown in what was at one time a well-oiled machine for social integration, and the riots of 2005 were only one symptom of this more general dysfunction.

Vaisse's reference to the long history of 'integration' in France was meant to invoke the classic republican values of universalism and equality, embodied most importantly in the hallowed myth of the Third Republic (1870-1940), which famously took a population of disparate peasants with rather low fertility rates and moulded them into a modern nation, with the help of waves of foreign immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.<sup>19</sup> This argument is rather typical of the neo-republican orthodoxy that took root in France among political elites in the 1980s. In response to the twin challenges of right-wing extremism in the form of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front and widespread anxiety about the increasing visibility of Muslims in France during these years, politicians from both sides of the political spectrum emphasized the French Republic's traditional success at overcoming regional diversity, economic exclusion and the arrival of newcomers. This republican consensus reflected concern about Le Pen's apparent success at retooling an older vocabulary of biological racism that had been discredited by the anti-Semitism of the Vichy regime, and presenting it to the electorate in a new form, emphasizing the cultural incompatibility of France's most recent minority

<sup>19</sup> The essential text in establishing this orthodoxy was Noiriel, *Le Creuset français*. Its theoretical foundation was most coherently stated in Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Force du préjugé: essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: La Découverte, 1987), in which Taguieff argued that all anti-racisms are bound up in an ineluctable embrace with the racisms they confront, unable to escape either the vocabulary or the concepts of difference that they seek to combat.

populations.<sup>20</sup> During the 1980s, a few on the left attempted to respond to Le Pen's highly effective and xenophobic demonization of 'immigrants'—many of whom possessed French nationality—by openly advocating a multicultural model of society that recognized a 'right to be different'.<sup>21</sup> Very quickly, however, these voices were marginalized by the political mainstream for being incompatible with the universal principles of French republicanism and portrayed as dangerous concessions to 'communitarianism'—a model of a segmented society that was seen as both un-French and a recipe for social conflict. The coincidence of the much-celebrated bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989 with the first wave of the Islamic headscarf controversy in France only cemented this association between an anxiety about difference and the defence of republican universalism, as if the only possible solutions to the problem of cultural difference could be found in a doctrinally pure form of the French republican tradition that refused to recognize the 'right to be different' and proclaimed instead 'assimilation' as the only possible goal in integrating newcomers.<sup>22</sup> The costs of such ideological purity were high,

<sup>20</sup> The emergence of a new 'cultural' racism has been widely observed in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s. See Verena Stolcke, 'Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe', *Current Anthropology*, 36.1 (1995), 1-24.

<sup>21</sup> The most noted manifestation of this form of French multiculturalism was SOS-Racisme, an anti-racist organization that organized demonstrations and public concerts throughout France in the 1980s. It should be noted, too, that this embrace of 'difference' in no way implied a rejection of 'French' identity. See, for example, Trica Keaton, 'Arrogant Assimilationism: National Identity, Politics and African-Origin Muslim Girls in the Other France', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36.4 (2005), 405-23.

<sup>22</sup> On this neo-republican orthodoxy, see Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)—especially Chapter 3, 'France: The Republican Philosophy of Intégration', pp.40-93. On the Islamic headscarf controversy, see John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

however, because republican anti-racists were forced to repudiate all claims made about the heterogeneity of the social body, whether they were made by racists in the National Front who sought to exclude certain populations from the political nation, or by members of religious minorities such as Muslims who sought to define a different way of being 'French.'

The well-known philosopher and author Alain Finkielkraut himself participated in the defence of this hallowed republican tradition, but in the autumn of 2005, in repeated interviews to the press, Finkielkraut could hardly hide his disdain for 'social' explanations such as those offered by Vaisse.<sup>23</sup> Such views, he argued, were typical of a 'political correctness' on the left that could not find it within itself to condemn a young man of North African descent who resorted to violence in contemporary France. When a 'petit blanc'—colonial slang for a poor white man—beats up a black man, said Finkielkraut, everybody is quick to denounce this racist act and see it as an example of immanent fascism in France. But when the kids from the *banlieues* resort to violence, the sociologists crawl out of the woodwork and excuse these acts with their social explanations. The fault, said Finkielkraut, was

---

2006), Françoise Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Le Foulard et la République* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995), and Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). In addition to the 2004 decision to ban the Islamic headscarf from secondary schools, this renewed emphasis on a republican universalism predicated on the exclusion of difference as a legitimate political category has had other consequences. Often cited in this regard are the *lois Pasqua*, harsh restrictions on the rights of foreigners in the late 1980s and early 1990s, named after Charles Pasqua, then minister of Interior in Jacques Chirac's Gaullist government.

<sup>23</sup> See Alain Finkielkraut, 'L'illégitimité de la haine', *Le Figaro*, 15 November 2005. In 1989, Finkielkraut was one of the signatories of a public letter decrying the appearance of the Islamic headscarf in a French high school and criticizing then minister of Education Lionel Jospin's attempts to find a compromise that would defend the republican principle of secular education while allowing the girls to attend school.

first of all that of the young people themselves, whose irresponsible violence was directed both at the rule of law and at other groups in society. If Finkielkraut saw any larger context in which to condemn these actions, it lay not in the realm of social explanations, but in a culture of permissiveness fostered by post-1968 educational institutions, which catered to the demands of different ethnic groups within the population, and fatally undermined the state's own responsibility to uphold the universal principles of the republic.

I will not dwell on what is specious in Finkielkraut's argument—the fact that there were plenty of sociologists who decried the violence, beginning with Vaisse himself, or that race only entered Finkielkraut's discourse in order to defend an apocryphal white aggressor from an alleged case of reverse discrimination by equally apocryphal social scientists. But I do want to point out what is missing from a debate that is structured as an alternative between positions like those put forth by these two authors. First, and most obviously, the agency of the young people in the *banlieues* is absent from both sides of this opposition, absent from Vaisse's arguments because by definition, the riots are the result of larger impersonal forces and institutions that are beyond their control, and absent from Finkielkraut's analysis except in so far as their actions are condemnable as morally reprehensible. By both demanding that these young people be held accountable for their actions (as if nobody else felt this way) and at the same time blaming the 'super-cool' ('super-sympa') institutions of the post-1968 French state for making these kids into what they were, Finkielkraut was able to have his cake and eat it too—he could blame the young people of the *banlieues* for behaving irresponsibly, while also arguing that the state produced irresponsible individuals.

The positions staked out by Vaisse and Finkielkraut also remain confined within a vision of France conceived as a European nation-state, with all the attendant assumptions about French

history that this entails. In Vaisse's account, this assumption arises in his point of departure—the question of 'integration'. 'Integration', he implies, is something that nation-states are either good at or not, but their essential personalities as nation-states—and above all the nature of the literal and figurative borders that separate the inside from the outside—remain essentially unchanged by the process. As it happens, Vaisse's diagnosis is an optimistic one. Elsewhere he has predicted a happy outcome to France's current difficulties, based on the country's past successes at integrating newcomers to the polity, a position consistent with many who defend the republican tradition as the answer to France's problems.<sup>24</sup> But even this generous interpretation of the past cannot obscure the fact that his reading rests on an assumption of a close and natural congruence between nation, population and territory, and on a one-to-one correspondence between citizens and the nation-state that they inhabit. Absent from such a conception is an awareness of how boundaries of exclusion and inclusion are created historically, mapped onto territories or peoples both within and outside the nation, and constructed, adapted or rejected by both states and individual subjects according to the needs of the moment. In Finkelkraut's account, the boundaries that separate the inside and outside of the nation are equally taken for granted, and given the status of natural fact. In his public comments, Finkelkraut has always been quick to interpret markers of difference—whether religious, ethnic, or racial—as evidence of essential cultural incompatibilities, or worse, as part of the 'clash of civilizations' that threatens to drive France into sectarian war. Also absent from these accounts is a dynamic conception of the nature of the contemporary French polity in which 'Frenchness' is

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Justin Vaisse and Jonathan Laurence, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), a work, published first in English, that aims to counter much of the 'official pessimism' (p.264) that the authors detect in the United States on the subject of Muslims in France.

a quality that can be possessed by peoples of varying backgrounds, without the need to invoke a stigma of origins, or the exclusionary hierarchies implied by degrees of assimilation and integration.

Finally, this strict opposition between individualist and social explanations cannot account for the complex dynamic of racial ideologies that lies behind the confrontations in the *banlieues*. In Finkelkraut's account, as we have seen, race comes up only in his attack on the alleged 'political correctness' of the left—and race is in no way considered as part of the dynamic which produces entire populations who are excluded from the relative prosperity of contemporary France. In Justin Vaisse's account, which emphasizes changes in the structure of the labour market as the main factor in the breakdown of France's mechanisms for integration, race is simply absent from his analysis, as if the slowness of job growth in France since the 1970s and the emergence of entire neighbourhoods marked by exclusion and marginal status, were not also shaped by political decisions about the state's priorities in social spending, or choices made by people at all levels of society about where they would live, where they would send their children to school, and with whom they would consent to work. As a spate of recent historical work has shown, such decisions take place in France within a context shaped by a long history of racial thinking. Finally, of course, the repeated invocations of the republican tradition make no reference at all to the extent to which French republicanism itself was implicated in the colonial project of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a period in which successive French governments committed themselves to the conquest and subjugation of populations in Africa and Asia, explicitly justified through the republican ideology of the 'civilizing mission'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> On the ways in which republican ideology shaped colonial policies in West Africa during the Third Republic, see especially Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*.

Historical research on the complex relations between the history of French republicanism and empire, ideas about racial difference, and the institutions of the French welfare state has been developing quickly in recent years, and this work, in spite of ongoing disagreements and a lack of consensus, can provide the necessary context for understanding both the *crise des banlieues* and the public controversies that followed it in France.<sup>26</sup> Much of this more recent literature developed out of a tradition within French historiography that developed through an engagement with

---

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). For a broader historical scope, see also Laurent Dubois's two books on the effects of the Haitian Revolution on French conceptions of citizenship and liberty during the 1790s: *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> In this connection see especially the works by Conklin and Dubois, cited above, and also (in alphabetical order) Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Richard Keller, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Amelia H. Lyons, 'Invisible Immigrants: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State in the Era of Decolonization (1947-1974)', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2004; Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Andrea Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For a recent essay on the institutional continuities that cross the divide between contemporary France and its colonial past see especially Sidi Mohammed Barkat, *Le Corps d'exception: les artifices du pouvoir colonial et la destruction de la vie* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2005).

the debates about colonialism and decolonization in the post-war period. Common references are the work of sociologist Georges Balandier and anti-colonial or anti-racist militants such as Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon in the 1950s, and the work of historians René Gallissot, Claude Liauzu and Claude Meillassoux in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>27</sup> Although certain publishing houses in France have long been active in pursuing works that seek to connect the history of racial thinking in France and the history of the French empire to the contemporary situation—L'Harmattan and François Maspero, most notably, and more recently La Découverte—the main centres of French historical research within French universities have been less active in pursuing these links, and the most recent wave of scholarship on these questions has been fed by numerous contributions coming from researchers working outside of France, including scholars from Britain, North America, Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Gallissot, Liauzu and Meillassoux are examples of historians in France who, in the years after the dismantling of the French empire, sought to establish a transnational context for understanding the economic and political consequences of the population movements that accompanied empire building and decolonization. See René Gallissot, *L'Economie de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris: PUF, 1961) and more recently, *La République française et les indigènes: Algérie colonisée, Algérie algérienne, 1870-1962* (Paris: Atelier, 2006); Claude Liauzu, *Aux origines des tiers-mondismes: colonisés et anticolonialistes en France (1919-1939)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982); and Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal, and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> A French book that has been particularly influential on U.S. and British scholars in the 1990s was Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, classe: les identités ambiguës* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988); published in English translation as *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991). An older generation of Caribbean authors, including C.L.R. James and Walter Rodney, has also contributed to the development of this critical tradition, embodied most recently by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, author of *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).



Recent trans-Atlantic and trans-Mediterranean scholarship has helped to shape the more general 'imperial turn' taken by European history in the 1990s. From Georges Balandier, this historical literature has borrowed and developed his understanding of what he called the 'colonial situation'. For Balandier, making the colonial situation an object of study was a way of insisting on the historical consequences of European imperial expansion, both for the peoples who became subject to colonial rule and for the colonizers themselves. Balandier's argument explicitly criticized the insufficiencies of an earlier generation of social scientists who treated Europeans as if they were the only peoples possessed of a history, while depicting the culture of 'indigènes' in Africa or Asia as static, existing outside of historical time. Studies of the 'colonial situation' initially focused on the territories in Africa and Asia that were subjected to conquest and rule by Europeans in the nineteenth century, but recent work has expanded the optic to include the territories of European nation-states at home, with the understanding that colonization had social, political and institutional effects at the centre of Europe's empires and among their home populations, as well as at their distant peripheries.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Georges Balandier, 'La Situation coloniale: approche théorique', *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 11 (1951), 44-79. On the impact of Balandier's work, see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp.1-56. Examples of work discussing metropolitan spaces within the context of empire have included works of cultural history and also studies of specific forms of knowledge and technology that developed in both the colonies and in France. See, for example, Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); and

While Balandier's work and that of his successors encouraged scholars to think of ways in which spaces within Europe might be considered a part of the colonial situation, recent re-readings of the classic anti-colonial texts of the 1950s have encouraged historians to think more critically about the French republican tradition and the extent to which its development across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been entwined with the history of colonial expansion and decolonization.<sup>30</sup> These texts provided powerful arguments for treating the history of colonial regimes not merely within the context of military conquest or economic exploitation, but as totalizing ideological systems, in which the very concepts employed to legitimate the colonial system—definitions of modernity, technological progress, and republican notions of political and economic liberty—became a part of its repressive apparatus.

Perspectives such as these offered an opportunity for historians to revisit what an earlier generation of research had taught us about the emergence of the *banlieues* in France. Urban geographers and social historians who studied the growth of suburbs in France tended to treat their subject as part of the modernization process,

Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> The key texts here, of course, are Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955), Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), and Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Buchet, Chastel, Corrêa, 1957). The association of this critique of republican ideologies with radical anti-colonial politics—and in Fanon's case with an open endorsement of violence as the only possible response to the injustices of the colonial system—no doubt contributed to the reluctance of many French historians in France to absorb the lessons of this critique. Historians of France working in other countries—Alice Conklin, Laurent Dubois, Mary Lewis, Clifford Rosenberg, Todd Shepard, Tyler Stovall and Gary Wilder, for example—seem to have taken more seriously the implications of the connection between republican ideology in its specifically historical instantiations and colonial practices.



conceived of largely within the confines of urban history with at most a national focus. As changes in manufacturing combined with rising real estate values and shifts in the labour market, so the story went, working-class populations were forced out of central neighbourhoods into peripheral areas on the margins of France's rapidly growing cities. From the beginning, these outlying areas were distinguished from the urban centres by a less regulated and more spontaneous practices of spatial organization and by forms of social and class solidarity which defined themselves in opposition to the wealthier and more privileged populations in the city proper.<sup>31</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, much of the population growth on these urban peripheries was fed by the arrival of immigrant labourers and their families from southern and eastern Europe, above all from Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland. Following the publication of Gérard Noiriel's *Le Creuset français* in 1988, many commentators tended to emphasize the positive aspects of this story of integration, under the assumption that dwelling on the conflicts and exclusions engendered by these population movements might lend credence to Jean-Marie Le Pen's xenophobic and racist political campaigns, and underestimate the ability of French society to absorb newcomers. According to this position, even the venerable French Communist Party became an active agent for integrating newly arrived

<sup>31</sup> On the growth of Paris's suburbs see especially Jean Bastié, *La Croissance de la banlieue parisienne* (Paris: PUF, 1964); Jean-Paul Brunet, *Saint-Denis: La ville rouge* (Paris: Hachette, 1980); Annie Fourcaut, *Bobigny: Banlieue rouge* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1986); John Merriman, *The Margins of City Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); François Soullignac, *La Banlieue parisienne. Cent cinquante ans de transformations* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1993); and Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). On the 'heterotopic' nature of suburban spaces—spaces of alterity and otherness—see Henri Lefebvre, *La Révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). My understanding of this literature here has been shaped by an unpublished paper on the Parisian *banlieues* by Ken Garner.

immigrants from elsewhere in Europe into the French republican nation.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of this retrospective historical optimism, however, the work of other historians has shown how the development of the working-class *banlieues* in France was accompanied by a long history of violence, social exclusion and racial stigma, a history that can only be understood by thinking of these urban developments in the context of France's wider imperial policies and conquests.<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting, for example, that the populations of Paris's marginal and peripheral spaces were explicitly racialized in middle-class commentaries long before the arrival of large numbers of colonial subjects from Africa and Asia. Historian Patricia Morton cites a telling example, from 1926, in a guide to the Paris suburb of Saint-Ouen that described a neighbourhood known as 'Morocco':

The detritus and filth invade everything, here is a pile of chicken carcasses, further a heap of old Camembert boxes, elsewhere a small mound of rags; the same filth covers the walls, the pavement of the streets, and all that lives in this empire. The humanity that swarms in the refuse

<sup>32</sup> Anne Sa'adah, *Contemporary France: A Democratic Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp.113-15. On the continued significance of racial and cultural bias among French workers, however, see Michèle Lamont, 'Immigration and the Salience of Racial Boundaries among French Workers', in Chapman and Frader (eds), *Race in France*, pp.141-61.

<sup>33</sup> On the connection between the *banlieues* conceived of as sites of political and social exclusion and racial hierarchies, see especially Tyler Stovall, 'From Red Belt to Black Belt: Race, Class, and Urban Marginality in Twentieth-Century Paris', in Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (eds), *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 351-69. Stovall develops here an argument also made by Gwendolyn Wright in *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

seems to form a body with it. Clothed in rags, unkempt women desperately excavate the heap to separate the wood from the iron, the wool from the silk, the bone from the paper; their arms are covered with wounds badly dressed by dirty linen, their red and weeping eyes tell of the grinding dangers of this corruption [...] but what is unimaginable is the filth that covers their skin, a black filth that scars their faces, blackens their cheeks and makes their eyes and mouth appear white.<sup>34</sup>

One might assume that racial ideologies adhered most powerfully to people—here we have an example of racial significance being associated with space: these inhabitants, who may have come from anywhere, have assumed the characteristics of colonial subjects (i.e. ‘Moroccans’) by virtue of their residence here, in a marginal location whose filth conveniently blackened their skin, so that their true nature was visible to all.<sup>35</sup>

Precisely because of this association of the working-class *banlieue* with the allegedly primitive and dangerous populations of the Empire—ready to revolt at a moment’s notice, in need of pacification, in need, in short, of civilization—Paris’s eastern edge at Vincennes was chosen as the site for the massive 1931 *Exposition Coloniale*, which celebrated the accomplishments of

<sup>34</sup> André Warnod, *Les Fortifs, promenades sur les anciennes fortifications et la zone* (Paris: Editions de l’Epi, 1926). Cited by Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, p.158.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which racial associations such as these were linked to violence against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys, *The Politics of Racism in France* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), pp. 10-23. This argument is a powerful corrective to the neo-republican story of French success at assimilating waves of immigrants prior to 1945.

France’s civilizing mission in Africa and Asia.<sup>36</sup> The director of the *exposition*, Hubert Lyautey, a military officer and former Resident General of Morocco, had originally wanted a site in central Paris, but he succumbed to arguments made by his staff and others that the pedagogic value of the *exposition* would be better served by placing its elaborate pavilions as closely as possible to those working-class populations who might benefit from its lessons. With its extensive esplanade, dotted with buildings celebrating the blending of French and indigenous cultural styles, the *exposition coloniale* used architecture to offer a particular vision of a syncretic modernity, in which African and Asian cultural forms marked their entry into the world of the twentieth century under French sponsorship. The exterior surfaces of the buildings reflected ‘traditional’ architectural motifs from the various colonies, while the interiors contained exhibits displaying the ways that French science and expertise had transformed the colonies, bringing them into the modern world.

The colonial pavilions at Vincennes—built on a site that is the gateway to Paris’s eastern *banlieues*—were torn down when the *exposition* was finished, but they were soon replaced on the skyline with ubiquitous blocks of low-rent housing, whose uniformity and rigorous line, devoid of decoration, spoke to an alternative utopia. This project of urban renewal was in response to a real crisis: the shantytowns of the urban periphery had blossomed in the decades after the Second World War, and they persisted in many areas until the 1970s. Between 1960 and 1973, the state organized the construction of up to 600,000 housing units per year. The result was the creation of enormous apartment complexes known as the *cités*. Constructed on marginal land on

<sup>36</sup> Stovall, ‘From Red Belt to Black Belt’, p.358; see also Charles Ageron, ‘L’Exposition coloniale de 1931: Mythe républicain ou mythe impérial?’, in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire. I. La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp.561-91.

the periphery of larger urban areas, often adjacent to highways, railroads, airports and industrial zones, the *cités* lacked the basic infrastructure of healthy cities, such as easy access to public transportation, commercial centres, parks, playgrounds and other public services. The buildings themselves were constructed using cheap materials, and, subject to heavy use, they deteriorated rapidly. Some have since been demolished, and those that remain have severe problems that affect their residents' quality of life on a daily basis, though some researchers have emphasized the persistence of a vital atmosphere of community sustained by residents in the face of such hardship.<sup>37</sup> Although the *cités* were initially conceived of as socially diverse spaces in which young working and middle-class families could live together as they established their first households, many nevertheless evolved into isolated *quartiers d'exil*, concentrated spaces of social dysfunction, where the combination of persistently high unemployment rates, failing schools, crime and drugs have created a downward spiral that has so far defied all attempts at intervention, whether by local authorities, neighbourhood associations, or successive governments of both the left and the right. In such a context, the riots of 2005, like the periodic outbursts that preceded them, have been described as a 'kind of hate and rage reminiscent of a prisoner's violence against his own environment'.<sup>38</sup>

Tyler Stovall argued recently that the role of racial ideologies in marking the exclusion of the *quartiers d'exil* must be nuanced, both to avoid the simplistic comparisons with the United States that are a staple of contemporary French debate, and to understand the extent to which class exclusions (and solidarities) still play an important role in French society. Stovall was certainly correct in

his assertion that it is possible to overstate the extent to which racial barriers trump other forms of social marginalization in France, and he emphasized that the cultural dynamism of France's *banlieues* might also provide an example of an identifiably 'French' yet hybrid space that has nurtured the emergence of dramatic and expressive literary voices, a new genre of French film, and new forms of popular music that now count among France's best-known cultural exports.<sup>39</sup> It is equally clear, however, that the race-blind policies followed by successive French governments to address the persistent social and political isolation of the *quartiers d'exil* have had only limited effects. Gwénaële Calvès pointed out that the primary strategy used by the French state to address this isolation has been to address the isolation of spaces, rather than specific groups of people. The creation of incentives for *zones d'entreprises* (1986), *zones urbaines sensibles* (1991), *zones de redynamisation urbaine* (1995) and tax-free zones (1996 and 2002) have, in Calvès's words, functioned as a 'proxy to implement a form of affirmative action very close to the American model, while avoiding the stigmatizing effects that might be triggered by more explicit and more exclusive forms of designation'.<sup>40</sup> By 2000, these *zones urbaines sensibles* constituted over 700 neighbourhoods throughout France with 4.5 million residents, among them many of the nation's most vulnerable populations, with average

<sup>39</sup> Stovall, 'From Red Belt to Black Belt', pp.357-63. As examples of this cultural dynamism, Stovall cites Mehdi Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1983), and the *banlieue* films, *Bye-bye* (Karin Dridi, 1997), *Rai* (Thomas Gilou, 1996) and *La Haine* (Matthieu Kassovitz, 1996). Other novels include Mehdi Lallaoui, *Les Beurs de Seine* (Paris: Arcantère, 1981); Paul Smäil, *Vivre me tue* (Paris: Balland, 1997); and Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge, Paris Octobre 1961* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Gwénaële Calvès, 'Color-Blindness at a Crossroads in Contemporary France', in Chapman and Frader (eds), *Race in France*, pp.219-26 (p.221).

<sup>37</sup> Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), p.96.

<sup>38</sup> François Dubet and Didier Lapeyronnie, *Les Quartiers d'exil* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1992), p.179. Cited by Anne Sa'adah, *Contemporary France*, p.213.

unemployment figures hovering between twenty and thirty percent, and even higher for those under the age of thirty. In these areas, violent confrontations between young people in the *cités* and the police are now routine, and the government's response, even before the riots of 2005, has been to move away from preventive measures, and embrace a repressive approach.<sup>41</sup>

From the point of view of the extreme right in France, as well as a good portion of the rest of the electorate, the violence of the *cités* is evidence of the failure of the republican doctrine of assimilation, colour-blind or not, and Jean-Marie Le Pen is not alone among leading politicians in their use of highly racialized vocabularies as they place the blame for this situation squarely on the excluded inhabitants of the *cités* themselves. In their rhetorical descriptions of the *banlieues*, one hears the echoes of the kinds of racial language used earlier in the century, a sign of the persistence of such fantasies, and their continued utility in political debate. A common tactic of the National Front in local elections since the early 1980s, for example, has been to spread rumours of 'Arabs' who slaughter sheep in the showers of their state-subsidized apartments.<sup>42</sup> These rumours—never confirmed, but nonetheless quite powerful in their effects on a fearful population—are remarkable for the deft way in which they reverse the hopeful aspirations of an earlier vision of colonial modernity, the cultural syncretism of the 1931 *exposition coloniale*, for example, in which

<sup>41</sup> This history was summarized by *Le Monde* during the violent weeks of November 2005 in 'Politique de la ville: trente ans de traitements d'urgence', *Le Monde*, 8 November 2005. For a perceptive account that emphasizes the history of the *banlieues* both as sites of exclusion and sites of cultural vitality, see Paul Silverstein and Chantal Tetreault, 'Urban Violence in France', *Middle East Report Online*, November 2005 ([http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/silverstein\\_tetreault\\_interv.htm](http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/silverstein_tetreault_interv.htm), consulted 21 February 2006).

<sup>42</sup> For an essential account of the effects of such electoral tactics at the local level, see Françoise Gaspard, *A Small City in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

indigenous architectural motifs were given expression on the exterior of the pavilions, while the interior documents the achievements of French civilization. In the right-wing fantasies of the *cités*, the message is reversed—here, the alleged monstrosity arises from the violation of the modern lines of the building's rational and hygienic exterior by the irreducibly foreign practices occurring within the *cité's* walls. Racial associations such as these are inseparable from French debates about which modernity they have opted for, and the very fungibility of these racial stigmas makes them tempting tools for demagogic politicians who seek electoral advantage in exploiting the anxieties of the French population. Recognizing this history is important, for example, in understanding the vitriolic reaction of young people in the *banlieues* in the summer of 2005, only months before outbreak of violence, when Nicolas Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior, promised to clean out the *cités* 'au Kärcher'—a reference to a pressure washer frequently used by municipalities to clean graffiti off the walls—literally, to whiten them, with a powerful blast of superheated chemicals and bleach.

In France, as in the United States, sociologists and historians have done more to explain the social and economic processes that have contributed to the isolation of the *banlieues*, and rather less to understand the place of racial ideologies in producing such exclusions.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, one group of militants in France tried to connect the history of racial thinking and colonialism to the violence in 2005: the so-called *Indigènes de la République*. Taking as their point of departure an enumeration of the burden of

<sup>43</sup> On the power of racial thinking in the formation of an underclass in the U.S., for example, see Loïc J. D. Wacquant and William Julius Wilson, 'The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 501 (1989), 8-25. Loïc Wacquant has warned about facile comparisons between U.S. 'ghettos' and the French *quartiers d'exil* in 'Banlieues françaises et ghetto noir américain: de l'amalgame à la comparaison', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 10 (1992), 81-103.

discriminations in housing, health care, schooling and employment faced by 'people from current or former colonies, or from postcolonial immigration', the *Indigènes de la République* argued that a direct continuity could be traced between the treatment of 'indigènes' under French colonial rule, and their descendents in France today. Their manifesto, posted first on the internet in January 2005, called for a radical critique of the history of colonialism, and a 'decolonization of the Republic'. Because the moment of their appearance on the public scene coincided with the parliament's passage of an ill-conceived and quickly modified law, which called upon schools to teach the history of colonialism 'in its positive aspects', the *Indigènes de la République* enjoyed a certain notoriety during most of 2005. When de Villepin's government invoked the law of 1955 to respond to the violence in the suburbs in November 2005, the *Indigènes* quickly claimed that this was a vindication of their position. In the press and on television, however, the spokespeople for the *Indigènes* were universally attacked by the defenders of the republican tradition, who assumed from the start that the *Indigènes'* critique could be reduced to a simple 'communitarianism', that is, a movement by people of colour, for people of colour, as opposed to a political movement with ostensibly universal goals. Few bothered to consider the extent to which the *Indigènes'* invocation of the history of colonialism might work as a refutation of the very abstractions being used to exclude their position from legitimate debate.

There are many signs, however, that the events of 2005 have begun to stimulate a more productive debate in France that would include a dialogue with those who live in the *cités*, as well as a discussion of the unfortunate consequences of previous policies of urban renewal and an unreflective reliance on the fallback position of 'republican' values of universalism, *laïcité* and anti-communitarianism. Olivier Masclet's research on political mobilization among the children of immigrants in Gennevilliers

should be a wake-up call to mainstream political parties on the right and the left, for what it tells us about the costs of ignoring local attempts to participate in the political process.<sup>44</sup> Sylvie Tissot of the Université Marc Bloch in Strasbourg has written a perceptive critique of the very concept of the 'quartiers sensibles', in which she demonstrates that the institutionalization of urban renewal projects that aim at improving 'le lien social' (the social fabric) has in fact made such political dialogue more rather than less difficult.<sup>45</sup> Even historians long associated with the defense of the immaculate republic have nuanced their positions in their more recent writings, leading one to think that the historical conversation that has been taking place outside of France, on the links between racial thinking, the French empire and social exclusion in contemporary France, might find its echoes within the metropole itself.<sup>46</sup> In spite of this atmosphere of *ouverture*, however, the recent initiatives of Nicolas Sarkozy's new government show that the obstacles still remain. By appointing Rachida Dati, a woman of Moroccan and Algerian origins, as Minister for Justice, and Rama Yade, a French-African woman

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Masclet, 'Des Quartiers sans voix'.

<sup>45</sup> Sylvie Tissot, 'Y-a-t-il un "problème des quartiers sensibles"? Retour sur une catégorie d'action publique', *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 24.3 (2006), 42-57.

<sup>46</sup> Already in 1999, Gérard Noiriel offered a more critical account of the exclusionary potential embodied in the social programme of the Third Republic, which he sees as an important predecessor of the more notorious social policies of the Vichy regime during the German occupation. See Gérard Noiriel, *Les Origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris: Hachette, 1999). Although Noiriel makes no attempt to connect this story to the Third Republic's imperial policies, the argument nevertheless is an important corrective to the use that is often made of the arguments he provided in *Le Creuset français*. Meanwhile, in 2007, Noiriel published a monumental account of the history of racial thinking in France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France, XIXe-XXe siècle: discours publics, humiliations privées* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).

whose childhood was spent in Senegal, as Secretary of State for Human Rights, Sarkozy appeared willing to break with the tendency of previous governments to select their members from a narrower circle of *haut bourgeois*—and white—elites. At the same time, however, his very public attacks on those who seek to enumerate the inhumanity of successive French regimes during the colonial era or during the Vichy period seem to indicate a break with the more apologetic posture taken by his predecessor, Jacques Chirac, and an attempt to preclude the kind of reappraisal of France's history that would be required to speak openly of the historical connections between racial thinking and definitions of the Republic. Meanwhile, a report released in November 2006 by the National Observatory of the 'zones urbaines sensibles', soon after the first anniversary of the riots of 2005, noted that in spite of the ongoing programmes of urban renovation that 'the new face of our suburbs will not be visible until approximately 2010'.<sup>47</sup> One might well wonder what colour that face will be.

Joshua Cole,  
University of Michigan

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of this report, produced by the Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles (Onzus) and submitted to parliament on 10 November 2006, see 'Les écarts entre zones urbaines sensibles et autres quartiers se sont creusés entre 2003 et 2005', *Le Monde*, 8 November 2006.

## Colonial history, postcolonial memory: contemporary perspectives

La seule chose que nous puissions et devrions tenter—mais c'est aujourd'hui l'essentiel—c'est de lutter [...] pour délivrer à *la fois* les Algériens et les Français de la tyrannie coloniale.<sup>1</sup>

Nous sommes entrés, qu'on le veuille ou non, dans la postcolonie.<sup>2</sup>

Recently targetted by Perry Anderson for omitting any sustained reference to colonial history from the essays that constitute *Les Lieux de mémoire*, the editor of the collection, Pierre Nora, bristled with indignation. Presenting the monumental Gallimard publication as a clear rupture with the ambitions of the *Annales* school, Anderson had described the work in *La Pensée tiède* as a 'soutien consensuel aux institutions du présent', an attempt to forge an 'union sucrée dans laquelle les divisions et les discordes de la société française se fondraient dans les rituels attendris de la remémoration postmoderne', i.e. a nationally shared memory that forms part of an explicitly ideological programme of national cohesion.<sup>3</sup> Central to such a critique is the recognition of the absence of any traces of colonial history, which is 'objet', according to Anderson, 'd'un *non-lieu* au tribunal de ces souvenirs à l'eau de rose' (p.52). Dismissing, by way of illustration, Charles-Robert Ageron's essay on the 1931

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Le colonialisme est un système', in *Situations V* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 25-48 (p. 48; emphasis in the original).

<sup>2</sup> Nicolas Bancel, 'De la colonie à la postcolonie', *Cultures Sud*, 165 (2007), 6-11 (p. 11).

<sup>3</sup> See Perry Anderson, *La Pensée tiède: un regard critique sur la culture française* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), pp. 50, 54.



*Exposition coloniale* as a study of 'babioles exotiques', for instance, he concludes: 'Que valent des *Lieux de mémoire* qui oublient d'inclure Diên Biên Phủ?' (p.53). Nora's response, in an acerbic accompanying retort entitled 'La pensée réchauffée', is double-edged: on the one hand, he upbraids his critic for failing to acknowledge the 'fécondité heuristique de la méthode'; on the other, he justifies the exclusion of realms of colonial memory, listing what might be seen as possible *lieux de mémoire (coloniale)*—the *parti colonial*; the ideological struggle between Ferry and Clemenceau; the *roman colonial*, posters and schoolbooks—before proceeding to dismiss such entries as ultimately 'bien légères par rapport à la taille de l'enjeu'.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of the present article is two-fold. On the one hand, it discusses the extensive and complex debates, epitomized by this spat between Anderson and Nora, concerning colonial history and its memorial afterlives, debates that have become increasingly prominent and acrimonious since 2005, at times appearing to dominate French media and intellectual life; on the other, it addresses the French reception of a loose body of thought—largely dependent on anti-colonial and poststructuralist writings in French, but emerging on the whole from the North American academy—known as 'la pensée postcoloniale'. The underlying suggestion is not only that these two areas are closely associated, but also that a new approach to the colonial past—in the light of, yet certainly not dictated by, the insights of the diverse and complex body of material constituting postcolonial critique—might permit clearer understanding of the series of entanglements that risk stymieing contemporary debate. The article is, in this way, a reaction to the claim, made by Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, editors of *Culture post-coloniale* (the third volume in their trilogy of collected essays on post/colonial history in France), in reference to Robert

Paxton's 1970s intervention in the historiography of Vichy, that 'l'histoire coloniale française est en quête de *paxtonisation*'.<sup>5</sup>

As the violent November 2005 events in a number of French *banlieues* begin to receive the close analysis they deserve,<sup>6</sup> and as it becomes increasingly apparent that the dropping of the notorious fourth clause of the 23 February 2005 law (obliging educators to present 'le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer') represents little more than a lull in wars over colonial memory,<sup>7</sup> French publishers appear—albeit belatedly—to have turned to the postcolonial field. It might be argued that an active engagement with postcolonial criticism began in the late 1990s, most notably in the context of the sesquicentenary of the abolition of slavery (1998),

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, 'Mémoire coloniale: résistances à l'émergence d'un débat', in Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel (eds), *Culture post-coloniale, 1961-2006: traces et mémoires coloniales en France* (Paris: Autrement, 2006), pp. 22-41 (p. 26).

<sup>6</sup> See Joshua Cole in this issue. See also the special issue of *French Politics, Culture and Society* devoted to the subject, 24.3 (2006), and the 'Dossier on the Fall Riots', presented by Nacira Guénif Souilamas, in *Contemporary French Civilization*, 31.1 (2007), 159-218.

<sup>7</sup> For the full text of the 'Loi n°2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés', see <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr> (consulted 15 August 2007). Article 3 of the February law continues to threaten diversity in research with its proposal that a 'fondation pour la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie, des combats du Maroc et de Tunisie est créée, avec le concours de l'Etat'. On recent memory debates in France, see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, 'Passé colonial, histoire et "guerre de mémoires"', *Multitudes*, 26 (2006), 143-54, and Claude Liauzu, 'Les historiens saisis par les guerres de mémoires coloniales', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 52.4 bis (2005), 99-109. On the law itself, see Romain Bertrand, *Mémoires d'empire: la controverse autour du fait colonial* (Broissieux: Editions du Croquant, 2006), and Claude Liauzu and Gilles Manceron (eds), *La Colonisation, la loi et l'histoire* (Paris: Syllepse, 2006). Pascal Blanchard helpfully explores the language of the legislation, suggesting that a critical focus on the term 'positif' has detracted attention from other key terms, such as 'oeuvre', 'place qu'elle mérite', 'sacrifice' and 'place éminente'. See 'Histoire coloniale: la nouvelle guerre des mémoires', *Cultures Sud*, 165 (2007), 30-35 (p. 31).

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Nora, 'La pensée réchauffée', in Anderson, *La Pensée tiède*, pp.99-137 (pp. 118, 120).

when the inadequacy of national narratives of the colonial past led to increasing awareness of what Said dubbed the 'overlapping territories' and 'intertwined histories' that characterize postcoloniality.<sup>8</sup> Since 2005, Gallic indifference (and occasional outright hostility) to postcolonial criticism has been rapidly transformed, and the epithet 'postcolonial—for years a purely, if of course complexly, chronological marker—was transformed into a site of increasingly anxious enquiry. A series of special issues of journals has addressed postcolonial questions: most notably *Hérodote* (120 [2006]), namely on 'La question postcoloniale'; *Labyrinthe* (24 [2006]), on 'Faut-il être postcolonial?'; *Multitudes* (26 [2006]); on 'postcolonial et politique de l'histoire', *Contretemps* (16 [2006]), on 'postcolonialisme et immigration'; *Esprit* (330 [2006]), on 'Pour comprendre la pensée coloniale'; *Nouvelles questions féministes* (25.3 [2006]), on 'Sexisme, racisme, et postcolonialisme'; *Cultures Sud* (165 [2007]), on 'Retours sur la question coloniale'. This proliferation of periodicals has accordingly introduced into French a new lexicon of postcolonial enquiry.<sup>9</sup> The activists and scholars associated with ACHAC (Association pour la Connaissance de l'Histoire de l'Afrique Contemporaine) have complemented the much commented *La Fracture coloniale* (2005) with their recent *Culture post-coloniale* (2006) and *La Colonisation française* (2007).<sup>10</sup> In addition, the publication of *Penser le*

<sup>8</sup> See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), pp.1-72. On 1998, see Romuald Fonkoua, 'Écrire l'abolition de l'esclavage aux Antilles françaises', in Christiane Chaulet-Achour and Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua (eds), *Esclavage: libérations, abolitions, commémorations* (Paris: Séguier, 2001), pp.215-61, and Laurent Dubois, 'Haunting Delgrès', *Radical History Review*, 78 (2000), 166-77.

<sup>9</sup> See also two earlier journal special issues devoted to postcolonial studies: 'Postcolonialisme. Décentrement, déplacement, dissémination', *Dédale*, 5-6 (1997), ed. by Abdelwahab Meddeb, and 'Postcolonialisme: inventaire et débats', *Africultures*, 28 (2000).

<sup>10</sup> See Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire (eds), *La Fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial* (Paris: La

postcolonial, a translation of Neil Lazarus's *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, as well as that of a French version of Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, marks a radical shift from the recent situation, in which (despite the efforts of researchers such as Jean-Marc Moura) postcolonial criticism remained exotically 'Anglo-Saxon', a 'communitarian' threat to the 'identitarian' integrity of the French republic and its institutions.<sup>11</sup> Said had been translated, but remained largely ignored (except as a commentator on the Palestinian question); Spivak and other leading critics are still, on the whole, un-translated, and as a result largely unknown.<sup>12</sup>

The context of this recent rapid change is evident: France has long been a country characterized by the mobility of its population and the porosity of its boundaries, yet the processes of national

Découverte, 2005), and Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Françoise Vergès, *La Colonisation française* (Toulouse: Milan, 2007). For critical responses to *La Fracture coloniale*, see Grégoire Leménager, 'Des études (post)coloniales à la française', *Labyrinthe*, 24 (2006), 85-90, and Alexandre Mamarbachi, 'Quand *La Fracture coloniale* fait disparaître les rapports de classe...', *Contretemps*, 16 (2006), 143-49.

<sup>11</sup> See Neil Lazarus, *Penser le postcolonial: une introduction critique*, trans. Marianne Groulez, Christophe Jaquet et Hélène Quiniou (Paris: Amsterdam, 2006), and Homi K. Bhabha, *Les Lieux de la culture: une théorie postcoloniale*, trans. Françoise Bouillot (Paris: Payot, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> The selection of these two texts—the first critical of much postcolonial work, the second reflecting a particular strand of postcolonial theory heavily influenced by poststructuralist thought—does not necessarily provide a representative indication of past and present work in the field. There is a continued risk that their publication will project an image of postcolonial studies in France that remains partial, incomplete and outmoded: not only are key foundational texts, such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), not available in French translation, but also the more recent, reinvigorating and challenging contributions to postcolonialism, such as Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) and David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), do not attract the attention they merit.



identity formation policed, and where possible domesticated, the effects of internal and continental migration. The twentieth century saw for the first time, however, the mass displacement of colonized people to France itself—initially as a result of the First World War, in which colonial troops played a key (if subsequently occluded) role, and then in the context of education and labour-related migration, which intensified in the thirty years following the Second World War. Such major demographic shifts were clearly linked to the practices, and then legacies, of Empire. The French reluctance, for a long period following the Algerian War, to address the implications of these meant that whilst pluri-ethnicity was acknowledged, the fact of multi-culturalism was seen as something that happened (and was best contained) elsewhere: across the Channel, or, even better, across the Atlantic. The centralizing, universalizing logic of French republican ideology would for a long time dismiss as ‘communitarianism’ the demands of a range of minority groups whose gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity failed to fit with ‘official’ processes of national identity formation, as disseminated through education, legislation, the privileging of secularism and, most recently, the establishment by Nicolas Sarkozy of a ‘Ministère de l’immigration, de l’intégration, de l’identité nationale et du codéveloppement’. In the terms of Achille Mbembe, explaining the French resistance to postcolonial thought: ‘à cause de son insularité culturelle et du narcissisme de ses élites, la France s’est coupée de ses nouveaux voyages de la pensée mondiale.’<sup>13</sup>

The recent and ongoing flurry of publications to which I have alluded above, categorized by Nicolas Bancel as a ‘configuration complexe [...] et qui a tout du *maelström*’,<sup>14</sup> is thus best understood in a wider context of debates in a variety of fields: a) public and popular culture—the Quai Branly museum was the first in a series of

high profile inaugurations of collections associated with the colonial past, and the forthcoming opening of the ‘Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration’ (CNHI) in the former colonial museum at the Porte Dorée is likely to be equally controversial;<sup>15</sup> Michael Haneke’s *Caché*, released in 2005, and Rachid Bouchareb’s *Indigènes*, released in September 2006, are the latest in a series of films reflecting critically on the colonial past and its legacies in the postcolonial present; b) politics and related social movements—the ‘appel’ of the ‘Indigènes de la République’ was published a month before the ‘loi du 23 février’, in January 2005; 10 May 2006 saw the first national day for the commemoration of slavery;<sup>16</sup> c) historiography and academic discourse—seen most publicly, perhaps, in the controversy surrounding the definition of ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonisation’ in *Le Petit Robert* 2007.<sup>17</sup>

Delayed engagement with postcolonialism is thus to be seen as one manifestation of a wider process of engagement with the colonial past in France—and of attempts to come to terms with the

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of postcolonial museology in France, see Robert Aldrich, ‘Le musée colonial impossible’, in Blanchard and Bancel (eds), *Culture post-coloniale*, pp. 83–101, and Herman Lebovics, ‘The Musée du Quai Branly: Art? Artifact? Spectacle!’, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 24.3 (2006), 95–110.

<sup>16</sup> On the ‘Indigènes de la République’, see Saïd Bouamama, ‘Les “Indigènes de la République”: un révélateur social et politique’, *Cultures Sud*, 165 (2007), 70–75, and Jérémy Robine, ‘Les “indigènes de la République”: nation et question postcoloniale’, *Hérodote*, 120 (2006), 118–48; on the commemoration of slavery, see ‘Traites, esclavage: la trace et l’histoire’, a special supplement of *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 52.4 bis (2005), Aggée C. Lomo Myazhiom (ed.), *Esclaves noirs, maîtres blancs: quand la mémoire de l’opprimé s’oppose à la mémoire de l’opresseur* (Paris: Homnispères, 2006), Catherine Reinhart, ‘Slavery and Commemoration: Remembering the French Abolitionary Decree 150 Years Later’, in Alec G. Hargreaves (ed.), *Memory, Empire and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 11–36, and Françoise Vergès, *La Mémoire enchaînée: questions sur l’esclavage* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> On this controversy, see Nadia Lamarkbi, ‘Colonisation: les maux pour le dire’, *Jeune Afrique*, 10–16 September 2006, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> See Achille Mbembe, ‘Qu’est-ce que la pensée postcoloniale?’, *Esprit*, 330 (2006), 117–33 (p. 121).

<sup>14</sup> See Bancel, ‘De la colonie à la postcolonie’, p. 7.

legacies of colonialism in the manifest diversity of the present. The extent of an engagement with previously published postcolonial criticism is, in fact, to be attenuated, not least in relation to the publications of ACHAC, which tend to allude to postcolonialism and operate under its umbrella without necessarily engaging directly with its specifics. It is perhaps for this reason that, in the flurry of 'postcolonial' publications mentioned above, no consensus has emerged, all the more so because—as Achille Mbembe makes clear in his interview with *Esprit*—postcolonial thought resists reduction to an orthodoxy, despite the best efforts of its critics to portray it as a monolith.<sup>18</sup> There is consequently a persistent uncertainty over what it might mean to apply the term 'postcolonial' to France itself, to its former colonies, and to those overseas departments and territories that form part of a residual 'Greater France'. Witness the exasperated, even alarmed, tone of the title of the CERI conference at Sciences-Po in May 2006, 'Que faire des *postcolonial studies*?', with its implications that this alien, untranslated, perhaps even untranslatable body of thought was somehow a wayward child requiring the benefits of firm disciplining.

Such confusion is not surprising in a context where the generalized acceptance that a pervasive 'devoir de mémoire' towards the colonial past might be a positive development is complemented and complicated by a majority adherence to a celebratory narrative of Empire that continues to present overseas expansion as a 'civilizing mission'. What an increasingly critical engagement with postcolonialism undeniably reveals, however, is a shift in usage of the epithet 'postcolonial' away from the customary chronological signifier of what comes after Empire. Such a marker of posteriority was already complex in the field of French colonial history: to focus on the Francophone Caribbean alone, Haiti has struggled to come to terms with its 'postcolonial' status for over two centuries, whereas—

<sup>18</sup> See Achille Mbembe, 'Qu'est-ce que la pensée postcoloniale?', *Esprit*, 330 (2006), 117-33 (pp. 117-21).

in the year following the sixtieth anniversary of departmentalization—such an epithet is still awaited by the DOMs of Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique. This new willingness to (in the terms of the title of the Neil Lazarus translation) 'penser le postcolonial', and the associated rapid proliferation of a postcolonial studies that dares to speak its name, have, nevertheless, triggered a series of predictably robust retorts, emerging across the political and intellectual spectrum, most notably in recent texts by Pascal Bruckner and Daniel Lefeuvre attacking the 'Western masochism' inherent in 'colonial repentance'.<sup>19</sup>

Bruckner, in *La Tyrannie de la pénitence*, describes what he sees as a widespread self-loathing inherent in current reassessments of the colonial past. In the essay, which may be read as a sequel to his earlier *Sanglot de l'homme blanc*, he claims to identify a paralysis within contemporary Europe caused by the failure to distinguish 'culpabilité' from 'responsabilité', repentance from remorse.<sup>20</sup> Treating the passage to postcoloniality as a process of historical rupture, and seemingly blind to France's continued association with (and even intervention in) its former colonies, Bruckner dismisses any attempt to detect legacies of the 'colonial' past in the 'postcolonial' present as 'téléscopage spatio-temporel' (p.153). His description of the Algerian War, in a 2006 debate with Benjamin Stora, as an 'épisode latéral de notre histoire', and subsequent claim that '[u]ne nation est grande non par ses conquêtes territoriales mais par ses avancées spirituelles, scientifiques', reveal the blend of

<sup>19</sup> See Pascal Bruckner, *La Tyrannie de la pénitence: essai sur le masochisme occidental* (Paris: Grasset, 2005), and Daniel Lefeuvre, *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005). Also of note are Max Gallo, *Fier d'être français* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), Paul-François Paoli, *Nous ne sommes pas coupables: Assez de repentances!* (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 2006), and Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La France perd la mémoire: comment un pays démissionne de son histoire* (Paris: Perrin, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> See Pascal Bruckner, *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc: tiers-monde, culpabilité, haine de soi* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

historical revisionism and ideological bad faith on which this 'white blindfold' thesis depends.<sup>21</sup> Lefeuvre's *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* itself attempts to offer independent historiographic back-up for Bruckner's thesis, equating the violence of French colonial expansionism in North Africa with that witnessed elsewhere in Europe as well as in France, and presenting in statistical detail the net economic cost to France of 130 years of Algerian occupation.<sup>22</sup> In refusing to acknowledge the specificity of colonial violence, Lefeuvre fails to distinguish between a customary, strategic denigration of the enemy and that radical dehumanization that culminates in scientific racism; at the same time, his reductively empirical analysis of the financial price of Empire is haunted by notions of the 'white man's burden', failing to acknowledge the symbolic and strategic capital generated by overseas expansion. What is missing in *Pour en finir* is any discussion of why, if colonization was so costly, colonialism lasted so long, and why, by association, its inevitable collapse was countered so fiercely. The weight of archival evidence effectively silences the complex

<sup>21</sup> See Marie-Laure Germon and Stéphane Marchand, 'Pascal Bruckner—Benjamin Stora: contre l'oubli, la mémoire ou l'histoire', *Le Figaro*, 14 November 2006. Available at [www.lefigaro.fr](http://www.lefigaro.fr) (consulted 15 August 2007). The phrase 'white blindfold to shut out the truth' was used by the Australian judge Marcus Einfeld to counter John Howard's dismissal of the 'black armband view of history', i.e. an approach to past events that entails a sense of shame and grief: 'The things done in the past should not have happened. Together they are human wrongs, not for blame in the crude sense, but for the deepest regret and for a commitment to put them right as a matter of the utmost urgency. If they represent what some have called a black armband view of history, I for one wear it as a mark of sorrow, and as a commitment to reconciliation. Rather a black armband than a white blindfold to shut out the truth.' See 'The Great Australian Brain Robbery: The Hijacking of the Australian Conscience', unpublished lecture delivered at University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, Thursday 19 September 2002. Transcript available at <http://www.safecom.org.au/einfeld.htm> (consulted 16 August 2007).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed critique of Lefeuvre's text, see Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch's review of the work, available at <http://cvuh.free.fr/actualite/coquery.repentance.coloniale.html>, consulted 15 August 2007.

experience of empire, Algerian or otherwise, and there is similarly no recognition that France and Algeria now exist as what Paul Silverstein has dubbed a 'transpolitical' space, in which the constant imbrication of the colonial in the postcolonial is seen as inescapable.<sup>23</sup> Hermann Lebovics' pioneering recent work on 'bringing the Empire back home' has given historical texture to more general debates about the enduring impact of decolonization on France itself, but Lefeuvre claims that any attempt to detect these traces in the present will lead to hyphenated identities, to the chaos of communitarianism, and—in his melodramatic concluding phrase—to 'une France de l'Apartheid' (p.230).<sup>24</sup>

Hostility to any approaches seen as loosely 'postcolonial' seems to revolve around a number of interrelated critiques, questioning, for instance: their appropriateness (as Lefeuvre's work seems to imply) to analyses emerging outside the North American academy; the applicability of such approaches to lived or historical experience as opposed to literary material; their excessive vagueness and tendency to conflate radically different colonial situations, or even to elide the colonial with the postcolonial; their derivative tendency to reiterate what Foucault, Gramsci, Sartre and others have outlined already; their ethnicization of social relations, reduced to a reified colonizer/colonized binary.<sup>25</sup> That such a wide-ranging self-analysis has always already existed within the postcolonial field, particularly in the work of scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad, Peter Hallward, Graham Huggan, Neil Lazarus and Benita Parry, seems to be

<sup>23</sup> See Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> See Hermann Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> These reasons for the hostile reception of postcolonialism in France are discussed by Mary Stevens in 'The Discourse of Postcolonialism and its Reception in France 2005-2006: notes towards an ethnography'. I am grateful to the author for providing a copy of this unpublished paper, first presented at the SFPS Postgraduate Research Workshop, IFRU, 10 November 2006.

entirely ignored. Moreover, the preface to *Culture post-coloniale* makes it clear that postcolonial criticism is 'un champ en pleine ébullition',<sup>26</sup> with Jean-Marc Moura's contribution to this volume underlining the risks of an obsession with the unsuitability of postcolonialism for the French case: 'la question n'est plus celle de la légitimité des études postcoloniales, mais plutôt celle de l'étonnante légèreté d'approches de l'histoire [...] qui prétendent ne pas tenir compte [du fait postcolonial]'.<sup>27</sup>

Bruckner's 'pénitents' and Lefeuvre's 'repentis' remain—with a few notable and, to those familiar with the field, obvious exceptions—unnamed, and close reading of their postcolonialist targets confirms a suspicion that their foils are in fact largely straw men. Bruckner and Lefeuvre's texts nevertheless reveal the primary risk, seen from a contemporary perspective, of the polarization of ideologically opposed positions. The editors of *Culture post-coloniale* warn against such a tendency, highlighting the hazards of pitting the advocates of an eternally blameless Republic, 'une et indivisible', against those for whom the same Republic should always—metaphorically, and often even literally—be on trial.<sup>28</sup> The danger is that discussions of history and memory with emphases such as these are posited on an assumption that the proper object of study is the normative French nation-state, in which territory, population and state form an isomorphic unit, and where non-European colonial subjects, and those of postcolonial immigrant origins, play little if any role. In his 'Unthinking French History', Gary Wilder has commented, however, on the need to 'recognize the French nation as a feature, not a container, of French imperial

<sup>26</sup> See Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, 'Culture post-coloniale: le temps des héritages', in Bancel and Blanchard (eds), *Culture post-coloniale*, pp.6-20 (p.10).

<sup>27</sup> See Jean-Marc Moura, 'Les influences et permanences coloniales dans le domaine littéraire', in Bancel and Blanchard (eds), *Culture post-coloniale*, pp. 166-75 (p. 169).

<sup>28</sup> See Bancel and Blanchard, 'Mémoire coloniale: résistances à l'émergence d'un débat', p. 34.

history'.<sup>29</sup> It is with a brief reflection on the restrictive territorialization of colonial history and of the understanding of postcolonial memory inherent in 'Hexagonalisme' that this article concludes.

In December 2005, as public and professional pressure mounted in opposition to the now infamous fourth clause of the 'loi du 23 février' discussed above, the then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy prepared to leave 'mainland' France for a visit to Martinique. Angered by this apparent insensitivity, Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau wrote an open letter to Sarkozy, provocatively entitled 'De loin', underlining the indelicacy, in the present circumstances, of his planned trip to their 'terre d'esclavage, de colonisation, et de néo-colonisation'. Martinique, they claimed, had taught them the benefits of 'l'échange et le partage'; it has fostered an understanding of 'les sociétés multi-trans-culturelles', rooted in a 'volonté sereine de partager les vérités de tout passé commun'.<sup>30</sup> Shortly afterwards, Sarkozy cancelled his journey. The following day Chamoiseau and Glissant launched a call in *Libération* for 'une solidarité des mémoires', adding that 'la mémoire est commune' and that '[o]n doit penser autrement notre manière de vivre ensemble'.<sup>31</sup> Historian Claude Liauzu similarly attacked the bill for its imposition of a monolithic version of the past that silenced alternative narratives of colonialism, challenging it in *Le Monde diplomatique* for preventing 'l'élaboration d'une mémoire

<sup>29</sup> See Gary Wilder, 'Unthinking French History: Colonial Studies Beyond National Identity', in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Critical Approaches to 'National' Histories and Literatures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp.125-43 (p.136). A longer version of this text was also published as "'Impenser" l'histoire de France: les études coloniales hors de la perspective de l'identité nationale', *Cahiers d'histoire: Revue d'histoire critique*, 96-97 (2005), 91-119.

<sup>30</sup> The complete text of the letter is available at: <http://www.ldh-toulon.net/spip.php?article1067> (consulted 15 August 2007).

<sup>31</sup> See Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, 'Il faut une solidarité des mémoires', *Libération*, 8 December 2005. Consulted at <http://www.liberation.fr>, 15 August 2007.

commune à tous les Français de toutes origines'.<sup>32</sup> It was in the light of this shift towards a commonality that reflects actually existing plurality that Chamoiseau and Glissant, in their open letter to Sarkozy, proposed a fresh take on postcolonial identity: 'Chacun est désormais un individu, riche de plusieurs appartenances, sans pouvoir se réduire à l'une d'elles, et aucune République ne pourra s'épanouir sans harmoniser les expressions de ces multi-appartenances'. They thus seemingly countered the essentializing, identitarian emphases of a homogenized, *modèle républicain* version of colonial history, a model that the 23 February law appeared to epitomize. They highlighted the risk that attempts to legislate on memory increasing serve to fragment memory further, ignoring in the process the need for a shared memory and a common narrative.

What this example illustrates is the complex process of reflecting on—and intervening in—debates about the relationality of multiple *colonial* memories in a period that considers itself historically *post-colonial*. The unevenness of such memories is patent, dependent as they are on the different locations of those remembering, on the actions of lobbies and other interest groups, on the often quixotic attempts at memorial legislation discussed above, on the activity of groups of historians, and on the unstable relationship between the individual and the interest group, the interest group and the collectivity, the collectivity and the nation. The example above reflects efforts to reconcile divergent memories of empire, within or across cultures, efforts rooted in a variety of motivations, both intellectual and ideological. At the same time, it reveals the continued frustration of such endeavours, a frustration that reflects both the continued incompleteness of the decolonization of France itself (to which Sartre alludes in the text used as an epigraph to this article), and the ways in which the legacies of empire persist in shaping contemporary societies.

<sup>32</sup> Claude Liauzu, 'Une loi contre l'histoire', *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2005, p. 28.

In talking of sharing—of histories, of narratives, of memories—there is of course a need to reflect on the nature of the common ownership of the past this implies, on whether it is latent or engineered, existing or fantasized. The emphasis in the preliminary report of the 'Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage' (2005) is on the fostering, from the multiple memories of slavery, of a 'mémoire partagée', which would itself permit the elaboration of what Ricouer dubbed a 'récit partagé'.<sup>33</sup> The possibility of such shared phenomena, linking France and its overseas departments in a reflection on slavery and its aftermath, is, as the report makes clear, greatly facilitated by the existence of common structures, educational and cultural, whereby connections may be forged. In most other cases, where the institutional and diplomatic dislocation between former colonizer and former colonized is more stark, any common ownership may prove much less consensual. What is clear, however, from the range of cases recently prominent in the French media (e.g. Algeria, New Caldeonia, Haiti, the Ivory Coast), in which memories appear divergent or convergent, antagonistic or complementary, is that a self-sufficiently national memory of Empire remains inevitably partial and increasingly unsustainable. Any such memory ignores both the emergence of more complex spaces (underpinned by the dynamics of memory), and the often contrastive, contrapuntal, even dissonant existence of competing alternative memories. Which models or approaches might then reflect—and permit reflection on—these spaces of remembering and forgetting? How might such models and approaches explore the spatial and cultural connections on which these spaces depend—connections that, in reality, bypass national boundaries, that ignore the often arbitrary chronological moments at which the colonial past is (through collective amnesia and its judicial support of amnesty, by the would-be post-colonial present) supposedly eclipsed, and that

<sup>33</sup> The full text of the 2005 report is available at <http://www.comite-memoire-esclavage.fr/> (consulted 15 August 2007).



evolve according to complex itineraries in which decades of forgetting can be unpredictably disrupted by the resurgence of the past?

In answering these questions about possible models and approaches, the aim must be to move towards a more inclusive awareness of the workings of colonial memory. Informative in this context is Dipesh Chakrabarty's warning against what he calls the 'asymmetric ignorance' that transforms 'other histories' into 'variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe"'.<sup>34</sup> A lead is perhaps offered by Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, whose call—in 'Between Metropole and Colony'—for a comparatist postcolonial approach to the history of Empire that operates according to a new agenda recognizing that the 'metropole and colony, colonizer and colonized need to be brought into one analytic field'.<sup>35</sup> In the French case, this might be translated not into a political or diplomatic 'Francophonía', in which intercultural communication and exchange are grounded in residually asymmetrical situations of power, but into a postcolonial 'francophonía', understood as a 'world region held together by historical events, [by] the binding strength of joint common experiences and places of remembrance'.<sup>36</sup> Such a space must not, of course, be seen as a homogenizing one, whose globalizing ambitions grind down the singularities that national histories tend to (over)privilege. It is to be characterized instead by the interdependencies identified by Achille Mbembe: 'depuis la Traite des esclaves et la colonisation, il n'y a pas d'identité française ou de

<sup>34</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts', *Representations*, 37 (1992), 1-26 (p. 1).

<sup>35</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in Stoler and Cooper (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-56 (p. 15).

<sup>36</sup> See Matthias Middel, 'Francophonía as a World Region?', *European Review of History*, 10.2 (2003), 203-20 (p. 205).

lieux français de mémoire qui n'englobent simultanément l'ailleurs et l'ici. En d'autres termes, l'ailleurs est constitutif de l'ici et vice versa.<sup>37</sup> Genuine tensions will remain within such a relationship: between communality and dislocation, between convergence and divergence, between theory and practice, between policy and the context on which this is imposed; yet it is such tensions that serve to deny the existence, and even the possibility, of any monolithic model of transnational—or perhaps more accurately transcultural—memory. The challenge is nevertheless for scholars to identify postcolonial sites that resonate for both (former) 'colonizer' and (former) 'colonized', bearing multiple and often conflicting memories that have been perpetuated, in often refracted forms, in the postcolonial era.<sup>38</sup>

In such a brief outline of these key questions, certain methodological issues remain unsatisfactorily fluid: how coherently, for instance, may one define 'memory', either distinctively, in relation to 'history', or according to the internal divisions that such a monolithic term invariably disguises? in discussing postcolonial memory, how is one to account for the uneven transformations of the past inherent in different means of transmission? and finally, in charting so wide a field, and in reflecting on such a range of different situations of colonial contact and its aftermath, how might specificity be protected—i.e. the existence of 'mémoires postcoloniales' (in the plural)—whilst permitting engagement with a more generic 'mémoire postcoloniale' (in the singular)? As Françoise Vergès notes in her recent *Mémoire enchaînée*: 'Cette histoire [the history of Atlantic slavery], partagée par les maîtres et les esclaves, les colonisateurs et les colonisés, dans la mesure où ils l'ont faite ensemble, sur un même sol, à travers les conflits et les

<sup>37</sup> Mbembe, 'Qu'est-ce que la pensée postcoloniale?', p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the emergence of contrapuntal, multidirectional colonial memories, see Pierre Boilley, 'Pour une histoire "équitable": confrontation et échange des Histoires à travers l'expérience "Regards croisés France-Mali"', *Cultures Sud*, 165 (2007), 13-17.

négotiations, le rejet et la rencontre, a produit des récits opposés'.<sup>39</sup> The task, in the present, is to explore the ways in which 'ces histoires se croisent, s'interpellent, s'influencent'. Scholars engaged in exploring French and Francophone postcoloniality from the outside, from across the Channel, from across the Atlantic and from elsewhere, who approach their objects of study in the light of the 'postcolonial turn' that has shaped recent intellectual horizons, must avoid both hubris and self-congratulation. The task instead is to respond to Achille Mbembe's call, significantly articulated in his reflections on 'fracture coloniale', to 'penser de manière critique la postcolonie', i.e. to elaborate an approach to colonial memory that permits a shift from memorializing the past towards engaging critically with the present.<sup>40</sup> This is the very shift that, one might suggest in conclusion, should be central to the ambitions of the postcolonial critic.<sup>41</sup>

Charles Forsdick,  
University of Liverpool

<sup>39</sup> Vergès, *Mémoire enchaînée*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> See Achille Mbembe, 'La République et l'impensé de la "race"', in Bancel, Blanchard and Lemaire (eds), *La Fracture coloniale*, pp. 139-53.

<sup>41</sup> This article was written while its author was in receipt of a Philip Leverhulme Prize. The support of the Leverhulme Trust is gratefully acknowledged.

## Reviews

HIDDLESTON, JANE

**Assia Djebbar: Out of Algeria**

Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2006. vi + 215 pp. £40.  
ISBN: 1-84631-031-8

Jane Hiddleston's broad-ranging, thoughtful monograph on the literary work (not the films) of Assia Djebbar is a welcome addition to scholarship on a still under-discussed author. Performing an original and productive cross-fertilization between postcolonial (and, on occasion, Islamic) thought, and French theories of subjectivity, Hiddleston comprehensively treats the formidable body of Djebbar's work. Djebbar's project is described as a highly literary one: it initially involves trying to exploit the polyvalent, poetic properties of language to render those Algerian subjectivities and identities (frequently female), which are overlooked by hegemonic regimes. Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of the singular-plural subjectivity provides an enabling paradigm for understanding how Djebbar avoids the pitfall of describing the specificity of a collective identity without reiterating the initially colonial act of crudely assimilating diverse subjectivities to one model.

However, this mission to write the postcolonial Algerian self (and *selves*) can only momentarily succeed: ultimately, the effects of post-independence violence and political turmoil in Algeria cause the fracturing of any cohesive, integrated sense of what it means to be Algerian. Consequently, '[p]ost-colonial Algeria has no "identity", but is figured as the partial memory of its losses, of colonial expropriation, and the spectral, melancholic resurgence of colonialism's half-forgotten victims' (p. 170). Accordingly, Djebbar's later works lay a new emphasis on hybrid postcolonial identity, rather than solely Algerian identity. This stems in part from the author's involuntary exile from her country: a

consequence of the brutal suppression of dissent against the Algerian government's monolithic vision of an Arabized Algerian identity. Writing identity thus emerges not only as a literary concern, but very much also as a political one. Djébar is revealed as a highly politically engaged writer, but one determined not to sacrifice the nuanced understanding evinced by her literary treatment of issues surrounding subjectivity. This commitment rubs off on the reading Hiddleston gives of Djébar. In a strong conclusion, she makes an impassioned defence of Djébar's move to situate herself far afield from what Hiddleston sees as the easy territory of identity politics, finding in Djébar's project to chart ambivalent subject positions a mature response to a colonial influence that, despite everything, remains culturally pervasive. Here we find Hiddleston widening her horizons to offer a deliberate, robust challenge to certain precepts of materialist postcolonial criticism.

Hiddleston's volume treats familiar themes in Djébar scholarship: hauntology, exile, trauma, memory, autobiography, gender. For this reader, a particular merit is the skill with which, via its treatment of postcoloniality, this 'book about expatriation' (p. 1), establishes, compellingly and carefully, the interconnections between all these concerns, and others besides. There are, however, slight structural shortcomings here, generating some inelegant repetition. A certain lack of finesse with language becomes something more discordant on the couple of occasions when Hiddleston describes aspects of Islamic social customs as 'backward' (pp. 83-4): given the book's subject matter, the choice of this particular term seemed surprisingly unfortunate. This is not to detract, however, from the value this thought-provoking work will have for researchers active in studying postcoloniality, above and beyond its very important contribution to scholarship on Francophone literature.

Claire Boyle,  
University of Stirling

HITCHCOTT, NICKI

**Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration**

Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007. 192 pp. £40.

ISBN: 978-1-84631-028-7

The field of Francophone studies has seen a growing interest in the question of author representation and the way African writers are received, perhaps because they have long been under-represented in the arena of the French media. In her critical work *Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration*, Nicki Hitchcott gives us a penetrating insight into the twofold relationship between Beyala and the media, stressing Beyala's separateness from the French media and her connection with them. For Beyala is a best-selling author in France and is widely read in the Francophone world, Britain and North America. She has attracted the attention of the media not only by her novels but also because of two allegations of plagiarism.

The originality of Nicki Hitchcott's work is that she takes the whole of Beyala's oeuvre into consideration, whereas other critical writers focused only on a limited selection of her earlier novels and tended to read her only as an African author, not as a migrant writer. Despite her success in the Francophone world, very little has been published by English critics. Hitchcott effectively fills this gap.

Hitchcott's critical work focuses on two main areas. First, Beyala's problematic status in France due to the media, who want to expose her as a fraud and yet at the same time are fascinated by her striking personality and writings. Hitchcott explores this ambivalence through a well-addressed question: whether this paradox is the result of all the controversy that surrounds Beyala, or the result of being both an African migrant and a woman. Second, Hitchcott makes an in-depth study of the manifestations of real or fictional experiences of migration from Africa to Paris and how it affects ethnic identity in a postcolonial context.



*Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration* is divided into five chapters. Drawing on the critical writings of Stuart Hall and Graham Huggan, Hitchcott analyzes the concept of 'postcolonial exotic' and examines the singular status of Beyala as an African writer living in France, suggesting that she is more of an exotic object than a great writer. This is followed by an explanation of Beyala's pessimistic description of Africa, which Hitchcott views as symptomatic of the migratory experience rather than 'Afropessimism' as suggested by Unde Fatunde. Subsequent chapters deal with how migration gives a new voice to African women and how they renegotiate their femininity, whether Beyala's characters are assimilated into French culture or if they are 'out of sync'.

Hitchcott's searching analysis of performances of migration is an invaluable tool for researchers working in the field of postcolonial studies. Although in her last chapter, Hitchcott alludes to the view of Beyala being some sort of self-promoting fake, nevertheless this energetic writer has given the critics rich controversial material, to which Hitchcott does full justice in this survey.

Laurence Randall,  
University of Westminster

HSIEH, YVONNE Y.

**Victor Segalen: Stèles**

Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications,  
2007. 116 pp. £6.00.

ISBN 0-85261-811-5

This volume offers a clear and didactic approach to a major work by this reputedly difficult poet. It also represents a significant contribution to readings of *Stèles*, since unlike the editors of the critical editions (Bouillier, 1982 and Doumet, 1999), Hsieh

includes a thorough discussion of the Chinese epigraphs as part of what she convincingly argues is a fully 'bilingual' text (p. 2). In the English-speaking world Segalen is now most often read for his incomplete *Essai sur l'exotisme*, and one of the merits of Hsieh's guide is her use of the *Essai* in order to elucidate *Stèles* and, arguably, *vice versa*. Here, as in the *Essai*, Segalen rejects the facile exoticism of the 'impression' as practised by Pierre Loti; indeed he wrote 'il me faut savoir, outre ce qu'apparaît le pays, ce que le pays pense' (p.15). And at the heart of his exoticism, as it is uncovered here, lies the paradox that the Other in its most extreme form (classical Chinese civilization) is used as a foil in order to return to the Self. Thus the mastery of the Emperor over the Empire brings us back to that of the Self who is 'Sage et Régent du trône de son cœur' (from 'Sans marque de règne', *passim*). It is the exploration of this innermost self that provides the central matter of Segalen's poetry.

After chapters on Segalen's life and the genesis of *Stèles*, the third and longest section of the book deals with the major themes of Segalen's poetic collection in roughly the order in which they appear. These are grouped under explicative, didactic titles ('religion'; 'travel and diversity'; 'self-discovery'; etc) that are glossed in the contents page (though confusingly not in the body of the text) as corresponding to the major divisions of Segalen's volume ('*Stèles face au midi*'; '*Stèles du bord du chemin*'; etc). Then follows a section on language, which relies almost entirely on Victor P. Bol's work of 1959. Hsieh does however contribute originally with her observations on the place of classic Chinese language and literary tradition in the heart of Segalen's poetry, linking this in a convincing and interesting way to Glissant's notion of *multilinguisme*, which she develops in a final section on Segalen and the postcolonial. In this last chapter Hsieh appears to plead for an appreciation of Segalen through the more contemporary figure of Glissant. Her book itself is however an

excellent introduction to a compelling and elliptic poetry that is without hesitation to be read in its own right.

Jennifer Yee,  
Christ Church College, Oxford

O'FLAHERTY, PATRICIA

**Kourouma: Les Soleils des Indépendances**

Glasgow: Glasgow Introductory Guides to French Literature 52,

2007. 100 pp. £6.00

ISBN 0-85261-813-1

O'Flaherty's *Kourouma: Les Soleils des Indépendances* is the first book-length study in English on a work by Ahmadou Kourouma, and as such represents a very welcome addition to the critical literature currently available in English on Sub-Saharan Francophone African authors. The book comprises five chapters: Kourouma and his Œuvre, Context, Systems of Belief, Language, and Writing West Africa. These are framed by a short introduction and conclusion; the book also includes a glossary of African and Islamic terms, and a well-laid out and comprehensive bibliography.

Although the book is presented as an introductory guide to the first of Kourouma's novels, its content is actually far more wide-ranging. The first two chapters offer an introduction not just to *Les Soleils*, but to all of Kourouma's novels. In the second chapter, for example, the historical context that is provided is extended beyond 1968 (the date of the publication of *Les Soleils*), to include events that took place in Côte d'Ivoire in the autumn of 2006, and even includes speculation on the potential significance of the 2008 World Cup for the country. The final chapter is similarly broad in its focus: the section on Location, for example, contains just one paragraph on the issue as it relates to *Les Soleils*; the remaining paragraphs deal with location (or, in many cases, the deliberate

refusal to fully specify location), not only in Kourouma's other novels, but also in novels by other authors such as Ferdinand Oyono, Sembene Ousmane, Patrick Grainville and Alain Mabanckou.

The third and fourth chapters are more clearly focused on *Les Soleils* itself. The chapter on 'Systems of Belief', although perhaps misleadingly generalising in its sub-titles ('Faith-based Daily Life', 'The Muslim woman', 'The Muslim man'), offers some useful insights into the contexts in which the protagonists operate and into the broader issues that emerge, such as Kourouma's refusal to present pre-colonial Africa in a nostalgic light. In the chapter on Language, O'Flaherty provides a helpful summary of various innovative techniques used by Kourouma, based on the analysis published by Makhily Gassama, but with many additional examples.

The style of the book is generally casual, rather than overly academic, and its target audience is never lost from view, with O'Flaherty making frequent comparisons between Kourouma's work and work by authors with whom readers might already be familiar, such as Chaucer, Bunyan, Shakespeare, Zola, Proust, and Flaubert. On one occasion O'Flaherty even goes so far as to describe the narrator's invitation to listen to the hunter's tales as 'a polite imperative to which the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh must have had no choice but to submit on many an occasion'. Although in many respects this reading of an African author within a strictly Western framework might be viewed as problematic, the result is nevertheless a text that will be immediately accessible to undergraduate audiences and will provide a helpful starting-point for students tackling Kourouma's work for the first time.

Kathryn Woodham,  
University of Nottingham

RINGROSE, PRISCILLA

**Assia Djebbar: In Dialogue with Feminisms**

Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006. 266 pp. Pb \$68.00.

ISBN 90-420-1739-2

Priscilla Ringrose's book *Assia Djebbar: In Dialogue with Feminisms* is a welcome investigation into Djebbar's strategies of writing and her complex relation to both Western and Arab feminist theory. Ringrose chooses to focus her analysis on four texts that Djebbar produced between 1985 and 1995 by applying a set of theories exposed in the early works of the most famous French feminist poststructuralist critics whose common feature, according to Ringrose, is the resistance to patriarchal discourse and the 'revalorisation of the maternal and the feminine and in particular of 'the archaic force of the pre-oedipal' (p. 18).

In the first chapter of the book, Ringrose matches Julia Kristeva's theory of language and her theoretical analysis of the symbolic and semiotic modalities of language to the characteristics of linguistic style in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Particularly interesting is the author's analysis of the syntactic and rhythmic level of the books' poetic passage *Sistre* and her comparison of the linguistic features of Arab syntax and the Arab poetic tradition with this passage of the book. The second chapter of the book is a detailed examination by Ringrose of similarities and differences between Djebbar's elaboration of an 'écriture des femmes' in *Vaste est la prison* and Cixous's theory of 'écriture féminine'. In the third chapter, Ringrose gives an original interpretation of the nature and the function of narrative and feminine dual identity in *Ombre Sultane* in superposition with Luce Irigaray's own ideas of the female unconscious, subjectivity and sociality. Finally, the treatment of women in Islamic history in *Loin de Medine* is the main object of analysis of the last chapter of the book. Here, Ringrose, in contrast to earlier interpretations of the same text, seeks to compare Djebbar's attempt to rewrite the early stages of

Islamic history from the point of view of the position and experience of the women of this early period with Leila Ahmed's and Fatima Mernissi's own theories on gender and Islam. As Ringrose concludes, Djebbar succeeds in the feminist project of reconstructing the female experience, however her position in relation to Islam and feminism remains ambivalent, as she does not finally reverse the patriarchal order.

The reader occasionally feels overwhelmed by the multiplicity of theoretical approaches to Djebbar's literary texts and Ringrose's comparisons may on occasion feel overstretched. Nevertheless, Ringrose argues convincingly for the necessity of adopting the approach of 'dialogic space' when analysing Djebbar's writing from the perspective of feminist politics and manages to avoid the pitfall of a reductive, ideological reading, thus bringing to light the complexity and multifaceted nature of Djebbar's work.

This book will not only appeal to scholars working on Djebbar's work, but also to students interested in women's studies and postcolonial francophone theory.

**Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani,  
Goldsmiths College, London**



### Obituary: Ousmane Sembene (1923-2007)

The death of Ousmane Sembene in June of this year marks the passing of one of the truly great African cultural figures of the twentieth century. A celebrated author and pioneering filmmaker, whose career spanned over fifty years, his work consistently engaged with the great issues of the day — decolonisation, neo-colonial corruption, dependence on Western aid, battles over historical memory and identity — but his characters were rarely depicted as mere ciphers, and he remained unfailingly attentive to the complexity of human identity and interaction. A committed Marxist and pan-Africanist, Sembene used his work to explore Africans' desire for justice and freedom, whether from colonialism, economic inequality, or the constraints of a male-dominated society. Although he devoted himself primarily to film from the late 1960s onwards, he always saw literature as his true love, and his literary legacy is an important one: his epic realist novel of an emerging social and nationalist consciousness in colonial Africa, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), is as important a text as Achebe's much better known text *Things Fall Apart*; equally, his collection of short stories, *Voltaïque* (1962), is a neglected classic of African literature, in which Sembene deploys a wide variety of narrative styles and displays a mastery of form, both of which reflect his willingness to embrace nuance and ambiguity (despite what certain of his critics might lead one to believe).

However, it is rightly as a filmmaker that he has gained an international reputation. Often lauded more for his politics than for his cinematic talent, Sembene was in fact a very thoughtful and daring filmmaker, and his films display an extraordinary aesthetic range: from the earthy humour of *Xala* (1974) and *Faat Kine* (2000), to the hilarious physical comedy of *Mandabi* (1968), the

complex historical drama of *Emitai* (1971) and *Ceddo* (1976), and the beautifully crafted human drama of *La Noire de* (1966) or his late masterpiece, *Moolaadé* (2004). Between 1971 and 1976, Sembene enjoyed his richest period of cinematic creativity, making three outstanding films — *Emitai*, *Xala* and *Ceddo* — which are by turns experimental, playful, deeply moving and shocking. *Ceddo* in particular represents a key work in the Sembene canon; the eponymous 'ceddo' resist both Islam and the forces of European domination (the film is loosely set in the eighteenth century) in order to preserve their own indigenous values and way of life. For Sembene, the ceddo were, above all, men of integrity, who refused to bow to any master, and he seems to have used their example as a model for his own passionate and belligerent approach to life, calling his home in Dakar, Galle Ceddo. When historians challenged the accuracy of Sembene's account of the period, he simply replied, 'it may not be historical, but it's my version', amply demonstrating his own obdurate, quarrelsome tendencies.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Sembene enjoyed a major reputation as one of the leading figures of what was then termed 'Third-World Literature' and 'Third Cinema'. However, in the vagaries of critical reception, Sembene's star has waned slightly over the past few decades: the trenchant nature of his political commitment (generally expressed in far less nuanced terms in his many interviews than in the work itself) often sat uneasily with the tastes of critics and readers less inclined to believe in the 'grand narratives' that consistently informed his artistic output. It is my fervent hope that his death will now lead critics to revisit his work, and develop the process already begun with the critical reaction to his final film, *Moolaadé*, rightly celebrated as a quintessential expression of Sembene's aesthetic credo: the blending of narrative styles, a profound humanism, a constant desire to make his audience leave the cinema with questions ringing in their head; essentially, Sembene believed that the work of art should launch a

process of debate and reflection rather than seeking to provide all the answers. In one of life's many ironies, the year preceding Sembene's death saw a reassessment of the career of Sembene's erstwhile political and creative opponent, Léopold Sédar Senghor (2006 was the centenary of Senghor's birth). The celebratory tone of the many publications assessing Senghor's life is understandable but the failure of most of this work to engage seriously with alternative strands of African cultural activity, not least the radical, politically inspired work of Sembene, is deeply misleading: the opportunity to balance the historical and artistic record must now be grasped.

A self-educated man who was by turns intransigent and compassionate, a maverick who never wanted to belong to the establishment, Sembene was, most importantly, an accomplished and inventive artist whose political passion was conveyed in an endlessly evolving style that embraced broad humour, high melodrama and the construction of complex symbolic narratives. Writing these lines, several months after his death, the sense of a major era in African culture having finally passed is still as overwhelming as on the sad day in June when I learned of his passing: for good and for ill, we are unlikely to see an artist of Sembene's specific vision, range and temperament again. Although, for many, there is great sorrow at his passing, it is, for my part, tempered by recognition of the extraordinary life that he led and the outstanding artistic legacy that he leaves behind.

**David Murphy,**  
University of Stirling

**FRÉJUS, 29 FÉVRIER – 1<sup>er</sup> MARS 2008**  
à la capitainerie du port

Colloque international :

**LUCIE COUSTURIER,  
LES TIRAILLEURS SÉNÉGALAIS  
ET LA QUESTION COLONIALE**

PROGRAMME PRÉVISIONNEL

**Vendredi 29 février :**

14h 30 – 18h 30 : *Accueil suivi de la 1<sup>ère</sup> séance : volet historique*

15h – 15h 40 : Marc Michel (Aix-en-Provence) : Les Tirailleurs sénégalais et la Grande Guerre

15h 45 – 16h 25 : Elsa Geneste (Paris) : Les Noirs en France aux années 20

16h 30 – 16h 55 : *Pause discussion*

17h – 17h 40 : Lt.-Col. A. Champeaux (Fréjus) : Les Tirailleurs à Fréjus

17h 45 – 18h 25 : Gregory Mann (New York) : Souvenirs et mémoriaux des Tirailleurs

**Samedi 1<sup>er</sup> mars :**

9h 30 – 12h 00 : *2<sup>e</sup> séance : volet artistique :*

9h 30 – 10h 10 : Claire Maingon (Paris) : Lucie Cousturier et les néo-impressionnistes

10h 15 – 10h 55 : János Riesz (Munich) : La plastique nègre chez Lucie Cousturier

11h 00 – 11h 15 : *Pause discussion*

11h 20 – 12h 00 : Adèle de Lanfranchi (Paris) : Lucie Cousturier artiste-peintre

14h 30 – 18h 30 : 3<sup>e</sup> séance : *volets géographique et colonial* :

14h 30 – 14h 40 : Berny Sèbe (Oxford) : Aventurières et voyageuses en Afrique de l'Ouest

14h 45 – 15h 25 : Jean-Jacques Mandel (Paris) : Lucie Cousturier en A.O.F.

15h 30 – 15h 55 : *Pause discussion*

16h 00 – 16h 40 : Roger Little (Dublin) : Lucie Cousturier et les colonies

16h 45 – 17h 25 : Éric Deroo (Paris) : Lucie Cousturier et la question coloniale

17h 30 – 18h 30 : *Discussion et (18h 15 – 18h 30) discours de clôture*

*Sur le contenu du colloque, contacter Roger Little à [rlittle@tcd.ie](mailto:rlittle@tcd.ie)  
pour l'intendance, contacter Cécile Vincenti à  
[cecile.vincenti.tourisme@frejus.fr](mailto:cecile.vincenti.tourisme@frejus.fr)*

## SPECIAL OFFER!

### ASCALF Publications Back Catalogue Only £60

In November 2002, the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French (ASCALF) officially changed its name to the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS). As part of this realignment of our activities, SFPS decided to rationalise its publications policy, with the *ASCALF Yearbook* and *ASCALF Bulletin* making way for a new, twice-yearly journal, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*.

However, as we move towards a new future, we are also keen to make our back catalogue of work available to both individual scholars and university libraries: 25 issues of the *ASCALF Bulletin* (the first 3 issues are no longer available), and 5 issues of the *ASCALF Yearbook* (issues 1 and 2 are no longer available) were published. These publications include articles by prominent scholars in the field as well as interviews with writers such as Tanella Boni, Azouz Begag and Ahmadou Kourouma.

Individual issues of both *Bulletin* and *Yearbook* can be purchased and their prices are listed below. However, we are also proposing a **special offer of £60 (inc. p&p)** for individuals and libraries purchasing the entire back catalogue (21 *Bulletins* and 3 *Yearbooks*). Cheques, made payable to 'Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies', should be sent to: **Dr David Murphy, School of Modern Languages, French Section, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland.**

*ASCALF Bulletin*  
Issues 4-19: £2.50 each  
Issues 20-25: £5 each

*ASCALF Yearbook*  
Issues 3 & 5: £5 each  
Issue 4: £7