

**Black, Muslim, and French?
Assimilation and French Identity**

**Lavar McIntosh-Holland
The Neighborhood Academy
Humanities Senior Seminar
April 2022**

Introduction

France is extremely culturally and religiously diverse due to its long history of colonialism. French colonization of Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean sprouted many diaspora communities that live in France. In a country as diverse as France, the belief would be that everyone's cultures would be appreciated and not changed, but this isn't so. Ideas of republicanism and uniformitarianism cause minorities' cultures and religions to be suppressed and not valued. France is striving to become more secular and seen as a republic. This in theory could unify a country, but taking away things that are unique to peoples culture and religion can lead to extremism and conflict within communities. France also takes steps to ignore race while still acknowledging people's differences. Jean Beaman said, "Racism in France is therefore simultaneously omnipresent yet continually suppressed" (Beaman 2017). France holds its idea of Republicanism to high importance, but this fails to acknowledge that people are different and experience French society differently. French society also steams down from the history of colonialism and the assimilationist mindset. Although French colonialism has mostly ended in the 21st century, the idea of assimilation is still present in French laws and society. The lasting legacy of assimilation negatively affects African migrants and people of African descent the most because of its narrow views on what it means to be a French citizen. Until France changes its laws and celebrates its citizens' diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, migrants in general, and especially African migrants, will struggle in France.

France's Colonial Past and African Struggles

For centuries, France has been a primary European power. France has also been a colonial power as well. France and Britain colonized most of Africa themselves, although many other countries scrambled for land there too. While Britain was the world's largest colonizer, both France and Britain had colonies in the important region of West Africa. This region was so important because of its profitability and close proximity to Europe. Where French and British colonies differed from each other was where their colonies were located (Ross 2010). Britain had most of their colonies in southern and East Africa, while France's colonies were primarily located in Western Sub-Saharan and North Africa. The location of French colonies were unique because of the difference in culture between Sub-Saharan and North Africa. Another significant difference French and British colonies had were the approach and attitude of colonizing these lands. Britain had an indirect approach with their colonized lands, which meant they had complete power over the colony without physically being present. This approach differed vastly from the French approach of colonization. France was in total control of their colonies and

implemented the idea of Assimilation. The idea of Assimilation was extremely important in French and African relationships then and even remains so today (Ross 2010).

French colonialism is not understood without the idea of Assimilation being brought up. Assimilation was the idea that the people of the culture that were being colonized were a “tabula rasa,” or a blank slate of people who did not have their own histories or cultures (Ross 2010). France saw the people of their colonies as conquerable, both physically and culturally, and used this idea heavily in their colonies. This idea was so extreme that France saw their colonies as oversea provinces, rather than just colonies (Seay 2019). France is different from other colonial powers because not only were Catholic missionaries working to assimilate African people, but the French government also put efforts towards assimilating people. Although the people living in these colonies dealt with many issues, France made somewhat notable leaps in equality compared to other colonizing powers. France gave their colonial subjects freedom of press, freedom of movement and freedom of association (Ross 2010). France also offered some colonial subjects the chance to have full French citizenship. This is not to downplay the negative effects of colonialism, but compared to other colonial powers, France gave more freedom to their subjects. Despite France giving some rights to the people in their colonies, they did not quite see the people of these colonies as equals. While the people living in these colonies were considered French citizens, they had basically had little to no rights that French citizens would have. Some of these rights include being independent and able to democratically vote. The Africans living in these colonies had to deal with a myriad of problems that ranged from environmental to the exploitation of their land. While Assimilation may sound like it lifted up colonial subjects, it may have divided them even further (Ross 2010).

With France considering their African colonies as an extension of itself, the idea of Black Frenchman was brought into discussion. What did it really mean to be French? This was a question that was asked during the colonial period and is still asked today. One idea that was cemented though, was classism that privileged certain Africans over others. Education was very heavily influenced by class. During the colonial period, an African elite was built in colonial societies. African Evoules, or elite Africans, were a social class created by the French to educate and train a specific and limited group of Africans. Benefits from being a black Frenchman includes the education, voting, and a more important role in their respective colonies. With the idea of Black Frenchman, there's a dilemma, however. Since the French colonized such an expansive area of Africa, the colonies had various dominant cultures and religions. One of those religions was Islam, particularly in North Africa. With the idea of an African assimilating and becoming a “Frenchman”, the idea of Muslims Assimilating into a

christian culture is highly controversial and hard to believe. How could somebody of such a different culture and religion become a “Frenchman” if French culture was so intertwined with Catholicism? Muslims were very much discriminated against and given a harder time to assimilate compared to sub-saharan Africans. This topic is still talked about today in the form of modern day Islamophobia.

The lasting impacts of the colonization of Africa were major. One of the biggest effects came after the brunt of colonization, in a process known as Decolonization. Decolonization was a period of time during the 1950's, 60's, and 70's when African nations began to gain independence. Decolonization was not that simple though. Many of the European colonizers created their own borders for African colonies. When these colonies became independent countries, the borders from colonization stayed. This is a problem for a number of reasons. The first problem is the dilemma of disregarding ethnicity. Many people assume that Africans are all from the same “tribe” and are all generally ethnically similar. This could not be any further from the truth. Africa is one of the most diverse continents in the world. There are thousands of unique ethnic groups in Africa that have their own language and culture. When the Europeans created their colonial borders, they split up many ethnic groups and aligned rival ethnic groups in the same colony. This created many different problems and led to many violent conflicts between rival ethnic groups, particularly after decolonization, when a power vacuum opened up in the newly independent countries. The ethnic and political conflicts that followed would plague most of Africa's modern history and lead to further problems (Ross 2010).

Africa as a whole today is assumed to be poor to the general public living outside of it. Although this is not completely true, Africa throughout its modern history has remained poor and had low life expectancies into the 1990's, when things began to improve for many African countries. Life expectancy is on the rise, and it is projected that Africa will have the most population growth out of any other continent (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy 2007). Despite this improvement, African countries still have various, serious problems, including ones that are based in their geography. In North Africa, the Sahara and multiple other deserts provide a challenge in movement and also impede the capability of North Africans to grow food. Although countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are very rich in resources, the tropical climate makes growing crops unpredictable and also harvests many tropical diseases. Fourteen African countries are also landlocked, which essentially makes it impossible for these countries to maintain steady trade with other international countries. Even with these problems, people still wonder why so many Africans leave their countries to seek a different life. The answer is a combination of financial and geographical. Many people living in less developed countries have very low

access to jobs and opportunities. The climate is also rapidly changing and volatile to the people living in it. With this climate change, it makes an already bad water and food supply situation even worse. As fights over resources and power intensify, it is predictable that emigration from Africa would increase (Ross 2010).

African immigration, especially North African immigration, has grown significantly in the 20th century. Although many Africans have legally immigrated to Europe, many others take illegal and extremely dangerous routes to make it to their preferred destination in Europe. Since 2009, 2.1 million people have crossed into Europe from the Mediterranean Sea. Most who immigrate this way land in southern European countries like Italy and Spain before reaching France. For many immigrants, there is still a desire to go to northern or other western European countries. France specifically has seen a rise in immigration since 1990, when the total percentage of migrants was 10.4 percent of the population compared to 2020, when migrants made up 12.8 percent of the population (United Nations, n.d.). Although many immigrants wish to go to a stable country like France, there are many roadblocks preventing these people from doing so successfully. Calais, France shows an example of massive African migration and the desperation that results when there is not prepared infrastructure for that migration. Many migrant camps are set up illegally and are poorly taken care of. Many of the migrants attempting to get to Britain from France are often stopped and forced to live in the dirty, poor, and sometimes dangerous migrant camps for indefinite amounts of time.

Racism and Racialization in France

Race plays an important role in France, and the idea of racialization affects the lives of Africans living everyday in France. Racialization is the idea of using race as an idea in everyday life in France and how it plays a part in racism and discrimination. According to Jean Beaman, an African American journalist, racialization, "is part of a "social uniform" that people of African descent are forced to wear" (Beaman 2017, 88) She says the uniform, or identity, is, "forced upon or assigned to individuals rather than chosen" (Beaman 2017, 88). Racialization also goes back a long time in French history, and has gone unaddressed because France has ignored the impacts of its colonial past (Mbembe, p. 56). The ways people are racialized in modern day France are by discrimination in housing, hiring, policing, and an absence of respect (Mbembe, p. 60). Because this racialization exists, many people of African descent feel that in order to rise up socially in France and not be too affected by racialization, they must assimilate into "French culture" and the idea of "whiteness." The effects of nationalism and assimilation in general can provide a serious challenge for African Diasporic communities. Although many

Diasporic populations struggle, some believe that they all have the same hope and beliefs. Jean Beaman argues that people of African descent have a, “diasporic consciousness, in that they see themselves as sharing the struggles against racial and ethnic inequalities that other populations confront” (Beaman 2017, 85). Therefore, although people of African descent come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, in France they may share many similar experiences due to racialization.

One reason racialization continues in France is because of the French media. Many things in the French media give off the appearance that people of African origin are scary and violent, while not explicitly addressing race. For example, the French government used the term, “urban violence,” to discuss race riots and protests involving African people (Mbembe, 59). Some journalists within the French media also acknowledge the blatant negative portrayal of Africans. Abdelkrim, a French journalist of Algerian origin, said, “The media here always encourages negative portrayals of blacks and Maghrebins. It’s the same thing the media does to blacks in the United States” (Beaman 2017, 86). Social media backlash, especially on Twitter, has also been the cause of many heated debates talking about Muslims and the Islamophobic and xenophobic views of them. This is sometimes encouraged by politicians on those media platforms. Right-wing French politicians usually talk about Muslim and Africans in a negative way. One of these politicians is Eric Zemmour, an extreme right wing politician. Eric Zemmour is a very controversial figure in French politics who initiated very negative discussions about immigration, Islam, and Africans. In September 2020, Zemmour appeared on CNews to give his opinion on poor immigrants from Africa and the Middle East who end up on the street in France. Zemmour said, “They don’t belong here, they are thieves, they are murderers, they are rapists, that’s all they are... They should be sent back, they shouldn’t even come” (Breedon 2022). Although Zemmour was convicted for inciting racial discrimination in 2011 for other racially charged posts and speeches, he is still influential in French media today. In general, the French media does little good in helping Muslims and Africans have a positive portrayal in France (Breedon 2022).

With the French media not doing African and Muslim immigrants any favors with their negative portrayals of them, civil unrest became quite common in France. This arose importantly in 2005, when two teenagers of African origin died while trying to evade a police patrol. The teenagers were on their way home from a soccer game to break the Ramadan fast when they encountered a routine police patrol and chose to dangerously hide in a subway station rather than face an interaction with the police (Tshimanga, Gondola, and Bloom 2009, 1). When the news of this incident was released, many French people took to the streets to

protest the poor relationship between the police and the African community in France. The 2005 protests in France were a huge indicator of the progressing civil unrest that was happening in France at the time and that continues today. Even though the 2005 riots got attention, the French government still refused to recognize racism as a problem, largely because it is not recognizing race.

Speaking upon the discrimination that people of African origin face in France is very hard because the lack of information known about discrimination and poverty. It is specifically hard because of France's ban on collecting demographic information and how taboo the topic of race and racism is in France. France completely banned the collection of racial demographic data in 1978 (Blelch 2001). There are many theories why the French do not collect demographic data, but one plausible theory is that France banned the collection of this data after the Algerian War, refusing to count how many people immigrated from the war (Blelch 2001). The other popular theory is that during the Vichy period, when the Nazis occupied France, the French would collect demographic data to identify Jewish people and report it to the Nazis (Oltermann and Henley 2020).

Modern France is very unusual compared to most other European countries for not collecting demographics. Other European countries, like the UK and Germany, track demographics to varying extents. The UK, for example, collects peoples' ethnic backgrounds, as well as where they are originally from. Germany uses the broad term, "migrant background," instead of the specific person's ethnic background, therefore not specifying the person's ethnicity. France is the only one of these three countries that does not even collect racial or ethnic demographics at all. The ban of collecting demographics in theory could unite a country more, but in all actuality it creates problems. It creates problems by not allowing people to see how race and ethnicity impact peoples' lives, and collecting this information is critical for understanding their situations. This is magnified by politicians and laws that do not want to show anything that has to do with individual acts of racism, making it harder to fight. Racism cannot be fought if it is not first acknowledged.

Islamophobia in France

Muslim's history with France has been very rocky for the centuries of their interaction. France has strong ties to Muslim-majority countries due to its colonization of most of North Africa. France in the modern day has a large population of people of North African descent, who are majority Muslim. There are an estimated 6 million Muslims living in France today, which is about 9% of France's total population (Francois 2021). It is also estimated that immigrants make

up about 12% of the French population, with a majority coming from North Africa and the Middle East. Having a large migrant population can be hard for a country and the migrants themselves, but it is even harder when the people in the country have conflicting views of the migrant populations. Although the French government prides itself in its secular nature, Islamophobia is a huge issue in France due to the clashing ideologies between Christian norms in France and Muslim immigrants. In modern day France, assimilation is still a relevant to a lot of France's actions to combat Muslim traditions. France claims to be a secular country that does not force any type of religion onto people. In patrolling secularism, though, it can erase Muslim people's cultures, traditions and religion (Mbembe, 57).

For the many North African Muslims who live in France, discrimination and xenophobia are unfortunately all too common. Many people who are just trying to live their normal day-to-day lives deal with Islamophobia. For example, Aisha, a mother who grew up outside of Paris, was accused of being part of an Algerian extremist group, the Islamic Salvation Front, despite being Moroccan (Francois 2021). In many ways, no matter what Muslims' ethnicities are, they are consistently grouped in and seen as solely Muslim, similar to how people of Sub-Saharan African descent are seen as immigrants, even if they were born and raised in France. Aisha was not only stereotyped for being Muslim, she was also outcasted. When Aisha was a child, she was forced to go to French schools, but was not allowed to go to class or interact with other kids because of her religion (Francois 2021). Not only does Aisha deal with this, a large number of people of North African origin living in France share stories just like hers. Another woman named Noura was discriminated against for being Muslim as well (Francois 2021). She was asked to take off her Hijab in a public place, and then had the police called on her for not taking it off. Unfortunately, these acts of discrimination lead to extreme thinking and ideas surrounding Islam (Francois 2021).

With discrimination against Muslims being so common in France, the divide created between Christian, non-religious, and Muslim people culturally and socially can lead to many other problems. One of the biggest of these problems is extremism and terrorism. Terrorist attacks have taken place in France and have unfairly changed many people's perceptions of immigrants and Muslims. Although the French media portrays the people who commit these terrorist attacks as migrants, many are not always committed by immigrants; some 21st century attacks were perpetrated by men and women who lived and were born in France. Additionally, because of the actions of Islamic extremists, the perception and rights of all Muslims are slowly being stripped away in France. The French government is forcing the image of Islam to be secularized or erased as a result. An unfortunate example of extremism can be the case of

Samuel Paty in 2020 (Lapin 2020). Paty was a high school teacher in Paris at the time. The attack happened on October 16, 2020 in a suburb of Paris (Daily Sabah 2021). Paty was murdered by a Muslim teenager of Chechen descent (Daily Sabah 2021). According to various sources, the attack seems to have happened because Samuel Paty made caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in class (Lapin 2020). This attack gained major international attention and led to a rise in violence against all Muslims in France. Even though the accused murderer was of Chechen descent, all Muslims were mischaracterized. In France, this disproportionately impacted North African and Middle Eastern immigrants.

One of the largest impacts of a rise in Islamophobia is a rise in violence against Muslims today. For example, after Paty's murder, violent attacks against Muslims went up 53%, from 154 to 235 (Daily Sabah 2021). They went up especially in large cities, particularly Paris, Lyon, and Nice. This rise in violence and discrimination against can be characterized by mass hysteria and fear, but trying to understand why the issues of terrorism and extremism exist opens up a whole other issue (Daily Sabah 2021).

The French government desperately wants to tackle the dangers of extremism, but their approach has caused more of a negative impact than a positive one. Although people have the right to be scared of extremist actions, leaving a whole demographic of people in complete isolation from the rest of French society can be even more detrimental. When looking at how some people become terrorists and have extreme ideology, you have to look at how the people who are affected feel. Many Muslim people in France feel outcasted from society because of the personal experiences that they have been through. For example, Noura, a university teacher from a middle-class neighborhood in Paris, said, "With this new [anti-separatism] law, I'm extremely pessimistic about the future in this country - I no longer see a future here... We are the undesirables, the unwanted and there are serious psychological wounds to this symbolic violence we experience" (Francois 2021). The ostracizing of Muslims in France led to these feelings of isolation and anger towards the French government and people. Another Muslim French woman, Hiba Latreche, a spokesperson for Muslims' rights in France said, "We are told we don't integrate, but we are gradually being pushed out of public life completely" (Francois 2021).

The feelings of anti-Muslim sentiment in France seem to be almost universal across the country. A Foundation Jean Jaurès study conducted in 2019, before the anti-separatism law was even past, revealed that, "42% of French Muslims felt they experienced discrimination based on their faith, with the number rising to 60% for Muslim women wearing a headscarf" (Guerin). The likelihood of developing terrorist and extremist ideologies increases when a person is put in a

position of loneliness or non-belonging. In a 2004 report from the US Office of Justice Programs, the executive summary highlights that, "Perceived injustice, need for identity and need for belonging are common vulnerabilities among potential terrorists" (Borum 2004). In general, there is no excuse for terrorism, but looking at the environment and situations that Muslims in France are put in, it's not difficult to see why some develop extreme ideologies.

In recent years, France has been pushing their anti-Muslim sentiment further and further. A good example of this is the French "anti-separatism" law, which was passed in 2021. The laws in it are a response to a growing tide of xenophobic and Islamophobic feelings from Emmanuel Macron. Macron, even in calling it an anti-separatism law, is stating that Muslims are seen as separate from the rest of France. There are multiple laws that have been put in place in France to isolate Muslims over the past decade, but this newest law creates stricter rules around surveillance of Muslims. For example, it dictates which individuals can run homeschooling programs (Yeung, 2021). This will disproportionately impact Muslim families who choose to homeschool their children. The anti-separatism laws also expanded a ban on any religious symbol to private businesses that work with the public sector as well (Francois, 2021). It is likely that this is policed differently among Muslims than other religious groups, particularly because headscarves are categorized as a religious symbol. Another portion of the anti-separatism law is the ability of local authorities to close organizations, like mosques or nonprofits, that do not support "Republican principles" (Francois, 2021). This is a problem for a myriad of reasons. One of the biggest reasons is that French authorities can close any Muslim mosques and businesses with suspension of them being engaged in terroristic activities. The French anti-separatism laws do not explicitly state that they are anti-Muslim, but most of the laws have Islamophobic roots under the guise of being secular..

As immigration to France has increased, so has anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment and attitudes in mainstream French media. A lot of this stemmed from French politics, specifically the far right. Politicians who tend to be on the far right of French politics continuously try to illustrate how immigrants and Muslims harm French society. The need to be secular fuels discrimination against minorities in France. One act of discrimination can be seen in the impact names have on hiring practices. Having a traditionally white, French name like Linda or Dianna can dramatically improve a person's chances of assimilating into French society (Beaman, 2017, p. 77-78). A 2015 study by Montaigne Institute compared resumes of Catholic sounding names (Michel and Nathalie) and Islamic sounding names (Mohammed and Samira). The study found that people who were identified as Muslims had a 4.7 percent chance of getting asked for a job interview, compared to 17.9 percent of people who identified as Catholic (The Local 2015).

It's not secular to favor one religion over another, it's just Catholicism in France is heavily favored over Islam and Islam is pushed aside and othered in French society. Eric Zemmour, a far-right politician, went as far as to say that the name Mohammed should be banned, "because it is not a French name" (Mallet 2021). Ironically, Eric Zemmour himself is of direct Algerian descent, with both his parents having migrated from Algeria. Another right wing politician, Marine Le Pen, who is also very controversial due to her anti-immigrant and Muslim sentiments, has garnered the support of over a third of French voters in the past three presidential elections. Unfortunately, it appears that Islamophobia continues to be on the rise in France.

French Identity

The idea of French identity is very hard to find a single definition of. It is so hard to find a definition because the feeling of identifying as French is so drastically different from many different people living in France. Some may argue that French identity is created by living in France, others believe that it is a feeling of belonging, while others will argue that French identity is simply having French citizenship. French identity also heavily ties into someone's ethnicity, race, and religion. Unfortunately in France, if a person is not white or assimilated, then that person probably will not fit France's societal definition of what it means to be French. The French motto of "Liberte, equalite, fraternite," which means liberty, equality, fraternity, shows the hypocrisy of modern day France and their assimilationist mindset. While liberty, equality, and fraternity are great things, many people in France do not have these things. In particular, African immigrants in general do not have the same "liberty, equality, and fraternity" as other white French people and immigrants. The idea of French identity is still very important today because being considered French is extremely important in a highly secular and assimilationist society such as France.

In reality, the idea of French identity is still largely shaped by the colonial mindset of the old French regime. France is stuck in a colonial mindset in many different ways. The largest example of the French colonial mindset in modern times is the characterization of modern day colonies as "overseas territories". The idea of having overseas territories is indicative of the assimilationist type of colonization that France used during the colonial era. These overseas territories are directly tied to mainland France, and all people from these territories are considered French. The fact that most of these territories do not have control of their own army and trade is indicative of the amount of power old French colonies would have (BBC News 2018). Another way that shows how their territories are still an example of modern colonialism is how they are treated by French society and media. In September of 2018, Hurricane Florence

hit St. Martin, a French territory in the Caribbean, and devastated the island and the people living there. When French President Emmanuel Macron visited the island he said, "I love all of the French republic's children, no matter their troubles" (BBC News 2018). The way Macron talks about this territory can be considered as paternalistic. Macron went to St. Martin to help and uplift people who have been devastated by Hurricane Florence but provided no immediate aid and patronized the residents living on the island. One man who took a photo with Macron told the BBC that while Macron took photos with black residents on St. Martin, their roofs and businesses had still not been repaired from the storm (BBC News 2018).

Another example of France's colonial mindset is the anti-separatism laws passed in 2021. These anti-separatism laws have very large anti-Muslim themes to them. Some of the laws detailed in the anti-separatism laws do not explicitly say that they are anti-Muslim, but in practice they target people who practice Islam (Yeung 2021). These laws also prevent Muslims from simply just participating in their daily life in France, which makes it hard for Muslim French people to feel fully French. There have been many arguments for France to take a more cosmopolitan approach to how their society is set up (Yeung 2021). Due to how many diverse people live in France, it would make sense for France to encourage people to practice their own unique cultures rather than just trying to assimilate into Western European and French culture. This would welcome in and celebrate the diversity of French culture, instead of excluding large portions of the French population.

France's narrow mindset about what it means to be French causes suffering for not only Africans, but also French people in general. Using race as an identifiable factor for being French is not healthy for a society at all. For example, Mourad, a thirty year old with Algerian roots, said that white immigrants are assumed to be French, "however, if you're of maghrebin origin, that's different. There are barriers. And in the eyes of others, you see that you are not always considered French" (Beaman, p. 66). Mourad also says, "Yes, I feel French, I want to be French, but what's certain is that in the eyes of others, we are not always seen as French...I cannot get into a nightclub. If I submit my CV to apply for employment, I get no response. I'm discriminated [against] in housing" (Beaman, p. 67). Racialization and Islamophobia make it clear that feelings, and not necessarily citizenship, currently shape who is considered French or not.

France's refusal to acknowledge the different cultures and religions within its country is causing France to go backwards in progress. The racist, Islamophobic, and xenophobic sentiments and arguments from French politicians even heighten this step backwards. Valérie Pécresse, who is one of the leaders of the Les Republicans (LR) party, has spread misinformed

and potentially dangerous ideas about race and migrants in her political speeches. In a speech on February 13, 2022, in front of 7,000 people in Paris, Pécresse discussed the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory that migrants will replace the native population of France (Onishi 2022). Her theory, which is gaining popularity in France, is not only xenophobic to the immigrants arriving in France, but it also affects the African people who are already living in France. The whole theory of the “Great Replacement” mainly targets non-white immigrants living in France. The hypocrisy of this theory is seen clearly in former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was a second generation French man with Hungarian and Greek parents. Sarkozy went on to be the president of France. In fact, he was part of Pécresse’s own LR party. Ideas like the Great Replacement are causing France to go backwards rather than progress.

Excluding people from French society is also dangerous. If a person feels that they are not a part of a society it can lead to very detrimental thinking and even extremism. This is seen in France as political leaders like Pécresse and Zemmour use language that creates “insiders” and “outsiders.” In an article by *New York Times* writer, Norimitsu Onishi, he stated that, “[Pécresse] said that France was not doomed to the ‘great replacement’ and called on her supporters ‘to rise up.’ In the same speech, she drew a distinction between ‘French of the heart’ and ‘French of papers’ — an expression used by the extreme right to point to naturalized citizens” (Onishi 2022). In her speech, Pécresse drew a distinction between true French people and French people by legal status. It is easy to interpret “true French people” as Christian, white French people and “French people by papers” as Muslim and people with an immigrant background in general.

To combat discrimination and to assimilate into an exclusive French culture, some second generation immigrants are shedding other aspects of their identities. In other countries, like the United States, minorities are often dually identified by their nationality and ethnicity, such as African American or Chinese American. In France, minorities are commonly identified as “French” or their original ethnicity (Beaman 2017). When it feels like a person is being forced to assimilate it hurts both the people who are assimilating and French society as a whole.

Conclusion

France’s history of colonialism continues to influence modern day France. The idea of assimilation that was used during colonization has an even greater influence on modern French society. From assimilation came the racialization of people of African descent in everyday life in France. This affects things like housing, hiring, and policing people of African descent in France. French assimilation is not just race based, but involves religion, as well. Muslims make up a

large majority of people with African descent in France. It is estimated that 6 million Muslim people live in France, making up 9% of France's total population (Local Fr 2017). France presents itself as a secular country, but seems to privilege Christianity over Islam through laws like the 2021 Anti-Separatism Law. Laws like these can have an extremely detrimental effect on how people view and treat Muslims and people of African descent. Anti-Separatism Laws can also lead to extremist thinking by some minorities in France, which further isolates people of African descent in the country. The discrimination that people of African descent face in France highlights that French identity is still tied up in the colonial, assimilationist mindset.

Although all these issues still exist in France, there are many ways that France could move forward. First, France should treat its overseas territories more equally. Next, it should move towards a more cosmopolitan society that accepts and celebrates people of a wide variety of backgrounds. Then, it should recognize the ways that race, ethnicity, and religion impact people's lives in France by collecting racial and religious demographic information. France should also remove its Anti-Separatism Law because laws such as this promote discrimination. People of African descent living in France will unfortunately continue to face discrimination until France addresses its continued assimilationist mindset and xenophobia.

References

- BBC News. 2018. "France's Macron causes stir over 'raised middle finger' photo." BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45711770>.
- Beaman, Jean. 2017. *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France*. Berkeley, California: Berkeley: University of California Press. 10.1525.
- Blech, Erik. 2001. "Race Policy in France." Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/race-policy-in-france/>.
- Borum, Randy. 2004. "Psychology of Terrorism." Office of Justice Programs. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/208552.pdf>.
- Breeden, Aurelien. 2022. "French Far-Right Candidate Convicted for Inciting Racial Hatred." The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/17/world/europe/eric-zemmour-convicted-racial-hate.html>.
- DAILY SABAH WITH AA. 2021. "Islamophobic attacks in France increase by 53% in 2020." Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/islamophobic-attacks-in-france-increase-by-53-in-2020>.
- Duroy, Quentin. 2011. "North African Identity and Racial Discrimination in France: A Social Economic Analysis of Capability Deprivation." jstor.org. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23257773>.
- Francois, Myriam. 2021. "'I felt violated by the demand to undress': three Muslim women on France's hostility to the hijab." *Islam* 1, no. 1 (July): 7.
- Guerin, Cécile. n.d. "A snapshot analysis of anti-Muslim mobilisation in France after terror attacks." Vision of Humanity. Accessed February 23, 2022. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/a-snapshot-analysis-of-anti-muslim-mobilisation-in-france-after-terror-attacks/>.
- Institute for Cultural Diplomacy. 2007. "The African Diaspora in Europe." culturaldiplomacy.org. https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_programs_diaspora_eu.
- Lapin, Tamar. 2020. "Four more teens charged over beheading of French teacher Samuel Paty." *The New York Times*, November 26, 2020.
- The Local. 2015. "France's Muslim men suffer CV discrimination." The Local France. <https://www.thelocal.fr/20151009/muslim-men-in-france-see-cv-discrimination-study/>.

- Local Fr. 2017. "How France's Muslim population will grow in the future." The Local France. <https://www.thelocal.fr/20171201/how-frances-muslim-population-will-grow-in-the-future/>.
- Mallet, Victor. 2021. "Marine Le Pen's woes deepen as French far-right rival outflanks her." *Financial Times*, October 2, 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/7596e37f-3207-424b-a064-51463c6703fa>.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2009. "Figures of Multiplicity: Can France Reinvent its identity?" *Frenchness and the African Diaspora*.
- Ocheni, Stephen, and Basil C. Nwankwo. 2012. "Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa." *cscanada.net*. www.cscanada.net.
- Oltermann, Philip, and Jon Henley. 2020. "France and Germany urged to rethink reluctance to gather ethnicity data." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/16/france-and-germany-urged-to-rethink-reluctance-to-gather-ethnicity-data>.
- Onishi, Norimitsu. 2022. "In France, a Racist Conspiracy Theory Edges Into the Mainstream." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/15/world/europe/france-elections-pecresse-great-replacement.html>.
- Ross, Lindsay N. 2010. "The comparative effects of British and French colonial rule on democratization in sub-Saharan Africa." *University of Georgia Theses and Dissertations*, (03). http://purl.galileo.usg.edu/uga_etd/ross_lindsay_n_201005_ab.
- Seay, Laura. 2019. "What is the role of Catholicism in Africa?" *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/09/how-did-catholic-church-respond-africas-decolonization-this-new-book-explains/>.
- Tshimanga, Charles, Didier Gondola, and Peter J. Bloom. 2009. *Frenchness and the African Diaspora*. Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- United Nations. n.d. "Population Division | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." United Nations Population Division | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Accessed March 2, 2022. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.
- Yeung, Peter. 2021. "France's controversial 'separatism' bill: Seven things to know." *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/15/frances-controversial-separatism-bill-explained>.