

Managing Difference Away: Public Order and the
Construction of the Other in French Society

by

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A North African immigrant community comes to life as the various spaces of the residence, probably located in the “*Goutte d’Or*”¹ or a similarly immigrant-heavy neighborhood of Paris, fill with music, prayer, and cumin. Two Peugeots pull up to the front of the building. The in-house marabout² is notified. The marabout excuses himself from a discussion and goes outside to find five suit-clad, sad-faced men (and one woman) huddling in the parking lot. In response to the African man’s inquiry as to their business there, the ringleader of the group gives a simple, “*Protection préventive sanitaire. Inspection général.*”³

The scene that follows in the 1985 comedic film, *Black Mic Mac*, consists of a sequence of shots of one or two of the French (Franco-French) sanitation officers who are rendered speechless as a result of each of their encounters with different goings-on in the residence under inspection. Chickens are found inhabiting one of the shower stalls. A bedroom that is supposed to be occupied by only two residents appears to be sleeping at least five. The room used as a mosque is deemed unsafe. No fire extinguisher in the metal workshop. Goats are being slaughtered in the kitchen. Even the trash receptacle seems to be lacking in some way. These moments are exaggerated for comedic effect. However, one can’t help but cringe upon observing the all too familiar systematic regulation of brown bodies. This situation is Foucault’s worst nightmare realized, and it all takes place in his country of birth. After the inspection is

¹ Literal translation: “drop of gold.” The *Goutte d’Or* is a neighborhood in the 18th arrondissement of Paris that has a large population of North African and sub-Saharan immigrants.

² A Muslim hermit or monk, especially particular to North Africa.

³ “Sanitation protection. General inspection.”

complete and the facilities are deemed “*insalubre*”⁴ by the inspector, the immigrant residents try to bribe him with payment. This offer is met with derision from the inspector, further highlighting the differences between the two worlds. Unsurprisingly, some residents of the foyer debrief together following the event, cursing “that white man” who has been on their case for three months.

While the film clearly involves a caricatured portrayal of both the white French bureaucrat as well as the North African, Muslim immigrant, the saga that begins with the scene described represents quite literally, whether intentionally or not, the ways in which social control is carried out by societal institutions. This tension between immigrant populations and the French state is evidenced in a number of incidents that loom large in the public discourse and debate. In this fictional case, the sanitation office can be understood as an extension of the state, and its representatives take up the work of deeming certain lifestyles unfit by French standards, literally “unsanitary” according to state regulations. This conflict scratches at the surface of exploring the ways in which difference gets conceived, identifying the individuals and institutions that dictate what is different, and how those differences are regulated out of visibility.

Introduction

Difference and sameness are constructed in relation to the imagining of the nation. The widely known and very influential Benedict Anderson has helped articulate, to the benefit of nationalism scholars everywhere, the ways in which

⁴ Unhealthy

nationalism comes before nation, and not the other way around. Anderson lays out the groundwork for an understanding of the nation as produced by a language that helps create symbols, history, and values that make a community (of any size) appear real (Zimelis 8). In addition to language, national education systems, national media outlets, and other knowledge-producing institutions function to foster a sense of belonging to a nation, a sense of unity between people who never have and never will come into face-to-face contact. Anderson doesn't dwell on the falsity or genuineness of a nation or community, but rather, his work is concerned with the different ways in which communities can be imagined. He doesn't even seem to be hostile to the idea of nationalism but wants to deconstruct the idea that there is some kind of concrete *truth* at the heart of a given community. Thus, my point of departure for an analysis of sameness and difference under French Republican nationalism is the conception of the French nation as a social construct. As with any socially produced identity, the nation is capable of being reframed and rescripted, which is particularly important in the context of the modern nation-state. Policy decisions made by a national government and the selection of events that reported are a couple examples of the ways in which a national identity is shaped. Policies towards immigration, and the public reception of immigrant populations generally, will be particularly relevant to this essay. The ways such policies interact with ideological discourses will be key in understanding how belonging is conceived of by the French citizenry, especially in light of recent social issues that have sparked public debate around the perceptions of second generation immigrants and their place within French society.

I now turn to Antonio Gramsci's ideas about hegemony as a way to introduce a discussion of control and power in the context of the imagined nation. How is it that people come to accept certain conditions for belonging and agree upon an understanding of community that includes some and excludes others? Gramsci directs our attention to the ways in which civil society establishes forms of consciousness and organizes human relationships in order to cultivate specific power dynamics that adhere to the interests of the ruling class. What Gramsci terms hegemony is a strategy of control that requires both the influence of civil society and the governmental state apparatus, which function together "to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling class" (Gramsci). Through intellectual and moral leadership, the dominant group in society maintains their dominance through a process of the subordinate classes' *consent* to their own domination. An "ideological consensus" is negotiated that takes into account both the dominant and subordinate classes. The national ideology reflects the interests of the ruling class while incorporating the interests of other, more subordinated groups, and combining them with its own so that the subordinated have reason to invest in the ideology. Acceptance of this social order by both dominant and dominated groups reflects the citizenry's investment in the culture of the nation. This tactic of consensual control is played out in the example of France's assimilationist perspective. French society is structured so that it is in the interest of immigrants to assimilate to French culture if they want to succeed economically (in the capitalist structure that has been set up by the ruling class) and socially (adopting the system of

values that has been set up by the ruling class). Gramsci talks about schools as positive educative functions and courts as negative educative functions that serve to maintain the social order. In the case of France, these corrective forces implement Western ideals in an increasingly postcolonial immigrant society. Gramsci's work on cultural hegemony implies that, regardless of the form of government and location of power that is officially claimed, culture can operate as the most persuasive means of social control.

If we are to invest in this understanding of control as one worth exploring in the context of French society, it is evident that an analysis of the kinds of national ideologies – civic universalism and republican nationalism – as well as the kinds of discourses at play at the street level are required. What conditions for belonging are assumed by a model of universal citizenship? How does the nation take up these philosophies in its understanding of difference? Are there limits to the French model? From an ideological standpoint, does a growing non-European immigrant population in France indicate the potential for a crisis for French Republicanism? What investment does the citizenry, specifically the most subordinated class, have in republican nationalism? What kinds of ideas are at play in the public discourse? What tools are being used to maintain the social order?

I will begin to explore these questions by first engaging a top-down approach through an analysis of the national ideologies that are alive today in France. Rhetorically, the French Republican model takes on the equalizing project of universal citizenship. Universal citizenship stresses that citizenship can and should be universally extended, irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, country of origin, etc.

However, in a national context, a government is limited to instituting policies that claim to reflect a universal set of ideals. These ideals rest on the assumption that citizenship transcends any social and group differences and that equality is best achieved by emphasizing that which citizens have in common. Blindness to difference and equal protection before the law serves as the foundation for civic universalism.

France's commitment to Republicanism, best understood as a nationalistic take on a model of universal citizenship, takes place in the public sphere. In the case of France, this type of nationalism is state-led and seeks to unite people under civic equality (Colak 792). While this is primarily a political project, culture is highly bound up in all that are considered to be "civic" concerns, and it can be argued that the philosophy necessitates exclusion, cultural assimilation, and suppression (Colak 791). Colak explains that participation as a citizen in modern nation-states tends to be grounded in a narrative of shared "ethnicity, religion, nationality, and common ancestry" (Colak 792). However, in France, this national historical narrative is distinguished by its fervently secular nature. The policy of *laïcité*⁵ upheld in public spaces in France is a result of a history of revolution and clashes with the Roman Catholic Church. This policy of neutrality extends further, marked by a strict exclusion of cultural difference of any kind from the public sphere. This silencing of religious, racial, and ethnic differences is advanced under the goal of a uniform civic identity. Who decides what is culturally different and the strategies of control that are

⁵ Refers to France's policy of secularism in government and official State institutions. It is based on the 1905 law of Separation of Church and State. For the purpose of this essay, *laïcité* is most often discussed in the context of the French public school system.

employed to maintain widespread investment in this difference are themes that I will continue to unpack throughout this exploratory process.

Hegemony operates more covertly in this universalism model because the national political framework suggests that all people are equals on account of their citizenship status. It is harder to contest the state's claims to a meritocracy and call out whites as the privileged group than it would be in a self-proclaimed multicultural society, because France is so invested in the belief that *laïcité*, color-blindness⁶, and an open immigration policy comprise the foundation of French society.

The difference-blind rhetoric is firmly grounded in French history in addition to drawing upon European Enlightenment notions about “the human subject as universal”: the idea that the Frenchman is, first, a man by nature, and, secondly, a Frenchman by accident (Jennings 577). Republicanism takes on as its duty of instilling an aspiration towards universality through the education of its citizens. By the end of the 18th century, France was at the forefront of the development of this model. Jennings describes post-revolutionary France as:

“the land of the rights of man, of enlightenment, and of individual liberty, a nation destined to spread the benefits of civilization across its national borders and beyond to its colonial Empire and the wider world.” (Jennings 578).

The ideals espoused in the name of civic republicanism – rationalism, freedom, and a shared commitment to the interests of the common good – stem from the Enlightenment. It is a Westernized understanding of civilization from which politicians, theorists, and thinkers draw when discussing universal citizenship. If this

⁶ Refers to France's practice of disregarding racial or ethnic characteristics, and non-collection of racial data. France acknowledges no ethnic or racial categories and makes no distinctions based upon race. All citizens are treated equally under the law.

movement and the ideas that came from it were born from a Eurocentric position, how can they claim to represent a set of universal ideals? The power of the state's institutions to make decisions under the umbrella of this ideology allows domination to seem impartial and objective. Western ideals are championed under the rhetoric of serving the interests of mankind. The assumption that all people in the nation experience the same citizenship and equal degrees of participation in the public spheres makes it difficult to identify the ways in which hegemony is operating.

In order to provide a point of comparison, I will briefly touch upon the way that hegemony can operate within a different ideological framework and the policies that are enacted in the name of equality under this ideology. "The merit of multiculturalism is that it challenges the hegemony of the categories identified with the universal" (Jennings 595). This suggests that, while the argument can be made that multiculturalism fragments societies into distinct collectivities with different agendas, it more overtly, albeit reluctantly, acknowledges the reality of oppressed minority groups within a white, male dominated society. Theoretically, multiculturalism offers a positive definition of group identity. Because it takes on an understanding of the work that hegemony does to ensure that the dominant group's culture will always infiltrate society's institutions so that minorities constantly experience oppression at the hand of the dominant group, policies that a Universalist perspective would deem unequal are implemented in an effort to produce equal outcomes. Policies, such as affirmative action, privilege certain identity groups that have been historically oppressed and discriminated against and give them "special rights" as compensation for such injustices. These efforts are advanced under the

belief that unequal treatment must be employed to produce equal outcomes. However, just as in the case of civic universalism, there is always a discrepancy between ideology and practice. The positive implications of acknowledging the inequalities that exist at the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and class, including the policies that are enacted to combat such issues, can mask real discrimination that persists under the surface. Ultimately, to return to Gramsci's argument about cultural hegemony, culture is used as a vehicle to produce power and maintain control, regardless of the national ideology espoused. The strategies of control that are used as tools by the dominant class to keep other classes subordinated manifest in the context of the social landscape under scrutiny. In order to gain an understanding of how social control is maintained in a given society, it is necessary to look at the power dynamics played out through language and human interaction. For this reason, I turn to news media representations of two major socio-political events that sparked ongoing debate for years thereafter. I choose to focus on coverage by the three major national news outlets in France, all of which are available online and some of which were printed as well. I analyze sources in the form of news media because this type of information is located at a dynamic crossroads – the representation of reality framed within the context of a national ideological discourse – and because of the accessible nature of news articles. I am careful to acknowledge and unpack the perspectives assumed by these national news companies, regardless of their political leanings (which I later address), in the reporting of events. The language invoked in the popular media not only reflects back on current conceptions of national identity and belonging but also serves as a tool to raise national consciousness and cultivate

kinship (Anderson). To extend this further with Gramsci in mind, it is also important to emphasize that media outlets are culture producers and should be understood as instruments to express the dominant ideology (Stillo). Media discourse serves to produce an understanding of both the imagined nation and the social order. I will therefore be concerned with the subtext in the language that gets used to report events, in addition to how and why specific events get covered.

Prior to delving into a fact-filled historical context of the 2005 *banlieue* riots and 2010 passing of the headscarf ban, it is important to understand the set of associations that correspond to the characters involved in the public debate surrounding these events and that are invoked and reproduced in the reportage of them. Much scholarly work has been done on the representations of the French “others,” or those excluded by mainstream French society. French sociologist, Nacira Guérif-Souilamas, addresses the gendered and geographic elements to these narratives, in addition to the more obvious ethnic and religious ones. In order to effectively contextualize the events and the aftermath that followed, I will draw from the “archetypal figures of the illegitimate” in France that Guérif-Souilamas lays out in her analysis of contemporary public debate surrounding discrimination, policy, and French identity (Guérif-Souilamas 23). I unpack the stereotypes associated with what she terms the “*garçon Arabe*”⁷ and the “*veiled girl*” and locate these archetypes as central characters in the reportage of the two events on which I choose to focus.

The Parisian *banlieue* refers to the suburban areas that surround Paris and lie just outside of the *péripherique*, a major highway that physically differentiates Paris

⁷ “Arab boy”

proper from the less desirable surrounding neighborhoods. Characteristics commonly associated with the *banlieue* are the looming housing projects (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré* or *HLM*), also known as *la Cité*, and which exist in the public discourse primarily as a hot bed of social ills. The *banlieue* neighborhoods are understood to be, although not reportedly, comprised of a majority postcolonial immigrant population. Residents of the *banlieue* are widely understood to be underemployed and generally economically disadvantaged. However, the controversy surrounding those who live in these neighborhoods has to do with who or what is to blame for their disadvantaged social position. The left-leaning argument of this debate claims that immigrants aren't well integrated into the job market because they face ethnic, religious, and class-based discrimination that confines them to a marginalized social position. The conservatives argue that it is the fault of a lack of willingness to assimilate to the *laïque*⁸ culture on the part of the immigrants that results in their social exclusion. *L'exclusion*⁹ is a term with which French society is very familiar and is most often used to talk about socially, economically, and geographically marginalized groups in popular discourse and the media. Although France practices a blindness to difference in an effort to avoid discriminating against certain groups while privileging others, certain French citizens are evidently feeling left behind in the job market as well as in other realms of society. Both the “*garçon Arabe*” figure implicated in the riots of 2005 and the “veiled girl” of the headscarf controversy are emblems of resistance to assimilation because they belong to the Arab and/or Muslim world. This refusal to integrate positions them as French society's most prominent “Others.”

⁸ Characteristic of *laïcité*

⁹ Exclusion

For many immigrants, there lies a strong desire to assimilate to French culture. In any given society, the phenomenon of people assimilating to a dominant culture is a key reflection of a successful hegemonic order. In this case, the subordinated classes are located in the prominent populations of Maghreb¹⁰ and North African immigrants to France. Assimilation is essential to the maintenance of the social order and is necessitated by the universalism model because “the idea that citizenship is the same for all translate[s] in practice to the requirement that all citizens be the same” (Young 254).

Nacira Guérif-Souilamas contends that there is a virtuous racism towards the visible minorities in French society and that the *banlieue* gets depicted as a battleground for war between the sexes. She describes the fictional narrative of the violent Arab male delinquent and rapist enacting multiple forms of oppression on Arab women, symbolized by the headscarf, as a scapegoating of France’s unresolved problems with sexism. Her arguments support the reoccurring parallel of the framing of the socially excluded people in the *banlieue* as “uncivilized” in comparison to the dominant “civilized” majority. This is particularly relevant in making sense of the coverage of the 2005 riots, which took on a nature of “expressive and theatrical violence” (Guérif-Souilamas 28). The argument that sexism and violence is depicted as central to life in the *banlieue* to conceal issues surrounding poverty and racism should be kept in mind in order to understand the use of the terms “violent” and “chaotic” in describing the riots.

¹⁰ Refers to people from the region of western North Africa. The countries in this area include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

The young men of the *banlieue* aren't in the privileged position of even being able to influence the representations of their inner psychologies that are depicted by the journalists, who are outsiders to the situation. The French media has for years been using the term, "*banlieue* to mean areas with high levels of poverty, violence, drug and human trafficking, ethnic and religious conflict without considering the fact that the surplus meaning demonizes all those who live in that area" (White 1). They are confined to a range of associated behaviors that limit them to the socially produced stereotypes already laid out for them – those associated with the violent, sexist criminal – which limits their actions to being understood in a certain way, regardless of what actually took place or the intention behind it.

Social Unrest of the 2000s

In late October of 2005, the national police attempted to arrest six French young males, of reportedly African or North African origin, after a call reporting attempted robbery in the area through which they were walking in the Parisian *banlieue* of Clichy-sous-Bois. Three of the boys pursued by the police were electrocuted upon taking refuge in an electrical substation, resulting in two deaths and one serious injury. While tension in the stigmatized Parisian suburbs had been steadily growing for some time, it was this event that triggered roughly three weeks of rioting throughout the Paris region and all over France.

In the news media, the situation was overwhelmingly represented as an issue of discontent among urban youth. The riots were concentrated among communities

of young males living in suburban housing projects (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré* or *HLM*), facing social and economic exclusion associated with a lack of opportunities, primarily job-related, with unemployment rates up to 50% in some outskirt communities, 1.5 times higher than in Paris. The rioting led to 200 million Euros in damage, torching cars, schools, and other buildings. President Jaques Chirac declared a national state of emergency on November 8, and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy responded to the civil unrest with a series of controversial claims and orders. For example, in addition to referring to the rioters as “scum” which arguably carries some suggestion of racial undertones, his comments suggested that the majority of the rioters were foreign born, which was not the case in actuality. Sarkozy, who was later elected president, ordered the expulsion of those involved in the riots who were in the country illegally as well as those with residency visas.

Here, I am inclined to pose a seemingly straightforward preliminary question: who are these rioters and what are the obstacles that impede their chances of economic advancement? However, the response to this question is complicated by France’s system of classification, or rather, lack thereof. Because identity markers are not widely recognized as a result of France’s colorblind and religion-blind society, there is not an agreed upon narrative of oppression surrounding the fate of certain communities or individuals with commonalities of background. This kind of disjointed national discourse lends itself to different descriptions of the rioters in the reporting of the event. Age, immigration status, ethnic origin, religion, and geography are drawn upon in combination and also used in isolation as descriptors to construct the image of the rioter. The unavailability of a narrativized experience of

marginalized peoples contributes to the portrayal of the riots as random, meaningless outbursts of violence, rather than a call to action, a mobilization of people around a cause specific to their lived experiences. I will return to this analysis and extend it further in the close reading of a sampling of news sources.

The second case that I examine implicates Guérif-Souilamas' other scapegoated figure in French society – the “veiled girl.” At the same time that the violent, Arab male came onto the scene as the object of insult and blame, the 2000s were also characterized by the emergence of the oppressed Arab, Muslim woman under the scrutiny of the media. The 1990s had seen the radicalization of public discourse, with racist language aimed towards Arab Muslim immigrants (Boubeker). The tensions surrounding the issue of public expression of religious identity, taking the symbolic form of the *foulard*¹¹, contributed to the sentiment that “dangerous communitarianism” was on the rise and posed a threat to French Republican values.

It was March 2004 that marked the moment in which these tensions came to a head in the form of an official ban on “conspicuous” religious symbols in French schools. The ban is widely understood as geared towards the wearing of the Muslim headscarf, as this particular religious symbol had been under attack for years preceding the official proposition of the ban. The controversy was first sparked in September 1989 when three female students were suspended from their middle school in Creil in northern France for refusing to remove their *foulard*. The minister of education, Lionel Jospin, responded by declaring that the wearing of the headscarf should be treated on a case-by-case basis, according to the teacher's wish. A few

¹¹ Headscarf

months later, three girls were suspended from another middle school in a different city. French educators and the French government kept reiterating the need for secularity in French public schools until the 2004 law (officially called the law 2004-228 of 15 March 2004) passed with an overwhelming majority vote. Although the ban applies to Jewish Kippa and large Christian crosses in addition to the headscarf, it was these events that led to its passing, so the law is commonly referred to as the “headscarf ban,” a term which I employ for the purpose of analysis.

Separation of church and state has long been incorporated into French law through its policy of *laïcité* instituted in 1905. However, the 2004 bill explicitly bans conspicuous religious symbols in French public primary and secondary schools. There has been much controversy about the implications of this law, especially as they relate to racial and ethnic identity and expression. Although the law does not *explicitly* target any specific religious group, many have made the argument that it is discriminatory toward Muslim women most directly, for whom the *foulard* is an article of faith to be worn in public spaces and is more conspicuous than some other religious articles.

The defense of a wholly *laïque* society hinges on the privileging of social peace over imagined sub-communities. The goal of a uniform French citizenry that brings exclusively civic concerns into the public sphere has been the long-standing French Republican ideal. Might the political integration of Muslim Arabs into France require a reconsideration of the relevance of Republicanism and national ideals concerned with the necessary concealment of religious, ethnic, or racial particularities? A parallel can be drawn between these two examples of social unrest

in France: the threat that French society perceived over the course of each of them should be understood as a reaction to the display of a non-nationalistic solidarity that is at the center of these events. The geographically widespread wearing of a headscarf by a portion of the female population of France symbolically connects them all, for reasons other than the fact that they are French. The riots work in the same way, as a visible manifestation, but in this case, of shared grievances that has the power to unite a sector of the population through shared experiences of discrimination and social and economic systematic exclusion. The way in which this solidarity is constructed through interactions that are not face-to-face in most cases, the instigating riot sparking a series of riots in different cities geographically isolated from one another, speaks to Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community. In the same way that the nation is imagined as a community that uses language and symbols to construct notions of a shared history and shared values, both the rioters and the headscarf-wearing women having carved out imagined communities to which they belong. This is precisely the type of communitarianism that immigrants have been accused of "withdrawing" into that is perceived as threatening to french society (Boubeker). We can analyze this paranoia in relation to Gramsci's theory of hegemony. He says that the dominant class' hegemony is capable of being overturned if a window of opportunity, in the form of a crack in the dominant group's power, presents itself, and the subordinate group class rises up and seizes this chance to challenge the existing order (White). For dominant French society, this potential for the power of imagined sub-communities to undermine the construct of the Republican nation is the subject of obsessive anxiety in the French public sphere. I go on to

explore how this anxiety manifests itself in the language used to talk about these events in the media and interrogate the impulse behind this evident panic.

Through analyses of the news coverage surrounding the 2005 suburban Paris riots and the national law passed in 2004 banning the wearing of a headscarf in public schools, I re-operationalize the universal citizenship model to explain how human sameness and difference are constructed as forms of social control, which lies at the heart of forms of nationalism, including French Republicanism. I find that French Republicanism is never criticized in the discussion of these controversies in the news media. Generally, the media seems to support the myth of a French nation premised on cultural homogeneity. Rather than framing the issues as crises for France's beloved Republican ideology, the news coverage points to a crisis that lies elsewhere and requires analysis from a bottom-up approach. Unlike many studies of nation and nationalism in general and certainly unlike those focused on France, I employ an alternative framework to understand these tensions: fear and the desire for public order. The dialogue of crisis surrounding the coverage of these events focus less on what it means to be a French citizen and more so on the disruption of "public order" and threat to the "security" of the nation that is implicated in them. This analysis calls for an attention to population management as an integral part of any nationalist project – only certain people are imagined as part of the nation and only through certain means. With this in mind, power might be understood as control over this imagining seeing, experiencing, and acknowledging differences holds over French society. Social control is not exercised via the state espousing an ideology that then trickles down and is adopted by the citizenry.

Foucault and Population Management

Indeed, questions about how social difference is imagined, constructed, and ultimately managed, must be reformulated in terms of social control. How are practices of social control evidenced in the representations of these incidents? In what ways do conceptions of difference become interpreted as crises throughout these examples? In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes how sovereign power operated in the past and how the transition to modern society has involved a switch to the social body's¹² development and management of life. In the age of monarchy, the King had the power to end the lives of those who acted outside of the strict limits imposed by the state. Crucial to the development of capitalism and modern society, techniques of power condition people to be the exact kind of subjects that are conducive to the operation of the state: docile ones. This disciplinary power employs techniques that regulate individuals by controlling "the distribution of individuals in space" and the rhythm and nature of their activity (*Discipline and Punish* 141). Foucault analyzes the extent to which the social body has taken control of life and the tactics that are employed to ensure individuals' commitment to societal norms.

These observations about the nature of power at the level of the state suggest that a less overt yet equally powerful system of control operate to maintain a veneer of quiescence in French society. I find that the fear of disorder and chaos is pervasive throughout the way civil unrest is imagined or constructed and use Foucault's insights to examine this as part of a state response to a system of power centered on "the calculated management of life" (*Discipline and Punish* 140). A Foucauldian

¹² Foucault's terminology that speaks to the role of social rules and influences in the disciplining and development of individual bodies.

framework exposes France's investment in public order by uncovering the ideological blanket of a commitment to the Republican ideals of secularism, colorblindness, and universal citizenship that normally masks such an investment. I will focus on the moments in which a "crisis of order" discourse is employed in the two crises of French Republicanism using Foucault's discussion of population management, docile bodies, and the political technology that he has termed, biopower, the regulatory mechanisms of control.

Republicanism operates as the primary ideological institution of coercive control in France. As an ideology, it would fall under the category of one of the "more discreet, but insidious and effective" techniques, one that pervades the other physical institutions, such as the school (*Discipline and Punish* 141). Based on this pervasive Republican ideology and the role it plays in articulating French national identity, one might expect the events that I will continue examine –the *banlieue* riots and the headscarf ban – as necessitating public dialogue about the realities of citizenship and Republicanism. However, examination of mainstream news coverage using a Foucauldian framework reveals that there is more to understand than that which can be examined using solely an ideological lens. In acknowledging the limits of an analysis of national ideological framework, the extent to which the nation's prized commitment to a belief system is really about social control becomes evident. These incidents get translated as crises because Republicanism is bound up in a commitment to public order, and this orderliness is attained through patterns of social control that dictate which forms of interaction should be read as crises or threats to the French public.

In the following section I will use Foucault's discourse about social control to expose France's investment in public order through an analysis of select articles that appeared in France's three major print media conglomerations (*Libération*, *Le Monde*, and *Le Figaro*). In order to examine the ways in which an ideology of universalism is negotiated at the street level, through interactions between and among individuals and institutions, I turn to media accounts of two events that were marked as major moments of civil unrest in the French press, including coverage of the debate that ensued. I found there to be less coverage of these events in the right-leaning paper, *Le Figaro*, than in the left-leaning and moderate papers, *Libération* and *Le Monde*. I would argue that this is the case because members of France's conservative right are most likely the most anti-communitarian and are strongly invested in public order. It would be in the interest of those taking up this position to suppress public knowledge of these events and subsequently undermine the potential for nationwide solidarity on these issues.

The 2005 *Banlieue* Riots

It is evident through examination of the coverage of the 2005 riots that the media avoids any conversation about inequality that might be taking place on the streets. This and the way that Republicanism is reiterated as the model ideological system to be upheld provides a clear answer to the question: Does this series of incidents indicate a crisis for Republicanism? These events are portrayed using

language that suggests that they are blips, not incapable of being incorporated into France's ideological narrative. When the term, Republican, is used, the emphasis is on the anti-Republican nature of the situation and how a return to safety and order would signify an upholding of Republican values. So then what is it exactly that is in crisis? The pervasive language surrounding the chaotic nature of the riots and the measures being taken to restore public order seems to suggest a panic about social control.

A common trend in the papers I examined is the intentional exclusion of rioters' voices and a lack of context provided that might give the reader a sense of the building social discontents that led to this moment. While the articles highlight the government's responses to these events by including statements from officials, no individuals present at the scene are quoted. An article entitled, "Banlieues : couvre-feu appliqué dans cinq départements, la violence recule," was released in *Le Monde* on November 11, 2005, shortly after the instigating riots. The piece outlines orders for the surveillance of areas in which riots had taken place within a week of the initial riots within the Paris region. The reporter discusses the details of the curfew that was put forth, describing it as " 'un reflux important' des violence urbaines."¹³ The journalist describes the riot squads' patrolling of neighborhoods, officers asking any people on the street to return to their homes after a certain hour, and emphasizes the extensive nature of the violence with shocking statistics on the types of acts of arson committed so far at this point in the situation's unfolding. Described in the article are the demands for a return to a state of calm and "a march for peace" to demand an end

¹³ " 'an important response' to the urban violence"

to the violence, planned to take place along the Champs-Élysées. While the *Le Monde* reporter goes on to outline all the ways in which government prefects can go about instituting measures to control the physical boundaries, hours, and nature of the activity that people included in the areas under strict surveillance can engage in, it fails to make any connections to a history of rioting, striking, and protesting that has been glorified as part of French tradition. Why is this series of riots different from the others that are represented as sources of pride in the history of the nation? Why, then, is this example of social unrest represented as particularly threatening and deserving of urgent and stringent response?

In the articles from *Le Monde*, there is no discussion of the impetus behind the riots and no voice given to members of the communities involved. This particular article from *Le Monde* focuses on the response and efforts to reestablish a state of calm amidst chaos. The measures outlined represent tactics of control over the circulation of bodies. The violence that broke out is a very clear failure of the state's ability to exert *biopower*¹⁴, and the panicked response that followed, evident in the focus of this article, speaks to the urgent need to restore the social body to a docile state.

There lack of voice given to the rioters in the coverage of the events begs the questions: What are they angry about? Why aren't the rioters' grievances included in the report? I would contend that giving voice to any specific individual might risk their coming to represent a specific religious or ethnic group. In this case, the incident would indicate a collective struggle on the part of a particular community. The

¹⁴ Foucault's term for the system of techniques modern nation states employ to control bodies and populations

“communitarian threat” that reporting specifics of involved parties might represent is avoided through strategic silencing. As long as there is no ethnic component involved in instances of civil unrest, that is, as long as the protesters are white, the media can respond in a way that classifies the event as an admirable struggle and files it away with the other historical moments of class struggle or other Anglo-centric issues, in which race need not be involved. However, in the case of the 2005 riots, the individuals implicated might be perceived as just a little too different. It is therefore safer to avoid framing the struggle as specific to a shared experience of oppression. The state must “avoid distribution in groups,” in this case, using the news media as a tool to “break up collective dispositions; analyze confused, massive, or transient pluralities” (*Discipline and Punish* 143).

Difference gets constructed in the media, without attention given to particularities. Similar to the way in which vague language is employed in the article previously discussed, a different article from *Le Monde* suggests the violent nature of a riot in Seine-Saint-Denis, a Parisian *banlieue*, without giving attention to specifics of the discontents. In the title of the article that came out on November 7, it is stated that, “36 policiers ont été blessés dans les émeutes de la nuit.”¹⁵ The journalist quotes several government officials, including minister of the interior at that time, Nicolas Sarkozy, who is cited saying that he hoped that the Republican order would return to the neighborhoods. Following this statement, he declared that, otherwise, the situation would be one controlled by gangs or mafias. Once again, this suggests violence without cause, framing and demonizing the rioters as “others” in a way that suggests

¹⁵ “36 policemen were injured in the evening riots”

that they belong to some group that is inherently violent and evil, embodying a lifestyle that is anti-Republican, which pits them against the rest of French society. The one mention of some sort of identity marker is brought up in the context of an Islamic organization, quoted condemning the violence and calling upon young Muslims to “calm their rage.” The extensive quoting of calls for a restoration of public order by various government officials and organizations, and the emphasis on “security” as an “absolute priority” is notable. The article ends by referencing Sarkozy’s assertion that the government hasn’t been confronted with this kind of situation in years. In response to these “criminal acts,” the government must be repressive to avoid them, preventative in nature, and must bring about a large social action. The lack of clarity about what crimes were actually committed and with what consequences they would be met feeds into the notion that the rioters actions are senseless and incapable of being explained other than their being non-French and therefore unintelligible from a Republican perspective.

The 2004 headscarf ban

French society has long been concerned with the presence of any and all forms of the headscarf. Some who desire its decreased visibility take up the feminist argument that it is the symbol of the subjugation of women, while others defend the need to uphold the Republican commitment to *laïcité*. Regardless of the specific argument taken up, the ban’s supporters seem to rally around the fear of an Islamist threat to the French way of life.

An article that appeared in *Le Figaro* in August 2010 outlined the constitutional council's decision to pass a law prohibiting the wearing of the *burqa* in public spaces, a follow up to the 2004 legislation, quoting lawmakers and members of the council exclusively in favor of the ban. The argument for its approval is grounded in "la sauvegarde de l'ordre public."¹⁶ This is articulated as the end goal and therefore provides justification for the law, as declared in the article. The ban targets Muslim women, who are sometimes part of immigrant communities but are also often second or third-generation French citizens. The widespread and ongoing media attention given to this issue and the consistent positioning of the *foulard* as a symbol at odds with French values speaks to the nature of the media to reflect state interests. This instance of state control over physical appearance reflects an example of *biopower* that the state exerts on its citizens who assert any particularity that is outside of the civic-minded, non-racialized, *laïque* norm. As Foucault identifies it, the power of regularization is clearly in play here. The power to intervene in life, guaranteeing life while managing it, is exposed in the crisis surrounding this response to public expression of religious difference.

France's project of integration is essentially a vision that involves the managing of difference into non-existence. France prides itself on its history of openness to immigrants, but the expectation is that inclusion is impossible without assimilation. Luckily though, everyone should be on board with universalism, because we're all citizens of the universe, *n'est-ce pas?* A universal citizenship model assumes that *laïcité* and colorblindness are ideals that everyone can identify with.

¹⁶ "the safekeeping of public order"

However, this generalism that requires that the public sphere be a neutral space seems to be inherently culturally specific. The cultural attachments, the *foulard* in this case, that modern day immigrant populations bring with them from their country of origin are evidently just a little too different to let slide. France maintains its commitment to inclusion, but “the other” is incorporated into the social body so that his or her life is fostered but only on the condition that it is a calculated maintenance of life, a regulated incorporation into the citizenry to ensure no disruption of the public order. Guillaume Perrault, political journalist at *Le Figaro* employs a nationalistic rhetoric, implicating Article 10 of the Declaration of the rights of man and citizen of August 26, 1789 to emphasize the need for a return to order. He quotes principles put forth in a 220 year-old France: “nul ne doit inquiété pour ses opinions, meme religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l’ordre public établi par la Loi.”¹⁷

Given France’s history of religious conflict, the nation views religion as a matter that should exist within the private sphere of each individual citizen. The national public school, which is essentially an extension of the state, upholds this strict policy of neutrality. While the conservative Right seems unable to move on from ancient doctrine that assumes a French society that has remained unchanged over the last couple of centuries, a collaborative statement published in 2003 by a sampling of professors, sociologists, and political scientists in *Libération*, France’s most popular left-leaning newspaper, assumes a different perspective. Rather than emphasizing the importance of upholding a fervent commitment to laïcité and the definitions given to it a century ago, the authors of this article allow more room for

¹⁷ “No one should have to worry about their opinions, even religious ones, provided that their manifestation doesn’t disrupt the public order established by the law”

bending to the needs and desires of a changing population. They are open to a redefinition of “l’application du principe de laïcité à l’école,”¹⁸ because exclusion, “la pire des solutions,”¹⁹ is to be avoided at all costs. The argument taken up by this group of academics is in the vein of “doing it for the sake of the children,” painting the young, veiled Muslim girl as the helpless victim in this situation. They are sure to clarify that they are certainly not in *favor* of the veil but, rather, they don’t think that a child should be held responsible for the culture that they are born into. They emphasize that the rhetoric around *laïcité* should get away from exclusion and towards freedom.

The authors of this piece, which come out in *Libération* as tensions surrounding the place of the *foulard* in the French school were mounting, ultimately oppose the ban on the *foulard*. However, their arguments for this article is dripping with moralistic undertones that construct the “veiled girl” and the culture from which she comes as different, which a reader could carelessly be glossed over, given the liberal context in which it is presented. The authors construct the Muslim girl as in need of saving and the school as her savior. To quote the article: “C’est en l’accueillant à l’école laïque qu’on peut l’aider à s’émanciper, en lui donnant les moyens de son autonomie, et c’est en la renvoyant qu’on la condamne à l’oppression.”²⁰ I would argue that this kind of defense is just as powerful as the conservative one in contributing to the oppression of France’s Arab immigrant

¹⁸ “The application of the principle of laïcité at school”

¹⁹ “The worst of solutions”

²⁰ “It is in welcoming her to the *laïque* school that we can help her to free herself, by giving her the means to achieve autonomy, and it is in sending her away that we condemn her to oppression.”

population, despite their different outcomes on the stance of the headscarf ban. It implicitly rejects the worth of any culture that is not French. This position on the *foulard* issue could have lent itself to an opportunity for a discussion about the value of difference but, instead, took an angle that ultimately reinforces the social order;

These different positions on the issue of *laïcité* in French schools as it relates to the headscarf controversy speak to the range of rhetorical strategies that can be used to construct a national identity, situating certain individuals outside of it. These examples point to the impulse for a need to constantly reproduce these “other” identity constructions as a means of avoiding a real conversation about difference. The suggestion here is that such a conversation is feared by the dominant public majority, as it threatens the possibility of social unrest.

Conclusion

The 2005 riots and the ongoing controversy of the headscarf incited greater awareness of the postcolonial²¹ dimension to struggle (Boubeker). Although this postcolonial struggle is often depicted using language to suggest that a “clash of civilizations” is taking place, “prior to this period (1990s), Islam in the banlieue had generally been well perceived by elected officials who saw in this religion an opportunity to maintain public order” (Boubeker 190). This evidences the power of rhetoric to legitimize racist sentiments in an issue that has always been about public

²¹ French society’s preferred pseudonym for ethnic or racialized. The term refers to immigrants from former French colonies.

order. The media, the education system, and other national institutions use whatever tools are at their disposal at a given moment to reinforce the urgent need for order.

As colorblind rhetoric is deeply seated in a Republican Universalist ideological framework, an acknowledgement of race would be understood as anti-Republican and would expose an investment in orderliness that takes priority over a commitment to the national ideology. For Foucault, resorting to an official policing of race and ethnicity would signal that the hegemony is not working. It would evidence a perceived lack of control on the part of the state. Unable to hide behind the guise of a commitment to Republicanism, such a change in policy would reflect an internal panic about public order, a crisis that would highlight not only the national obsession with orderliness but also a moment of the state's loss of control over this order.

In keeping with the ideological narrative of the French Republic, the government turning its back on a colorblind view of society would be framed as a rejection of the Republican commitment to neutrality, but, in reality, would be threatening because of its potential to expose the state's interest in public order. Generally, public order is maintained without state intervention and regulation operates covertly. The social body is arranged so that citizens police one another, while *biopower* operates to assure that society's "others" are kept confined to their marginalized position. It is evident from the panicked responses to this glimpse of what an official state ethnic/ racial policing would look like is that such practices would make for a citizenry more difficult to govern. As long as the social body is the regulating power responsible for social control, a level of docility can be maintained.

Keeping ethnic particularity in mind while thinking about the school as the site of production of the French citizenry, I would like to return to Benedict Anderson's understanding of a national imaginary and to the idea that national identity is constructed rather than projected onto a community. Because there is no *truth* or *reality* surrounding the nation, it is understood as we imagine it to be and by way of the symbols, language, and histories on which society places value. As it stands, "France's supposedly secular education system is expected to integrate the nation through the universal forms of human knowledge and values exemplified by French language and culture" (Tarr 128). This is an approach that assumes "Eurocentric attitudes of the ruling elite toward the culture of those originating in France's former colonies" and functions to reproduce the hegemonic order of the dominant culture (Tarr 128). Given the important role of the school, which functions as an extension of the State in French society, an apt synthesis of the theoretical points and primary evidence provided in this essay should take the form of a proposition to open up a discussion of a *reimagining* of French society. The school is a potential site of hegemonic change. It is a place where national identity and each pupil's place in it come to be understood. It makes the most sense for the first steps towards a reconstitution of the French nation to take place in the school. This would require a reworking of both curriculum and pedagogy in order to construct a more complex narrative of the nation that challenges dominant history and incorporates the perspectives – both language and histories – of its pupils from France's former colonies.

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