

Master Thesis

DECOLONIZING THE REPUBLIC OF FRANCE:
A CASE STUDY OF POSTCOLONIAL RACISM
AND THE FRENCH OF ALGERIAN DESCENT



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Summary

This thesis argues that the Republic of France was constructed on a colonial imaginary that establishes a differentiation between French, “white,” citizens and inferior, “Other,” subjects. It explores how this imaginary is reproduced in dominant discourses, practices, and representations in France in a way that remakes the French colonial project of the civilizing mission. This differentiation, or postcolonial racism, targets the French descending from the formerly colonized populations who also are postcolonial immigrants. The author contends that it particularly targets the French of Algerian descent, represented as the “French Muslim.” Furthermore, it argues that it is important that the Republic of France, its state and society, goes through a process of transformative decolonization of its national imaginaries in order to embrace the plurality of subjectivities that makes up the community of France today.

Este trabajo argumenta que la República francesa se ha construido a través de un imaginario colonial que establece una diferenciación entre ciudadan@s frances@s, “blanc@s”, y sujetos, contruidos como “Otros”, inferiores. Investiga como este imaginario se reproduce en discursos, prácticas y representaciones dominantes en Francia de una manera que reviven la misión civilizadora del proyecto colonial francés. Esta diferenciación, o racismo postcolonial, condiciona a l@s frances@s que descienden de las poblaciones colonizadas en Francia, o inmigrantes postcoloniales. Esta tesis sostiene que condiciona particularmente a l@s frances@s de ascendencia argelina que el imaginario colonial/postcolonial representa como “frances@s musulman@s”. A continuación, la autora plantea la importancia de que la República de Francia, su estado y sociedad, pase por un proceso de descolonización transformativa con el fin de abarcar la pluralidad de subjetividades que conforma la comunidad de las personas que son Francia hoy en día.

Ce travail défend l'idée que la République française s'est construite à travers un imaginaire colonial qui établit une différenciation entre citoyen-ne-s français-e-s « blanc-he-s » et sujets, « Autres », inférieurs. Il explore comment cet imaginaire est reproduit dans les discours, pratiques et représentations dominantes en France de telle façon qu'il fait revivre le projet colonial français de la mission civilisatrice. Cette différenciation, ou racisme postcolonial, cible les français-e-s qui descendent des populations anciennement colonisées qui sont aussi les immigré-e-s postcoloniaux. Cette thèse soutient qu'elle cible tout particulièrement les français-e-s d'ascendance algérienne qui sont représenté-e-s comme les « musulman-e-s français-e-s ». En outre, l'auteure avance qu'il est important que la République française, son état et sa société, passe par un processus de décolonisation transformative de façon à embrasser la pluralité des subjectivités qui constitue la communauté des personnes qui font la France aujourd'hui.

Key Words

Racism; colonialism/postcolonialism; France; diversity; immigration; French of Algerian descent

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
INTRODUCTION	1
Starting With My Own Story	1
Contextualizing Research	3
Research Question	6
Methodologies	6
Confronting Myself Within Research	7
Reviewing the Literature	11
Structuring The Process	24
CHAPTER 1: DECONSTRUCTING (POST)COLONIAL RELATIONS.....	26
Introduction	26
<i>Le Projet Républicain, Ou la Mise en Place du Racisme Colonial</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>L'Exception (Coloniale) Française</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>L'Algérie Sera Française</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>L'Algérie Française, ou le Rêve Assimilationniste</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>La "Race," Ou Cet "Autre" Que L'On Ne Veut Pas Voir.....</i>	<i>40</i>
White Republic.....	42
<i>La Fracture Coloniale</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>La Fracture Coloniale.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>La Présence Absente</i>	<i>55</i>
Algeria.....	62
History Is Politics. And "White" Is A Color.	65
Conclusion.....	68
CHAPTER 2: TEASING OUT POSTCOLONIAL RACISM THROUGH DISCOURSE	71
Setting Tone	71
<i>Mission Civilisatrice, République et Assimilation</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Un Racisme d'Exception, Le Racisme Postcolonial.....</i>	<i>73</i>
The Remaking of The Civilizing Mission: <i>Égalité, Laïcité, Diversité.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>De La Diversité N'est Pas Français.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Assimilation and Ascétisme: The Violent Rhetoric of "Good" and "Bad"</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Islam, République et Banlieues Ou la Rhétorique d'un Racisme Postcolonial.....</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Islamisation, Ghettoïsation et Stigmatisations</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>L'Islamophobie Ou la "Haine Respectable"</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Les Banlieues Ou La Production de l'Altérité</i>	<i>100</i>

Conclusion.....	107
CHAPTER 3: NOTES TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE DECOLONIZATION.....	111
Itinerary	111
Decolonizing Theory.....	116
Embodying Debate	119
De-centering the “White Male”	124
Decolonial Epistemologies	127
Unmaking Race, Remaking Soul.....	132
Towards a Transformative Recognition of French PostColoniality	133
Towards Embracing the Peaceful Aesthetics of Plurality	143
<i>Reprendre le Fond de l’Histoire pour Transformer les Relations...et Conclure, Momentanément.</i>	152
CONCLUSIONS.....	156
BIBLIOGRAPHY	168

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Introduction

If I was going to dance, I wanted to dance about real things that were real in my life.

(Anna Halprin in *Breath Made Visible* 2009)

Starting With My Own Story

I grew up in Northern France in predominately white countryside. I mean that I grew up in a place where postcolonial immigration was not visible. At the age of seventeen, the journey of my life experiences made me realize that I was the only person with the great power to decide for myself. In Calais, the town where I attended high school, I became involved in the local not-for profits supporting the *sans-papiers* who live in extremely poor conditions in Calais. The *sans-papiers* are persons in migration transiting in Calais in order to reach England through whatever means available when one does not have official documents to travel. A year later, I moved to the city as a student. There, I built true interest in the cultural richness and mixing of populations that inhabit and give life to the city. I also built deep friendships with students from Algeria who were studying in the same university as I. During the summer, I joined a group of other French young people at a French not-for-profit and participated in an intercultural exchange with a small village located in the South of Morocco. This experience was quite determinant in building my critical consciousness on the importance of deconstructing differences and dialoguing across cultures, as well as on the structural and cultural inequalities that condition human relations across the globe.

The faculty where I studied was located in a very poor neighborhood of the city. This, among other things, led me to reflect on social relations in a way that raised my concern for inequalities. I specifically remember telling myself that I would not fall victim to the simplicity of essentializing race/culture, that there is something out there that I had to explore. I was already driven by the strong belief that humans are not naturally violent, nor are they

naturally bad or deviant. Rather, humans are shaped by their environment and to some extent conditioned by the structures of society. Later, I understood that within that environment, humans have endless possibilities to create and transform, but that realization arose from Peace Studies, not my reflections at the time. Driven by such beliefs, I looked for answers to my questions through researching on my own, attending conferences, cultural events, and meeting people that opened ways toward shaping my own understanding of the world and its dynamics. Particularly, I started to build strong interest in issues related to colonialism and racism. I realized then how little I had been taught in school about these topics in particular and how much of this was hidden or just not talked about in general, despite the fact that it appeared to me as a major issue of our world.

At the end of my second year at university, I was selected to participate in a summer institute at Drexel University (Philadelphia), co-organized by the Fulbright Institution and the US State Department. It was dedicated to civic engagement and addressed to “outstanding European students.” Apart from the immense richness such an experience provided me with on many levels, it was a considerable step towards empowering myself. It pushed me to believe that I was capable of contributing in some way to making this world a more liveable one for all. Besides, it allowed me to further develop interest in issues of race and inequalities.

Since then, many more experiences have shaped me. I have become increasingly aware of my existence as a woman in a patriarchal society, which has held an important place in my life. I have tried to lead my life in a way that promotes in me an open curiosity of the world as well as a form of critical engagement to peace. I let the world surprise me. This has been my dance of life.

The place in which I am now – the place that inspired me to write this piece of research and to take the path of Peace and Conflict Studies – is a result of this personal

journey to find my own place in relation to the world. Part of this has been, for me, to negotiate how people see me and how I see myself, and to become aware of my political identities when making my own choices for life and who I want to be. It is important for my research because it directly relates to my position in the world, which allows me to see certain things and be blind to others. I will discuss this later in this introduction. However, this process of finding my place in relation to the world has led me to undo – decolonize – the imaginaries and learnt practices within me – the pieces of the social and political constructions of whiteness in France. It is a constant process of renewed consciousness that move through different energies and places. Thus, the result of this research comes from a place of here and now, where both anger and transformation (and many more energies) come together. It is constantly moving and radically open.

Contextualizing Research

My interlocked interests in French colonialism and racism, as well as my concern for transforming conflictive realities, have led me to research on the legacies of French colonialism in the dominant discourses and practices in diverse France today. The present context is marked by the growing wave of popularity of the extreme-right nationalist party of *Front National*, both in discourses and in voting polls. This political evolution, however, takes shape within a context of growing nationalist-racist, patriarchal discourses on the part of the French elite in general. The intrusion in public debate of discourses targeting the citizens perceived as Muslims and the 2nd, 3rd, 4th generation immigrants in general plays out as a repetitive questioning of the legitimacy of certain populations within the nation-state. Such discourses seem to systematically orientate the discussion towards questioning the so-called “integration,” within the “national” or “Republican” identity, of people who are French yet labeled “*Français-e-s d’origine immigrée*.” Furthermore, such discourses also place “immigration” as a major issue for French society today, in a way that generalizes it as a

universal fact, hiding its multiple dynamics and the historical conditions that shaped it. Such discourses do not situate themselves in relation to the world and problematize the idea of “national identity.” Yet, the multiplicity of faces that inhabit the country is mainly the result of a long colonial history that has durably and in multiple forms tied the French society to diverse populations, mostly but not only from West Africa and North Africa.¹

These discourses have intensified in the last ten to fifteen years. They reflect a malaise, or conflicts – a sort of unease with oneself. They seem to be the result of the growing place “*les immigrés*,” the descendants of Algeria and other colonized peoples, occupy in the national landscape. I do not think, however, that there is an issue of “integration,” “immigration,” or the place of Islam within the French Republic. On the other hand, I do believe there is a malaise that finds its roots in the immense gap that exists between these elitist, white, heterosexual, middle-class, middle-aged, male discourses, and the multiple, plural faces, stories, realities that make French society.

Furthermore, the political and philosophical tradition of the French Republic permeates these discourses. Its nationalist-universalist blindness to “race” seems to be an impediment to recognizing French diversities and the discriminations – the multiple and intersecting levels of discriminations – that hinder the potential for living together in harmony. The negation of race as a potential factor of politico-social division seems to be the expression of a negation to recognize colonialism, the internalization of colonial/patriarchal imaginary, language, representations, and practices that subjugate the colonized “Others.” Beyond, it seems to me that it is a negation to problematize the potential continuities of such construction in relation to identity, memory, and territory in 2014 France.

¹ I include people from the French overseas territories who were mostly taken from West Africa for the slave trade.

Most specifically, I sense that the French of Algerian descent are the target of an exceptional form of postcolonial racism ingrained in the dominant discourses and the imaginaries that support them. As the intimacy of the relationships between France and Algeria radically transcend borders, the descendants of Algeria in France are the most familiar of all immigrants, yet they seem to be, in the dominant imaginaries, the most “problematic” of all French communities.² I want to explore the exceptionality of Algeria as a colony and as a postcolony within the French colonial and postcolonial relational landscape.

In sum, I want to investigate how postcolonial racism permeates social relations in multicultural, postcolonial France. I understand this form of postcolonial racism as a differentiation on the basis of perceived race, ethnicity, religion, and colonial background within the nation. Postcolonial domination takes place within a system in which it is inherently tied to other systems of domination. It targets specifically the so-called French of immigrant background, who are in fact descendants of formerly colonized populations. It is postcolonial for it reproduces practices, imaginaries, discourses and representations of French colonialism in a way that remakes the French colonial project of the civilizing mission. When I refer to French citizens of Algerian/colonized background, the “*français-e-s issu-e-s de l’immigration*” or “French Muslim” (*musulman-e-s français-e-s*), I understand nationality and citizenship in a broad sense, in a sense of belonging. I thus include all generations of immigrants who grew up in France, whether or not they hold French nationality and citizenship.

Until recently, French colonialism has been the object of a general silence in France. Since early 2000s, however, debates on French postcoloniality and racial discriminations have

² French-Algerian relations are complex and identities are hybrid. There are also white-Catholic French who descend from Algeria. By “French of Algerian background” or “French descendants of Algeria,” I refer to the descendants of Algeria who are perceived as such, in this case as “Arab” and “Muslim.” The same applies to the expression “descendants of formerly colonized populations” in general.

penetrated, not without resistance, academic research. Some intellectuals have highlighted the necessity of reflecting on French colonialism in the light of these present debates. They have enhanced the need to decolonize imaginaries and institutions. Concomitantly, growing pressures from civil society have voiced the realities of racial discriminations, shedding light on the legacies of French colonialism along with the demand for equal treatment. This context is conflictive but/and offers immense opportunities for change. Such a context opens spaces for transformation. The need for transforming postcolonial relations in a way that transcends race and embraces the plurality of stories/faces that make French society is critical. My thesis takes place within, engages with and contributes to, through an interdisciplinary input, the current academic and political debates on postcoloniality, race, and diversity in France.

In order to narrow the scope of my research, I take the French descendants of Algeria as a case study. Postcolonial racism tends to be more consensual when it points at the French perceived as Muslims, most specifically Algerians. Yet, as I have said, it is, according to my research, a paradigmatic case of postcolonial racism in France. The implications of this research go beyond this case study. Postcolonial racism targets the descendants of the formerly colonized populations in general. French society needs a process of transformative decolonization in general – one that questions profoundly the imaginaries and representations that underlie institutional, media and political discourses and practices within the Republic.

Research Question

How do some of the major socio-political conflicts and discourses in Republican France camouflage a form of postcolonial racism? How does such a postcolonial racism remake the French colonial project of the civilizing mission through the relations of the Republic with the French of Algerian descent? How do I envisage a process of transformative decolonization of the Republic and relations within it?

Through this research, I am interested in how colonial imaginaries and representations are revived in dominant discourses and practices in the present-day within the French Republic. I identify the French descendants of the colonized, more specifically Algerian, as the target of such discourses and practices that reproduce the colonial racism within the nation. I want to look at how these discourses that rely on the values of the Republic camouflage the ways in which postcolonial racism is ingrained within this Republic. I intend to analyze how such postcolonial racism plays out in the everyday discourses and socio-political conflicts surrounding postcoloniality and diversity. I want to explore how a process of transformative decolonization can rethink human relations across diversities in order to embrace all voices in plural France.

Methodologies

My guiding methodologies are feminist (Ackerly and True 2010; Luker 2008). Feminism for me does not limit itself to reflecting on gender relations in a way that liberates human beings from the chains of patriarchy. Feminism is engaged, epistemologically and politically, with making visible assumptions that stem from my location of power, my standpoint. Thus, it compels me to make a reflective effort on my own location, on my place in the world.

A feminist ethic of research leads me to use a theory-seeking approach of methodology (Ackerly and True 2010). Instead of expressing a hypothesis that I prove right using existing literature, I intend to fill in gaps within existing theories in order to add a piece to the interdisciplinary puzzle. I want to be surprised through the research process. The latter is dynamic, open, and non-linear.

My research is theoretical with a qualitative approach. I mostly use secondary sources, books and journal articles published in the French colonial/postcolonial context as well in

other contexts of colonial and/or racist experiences, like the United States and Latin America. I stand in Peace and Conflict Studies as the main discipline of my research. I interweave it with the fields of Philosophy, History, Sociology, Feminist Studies, and Critical Race Studies.

As primary sources, I mostly use newspaper articles for the sake of analyzing discourse as well as speeches and institutional documents. As I truly believe that decolonization breaks borders, I also rely on pieces of art such as French rap music texts and literature. Literature written in the colonial/postcolonial context reflects the trans-cultural hybridity, the beautiful ambiguity, the radical creativity that emerges out of human relations, even when they are colonial. Among these authors who radically mix the personal and the political, I cite Assia Djebar and Abd-Al-Malik.

I am theoretically and methodologically influenced by poststructuralist and post-colonialist literature. These lenses push me to systematically look beyond the visible, to search for the blind spots in practices and discourses, to unveil ideology and potential hegemony. They engage me with making silenced onto-epistemologies and knowledges visible. These lenses lead me to rely heavily on discourse analysis. For the sake of transformation, however, discourse analysis must be coupled with methodologies that open space for action and engage with the countless opportunities for change that surround us in any situation. This is why I weave these poststructuralist/post-colonialist lenses with the Peace Studies perspective.

In addition, I embrace the methods rooted in the principles of Peace Studies, for they push me to go beyond the claim for positivist scientificism. They push me to be critical in a way that engages me with transformation and the creation of new spaces in which we might live together nonviolently. Vicent Martínez Guzmán's "epistemological turn" resonates in me in my search for renewed and open lenses with which to look at the complexity of human

relations, that is, humans-in-conflicts. In intersubjectivity as a scientific method, I see the reflection of my own *responsibility* and *vulnerability* as a human being in interconnection with my environment. My humanity lies in the moving energies of life that surround me.

Confronting Myself Within Research

Identity is constructed, flexible, multiple, and messy. At the same time, it also is real. Politically, it positions me in a place from where I see and experience the world. My identity is conditioned by the intersection of my life choices and experiences, my agency, and political factors of my gender and sexuality, my skin color, “race,” language, and nationality, my social class, among other things. All co-constitute who I am. So, I am white and I am a middle-class heterosexual French woman. Deep inside me, I know that I am none of these things. And then, I also know that I am all of them due to the co-constitution of the subject, of myself. Locating myself leads me to acknowledging my *privilege(s)*. I understand the acknowledgement of my privilege(s) as the *responsibility* to make my position visible because in this world “race” is socially constructed yet very real. My “race” conditions how I see the world. It conditions my realities. Being aware of my own position is useful for the sake of *transformation*.

Indeed, starting from this position, I attempt to decolonize the imaginaries and representations which dominate the socio-political debate in France. The objective of this research stems from my own struggle for the consciousness of my place in France and in the world. I intend to raise my own consciousness to a level where I can be aware of the functioning of power, race, and politics in social relations – starting from myself – and simultaneously see beyond these conditioning factors in the way I apprehend the world.

In doing so, I am concerned about reproducing dichotomies, which my research intends to transform in a plural conception of identity. In the process of decolonizing my

mind, I sometimes tend to analyze relations in a sweeping way that does not leave space for natural resistance or complexity. It is very important for me, as a white person, to explicitly acknowledge these tendencies, which are part of my struggle for consciousness because they may appear as a defensive discourse in the name of the colonized. This is very problematic, for such protectionist approach is part of the patriarchal/colonial order/relations and may appear as a remaking of the “white man’s burden.” This is not my intention. I do not want to “defend” or “be the voice of”. Rather, I only intend to speak for myself, from my place. In so doing, I intend to shift the dominant lens on postcolonial diversity in France from my own location as a privileged, yet not dominant, voice. My thesis is addressed to all people that inhabit France and contribute, in one way or another, to constructing realities in that place. It is most particularly directed towards those who do not question the state discourses that create a differentiation of citizens within the nation, and beyond, of human beings within this world.

Furthermore, in my effort to deconstruct knowledge(s) and transform epistemology, I sometimes find myself trapped into universal, modern language. I am concerned about reproducing the very categories I attempt to undo. Thus, I try, as much as possible, to make myself visible and to clarify from where I speak. On the other hand, language offers endless possibilities and spaces of resistance and creativity to transform the realities it reflects. The choice I make to cite rap music authors, for example, reflects the shifting lens that I call for in this work. Through my plural language, the shift takes shape in real time. Besides the trap where language can get me, I also explore and use the creative power of language to act upon my own contradictions.

Dancing Research

I constantly find myself negotiating my position in relation to the discourse analysis of poststructuralist/post-colonial lenses and the call for a space of radical openness and

resistance of elicitive conflict transformation. Through the process of raising my own consciousness, I tend to deconstruct binary thinking in anger, and anger often sends it back at me. It locks myself in social structures and essentialist discourses of equality and justice, in my own blindness of the complexities of human relations and their opportunities for transformation.

Yet, anger is part of my process. I do not have to settle myself – all my contradictions are part of myself and are part of the transformative process. In the power of dance lies power to transform. In between acting and reacting lie many third spaces in which I find myself, not in the struggle of one over the other, but rather as the creation of new spaces, constantly negotiating, unstable, vulnerable, here and now.

This thesis reflects myself. What moves me academically arises from the experience of my multiple realities, all *embodied* in myself. This is why it is full of contradictions. I am part of my analysis. How do I balance expressing “rage” (hooks 1995) and transforming it? I am incompletely one, and incompletely the other, finding myself in the frontier of both. This frontier is a way-through, a bridge combining my multiple selves. My language is plural and my work is, too.

Reviewing the Literature

My journey starts in Peace and Conflict Studies. Peace Studies emerged in Europe after the Second World War when researchers realized that violence had been taken to another level of human barbarism. In his journey to make Peace Studies recognized in Academia, Vicent Martínez Guzmán elaborated the Philosophy for Peace, which constitutes the theoretical grounds that found the International Master in Peace, Conflicts and Development Studies. The central input of this Philosophy for Peace, in my view, is the epistemological turn (*el giro epistemológico*) (Guzmán 2009). It is a new paradigm, which replaces human

beings in the center of science and aims at maintaining the sustainability of life (Comins Mingol and Paris Albert 2009). In this paradigm, objectivity does not exist. As human beings are interconnected with and within their environment, no one stands outside of conflict. In this new vision of science, the diversity of human beings and their subjectivities plays an important role in making peace(s). For Martínez Guzmán, there are as many (ways to make) peace(s) as there are people. Francisco Muñoz, from the University of Granada, has elaborated the concept of imperfect peace (2004). According to Muñoz, peace *is* everywhere, in everyone and in every moment, coexisting with conflict and violence (ibid.). In Peace and Conflict Studies, conflict is not negative; rather, human beings live in and within conflict (Martínez Guzmán 2001; Lederach 2003; Dietrich 2013). Everything is relational (ibid.). Conflict is, in fact, an opportunity for transformation (Lederach 2003; 2005; Dietrich 2013). Lederach is the key practitioner and theorist of the elicitive approach of conflict transformation, which also constitutes the foundation of the Innsbruck Universität MA Program for Peace Studies. In the elicitive approach, the only true moment available to us is the here and now because life, relations, energies are constantly moving. In this here and now lie endless possibilities – right in front of us – to transform our realities nonviolently and creatively. These Peace and Conflict lenses constitute the theoretical foundations of how I look at humans and conflicts, humans-in-conflict.

However, if that is the case, how did I decide to write my paper on racism? I relate very much to the spaces that Peace and Conflict Studies open in order to understand the world. Yet, I see the violence of racism in its different forms and expressions as a major gap in the field. I think Peace and Conflict Studies fail to talk about race and in so doing, fail to locate itself. How do I talk about interculturality without discussing the destructive and very real effect of race – and nationality, spirituality, etc – in a world that is postcolonial and Eurocentric? How do I approach dialogue across cultures and religions without understanding

how race, as a factor of domination and subjugation across history, plays out within and between cultures? How do I speak about peace(s) across cultures and continents from my location in the white European world without recognizing my privileged position in my own context and in the world? To answer these questions, I turned to Critical Race Studies, Decolonial Studies, and Post-colonial Feminist Studies.

Colonial Discourse, Power, and Representation

In talking about race, I must talk about power. How does power function so that race, which is socially constructed, matters? The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault has been revolutionary in rethinking the ways that researchers undertake theory in the Social Sciences (Mills 2003). He shifts his point of departure in order to make visible blind theoretical spots and ask questions that have not been asked. He questions the rigidity of any theoretical/political position and sees the changing of position as an essential part of theory. He also breaks with binary-thinking for he claims that power *is*, always, everywhere, and that it circulates in ways that it gives opportunities for change.

In teasing out how racism plays out in French society, I must analyze dominant discourses in the French context – how media, politicians, legal texts and practices, the institutions function in a way that reproduces colonial racism within French society and remakes the civilizing mission. In analyzing discourse, I must highlight the functioning of discourse in order to highlight the ideology that hides behind it and makes it appear as hegemonic – that is, as the only available truth (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1972). For Foucault, the concept of discourse encompasses not only the actual language but also the institutional apparatus in which it is framed and by which it is legitimized as well as the different practices that follow from such discourse (Foucault and Gordon 1980; Hall 1997). Discourse is constructed through knowledge, and discourse produces knowledge. No

knowledge is produced outside the operating of power in social relations, and power is also reinforced through the creation of knowledge (Foucault and Gordon 1980).

Highly influenced by Foucault, the feminist philosopher Judith Butler argues that there is no essential identity before discourse comes into play (Butler 1990). There is no such thing as dichotomy-based identities (ibid.). Rather, they are categories that are constructed by discourse and performed through discourse (ibid.). Like Foucault, she argues that the body is political (ibid.). It is the battlefield where constructed identities take place, the battlefield for the exercise of power (ibid.). Butler's input is fundamental because she demonstrates that identity is political; it is flexible and opens spaces for transformation.

Post-colonial Edward Said, who published *Orientalism* in 1979, is highly influenced by Foucault's power/knowledge argument (Hall 1997). In *Orientalism*, Said analyzes the discourse of the dominant culture – of those who hold the power to look and represent – over the formerly colonized populations – those who are looked at and represented through the gaze of the dominant culture (Said 1979). He demonstrates how imperialism plays out through culture in post-colonial relations between “the West” and “the East” (ibid.). His text is important, not only because it is seminal in Post-Colonial Studies, but mostly to understand the continuities of colonialism after independence in the way the colonizers construct the “Other.” In France, a form of “Orientalism” constructs the French Muslims in particular as the exotic and threatening “Other.”

Stuart Hall, from the field of Cultural Studies, writes, as a black Jamaican man living in Great Britain, about the inside Great Britain colonial/postcolonial context. He shows how the “racialized knowledge of the Other,” that is, how “race” is constructed through the operation of language, representation, and power (Hall 1997). He appears to me as a sort of bridge between Foucault and Said. According to Hall, *stereotyping* is the attempt of the

dominant discourse, through a typically binary representation of the Other, to fix the meaning/knowledge about this created Other (ibid.).

Power, as Foucault demonstrates, circulates; in other words, it operates at all times in all relations (Foucault and Gordon 1980). This is why racism and colonialism are *systems* of domination. Feminist bell hooks, who talks about race in the US context, prefers the term white supremacy over racism in order to highlight that within the system of “white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy,” people of color also take part in reproducing their own domination through the internalization of white gaze (hooks 1995). Thus, the dominant discourse in France, in other words, the discourse that perpetuates colonial relations through representation, language, and practices, encompasses all people in the country even though we all have different positions of power in relation to such discourse and participate differently in reproducing it.

Post-colonialists have often criticized Michel Foucault and other postmodernists-poststructuralists for not engaging in a critique of the consequences of colonialism and its persistence in modern societies. Indeed, they lack critical reflection on their Eurocentric male location in a world where race, gender, and colonialism matter in relation to power. Post-colonialism is an intellectual movement that originates from literary and cultural studies mostly through Third World authors who studied in former colonial Empires (Gregory et al. 2009). Post-colonial studies are concerned with the different impacts colonialism has on the culture of the colonizing and the colonized peoples in terms of the continuities of colonial relations, practices, and representations between past and present (ibid.). It constitutes a conceptual frame that allows me to displace debate in France in order to make assumptions visible within dominant discourses. It allows me to critique the discursive and material legacies of colonialism as well as question the knowledges – permeated with colonial imaginaries – produced by these legacies. I resonate with their engagement – political and

epistemological – to make subalternized knowledges and marginalized historiographies visible. In doing so, colonial discourse analysis is at the core of their approach. One of the main critics of the post-colonial approach, however, is the tendency to homogenize post-colonial realities, which are multiple and diverse (Loomba 1998; Omar 2008; Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012). This is important for me as I apply international literature to a context that, beyond the similar patterns it presents with other racist and colonial contexts, bears its own specificities and histories.

Thus, in analyzing colonial and racist discourse in France, I relate to Algerian philosopher Seloua Luste Boulbina. Yet, even though her work on the French colonial/postcolonial context is fundamental, she is widely ignored by mainstream newspaper and journal publishers. It is not surprising considering how subversive it is in France, where resistances towards the decolonial imperatives are strong, especially in the institutions of knowledge. If I had to define her, I would say that she is feminist, de-colonialist, and rooted in the French colonial and postcolonial context. In her book *Le Singe de Kafka et autres propos sur la colonie*, I identify two core premises that constitute the foundational arguments of her work. First, she points out that using the term “colonization” is problematic, for “colonization” can only be seen through the eyes of the colonizers (Luste Boulbina 2008). Thus, colonization becomes an indefinite process for submission can never be absolute (ibid.). Furthermore, she highlights that the colonization-decolonization paradigm reflects a historical, linear understanding of relational, dynamic, complex processes (ibid.). Just as the conceptualizations of Post-colonial Studies, she says that political independences have not been coupled with a decolonization of the representations constructed throughout French colonialism (Luste Boulbina 2008; Loomba 1998; Omar 2008). In addition, she understands philosophy as politics so that it becomes visible who speaks and who is absent in the telling of history (Luste Boulbina 2007; 2008). In this aspect she resonates with post-colonial

historiography thinkers like Ann Laura Stoler (2010). Stemming from this first major claim of hers, she displaces debate, as in the subject of debate. According to her, we must think “the colony” (Luste Boulbina 2008) and “the postcolony” (Luste Boulbina 2007).

Second, because colonization is a multidimensional project that elaborates through *relations* and impacts the colonized as much as the colonizing people – even though it may do so differently – France also needs to decolonize (Luste Boulbina 2008). This second argument constitutes the *raison d’être* of my research. Indeed, the dominant discourse tends to *place* debate related to diversity, race, and postcoloniality *in* the “French of immigrant background.” In so doing, it divides society into insiders and outsiders and separates the colonial from the national imaginary (Luste Boulbina 2007; 2008; 2011). This is what I call epistemological violence, which is, in fact, part of the dynamics of racism. I choose to shift the debate in a way in that I look beyond the visible and the hearable – into deeply rooted assumptions – in order to open new spaces of understanding and transformation. The *raison d’être* of my research rests in the present-day France, which no longer is a colonial Empire. It presents a complex mixing of populations, which in large part is the result of France’s colonial projects. In such a context, decolonization transcends historical borders; it is the matter of the whole society, collectively and individually, even though differently.

Decolonization

Luste Boulbina analyzes French discourse in a way that shows the continuities of French colonial imaginaries, representations, and practices in the national consciousness, such as public discourses around the 2004 law on secularity and wearing of religious symbols in schools. She is very sensitive to the perpetuation of the colonial language in the colony and postcolony. She argues that a decolonization of knowledges and the institutions in which they are produced is necessary in France (Luste Boulbina 2012). Indeed, she highlights the

ingrained hierarchization of people, subjects, and disciplines, which systematically place the French white European male as the rational norm. Such hierarchization does not only take place in content – what appears and what does not/who is heard and who is not – but also in methodology – *how* things/subjects are represented. Luce Bachelard's work is extremely important in the French context. She is the only one, among all authors I have read, who so brilliantly deconstructs the continuities of the colonial language, imaginary, and representations of institutional discourses in postcolonial France and how it conditions the relations of the Republic with its remade "subjects".

My perspective is transformation of conflicts. It aims at finding a place of encounter for people to be in harmony. In this framework, I resonate more with a de-colonial than the post-colonial critique which responds better to the specific context of France. Decolonial Studies emerged about fifteen years ago from the specific local contexts of Latin America echoing the global context of political and epistemological Eurocentrism. For Peruvian Aníbal Quijano, "modernity" and the "coloniality of power" are the two axes of "global, Eurocentered, capitalist power" inherited from the colonial/modern European project (Quijano 2000). In the coloniality of power, what is at play is a universal social classification of people in terms of "race" (ibid.). Argentinian María Lugones critiques that the coloniality of power assumes patriarchy as the normative gender system regulating social relations (Lugones 2008). She shifts it to the "coloniality of gender" – the system in which gender and race are intrinsically intermeshed in a way that they mutually constitute each other: one does not exist without the other (ibid.). María Lugones, like many other women of color (Anzaldúa 1990; Suárez-Navaz and Hernández Castillo 2008), is also known for her critical de-colonial position in relation to white feminists who, by not situating themselves within the world, homogenize the diverse experiences of heterosexism and silence women of color.

Sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel takes Quijano's concept of global coloniality of power and bridges it with Critical Race Studies in the US context. He claims for a decolonization of white supremacist, capitalist, Eurocentric, patriarchal knowledges and political-economic practices of the modern/colonial system (Grosfoguel 2007). He introduces "transmodernity" as an alternative, based on a plurality of answers to modernity, in which "pluriversality" replaces universality (Grosfoguel 2011). Both Lugones and Grosfoguel connect with an intersectional understanding of systems of domination. Intersectionality was introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in an article titled "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" published in 1991. Crenshaw shows, in the US context, that isolating systems of subordination from each other reproduces political, structural and representational forms of violence against women of color (Crenshaw 1991). Indeed, they are entangled in a way that race, class, and gender operate in an intersectional way that conditions social existences differently. bell hooks refers to the system as "white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" (hooks 1995).

The idea of decolonization has recently been exporting to and transforming in the context of Europe through authors like Françoise Vergès in France or Grada Kilomba in Germany. I also think this is necessary. Race remains a blind spot in European thought – Achille Mbembe refers to it as "*l'impensé de la race*" in the French colonial/postcolonial context. The concept of race bears a strong symbolic meaning in the history of 20th century Europe. Race is socially constructed and it is extremely important to know the devastating consequences that the invention of such a concept, the socio-political construction of race, and the legacies of scientific racism have had for humanity. However, race was created by Europeans for/in the colonial projects. Refusing to discuss race – given that it is socially constructed – is also a way to not deal with present racism. In fact, it is generally accepted that talking about "race" is racist, which serves to reproduce colonial legacies. Indeed, if I

distance myself from academic discourse and look at political discourses in Europe, I must say that, while it is not okay to talk about race within white Europe, it seems very okay to do so in a way that stigmatizes certain populations particularly Muslim, so-called “Arab.” Such an imaginary tends to reproduce the hierarchization of people on the basis of socially constructed yet very real “race.” In postcolonial Europe, it is necessary to acknowledge that race matters for the racial discriminations to which some populations are subjected. This must be a key element in the academic and political discussions on the legacies of European colonialism.

In France, many authors have recently opened the door to a de-colonial perspective on French society by analyzing the continuities of the French colonial imaginary in the present. It is still very new and contested. The opening of Academia to post-colonial/de-colonial questions occurred via the discipline of history. Benjamin Stora is the well-known French-Algerian historian who specialized in the relations between France and Algeria. He has long highlighted the ambiguities and complexities that make up these relations and critiqued the general politics of amnesia of the French state regarding its colonial history with Algeria. Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel are two key historians of the French colonial and postcolonial context who focus on the treatment within France of French colonial history in relation to its postcolonial, present face, that is, immigration. *La fracture coloniale* is the title of their book, published in 2005, which is both their most well-known and their most controversial. It in fact breaks with the French tradition that hides racial discriminations behind the mask of social inequalities. They highlight how the general negation of the “colonial fact” and “postcolonial fact,” both in political and academic discourses, contributes to creating a strong divide, a malaise, within the nation. Indeed, this bears the consequence that dominant French society keeps a rather colonial eye – white gaze – on their history and “identity,” which are in fact plural.

Thinkers like the socio-demographer Patrick Simon and the philosopher Achille Mbembe bring more pieces to the puzzle. They have critically shown how the universal discourse of the Republic that sells the equality-laïcité-diversity package as the mythical model of “integration” is a white patriarchal discourse unaware of its own colonial racism. Simon demonstrates how such ethnically blind discourse negates and thus perpetuates racial inequalities (Simon 2005; 2008). Mbembe, from Cameroon, is very critical of the French tradition of nationalistic universalism, which he claims to be narcissistic and ethno-racist, for it places the Republic on a white pedestal where the Other can only exist in a narcissistic image of self (Mbembe 2000; 2005). Part of the de-colonial project is to unveil race, which is for him a fiction yet a millstone (*ibid.*). Along the same lines, though with gender sensitivity added, María Lugones asserts: “Race is no more mythical and fictional than gender, both powerful fictions” (Lugones 2008, 12).

Saïd Bouamama is an Algerian sociologist and activist who was born and lives in France. Pierre Tévanian is a French essayist and activist. They came up with the concept of postcolonial racism in a common article published in a 2006 book edited by Blanchard and Bancel. They highlight that a specific form of racism applies to the descendants of the colonized populations and reproduces discourses, practices, representations, and imaginaries of colonialism (Bouamama and Tévanian 2006). It is deeply rooted and does not seem to disappear throughout time like it does for other immigrant groups (*ibid.*). I find the concept interestingly relevant in the sense that it reflects the special place of ambivalence that the descendants of the formerly colonized, particularly from Algeria, hold in the national consciousness. It also highlights the intersectional continuities between colonization and immigration, which is a fundamental element in the French context. The blind spot I see in their analysis is the entanglement that colonialism and racism certainly have with sexism, much like Luste Boulbina shows in her analysis of French colonial/patriarchal institutional

discourses. I resonate with the concept of postcolonial racism and I add my own feminist lenses to it. I must understand postcolonial racism as intersectional if I do not want to reproduce, in my de-colonial process, other forms of domination.

The idea of Bouamama and Tévanian takes from the great work of Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, who studied how colonization and immigration are intimately tied in the French colonial/postcolonial context (Sayad 1991; 2006). He showed how colonization created the conditions for immigration, and consequently the very special place Algerian immigrants hold in postcolonial France (ibid.). He highlights the contradiction that while Algerian immigrants in France do not behave like any other immigrant, dominant French society still relates to them in a way that perpetuates colonial/patriarchal relations (ibid.).

Sayad also shifts the mainstream understanding of immigration as a neutral fact to an understanding of it as a concept that necessarily reflects the gaze of the dominant society (Sayad 1991). Sayad's work is seminal for the development of post-colonial/de-colonial studies in France. In their article on French intersectionality, anthropologists Moujoud and Ait Ben Lmadani critically show the necessity of de-colonial academics and activists rooting their reflection in context (Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012). It is a matter of the political and academic engagement they must have with the visibilization of marginalized voices (ibid.). This means, among other things, to engage with the work that has been done in the French context by existing yet often marginalized authors like Sayad (ibid.). This article was published in the alternative and interdisciplinary journal *Mouvements* in a 2012 issue titled "Decolonizing Knowledges" and edited by Luste Boulbina. It is a lightening issue, interdisciplinary and feminist, mixing different contexts and disciplinary perspectives of decolonization.

Most de-colonial literature in the French context has focused on the relations of domination in postcolonial France that the French Republic maintains with the French who descend from the formerly colonized populations, specifically in the context of exception of the *banlieues populaires* (marginalized spaces in the cities). Within the decolonial literature, Françoise Vergès identifies a blind spot: the place of the French overseas territories and populations within colonial history, thus within the Republic (Vergès 2006; 2007; 2010; 2012). Indeed, she highlights, the national imaginary still limits its territorial understanding of France to the metropolis (ibid.). Part of the decolonial transformation, she says, is to open the conceptualization of French territory, memory, and identity (ibid.). It is also to view colonial history as a complex history where realities are entangled with present continuities in the colonial order (Vergès 2007; 2012). In her struggle for the visibilization of memories, she claims the *droit de cité* (power to speak and be recognized) of all French people (Vergès 2006; 2007; 2010; 2012). The colonized must be *subjects* in the telling of history. This is also what Luste Boulbina means by thinking “the colony.”

Françoise Vergès grew up in the overseas territory of Réunion. She also lived in post-independence Algeria and did her doctoral research in the USA. She is both an activist and an academic, strongly feminist and committed to the history of slavery. Vergès and Luste Boulbina have very similar ideas, even though Vergès is more engaged with the memorial struggle and with the French overseas populations, while Luste Boulbina’s approach is more philosophical and is more engaged with the colony and postcolony, mostly Algerian, within France. Furthermore, Luste Boulbina’s approach is more discourse analysis, poststructuralist-oriented and it often seems to come from a place of anger. On the other hand, Vergès’ view of decolonization brings me closer to the transformative nature of conflict where I can approach it in terms of human beings and spaces for dialogue. They complement each other and they both are necessary.

Structuring The Process

I have articulated my work in three main chapters. Each of them aims at adding a piece to the puzzle that responds to my research question. My first chapter is a broad contextualization of my topic where I highlight the connections between the different elements that make up the present-day situation. It examines the colonial relation that the French Republic has established within itself with the colonized Other and remade with the immigrant Other in the present-day. I show how the Republic was constructed through the colonial times on a differentiation within the nation regarding who is citizen and who is subject of the Republic on the denied basis of the constructed “race.” I explore the ambiguity specific to the case of *l’Algérie française*, where nationality and citizenship were two different things for *les français musulmans* (the French perceived as Muslims). As I demonstrate the overlapping continuity between colonization and immigration, I look at how such relations have been perpetuated through the children of immigrants. Concomitantly, I highlight the strong connections/gaps between the tradition of nationalist universalism that makes the Republic untouchable and the negation of the history of colonialism and postcolonialism. I want to capture how the denial of the stories creates a colonial fracture within the nation that parallels social discriminations in a way that race/religion, memory, and class intersect in a system of domination of the French of Algerian descent.

The second piece of my research puzzle relies heavily on the analysis of dominant – mostly media and institutional/legal – discourses. I aim at teasing out how a form of postcolonial racism, that is, a reproduction of the racist differentiation supported by colonial imaginaries, representations, discourses, and practices, functions. I show how this occurs in a way that remakes the colonial project of the civilizing mission of the Republic through a remaking of the position of the descendants of the formerly colonized as subjects of the Republic. I demonstrate how the elite, through white patriarchal discourses of “integration”

that rely on/hide behind the package of equality-laïcité-diversity of the Republic, remake the differentiation of who is fully French and who is not on the basis of intersections of “race”/religion with colonial background and class. The descendants of Algeria are, in the unconscious imaginary of the nation, the most targeted by such discourses, for they are the most “familiar” yet the most problematic of all “immigrants.” I highlight the *banlieues populaires* as the mystified construction of colonized “Other,” the reproduction of the colony where populations are “territories” and measures are “exceptional.”

My third chapter argues in favor of a transformative journey of decolonization of French state and society. I understand it as a reflective process, epistemological and political, that encompasses all people living in France even though for all differently. I claim that the national consciousness must displace debate in order to see differently. I explore, using feminist theories, how situated knowledges and decolonial epistemologies can shift the hegemonic lens and open myself to critical and transformative visions. I place the development of contextualized post-colonial, feminist, intersectional approaches in academic research as the factors to decolonize knowledges, imaginaries, and institutions. I examine the need that we, as human beings in relation living in France, come to recognize the postcolonial condition of the Republic in a way that deconstructs the myth of the universal Republic through decolonial lenses. I argue for a transformative process that starts from the present-day and leads to rethinking openly identity, memory, and territory within the nation and within the world. I encourage new ways to see in plurality as a way to transform relations to find a place of harmony.

Chapter 1: Deconstructing (Post)Colonial Relations

Explosion du Fort l'Empereur, le 4 juillet 1830, à dix heures du matin. La formidable détonation remplit de terreur tous les habitants d'Alger, et de joie triomphante l'armée française qui s'échelonne depuis Sidi-Ferruch jusqu'aux citadelles de la capitale.

(Assia Djébar 1985, 45)

Introduction

In a postcolonial, multicultural nation like France, past and present are intrinsically tied in a way that transcends the borders of time and identity. Yet the dominant discourse of the nation does not seem to embrace this here and now. A few generations have passed since the time of France as a colonial Empire. Relations shift but do not disappear. Decades of shared experiences leave deep traces in multiple forms. Post-colonial migrations and a mixing of populations are one of them. In France, descendants of formerly colonized populations, *les enfants d'immigrés*, were born. Most of them are French. At the same time, French society has transformed, changed face, pluralized. It is visibly and completely postcolonial. Yet, it is not equal. The dominant imaginaries of the state and society seem to reproduce colonial differentiations within the nation. The French “*issus de l'immigration*” have thus become, in these imaginaries, the “visible” traces of French colonial past. In these imaginaries, they continue to “haunt” the very Republic that, in the dominant discourse, guarantees universal equality.

Colonial-Postcolonial are two moving frames that overlap and recreate, just like time and space. The French Republic was built through its colonial glory. Colonial representations and discriminations have survived, reshaped through the relation with the *enfants d'immigrés*. In this regard, the *banlieues populaires* are a reality that is way too familiar in the light of the colony.

The French-Algerian relation has had a very special destiny that still holds a place of “exception” within the Republic. Algeria is the most “familiar” of all French colonies, yet it appears as the most “problematic” for the Republic. The French “*d’origine algérienne*” demand equality while the ethnic-blind Republic thinks it deserves gratitude. Postcolonial conflicts lie in this outward contradiction that the discourse of the Republic sees as an incompatibility.

Through a post-colonial perspective, I want to analyze how these conflicts take shape. What sort of malaise lies within the Republic? More specifically, how does racism play out in the relation between the Republic and the colonial and postcolonial aspects of itself? How do discussions on “immigration,” memory, the French-Algerians, and the Republic reproduce colonial imaginaries? How are they constitutive of a form of postcolonial racism? This chapter teases out all these elements of conflict in complex, post-colonial, multicultural France today. It encompasses many different aspects of what constitutes relational existence within the Republic in terms of “race,” memory(ies), social life, and power.

I begin by setting the stage for the complex historical context that constructed the French Republic through its colonial project. I endeavor to understand how such construction has fostered (colonial) racism within the Republic in a way that is blatant today. In the second part, I engage in a wide discussion on memory and attempt to tease out the colonial malaise perceivable within the Republic. I make visible how the question of memory, in relation with its citizens of colonized descent, interweaves with “race” and the need for recognition on the part of the *enfants d’immigrés*. Throughout this chapter, I attempt to weave the Algerian case study through my line of thought. I first provide the broader frame of French colonial/post-colonial relational experience and then apply it to the French-Algerian case.

Le Projet Républicain, Ou la Mise en Place du Racisme Colonial

L'Exception (Coloniale) Française

In the 2005 foreword of his famous book *De la Postcolonie*, the well-known author Achille Mbembe explains that the French philosophical tradition of the *Lumières* has constructed the subject as universal and rational. Such principles were the philosophical cornerstone of the 1789 French Revolution and creation of the Republican regime. Thus, inherited from the tradition of modernity, the French Republic was built on a paternalistic understanding of equality (Mbembe 2005). In this context, identity results from “*l’inutile tension entre républicanisme et différentialisme*” (ibid.).³ Indeed, the French Republic has nationalized this “abstract universalism,” which is represented in its national motto: “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*” (ibid.) It has become a form of “ethno-racist narcissism” that can only think of the Other as a reproduction of self (ibid.). “*Il s’agit d’une forme d’universalisme qui ‘ne peut penser l’autre qu’en termes de duplication, de dédoublement jusqu’à l’infini d’une image narcissique’ à laquelle est assujetti celui qui en est la proie*” (Mbembe 2005, citing Hassoun).⁴ This racialized (and racist) arrogance is deeply internalized in “the French mind”. Consequently, equality only comes out of invisibility. In narcissistic racist terms, this involves the assimilation of the “racially visible” (and “culturally visible”) to the so-constructed (white Christian) “racial centre” (and “cultural centre”).

Thus, the project of assimilation was a project of the negation of self. The work of Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist from the French island of Martinique⁵ who fought for the national liberation of Algeria alongside the FLN, analyzes the pathological relationship that ties the colonizer to the colonized in the French Empire. He provides a strongly anti-colonial analysis of the political and cultural enterprise of colonialism. His seminal texts pave the way for the

³ My translation: “the useless tension between republicanism and differentialism.”

⁴ My translation: “It is a form of universalism that ‘cannot think of the Other but in terms of an infinite duplication, a reproduction of a narcissistic image’ that enslaves its prey.”

⁵ La Martinique was part of the first French colonial Empire of the 17th century. It remains French up to this day.

future development of Post-colonial Studies. Even though Fanon's analysis of "colonial alienation" is too Manichean and fails to capture the deep complexity of co-constitutive colonial relationships, his texts remain powerful tools for understanding the present-day situation in the French-Algerian transnational context.

In *Pour la Révolution Africaine*, he writes:

Si la psychiatrie est la technique médicale qui se propose de permettre à l'homme de ne plus être étranger à son environnement, je me dois d'affirmer que l'Arabe, aliéné permanent dans son pays, vit dans un état de dépersonnalisation absolue. Le statut de l'Algérie ? Une déshumanisation systématisée (Fanon 2006, 60).⁶

I understand his exploration of alienation as a psychological mechanism that reaches the colonized in their flesh, in the depth of their very beings, so as to make them hate the characteristics of their own selves. It is a process of destruction of identity, both personal and collective. It leads to a "*dépersonnalisation absolue*" or "*déshumanisation systématisée*," which allows for the condition of submission that creates, and is simultaneously created by, the colonial relation. Through this process, the colonized assimilates her condition of inferiority to the extent that she no longer has an existence separate from her relation to the colonial *centre*. This dissociation of the subject from her natural and social environment is an *extraterritorialization* (Luste Boulbina 2008). This is to such an extent that one becomes foreign in her own territory, language and body (Thiong'o 1986). Through the systematic downgrading of her culture, language, traditions, customs and religion, the colonized is reduced to inferiority and primitiveness (Thiong'o 1986). Inasmuch as this configuration presents continuities within the postcolonial condition, which I explore later through the French-Algerian citizen in France, it is important to specify clearly that this is an interpretation of the colonial era.

⁶ Translation from the 1967 English edition: "If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. What is the status of Algeria? A systematized dehumanization" (Fanon 1967, 53).

French colonialism anywhere has always relied on racist and hierarchical ideology. The French were actively involved in the European capitalist project of slavery and the slave trade, particularly from the 17th century on to the middle of the 19th century (M'Bokolo 1998).⁷ It was a *system*, calculated and brutal, of subjugation of people. It impacted all aspects of life: economic, cultural, physical, psychological, emotional, and so on. In the case of France, slave companies took people from the coasts of West Africa, sold them, and enslaved them in the French colonies of America (M'Bokolo 1998; Astégiani-Merrain et al. 2007). There, the slaves worked on plantations for international commerce (ibid.). Anti-black racist ideology sustained slavery and the slave trade (ibid.). Christiane Taubira, current Minister of Justice, explains: “*il [le maître] n'est pas seulement maître de plantation, il est le gardien de la civilisation*” (*Noirs De France - 1/3 - Le Temps Des Pionniers (1889-1940)* 2012).⁸ The white man was superior, and it is through this ideology that he granted himself the right to subjugate people who he saw as savages. Slavery constituted and was constituted by race (Mbembe 2000). To discuss the complex process of how race was constructed socially is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in my work, it is important to highlight how it was brought to the juridical realm at the time of slavery and the slave trade. *Le Code noir*, established juridically in 1685 in *les Antilles françaises*, institutionalized a racist organization of life through the subjugation of slaves who were, under such jurisdiction, “movables” (Vergès 2007).⁹

In 1848, when slavery was eventually prohibited under the second Republic, abolitionists aimed at settling renewed social relations in the *Antilles françaises* through a “national reconciliation” movement so as to bring former masters and slaves to coexist

⁷ It is important to specify that although the French government, under the leadership of Victor Schoelcher, finally made slavery illegal in 1848, forced labour, which was a renewed form of slavery, has only been prohibited since 1946 (M'Bokolo 1998).

⁸ My translation: “he is not only the plantation master, he is the guardian of civilization”.

⁹ First established in the *Antilles françaises* (French Caribbean islands), *le code noir* was then extended by the French government to other colonies such as Guyane, Réunion, and Louisiana.

equally (Cottias 2004). *Antillais-e-s* became citizens. On the other hand, in the rest of the French Empire, starting with Algeria in 1875, *le Code de l'indigénat* ruled the new colonies (Le Cour Grandmaison 2010; Mbembe 2000). The Constitution of the Second Republic already placed the new colonies outside the frame of common law. However, from 1870, with the beginning of the Third Republic, well-known political figures such as Jules Ferry and Arthur Girault elaborated on its “*mission civilisatrice*” (Le Cour Grandmaison 2010). In this way, colonial France concretized its colonial rule of domination in the new colonies (ibid.). Deemed inferior for the apparent “primitiveness” of their “race,” the so-called “*indigènes*” were granted the exceptional status of “subjects” of the Empire rather than citizens. From 1875 to 1945, “*les indigènes*” were denied political and social rights, and subjugated to repressive and discriminatory procedures, including forced labor (ibid.). In the new overseas territories, colonial France ruled by decree, more flexible than law. On command, the centralizing figure of the “*gouverneur*” issued decrees in order to maintain the domination of the colonizer over the colonized and ensure stability and prosperity of the Empire (Le Cour Grandmaison 2010; Mbembe 2000).

French colonial power justified these colonial ruling strategies through a profound belief in the superiority of the white man over any other so-constructed races. The Third Republic, at the time of the conquest of Algeria, engaged the whole domain of public representations, through popular culture and the mass education system, in the construction of the patriotic idea of the nation (Sessions 2011, reviewed by Zarobell). This was done through the figure of a colonized “Other,”¹⁰ essentially inferior to the (white) French (ibid.).¹¹

Likewise, the colonialist Jules Ferry advocated in the early 1880s for free, mandatory, and

¹⁰ Part of the functioning of racism is the political construction of “Otherness” that holds identities in place and divides the “we” from “the others.” The “we” coincides with those who look, while “the Other” coincides with the one who is looked at by the gaze of those in power – the “we.” In the French colonial and postcolonial context, I understand the “Other” as a colonized “Other,” that is, as “subject”. Thus “Otherness” is relative to her familiarity (assimilation) with the white French center in the colonial order.

¹¹ The stigmatization of Islam plays an important role in Tocqueville’s writings in asserting the “superiority of the French civilization.”

secular schooling for all – a political strategy to build French nationalism around the “Republican ideal” of the “*mission civilisatrice*” (Bancel and Blanchard 2005). Schooling had to be given in the French language in all French territories, including Algeria. “A universalistic outlook on the nation as a community transcending ethnic, religious, and class distinctions underlay the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1880” (Soysal & Szakács 2010, 104). This quote shows how the institutionalization of the mass education system contributed to the construction of the Republican colonialist imaginary. The French value of *laïcité* (secularism), introduced in French schools in 1905, completed the Republican idealistic package of equality-*laïcité*, of which *l'école de la République* became the sacred guarantor.

While it gave to the *indigènes* of Algeria the status of colonial “subjects,” Republican power granted citizenship to the inhabitants of the *Antilles françaises*. Such “privileged” treatment hid the ever-lasting institutionalized racism that maintained *les Antilles françaises* in a status of colonies (Dumont 2013). In addition, the remnants of slavery still made the organization of social, political, economic, and cultural life racist and hierarchical (ibid.). This equality in text did not exist *de facto* (ibid.). Following from their “privileged status,” in 1946 *les Antilles françaises* became French *départements*, supposedly equal to the metropolis, a noticeable move in a context of growing demand for national liberation on the part of most colonies of the time.

As the frequent revolts in the present-day *départements et territoires d'outre-mer* reveal, the foundations of the societies in the *Antilles françaises* still rely to this day on a social and racial hierarchy (Vergès 2010; Dumont 2013). Only three years after the “*départementalisation*,” Aimé Césaire from Martinique published his famous *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955). Through this powerful text, Césaire demonstrates how French, and by extension European colonialism, has always relied on a racist and social hierarchy, despite claims to a civilizing higher motive. He explains that the “dehumanized bourgeoisie,” which

emerged out of capitalism, defends universal ideals by holding hegemony over science (western and rational), morality, and spirituality. In deconstructing the colonialist discourse, Césaire highlights the spectacular contradiction existing between the speech and the deeds of the so-called universal white man. The latter enslaves human beings, whom he regards as the Other of civilization, based on the pretense of naturalized superiority.

Likewise, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in 1952, Fanon sheds light on the alienation of the black man by the white man in the context of his own location, *les Antilles françaises*.¹² Through psychological lenses, he explores the feeling of inferiority (“*sentiment d’infériorité*”) of the black man, *l’Antillais*, who had always identified as white until he is faced with the European world. He argues that the white gaze (“*le regard blanc*”) makes the *Antillais* black and gives the *Antillais* his place in the world – his “race,” history, and body scheme. This racist colonial practice, whereby the “white man” places on the black man the objectifying objectivity (“*objectivité écrasante*”) of his enslaving gaze, triggers a psychological mechanism that creates in the black man the unconscious desire to be white (“*désir inconscient d’être blanc*”). The black man is faced with a dilemma: to whiten or disappear (“*se blanchir ou disparaître*”) (Fanon 1971, 80). He therefore develops strategies of resistance to save the race (“*sauver la race*”), (Fanon 1971, 38) through which he alienates himself. It is the manifestation of the “complex of inferiority/dependence” in front of the white man (Fanon 1971, chapter 4).

The works of Césaire and Fanon bear great significance even today. They are caught in the binary logics that determine them to a degree. In teasing out postcolonial racism, I need to move beyond the binary that I try to undo in order to embrace the complexities of postcolonial relations. The works of Césaire and Fanon are foundational because they name

¹² It is important to clarify that “black man” and “white man” are social constructions. I am taking these terms from Fanon’s language to reflect on his ideas. Likewise, I am consciously using the male pronoun here, for Fanon’s analysis is male centred.

colonial racism. Through their own experiences as colonized and Other, they unravel how it functions in the context of the *Antilles françaises*. They are also evidence of the fact that colonial racism existed way before *l'Algérie française* within the French Empire. The colonization of Algeria emerged in a context of renewed colonialism, yet within a nation that was built on a long history of imposed colonial domination over its possessed, racialized Other.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that racism was constitutive of French colonialism, not only in the Algerian case, but also in other colonial cases. Indeed, at this point in my exploration, it follows that: “*Enfin, dans cette logique coloniale, puisqu’il est impossible, tant qu’il reste encore des indigènes, que la domination soit entière, la guerre ne peut avoir de terme. La guerre est sans fin, la paix impossible. La colonisation, dès lors, est un processus indéfini.*” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 135)¹³ Essential to my own exploration, decolonization is also an indefinite process in a common and complex effort of transformation involving all parties descending from the history of colonization.¹⁴

L’Algérie Sera Française

“1830, c’est aussi la conquête de l’Algérie, l’antidote que la France a trouvé pour vivifier ses passions et grandir ses intérêts. 1830, c’est le début du dernier empire colonial français” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 138).¹⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville was a political figure and philosopher in the first half of the 19th century. He was in charge of the colonies (old and new), including Algeria for almost 10 years, from 1839 to 1847 (or 1849 if we include the time when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs). He was, on the French side, the central

¹³ My translation: “Finally, within this colonial logic, as it is impossible, as long as a few *indigènes* remain, that the domination be total, the war [to colonize] does not have a term. War is endless, peace impossible. Colonization, therefore, is an infinite process.”

¹⁴ When speaking of descendants of colonialism, I refer to the descendants of the colonized as well as of the colonizers of the time.

¹⁵ My translation: “1830 is too the conquest of Algeria, the remedy France found to invigorate its passions and increase its interests. 1830 is the start of the last French colonial empire.”

political character and a strong advocate of the colonization of Algeria. He also is a paradigmatic figure of France's relation of ambivalence with Algeria.

For Tocqueville, in the national context of construction of the newly born Republic, patriotism was the inherent condition for the establishment of a free and powerful nation. This is what determined France's political choices in Algeria in the 19th century. *L'entreprise algérienne* was a way to assert power and patriotic grandeur through sovereignty and citizenship within France (Le Cour Grandmaison 2001; Welch 2003). It was a way to build a sense of national identity from within, one that would enhance collective political liberalism – the idea of a *grand* civilizing nation.

This national context echoed the international one. Algeria was envisaged as the playing ground for France in relation to its rivalry with the UK (Luste Boulbina 2008). At this time, the UK held an economic and political monopoly, and France's position as a world power was on the decline. Instability threatened the position of France on the international scene. Confronted by strong resistance led by Abd-el-Kader, it is precisely this position of grandeur that the French staked in Algeria. Indeed, Tocqueville was convinced that only through a vigorous politics of conquest through its colonies could France regain its position of Empire (Luste Boulbina 2008; Le Cour Grandmaison 2001). Luste Boulbina argues that the decline of France, according to Tocqueville, did not start with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, but goes back to the *traité de Paris*. The latter, signed in 1763 with Great Britain, put an end to the French colonial Empire of the time, abandoning most territories to the British. For Tocqueville the politician, in this international and national context of uncertainty, the colonization of Algeria was an inevitable opportunity to re-assert the French *grandeur* and its powerful position in the world.

The conquest of Algeria took place in the founding era of the Republican regime, along with the establishment of its institutions and its *enracinement* in political and social life. The *idea* of the Republic – *la République française et ses valeurs* – clarifies France’s discourse and practice of colonialism in Algeria. Algeria was sacrificed for the sake of the Republic, for its identity and grandeur, both within and outside of France.

Tocqueville, a strong advocate of human rights and recognized theorist of western democracy, recommended that colonialists use techniques of extreme violence against the people in Algeria (Welch 2003; Kohn 2008). In his view, the end justified the means. Democracy and political freedom in France justified depriving other men the very rights he called for in France. In his view, asserting domination over other peoples was inevitable.

Telle est la différence entre une conquête et une colonisation. La conquête concerne le gouvernement des hommes, la colonisation l’administration des choses. La colonie, du reste, est peut-être tout territoire dans lequel l’ensemble des affaires relève de l’administration des choses. Ce n’est plus, dès lors la sensibilité du penseur qui s’exprime mais ce qui est censé être sa « raison ». En effet, si coloniser c’est déposséder des hommes et s’approprier des choses, seule la violence peut y parvenir. C’est pourquoi Tocqueville estime qu’il faut pour ainsi dire tailler dans le vif, une bonne fois pour toutes, et s’emparer, définitivement, des terres convoitées. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 110)¹⁶

For Tocqueville, resorting to extreme violence was based on the “rationality” of the political enterprise. In order to achieve France’s (“rational”) political interests, there was no other choice but *to colonize*: Tocqueville “*n’est pas inhumain s’il est réaliste*” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 126).¹⁷ Domination was only an incomplete enterprise for the *grandeur* of France: the Republic had to *colonize* (Luste Boulbina 2008). In addition, France had to succeed, at any cost (Welch 2003).

¹⁶ My translation to English: “Therein lies the difference between *conquering* and *colonizing*. Conquering has to do with the *governance of men*, colonizing with the *administration of things*. The colony, consequently, may be any territory in which everything falls under the administration of things. It is, thus, no longer the thinker’s sensitivity that is expressed, but his supposed “reason”. Indeed, if to colonize is to *dispossess men and appropriate things*, nothing but violence can achieve it. This is why Tocqueville claims that it is necessary to somehow get straight to the point, once and for all, and seize the lands longed for.”

¹⁷ My translation to English: “is not *inhuman* if he is *realistic*.”

The colonization of Algeria has deployed an exceptionally high level of direct violence. Faced with the unexpectedly strong resistance led by Abd-el-Kader, the French colonial troops – led, among others, by bloodthirsty General Bugeaud, famous for his contribution to the “development of a new science: *la guerre d’Afrique*” – engaged in a 17-year savage war of “terror and lawlessness,” which saw death, destruction, and extermination without limits (Welch 2003). “Transgressing settled notions of right, breaking promises, and engaging in murderous terror were the hallmarks of a Tocquevillean netherworld in which the French surrendered to the worst tendencies inherent in their history and social condition” (Welch 2003, 255). In 1848, Algeria became *l’Algérie française*, and thousands of French settlers were sent to colonize the land and spread (the “superiority” of) French civilization. Colonization had to be absolute, and the *indigènes* of Algeria became a minority in their own land.

L’Algérie Française, ou le Rêve Assimilationniste

To understand the colonization of Algeria, I need to examine and dig into the epistemology of the power that sustained it. I must combine philosophy and history in order to understand how the French Republic constructed itself in relation to – through a colonialist-racist relation to – its Algerian “subjects.” I need to understand what it *meant* that Algeria became *l’Algérie française, les départements français d’Algérie*, instead of a colony or a protectorate like other colonized populations.

Algeria constituted the “*rêve assimilationniste*” français (Martín-Muñoz 1994). It was the *exception* of the French colonial Empire. It was *part* of France, yet constantly (in) a “state of exception” within the French Republic.

L’Algérie est ici l’exception qui confirme la règle. Elle est une colonie particulière dans la mesure où, précisément, elle n’est pas intégrée de facto dans les colonies. C’est – contradiction dans les termes – une colonie qui fait la France. Il n’y a rien de

plus criant que la négation du fait colonial en Algérie, la colonie la plus « assimilée », ce qui est affirmé constamment ; mais dans un régime d'exception qui, quant à lui, est constamment nié. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 150)¹⁸

If Algeria is not a colony, France is consequently not a colonial state. This differentiation, or “state of exception,” carries an extreme level of psychological violence. Indeed, it is a total negation of the existence and rights of the local population. Furthermore, it means that the latter has no legitimacy whatsoever in claiming for national liberation. In fact, French elite envisaged the struggle for national liberation in Algeria as a *social* issue, not as a colonial issue (Luste Boulbina 2008). French elite even compared it to the quest for autonomy of the Alsace-Lorraine region (*ibid.*). This “*négation du fait colonial*” also means that they have no right to have a voice in deciding upon their future as a potential nation, because Algeria *is not* a colony.

The extreme violence of French colonial politics is that national assimilation was, simultaneously, not political. Algeria was maintained as a “state of exception” whereby *les indigènes* had a *particular* status that fell *outside* the common law (Luste Boulbina 2008 among others).¹⁹ As Mbembe demonstrates, in the colony, the state of exception needs no justification but itself since, by definition, the colony exists outside of the common law; law (*droit*) is conditioned to act (*fait*), and destruction itself makes the very existence of the colonial act: “[S]on droit suprême était simultanément le suprême déni de droit.” (Mbembe 2000, 43)²⁰

However, Algeria was an exception within the exception. The difference lies in the fact that the politics of assimilation negated Algeria altogether. In Algeria, the politics of assimilation negated the state of exception characteristic of all French colonies. In other

¹⁸ My translation: “Algeria is here the exception that proves the rule. It is a unique colony insofar as it is, precisely, not integrated *de facto* in the colonies. It is – contradiction of terms – a colony that makes France. There is nothing more blatant than the negation of the colonial fact in Algeria, the most “assimilated” of all colonies, which is constantly *put forth*, yet in a state of exception that is constantly *negated*.”

¹⁹ The state of exception was cancelled in 1958 and re-established 1962.

²⁰ My translation: “Its supreme law was simultaneously the supreme negation of law”.

words, the French Republic legally saw Algeria as part of the national territory, that's to say territory on which common law must apply. *De facto*, however, France ruled Algeria *differently*. This shows France's colonial relation with Algeria. As I explore further below, the negation of the exception reinforced the exception. Assimilation was the negation of the existence of colonization, and by extension, of its objects (Luste Boulbina 2008).

In a suggestive article titled, "*Une République française « postcoloniale,*" Todd Shepard recounts the evolution of the institutions of the French Republic in relation to Algeria. He highlights the present "*traces institutionnelles et juridiques*" of French colonialism, documenting that since 1848 and the creation of *l'Algérie française*, French Algerians have become "*sujets de la République*" (Shepard 2006, 49). Nationality and citizenship were two different things in colonial France. Until post-WWII, part of the nation was governed by what was called "*le droit local,*" a differentiated set of laws, because of its "*statut civil local.*" The attribution of the differentiated status was based on lineage (ibid), and lineage was based on first names: whether it "sounded" "Arabic or Berber" or rather "Christian or Jewish" determined whether they were "Muslims native of Algeria" or "French-born natives of Algeria" (Simon 2006, 10). The nationals with a *statut civil local* were officially the "*Musulmans d'Algérie*" or "*Français musulmans*" or "*Français musulmans d'Algérie,*" also called "*indigènes musulmans.*" To become "citizens" (without citizenship), they had to give up on their *statut civil local* (their local judicial system), either Islamic or Jewish-based. In 1947, they were granted the status of French citizens without citizenship – without the political rights of citizenship (Shepard 2006).

Despite its clear discriminatory practice, the French administration officially did not recognize the institutional racism at play in its colonial politics in Algeria. On one hand, colonial discourse of the time shows that French elite justified colonialism in Algeria (and in other places) and believed the French accurately represented a hierarchy of "races". On the

other hand, however, in the official discourse the differentiation subject vs. citizen in Algeria was not based on any racial or religious feature of identity (Shepard 2006). By negating the intersection of racial and legal difference, the French Republic located its colonized subjects in a place of essential, un-transcend-able inequality in the name of equality. By negating a racial difference that it had produced, the French Republic reinforced the intrinsically contradictory, dehumanizing politics of assimilation.

La “Race,” Ou Cet “Autre” Que L’On Ne Veut Pas Voir

In the French tradition, “race” is taboo. As we have seen earlier, the *Lumières*-grounded Republic establishes an ideal equality package that views (real) diversity as a threat. This discourse is fundamental for understanding the political practices and debates of the present-day. Indeed, as surprising as it seems, the French Republic still does not recognize the racist differentiation it has built throughout history. It still clings on to a politics of assimilation that is both intrinsically racist and an *essential* illusion. The French socio-demographer and INED²¹ researcher on politico-ethnic discriminations in France, Patrick Simon, in an article titled “The Choice of Ignorance. The Debate on Ethnic and Racial Statistics in France,” depicts the strong French historical hostility towards recognizing “race” and “racial identity” in its national statistics, and consequently, in its policies.²² For example, there is an incredibly strong reaction of the French *intelligentsia* to the idea of potential affirmative action policies (Simon 2008; Mbembe 2005). In the French consciousness, the concept of “race” is not relevant; what’s more, it is an aberration, and equality can only be pursued through colorblind or ethnicity-blind policies. To give a few examples, in the French context, the terms “*culture*” and “*identité culturelle*” are preferred to racial identity. The French in general do not speak of Arab French or black French but rather of the “*Français*

²¹ Institut National d’Etudes Démographiques (National Demographic Institute)

²² I use the phrase “politico-ethnic discriminations” to highlight that “ethnicity,” like “race,” is politically constructed and does not actually “exist.”

issus de l'immigration” to speak *about* (it is never to speak *with*) the French descendants of the colonized. Finally, for a long time and still now sometimes, French people have commonly used the English term “black” instead of the French term “*noir*” to refer to black people. The latter example is paradigmatic of France’s ambivalence towards race. That is, most people in France do tag differences – identity is discussed in a way that makes these differences seem natural. However, the “tags” are dominantly associated with “culture”. According to Simon (2008), national surveys have long made a census of the sole nationality or place of birth around these three categories: “French”, “foreigners,” and “French by acquisition.” It is only in 1999 that the French government introduced the parents’ place of birth in national surveys (Simon 2008). This was a possible first step toward recognition of racial diversity brought about by immigration, and one may argue, the relation of certain immigration with the colonial past.

However, in postcolonial multicultural France, there is a need to point to and define racism because, inasmuch as “race” is constructed, racism is a politico-social reality of the everyday. Thus, if discourse does not officially provide the space to talk about “race” in terms of the ways in which power plays out in society, it silences minority groups. Furthermore, it deprives them from raising collective issues arising from their subjective experiences as ethno-socio-historical groups. This is why the equality through invisibility ideology is highly problematic – not for race as a paradigm, but instead, to make racism visible. In the politics of assimilation, life opportunities are conditioned in a differentiated manner by ethnicity or “race,” and such oppression is reinforced by the non-recognition of ethnicity or “race” as conditioning factors (of oppression). It is what Simon names the “choice of ignorance” (Simon 2008). It allows the French state to “erase the heritage of immigration and reinforce assimilation into the nation” (Simon 2008, 8). In other words, on behalf of equality, the

French state inevitably makes invisible, institutionalizes, and enhances racial inequality and “historically crystallized relationships of power” (Simon 2008, 18).

Interestingly enough, this remaining hostility towards recognizing “race” (racism) increasingly collides with the growing matter that it represents in the French context today. More specifically, a growing reference to and stigmatization on the basis of “race” characterizes recent public discourse. This may be, to some extent, evidence that there is a growing need to recognize racial diversity in France today. As Simon argues, “[t]he gap between the statistical categories and the terms used in everyday discourse is huge” (Simon 2008, 12).

Achille Mbembe writes:

Il se trouve que dans ce vieux pays, la France, une imprenable tradition héritée de la révolution de 1789 et de la Terreur et opérant par nationalisation de l'idée d'universalisme, n'a cessé de nier le fait brutal de la race, sous le prétexte que la revendication du droit à la différence – peu importe laquelle – contredit le dogme républicain d'égalité universelle. Que la poursuite aveugle d'un idéal aussi noble dans des contextes du multiculturalisme objectif, de pluralisme racial et religieux, et d'une histoire coloniale toute récente, produise, en fin de compte, exactement le contraire de ce que cet idéal stipule : voilà qui tarde à faire l'objet d'une prise de conscience conséquente. (Mbembe 2005)²³

In this regard, it is relevant to note that, as surprising as it looks, most members of the French elite strongly resist the institutionalization of Post-colonial Studies in France.

White Republic

The French Republic is profoundly colonial in the way the elite has thought and constructed it. It has built national identity on a self-centered, paternalistic relation with its colonized Other. *L'Algérie française*, the colonial experience that the French government

²³ My translation: “In this old country called France, there is an untouchable tradition, inherited from the 1789 Revolution and the Terror and operating through the nationalization of the idea of universalism, which never ceased to negate the brutal fact of race on the account that claiming one’s right to difference – whatever that may be – contradicts the republican dogma of universal equality. Pursuing blindly such a noble ideal in the present contexts of objective multiculturalism, racial and religious pluralism, and a just-ended colonial history, produces, after all, exactly the opposite of what such an ideal proclaims. This has not yet become the object of real consciousness.”

carried out to the extent of negating the existence of Algerians as a people, has played a foundational role in this. Additionally, the Republic was created *with* Algeria. It was founded on the differentiation of the figure of the Other, or subject, from that of the Republic. France was built with Algeria because Algeria was (thought of as) part of France while not really part of it. This differentiation is at the core of French political identity. Nationalist-universalist discourse built national identity on a racial inequality engraved in the Republic. The French grandeur, or identity, *is* because the differentiation from *the colonized other*, the *subject* of the metropolis – part of the territory but politically outside the space of the Republic – constructs the frontiers of *what is French (grandeur)*. In my understanding, this colonialist/patriotic arrogance is at the core of today's political "debates" (discourse) involving French cultural and racial diversity, and particularly targeting the French of Algerian descent. France was coconstituted through its relation with Algeria. The whole population in France, even though the whole population differently, descends from "*la France-Algérie*", the ambiguous relations between France and Algeria and the relational differentiation within the Republic. It strongly influences today's politics.

It appears very clear that *à travers l'entreprise française en Algérie*, the French Republic was constructed on the internalized differentiation of a white center and a racialized other. Yet, Todd Shepard (2006) claims that even *les institutions de la Vème République*, in other words the institutions of the postcolonial Republic, were constructed *with* Algeria.

Indeed, in 1958, the Constitution of the Fifth Republic officially granted national citizenship to all *Musulmans d'Algérie*. The *Accords d'Evian*, signed in March of 1962, ensured that such a status would remain after the declaration of independence of Algeria. Yet, when confronted with the exodus to the metropolis of thousands of *Musulmans d'Algérie* in April-May 1962, most of who had fought to defend *l'Algérie française* and were trying to seek protection in the metropolis, France treated them as foreigners, as a wave of mere

immigrants. The status of “*rapatriés*” (that granted them French citizenship) stated by the Accords d’Evian dropped. They were from then on called *les Musulmans* or *les harkis* and became refugees. Furthermore, French government distinguished between those who deserved the status of *rapatriés*, that is to say deserved to keep citizenship, and those who did not. French government based such distinction on perceived affiliation to Islam, determined as it was during the colonial era by what the first name “sounded like.” On July, 25, 1962 President de Gaulle stated clearly: “*le terme rapatrié ne s’applique évidemment pas aux musulmans. Dans leur cas, il ne saura s’agir que de réfugiés*” (cited in Shepard 2006, 52).²⁴ In doing so, French government naturalized a separation within the nation. It institutionalized postcolonial racism towards (perceived) French Muslims. Thus, *par association (inconsciente) d’imaginaires (coloniaux)*, it also constructed postcolonial racism in France towards people of Algerian descent.

*la [Vème] République institutionnalisait l’idée que les « Français musulmans » d’Algérie étaient différents des autres Français. [...] La délimitation de nouvelles frontières territoriales, suite à l’abandon des départements algériens, s’est donc accompagnée d’une redéfinition majeure des limites de la nation française, consacrée par la refonte des institutions républicaines sous l’impulsion du général de Gaulle. (Shepard 2006, 52-53)*²⁵

Furthermore, although 9.5% of the Parliament, including its vice-president, was “of color” at the time, de Gaulle deliberately evicted all of them from political life and transformed the institutions of the Fifth Republic in such a way that there would no longer be any (Shepard 2006). For that matter, the presidential election became an election by direct suffrage for two reasons: on one hand, it could not have taken place earlier than 1962, since the Constitution of

²⁴ My translation: “the term repatriate obviously does not apply to the Muslims. In their case, they can be nothing but refugees.”

²⁵ My translation: “the Fifth Republic was institutionalizing the idea that the ‘French Muslims’ of Algeria were different from the other French. [...] The delimitation of new territorial borders, following the surrender of the Algerian *départements*, came along with a major redefinition of the frontiers of the French nation, sanctioned by the re-foundation of the Republican institutions under the impulse of General de Gaulle.”

this new Republic granted citizenship to all “*musulmans d’Algérie*,” on the other hand, by direct suffrage there was no risk that a “*musulman*” would be elected (Shepard 2006).

French power has built its Republic on this historical/colonial differentiation – on the basis of race, on what/who is French, and on what/who is not in its very national territory. *La République est fondée sur un déni d’égalité.*²⁶ A racism of state was established, perpetuated and remade in the postcolonial era. Finally, Shepard contends:

Par ailleurs, les institutions républicaines, mises en place pour gouverner la France et l’Algérie en tant qu’entités politiques, ont été redéfinies en occultant une réalité essentielle et aveuglante, en l’occurrence que la République française s’était bel et bien construite avec l’Algérie et que des structures et dispositifs, initialement mis en place aux marges de la République (c’est-à-dire dans les départements algériens), avaient été importés en « métropole » et notamment une certaine définition de la nation, de ses frontières, des populations ayant accès à la citoyenneté et de celles qui en sont exclues. (Shepard 2006, 49)²⁷

Algeria became a symbol of anti-Imperialist struggle. As opposed to most former African colonies of France, Algeria was an exception of *la Françafrique*, France’s neocolonial politics in Africa. This, along with other factors such as Algeria’s strong pro-Palestinian position and the “importation” of the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s on to the French metropolis, contributed to the *enracinement* (establishment) of postcolonial racism towards the French-Algerians in France. Yet, France could and can no longer escape from the deep-rootedness of more than a hundred years of relations and the consequences it implies – the mixing of populations, cultures, practices *and* the responsibility that goes with such history.

La Fracture Coloniale

²⁶ The Republic was founded on a negated equality.

²⁷ My translation: “Likewise, the institutions of the Republic, established to govern France and Algeria as political entities, were redefined in a way that hid a necessary and blinding reality – that the French Republic had undoubtedly been constructed *with* Algeria and that some structures and mechanisms, initially implemented in the margins of the Republic (i.e. the Algerian departments), had been imported to the metropolis, more specifically a particular definition of the nation, of its frontiers, of the populations who have access to citizenship and those who are excluded from it.”

As Mbembe points out in his foreword to *De la Postcolonie*, the remaining reticence over the recognition of “race” and multiraciality in France denotes a refusal to deal with the colonial past through a constant and pathological negation of its history (Mbembe 2005). Indeed, many authors of the French colonial/postcolonial context, in history, political science, and sociology, such as Patrick Simon, Françoise Vergès, Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and many others, have written on the intimate relation between colonialism and the Republic. In particular, they highlight the persistence/re-creation of the colonial and racist imaginary in contemporary French politics. One of the ways in which this imaginary persists is in the negation of the colonial (national) history through the systematic subalternization of a certain part of its population, *les enfants d’immigrés*. This “*fracture coloniale*” is a major impediment to the peaceful construction of post-colonial, multiracial France today.²⁸

The year 2005 is a turning point in the discourses involving colonial history, “immigration,”²⁹ and simultaneously the social realities of the *banlieues populaires*. The intensity of those discourses had already reached a peak a year earlier in the context of the laws on laïcité that revolved around the place of the Islamic veil in schools. In these discourses, the question of memory seems to be a crystallizing point of debate. Indeed, the 2005 law on the “positive role” of colonization “particularly in North Africa” (cited in Luste Boulbina 2008, 91) to be taught in schools was the trigger of what is commonly referred to in the discourse as “war on memories.” In the same year, the decolonial movement “*Indigènes de la République*” was created. It was the first time the *enfants d’immigrés*, descendants from the colonies, explicitly united in a collective voice to demand recognition for the colonial and

²⁸ *La fracture coloniale* is the title of a major book, edited by Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire in 2005, that combines most French authors on the perpetuation of colonialism in postcolonial France.

²⁹ The term immigration, often used as the signifier of a fact, is, as Sayad shows, the signifier of a concept, which, in fact, always and only reflects the perspective of the receiving society and hides the existences of the subjects of the complex dynamics of migration. In the French context, “immigration” bears a rather negative connotation and is often part of a blaming and hateful discourse. The use of inverted commas is an expression of contestation.

postcolonial past and present, condemn the colonial Republic, and call for a decolonizing struggle (Les Indigènes de la République 2005). Finally, in the “*banlieue populaire*” of Clichy-sous-bois on October 27, 2005, two young boys trying to escape from a police control died. This traumatic event triggered three full weeks of revolts in the *banlieues populaires*, resulting in a massive ethno-geographic stigmatization of the “*jeunes de banlieues*” and in the government calling out for the “state of exception.” These events led to an ever-growing discourse of hate and domination towards the so-called “*français issus de l’immigration.*”

Simultaneously, there has been a growing political pressure, on the part of the descendants of slavery and colonialism in France, for the recognition of plural memorial voices. This decolonial move has given the opportunity to the “sacred guardians of French universality” to purposefully reduce all debates down to a question of memory, of “repentance” on behalf of history. As discussed in this section, it is not just a question of memory. Memory does matter for the sake of recognition, in the past and in the present, and it matters in the light of the politics of the present day. The contemporary “traces” of French colonialism are not only symbolic, “*imaginaires ou fantasmées,*” but also material, real, and strongly perceived (Vergès 2006, 9). Claiming that it is a mere question of memory is a (colonial) strategy that enforces power and systematically wipes off plural voices and the collective needs for present recognition. Rather, if indeed history and memory are a recurrent aspect of debate in multicultural France, it is because they have symbolically and materially constructed today’s social realities. The hegemonic discourse, through the rhetoric of “*communautarisme*” (ethnic separatism), “*concurrence des mémoires*” (memorial competition), or “*procès de l’histoire coloniale*” (historical trial), tends to blame a “conspiracy” against the “universal” history of the Republic, or at best, the “ethnicization” of the latter. Such a white-centered look is the sign of a deep colonial racism engrained in French society and of the long decolonization process that has yet to be carried out.

La Fracture Coloniale

The point of malaise, or *fracture*, seems to be located in immigration as the historical continuity of colonization and the present face of race in the Republic. Many authors in the French/francophone context have demonstrated the *exceptionality*, in many aspects, of this historically contextualized immigration. The most prominent of them is the French-Algerian sociologist, Abdelmalek Sayad, who extensively and critically studied immigration in the context of France. Sayad decolonizes the way people commonly *think* immigration. It is always, he contends, a state ethnocentric perspective. Immigration, portrayed in the dominant discourse as a *fact*, is a *concept* that only exists through the “problems” – constructed by the state – which it brings up in the eyes of the host society. To start with, he says, we need to critically question why immigration is thought as a *problem* as if it was naturally one (Sayad 1991). In this regard, the expression “*français issus de l’immigration*,” widely used in the discourse to refer to the *enfants d’immigrés*, appears very problematic to me if I am meant to shift the colonial lens. Such *naming* categorizes certain people and represents them as a problem. It also hides socio-historical realities that make it possible to understand the mixing of populations that make up French society. It appears as a re-creation of the colonial practice through which white France objectifies its historical *indigène* Others.

In the French public sphere, the political “debates” over “immigration” are dominated by an internalized racism of a specifically (post)colonial nature. The discourse associates “immigration,” as in the problems of immigration, to a certain type of *immigrés*. It refers to these people as “*minorités visibles*,”³⁰ “*français d’origine immigrée*,” or “*issus de l’immigration*.” Such discourse points at the citizens who are French and descend from the ex-colonized in Africa and North Africa (Bouamama and Tévanian 2006). An imagery clearly inherited from the colonial era dominates national consciousness and veils/negates this very

³⁰ I want to point at the term “visible” as a way to refer to *people* in order to highlight the cultural violence that such use of the term carries.

connection. Further, in the imagined hierarchy of “integration,” French Muslims (or perceived as such) are more strongly associated with (“the problems of”) immigration. Bouamama and Tévanian write:

En d’autres termes, il convient de distinguer le stigmaté xénophobe, qui n’existe sous une forme exacerbée que pour les nouveaux arrivants, et le stigmaté raciste, qui cristallise des représentations beaucoup plus profondément enracinées, et qui par conséquent ne perd pas – ou très peu – de sa force avec le renouvellement des générations et leur enracinement en France. (Bouamama and Tévanian 2006, 243-244)³¹

Bancel, Blanchard, and Lemaire led an investigation in 2003 in and around the city of Toulouse on colonial memory in order to evaluate the reality of the colonial fracture. Even though it is now ten years old, it does provide useful information for understanding the colonial malaise perceivable in French society. Considering the intensification of “debates” in the last decade, I do expect, however, that opinions expressed in 2003 have generally shifted towards more extreme stances today. The outcomes of this investigation confirm Bouamama and Tévanian’s argument. It appears, on the one hand, that the younger the generation, the stronger the feeling of an “*ethnicisation*” of society, particularly in the *banlieues populaires* (Bancel et al. 2005). On the other hand, it appears that the *fracture* is stronger towards the French of colonized descent, whose integration is imagined as “difficult” or even “impossible” (ibid.). In particular for those of a North African, specifically Algerian descent, French people seem to think integration to be “impossible” (ibid.).³² This is (supposedly) due to history, rather than ethnicity (ibid.). This differentiation of history and ethnicity is dangerously problematic, a distinction that the investigators themselves surprisingly did not critically raise. This differentiation, said to be solely based on history regardless of ethnic

³¹ My translation: “In other words, it is important to distinguish the *xenophobic* stigma, which only manifests strongly towards the newly arrived, and the *racist* stigma, which crystallizes representations that are rooted way deeper and consequently do not – or barely do – lose strength from generation to generation along the process of their stabilization in France.”

³² The questions of debate commonly raised in the mass media about whether or not Islam is “compatible with the Republic” are significant in this regard.

background, appears to me as a clear negation of race as a factor of discrimination, in the same way that French government said to have founded the so-called category *Français musulmans d'Algérie* on a differentiation of law that had nothing to do with “race” (racism). This is a manifestation of the French universalistic construction of equality as invisibility that reinforces racism through negation or invisibilization of “race.” Thus it does not allow for a necessary discussion on racist actions – in all forms. In the French colonial and postcolonial context, history and ethnicity are two sides of the same coin.

This particular immigration is not like any other because these particular *immigrés* are not like any other. There is, indeed, a strong and ambivalent connection between colonization and immigration for the *intersection* of the realities of *le fait colonial* (the colonial fact) – *la colonie* – and *le fait postcolonial* (the postcolonial fact) – *la postcolonie*. Indeed, as Sayad wrote in 1991, colonization inevitably conditioned immigration.

Si on s'attaque plus précisément à l'immigration qu'on dit « non européenne », n'est-ce pas, dans une certaine mesure, en raison du passé colonial qui a produit cette immigration et dont elle constitue une manière de survivance : colonisés comme n'ont pas été les autres sujets coloniaux, les immigrés algériens se comportent en France comme ne se comportent pas les autres immigrés. [...] La colonisation que l'immigration prolonge et fait survivre d'une certaine manière, constitue comme le « laboratoire » dans lequel se donne à voir, à l'état expérimental (sur intervention), les conditions génératrices, les conditions de perpétuation et, peut-être, aussi les conditions d'extinction du phénomène migratoire. Si, « réguliers » ou « irréguliers », mais facilement « régularisables » tant qu'on en avait besoin, les émigrés avaient répondu en masse à l'« appel » qu'on leur faisait, c'était parce que l'état des rapports de force entre, d'une part, les pays, les sociétés d'émigration et leur économie et, d'autre part, les pays, les sociétés et l'économie qu'ils venaient servir, avaient déjà produit les conditions objectives de leur émigration. (Sayad 1991, 76-77)³³

³³ My translation: “If most precisely an immigration called “extra-European” is targeted, isn’t it, to some extent, because of the colonial past that has produced such immigration and of which it constitutes an expression of survival? Colonized like no other colonial subjects were, Algerian immigrants behave in France like no other immigrants do. [...] Colonization, that immigration extends and allows to survive to some extent, constitutes a sort of “laboratory” in which one can observe, at an experimental stage (by intervention), the driving conditions, the perpetuating conditions and, perhaps, also the extinguishing conditions of the dynamics of migration. If, “regular” or “irregular” but easily “regularized” as long as they were needed, emigrants massively responded when “called” in, it is because the condition of balance of power between, on one hand, the emigration countries, societies and their economy, and on the other hand, the countries, societies and the economy they were going to serve, had already produced the objective conditions of their emigration.”

Most importantly, *dans les réalités d'aujourd'hui se retrouvent les réalités d'hier*.³⁴ Post-colonial immigration has led to continuities in the (colonial) relations, representations, and power. *Les enfants d'immigrés* are the second-class citizens of a racist postcolonial Republic.

*En la matière, on sait à quoi s'en tenir. La colonisation nous a familiarisés déjà avec cette discrimination et, somme toute, s'il fallait prolonger le parallèle entre colonisation et immigration, statut de colonisé et statut d'immigré, tout laisse penser que l'immigré d'aujourd'hui est le colonisé d'hier. Il n'est qu'un colonisé nouvelle manière, un colonisé d'au-delà de la colonisation. (Sayad 2006, 29)*³⁵

To bring the ambivalence further, the “immigré” is a postcolonial “indigène.” By definition, *l'indigène* cannot speak, as she cannot *be heard* (Luste Boulbina 2008). Kery James is a French Muslim black man who grew up partly in his native Guadeloupe Island³⁶ and in the Paris suburb of Orly. He is a descendent of slaves and the colonized. To be heard, he raps a “*Lettre à la République*”:

Lettre à la République/A tous ces racistes à la tolérance hypocrite/Qui ont bâti leur nation sur le sang/Maintenant s'érigent en donneurs de leçons/Pilleurs de richesses, tueurs d'africains/Colonisateurs, tortionnaires d'algériens/Ce passé colonial c'est le vôtre/C'est vous qui avez choisi de lier votre histoire à la nôtre/Maintenant vous devez assumer/L'odeur du sang vous poursuit même si vous vous parfumez/Nous les Arabes et les Noirs/On est pas là par hasard/Toute arrivée a son départ !/Vous avez souhaité l'immigration/Grâce à elle vous vous êtes gavés, jusqu'à l'indigestion/Je crois que la France n'a jamais fait la charité/Les immigrés c'n'est que la main d'œuvre bon marché/Gardez pour vous votre illusion républicaine/De la douce France bafouée par l'immigration africaine/Demandez aux tirailleurs sénégalais et aux harkis/Qui a profité d'qui ?/[...]/On ne s'intègre pas dans le rejet/On ne s'intègre pas dans les ghettos français, parqués/Entre immigrés, faut être sensés/Comment pointer du doigt le repli communautaire/Que vous avez initié depuis les bidonvilles de Nanterre/Pyromane ou pompier, votre mémoire est sélective/On n'est pas venu en paix, votre histoire est agressive/Ici, on est mieux que là-bas, on le sait/Parce que décoloniser pour vous c'est déstabiliser/Et plus j'observe l'histoire beh moins j'me sens redevable/Je sais c'que c'est d'être Noir depuis l'époque du cartable/Bien que je n'sois pas ingrat, j'n'ai pas envie de vous dire merci/Parce qu'au fond c'que j'ai, ici, je l'ai conquis/J'ai grandi à Orly dans les favelas de France/J'ai « fleury » dans les

³⁴ The realities of today meet the realities of yesterday.

³⁵ My translation: “As far as it is concerned, we know where to stand. Colonization already got us used to this kind of discrimination and, all things considered, if we had to extend the parallel between colonization and immigration, status of colonized and status of immigrant, everything converges so as to think that the immigrant of today is the colonized of yesterday. He is nothing but a renewed type of colonized, a colonized from beyond colonization.”

³⁶ Guadeloupe is the neighboring island of Martinique in the Caribbean. It has the status of French *département* (administrative division of French territory).

maquis j'suis en guerre depuis mon enfance/Narcotrafic, braquage, violence... Crimes ! (Kery James, "Lettre à la République", 2012)³⁷

Colonial racism carries strongly felt "collective humiliation" (Bancel et.al 2005, 251). As one can sense in Kery James' text, a denied memory reinforces such humiliation resulting from marginalization and lack of recognition. Thus, "[m]arginalisation sociale (vécue et/ou ressentie) et sentiment d'une marginalisation ou d'une négation de l'histoire personnelle et de la mémoire semblent aller de pair" (Bancel et al. 2005, 251-2).³⁸

The philosopher Albert Memmi provides an interesting portrait of the "pathological" relationship, to echo Fanon's words, that connects the descendants of our colonial history – us – in contemporary multicultural France.³⁹ In taking on the point of view of the "metropolitan" French over the (North African) immigrant, he says:

Pour l'ex-métropolitain, sauf chez quelques esprits d'avant-garde, il est le rappel vivant de la défunte entreprise coloniale ; de l'époque où le drapeau français flottait sur des terres immenses, où la France régnait sur des peuples nombreux et divers. Même s'il n'a pas été un adepte de ces aventures, la présence de l'immigré est le résidu d'un deuil collectif, d'une séparation faite dans la violence, où les siens ont perdu la partie. [...] [L]a présence de l'immigré l'empêche d'oublier une histoire

³⁷ My translation: "Letter to the Republic/To all these racists with hypocritical tolerance/Who built their nation on blood/Now set themselves up as lesson givers/Looters of resources, killers of Africans/Colonizers, torturers of Algerians/This colonial past is yours/You were the ones who chose to tie your history up to ours/Now you need to take responsibility/The smell of blood haunts you even if you use perfume/We Arabs and Blacks/We are not randomly here/Whoever lands departs from somewhere!/You wanted immigration/You stuffed yourselves with it until you had indigestion/I think France never did give a handout/Immigrants are nothing but cheap labor force/Keep the Republican illusion for yourselves/Sweet France spoiled by African immigrants/Ask *tirailleurs sénégalais* (African corps of the colonial army) and *harkis* (Algerians pro-*Algérie française*)/Who took advantage of whom?/[...]/No one integrates through exclusion/No one integrates in the French ghettos, penned in/Among immigrants, just think/How can you point fingers at ethnic separatism/When you initiated it from Nanterre shantytowns/Pyromaniac or firefighter, you have a selective memory/We didn't come in peace, your history is aggressive/Here, we are better off than there, we know it/Because for you to decolonize is to destabilize/And the more I observe history well the less I feel I owe anything/I know what it's like to be Black since I go to school/Even though I'm not ungrateful I don't want to thank you/Because after all what I've got here, I earned it/I grew up in Orly in the French favelas/I "flowered" (Fleury-Mérogis is a famous prison located in Paris suburbs) in the undergrounds/I've been at war since I was a child/Drug trafficking, holdup, violence... Murders!"

³⁸ My translation: "(experienced and/or felt) social marginalization and the feeling of marginalization or negation of personal history and memory seem to go hand in hand."

³⁹ By "descendants of the colonial history" in France I refer to the whole French society today, even though we all are descendants of the French colonial/postcolonial history differently – occupying very distinct positions of power. Indeed, as Boulbina (2008) argues, as much as colonization is a bilateral and multidimensional process, decolonization is too, and colonial history is national history. In my attempt to de-center the French Republic and decolonize the minds, it is necessary to consciously *think* decolonization in an inclusive way locating the whole society as *descending from*, as the *object* and *subject* of our present history.

glorieuse pour certains, scandaleuse pour d'autres. Le Maghrébin n'est pas un immigré russe ou roumain, un étranger venu là par hasard, il est le bâtard de l'affaire coloniale, un reproche vivant ou une déception permanente. (Memmi 2004, 97)⁴⁰

I partly agree with Memmi. As many rap singers express in their texts, within the national narcissist consciousness, the French of Algerian descent embodies a sort of 'historical complex.' She is the living witness (*le témoin vivant*) of the colonial enterprise, of its wounds, shames, and nostalgia (Béru, 2011).

However, as Sayad would argue, this is to envisage *l'immigré* through the gaze of the society of immigration. In the light of Sayad (2006), and Bouamama and Tévanian (2006), postcolonial racism goes beyond a mere bitterness of the past made of guilt, nostalgia, and resentment. It is also the result of the continuities of a "natural," unquestioned inferiority inherent to the colonial/postcolonial relation – a relation that is at the core and roots of the construction of the Republic and its national identity. Consequently, in a context of a growing "visibility" in the public space, the immigrant "noir" (black) or "Arabe" (of Maghreb origin) embodies the failure of the model of integration based on a mythical Republican equality. She seriously questions and unsettles the Republic itself and its foundations.

At this point, one can see how the telling of history(ies) is a key element for *decolonizing* French society. French society can only overcome the challenges of creating a better here and now if we, as a national whole, know ourselves, our strengths and failures, and recognize them. How could French society *equally* embrace its components without taking into account its differentiated conditioning by history? Today, the *banlieues populaires* function as the material "black hole" of French history and present, as *spaces of exception*

⁴⁰ My translation: "For the ex-metropolitan, except in a few minds of avant-garde, he is the living reminder of the lost colonial enterprise; of the time when the French flag was flying over immense lands, when France reined over many and diverse peoples. Even if he has not been an avid follower of these adventures, the presence of the immigrant is the remnants of a collective mourning, of a separation that ended in violence, in which his fellows lost the game. [...] [T]he presence of the immigrant prevents him from forgetting a history that is glorious for some, outrageous for others. The Maghreb Arab is not a Russian or Rumanian immigrant, a stranger that came in randomly. He is the illegitimate child of the colonial business, a living reproach or an ever-lasting disappointment."

within the (colonial) Republic.⁴¹ How can French society understand, and possibly transform, the social, cultural, geographical, racially complex place held by the *banlieues* without a post-colonial approach to history? Likewise, how can the descendants of the *indigènes* understand, and possibly transform, the place they hold in the French historical landscape? Stories – memories – transcend time; they are the bridge between intersecting colonization and immigration, immigration and colonization. Didier Lapeyronnie, in his account of a long-term sociology fieldwork in the *banlieues*, argues:

Bien au-delà des discours, la dimension coloniale inscrite dans la République est aujourd'hui au cœur de l'expérience des habitants des quartiers issus de l'immigration. Et c'est à partir de cette expérience que l'urgence de la réincorporation des mémoires et de l'histoire se fait sentir : elle est la seule façon de lui donner sens et de permettre à ceux que l'universalisme républicain a niés, et continue de nier, d'accéder à la reconnaissance et de pouvoir enfin construire leur intégration. (Lapeyronnie 2005, 11)⁴²

A social fracture emerges along the lines of the memorial fracture. This malaise *is*, latent and without borders. Like many political artists say, for the inhabitants of the *banlieues populaires*, it is often felt as a “war.” It is radically there, and it divides, undoubtedly. As any conflict, it is *relational*. Divisive malaise might sound like pleonasm, but it is not. Discourse unilaterally points to the “*français issus de l'immigration*” – particularly the inhabitants of the *banlieues populaires* – for performing a so-called “*repli identitaire et communautaire*.” As surprising as it seems, *this (power) rhetoric is the sole and only one hearable in the public space*. Yet, the “*repli identitaire*” is not one of the sole *banlieues*, but rather of the society as a whole. Is racism not “communitarism?” Is the *absence* – non-representation – of the *banlieues* in the spheres of power not “communitarism?” Is, *this* France who keeps blaming

⁴¹ Most immigrants from the colonies came to France after the political independences as cheap labor force. They were placed in *outside* spaces, off cities – the *banlieues* – where, later, their descendants grew up.

⁴² My translation: “Well beyond discourses, the colonial dimension engraved in the Republic is today at the core of the experience of immigrants inhabiting the poor neighborhoods. And it is from this experience that the urgent need to reincorporate memories and history is felt: it is the only way to make sense of it and to allow those who have been, and are still, negated by Republican universalism, to achieve recognition and be able to build their integration at last.”

that France, an example of “integration?” *Est-ce que la France pourrait arrêter de se regarder le nombril ?*

La Présence Absente

Despite the central role a full recognition of colonial and postcolonial history would play in the necessary *decolonization* of French society, it has been greatly *negated*. Sandrine Lemaire, in “*Histoire nationale et histoire coloniale: deux histoires parallèles*”⁴³ analyzes colonial memory based on school educational programs. She provides an exhaustive look into the mechanisms of negation – highly significant in perpetuating the colonial mindset in the national consciousness (Lemaire 2006). Benjamin Stora is a well-known historian of the Algerian Liberation War. Both thinkers, among others, highlight how colonial history is marginalized, located at the “*periphery*” of the “grand French national history” (Lemaire 2006; Stora 2005). It is striking to observe how very little knowledge French people generally have of their colonial and immigration history (Bancel et al. 2005; Vergès 2006)⁴⁴. It appears as “*une histoire virtuelle,*” a vague idea, general and unclear, in which state-centered traumatic events appear first and last (Bancel et al. 2005). It is a feeling of a *lointaine* (far-off) history that does not resonate within the national consciousness *in the present* (ibid.). It sustains the idea that colonialism is not a national matter, but rather one of the sole colonial subjects, taking place *far* from the national territory. Authors such as Luste Boulbina (2008; 2011), Lemaire (2006), and Bancel (2005) have critically shown the “*césure*” (schism) that exists in the dominant imaginary between colonial history and national history. The investigation carried out in Toulouse demonstrates that “*l’héritage [de la colonisation] est*

⁴³ My translation: “National history and colonial history: two parallel histories”

⁴⁴ It is necessary to mention that slavery is, without any doubt, part of this historical silence, which maintains the overseas territories of France in a state of second class territories, marginalized from the French national citizenship, as Vergès demonstrates in her article.

bien loin de participer à la construction d'une histoire commune" (Bancel et al. 2005, 250).⁴⁵

A clear division exists between what (who) is *really* part of France, its history and identity, and what (who) is not, which is highly problematic *vis-à-vis* the postcolonial dynamics of society.

This configuration of colonial history appears as an "épistémè" in the sense that Foucault gives to it – one that constructs knowledge in a way that "*certaines frontières*" *apparaissent "comme naturelles, certains territoires comme limitrophes, certaines régions comme éloignées"* (Luste Boulbina 2008, 83).⁴⁶ Nicolas Bancel analyzes the "*historiographie du fait colonial et postcolonial*" in the French academic world. He documents how, since 1830, the incorporation of colonial history in the national narrative has faced huge resistance (Bancel 2005). Thus, the Algerian Liberation War only appeared in French university and research programs in the 1990s, about 40 years after it started (Stora 2005). Then as today, French Academia has not *recognized* colonial history as a *legitimate* object *in itself* (Bancel 2005).

Mais il est encore plus marquant de constater qu'aucun équivalent aux postcolonial studies anglo-saxonnes, appliquées à l'histoire des métropoles, n'existe en France. De fait, l'histoire coloniale en métropole reste marginale et l'histoire postcoloniale en métropole n'existe tout simplement pas. C'est une histoire qui n'a pas voix au chapitre, perçue comme lointaine – puisqu'elle s'applique d'abord aux ex-colonies –, en aucun cas une histoire qui pourrait s'intégrer, de plein droit et de pleine légitimité, à l'histoire nationale. C'est là le signe manifeste d'un blocage, ou, au mieux, d'une indifférence (Bancel 2005, 86).⁴⁷

The strong separation between national and colonial has to be looked at in the light of contemporary French politics. It is the clear manifestation of the (modern) idea(ology) that

⁴⁵ My translation: "the legacy [of colonization] is far from contributing to the construction of a common history"

⁴⁶ My translation: "some borders" appear "as natural, some territories as borderline, some regions as distant."

⁴⁷ My translation: "But it is even more striking to note that no equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon Postcolonial Studies applied to the history of the metropolis exists in France. In fact, colonial history in the metropolis remains peripheral, and postcolonial history in the metropolis just does not exist. It is a history that has no say in the matter, perceived as far-off – since it first applies to the ex-colonies - and in no way, shape or form a history that could be integrated, in full right and legitimacy, into national history. It is a clear manifestation of a blockage or at best of indifference."

some histories count more, that some citizens count more – a differentiation that recalls the racist (post-)colonial state of exception. It is a clear expression of the negation, on the part of the French state, to see certain components of the nation (as I will explain in chapter 3, this stems from the inability to see itself).

Beyond all resistances to inclusion, the way history has been approached matters. Yet, it is also constitutive of a strong negation of colonial and post-colonial history. It prevents a full comprehension of the complexity of its deeply rooted dynamics. The crystallization of the colonial era in traumatically symbolic events, particularly related to Algeria (such as the Liberation War), denies access to a more complete understanding of it as the actual implementation of a colonial *system, un fait total, une institution absolue*, rooted in racism, inequality and a state of exception (Lemaire 2006; Bancel et al. 2005). It disconnects colonial history from the historical continuity of the nation and construction of the Republic (Lemaire 2006). This chosen simplification of the realities of the colonial experience maintains a vague and unclear condemnation of the colonial system, like a section of history that French state and society should not be proud of but still are, the continuities of the colonial “*mission civilisatrice*” (Lemaire 2006; Bancel et al. 2005).

Car là est l'essentiel : la guerre d'Algérie permet de reformuler un “consensus républicain” cristallisé autour de la condamnation des aspects les plus visibles et révoltants de la colonisation, mais pose simultanément un masque sur le système colonial en lui-même. [...] [L]es élèves ne sont dès lors pas à même de comprendre pour quelles raisons les colonisés se sont révoltés, ni pourquoi la France s'est opposée violemment à leur « émancipation », comme disent encore pudiquement quelques rares manuels. Du coup, ce sont chez certains élèves le « fanatisme » ou l'« ingratitude » des colonisés qui en viennent à expliquer les désirs d'indépendance (Lemaire 2006, 65).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ My translation: “Because there is the essential point: the War of Algeria is used as a tool to reformulate a “Republican consensus” through the condemnation of the most visible and outraging aspects of colonization, but simultaneously puts a mask on the colonial system itself. [...] [A]s a result, students are not able to understand why the colonized revolted, nor why France violently opposed their “emancipation,” as a few rare school manuals still modestly say. Thus, it becomes for some students fanaticism or ungratefulness that explain why the colonized happened to hope for independence...”

In Lemaire's words, this "fragmented history" dislocates colonialism from its contemporary expressions, forms, and "traces." In the minds of the majority, if colonial history is not the story of a *total system*, how can it still be such a point of debate today? Furthermore, if it is a story, far-off in space and time, why it is such a big deal to the *national* territory of France? In the contemporary debates involving *les enfants d'immigrés*, the hegemonic discourse blames a tendency to be "stuck in the *past*." This memorial position is fully integrated in the "ideological apparatuses" of the state (Althusser 1971). Yet, as ideology of power, it appears "naturally" non ideological, as only and absolute truth.

The question of colonial memory is a delicate one in the political debates, one that upsets, because the story it tells opens up the debate about our postcolonial history and present. It can be felt as "*mise en danger de l'histoire contemporaine*" for it will unveil "*les aléas de la politique coloniale républicaine, les discours universels et les politiques concrètes de puissance et d'oppression coloniales et postcoloniales, les politiques migratoires, les discriminations et le racisme*" (Bancel 2005, 90).⁴⁹

In fact, *le récit de l'histoire coloniale* is greatly disconnected from the dynamics of postcolonial history, as well as the presence of *immigrés* on the colonial territories. Thus, in school programs,

What is surprising, however, is the extent to which immigration is left out of the nation's symbolic makeup. The history textbooks are rife with symbolism about the United States as a country of immigration, but France's own immigration history is nearly invisible (Soysal and Szakács 2010, 106-107).

Immigration is presented as a global dynamic, as a *geography* subject or, at best, through a human rights approach; however, it is always distant from history and from the specific history of France (Soysal and Szakács 2010). Likewise, French diversity, even though it has

⁴⁹ My translation: "endangering contemporary history" for it will unveil "the unforeseen details of Republican colonial politics, universal discourses and concrete colonial and postcolonial force and oppression policies, migration policies, discriminations and racism."

appeared in the textbooks as an actual subject, is by no means related to immigration and even less to the specific historical context of immigration of the French/francophone world (ibid.). The authors further note that “[t]he lack of an adequate historical and contemporary discussion of immigration in France, and its cultural and political implications, is remarkable” (Soysal and Szakács 2010, 107). The inclusion of these topics into the curriculum does not translate into their *incorporation* into the present debates on France’s specific diversity and its challenges.

As mentioned earlier, the politics of negation perpetuate the colonial mindset and relations. The marginalization of history builds up to the social marginalization faced by the *enfants d’immigrés*. Indeed, the latter perceive colonial memory as the “metaphor” of the “oppression” that they face today – one that carries the feeling of being (seen as) “children of *indigène*” or “children of colonisation” – a “representation of self” that is inferiorizing and foreign (Bancel et al. 2005, 250). In this way, colonial memory has become “*une ressource négative*” pour les enfants d’immigrés, “*qui se sentent rejetées par la société d’accueil*” (ibid.).⁵⁰

The oppression is, like in the colony, ambivalent. *Les enfants d’immigrés* never escape from this very (self-)image. Yet, even though postcolonial racism is due to their *exceptional* affiliation with France, it is never stated explicitly. It is not said. In other words, it is not *recognized*. Thus, the *exceptionality* of their political existences, such as the realities of the *banlieues*, cannot be understood. This is French colonialism. It is precisely because there is no recognition of the *colonial fact* that the latter is felt and perpetuating itself. The politics of negation reinforce the object of negation, in this case, colonialism.

⁵⁰ My translation: “a negative recourse” for the *enfants d’immigrés* “who feel rejected by the host society”.

In the historical narrative, it is remarkable and remarkably colonial that the *indigènes* are radically *absent*. The *colony* is *absent*. Colonial memory only exists through the eyes of the colonizing actor, the French state. The need to *de-center* is indisputable.

Par ailleurs, les autochtones, les colonisés sont totalement absents du récit, ou alors réduits à des « masses » qui subissent cette histoire sans y prendre part. Les opinions publiques, la culture coloniale ou l'impact idéologique sur les élites ne sont pas ou très peu étudiés. Ce traitement n'accorde toujours pas de place à l'Autre, celui qui a partagé cette histoire, si ce n'est en tant que « victime » anonyme, « leader » charismatique tel Gandhi ou « ennemi ». (Lemaire 2006, 63)⁵¹

Luste Boulbina places philosophy at the center of the discussion on history. She contends that decolonization of memory is still to come. Language is beautiful and a creative site of resistance (Luste Boulbina 2007), yet *language*, she says, is coconstitutive of the colonial domination (Luste Boulbina 2008). Through lexicon and syntax, the subject of (colonial) history is a subaltern – s/he is the third person, the absent actor of her/his reality (Luste Boulbina 2008). “*Les contradictions se résument à une contradiction fondamentale : celle de deux mondes contradictoires logés en un seul, celle de deux mondes, l'un existant, l'autre inexistant, logés dans le même monde réel*” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 97).⁵² In the colonial imaginary, “*l'élosion du sujet*” plays a fundamental role in constructing the *representation of* the latter – one that is but *is not*, that exists but *does not*. About the 2005 law⁵³, she asserts:

⁵¹ My translation: “Besides, the natives, the colonized are absolutely absent from the narrative, or reduced to “masses” who suffer from the story without taking part. Public opinions, the colonial culture or the ideological impact on the elites are not or barely are subjects of study. This treatment still does not give a place to the “Other,” the one who shared the story, if not as anonymous “victim,” charismatic “leader” like Gandhi or “enemy.””

⁵² My translation: “Contradictions come down to one fundamental contradiction: that two contradictory worlds inhabit one sole world, two worlds, one that exists, the other that does not, inhabiting the same *real* world.”

⁵³ The controversial article of the law said: “*Les programmes de recherches universitaires accordent à l'histoire de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, la place qu'elle mérite. Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l'histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l'armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit.*” (Boulbina, 2008: 91) - My translation: “University research programs grant to the history of French presence overseas, particularly in North Africa, the place it deserves. School programs recognize in particular the positive role of French presence overseas, particularly in North Africa, and grant to the history and the sacrifices of the combatants of the French army from these territories the eminent place they deserve.”

C'est bien pourquoi le langage dans lequel cet article est formulé est si révélateur : c'est tout simplement le langage de la colonie. Dans la colonie, on ne dit pas occupation (péjoratif), on dit présence (laudatif). On ne dit pas pays, on dit territoire. On parle de « territoires placés antérieurement sous souveraineté française ». On parle d'« outre-mer ». On dit « rôle positif », mais on ne dit pas pour qui ce rôle est positif. Ce qui a lieu, c'est l'élimination du sujet. L'élimination du sujet colonial, l'élimination du colonisé, l'élimination de l'indigène. S'il a fait partie « intégrante » de la République, c'est en tant qu'absent. Quand il s'agit d'évoquer le « rôle positif » de la colonisation, c'est, en fait, à propos des colonisateurs, non des colonisés. Là, il n'y a point de clivage qui tienne. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 91-92)⁵⁴

She adds: “*Dans ce langage, la colonie n'existe pas. Le mot ne fait pas partie du vocabulaire politique. Autrement dit, on veut bien parler mais sans rien dire*” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 93).⁵⁵

The focus placed in and through language on colonization is a way not to think *the colony* (“*penser la colonie*”). In other words, colonization necessarily reproduces the perspective of the colonizer and objectifies the subject, whose reality is inexistent, subaltern.⁵⁶ In the colonial imaginary, *la colonie* is “*une réalité fantôme*”, a ghost reality in which “[*l*]a troisième personne est fantôme. [...] Elle est de fait un subalterne” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 99). The historiography of the colonial *fact* is colonial. In the name of “natural” objectivity, the perception of the colonial state is *normalized* as *the only existing eyes* and its language as *the only existing word*. It is precisely because the language of the colony is “familiar” that the colony seems to be and the subalternization of the colonized seems normal (Luste Boulbina 2008). Yet, who can speak? History takes place without *le colonisé* and so does the story of (his)story.

In the national consciousness, colonial memory is an obvious non-obviousness – visible but invisibly colonial. It is an absent presence, *une présence absente* – which does not

⁵⁴ My translation: “We speak of ‘territories formerly put under French sovereignty.’ We say ‘overseas.’ We say ‘positive role,’ but we do not say for whom this role is positive. What happens is the subject elides. The colonial subject elides, the colonized elides, the *indigène* elides. If he has been ‘fully’ part of the Republic, it is, in fact, as absent. When it turns to the ‘positive role’ of colonization, it is, in fact, about the colonizers, not the colonized. In that case, there is no doubt whatsoever.”

⁵⁵ My translation: “Within such language, the *colony* does not exist. The term does not belong to the political lexicon. In other words, it is okay to speak, but only if it says nothing.”

⁵⁶ We can draw a parallel here with Sayad’s analysis of immigration: “immigration” hides the existences of the subjects, *les immigrés*.

allow for understanding the place the *enfants d'immigrés* hold in France today. The dominant lens needs to shift the epistemological foundation of the way it has looked at colonial history and its heritage, and by extension, the way it sees society today. The French state decided to colonize, and whether it wants it or not, this (his)story will continue to “haunt the Republic” (Vergès, 2006) because it cannot escape from movement and the deep mixing of lives colonization supposes.

Algeria

Inasmuch as it is scoffed at, the questions of memory around the relations between France and Algeria remain widely unspoken and need-to-be-spoken ones. These questions seem to hold in them an explosive mix of resentment and lack of understanding in relation to colonial/national history. *L'Algérie française* ended with a savage war that did not separate who was going to be part of it or not⁵⁷. Algeria was the first and last colony of a declining Empire in a moving world and became an international symbol for national liberation and independent (non-aligned) politics. Algeria in France, and 132 years of a crossing destiny, had to be wiped off the national mind in past, present, and future. This political *refoulement* (pushing away) failed to take into account that these relations pushed well beyond any fixed notion of what was thought of as colonial versus national, French versus *indigène*, for versus against, inside versus outside. It failed to take into account that 132 years had built intimate, multiple ties interweaving the existence of all descendants of *la France coloniale/l'Algérie française* who need to understand who they are. It failed to take into account the millions of people whose destiny had been thrown, willingly or not, into a bloody war of terror, leaving whole sections of society traumatized, crying out for the recognition of their stories.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Such savage war is representative of the exceptional level of violence deployed all along the history of *l'Algérie française*.

⁵⁸ It is only with the June 10, 1999 law that the so-called “*événements d'Algérie*” (events of Algeria) were officially recognized as “*guerre d'Algérie*” (War of Algeria).

For long, France refused to *see*, to *feel*, and to *hear*. Today, amnesia remains under a different form. Algeria has become “the tree hiding the forest,” the obvious non-obviousness.

L'Algérie est l'arbre qui dissimule la forêt des colonies françaises. De par sa position paradoxalement « privilégiée », elle constitue en réalité un « obstacle épistémologique ». Pour des raisons de proximité historique, de proximité géographique, de migration, de mixité, bref, pour des raisons de (fausse) familiarité, l'Algérie, « inquiétante étrangère », est un écueil pour la pensée. Le jour où cet obstacle sera parfaitement surmonté, la « science » et la politique seront (enfin) décolonisées. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 71)⁵⁹

The Toulouse investigation shows that colonial history in general is “crystallized” in Algeria, particularly in its Liberation War, to the extent that there is a systematic confusion between colonial history, immigration history, and the so-called “Algerian War” (Bancel et al. 2005). Likewise, in the schools of the state, the war occupies more than the entire colonial history (Lemaire 2006). Concomitantly, the imaginary over the realities of immigration is crystallized in the North African, particularly Algerian, representation of *immigré* or “*Arabe*” (Bancel et al. 2005). Yet, as I have mentioned previously, there is an *exceptional* hostility towards the image of *immigré Arabe* – the feeling of incompatibility. Therefore, visible (history) seems to mean problematic (present). It is the ambivalence of the colonial and postcolonial relations with Algeria: the memory of Algeria is more “familiar” because through *les immigrés d'Algérie* it is more “visible” and present. Simultaneously, *les immigrés d'Algérie* are more “problematic” because the memory of the war is more traumatic.

Moreover, like in the colonial era, this status of exception is ambivalent. It is precisely because memory is (or appears as) *exceptionally* obvious that the comprehension of its complexity in the past and the present is *exceptionally* not. The “contradictions,” in Luste Boulbina’s words, inherent to the colonial fact, are pushed to an extreme. To start with, the

⁵⁹ My translation: “Algeria is the tree that hides the forest of all French colonies. For its ambivalently “privileged” position, it, in fact, constitutes an “*epistemological obstacle*.” For reasons of historical closeness, geographical proximity, migration, ethnic mixing, in short, for reasons of (fake) *familiarity*, Algeria, “strange foreigner,” is a pitfall for the brain. The day this obstacle will be fully overcome, “science” and politics will (finally) be decolonized.

crystallization of the memory of colonial and postcolonial Algeria in the “War of Algeria” (“*la guerre d’Algérie*”) veils the colonial system of *l’Algérie française*. Beyond that, if we do focus on the Liberation War itself, the memory of the latter is crystallized in the trauma that it has represented. In other words, the “Algerian War” is known for the violence that has been displayed on both sides, triggering feelings of shame and resentment, but not on the actual war in its contextual complexities (Lemaire 2006). The memory of the war has widely been the object of negation – *un “refoulement”* (Stora 2005) whereby “*on veut bien parler mais sans rien dire.*”⁶⁰ It is “*la nostalgie*” (Stora 2005, 62) – only seen through state ethnocentric emotions, so as to hide the atrocity of the colonial system. In the meantime, it is still “*assimilée à un conflit externe,*” et à “*une mémoire ‘périphérique,’*” qui “*ne concerne que les groupes porteurs de la mémoire de la guerre coloniale, lointaine : les immigrés, les harkis, ou les soldats*” (Stora 2005, 63).⁶¹

While the memory of the war is not located within the bigger framework of history, its violence cannot be understood outside the more general context of the colony. Beyond official data, it is important to openly define war in order to understand *l’Algérie française*. This allows for situating, for example, the 17 years of “terror and lawlessness” to “consolidate the French victory” against Abd-el-Kader (Welch 2003, 254), or the Setif massacre on May 8, 1945, in which thousands of Algerians were killed (Harbi 2005). Commenting on the work of Raphaëlle Branche on the use of torture in French Algeria, Elbaz (2009) highlights that *le vrai visage* (the real face) of torture in the Algerian Liberation War was: “*celui d’un instrument politique au service d’un discours de domination : « Jusqu’à dans le corps des prisonniers, l’électricité peut être considérée comme une marque de civilisation française... ».*”⁶² It is

⁶⁰ My translation: “it is ok to speak but only if it says nothing.”

⁶¹ My translation: “assimilated to an external conflict” and to “a peripheral” memory”, which “only matters for the groups of people who carry the memory of the war, colonial and distant: immigrants, harkis or soldiers”

⁶² My translation: “one of a political instrument in the service of a discourse of domination: ‘up to in the very body of the prisoners can electricity be considered a trace of French civilization...’”

important to see the massive use of torture and rape not as weapons of the sole Liberation War but as systematic tools for domination over the 132 years of colonial rule, as weapons of *war*.

Likewise, Alexander and other authors (2002) explain how the debates over the human cost of the war illustrate the complexity of the actors of the conflict and question its memory. It makes visible the holes and ambiguities within the official memories. In other words, it makes visible the absence of ambiguous memories, of those who do not fit on either side of the political binary. The *harkis* are Algerians who fought alongside with the French army to maintain French Algeria. The *pieds-noirs* are the French residents of Algeria, most of who were in favor of French Algeria. Both of them in particular embody the complexity of the war in relation to identity and politics. Yet, they do not appear in the official *récit de guerre* (McCormack 2008). The negation of their memory(ies) is the negation of their identity(ies) in relation to France, where many of them migrated. Thus, how does French society relate today with their French children, with itself?

The history of colonization, and particularly of *l'Algérie française*, goes well beyond dichotomies and boxes. The chosen simplification of the war essentializes political and racial identities in a way that negates the ambivalence of French-Algerian relations as well as the consequent cultural ambivalence of our national identity. Further, it justifies the exclusion of *les enfants d'immigrés Algériens* in France, as if they were “not really French” – sort of foreigners in their own country, displaced in their own place. The divisive malaise, *les replis identitaires*, emerges in and from the contradiction that we are one plural community yet the dominant gaze divides a “we” from an “Other.”

These debates on the war itself and the knowledge that has been constructed around it bring us back to a central question, already raised but pending: who tells the story?

History Is Politics. And “White” Is A Color.

This debate on colonial memory leads us to the heart of the reflection – decolonizing knowledge, decolonizing history and how it is told. Colonial memory shows an apparent contradiction: it is the object of an “*excès*,”⁶³ yet it is still negated. In Luste Boulbina’s words, “*on veut bien parler mais sans rien dire*”⁶⁴ – and we remain enchained within the narcissist, abstract universalism *à la française*. Indeed, the debates on colonial history are dominated by a “culture of history” (“*culture historique*”), whereby discourse takes (pretends to take) history outside its philosophical and political *nature* (Luste Boulbina 2008). This culture of history, by definition, does not have any historical depth. It promotes a *récit de mémoire* that pretends to be objective, just like French colonialism. It thus reproduces the inequality characteristic of the colonial relations. At the core of this argument lies our central question: who tells history/the story? Memory, for it tells a story of history, is the subjective account of lived experiences; it is, *de facto*, plural. It compels us to constantly make visible who is part of the story, and most importantly, *who is not*. This is a debate about *representation*. It is about re-placing politics at the centre of the debate on history. It is about re-thinking critically the very foundations of debate. It is about *de-centering* the universality and shifting the colonial lens on memory – because what is at work in the politics of negation is the politics of subalternization.

In an article for *Le Monde*, the greatly known theorist of memory, Pierre Nora (2011), claims that the debates created by the “*minorités issues de l’immigration antillaise et africaine*” on colonial history represent *des “explosions mémorielles”* (“memorial explosions”). Yet, why are these debates “explosions” only if they deal with colonial history, when the memory of the Shoah, omnipresent, is not a *political problem*? Nora claims that to demand an effort of memory of “colonial history” is “*faire le procès de l’histoire nationale*” (to put national history on trial) and criticizes the “*politisation*” of colonial history (and of

⁶³ “*la colonie entre l’abus d’histoire et l’excès de mémoires*” (Boulbina, 2008: 70)

⁶⁴ “it is ok to speak, but only if it says nothing.”

slavery). Nora's intellectual position is representative of the French (power) majority. Luste Boulbina replies to him in *médiapart* (2011). She challenges his colonialist-racist arrogance. “*Quels critères permettent, à coup sûr, de faire la part du colonial et du national? Le mineur et le majeur? La périphérie et le centre? Le réel et l'idéal? Le mauvais et le bon?*”⁶⁵ Is history only *politisée* when it *displaces*? History is, by definition, *always* political. And if it is not (or if it pretends not to be), it compels one to question her own position in the political landscape. While hiding behind a modernist *science* of history, Nora justifies, and hence reinforces, the colonial lens on history and his own privileged position in society. Unaware of his own location, Nora applies a form of colonial racism that creates a hierarchical distinction within the nation.

The debate on memory is more an epistemological question than a historical one, *un débat qui “soulève moins, en tout cas, des questions factuelles que des questions conceptuelles”*⁶⁶ (Luste Boulbina 2008, 77). History needs to be (re-)thought in a way that responds to the “*soucis de justice*” because “[l]’objectivité de l’historien, pour finir, c’est sa barbarie.” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 75-76).⁶⁷ Claiming a (fake) apolitical objectivity draws the frontier between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge (Vergès 2006) – making invisible the very position of power that gives the privilege to *discriminate*. Like in *the colony*, the neutral universalist-positivist understanding of history says it is objective, but it does not say *for whom*.

The “truth” (“*vérité*”) of (just) history lies in unveiling *les réalités absentes, les “choses rendues “invisibles, immatérielles”* (Vergès 2006, 72). It appeals to radically *decolonize. De-center*. Open the path towards a new *place* for relations to *be*. It is a *critical*,

⁶⁵ My translation: “What criteria can, for certain, separate the colonial from the national? The minor from the major? The periphery from the center? The real and the ideal? The bad from the good?”

⁶⁶ My translation: a debate that “in any case, raises less factual questions than conceptual questions”

⁶⁷ My translation: “The *objectivity* of the historian, in the end, is his savagery.”

continuous, and dynamic effort to let go of power and reach a new level of *consciousness*.

“La vérité procède en effet, toujours, d’un changement de terrain. C’est pourquoi elle peut blesser. Elle peut blesser en faisant apparaître une autre image de soi en révélant un autre visage des choses” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 77).⁶⁸

The debate on memory is about *representation*. Hence history is political, and memory is even more so. *L’absence participe du maintien de la colonialité*. This is why, Luste Boulbina says, *les “postures ne sont pas décolonisées”* (Luste Boulbina 2008).

Il existe aujourd’hui des citoyens français dont les ancêtres furent esclaves, engagés, colonisés. Ils portent en eux une histoire singulière qui interroge le récit universaliste abstrait. Revendiquer cette histoire, c’est chercher à donner droit de cité à une histoire qui est une part centrale de celle de la France. (Vergès 2006, 10)⁶⁹

Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have attempted to thoroughly contextualize my central question in French history – past, present, future. What – *quels impensés*, what assumptions – hides behind the “debates” on “immigration” and “diversity” today? From where does the malaise in the relation between the *enfants d’immigrés*, most specifically French-Algerian citizens, and the Republic come?

To answer these questions, I choose to take on a post-colonial approach in my analysis of history. Colonialism is not a mere section of French history – told in school books – that, from the day of the independences, becomes obsolete and turns page. Colonialism, or rather colonial relations, has built the nation and the Republic throughout history in such a way that our national roots are profoundly racist, constructed on a differentiation with the colonized,

⁶⁸ My translation: “Truth always proceeds, indeed, from a displacement. That is why it can hurt. It can hurt by revealing another image of self by revealing another face of things.”

⁶⁹ My translation: “There are today *French citizens* whose ancestors were slaves, engaged, colonized. They carry within them a unique history that questions the universalistic abstract narrative. To claim such history is to seek to *establish* a history that is a central part of France.”

inferior Other. What's more, *les enfants d'immigrés*, the descendants of the former colonized, appear as the living traces of this relational experience which is, in fact, very present.⁷⁰ The need for a post-colonial approach is steep.

France, however, has pathologically negated its memorial duty on account of a systematic and illusionary separation between the national and the colonial. As the *indigènes* who were the “subjects” of the grand Republic, the memorial approach of colonization remains peripheral, far-off. It is only there as a way to reinforce the “universal” history, inevitably white, racist and patriarchal. It is *une présence absente* and a self-supply of power.

Yet, France is a postcolonial nation. And its inability to deal with its multiracial condition is symptomatic of the negation of its postcolonial condition. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, the Republican malaise, or “*colonial fracture*,” manifests specifically in relation to particular minority groups – the “visible” traces of a long and deeply rooted colonial relation.

France-Algeria is a symptomatic example of such ambivalence. In the colonial Empire *l'Algérie était française mais les indigènes (algérien-ne-s) n'étaient pas citoyen-ne-s (français-e-s)*. Algeria was French, yet the (Algerian) *indigènes* were not (French) citizens. “Race” was denied as a factor of differentiation. Colonialism has built a tradition where “race,” as in racism, is denied and, consequently, safe.

Colonialism has contributed to creating a mixing of populations that share decades of years of history. Such assemblage is beautiful. But the need to understand who *we* are is huge – it is the condition to confront and embrace ourselves in conflict. Today, a whole portion of the nation, longing for equality, feels at war. The ethno-political divide tends to parallel the socio-political divide. The question of memory is a question of the present. It is a question of

⁷⁰ I want to make clear that if they appear as such, it is because of an inability to de-center the French white male from being the constructed norm of society. Indeed, *we* all are the living traces of colonial history.

recognition in the present. It is to confront the “French colonial forest,” but also all the beauty that comes out of it. It is to face ourselves, to look in the mirror. Memory is plural and we are too. *If we imagine...let go like the flowing river and dance in the sounds of drums.*

Chapter 2: Teasing out Postcolonial Racism through Discourse

Il faut par conséquent être prudent et ne pas se précipiter dans des raccourcis qui, s'ils ont l'avantage d'être facilement compris, masquent la complexité du réel.

(Vergès 2006, 5)

Setting Tone

Today's France is facing a social malaise for multiple intersecting reasons. What I am particularly interested in is how the discourse on "immigration" and "diversity" in the specific context of France constructs national divisions along racial and religious lines. How does it remake the French colonial project through the racist construction of the figure of the "*français musulman*," specifically "*d'origine algérienne*"?

In the previous chapter, I have claimed that a form of colonial malaise is tearing at French society today. I have attempted to demonstrate that France has not undone its colonial project in the nation and state. I have argued that such a situation has led to the perpetuation, or rather the perpetual remaking, of colonial relations and the national imaginary that sustains such relations, through the construction of the "*français-e-s issu-e-s de l'immigration*" in the citizens of Algerian descent.

In this chapter, I attempt to look deeply into the dynamics and functioning of racism as a set of dominant discourses and practices in legal/institutional, political, and media discourses. My aim is to tease out postcolonial racist discourse in France. It is imperative that French society (myself included) rethink national community as part of a common effort to decolonize. In this way, we can begin to honestly discuss the different forms of postcoloniality within France and its relations with identity(ies) and diversity(ies). So, what makes such re-thinking effort, which I explore in chapter three, necessary? How does

postcolonial racism *function* and how is it *normalized* in media, as well as legal/institutional, and political areas of public life?

The legal, institutional, and academic discourse on “immigration” and “diversity” in France tends to highlight such issues as the so-called *ghettoisation des quartiers populaires* (ghettoisation of the working-class neighborhoods), *l'intégration des minorités visibles* (the integration of visible minorities), *la perte des valeurs républicaines* (the loss of republican values), Islam, “the French Muslim,” *laïcité* (French secularism), the so-called “*jeunes de banlieues*” (youngsters from the banlieues), “national identity,” and “*français issus de l'immigration*.” However, there is a tendency for these discourses to hide assumptions and take positivist approaches, thereby overshadowing subjective realities. In this way, these discussions assert truths that claim universality and are not located. Therefore, I want to look at this discourse in order to *make visible the invisible*.

The debate that I have engaged in the first chapter on the visibilization of the colonial relations and its contemporary traces brings me to one main obstacle in the building of healthy postcolonial relations: racism. It is a racism of exception, *de l'exception (post)coloniale*, that targets the French citizens of Algerian descent today. I intend to highlight the historical continuities of such racism and to understand the remaking of the colonial relations in light of the multiple factors characteristic of the present national and international socio-political contexts that enter into the functioning and re-formation of the French colonial project of the civilizing mission.

In order to do so, I will thoroughly engage with the political debates of the last ten to fifteen years. The racist discourse that I am willing to tease out takes its place in ten years of intense stigmatization of Islam and the French Muslim – starting in 2004 with the ban of religious symbols in public schools, confusingly coupled with a great mystification of the

banlieues populaires. This discourse has appeared as a constant and (sometimes not so) hidden reminder to the French citizen of Algerian descent that she is not “fully French.”⁷¹

I divided this chapter into two main parts. The first one teases out the remaking of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* through the construction of the *enfant d’immigrés algériens* as the Other, or as the subject of the Republic. The second part articulates the multiple elements that enter into the functioning of an (extra)ordinary postcolonial racism. Using rhetoric that assimilates immigration, the *banlieues populaires*, and the so-called Muslim French, public discourse normalizes and systematizes stigmatization against citizens perceived as Muslim, particularly of Algerian descent.

Mission Civilisatrice, République et Assimilation

Un Racisme d’Exception, Le Racisme Postcolonial

I understand racism as the act of treating someone differently on the basis of her/his perceived “race,” or of any number of multiple arbitrary factors such as skin color, religion/spirituality, language, nationality, ethnicity, and social class. Racism is a marker of social relations that conditions lives differently. It constructs a hierarchy of human beings. It leads to the collective domination of certain human beings, constructed as superior, central, and normative, over “others,” constructed as inferior, peripheral, and deviant, in such a way that multiple factors play out and intersect with one another. “Race” is constructed by the dominant group(s) through the representation of (a) minority(ies) (in a political sense) subjected to stigmatization. As it is relational, racism functions concomitantly through different forms of *discrimination* of the political minority and different forms of *privilege* of the majority. It constitutes multiple forms of violence – physical, psychological, emotional, cultural/symbolic, structural, epistemic – and it manifests “ordinarily” in all aspects of life.

⁷¹ To refer to the dominant discourse in general, I will use inverted commas. For the words of a specific author, political leader, etc, I will use inverted commas and the reference of the source between brackets.

Racism constructs an “Other” on the basis of an identity perceived from the outside and subsequently essentialized.

Racism is inherently tied to the historical backgrounds in which it was constructed. Indeed, I cannot understand racism separately from power, that is, from the system of multiple constructed hierarchies, which structure the world and the positions of human beings in the world. Racism takes place within a system whereby patriarchy, capitalism, and modern colonialism are one single project. In particular, racialization plays out and intersects with gendering.

The human beings who live within a system of racist hierarchies often internalize racism in its everyday expressions. The violence of racism lies in the fact that it tends to be invisible, particularly to those who belong to the political majority. Yet, as racism is entrenched with power, the political majority is the one that, through the exercise of power and the functioning of racism, has the dominant, most hearable, collective voice. Consequently, racism is often deeply ingrained and normalized in public discourse, as well as in the minds of the human beings who live within a system in which racism applies. Moreover, it is reproduced by the privilege it gives to the majority as well as the unconsciousness of such privilege.

It is important that I keep in mind the heterogeneity of the constructions of “race,” and therefore, of the forms of racism across different historical and social settings. Specifically in the French colonial/postcolonial context, racism, as it targets the populations who descend from postcolonial immigration, cannot be separated from the French colonial projects involving Africa, the French Caribbean, and North Africa. By French colonial project(s), I refer to the different imbricated – intersectional and overlapping – projects of French colonialism, from slavery starting in the 17th century to the “grand civilizing mission” of the

19th and 20th centuries that followed from the abolition of slavery up to the different processes of formal decolonization of the 20th century. Throughout the different episodes of French colonialism, “race” has been constructed differently, and racism has taken different shapes. Yet, in the present colonial/postcolonial context within France, where immigration ensures the continuity of colonization, the functioning of racism intersects with colonialism.

To voluntarily speak of a “postcolonial racism” is not a mere association of words. It is the inherent relation between two key ideologies that have constructed the French imaginary over its national identity through the image of the inferior, colonized Other. It is a strategic claim that aims to highlight the intersectional and inseparable relation, in the French/Algerian context, between colonialism and racism. French racism inherits from and inherently relates to a specific set of institutions, discourses, representations, and practices elaborated in a specific context: colonization, for a specific population: *les indigènes*. On the other hand, a set of racist institutions, discourses, representations and practices supporting French colonialism constantly reshape the latter in the present. Saïd Bouamama (Algerian sociologist and political activist) and Pierre Tévanian (French essayist and political activist) introduced this term in an excellent article published in 2006. They open up the discussion with the following claim:

À cette question de savoir si l'on peut parler d'un racisme post-colonial, nous répondons par une autre question : comment peut-on ne pas en parler ? Comment peut-on parler des formes contemporaines du racisme sans évoquer deux de ses principales généalogies : les systèmes esclavagiste et colonial ? Comment peut-on nier qu'existe aujourd'hui un profond racisme qui trouve son fondement dans des institutions, des pratiques, des discours et des représentations qui se sont élaborés dans le cadre de l'Empire colonial français ? Comment peut-on le nier, par exemple, alors que les enquêtes d'opinion mettent en évidence une forme de mépris ou de rejet spécifique, plus fort et plus durable, à l'encontre des immigrants originaires de pays colonisés ? (Bouamama and Tévanian 2006, 243)⁷²

⁷² My translation: “To whether or not we can talk about a post-colonial form of racism, we ask another question: how can we not talk about it? How can we talk about contemporary forms of racism without mentioning two of its main genealogies: the systems of slavery and colonialism? How can we deny the existence today of a profound racism that digs its foundations in the institutions, practices, discourses, and representations that were elaborated within the French colonial Empire? How can we deny it, for example, when opinion polls highlight a

Pierre Tévanian also calls it “*racisme républicain*.”⁷³ The association of the two terms “*racisme*” and “*républicain*” points at the schizophrenic, pathological nature of the French Republic on which lies a paradox, an inextricable tension between what it wants to be (the ideal of universal grandeur) and what it is (colonialist and racist).⁷⁴ The Republic is a *dream* – the imagined projection of a grand France that governs many peoples and in which all individuals are “*libres, égaux et fraternels*.” I see such a project as inevitably colonialist because French power imposes its rules over peoples whom it uses as subjects of its own expansion. I see it as racist because behind the ideal of equality hide rules of exception imposed by a white power, unaware of itself, on to peoples who, because they are inferior in the Republican imaginary, can be ruled by exception within the supposedly equal grand Republic. The ideal is such that the subjects will become real (equal) citizens through assimilation to the French, that is, white, race called culture.⁷⁵ It is, *by definition*, an *absolute*, an *infinite* project, and one of extreme violence.

When I speak of a *racism of exception*, I refer to a particular type of racism targeting the French descendants of Algeria. Such racism both negates and justifies itself through the French concept of *laïcité* (secularism) and the Republican value of equality – constructed in hierarchical opposition to the colonized Other. Indeed, the Republic or, rather, the *abstract* idea of *untouchable* Republican values is central in public discourse. It is even more central in discourses involving immigration and diversity as it legitimizes patriarchal discourses of “integration” (assimilation). The Republic appears as a myth. It appears as the *image* of a

specific form of contempt or casting out, stronger and more enduring, towards immigrants coming from colonized countries?”

⁷³ Tévanian published *Le racisme républicain* in 2002 and – because it is still relevant twelve years later – reiterated his ideas last year with *Chronique du racisme républicain*.

⁷⁴ This tension could be personified in the political and intellectual figure of Alexis de Tocqueville, as I have explained in chapter 1.

⁷⁵ I purposefully use the term “race” in this sentence to highlight the racist ambiguity of the French power that pretends not to be racist yet inevitably is.

sacred, superior figure that is timeless and needs to be worshipped; it appears as the ultimate Truth. In fact, it is interesting, activist Houria Bouteldja points out, how Republican *laïcité*, which tends to equate religion to oppression, functions as a religious, possibly oppressive, discourse (Robine 2006). The Republic appears as the *idea* of a *grand mothering nation* in which all of its children have equal chance. Such discourse frequently represents a “successful” French “*issu-e de l’immigration*” as the example of the “French Republican model.” The story is told in a way that praises *la grande école de la République, laïque et égalitaire*, and “confirms” that France is not racist.

I use the expression “racism of exception” as an analogy of the *exceptional* colonialism of Algeria, one that is filled with the imperialist arrogance characteristic of the French colonialist project of grandeur. It is a deeply engrained form of racial inequality claimed in the name of equality. It is a racism that negates itself (and reinforces itself through its own negation) on account of the universalist Republican model. As it claims equality, *la patria* does not recognize “race” as an issue. Thus, the French intelligentsia negates that socio-spatial questions are also racial ones (Cohen 2012). This is a racist claim precisely because it claims that it is not. In negating the existence of “race,” the discourse negates racial specificities (the real effects of “race”), as well as the differentiated, unequal treatment of the French citizens of Algerian descent along the lines of ethnicity, religion, class, gender/sexualities and history.

Postcolonial racism is racism inherited from colonial France, the one France that thinks of herself as *the center of the world*. Postcolonial racism allows such an imagined grand position to live on. This colonial imaginary is not only the matter of an elitist discourse; it is deeply rooted in the minds of the people of France. Pascal Blanchard, in words that recall Mbembe’s, argues:

Il faut aujourd'hui décoloniser ces mentalités pour entrer dans une nouvelle temporalité. Ce processus de transformation sera long. Mais s'il ne l'était pas, il serait anormalement court pour un pays tel que la France qui se prend très souvent pour le centre du monde, qui l'a par ailleurs prouvé, et qui est à l'origine de ce modèle de citoyenneté reposant sur la laïcité et l'abstraction faite des particularismes. (Blanchard 2009, 125)⁷⁶

La République française a institué en son sein un complexe de supériorité autour de ce qui est pensé comme français, ou normalement français, c'est-à-dire autour de l'homme blanc. The French Republic has established within itself a complex of superiority on what is thought as French, or *normally* French, that is to say, the white man. In a discourse held in 2006 while he was Minister of the Interior and running for presidency, Sarkozy declares, “*On en a plus qu'assez de devoir en permanence avoir le sentiment de s'excuser d'être français. Et d'ailleurs, si y'en a qu'ça gêne d'être en France, je l'dis avec le sourire mais avec fermeté, qu'ils ne se gênent pas pour quitter un pays qu'ils n'aiment pas*” (Le Huffington Post 2012).⁷⁷ Who is “*on*” (we) and who is “*ils*” (they)? By not locating himself, Sarkozy uses the position of power from where he speaks to declaim a hateful, arrogant, and paternalist discourse that pretends to know for the communities he scolds and silences.

The Remaking of The Civilizing Mission: *Égalité, Laïcité, Diversité*

The dominant discourse on immigration and diversity relies on an unsaid differentiation whereby *the French citizens of Algerian descent are systematically thought of as non-French*. They are *tolerated* if they remain *invisible*. In fact, French minorities (specifically postcolonial) are increasingly referred to as “*minorités visibles*” (visible minorities). How can people be invisible? The term “visible” is culturally and epistemologically violent because it *assumes* that these specific minorities are a problem. It is

⁷⁶ My translation: “Today we need to decolonize these mentalities so as to enter into a new temporality. This transformational process will take time. But if it did not, it would be abnormally short for a country such as France that very often thinks of itself as the center of the world, which it has, in fact, demonstrated before, and that has created this model of citizenship that relies on laïcité and particularist abstractism.”

⁷⁷ My translation: “We are more than fed up with forever having to get the feeling that we should say sorry for being French. And by the way, if there are some who have a problem with being in France, I’ll say it with a smile but I surely mean it, they shouldn’t doubt to leave a country they don’t like.”

racist because it homogenizes and essentializes a group of people as deviant. It systematically places people *outside* the constructed norm so that they are not legitimately French and therefore cannot be political agents of and within the Republic. “Visible,” in this sense, refers to the problematic contradiction, in the eyes of the majority, between the acquisition of power – due to their settlement in the Republic – and the fact that the colonial/postcolonial Republic sees them as subjects who should “stay where they are” (*rester à leur place*). Through this paternalist-racist colonial gaze, it seems that *les indigènes*, who used to be “*les populations à civiliser*,” are now “*les populations à discipliner*.”

Seloua Luste Boulbina, in *Le singe de Kafka et autres propos sur la colonie* (2008), brilliantly analyzes the discourse that recalls the “*mission civilisatrice*.” In doing so, she presents the political “debates” over the 2004 ban of religious symbols in public schools as a paradigmatic example of what I call postcolonial racism. For the sake of argumentation, I focus on this particular case of the remaking of the “*mission civilisatrice*.”

Returning to the philosophers of the *Lumières*, Luste Boulbina deconstructs the Republican principles of *égalité* and *laïcité*. The latter emerged from the concept of tolerance that in the French context was constructed by Voltaire and Romilly as the “absence of persecution” of a “fault” – the Other, her religion, her culture (Luste Boulbina 2008). Tolerance, therefore, is not the acceptance of difference, but rather the correction of the latter. Tolerance is prompted by the paternalist benevolence, the complex of superiority of the “French white man,” representative of the colonial order. Subsequently, the state and its apparatus make decisions related to the “visibility” of “*musulmans Français*” on the basis of (arbitrary) *fact* rather than *law* (*ibid.*). As their religion is a fault, their visibility constitutes a threat to public order. Thus, the state administration ought to protect (against the fault) and correct (the fault) in the name of *equal* tolerance of all religions (*laïcité*).

I acknowledge that my analysis comes from Luste Boulbina's place of anger, which I tend to reproduce as guilt. My point is not to demonize the "French white male." Ultimately, I do think that these conflicting realities are more multilayered than I picture them in this specific analysis. So, are these emotions useful for transformation? I do not know, but I do know that it is important for me to acknowledge the different places in which I find myself throughout the process. A tension lies in my process of deconstruction between the location from which I speak, the guilt that comes along the awareness of such a location, and the transformative energy I want to create.

The 2004 law is written as follows:

[T]he wearing by students, in the schools, of signs whereby they believe to be manifesting their adherence to one religion is itself not incompatible with the principle of laïcité, since it constitutes the exercise of their liberty of expression and manifestation of their religious beliefs; but this liberty does not permit students to exhibit [*d'arborer*] signs of religious belonging which, by their nature, by the conditions under which they are worn individually and collectively, or by their ostentatious or combative [*revendicatif*] character, would constitute an act of pressure, provocation, proselytizing or propaganda, *threatening to the dignity or liberty of the student or to the other members of the educational community, compromising their health or their security, disturbing the continuation of institutional activities or the educational role of the instructors, in short, [that] would disturb proper order in the establishment or the normal functioning of public service.* (Benhabib 2006, cited in Weil 2009a)⁷⁸

Patrick Weil, international scholar, was member of the *Commission Indépendante sur la Laïcité* that initiated the law. He argues that the law aimed at protecting the girls' freedom of conscience against any pressure from religious groups (Weil 2009a). Yet, the law shows more concern for public order than for the supposed subjects of freedom. In addition, it is striking to note that the text of law does not decide anything, but rather gives *power* to the state

⁷⁸ Stresses are mine.

administration (school directors) to decide when the veil, and by extension, the girls, is/are a threat to public order.⁷⁹

La bienveillance que l'on connaît pointe le bout de son nez : quand il est question de liberté (de jeunes musulmanes), l'institution (scolaire), est habilitée, per se, à décider de la limitation de la liberté (des jeunes élèves musulmanes) pour leur propre bien, dans leur propre intérêt. Cet intérêt propre est, comme on peut s'en rendre compte, dérivé du « bon fonctionnement de l'école ». La boucle est bouclée. Des sujets de droit sont ainsi devenus entièrement dénués de droits et soumis, comme au bon vieux temps (des colonies), à l'appréciation discrétionnaire de l'administration française. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 34)⁸⁰

Weil dares to assert that this law, and the debate surrounding it, contributed to the recognition of the French Muslim community, as “for the first time in its history the French state and French society have decided to fully integrate an important Muslim minority into its common frame” (Weil 2009a, 2712). Likewise, Bernard Stasi, president of the same Commission, states:

L'application de la loi doit se faire dans un esprit de dialogue et de pédagogie. Lorsque la médiation n'aura pas réussi, alors la loi sera appliquée. Je plains les jeunes filles qui refuseront de s'y plier. La république aura tout tenté pour les accueillir. J'espère qu'elles ne seront pas nombreuses. (20minutes.fr 2006)⁸¹

This colonial discourse *displaces* the subject: what is a matter of *right* becomes a matter of *fact*; what is a matter of *protection of the girls' freedom* becomes a matter of *tolerance and security of the school*; what pretends to “integrate,” *excludes*. Most importantly, what was about the *young girls* is now about *the Republic* (Luste Boulbina 2008).

N'est-ce pas à l'intérieur de ce schème que le foulard des jeunes filles musulmanes a été appréhendé ? Comme la manifestation éclatante d'une erreur à corriger, en toute

⁷⁹ The same ambiguity exists in the “*lois de naturalisation*” (naturalization laws): the Islamic veil does not systematically but can represent “*un défaut d'assimilation*” (according to the French administration) and whether it does or not is left to be judged by the civil servant in charge (Hajjat 2010; Vosdroits.service-public.fr 2014).

⁸⁰ My translation : “So-called benevolence comes pouring out: when liberty (of the young Muslims) is at stake, the institution (of the school), is entitled, *per se*, to decide over the limitation of liberty (of the young Muslim students) for their own good, in their own interest. Such self-interest derives, as we see, from the “well functioning of the school.” It all comes full circle. Subjects of the law have been fully denied of their rights and subjected, just like in the old days (of the colonies), to the French administration’s discretionary appreciation.”

⁸¹ My translation: “The application of the law has to be carried out in a mindset turned towards dialogue and pedagogy. Once mediation does not succeed, then the law will be applied. I feel for the young girls who will refuse to abide by it. The Republic will have tried everything it could to welcome them. I hope they will not be many.”

tolérance, puisque correction ne signifie pas persécution ? [...] Dans la tolérance, il n'est pas question, ici, de liberté, mais de vérité, il n'est pas question de droit, mais de fait. Voilà la condition intellectuelle de possibilité de l'exclusion. Mais voilà qui éclaire les « troubles de l'ordre public » et l'« atteinte au bon fonctionnement de l'école » que le port de ce fameux foulard était censé provoquer. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 41)⁸²

Therefore, *la laïcité* becomes the tolerance of the fault committed in private and the defense, against the fault of public order – a “public order” that is constructed as French, white, and Christian. Beyond all consideration of opinions, the government brought about the debate on the Islamic veil in order to stigmatize the French Muslim community and assert their differentiated status (legitimacy) within the Republic. A woman demonstrating against the law in January 2004, who also disagreed with wearing the veil in schools, declares: “*Je suis venue voir comment on nous oblige à devenir la caricature de nous-mêmes*” (Hancock 2008, citing *Libération* 2004).⁸³ There is no “*problème de l'Islam en France*.” Rather, through the representation of les “*musulmans français*” as inferior (*dans l'erreur*), and through the construction of an image of an Other to civilize/discipline, postcolonial racist discourse remakes and revives the colonial/patriarchal project of a superior French (white and Christian) grandeur. *Dans le discours raciste postcolonial, les personnes perçues comme les “français-e-s musulman-e-s” sont les sujets de la République, ils servent la grandeur de la France.*

As *subject*, *l'indigène* is part of the Republic in her essential condition of servant, as opposed to and in relation to citizens, who are recognized as having political agency within the Republic. She is therefore “not fully French,” granted an exceptional place based on her “*indigénéité*” – her religion, her traditions, the color of her skin. She is, in the imaginary of the universal Republic, too visible, too sexual, too irrational. The girls were not *françaises* but

⁸² My translation: “Isn’t it within such a framework that the scarf of the young Muslim girls was apprehended? As the resounding manifestation of a fault to correct, with great tolerance, since correction and persecution are two different things? [...] When it comes to tolerance, it is not, here, about liberty, but truth, it is not about right, but fact. There stands the intellectual condition of the possibility of exclusion. But there clarifies the “trouble to public order” and the “disturbance to the well functioning of the school” that wearing the so-called veil was supposed to provoke.”

⁸³ My translation: “I came to see how we are forced to become the stereotype of ourselves.”

“*musulmanes françaises*,” that is, in the collective unconsciousness, also descendants of *l’Algérie française*.⁸⁴ It is on such grounds that “*la France laïque*” can “civilize” them.

There is historically a strong symbolic association in the expression “*musulmans français*,” literally the French Muslim, to the descendants of Algeria. In 1962, the French government negated French citizenship to the Algerian “*rapatriés*” (violating the accords d’Evian) and gave them the status of “*Algériens d’origine musulmane*.” In doing so, the government *established*, institutionally, culturally, epistemologically, the notion of “*origine*” within the imaginary of the Republic (Luste Boulbina 2007; Shepard 2006). On top of that, the term “*français-e-s musulman-e-s*” became, in the colonial unconscious, the equivalent to “*d’origine algérienne*” (ibid.).

Why is this racism *exceptional*? If an Indonesian woman wore the veil in France, she would not be a threat because she would not be *une étrangère* (an outsider) but a mere *inconnue* (an unknown). However, an Algerian woman, “*une indigène*,” is naturally suspect. For her, it becomes a “visible fault” because it threatens to displace the norm, fundamentally white and Christian. It threatens to unsettle the colonial order. It constitutes the threat that the *indigène* has full rights, that is, the right of agency, the right to be *invisibly visible*, whereas she is, by definition, *un animal assimilable*. *L’indigène*, essentially Muslim, essentially Other, is not French; however, she is the *subject* that *makes* France. Thus, her “visibility” is a threat to the grandeur of national identity because she is no longer a *subject*, that is, she is no longer the narcissistic image of the French Republic. She represents, on the contrary, *la présence visible*, the visible presence, *la marque*, the trace, *de l’illusion du rêve républicain*, of the illusionary nature of the Republican *dream*, *de son immatérialité*, of its immateriality.

Le port du « foulard islamique » a d’autant plus dérangé les consciences qu’il a dérangé l’impensé de ces consciences. A suivre celui-ci, il serait normal que, dans

⁸⁴ As if *we* were not *all*, in France, descendants of *l’Algérie française*.

leur propre intérêt – c’est-à-dire par soucis de normalisation - les très jeunes filles qui ont défrayé la chronique ne soient pas musulmanes. Il serait normal qu’elles sortent, partout, tête nue. Il serait normal qu’elles ne se fassent pas remarquer. Il serait normal qu’elles deviennent invisibles. A ce moment-là, on les tolérerait. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 43-44)⁸⁵

Thus, in the national unconsciousness of the dominant discourse, the Islamic veil is “*un coup porté contre l’assimilation, un crime contre l’acculturation et, de fil en aiguille, un refus de la France (terre d’accueil)*” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 41).⁸⁶ Since *laïcité* is thought as the tolerance of a fault and Republican values as the ultimate Truth, assimilation is progress, and resistance to assimilation is “unintelligible, unthinkable, unhearable” (ibid.). Thus, behind the discourse on “*intégration républicaine*” lies the deeply rooted assumption that cultural assimilation is the norm, and a lack of it can only be due to lack of willingness (“*mauvaise volonté*”) (Luste Boulbina 2008, 42).

When I, as “white French,” deconstruct in anger something for which I am the representative, I risk reproducing colonial power. I do feel anger mixed with guilt because in the colonial/postcolonial society in which I live, I have, in spite of myself, been conditioned to reproduce white/colonial privilege and postcolonial racism. The process of deconstruction can only come from my own story. I am responsible for taking responsibility of my location of power, for taking a clear stance in front of society and, most importantly, in front of the majority to which I, in a political sense, belong. I do so not as a sort of spokesperson in the name of specific populations, but rather to raise awareness of the dynamics of colonialism and racism that permeate the very broad majority of discourses, practices, and representations hearable in public space.

⁸⁵ My translation: “That the young girls wear the ‘Islamic scarf’ has made it all extremely disturbing for the minds, for it has disturbed the *blind spots* of these minds. Following these, it would be *normal* that, in their own interest – that’s to say for the sake of *normalizing* – the young girls are not Muslim. It would be normal that they do not draw attention to themselves. It would be normal that they become invisible. Then they would be tolerated.”

⁸⁶ My translation: “an attack against assimilation, a crime against acculturation and, one thing leading to another, a negation of France (land of refuge)”

De La Diversité N'est Pas Français

French political discourse has, in the last years, tried to shift paradigm from the integration discourse to the notion of “diversity” as a new way to look at the challenges of a multicultural and postcolonial society. This new rhetoric establishes the racial and racist differentiation of what/who is *normally* “français-e” and what/who is “*représentant-e de la diversité française.*” In this dichotomized thinking, where one can either “represent” France or “represent” diversity, France is, by definition, not diverse. Am I not representative of French diversity?

In the dominant discourse, the political ideology of “*intégration républicaine*” has, supposedly, been replaced by the promotion of “diversity” (Soum and Geisser 2009). First of all, considering the language used by the French administration on the “*contrôle d’assimilation aux valeurs de la République*” (Vosdroits.service-public.fr 2014), one is compelled to observe the immense gap that exists between the discourses and practices of the state. Second, the concept of diversity did not break with/still rests on the differentiation of “*français de souche*” versus “*français issu de/d’origine*” (Soum and Geisser 2009). It does not break with the old French tradition of universal abstractism, a form of *universalism* constructed in opposition to the *exceptional* – a universalism that is not “universally shared” (Luste Boulbina 2007). Decolonization has yet to occur (Blanchard 2009).

Enfin, cela pourrait devenir la conséquence la moins bien maîtrisée et la plus « perfide » du succès de la thématique de la diversité : au nom de la lutte contre les discriminations ethniques, elle finit elle-même par induire, légitimer et conforter une frontière imaginaire entre les « vrais Français » et les « Divers », entre le noyau central de l’identité française et ses périphéries exotiques. En somme, la diversité contribuerait indirectement à renforcer une vision ethnique de la société française avec, d’un côté, l’ethnicité dominante (les Français dits « de souche ») et, de l’autre, les ethnicités minoritaires (les fameuses « minorités visibles »). (Soum and Geisser 2009, 106)⁸⁷

⁸⁷ My translation: “Eventually, that could become the least under control and the most ‘perfidious’ consequence of the success of the subject of diversity: in the name of the struggle against ethnic discriminations, it ends up leading to, legitimizing, and comforting an imaginary border between the ‘real French’ and the ‘diverse,’

In fact, the promotion of “diversity,” instead of rethinking French society, has taken the form of symbolic measures. Thus, the introduction of “*représentants de la diversité*” in the leading circles of the nation appears more as a political strategy than an impulse for real equality – “a superficial colorization” (Soum and Geisser 2009). Likewise, I am uncomfortable with the media coverage of the “success” of French people (re)presented as “*de la diversité*.” As it pretends, in words (content), to break with stigmas, such coverage actually reproduces them in acts (form). Inasmuch as such media discourse pretends that “*origine*” is unimportant, it seems important enough to be mentioned. And, it is mentioned in a way that she – the immigrant – appears as the “ambassador” of all minorities, that is, of all Others. Overall, this differentiated coverage implicitly and paternalistically reinforces the unsaid assumption that *she is the exception that proves the rule* (Liberation 2013a; Le Nouvel Observateur 2014 for example; Beyala 2009; Deltombe and Rigouste 2005). Tibault Baka, labeled as a “writer from the banlieues,” claims: “*Quand un écrivain a grandi dans le XVI^e, on n’en fait pas un porte-parole du XVI^e. Moi, c’est pareil*” (Liberation 2013a).⁸⁸

“Diversity” is not *thought*. “*Diversité à la française*” does not break with the paradigm of “*égalité à la française*.” The unsaid remains unsaid and the invisible remains invisible. The rhetoric of “diversity” takes equality for granted and hides discriminations that are specifically ethno-racial (Cohen 2012). The promotion of “diversity,” in fact, silences discussions around “race” and even negates racism. It maintains the status quo. Just like *la parité*, la “*diversité*,” “*c’est l’affirmation de l’égalité impossible, c’est la « négation » de*

between the central nucleus of French identity and its exotic peripheries. Overall, diversity seems to contribute indirectly to reinforcing an ethnic perspective of French society with, on one side, the dominant ethnicity (the so-called ‘purebred French’) and, on the other side, minority ethnicities (the so-called ‘visible minorities’).’

⁸⁸ My translation: “When a writer grew up in the 16th *arrondissement* (well-off area of Paris), we do not make of him a spokesperson for the 16th *arrondissement*. Same thing with me.”

l'égalité” (Luste Boulbina 2007, 14).⁸⁹ It appears as a void political strategy. Beyond the fact that the acts do not follow the words, it uses the rhetoric of recognition of diversity as a way to elude the socio-political stakes lying behind diversity, that is, mutual recognition, harmony, and reciprocity. Indeed, the discourse on “diversity” does not carry any intention to share political power (Soum and Geisser 2009). In fact, it hides an inexistent political representation of minorities. *Les “Français-e-s de la diversité”* are imprisoned in a decorating concept that they are *subjected* to “represent” *au service de* the ever-living grand Republic. Diversity does not mean a diverse voice.

Dans un tel contexte, « intégration » et « diversité » sont des mots qui ne sont pas faits pour durer. Pire ils ne signifient plus rien aujourd’hui. Ils ont trente ans de retard sur les mutations sociétales. Si notre société ne s’assume pas, nous traverserons des crises, telles que les émeutes de 2005 qui demeurent une vraie « révolution républicaine », celle de personnes qui s’expriment différemment pour marquer leur appartenance à la France et faire accepter leur « différence ». (Blanchard 2009, 126)⁹⁰

The promotion of “diversity” has not accompanied a radical decolonization of the minds. What’s more, diversity appears a ceremonial dress to revive the national grandeur. In doing so, it pertains to the colonial imaginary and perpetuates postcolonial racism.

Assimilation and Ascétisme: The Violent Rhetoric of “Good” and “Bad”

L’enfant d’immigré-e-s algérien-e-s is expected to “assimilate.” Only then, if she drops her “*origine*,” if she drops herself and puts on the *mask* of assimilation, can she be invisible, “tolerated,” and (almost) “French.” This is what Luste Boulbina refers to as “*ascétisme*” (ascetics) (Luste Boulbina 2008). As introduced in chapter one, the psychological

⁸⁹ My translation: Just like *la parité*, “diversity” “amounts to making equality impossible, it amounts to the ‘negation’ of equality.” (The term *parité* is commonly used to refer to gender equality, but it refers to a narrow understanding of gender equality, one based on numbers and statistics.)

⁹⁰ My translation: “In such a context, the words ‘integration’ and ‘diversity’ are meant not to last. What’s more, they no longer mean anything today. They are thirty years behind societal mutations. If our society does not come to terms with itself, we will encounter crises, such as the 2005 revolts which are a true ‘Republican revolution,’ of people who express themselves differently to engrave their belonging to France and ensure the acceptance of their ‘difference.’”

process of (post)colonial racism, the “*complexe du colonisé*,” leads to alienation. *Ascétisme* recalls, to some extent, Anzaldúa’s “masks of oppression” (Anzaldúa 1990). Gloria Anzaldúa speaks from her experience as a woman of color in the US context. She explains that the multiple masks of oppression are strategies that women of color are forced to use in order to resist (survive from) the multilayered oppressions they face. Likewise, *ascétisme* is, for the colonized (*la minorité “visible”*), the condition of a human life (ibid.). It is the negation of self in order to suit the representation of self expected by the dominant, that is, to suit the colonial *patriarchal-racist gaze* and, in the rhetoric of the discourse, become the “good immigrant” (ibid.).

As I have argued earlier, in the colonial and postcolonial imaginary, the Algerian is naturally not fully French. She is naturally visible and sexual; she is naturally *an exception* and naturally a fault. To become a “good immigrant” (yet still immigrant) – that is to say, if she wants the receiving society to *tolerate* her *presence* in the national body, she needs to “integrate” and, in the rhetoric of the state, show “unconditional willingness” to “integrate” (Luste Boulbina 2008; Deltombe and Rigouste 2005; Hajjat 2010). Yet, only the receiving society, based on its racist understanding of what is French, is entitled to make this judgment call. The rhetoric of “integration” is, in fact, an assignation to assimilation.

Le classement se fait par cercles concentriques du plus « proche » au plus « lointain », de l’« assimilable » à l’« irréductible ». [...] Un exemple : les Kabyles sont placés sur le premier cercle, les Nord-africains sur le second, les Arabes sur le troisième. Manière de signifier la place rêvée de la France dans le monde [...] Qu’est-ce alors que l’assimilation? C’est le passage d’un cercle à l’autre jusqu’à arriver au centre même : au « noyau dur » français. (Luste Boulbina 2008, 22-23)⁹¹

⁹¹ My translation: “The classification is set through concentric circles from the ‘closest’ to the most ‘far-off,’ from the ‘assimilable’ to the ‘irreducible’. [...] Example: Kabylisians are placed in the first circle, North-Africans in the second, Arabs in the third. A way to express the dreamt-of place of France in the world. [...] What, then, is assimilation? It is the upgrading from one circle to the next until its gets to the very centre: the French ‘hard core.’”

In the gaze of colonial/patriarchal power, the “good immigrant” – the “*française d’origine...*” for whom the discourse will, *dans son exceptionnelle bonté civilisatrice*⁹², drop the “*origine*” – is *une immigrée disciplinée, un bon sujet de la République. C’est l’animal discipliné, l’animal assimilé, et dans l’inconscient collectif, l’assimilation est l’unique condition de son humanité.*⁹³

A l’instar de la colonisation, qui est un fait total, la négation de soi, l’entreprise ascétique, doit être absolue. L’ascète doit faire table rase de sa mémoire (Luste Boulbina 2008).⁹⁴ “[l]’Etat ne peut se satisfaire d’une assimilation inaboutie” (Vosdroits.service-public.fr 2014).⁹⁵ Plural identities are not allowed and the *responsibility* of a non-ambiguous “willingness to assimilate,” a non-ambiguous belonging to the “national community” is exclusively the *ascète*’s (Deltombe and Rigouste 2005). Mustapha Harzoune reports: “*Et Ivan Rioufol, [...] apostrophe le céléberrissime joueur : ‘Oui, on aimerait que Zinedine Zidane, qui ne cache pas sa tendresse pour l’Algérie [le devrait-il ?] de ses racines, se dise clairement, c’est-à-dire uniquement [sic] français.’*” (Harzoune 2003, 57)⁹⁶ He comments “*cette pensée dualiste revient à mettre à l’écart, à tenir à distance, à refuser une appartenance pleine et entière à la communauté nationale*” (ibid.).⁹⁷

Through the rhetoric of good/bad immigrant, real/fake French, successful/failed integration, as well as the separation between a borderline “them” and a national/normal “us,” the *enfants d’immigrés algériens* thought as non-assimilated, are, openly or subtly, held responsible for their supposed non assimilation (Deltombe and Rigouste 2005). In addition,

⁹² in its exceptional civilizing kindness

⁹³ She is the disciplined animal, the assimilated animal, and, in the collective unconscious, assimilation is the only condition of her humanity.

⁹⁴ Just like colonization, which is a *total fact*, the negation of self, the ascetic enterprise, has to be *absolute*. The *ascète* has to start again from scratch.

⁹⁵ My translation : “[the] State cannot be satisfied with a half-way assimilation”

⁹⁶ My translation: “And Ivan Rioufol, [...] calls out the notorious player: ‘Yes, we would like Zinedine Zidane, who does not hide his tenderness for the Algeria [should he?] of his roots, to define himself clearly, that’s to say as exclusively [sic] French.’”

⁹⁷ My translation: “this dualistic thinking amounts to putting aside, keeping distance, refusing his full and complete belonging to the national community.”

the latter can only be a “lack of willingness” and proves the immigrant’s daughter/son’s “superficial belonging” to the “national community” (ibid.). During the 2001 France-Algeria football match held at the national stadium, initially presented as a symbolic act of “reconciliation,” a minority of the French spectators of Algerian descent “stormed” the pitch in the second half of the game. In a brilliant article published in 2003, Harzoune shows how public comments made after the game are a conspicuous example of the colonial discourse I have just mentioned. Indeed, comments gushed out to blame “these youngsters” (“*ces jeunes*”) who were probably manipulated, like the young girls who refused to uncover their head probably had been as well. It blamed them for their *attitude* – like a dad scolds out his *undisciplined* kid (Harzoune 2003). Again, the paternalist gaze takes any form of agency off them. In addition, it establishes, right away, an arbitrary connection with their double national/cultural belonging (ibid.). Thus, by such attitude, immediately *interpreted* as a disavowal of the nation, not only do they “confirm” their “non-full belonging” to the “national community” – that the colonial/patriarchal unconscious already assumed, but they also show the impossibility of a “full belonging” to the nation and the impossibility of their assimilation (ibid.). Abd Al Malik, powerful(ly) writes: “*C’est parce qu’ils ne se sentent pas français [...] c’est [donc] parce qu’ils ne sont pas français [...] C’est le choc frontal du signifié et du signifiant, de l’avouable et de l’inavoué, de l’audible et de l’inaudible. C’est alambiqué, mais ça fait du bruit, l’ambigu*” (Abd Al Malik 2010, 62-63).⁹⁸

Yet, even though *l’indigène* or *enfant d’immigrés* is responsible for her own *ascétisme*, the latter is, like colonization, an infinite enterprise, an ideal, an *illusion*. The ascetic ideal (“*ideal ascétique*”) is a narcissistic, reinforcing image of the dominant. Thus, the belonging to the French nation always remains virtual, superficial. *C’est “la recherche implicite d’une*

⁹⁸ My translation: “That is because they do not *feel* French [...] that is because they *are* not French [then] [...] It is the head-on shock of the signifier and the signified, of the confessable and the yet-to-be-confessed, of the hearable and the unheard. It is tortuous, but it resounds, the ambiguous.”

reconnaissance impossible” qui “s’apparente à l’impossibilité de se défaire de soi” (Luste Boulbina 2008, 23; 19).⁹⁹

Therefore, the receiving society always has the right to bring her down to her “origin,” and it is this society alone who can judge her “degree of assimilation” (or “degree of Frenchness”). In this regard, it is striking to observe that the top of the citizenship application form asks whether the person wishes to demand “*la francisation de [s]es nom et prénom*” (Vosdroits.service-public.fr 2014).¹⁰⁰ Beyond the immense coloniality of such an “offer,” I wonder whether an affirmative answer raises the imagined “degree of willingness to assimilate” and consequently the chances to access citizenship.

Not only does the slightest “error,” or “*défaut d’assimilation*,” bring her back down to her “origin,” but *the slightest “error” appears as a confirmation of her superficial belonging to the nation*. In his last game with the French National Team, which was also the 2006 World Cup Finals, the footballer Zinédine Zidane headbutted the Italian player Materazzi after the latter insulted him on the pitch. Immediately, the national hero who had permitted the 1998 World Cup victory was brought back down to his “*Algérianité*.” He was, then, “*Pied-noir*” and “*kabyle*.” It is precisely because it is an ideal that *l’idéal ascétique does not allow the “citizen of origin” to make “mistakes.*” If she does, white gaze does not forgive because it perceives it as a confirmation of her naturally assumed deviance and periphery within the nation on account of her “origin.” These words published in *Le Monde* are an example of the violence of the media commentaries:

Il a raté sa sortie, comme un enfant trop gâté et mal élevé. Dimanche 9 juillet, lors de la finale de la Coupe du monde en Allemagne, Zinédine Zidane a terni la fin de son histoire de footballeur de génie par un coup de tête inadmissible, intolérable, inexcusable. [...] Un coup de tête, tout s’écroule, et ses précédents écarts reviennent en mémoire. [...] Un coup de tête, et c’est le versant sombre du personnage qui

⁹⁹ My translation: “the implicit pursuit of impossible recognition” that “is like the impossibility of getting rid of oneself.”

¹⁰⁰ My translation: “the ‘French-like-ization’ of my last and first names”

réapparaît, *sa face noire, revers de l'image colportée de l'un des hommes publics préférés des Français. Dimanche, les Italiens ont battu les Bleus en finale de la Coupe du monde. La France a surtout perdu Zizou.* (Causset 2006 in Luste Boulbina 2008, 19)¹⁰¹

There is good Zizou, the national hero – the one who loves and serves the country, and there is bad Zidane, – *le sale gosse, le mauvais élève* (bad kid), the one that French white gaze had *almost* forgotten yet that always *threatened* to reappear. Everything happens as if, in his *attitude* that day, Zidane showed his *real nature*; this marks the point of no return. In 2001, there was no sign whatsoever of a religious motive or character in the intrusion of spectators on the pitch, yet they were labeled “*jeunes Français musulmans*,” those who “stormed” the football pitch (Harzoune 2003). Likewise, girls who refuse to uncover their heads, in this case *françaises “musulmanes*,” through their “provoking attitude,” were “disloyal” to the Republic (Hajjat 2010). This “attitude” places them on a circle (Luste Boulbina’s concentric circles of “familiarity”) far from the “French” “*noyau dur*,” which is *dans “l’impensé des consciences*,” the white heterosexual male. It becomes the evidence of the *expected* “inassimilability” of the “*musulmans français*,” who, “once again,” in a hegemonic *pensée impensée*, “confirm” their position as “*Arabes*.”

The French of Algerian descent, like the *indigène* in the past, has to do more than any other. She does not have the right of the “fault.” However, she cannot complain about this unequal treatment. *Le “bon immigré” est celui “qui ne montre pas sa plaie”*¹⁰² (Luste Boulbina 2008). “*On n’est pas protégé parce qu’on est issu d’une minorité, parce qu’on est d’origine maghrébine ou africaine. On doit [faire] comme les autres, et je dois même dire,*

¹⁰¹ My translation: “He failed his ending, like a *child too spoiled and ill-mannered*. On Sunday 9th of July, in the World Cup Finals against Germany, Zinédine Zidane stained the end of his history as a genius football player in a head-butt *inadmissible, intolerable, inexcusable*. [...] A head-butt, everything falls apart, and *his previous misbehaviors come back to mind*. [...] A head-butt, and it is the *dark* side of the character that *reappears*, his *black* face, the backlash of the hawked image of one of the French’s favorite public figures. On Sunday, the Italians beat the *Bleus* in the World Cup Finals. France mostly lost *Zizou*.” (Stresses are mine)

¹⁰² My translation: The “good immigrant” is the one “who does not show her wound.”

plus que les autres” (Nadine Morano¹⁰³ 2008, cited in Geisser and Soum 2009, 103).¹⁰⁴ To pretend that a form of reverse racism privileges the immigrant is a typical strategy that aims at establishing racism. In addition, this discourse is fueled by the illusion that through *ascétisme* (assimilation) the immigrant becomes *normal* French. But in fact, as Akli Mellouli¹⁰⁵ says to his child: “*Ne te casse pas la tête mon fils ! Tu ne seras jamais assez bien pour eux ! Tu ne seras jamais au bon endroit ! On se demande d’ailleurs ce que tu fais là !*” (Akli Mellouli 2007, cited in Geisser and Soum 2009, 103).¹⁰⁶

Does discourse analysis inevitably trigger in me a response that reproduces the same binary logic of violence? This is a complex question because the transformation process does require consciousness of the conditioning of constructed racial identities in the colonial order. At the same time, transformation compels me to go beyond these dichotomies to a place where I can approach conflicts in terms of human beings, relations, and transformational energies. This is where I find myself, in the negotiation of these places. They are conflicting and I take them as an opportunity to create my own journey towards a moving consciousness.

Islam, République et Banlieues Ou la Rhétorique d’un Racisme Postcolonial

Islamisation, Ghettoïsation et Stigmatisations

The dominant discourse and its representations make the figure of the “French Arab” a threat to “national identity” as well as “Republican identity,” in which Islam is presented as a key factor of threat and “*la banlieue*” its stage.

Tout se passe comme si, également, l’État français postcolonial s’élevait sur un champ de ruines tel qu’il faille réhabiliter d’abord la république (qui ignore les différences et

¹⁰³ Nadine Morano is a politician who belongs to the conventional right-wing party (UMP). In 2008, she was Secretary of State in charge of family issues.

¹⁰⁴ My translation: “One is not protected because she is part of a minority, because she is of Maghreb or African origin. One should [work] like any other, and I shall say, more than any other.”

¹⁰⁵ Akli Mellouli is Deputy Mayor of Bonneuil-sur-Marne.

¹⁰⁶ My translation: “Don’t put yourself out, my son! You will never be good enough for them! You will never be in the right place! In fact, they even wonder what you’re doing here!”

les «communautés »), puis la laïcité (qui réprovoe le voile), ensuite l'identité nationale (qui cache la « diversité culturelle ») pour exister pleinement. (Luste Boulbina 2007, 13)¹⁰⁷

Thus, Luste Boulbina sarcastically notes, the “Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-development,” created in 2007, could be re-baptized “*ministère du redressement national*” (ministry of national recovery). A few scholars, united in a petition for the elimination of the aforementioned ministry, argue:

Réfugiés et migrants, notamment originaires de Méditerranée et d’Afrique, et leurs descendants, sont séparés d’un «nous» national pas seulement imaginaire puisque ses frontières se redessinent sur les plans matériel, administratif et idéologique. (Libération 2009)¹⁰⁸

Hence, in less than two years, the government raised, at two different times, what it called “debates” on “national identity” and on “Islam and *laïcité*,” respectively. In fact, it very clearly did so in order to target the French Muslim community in a binary logic of us/them, *vrai/faux français, musulmans intégrés/non intégrés, immigrés assimilés/inassimilables* and to subtly re-claim that *le caractère français* is proudly “white” and Christian. For the implementation of the “debates on national identity,” the then minister of the Interior, Eric Besson, delivered a guide to local authorities. In the first point of “debate” titled “*quelles [sic] sont les éléments de notre identité nationale?*” (what are the elements of our national identity?), he makes direct references to “our wine” and “our churches and cathedrals,” for example. It appears as a clear message sent by French elite to signify that some human beings, regardless of their citizenship, are not part of the politico-socio-cultural community of France.

The violence of such postcolonial racism has reached a critical level in the last few years. In 2011, Claude Guéant, successor of Eric Besson, wrote to the *préfets* (local

¹⁰⁷ My translation: “Everything happens as if, as well, the French postcolonial State stood on a devastated battleground in a way that the Republic (which ignores differences and ‘communities’), then *laïcité* (which condemns the veil), and national identity (which hides ‘cultural diversity’) need to be rehabilitated in order to exist fully.”

¹⁰⁸ My translation: “Refugees and migrants, particularly from the Mediterranean and from Africa, as well as their descendants, are separated from a national ‘we’ that is not solely imaginary since its borders are reshaping at material, administrative, and ideological levels.”

authorities) a letter titled “*Circulaire du 24 août 2011 relative au contrôle de l’assimilation dans les procédures d’acquisition de la nationalité française*” (Vosdroits.service-public.fr 2014). In very explicit language, this letter specifically targets the persons of Muslim faith, origin or culture, yet without naming any community. It could be renamed “witch-hunting of non assimilated Muslims.” Listing all reasons of “*indignité*” and “*défaut d’assimilation*,” the minister clearly establishes how being granted citizenship constitutes *the exception*, and having it denied, *the rule*. “Muslim men,” represented as essentialized misogynists, are particularly targeted by a castrating discourse. It does not defend the rights of women who are represented as the unconscious victims, yet accomplices, of the Muslim male phallus; however, it deprives the “Muslim man” of the power related to his constructed maleness. Quite significantly, the minister ends his letter with the following words: “*Je vous demande d’accorder la plus grande vigilance à la mise en œuvre de ces instructions afin d’assurer un suivi particulier des dossiers présentant un défaut d’assimilation*” (ibid.).¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, looking at the dominant discourse, it seems that for the last ten years the Republic has been constantly under the overwhelming threat of ethnic separatism. Terms such as “*communautarisme*” and “*ghettoisation*” are repetitively used. Last year, the then Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault ordered a report to elaborate strategies for the “re-foundation of the politics of integration” in France. The report radically unsettled the established colonial imaginary of the Republic in a way never seen before. It triggered an incredible wave of violent reactions (Le Point 2013a), often rigged out in an “(extra)ordinary racism” (‘*Racisme (Extra)Ordinaire*’ 2014), which led the Prime Minister to immediately abandon the project. The report aimed at “*répondre à l’attente des personnes immigrées et de leurs descendants: être considéré comme n’importe quel Français*,” “*faire France en reconnaissant la richesse des identités multiples*,” “*reconnaître toutes les migrations comme constitutives de la nation*”

¹⁰⁹ My translation: “I am asking you to devote the biggest vigilance in implementing these instructions in order to ensure a particular follow-up to the cases that show an assimilation defect.”

(Le Figaro 2013a; Le Point 2013b). It argued that “[l]a France devrait assumer la dimension *“arabo-orientale”* (comme afro-antillaise, océanindienne, mélano-polynésienne ou sud-est asiatique) de son identité et sortir de son attitude postcoloniale” (ibid.).¹¹⁰ Politicians and intellectuals rose up to defend the Republic against what they labeled as a “provocation,” the promotion of “communautarism,” the “negation of the Republic” of its values, of “Republican integration” and “national unity.” They qualified it as *“la négation nationale”* (Le Figaro 2013b), and beyond this, their language suggests that they perceived it as a personal attack. In the national unconscious, the *model* of the Republic is undoubtedly and proudly superior to the Anglo-Saxon multicultural paradigm. The violence of these reactions shows how deeply the Republican model is ingrained in the commonly understood sense of national patriotism and how difficult it is to challenge the model of the Republic in public debate. This is an example of the reactions I mention:

Comme les bons élèves, qui sont souvent la cible des railleries de leurs petits camarades, l'homme blanc et hétérosexuel pourrait bientôt être obligé, dans notre pays, de se cacher. Ce propos n'est pas celui d'un odieux réactionnaire. Il s'impose à la lecture du rapport commandé par le premier ministre pour nourrir sa réflexion sur la refonte de la politique d'intégration française. (Le Figaro 2013b)¹¹¹

These right-minded owners of “national identity” have become the defenders of a “national identity” *“de souche”* associated with a constructed “whiteness” that is European, French, Christian, and loyal to the laic-Republican package. Thus, the recognition of all migrations and multiple identities as part of the nation is not a threat to “national identity,” but rather to its white narcissistic foundation. Likewise, the threat to the Republican identity

¹¹⁰ My translation: The report aimed at “responding to the expectation of the immigrants and their descendants: to be considered like any other French,” “consolidating France by recognizing the richness of multiple identities,” “recognizing all migrations as constitutive of the nation.” It argued that “France should come to terms with the ‘Arab-oriental’ (and Afro-antillaise, Oceanian, Malayo-Polynesian and south-east Asian) dimension of its identity and break with its postcolonial attitude.”

¹¹¹ My translation: “Like *good students*, who are often the target of mockery by their *little friends*, the *white heterosexual male* could soon have to hide, in our dear country. These words are not ones of an obnoxious reactionary. They inevitably follow when one reads the report ordered by the Prime Minister to nourish his reflection on how to remake French integration politics.” (stresses are mine)

model is not a threat to the Republic, but rather to the national/racial differentiation on which the Republic rests.

La laïcité, continuously waved as the sacred Republican value to defend, untouchable, and last guarantor of “Republican equality” is *fundamentally* “white” and Christian. In the last ten years, this so-called *laïcité*, meant to keep any kind of religious “ostentation” in the *private* sphere, has become the *public* defense of the “white-Christianness” of “national identity.” In other words, *laïcité* has become the avatar of Republican racism. It has become the Republican justification of a racism rooted in the Republic – in the myth of egalitarian Republic. It has become the racist instrument of *la grande exception française* – white, superior, and colonial.

L’Islamophobie Ou la “Haine Respectable”

The expression of postcolonial racism, coupled with the post-9/11 international context directly inherited from the Clash of Civilizations doctrine, has led in the last years to a frightening expansion and normalization of racist acts and acts of speech. This is confirmed by the 2013 report of the *Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l’Homme* (CNCDH), published earlier this year. Particularly, the CNCDH points out an overwhelming rise of a specific form of racism: one that is explicitly directed towards Islam and Muslim people. The great rise of the *Front National* (FN), the main nationalist/racist party who digs its votes in a growing anti-immigration, anti-Muslim rhetoric is noticeable. Yet, it is important to spell out that such racist explosions, taking place in the wider European context, are partly the consequence of a constant and constantly growing politics of fear that conventional parties have ruled by for the last ten years or so.

Concomitantly, Christine Lazerges, the president of CNCDH, also notes the rising use in public discourse of the term “islamophobia.” It refers to the fear of Islam that translates into acts of violence against the Muslim community. This term is important for what it *signifies* –

for the *recognition* of a violent reality, a specific form of racism that is increasingly sneaking into all aspects of public life. It is even more so because there is a sort of unsaid yet palpable resistance from the state towards such a recognition (Libération 2013b).

However, the rising hegemonic *discourse* that has emerged around the term “islamophobia” tends to fuel the reality it is supposed to tackle. Indeed, the systematic use of the term appears as a way not to name what the matter really is: RACISM.

Dès lors, comment comprendre qu'on puisse parler de xénophobie ou d'islamophobie ? Est-ce pour en faire des attitudes relevant de la pathologie, dont on n'est pas responsable, pour en faire des troubles de l'inconscient, des «maladies» que l'on subit donc, et que l'on ne choisit pas, comme on ne décide pas un jour d'avoir la phobie des objets tranchants ou des araignées ? Les mots ne sont jamais neutres : parler d'islamophobie (ou d'homophobie ou de xénophobie...) évite en fait de dire qu'on peut volontairement, intellectuellement, culturellement, idéologiquement, politiquement, refuser l'altérité, rejeter l'autre - non pour ce qu'il fait, mais pour ce qu'il est -, bref, être raciste. (Maggiore 2013)¹¹²

Marwan Mohammed, spokesperson of the *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF), endorses the legitimacy of the term but condemns its dominant use in discourse (Libération 2013b). It appears as a softer reality, “*un racisme acceptable*” (ibid.), or in the words censored by *Le Monde* and reproduced by Alain Gresh, of Thomas Deltombe, *un “racisme sans race,” une “haine respectable*” (Gresh 2013).¹¹³ Islamophobia does exist; it is the fear of Islam as a religion and it is increasingly tangible in society. However, beyond Islamophobia, what I think exists even more is a form of anti-Muslim racism, that is, the production and reproduction of racist acts, discourses, and practices targeting communities of Muslim faith, origin, and culture.

¹¹² My translation: “Therefore, how are we to understand that we are able to talk about xenophobia or islamophobia? Is it to turn them into attitudes that fall under pathology, of which one is not responsible, to turn them in unconscious trouble, ‘illnesses’ that we, thus, suffer from, and that we do not choose, like we do not decide one day to have an aversion to cutting items or to spiders? Words never are neutral: to talk about islamophobia (or homophobia or xenophobia) prevents one from saying that one can willingly, intellectually, culturally, ideologically, politically, refuse otherness, negate the other – not for what she does, but for what she is –, in a word, racist.”

¹¹³ My translation: “racism without race,” “respectable hatred”

Furthermore, by naming the religion whose believers are targeted, “islamophobia” points at Islam as the specific “factor” of such racism. In doing so, it almost makes Islam the cause of its own racism. In a context of growing normalization of anti-Muslim racist acts and acts of speech in a global, post-9/11 context, it appears as if Muslim people, for their “obvious tendency towards fundamentalism” are the cause of their own racism (Gresh 2013). Likewise, Lazerges notes that racist acts qualified as “islamophobic” are legally less sanctioned by criminal law than are similar acts qualified as “racist” (Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l’Homme 2014).

Beyond that, it almost appears, in the national unconscious, as if “islamophobia” was an act of freedom of expression, the expression of *laïcité* (ibid.). I dare to say that in “*l’impensé des consciences*,” anti-Muslim racism is the consequence of the “incompatibility” of Islam with the Republic, and also of the “inassimilability” of “*les musulmans français*” – to the possible extent that it might exist as unconsciously legitimate. Indeed, the hegemonic discourse on “islamophobia” shall not make us forget about the unrecognized (but well and truly existing) postcolonial racism, exceptionally directed towards the “*musulman français*,” who is not any Muslim French but rather “*le rappel vivant de la défunte entreprise coloniale*” (Memmi 2004, 97).¹¹⁴ In fact, the discourse on “islamophobia” contributes to the negation of this particular form of racism that this thesis aims to tease out. It turns a blind eye to the racism of exception that impacts the citizens of Algerian descent. I am not denying here the existence of a racism targeting all so-called “Muslims” in France – one that is dangerously expanding in Europe. However, I do argue that in the persons of the French citizens of Algerian descent, racism is more complex. It operates in a way that this general revulsion against a community constructed as Muslim intersects with an exceptional form of racism

¹¹⁴ My translation: “the living reminder of the lost colonial enterprise”

directly inherited from colonialism and filled with representations, discourses, institutions, and practices of the colonial imaginary.

In France, “Islamophobia” is part of the *hegemonic discourse* – pronounced by the state to legitimate a reality that it has created. Indeed, while they are condemning so-called “Islamophobia,” many political leaders keep on stigmatizing Muslim communities by perpetually creating controversies around such things as the Islamic veil or halal restaurants, which in fact *are not* topics of debate until said politicians represent them as questions of “national identity.” These strategic nationalist discourses, sociologist Marwan Mohammed argues, have played a huge role in constructing a “*problème musulman*” (Muslim problem) (Libération 2013c). “[O]n ne peut pas comprendre les réactions hostiles à une femme portant le hijab sans le mettre en rapport avec vingt ans de discours politique et médiatique sur ce sujet.” (ibid.)¹¹⁵ Alain Finkielkraut is an openly anti-Muslim racist thinker who writes about “the threat that the refusal of integration of French youth represents for national identity.” Yet he was recently given the national recognition, supported by many “respectable figures” of the French elite, of being elected at the *Académie française* – a highly recognized national institution composed of 40 “immortal” scholars and authors. To me, this political decision appears as *the establishment and normalization, by the state, of an anti-Muslim racism directed towards les “français musulmans,”* the descendants of postcolonial immigration. It targets specifically the descendants of Algeria – “the most inassimilable of all” – who carry, on top of ethnicity, religion and coloniality, *l’exception d’un colonialisme inachevé.*¹¹⁶

Les Banlieues Ou La Production de l’Altérité

The *exceptionality* of the racist construction of the French of Algerian descent in a system of (post)colonial representations, discourses, and practices, is pushed to an extreme in

¹¹⁵ My translation: “[O]ne cannot understand hostile reactions towards a woman wearing hijab if one does not put it in relation with twenty years of political and media discourse on this topic.”

¹¹⁶ the exception of a living colonialism

the dominant imaginary on the “*banlieues de la République*” or in Lapeyronnie’s terms, “*le théâtre colonial*” (Lapeyronnie 2005).

The *banlieues populaires* (working-class *banlieues*)¹¹⁷ are postindustrial spaces located in the outskirts of big cities such as Paris, Lyon, Marseille, and Lille, which are characterized by their poor housing projects implemented a few decades ago and their high unemployment rate (Dikeç 2006). They are sites of high cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. However, they “are the repositories of the second generation of mass unemployment before they are the crucible of the second generation of immigrants” (Wacquant 2008). The security-oriented “politics of the *banlieues*,” in place particularly since the 1990s, has strengthened discriminatory representations, discourses, and practices towards the inhabitants of the *banlieues populaires*, particularly young “black” and of Maghreb background men, indifferently labeled as “*les jeunes de banlieues*.” There is great racial and territorial discrimination in accessing jobs and accommodation (Weil 2009b; Abd-Al-Malik 2010; Observatoire des discriminations 2004 among others). Furthermore, the legalization of repetitive identity checks and the reinforcement of the policing of the “*cités*” have been coupled with widespread racism among the police and have led to overwhelming police violence and impunity (Dikeç 2006; *France: Des Policiers Au-Dessus Des Lois ?* 2009; Abd-Al-Malik 2010 among others).

Mustafa Dikeç, a Professor in Human Geography at the University of London, explains:

[S]tarting particularly with the 1990s, there has been a strong stigmatisation of *banlieues* with reference to the formation of ghettos, ethnic separatism, and Islamic fundamentalism. When the ‘threat’ of *banlieues* was articulated in the 1970s, it did not involve ‘ethnic’ and religious connotations. Starting in the 1980s, however, the *banlieues* were associated with the ‘problem of immigration’, the problem being the ‘integration’ of non-European immigrants and their descendants into French society, and, starting in the 1990s, Islam became a dominant theme. (Dikeç 2006, 161)

¹¹⁷ Even though the dominant discourse uses the term *banlieues* to refer to the working-class *banlieues* as a stigmatizing strategy, there are also many upper-class *banlieues*.

Indeed, the inhabitants of the *banlieues* are the object of a hyper-stigmatizing discourse that associates such different and wide topics as Islam, immigration, and insecurity. Through these politics of representation, the *banlieues populaires* have become the image of the threat to the Republic, for the security of its national territory and for the integrity of its national identity.

In addition, the *banlieues* are constructed as off spaces – *des territoires de non droit*. They are located at the *periphery* of socio-political and geographical existence – *territoires de seconde zone avec des citoyens de seconde classe – des territoires d’exception*.¹¹⁸ “*Est-ce qu’on parle des banlieues ou est-ce qu’on parle de la France ? Est-ce qu’on parle d’une partie ou est-ce qu’on parle d’un tout ? De quoi parle-t-on ?*” (Abd-Al- Malik 2010, 19)¹¹⁹ This representation of a far-off reality, *une réalité lointaine*, recalls the colony.

*La banlieue est un espace mystifié. Comme la colonie, c’est un espace imaginaire et imaginé, une réalité immatérielle, qui ne vit qu’à travers la représentation. Comme la colonie, la banlieue n’est pas “pensée”. Ce qui est pensé c’est l’“immigration” ou la “sécurité,” c’est-à-dire que la banlieue, en tant que discours, n’existe que par sa relation avec la société dominante. Non défini, hors du temps, ce territoire de non-droit se justifie par sa propre existence et se caractérise par son extraterritorialité et son exceptionnalité.*¹²⁰

Through the hegemonic discourse of the elites and its mechanisms of postcolonial domination, the *banlieues populaires* are “deviant spaces” that the state ought to “discipline.”

En France aujourd’hui, les individus des « quartiers sensibles » sont réduits au silence sur le plan politique, maintenus dans une très forte dépendance économique et

¹¹⁸ Second-rate territories with second-class citizens – territories of exception

¹¹⁹ My translation: “Are we talking about the banlieues or are we talking about France? Are we talking about a portion or are we talking about a whole? What are we talking about?”

¹²⁰ The banlieue is a mystified space. Like the colony, it is imaginary and imagined, an immaterial reality, which only lives through representation. Like the colony, the banlieue is not “thought.” What is thought is “immigration” or “security,” in other words the banlieue, as a discourse, only exists through its relation with the dominant society. Undefined, off time, this off-law territory justifies itself through its own existence and characterizes itself by its *extraterritoriality* and its *exceptionality*.

dominés socialement et culturellement par un véritable « système » d'institutionnalisation du racisme et de rapports coloniaux. (Lapeyronnie 2005, 3)¹²¹

This “deviant character” is a collective and homogeneous assignation *from outside* – “*les jeunes des banlieues*,” represented as young boy, “Arab” (of Maghreb origin) or “black,” Muslim, misogynist, and probably “delinquent” or about to be one. It is a denial of agency – *une assignation territoriale et identitaire, un enfermement, un conditionnement, a confinement: racism.*

Racisme nom masculin. 1. [...] 2. Cimetière identitaire, métaphore intérieure de la prison à ciel ouvert. 3. Attitude d'hostilité systématique à l'encontre d'une catégorie déterminée de personnes. **Racisme envers les jeunes** : anti-Nous universel empêchant toute poussée dans les aigus du champ lexical qui permettrait de ne plus dire « jeune de banlieue » mais « jeune » tout court, en sous-entendant « citoyen » et peut-être même « semblable », voire « être humain ». 4. Conservatisme, virus malin, qui s'adapte, se développe même dans un environnement qui ne lui est pas favorable a priori, c'est un cancer d'un autre genre, d'un autre âge, une pathologie aux symptômes invisibles pour beaucoup mais qui gangrène sous la chair de nos jolis mensonges. (Abd-Al-Malik 2010, 61- 62)¹²²

This “*cimetière identitaire*” is “*une assignation territoriale*” that functions as “*une injonction identitaire*,” and these socio-spatial representations are the tools of a symbolic and material postcolonial domination (Hancock 2008). Territories are only metaphors of their inhabitants (Hancock 2008; Abd-Al-Malik 2010). In line with the “Republican tradition,” the rhetoric of “territories” allows the state to talk about communities that cannot be named ethno-religiously.¹²³ Through the stigmatization of the *banlieues*, the discourse assigns a homogenous representation of ethno-religious identity, even though the reality of the *banlieues* is much more complex. Therefore, everything that happens in the *banlieues* is

¹²¹ My translation: “In France today, the inhabitants of “sensitive neighborhoods” are reduced to silence at the political level, maintained in a state of strong economic dependence, and dominated socially and culturally by a real “system” of institutionalization of racism and colonial relations.”

¹²² My translation: “**Racism** masculine noun. 1. [...] 2. Identity cemetery, internal metaphor of the open-cut prison. 3. Attitude of systematic hostility towards a determined category of people. **Racism against the youth**: anti-universal Us that impedes any boost towards a higher pitch in the lexical field that would beneficially turn “jeune de banlieue” into “jeune” period, in an intention to hint “citizen” and maybe even “counterpart,” or “human being.” 4. Conservatism, malignant virus, that adapts, develops even in an environment that is not suitable *a priori*, it is cancer of another genre, of another age, a pathology whose symptoms are invisible for many, yet that gangrenes under the flesh of our pretty lies.”

¹²³ As Boulbina has shown, colonial language is filled with a series of euphemisms such as “territories” instead of “countries,” “presence” instead of “occupations,” etc.

represented as the result of such ethno-religious identity. Through this system of representation, the discourse looks for the stigma it has created. This explains why the “*question du voile*” has been thought of as the female version of the question of the *banlieues populaires* (Hancock 2008).

In a discourse that mixes indifferently questions of “security,” “Islam,” and “immigration,” such assigned ethno-religious identity targets *les enfants d’immigrés*, and the stigma is located in the failure of their “integration,” filled with an irrational and rhetorical fear that the *banlieues populaires* have become the “ghettos” of the Republic. Thus, the dominant voices of public debate interpreted the 2005 revolts as the expression of an identity crisis and “quickly gave rise to debates about ‘integrating’ the children of (non-European) immigrants, ethnic separatism, and Islamic fundamentalism” (Dikeç 2006, 162). Implicitly, “race” is (re)presented as the “natural cause of deviance” of the “*jeunes*.” “Race” matters for racism. In the *banlieues*, however, the government uses “race” as an argument to sustain the very discourse that creates a situation of oppression where race/religion functions as a factor of marginalization along with class as well as gender.

Therefore, this racist discourse initially targeting the *banlieues populaires* leads to a racism that targets the descendants of the colonized populations in general. It is a racism of exception, an assignation of territory and identity on the basis of an imaginary of exception – a colonial one that in a binary logic of “us” versus “them” opposes *l’indigène de la République* to *la République*. Part of the functioning of postcolonial racism in the *banlieues* is that the state claims that the differentiation is not racial, that’s to say racist, but rather due to the “exceptionality” of the “territory.”

The “exceptionality” of the situation in these “territories” – also called “*quartiers sensibles*” – justifies a treatment of exception, measures of exception, which are far too symbolic in this historical and geographical context. Thus, in 2005, the discourse of Nicolas

Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior and key political figure of the revolts, reveals an urge, an impulse, and a necessity, to *éradiquer* (eradicate) the criminality of the *banlieues populaires* through phrases like *nettoyage* (cleansing); *kärcher* (German brand that sells very powerful outdoor cleaning machines using strong water jets); *racaille* (rabble); *voyous* (louts); *on va vous en [la racaille] débarasser* (we are going to get rid of it [the rabble] for you); *tolérance zero* (zero tolerance).¹²⁴ On top of that, the declaration of state of emergency “added insult to the injury” (Dikeç 2006, 161). The implementation of a law that was created in 1955 to kill the Algerian independentist movement and legitimized the use of torture and rape as an institutionalized and systematized weapon of war was nothing but a “colonial provocation” (Bernard 2005). “*Face à quels autres citoyens le gouvernement exhumerait-il un texte législatif conçu pour mater une rébellion coloniale?*” (ibid.)¹²⁵

The same Nicolas Sarkozy, this time as president of the Republic, reiterated these sentiments in 2010 in his sadly famous “Grenoble speech,” thirty minutes of sick speech combining hypocrisy, hatred, and diverse forms of stigmatizations towards the inhabitants of the *banlieues populaires*.¹²⁶

*C'est donc une guerre que nous avons décidé de mener contre les trafiquants et les délinquants, comme en Seine-Saint-Denis. Nous avons décidé de nous occuper particulièrement de certains territoires qui ont besoin d'une action ciblée pour que les conditions de l'ordre républicain y soient rétablies. Tel est le cas de cette ville et de ce département. Il n'y a aucune volonté de stigmatisation. Tous les élus, ce n'est pas une affaire d'opposition, de majorité, de gauche ou de droite, c'est une affaire d'intérêt général [sic]. (Elysée 2011)*¹²⁷

¹²⁴ On 30th of October, on the national TV channel France 3, Eric Raoult, Mayor of Raincy, a town located in the same *département* of Clichy-sous-bois, confirmed: “*Nicolas Sarkozy a eu raison de faire passer le message qu'il y a les gens, et puis il y a la racaille.*” - My translation: “Nicolas Sarkozy was right to pass on the message that there is people, and then there is rabble.” (youtube video of France 3 10/31/2005 program)

¹²⁵ My translation: “To which other citizens would the government dig out a legal text produced to put down a colonial rebellion?”

¹²⁶ It matters to specify that through this speech Nicolas Sarkozy officially appointed a policeman to the position of *préfet* of Isère (the highest ranked civil servant of the *département*) – the same measure he had taken for Seine-Saint-Denis, the most “famous” of all *départements* of “*quartiers sensibles*.”

¹²⁷ My translation: “It is therefore a *war* that we have decided to carry out against *traffickers* and *delinquents*, like in Seine-Saint-Denis. We have decided to take particular care of *certain territories* that need *targeted action* in order to reestablish the conditions of *Republican order*. This is the case for this town and this *département*.”

The political discourse held in cases of manifestations of violence (resistance?) in the *banlieues populaires* is a very symbolic discourse of “war,” one that led an activist from Vaulx-en-Velin to say “the Algerian War is not over in France” (Abdel 2002, cited in Dikeç 2006). *Ce discours de guerre est un discours de force, un discours “d’homme à homme” et un discours de castration.* This war discourse is a “male to male,” castrating discourse—inherently part of the colonial relation – a phallus-centered demonstration of force that aims at asserting sexual power and controlling women’s bodies.

Finally, this discourse of colonial power aims at showing the French *enfants d’immigrés* that it is not they who are the owners of their future in this “territory.” In assimilating issues of insecurity to the enforcement of the immigration policy, the discourse re-asserts that French descendants of Algeria are second-class citizens, whose future as members of the national community is not granted. The recurrent discourses on *déchéance de la nationalité* (loss of national citizenship) are a conspicuous example.



As a sign of “full” belonging, a French man shows his voting registration card at a demonstration for equal treatment of all “territories” in Marseille, June 2013, my own photo.

There is no intention to stigmatize. All elected representatives, it is not a matter of opposition, majority, left or right, it is a matter of *general interest* [sic].” (Stresses are mine).

In 2010, Abd-Al-Malik writes a powerful piece, which juxtaposes story and reality in the *banlieues*, which he entitles *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu* (The war of the banlieues will not take place). Through the voice of Peggy, a young man from a working-class *banlieue* (who becomes Suleymane through his conversion to Islam), he is able to shift the dominant look and reflect a subjectivity from within. Purposefully alternating between two literary styles – “*l’auteur se fait narrateur*” d’une “*histoire de banlieue*” (the author becomes the narrator of a story of *banlieue*) and “*moi, Peggy, personnage principal, m’empare de mon histoire et la raconte moi-même*” (I, Peggy, main character, take over my own story and tell it myself), he highlights the character’s radical consciousness over his own reality. Abd-Al-Malik brilliantly shows the injustice of a hegemonic and taken-for-granted *discourse* that silences the subjectivity of oppressed lives through a unilateral power to *represent* and construct a reality that is *totally* stigmatized, mystified, and of which it knows nothing. He writes:

Mais aviez-vous déjà pris le pouls de cette jeunesse, je veux dire avant qu’elle ne soit malade ? Non ! Mais vous vous confondez pourtant en diagnostics hasardeux. Vos intelligences peuvent-elles admettre que ce mal ne ressemble à aucun autre ? Vous ne le connaissez pas. Vous ne les connaissez pas. (Abd-Al-Malik 2010, 62)¹²⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the dominant/consensual discourse in France on “diversity” and “immigration” in relation to the construction of the figure of the *français musulmans*, in particular of Algerian descent. I have heavily relied on discourses of political figures, often supported by conventional “intellectuals,” legal texts, institutional rules, and media coverage. Indeed, the French Algerian citizens are imprisoned by hegemonic

¹²⁸ My translation: “But had you ever had your finger on the pulse of this youth, I mean before it fell sick? No! But still you are effusive in your hazardous diagnostics. Can your intelligences admit that this sickness is not like any other? You don’t know it. You don’t know them.”

representations built through a stigmatizing discourse that compels “certain populations” to “integrate.”

Through my research I have found that this established relation of power is determined by a patriarchal-racist gaze that constructs the French citizens of Algerian descent as the *subjects* of the French Republic. “Naturally inferior,” “Other,” they ought to be “disciplined.” Concomitantly, through this racism of exception, they, like their parents in *l’Algérie française*, are the guarantors of the French grandeur. Indeed, it is in opposition and in relation to the constructed figure of the “*Français musulman*,” from the *banlieues*, that the “dream” of the French Republic and its grand values of *égalité* and *laïcité* is, in the discourse, alive.

The French descendants of Algeria represented as a threat to a “national identity” that is, in the collective unconscious, “white,” Christian, and loyal to the Republic-*laïcité* package. Through such discourse, they are “tolerated” if they remain “invisible,” that is, *assimilated*. In the Republican imaginary, the *enfants d’immigrés* are responsible for their own “assimilation” or “*défaut d’assimilation*” to the “nation.” Besides, only the latter is able to judge. In this imaginary, they do not have the right to make “errors,” and if they do, it works as the evident representation of their expected superficial belonging to the nation. Through these politics of representation, the discourse vividly maintains the illusion of “integration” into a *grande République égalitaire et laïque*. It is through this postcolonial “*mission civilisatrice*” that France “remains grand” (white). A “*mission civilisatrice*” that, by definition, is *un projet impossible, une entreprise sans fin, une guerre totale*.¹²⁹

Such construction of self through negation of other plays out through constant racial and racist stigmatization that hides behind the defense of Republican values. Specifically, “Islam” and the “*banlieues*” function as the avatars of a postcolonial racism applied upon the

¹²⁹ an impossible project, an infinite enterprise, an absolute war

so-perceived French Muslims (most importantly) of Algerian descent. Through them, the dominant discourse represents Islam as a threat to *laïcité* and the *banlieues* as “territories” of exception. It enables the state to practice racism without explicitly targeting communities. In an international context of stigmatization of Islam in most Western nations, and through a rhetoric of fear of so-called “ghettos,” Islam fundamentalism and “illegal immigration,” the discourse makes the systematic confusion “*jeune de banlieue*,” “*issu de l’immigration*,” and “potentially fundamentalist” (and “terrorist”). It aims at reaffirming the non-full belonging in the “French community” of the French-Algerian citizens. It reaffirms who holds patriarchal power.

More specifically, the “*banlieues*” are represented as a far-off space on the geographical and political-social periphery of the nation. Just as the Republic was constructed with *l’Algérie française*, Republican identity today constructs itself with the French immigrant, child of *indigènes* parents, represented as Muslim and from the *banlieues*. This postcolonial form of racism is complex because it plays out through the intersection of multiple factors of stigmatization: class, “race,” religion, gender, and history. It is hidden behind discourses that use an apparently non-racial rhetoric that does not specifically name. I have argued that these elements are perpetual tools of the patriarchal-racist gaze/discourse of systematic injunction to “integrate” which, in the “*impensé des consciences*,” is addressed to the (French) child of (Algerian) *indigènes*.

By teasing out the racist discourse that targets all of these elements, I have tried to show that the latter relies on a coloniality of knowledge that reproduces and remakes the discourses, practices, representations, and institutions of the French colonialist project. This postcolonial racism is deeply internalized in a way that it is invisible. It functions in a way that takes for granted its white, narcissistic nature and makes the French of Algerian descent

unheard and unhearable. The *enfant d'indigènes* is concomitantly a threat and the guarantor for the grand Republic.

Republic and diversity are compatible. However, it is necessary that French society decolonize itself as well as the political project of the Republic in order to create the space from where it is possible to live together in balance throughout diversities, stories, and identities.

Chapter 3: Notes towards Transformative Decolonization

This is the story of a house. It has been lived in by many people. Our grandmother, Baba, made this house living space. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around us. She was certain that we were shaped by space. From her I learned about aesthetics, the yearning for beauty that she tells me is the predicament of heart that makes our passion real. A quiltmaker, she teaches me about color. Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space. In rooms full of objects, crowded with things, I am learning to recognize myself. She hands me a mirror, showing me how to look. The color of wine she has made in my cup, the beauty of the everyday. Surrounded by fields of tobacco, the leaves braided her hair, dried and hung, circles and circles of smoke fill the air. We string red peppers fiery hot, with thread that will not be seen. They will hang in front of a lace curtain to catch the sun. Look, she tells me, what the light does to color! Do you believe that space can give life, or take it away, that space has power? These are the questions she asks which frighten me. Baba dies an old woman, out of place. Her funeral is also a place to see things, to recognize myself. How can I be sad in the face of death, surrounded by so much beauty? Dead, hidden in a field of tulips, wearing my face and calling my name. Baba can make them grow. Red, yellow, they surround her body like lovers in a swoon, tulips everywhere. Here a soul on fire with beauty burns and passes, a soul touched by flame. We see her leave. She has taught me how to look at the world and see beauty. She has taught me 'we must learn to see.'

(hooks 1990, 103)

Itinerary

This discussion takes place within a difficult context marked by the domination in the public sphere of “debates” involving issues of “immigration,” “race,” and the French so-called “*issus de l’immigration*.” This context is also marked by the widening tension between the simultaneous omnipresence and denial of racism in the public space, mostly directed towards the so-called “French Muslims.” Finally, the descendants of the colonized *indigènes* demand full belonging and, accordingly, that the discourse of abstract Republican equality translates on ground, in the realities of intra-national relations. The institutions, practices, and representations of the state are disconnected from the people that make up French society. The

postcolonial reflection has slowly penetrated French Academia since the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, yet it still bears great resistances from the French intelligentsia. The challenge that lies in front of society in France today is *how* it must lead this reflection. It is more a conceptual, methodological, epistemological question than a question of content.

In chapter one, I explore in direct relation to Algeria as a colony how the French Republic is constituted by and constitutive of the differentiation between white colonial France and the colonized *indigènes* Other. I have argued that the negation to tell plural and complex stories of colonialism reproduces and recreates the colonial hierarchy within French society today. It marginalizes the citizens of colonized descent, *les enfants d'immigrés*, from the national imaginary. The contradiction between the conservatism of the French universalist tradition and the realities of racial and social discriminations lead to a colonial/national malaise. In chapter two, I tease out the existence and functioning of a form of postcolonial racism using analysis of legal, media, and political discourses. I focus on the French of colonized descent, most importantly the figures of the “*Français-e-s musulman-e-s*,” specifically “*d’origine algérienne*.” I have claimed that through familiar representations, institutions, practices, and discourses, such as the discourse of “integration,” postcolonial racism remakes the French colonial project of the “*mission civilisatrice*.”

My intention in this chapter is to explore a transformative process of decolonization. I do not intend to provide a solution or to transform postcolonial conflicts. These are multiple and manifest in multiple forms. Rather, epistemologically and ontologically I want to frame a transformative process of decolonization. This requires that I shift the dominant lens explored in the first two chapters and demonstrate that it is possible to start the postcolonial conversation on the challenges of postcoloniality and diversity in different ways. I propose to ask *how*-questions, in other words to replace power as a fundamental element of the discussions on diversity, immigration, and postcoloniality in France. I believe that the most

hearable voices on French diversity and postcoloniality have rooted their position in invisible assumptions that condition inequality. I propose to critically re-think the grounds of debate in a way that is sensitive to power and power relations. I make a reflective effort of transformative decolonization in order to lead myself and my reader towards a higher level of consciousness from where I, and society as a whole, can imagine and live out more peaceful and more equal relationships across “race,” gender, nationality, religion, and class in France. In doing so, the decolonial effort questions and problematizes the French Republic’s ethno-blind, universal representations on *égalité* and *laïcité*. Individually and collectively, it is important to look into such questions with humility. It is necessary to rethink the questions that have been asked, and to think those that have not but that help me to reframe such universal claims through transformative decolonization lenses – *faire un effort de détachement, ou plutôt de déplacement*. Decolonization compels people in France to make an effort of detachment, or rather displacement, in distinct and contextualized ways. This critical reflection process and questioning does not amount to demonizing, boxing, or assessing, but rather opens up new spaces for understanding, acting, and being in relation. It uses the power human beings have to transform energies, simultaneously unmaking and remaking relations and selves in conflict.

There exists a tension in my research with regards to the problematization, or rather the un-problematization, of the nation-state, which I have not addressed yet. I focus on postcolonial racism in relation to people of French belonging, by culture or nationality, most specifically second or third (or first who partly grew up in France) generation immigrants. I must also problematize the concept of French belonging by culture. What is culture? Who defines culture? Who defines belonging? Isn’t the very subject the only person entitled to decide upon her own culture and sense of belonging? There are many definitions of culture, just as there are many definitions of peace(s). All are valid, personal, and the result of one’s

experience and worldview of life. Also, as culture is a core element of identity, there is a tension in the very defining of the term between the perceptions of the subject herself and how others perceive her.

Even though I do not draw a line of belonging on the basis of legality or citizenship, my discussion still is located within an understanding of France as a nation. The latter is problematic in regards to my concerns for creating spaces of harmony in difference. The system of the nation-state creates a border, physical and symbolic, between a “we” and an “Other” on the basis of a factor of identity – national belonging – which is a construction of the same nation-state. In the modern system of nation-states, there is always an Other, the refugee, the asylum seeker, the undocumented. Also, as I focus on the specific case of the French, I wonder how such a system applies to and affects first generation Algerians in France. I understand “France” as the whole ensemble of people who inhabit/make up the landscape of France: territorially, spiritually, or culturally in the here and now, regardless of any factor such as nationality, “race,” ethnicity, language, religion/spirituality, etc. Most specifically, when I claim for a transformative decolonization of France, I do not limit my thoughts to any border of identity. In deconstructing postcolonial racism, I do focus on the people who, through the effects of postcolonial immigration, present cultural traits, such as language (understood as dynamic and plural), practices, and a common understanding of certain things that, relatively speaking, build a common ground for unity.¹³⁰ I also do acknowledge, and it seems very important to me to do so, that I am somehow drawing here a border that stems from the construction of the nation-state. It does not mean I do not challenge such construction. I do believe in radically plural identities that transcend such a construction. This is partly what I explore in this chapter, as I attempt to transform and create.

¹³⁰ Even language as factor of national belonging is relative. For example, and there are many more, the mother tongue of most French from the Antilles is creole. Similarly, many first generation immigrants from North Africa and West Africa speak French.

In the first part of this chapter, I look at decolonizing theory in France through the input of feminist and post-colonial approaches. I tease out how situated knowledges, de-centered perspectives, and decolonial epistemologies can respond to the necessity to engage with making silenced voices hearable in the French context. In the second part, I investigate the process of transformative decolonization in France. I highlight the need for the Republic to recognize the condition of postcoloniality in its complexities and pluralities in order to think of diversity as harmony in difference. Then, I explore the process of transformation as an unsettling, beautiful, and open process towards embracing the plurality of identities in contemporary France.

I engage in an interdisciplinary adventure, borrowing mostly from Peace and Conflict Studies, Critical Race Studies, Philosophy, Post-colonialism, Feminism, and Human geography. It is the result of my on-going reflection, made of the different perspectives, that have enriched my thoughts over two years studying Peace, Conflict, and Development in the framework of the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace at the Universitat Jaume I, Castelló, Spain. It is, like the pieces of a mind, messy. It is, furthermore, one proposition towards transformation, but surely not a final or sole answer. It is a more personal part of my work, one that reflects one image, and many images, of myself. It is moving. It connects my theories with my aesthetics – the creative “aesthetic agency” that fosters transformation and the practice of my freedom (Acampora and Cotten 2007). It is the dancing me.

I am concerned, particularly in this part of the process, with negotiating wisely my own location within my topic (Rich 2003; Haraway 1988; Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012). I must be sensitive to power while I argue for plurality. According to Peace Studies, I have an intersubjective relation with my research, which means that I, from where I stand, am simultaneously impacting and being impacted by the subject of my research. Thus my own location is fundamental. In my context of analysis, I am a white citizen who belongs to the

constructed French norm. My voice is a voice that comes from this position of power, with the realities and the blind spots that it supposes, the things it has let me see and those it has not. Integral to Peace Studies is the inner work that must happen within of any conflict facilitator. Thus I am looking to uncover my own blind spots.

This chapter seems more theoretical than the other two. It aims at epistemologically re-thinking theory. I do not enter into the redistribution debate. This work intends to be an initial reflection that opens the path towards making changes possible. It is an invitation to the imagination. I do believe that theoretical exploration, as well as theoretical reflection on existing theories, is, in fact, essential and integral to any process of transformation of the realities on the ground. In fact, I think that arguing the opposite is part of a self-supplying, uncritical, universal discourse of power. I believe that engaged imagination is fundamental to break boxes, *défaire et refaire le réel*.

There is a noticeable shift from my first two chapters. I move away from the *enfants d'immigrés algériens* as a case study. My concern for transformative decolonization goes beyond my case study. Even though the condition of postcoloniality reflects heterogeneous realities, I believe that the need to decolonize French institutions and imaginations transcends borders within that condition. My proposal looks at breaking with perceived identities in an effort to unmake/remake a plural, harmonious, and imperfect whole.

Decolonizing Theory

In the current discussions on coloniality and postcoloniality, decolonization refers to an intellectual and political movement that emerged in the specific context of Latin America from Cultural Studies and Sociology disciplines, mostly through Aníbal Quijano (2000), Ramón Grosfoguel (2007; 2011), and Walter D. Mignolo (2000). It refers to an epistemological and critical project that aims at decolonizing knowledge from the hegemony of modernity by

giving space to diverse political, epistemic, and ethical projects, with a special engagement towards silenced and subalternized voices and bodies. Initially inspired by local situations, this decolonial movement conceptualizes a theorization of global systems of domination, bridging coloniality, race, and political-economy. Through the perspectives of Ramón Grosfoguel and Walter D. Mignolo, it resonates with the theory of Intersectionality elaborated in the US context. Drawing on the experience of women of color, Intersectionality Theory introduces an understanding of racism as the playing out of simultaneous oppressions on the basis of multiple factors of identity, mostly race, gender, class, and sexualities, intersecting with each other in such a way that patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism function as one intermeshed system (Crenshaw 1991; hooks 1995).

My proposal for decolonization takes place within the specific national context of France. It is also a political and epistemological project. It bridges the way we see and the way we act, looking at conceptual roots and acting upon “*l’expérience historique et [les] expériences subjectives singulières auxquelles certaines situations économiques, politiques et sociales donnent lieu*” (Luste Boulbina 2007, 10).¹³¹ It also deconstructs the claim of universality of the European modern/colonial project. However, the coloniality that is targeted in both contexts is very distinct. In Latin America, the formal process of political decolonization occurred about two hundred years ago. On the other hand, the intellectual movement known as “decolonial” has emerged from cultural critics departing from today’s social and racial realities. The latter realities are legacies of the colonial/modern system but/and exist on their own. My claim for the decolonization of France certainly is a claim for the present that starts from the present. Yet, colonialism holds a very special place in understanding contemporary France and thinking of its decolonization. Decolonization thus aims at transforming the remnants and continuities of French colonialism in France in the

¹³¹ My translation: “the historical experience and singular subjective experiences resulting from certain economic, political, and social situations.”

present-day. It embraces and engages with the multiple and plural bodies that constitute the human community of France. Additionally, in my context, decolonization takes place in and within the former Empire (as opposed to former colonies), even though my understanding of France today is more complex than my understanding of France during colonial times. It is rooted in the specific context of French coloniality and postcoloniality in which the Republic and its dominant imaginary of white French (male) grandeur holds a central place in the national colonial project.

In France, intellectual and political voices that critically bring a post-colonial lens on French society have recently emerged. They mostly manifest as the necessity to narrate the story(ies) differently. To recall Ann Laura Stoler's words, there is in France an "*aphasie coloniale*," a sort of "*occultation du savoir*," occultation of knowledges that highlight such an oxymoron as the "colonial Republic" (Stoler 2010). Many authors I have referred to – Luste Boulbina (2012), Vergès (2012), Bancel and Blanchard (2005), Blanchard (2009), Simon (2005), Hancock (2008), Mbembe (2005), Guénif-Souilamas (2005) have written on the necessity to "decolonize knowledges," "imaginaries," "institutions," "representations," "mentalities," "the Republic," and "*le regard*" (the look) in France. The decolonial project in France bridges decolonizing minds (imagination) and practices.

I depart from these French, European-based intellectual and political trends. I attempt to bridge these with Feminist and Race Studies critics that mostly arose out of the US context. bell hooks is one of them. She is an influential feminist thinker and activist, one of the well-known theorists of Intersectionality. She draws her inspiration from her own experience of marginalization as black woman in the United States. From the field of Cultural Studies, she looks at the interlocking of class domination, racism, and heterosexism in her national context through power and representation. Her numerous writings also explore the beauty of creativity that lies in the margins as power to create, to learn new ways of seeing, and to act upon one's

condition of oppression. Like bell hooks, I think that systems of domination are interlocked in this world of “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 1995). In my specific colonial and postcolonial context, patriarchy takes a distinct nationalist and white-Catholic narcissistic form. Power structures and relations function in a way that race/religion, class, gender, and sexualities (to name a few) intersect as markers of subjugation and different life conditioning (Crenshaw 1991; hooks 1995). In particular, race and gender are co-constituted in the colonial project of modernity and subject us in all domains of existence (Lugones 2008). In resisting modern Eurocentrism, I also claim feminist partial vision of situated knowledges. Finally, I argue for transformative decolonization, one that takes its roots in conflict transformation of the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies. Decolonization aims at finding a place of encounter where dialogue can happen and relationships can be re-created. It is holistic and it moves within decolonial epistemologies of plurality.

At last, transformative decolonization is simultaneously collective and individual. I start with myself. “*En outre, que l'on soit d'un côté ou de l'autre de la frontière coloniale, dans l'ancienne métropole comme dans l'ancien territoire dominé, la décolonisation commence et finit par soi-même, comme tout effort d'émancipation, tout combat de libération, tout travail de désaliénation*” (Luste Boulbina 2012, 131).¹³² I am *in* the dynamics of postcoloniality and diversity of France. This final chapter is also my own personal (and relational) journey towards a self-politics of decolonization.

Embodying Debate

In decolonizing epistemology, I am concerned with *method*. What do we make theory for and, most importantly, for *whom* do we researchers make theory? From literary theory, Barbara Christian raises these questions in her critical essay on “The Race for Theory”

¹³² My translation: “Moreover, whether one is on one or the other side of the colonial divide, in the former metropolis as in the former dominated territory, decolonization starts and ends with one’s self, like any emancipation effort, any liberation struggle, any de-alienation job.”

(1988). I cross disciplines here and raise the same concerns in the Social Sciences. Indeed, in my view, these questions matter, for they determine *how* we make theory: how we know what we know, what we claim to know, what we say and what we simply assume, what our *body* allows us to see and where the blind spots in our *vision* are. “The Race for Theory” takes place within the universalistic project of modernism, and its continuities in postmodernism. Such a project tends, on account of its positivist influences, to claim “disembodied objectivity” (Haraway 1988) and consecutively to lead to (the privilege of) *abstraction* – “prescriptive, exclusive, elitish” theory (Christian 1988, 74). Modernist universality has been the cornerstone of colonialist, capitalist, white supremacist, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexist hegemonic world power. It has conditioned epistemology in a way that today’s construction and hierarchical organization of knowledge(s) still bear the legacies. While placing the “white” European heterosexual male as the existential norm of society, such modern universal structuring of the world has systematically silenced other ways of seeing and theorizing, being and acting in the world.

From the 1980s onwards, post-colonial, decolonial, and intersectional feminists located in the global colonial powers have massively written about the importance of positioning one’s self in claiming her vision of the world (Rich 2003; Haraway 1988; Anzaldúa 1990; Suárez-Navaz and Hernández Castillo 2008; Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012; among others). For as all bodies are *marked* by and with the structures of power within which they take place, all forms of knowledge(s) are *embodied*. They reflect a certain perspective determined by one’s epistemological and political location. Thus, the claim of the rational is the sign of partial vision: “Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision” (Haraway 1988, 582-583).

The hierarchical structuring of knowledge leads to what Luste Boulbina refers to, in the French context, as “objective fetishism.”

Le fétichisme objectif (et objectal) qui ramène ainsi, dans certains domaines plus que dans d'autres, les grandes personnes aux grandes questions, universelles de préférence, dispose ainsi sans le secours de la volonté les chercheurs et les enseignants sur une palette qui s'étale du plus grand au plus petit, du plus universel au plus particulier, du majeur au mineur, du dominant au subalterne (Luste Boulbina 2012, 133).¹³³

Thus the institutional hierarchization and colonization of knowledge takes place along the lines of the constructed universal, that is, it parallels the subjugation of peoples in the colonial world. Barbara Christian (1988) talks about her own experience as black feminist literature writer. From her context, she echoes Luste Boulbina's argument: “Again I was supposed to know *them*, while they [the tenants of academic (western) knowledge] were not at all interested in knowing *me*” (Christian 1988, 72). Knowledges and peoples are hierarchized in relation to the European core. Such epistemological blindness is a form of Eurocentric epistemological and ontological racism. Indeed,

‘You do not see me because you do not see yourself and you do not see yourself because you declare yourself outside of culture,’ writes María Lugones. According to Lugones, dis-engagement is a sanctioned ethnocentric racist strategy. Whites not naming themselves white presume their universality; an unmarked race is a sign of Racism unaware of itself, a ‘blanked-out’ Racism (Anzaldúa 1990, xxi).

The hierarchization of questions and people(s) from the most universal to the most particular takes place within colonialist and patriarchal structures of modern and postmodern thought. It is such that, for instance, a philosopher from the Global South is expected to know extensively Euro-centred philosophy while it is *normal* for a Western-based philosopher not to know anything outside Euro-centred philosophy and still claim (disembodied) objectivity.

¹³³ My translation to English: “Objective fetishism thus brings back, in some areas more than in others, great persons to great questions, preferably universal. It thus places, regardless of will, investigators and professors on a scale that stretches from the greatest to the most insignificant, from the most universal to the most particular, from major to minor, from dominant to subaltern.”

“Objective fetishism” is a form of blanked-out racism deeply ingrained within French institutions as well as imaginations. In addition, “[c]omme dans toutes les institutions, la méconnaissance de soi, pour être un défaut de réflexivité critique, n’en est pas moins un avantage objectif” (Luste Boulbina 2012, 133).¹³⁴ In the French postcolonial context, such “*avantage objectif*” bears its own specificities. Indeed, French institutions of knowledge (and power), through the conservatism of its rigid structures and its intellectual stakeholders, tend to *reproduce* the traits of colonial hierarchization of social life (Luste Boulbina 2012). It follows that “objective fetishism” rests on national and metropolitan preference intertwined with white and male preference (ibid., 136). The same sort of blind policy that in the French colonies did not see racial inequality applies today through a legitimizing trust in the *école républicaine* that extends to all institutions of knowledge (ibid.). As conventional researchers tend to think of themselves as the undisputed owners of rational knowledge, they separate objects and subjects of knowledge. It is precisely because of this detachment that they tend to reproduce and enforce the very discriminations they vividly criticize in theory (ibid.). It results that maleness, as well as the differentiation between European French and non-European French, French and non-European non-French, function as invisible factors of competence (ibid.).

L’invisibilité du plafond [de verre], c’est-à-dire la cécité collective sur son existence et sa fonction, jusqu’à preuve du contraire, est constitutive de ce plafond. Il suffit de le voir, collectivement et publiquement, pour qu’il se lézarde. Or, dans le monde académique français, la perception des discriminations reste privée (ibid., 140).¹³⁵

In the French institutions conservatism is the rule. “*Les institutions d’enseignement et de recherche sont donc réglées par un fétichisme qui détermine les sujets par les objets et les objets par les sujets comme dans toute administration des choses, comme, aussi, dans tout*

¹³⁴ My translation: “[l]ike in all institutions, lack of knowledge of one’s self, inasmuch as it is a default of critical reflexivity, is equally a form of objective advantage.”

¹³⁵ My translation: “The invisibility of the glass ceiling, that’s to say the collective blindness to its existence and its function is, until proven otherwise, constitutive of the ceiling. We need only to see it, collectively and publicly, for it to crack. Yet, in the French academic world, perceiving discriminations remains private.”

commerce” (Luste Boulbina 2012, 134).¹³⁶ By abiding by the rules of objective fetishism, institutions and researchers that constitute the institutions maintain the *status quo*. In fact, “*La France intellectuelle est connue dans le monde entier pour sa fermeture d’esprit : elle est seule à ne pas le savoir*” (Luste Boulbina 2012, 139).¹³⁷ In France, part of the decolonial project certainly is the immense work that remains ahead to decolonize the institutions of the French Republic, in particular the institutions that regulate knowledge and the conditions of its formation.

Such objective fetishism that organizes the academic world applies to political debate in France. *C’est l’impensé de la réflexion*.¹³⁸ It results that society hears some voices – those voices which are a narcissistic image of self, *ces memes voix qui se/nous regardent le nombril*, and disregards others for their position in what amounts to a hierarchy of colonial/postcolonial patriarchal landscape. In France, the discourse frames *questions* in conditions of power inequalities. For instance, when the Minister of the Interior launches a “debate on national identity,” he, along with the political and intellectual elite that supports him, is epistemologically and politically biased. The legitimacy of “debate” rests on the unquestioned idea that certain populations are a threat to so-called “national identity.” Furthermore, “national identity” is a concept that forms part of the state ideology of security. It is presented here as a granted and blinding fact. Finally, it is not a “debate” when its managers only invite some populations of the national community to take part while systematically excluding others from it.

All people actually speak because all bodies are political (Butler 2011). In the margins and from the margins, people speak too, in voices radically theirs. Gloria Anzaldúa’s

¹³⁶ My translation: “Institutions of research and higher education are thus controlled by a fetishism which determines the subjects by the objects and the objects by the subjects like in any administration of things, like, also, any form of commerce.”

¹³⁷ My translation: “Intellectual France is known all over the world for its narrow-mindedness: it is the only one that does not know.”

¹³⁸ It is the blind spot of debate.

Borderlands is a brilliant example of how to creatively act upon one's condition of oppression and make beauty out of, from, and in the border – *la frontera*. Similarly, the inhabitants of the *banlieues populaires* in France create alternative dialogical spaces of expression, mainly through the street, religious creativity, and hip-hop culture (Zegnani 2013).¹³⁹ These alternatives, as opposed to dominant forms of political participation, are a manifestation of their marginalization in public space. Hegemonic discourse systematically places their voices at the periphery of social life, approaches their bodies as deviant and suspect, and silences them for being, in Carbado's (2005) words, "racially interested."

In France, the discourse must re-think the frame and replace *body* (embodiment) as a central concern of politics. The elite and society must *displace* debate and *question* method. Like Todd Shepard in his research on the history of colonial relations between France and Algeria, we as a national consciousness need to start by reflecting on which histories have been written and which ones have not (Casanova, Izambert and Rahal 2013). In discussing history, identity, and diversity, I must *always* situate myself within the subject of debate, when I speak and also when I remain silent. Human beings are always transforming and dynamic agents.

De-centering the "White Male"

In the modern capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist power structures of social life in which most human beings, including Europeans, are framed, spaces and bodies are highly racialized and gendered in relation to a constructed norm that is white, male, heterosexual, and middle class, among others. Consequently, part of the process of displacing methodology in debate is to displace the norm, to *de-center* whiteness and maleness. Central to the idea of de-centering the "white male" is undoing (white male) *privilege*. Devon W. Carbado's chapter "Privilege"

¹³⁹ One of my critics of Zegnani's work is his blindness to gender. In fact these modes of political expression are mostly male ones.

intends to shift the way politics commonly thinks discrimination. Because “[o]ur identities are reflective and constitutive of systems of oppression,” he says, the effects of discrimination are “bidirectional” for “discrimination allocates both burdens and benefits” (Carbado 2005, 191). What is white privilege? He quotes Barbara Flagg: “There is a profound cognitive dimension to the material and social privilege that attaches to whiteness in this society, in that the white person has an everyday option not to think of herself in racial terms at all. [...] To be white is not to think about it” (ibid., 193-194). Carbado leads a reflection on race and privilege in the context of the United States, which indeed is very specific. Yet, the functioning of racism anywhere entails an institutionalized organization of social life which privileges some for their perceived racial belonging, and disadvantages others on the same account. Consecutively, to open spaces for transforming racial (and gender-based, etc.) discrimination is to work *dialogically* on both its effects: disadvantage and privilege. Indeed,

Informing this privileged-centered understanding of discrimination is the notion that taking identity privileges for granted helps to legitimize problematic assumptions about identity and entitlement, assumptions that make it difficult for us to challenge the starting points of our most controversial conversations about equality (ibid., 190).

Indeed, privilege matters for the sake of consciousness. How do I talk about equality in power-blind epistemologies? Race plays out in all relational existences. This means that *race is always there even when it is invisible*. Anyone who wants to talk honestly about diversity in France needs to recognize that the French white European male is, systematically, unconsciously, violently *always* placed in the center – as the referent point of view. It takes radically de-centering one’s self to be able to *see through*, transcend “race.” *What’s more, not locating privilege is to reinforce it, in other words to maintain the racist (and heterosexist, etc.) status quo*. Locating privilege is part of the “politics of location,” that is, the responsibility to make one’s body visible.

The politics of location. Even to begin with my body I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity. When I was carried out of the hospital into the

world, I was viewed and treated as female, but also viewed and treated as white – by both Black and white people. I was located by color and sex as surely as a Black child was located by color and sex – though the implications of white identity were mystified by the presumption that white people are the center of the universe.

To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go (Rich 2003, 32).

In raising the question of “race” in both its effects of privilege and disadvantage, I shall be cautious not to “universalize [whiteness]” and “present it as a ‘cohesive identity’ in ways that deny, obscure, or threaten the recognition of [white] multiplicity” (Carbado 2005, 198). Part of the post-colonial lens is, in fact, the sweeping risk to homogenize postcolonial experiences that manifest in multiple ways, shapes and forms (Loomba 1998; Luste Boulbina et al. 2012). Likewise, I am sensitive to the possibility that I enhance coloniality through applying US-based theory upon the French colonial and postcolonial context. Thus, my de-centering efforts must be *intersectional* and *context-based* in order to look at the playing out of simultaneous factors that condition political identities and lives in the specific context of France differently. In the French constructed imaginations, the center is the Republic, nationalist-universalist, white-Catholic European, male dominant.

Furthermore, the claim for de-centering runs the risk of having the opposite effect, in other words to reinforce the center (the colonial relation) that it tries to de-center (decolonize). The de-centering (decolonizing) process requires me to make a continuous and continuously renewed effort of *radical consciousness*. The deconstruction of my privilege is necessary but/and only is useful if it is one of *responsibility*. I must not do it for myself or others, but for society as a whole, for the sake of the conscious relationality of our social existences. It is necessary that I de-center myself just as it is necessary that everyone in society, even though everyone differently, de-center him/herself. Such an effort functions as an incentive to transform peacefully the real (symbolic and material) effects of discrimination. De-centering shall push national consciousness to a higher level whereby within, despite, and aware of the

complex racist/colonialist/capitalist patriarchy many people are framed in, we must forget about color (or “race,” or colonial background, or sexuality, among others), but we must never forget about color (or “race,” among others). This is just like Pat Parker says to “the white person who wants to know how to be [her] friend” (Parker 1990, 297). De-centering whiteness requires these two things simultaneously. I “forget about color” when I consciously treat someone on the basis of our shared humanity. I “forget about color” when I resist seeing her as Other and treat her differently on this account because of the “color” I may perceive in her. To de-center myself as white also requires me to be aware of the differentiated power that “color” entails for different people. Most specifically, it requires me to be aware that I, my habits, traditions, my hair, my body, my philosophy, my music, are systematically taken as the norm in society; it requires me to be aware that this systematic central positioning silences people “of color.” Such a double consciousness is a decolonial tool to act, relate, and be in difference. In de-centering, I attempt to look beyond binaries while being aware of my privilege(s).

Decolonial Epistemologies

Decolonization implies a radical epistemological and political shift in the way we see. It is a displacement of the look, one that makes power appear in the learnt practices, representations, discourses, and institutions of the Republic. Part of such a displacing project is the necessary institutionalization in French Academia of critical Post-Colonial and Feminist approaches rooted in the French context (Cohen et al. 2007; Luste Boulbina et al. 2012). The harsh resistances to such recognition still confronted today are highly significant of the Republic’s limited sensitivity to decolonizing its institutions and imaginations (Luste Boulbina 2012). Yet,

La nécessité de décaler le regard est à l’origine même de l’approche postcoloniale puisqu’elle cherche à faire apparaître un impensé radical enfoui dans les rapports

sociaux, masqué par les représentations dominantes. [...] Le point commun des « études postcoloniales » est sans doute de servir de boîte à outil pour contrer les visions rigides des frontières identitaires, les mécanismes de sélection qui condamnent les uns à rester dehors (hors frontières), les autres à subir les effets des catégorisations, des distinctions (de classe, de race, de genre), des discriminations et des stigmatisations qui sont en partie – beaucoup plus qu'on ne l'admet généralement – liées à un héritage colonial, à des hiérarchies sociales et des représentations anciennes et tenaces. Elles inaugurent aussi, en lien avec un agenda politique brûlant, de nouvelles postures épistémologiques (Cohen et al. 2007, 11-12).¹⁴⁰

Core to the *raison d'être* of Post-colonial and Feminist approaches is the idea of *engagement* that the French dominant academic perspective so critically lacks. Such engagement is political and counter-discursive (Omar 2008). It is committed to marginalized voices in their radical and intersectional pluralities. It is committed to the politics of location and to being attentive to power in the (re)production of knowledge.

Like any other approach, it also bears its own limitations. Fatima Ait Ben Lmadani and Nasima Moujoud are two anthropologist feminist thinkers located in the French and Maghrebi postcolonial contexts. In an excellent article titled, “*Peut-on faire de l’intersectionnalité sans les ex-colonisé-e-s ?*,” they highlight the fact that critical Post-colonial and Feminist approaches must engage in bridging theory and praxis; in other words, they must *engage contextually* (Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012).¹⁴¹ Indeed, they claim, many French feminists tend to *uncritically* apply intersectionality theory to the French context in a way that *silences* the knowledges of minorities (ibid.).

Aussi, le concept de race ne peut prendre sa pertinence qu’au regard de l’histoire (post-)coloniale et l’approche en termes d’intersectionnalité ne peut être féconde qu’au prix d’une lecture historique, transnationale qui reconnaît les conditions

¹⁴⁰ My translation: “The necessity to shift the look is core to the postcolonial approach, for it aims at unveiling a radical blind spot stuffed in social relations, hidden by dominant representations. [...] The common point of “postcolonial studies” is probably to function as a toolbox in order to counter rigid visions of identity borders, selective mechanisms that compel some to stay outside (borders), others to suffer from the effects of categorizations, distinctions (of class, race, gender), of discriminations and stigmatizations which are partly – more than we usually admit – linked to a colonial heritage, to social hierarchies, and to old and tenacious representations. They also initiate, within a hot political agenda, new epistemological postures.”

¹⁴¹ My translation: “Can we do intersectionality without the ex-colonized?”

matérielles et ce lien entre migration et colonisation. (Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012, 19)¹⁴²

In the French context, a critical feminist post-colonial lens on race and identity is attentive to giving space to the knowledges of postcolonial minorities specifically. Thus, it challenges the Republican tradition. In so doing, it needs to draw on the great work done in the French colonial and postcolonial context in sciences, literature, philosophy, and sociology by intellectual figures such as Abdelmalek Sayad and Assia Djébar (ibid.). It is essential to make explicit the foundational connection between immigration and colonization, intersectionality and colonization (ibid.). It also requires valuing and drawing on activist practices, including but not limited to music, literature, and art, which reflect the materiality of the lives of the citizens “*issus de l’immigration*” (ibid.). It also includes approaching society in France in its heterogeneous pluralities, and finally, understanding “race” in its intrinsic relation with coloniality/postcoloniality, class, and patriarchy (ibid.). A post-colonial feminist approach of society in France engages critically with the French political, historical, and theoretical context, which is “migratory, postcolonial, and transnational” (ibid., 13).

Such engagement is one of *accountability* and *responsibility* (Haraway 1988). It prompts the feminist, in an intersubjective relation with her research, to make the conscious effort of constantly reflecting on her own position(ing), to look beyond the simplicity of partial vision.

“The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. Splitting, not being, is the privileged image for feminist epistemologies of scientific knowledge. “Splitting” in this context should be about heterogeneous multiplicities [...] Subjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. [...]

¹⁴² My translation: “Thus, the concept of race can only be pertinent in the light of (post-)colonial history, and the approach in terms of intersectionality can only be fruitful at the cost of a historical, transnational reading that recognizes material conditions and this connection between migration and colonization.”

Vision requires instruments of vision; an optics is a politics of positioning. Instruments of vision mediate standpoints; there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated.” (Haraway 1988, 586)

“[P]artial sight and limited voice” is a located vision. It allows getting closer to the real. It allows *seeing* the “connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible” (Haraway 1988, 590). The claim for a politics and epistemologies of location resonates with human geographer Edward W. Soja’s concept of *Thirdspace* as alternative epistemology to approach subjectivities and identities (Soja 1996). Thirdspace is a displaced look that is consciously spatialized in the uncertain, undefined, and unsettled. The condition of Thirdspace is “radically open and openly radical,” constantly changing and moving (ibid.). It allows being in and “exploring the spaces that difference makes” (ibid.). These spaces are not neat and uniform; they are conflictive because difference brings conflictive energies. From a Peace and Conflict perspective however, conflict is natural and entirely part of human existence. What’s more, it creates opportunities for transformation. In between modernity and the rejection of modernity, Thirdspace is a place of renewed, counter-hegemonic practices, as well as forms of being and looking (ibid.). “[I]t challenges all conventional modes of thought and taken-for-granted epistemologies. It is disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed, never presentable in permanent constructions” (ibid., 70). It challenges the modern binary logic of either/or; not entirely in yet not entirely out. Thirdspace is a place of higher collective consciousness. It makes explicit the connection between identity and space and makes it possible to speak in and from the margins; it includes all and everything. Thirdspace is liberating. It is radically unsettled and unsettling, open and free, yet located. It is transformative.

La colonisation se construit sur et construit simultanément des hiérarchies diverses et diversifiées et des frontières, plus ou moins éloignées. Colonial power builds and builds on hierarchies, diverse and diversified, and borders, more or less distant (Luste Boulbina et al.

2012). *Ce qui est au centre de nos préoccupations, c'est l'égalité, c'est-à-dire défaire ces hiérarchies et repousser ces frontières.* Decolonization is concerned with equality, i.e. undoing these hierarchies and pushing these borders away. *Ce qui est à l'œuvre dans le déplacement du regard, c'est de repousser les frontières de la pensée.* In displacing the look, feminism(s) aims at pushing away the borders of thought to uncover inequalities of power that condition theory and practice. *Le savoir et le pouvoir étant intimement liés, l'un soutenant l'autre et inversement, transformer les frontières épistémologiques c'est aussi repousser les frontières politiques.* For as knowledge and power are intimately tied to and sustain each other, to transform epistemological borders is also to push political borders. It is opening up to *l'entre-mondes, or les entre-mondes, the in-between worlds.*

Colonialism is the negation of the in-between worlds for it (en)forces the conditions of its own world (Luste Boulbina 2011). *C'est le refus de l'entre-mondes, c'est-à-dire des entre-mondes, de ces espaces de mouvement et de l'incertain, lieux chargés de l'exil, qui ne sont ni l'un ni l'autre, où "l'extériorité se trouve dans l'intériorité et l'étrangeté dans la familiarité"* (ibid., 22).¹⁴³ *Les frontières (coloniales) sont géographiques ; mais elles sont aussi politiques.* (Colonial) borders are geographical; but they also are political (ibid.).

La politique, comme la famille, est la construction d'un nom et d'un nous, c'est-à-dire d'une représentation. [...] Effectivement, la politique, surtout lorsqu'elle est nationale, s'édifie sur le refus de l'entre-mondes. La politique est la terre d'élection de l'alternative. Le « ou bien-ou bien » sert, dans cette perspective, à construire, artificiellement, un nous à partir duquel s'unifieraient les mondes pour n'en faire qu'un seul. [...] Le renversement de perspective [...] transforme en objets ceux qui se croyaient jusqu'alors les seuls sujets réels, aptes à voir et à parler, à évaluer et à juger, dans une ignorance d'eux-mêmes aveuglante. C'est du reste ce qui irrite tous ceux qui arguent que cette nouvelle optique n'avance à rien, précisément parce qu'elle est inverse. C'est, cependant, confondre inverse et inversé. Les femmes, les Noirs, les Arabes, les homosexuels et tous les « autres » connus et inconnus, classifiés ou non-répertoriés n'offrent pas un sens opposé ou un ordre contraire, mais

¹⁴³ It is the negation of the in-between world, that's to say, the in-between worlds, these spaces of the moving and the uncertain, places of exile, which are neither one nor the other, where "outsideness is located in insideness and strangeness in familiarity."

seulement un point de vue qui n'avait pu jusqu'alors s'exprimer. (Luste Boulbina 2011, 26-27)¹⁴⁴

L'entre-mondes est aussi une "anamorphose", un miroir de soi. The *entre-mondes* is the condition of being in the world, mirroring self. *La construction de l'Autre, c'est la construction de soi.* The construction of Other is the construction of Self. *Les entre-mondes sont des invitations au voyage.* To embrace *les entre-mondes* is a shift in the lens. Like Thirdspace, it allows seeing from a different perspective, which makes identity necessarily moving and ambiguous.

I profoundly believe that it is necessary for French society to decolonize and transform, and to do so in differentiated, multi-dimensional, and changing manners. With conscious responsibility, it must enrich with critical/located epistemologies that re-think identity, subjectivity, and space in order to shift the dominant lens on itself and transform relations beyond postcoloniality.

Unmaking Race, Remaking Soul

In contemporary France, displacing debate means decolonizing the structures of thought and practices inherited from colonial relations and dominant imaginations. In doing so, French society inevitably needs to *de-center the Republic*, the idea of the Republic thought as *above all suspicion*. Through such a process, it appears necessary to recognize postcoloniality in its complexities. More precisely, it appears necessary to tease out postcolonial racism in its everyday functioning, as well as the ways in which it intersects with other factors to create discriminations that derive from the migratory, postcolonial, and

¹⁴⁴ My translation: "Politics, like family, is to construct a name and an us, that's to say, a representation. [...] Indeed, politics, particularly when it is national, stands on the negation of the in-between worlds. Politics is the land of the choice of alternatives. The "either-or" serves, through such perspective, to build, artificially, an us from which worlds unify into one single world. [...] The shift in perspective [...] transforms into objects those who thought of themselves as the only real subjects, able to see and to speak, to assess and to judge, in a blinding ignorance of themselves. This is, besides, what irritates those who argue that this new lens is worth nothing, precisely because it is reverse. This is, however, confusing opposite and reversed. Women, Blacks, Arabs, homosexuals and all "others" known or unknown, classified or unregistered, do not offer an opposite direction or a contrary order, just a point of view which could not be expressed so far."

transnational condition of society in France. Last but not least, it also requires recognizing the imperfect beauties that emerge from human relations, transform power in them, and transcend the status quo.

I am aware that postcoloniality takes the colonial as a reference point in time and space. It runs the risk of approaching society and history in a linear way. Most importantly, it risks enhancing, or overestimating, the impact of and homogenizing the multiple subjective experiences of colonialism and postcolonialism on people's lives. I understand postcoloniality as "*un ensemble de circonstances caractérisé par la présence du postcolonialisme*" (Hargreaves 2007, 24).¹⁴⁵ It is a marker of identity within the nation. I take it as a point of departure in the here and now with the historical implications I describe in chapters one and two. It is meant to transform. Decolonization as a process recognizes the postcolonial space, and moment and transcends and moves beyond it.

The decolonization process, in its effort towards opening dialogical spaces for transformation, compels resisting simplistic interpretations. "*Parler de postcolonie, en ce sens, c'est engager des commencements plus que des achèvements, des interprétations plus que des explications; c'est se dégager des origines et des causes supposées des malheurs du monde postcolonial; c'est identifier cependant, des inachèvements*" (Luste Boulbina 2007, 19).¹⁴⁶ Decolonization looks beyond the visible; it listens beyond the hearable.

Towards a Transformative Recognition of French PostColoniality

It is significant to note that French authors of postcolonial minorities are mostly studied outside France by non-French or US-expatriated French academics (Hargreaves 2007; Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012; among others). In an interview given to Luste Boulbina

¹⁴⁵ My translation: "a set of circumstances characterized by the presence of postcolonialism".

¹⁴⁶ My translation: "To talk about postcolony, in this way, is to engage beginnings rather than endings, interpretations rather than explanations; it is to leave the supposed origins and causes of the tragedies of the postcolonial world behind; it is, however, to identify incompletions."

and Simon, well-known Françoise Vergès explains how she chose to study French colonialism in the USA because the level of debate surpassed and moved way beyond the point where the conversation currently stands in France (Luste Boulbina and Simon 2012). Indeed, post-colonial discussions, often referred to as the euphemism “*la question coloniale*,” slowly appeared in the middle of the 1990s – more than 30 years after the colonial Empire finally collapsed with the declaration of independence of Algeria. Researchers have mostly approached it as a matter of the discipline of History, as a matter of *history* (Luste Boulbina and Simon 2012; Luste Boulbina 2012).

In France, epistemological and political decolonization entails the recognition of postcoloniality. This recognition effort is radically open, openly political but politically free. In other words, I claim that the decolonizing process needs to recognize the condition of postcoloniality as complex and intercrossing realities that challenge modern notions of time and space. It engages both with the realities of the present/past and with the bigger outlook towards transformation. Finally, it provokes a critical *reflection* on the Republic and the construction of French citizenship.

As I have demonstrated in chapters one and two, conversations involving postcoloniality, race, and the French *enfants d’immigrés* are dominated by deep conservatism. Such standpoint rests on a constructed untouchability of the Republic and its model of universal equality. Within such an ideological position, discriminations are invisible and widely negated, yet they are and they divide. I claim that in order to move on from this colonial/national “*fracture*,” the epistemological and political process of decolonization needs to put the Republic in a place of vulnerability whereby it is possible to critically reflect on its strengths and weaknesses in the light of the present migratory, postcolonial, and transnational condition and context. In fact, vulnerability is a place of humility. It is humanity, where the Republic needs only to *be* listening and looking openly.

This is not an easy process. During the 2010 Cannes festival, Rachid Bouchareb's film *Hors-la-loi* brought to light the massacre of thousands of Algerians in the Setif demonstrations on May, 8th, 1945, nine years before the official start of the War of Independence. The film triggered great controversies and was scolded for being "anti-French" (Benbassa 2011). This is just one example among many of the obstacles that constitute the decolonizing process. Trying to *approach* (get close to) the realities of colonization, such as the multiplicity of subjective experiences, is not an easy and simple task. In France particularly, challenging the dominant colonial narrative faces many resistances, for history(ies) and memory(ies) are often associated as one single imperative of History.

Le « bilan » de la colonisation, brandi devant ces demandes [de relecture des archives de l'histoire], induit un jugement qui éloigne de la complexité historique, inhibant l'analyse des multiples dimensions du passé colonial de la France. [...] Il faut donc abandonner la notion de bilan pour tenter d'aborder l'épaisseur de chaque fait historique et comprendre l'impact de la colonisation sur les sociétés colonisées et la métropole. Par contre, il faut revenir encore et encore, car le sujet est loin d'être épuisé, sur la longue histoire du colonialisme européen, sur toutes ses contradictions, sur ces [sic] conséquences inattendues, imprévisibles qui ont fait aussi de ces espaces colonisés, des espaces de rencontre, de solidarités transcontinentales, et d'expressions trans-culturelles (Vergès 2007, 110).¹⁴⁷

As I have explained in chapter one, it is important to overcome the place of negation in which the Republic finds itself with regards to history and to embrace the multiple stories that make up the national memory. Recognizing postcoloniality implies that I look into myself and the Republic deeply in order to reflect upon the contradictions and ambiguities that rest in the universal Republican model. It undoes assumptions and it displaces. In the French context, indeed, strong resistances to recognizing postcoloniality stem from the fear of transformation, of unsettling power. In the French Republican tradition, the colony "*existe comme symptôme*

¹⁴⁷ My translation: "The 'assessment' of colonization, brandished in response to these demands [to re-read archives] induces a judgment which moves away from historical complexity, inhibiting the analysis of multiple dimensions of France's colonial past. [...] It is thus necessary to give up the notion of assessment to attempt to approach the thickness of all historical facts and understand the impact of colonization on colonized societies and the metropolis. On the other hand, it is necessary to go back, again and again, for the subject is far from being exhausted, on the long history of European colonialism, on all its contradictions, on its unexpected, unpredictable consequences, which are also made of these colonized spaces, spaces of encounter, transcontinental solidarities, and trans-cultural expressions."

d'un malaise au cœur de la pensée universaliste" (Vergès 2007, 103).¹⁴⁸ Indeed, "*si [les principes de la République] relevaient de l'universel comment expliquer l'exception ?*" (ibid: 102)¹⁴⁹. Consequently, the postcolony exists in the nation as *fracture*, a sort of malaise hiding wounds and frustrations. If equality within the Republic is out of touch, how do I explain postcolonial racism?

The evolution over the years of resistance movements – such as the political movement of the "*Indigènes de la République*," the 2005 revolts in the *banlieues populaires*, or hip-hop culture – is a demonstration that the myth of the egalitarian Republic is dying. Additionally, it is a demonstration that it is time to honestly talk about race in the Republic. The 1980s social movements, like the marches against racism and for equality, were predominantly anti-racist with a social and political understanding of discrimination; in other words, most of them were still in line with the *liberté, égalité, fraternité* tradition of the Republic (Robine 2006). On the other hand, today's expressions of resistance are marked by a disbelief in the "myth of the Republic." Activists apprehend discrimination in a way that "race" is an "objective reality;" it reflects everyday experiences of specific communities like the youth in the *banlieues populaires* (ibid.). At this stage, the state, supported by its institutions, cannot keep up with the same disconnected discourse that, through its blindness to "race," roots racism deeply. Thus, decolonizing the Republic requires that society, including myself, undo the myth of the Republic, the idea that the Republic is beyond "race" as it guarantees equality across identities. In undoing the myth, society must listen, from a place of transformation and humility, to all voices in their multiple expressions.

Internalized postcolonial racism plays out in all areas of life in all aspects of social relations. In fact, "*[i]l n'y a rien de plus ordinaire que de discriminer*" (Luste Boulbina 2012,

¹⁴⁸ My translation: "exists as the symptom of a malaise central to the universalist thought."

¹⁴⁹ My translation: "if [the principles of the Republic] were universal, how to explain the exception?"

139).¹⁵⁰ The idea(l) of *grandeur* corrupts institutions, imaginaries, discourses, and practices within the Republic. It roots racism deeply, as it is a form of nationalistic narcissism unaware of itself that rests on the complex of superiority of the French white man and serves as *the norm* of all political and social debates. The Republic is corrupted by the denial of such narcissism.

The current resistance to the emergence of memories and histories that belie the narrative of the universal demonstrates again what Fanon saw as a form of narcissism deeply ingrained within the French political psyche, the idea that the French people is incapable of mass murder, crimes and massacres (Vergès 2010, 95).

Yet, “*La négation n’est ni la mémoire, ni l’oubli. Elle est une forme de censure qui relève de la raison d’État et de ses artifices ; elle est corrélativement une forme d’évitement de la responsabilité*” (Luste Boulbina 2007, 14).¹⁵¹ *Reconnaître la postcolonialité de la France c’est faire descendre la République de son piédestal tout blanc*. To recognize French postcoloniality is to bring the Republic down its all white pedestal. It means that I deconstruct French narcissistic patriotism. The *sentiment de grandeur*, so particular to the French colonial mentality, is rooted in dominant national discourses and actions; it indicates the ways in which such understandings of the French nation apprehend the Other and *see her*.

More than that, it entails that I recognize *the realities of postcolonial racism*. To recognize postcolonial racism today involves *recognizing* it as the recreation of a deeply engrained colonial-patriarchal imaginary that conditions all relations in contemporary France differently. In particular, it involves an understanding that the Republic tends to reify the figures of the *enfants d’immigrés* as the “subjects” of a remaking of the grand civilizing mission. It also includes recognizing that there remains a strong differentiation within the nation, along the colonial divide (even though the latter is blurry), that works in such a way that makes some citizens more French, some histories more central, some cultures more

¹⁵⁰ My translation: “[T]here is nothing more ordinary than to discriminate.”

¹⁵¹ My translation: “Negation is neither memory nor oblivion. It is a form of censorship that falls under the reasons of State and its devices; it is correlatively a way to avoid responsibility.”

acceptable, some voices more legitimate, some bodies more neutral, some lives more valuable.

Consequently, displacing debate leads me to re-think citizenship and identity within the Republic. The French conceptualization of the Republic is strongly tied to the idea of the nation. This is key to understanding the dominant imaginary in France. In the French *construction* of the nation-state, the different elements that make the nation, the political, the cultural, the territorial, and the emotional all merge as one, that is, they are interconnected and inseparable from each other (Robine 2006). The Republic, the political project, and the nation, the historical project, function as one. Thus, Saïd Bouamama states,

On a bien là, derrière le vocabulaire de la nation politique, l'idée que la nation politique par excellence c'est la nation culturelle française, qui est une culture abstraite en plus, parce qu'elle est faite à partir de plein de composantes et qu'elle n'est pas si homogène que ça. [...] Il y a confusion entre unité politique et unicité culturelle, et ça, c'est vraiment l'histoire de la conception nationale française, et cela imprègne les inconscients politiques, à droite comme à gauche. Le blocage est plus grand en France qu'ailleurs à cause de la spécificité de la conception française de la nation (Robine 2006, 134).¹⁵²

On top of that, such patriotism was built with and through the nationalist-colonialist project in Algeria in particular. It was at the core of Tocqueville's arguments. The idea of the French (cultural) nation was built on the differentiation and on its negation of what/who is French and what/who is not, that is, colonial racism. French universalist nationalism has existed through "*l'impensé de la race*" (blind race) – the superiority of the white European (male) over the colonized populations, "subjects" of such superiority. While the Republic keeps negating it, (post)colonial racism resists in renewed ways, shapes, and forms. However, the Republic supported by the universalist paradigm lives through the political project of equality: the Republican idea rests on the idea of a nation where all and any have equal place. Postcolonial

¹⁵² My translation: "There lies indeed, behind the lexicon of the political nation, the idea that the political nation par excellence is the French cultural nation, which in fact is an abstract culture, because it is constituted of many components and it is not that homogeneous. [...] There is a confusion between political unity and cultural uniqueness, and that is truly the history of the French conception of the nation, and that penetrates political unconscious(es), Right and Left. The blockage is more important in France than elsewhere because of the specificity of the French conception of the nation."

racism, or the remaking of the colonial project, lives in the deeply ingrained, almost schizophrenic contradiction between the Republican ideal and its differentialist practices. *C'est toute la violence du projet républicain, tel qu'il a été conçu dans la tradition philosophique et politique française.*¹⁵³

Par enchaînement d'idées (ou d'impensés), it follows that the dominant discourse pictures (represents), through the rhetoric of assimilation/integration, the figure of the “*Français-e issu-e de l'immigration,*” particularly when s/he is perceived as “*Arabe musulman-e,*” as the problem, the malaise of the Republic. I think that the malaise does not stand where the dominant voice thinks it does. Saïd Bouamama pinpoints:

Le rapport colonial ou l'imaginaire colonial n'est pas un problème lié aux caractéristiques des immigrés, il est un problème lié à la manière dont on aborde l'étranger, et ça c'est un problème français. [...] J'ai un copain turc qui me dit : mais moi je suis un Algérien dans le regard des gens. (Robine 2006, 128)¹⁵⁴

Bouamama's words reflect that conflicts lie, in my view, in the fact that the dominant society applies a patriarchal-racist *gaze*, inherited from the colony and remade in the postcolony, which *constructs* and *stigmatizes* so-called minorities for being “visible.” Consequently, it primarily thinks diversity through assimilation. “*Le paradigme dominant [pour percevoir les populations ‘issues de l'immigration’] reste le paradigme intégrationniste et culturaliste*” (Bouamama in Robine 2006, 128).¹⁵⁵ The dominant gaze sees the so-called “ethnicization of society” but does not see that its constructed identity *is* ethnic – white, middle class, Catholic. The “problem” is neither Muslim nor the visibility – that is, inassimilability – of postcolonial minorities. *Le problème n'est ni musulman ni la visibilité, c'est-à-dire l'inassimilabilité, des minorités postcoloniales.* Rather, the malaise perceivable in the debates on “immigration” and

¹⁵³ There lies the violence of the Republican project, as it was conceptualized in the French philosophical and political tradition.

¹⁵⁴ My translation: “The colonial relation, or the colonial imaginary, is not a problem related to the characteristics of the immigrants, it is a problem related to the way one apprehends strangers, and that is a French problem. [...] I have a Turkish friend who says to me: but I am Algerian in the way people look at me.”

¹⁵⁵ My translation: “The dominant paradigm [to perceive the populations ‘of immigration background’] remains the integrationist and culturalist paradigm.”

“diversity” is the manifestation of the deep gap between the construction of so-called “national identity” and the plurality of identities/faces France has today.

This is at the very foundation of the “*Indigènes de la République*.” Houria Bouteldja is a well-known French activist and one of the main founders of the movement. She explains:

Nous, ce qu'on veut montrer, c'est qu'il faut que la France repense l'identité française. L'identité française doit exploser, elle est étriquée aujourd'hui. Il faut repenser la question de la citoyenneté. Le problème c'est qu'en France la nation est ethnique, l'identité est très ethnique [...] Je pense qu'aujourd'hui le Français doit accepter sa part arabe, et musulmane... et sa part africaine, antillaise, berbère, et sa part chinoise s'il y a des Chinois... et nous-mêmes, on doit accepter tout ça, je dois accepter ma part chinoise [...] c'est prendre acte de toutes les composantes de la société, c'est la réactualisation de l'identité en fonction des gens qui sont là (Robine 2006, 130).¹⁵⁶

Bouteldja’s words resonate with the necessity, collectively and individually, for me and for all in France, albeit differently, to de-center as French citizens. In other words, it is important to displace along the circles of familiarity and proximity to the constructed national core. I enlarge here the understanding of citizenship and nationality to one where all second, third, fourth generation immigrants, “*Français-e-s issu-e-s de l’immigration*,” who are not necessarily French citizens on paper, are so in my discussion on identity and citizenship. De-centering as a French citizen, or just as a human in France, *in relation to* the migratory, postcolonial, and transnational society allows me to have a located standpoint where it is possible to see the bigger picture and its potential dialogical spaces for transformation. Indeed, in rethinking identity and citizenship within the Republic, in decolonizing the Republic in dialogue with society in its whole, what matters is *harmony*. So far French citizenship is not equal. I mean this in the sense that “race”/religion, colonial background, gender, and class still construct hierarchies of national universality – the French norm or

¹⁵⁶ My translation: “What we want to show is that it is necessary that France rethinks French identity. French identity needs to explode; today it is narrow. It is necessary to rethink the question of citizenship. The problem is that in France the nation is ethnic, identity is very ethnic [...]. I think that today French people need to embrace their Arab, and Muslim, part...and its African, *Antillaise*, Berber part, and its Chinese part if there are Chinese...and we too, must embrace all this, I must embrace my Chinese part [...] it is to acknowledge all constituents of society, it is to renew identity according to the people who are there.”

Republican neutrality. As explored in chapter two, the perceived Others of the Republic are required to assimilate to this norm and do so “in their own benefit.” Sociologist and activist Saïd Bouamama, key member of the *Indigènes* movement, adds:

*L'intégrationnisme est le refus de la diversité culturelle française, c'est l'idée que la personne [issue de l'immigration postcoloniale] n'est jamais tout à fait française : elle est indigène, elle a toujours un effort supplémentaire à faire. Et on va expliquer ses difficultés par une intégration insuffisante, jamais par une inégalité ou une domination (Robine 2006, 133).*¹⁵⁷

In an interview with Jérémy Robine, Bouteldja explains further:

*Mais l'objectif essentiel c'est de poser la question sociale, la question de l'égalité, la question de la citoyenneté, de l'égalité entre citoyens, entre humains, même, parce qu'on n'en est pas là, lorsqu'on est issu de l'histoire coloniale, on n'est pas des humains égaux : toi tu es l'universel, dont émanent toutes les valeurs universelles, les droits de l'homme, etc., tu m'illuminés de tes Lumières, n'est-ce pas ? J'apprends de toi, on n'est pas dans une relation d'égalité, c'est toi qui m'apprends des choses et pas moi qui t'apprend des choses, on n'est pas dans une relation de réciprocité, c'est ça qu'il faut détruire. On partage la même citoyenneté, plutôt la même carte d'identité, et pourtant on n'est pas des égaux. C'est le fruit du mythe [de la République] et nous, on veut détruire le mythe, pour une égalité réelle (Robine 2006, 132).*¹⁵⁸

This quote is extremely important, for it shows what postcolonial racism means in terms of the differentiated places and power it entails for different people within the whole constitutive of the nation. It argues that there cannot be equality in France without mutual recognition and reciprocity from a place of shared citizenship and humanity. It is important to raise the question of equality in the French context because equality is at the core of the conceptualization of the Republic but, in fact, as I have explained in chapters one and two, the

¹⁵⁷ My translation: “Integrationist ideology is the negation of French cultural diversity, it is the idea that the person [who descends from postcolonial ‘immigration’] will never be fully French: she is *indigène*, she always needs to put forth additional effort. And if discourse will explain her difficulties on the account of limited integration, never will it do so on the account of a form of inequality or a form of domination.”

¹⁵⁸ My translation: “But the main objective is to ask the social question, the question of equality, the question of citizenship, of equality between citizens, between humans, even, because we aren’t there yet, when we descend from colonial history, we aren’t equal humans: you are the universal from whom all universal values follow, human rights, etc, you light me up with your Enlightenment, don’t you? I learn from you, we aren’t in a relation of equality, you are the one who teaches me things and I’m not the one who teaches you things, we are not in a relation of reciprocity, this is what we need to destroy. We share the same citizenship, or rather the same ID, and still we aren’t equal. This is the result of the myth [of the Republic] and we [the *indigènes* movement] want to destroy the myth, for a real equality.”

ethno-blind, universal conceptualization of equality simultaneously negates and favors inequality – that is the “myth of the Republic.” So, it is important for me to start from there in the process of decolonization of the dominant imaginary in France.

Yet the idea of equal citizenship raises many questions. Even if equal citizenship contributes to harmony, the latter is not complete because this still leaves first generation immigrants, including the undocumented, outside the national group or community. Besides, is it even possible to build equal citizenship within the nation? Can anything national be equal? By definition, from the moment there is a nation, there is a “we” and there is a “they.” The very idea of nation relies on an onto-epistemology of exclusion. Consequently, there are, even within the nation, within the “we,” a differentiation of citizenship. In this regard, decolonization shows a tension with the nation-state. Indeed, if decolonization overcomes and moves beyond fixed and assigned identities, it also has to question the nation-state. It is interesting to me that the philosopher Rada Iveković, in her reflection on decolonizing knowledges, demonstrates that there necessarily needs to be a denationalization of knowledges alongside their decolonization in order for the latter to occur (Iveković 2012). It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore further the relation between decolonization and denationalization, but it does provide the space for needed future investigation.

Following my conversation on equality, when it comes to transformation, thinking in terms of plurality brings me to another level of awareness entirely where equality is no longer relevant. The point of transformative decolonization is to build *harmony in difference*. In short, “*penser la postcolonie*” amounts to *re-thinking identity and citizenship within the postcolonial Republic through de-centered and pluralist epistemological lenses*. Overall, “[t]hough Left and Right might recognize that there were violations of republican and universalistic principles, the question that lingers is: to what extent does the Other have the right to intervene in the national debate?” (Vergès 2010, 102). Indeed, in the French

imaginary, “*la « diversité » c’est les autres*” (Luste Boulbina 2012, 133).¹⁵⁹ “*Penser la postcolonie*” implies re-thinking “immigration” and “diversity” in a way that opens identity towards a place where diversity becomes harmony in difference. Like I said earlier, decolonization is radically political. Such transformation of imaginary must reach all spheres of social life and permeate all relations, including institutions and practices. Diversity is real when color and race matter but do not matter, are visible yet invisible. Postcolonial minorities are “French” not only to win the World Cup or be a good comedian when they suit the dominant representation of the good immigrant. Rather, all human beings inhabiting France, in the present, are part of one community, always, everywhere, in every bit of our relations and existences. Diversity is real and beautiful when it breaks borders.

Additionally, decolonization crosses through political divides. The conventional Right and Left political opposition movements must make an effort of reflection. Beyond their role as decision makers, they bear an important role in shaping discourses, imaginaries, and representations. It is their responsibility to look honestly at the present and ask themselves how the “*Français-e musulman-e*” is, in the national imaginary, the figure that (re)makes the national consensus of the civilizing mission. It is indeed not the result of the rise of the extreme right FN party. Rather, the rising popularity of such a party is the result of the scourge that postcolonial racism represents. It is important that the French elite hear the state of malaise and encourage dialogue. I am not talking about any dialogue, but rather one that is engaged and open, critically feminist and transformative.

Towards Embracing the Peaceful Aesthetics of Plurality

France’s postcolonial conflicts are also an opportunity for change. Conflict is part of life and the driving essence of movement. It must be a constitutive part of the discussions to

¹⁵⁹ My translation: “‘Diversity’ is others.”

open dialogical spaces for a transformative decolonization. Transformation is always a process, never-ending, dynamic, open and multidimensional (Lederach 2005; J. Lederach and A. Lederach 2010). Like peace, it is plural, indefinite, and imperfect. Peace(s) and conflict transformation are creative processes. They are naturally unfixed, ambiguous, made of conflicts and peace(s). I want to start from here because this philosophy for peace makes up the lenses through which I see life and relations.

Indeed, my proposal is a relational approach to humans and conflicts. My input into the discussions on decolonization in France is transformation. In the context of decolonization and transformation, I relate John Paul Lederach's approach of conflict transformation to the aesthetic agency theory of women of color located in the US context. Although both authors in their respective disciplines come from very distinct places, they both, in my view, radically open spaces for transformation. In bridging elicitive conflict transformation and feminist critical race theorists, I argue that decolonization is the individual and collective process that leads me, and society, to learn *new ways of seeing* (hooks 1990 in Soja 1996; Acampora and Cotten 2007). It compels society to use creativity and the imagination as strategies to find home, a place of encounter with one's self and with others where emotions find *their way* (Lederach 2005; Acampora and Cotten 2007). It is this tension between the personal and the collective (communal) that makes home. Transformative decolonization is finding a place of encounter between past and future that can reframe present. It is a place where the personal and the collective come together to re-make relationships. Decolonization is therefore a process that *starts from the present* (Vergès 2012). There comes Françoise Vergès and her critical interdisciplinary approach rooted in the French colonial and postcolonial context. Of all authors I have read in this context, she is the closest one to my Peace and Conflict perspective: the relational approach of conflicts and the transformative nature of the spaces for decolonization.

Transformative decolonization is multidimensional and non linear. It is also cyclical and repetitive, transcending fixed notions of time and space. It transcends the borders of memory, identity, and territory in a way that embraces the “unlimitedness” of plurality. It means that color, religion, and colonial background, among others, interact together in unexpected and disorganized ways. The frame is constantly moving, unsettled, radically open. There are no hierarchies of time and space; periphery/center; before/after. They are all lived experiences in the present. These are the transformative new ways to *see*, *act*, and *be* from where I am located (hooks 1990 in Soja 1996; Acampora and Cotten 2007). It is constitutive of E. Soja’s Thirdspace epistemology that consciously embraces the unsettled, subjective, and radically open spaces for resistance and transformation that lie in the spatiality, historicity, and sociality of human life.

I have argued for a contextualized (critically engaged with the realities of people’s lives) decolonization, epistemological and political – of imaginaries, discourses, and practices. My main concern, as I see French postcolonial conflicts, is harmony across diversities, or how to transcend postcolonial racism. This concern takes place within the wider, transcendental search for (imperfect) peace(s). The difficulty for French elites to see “race” and not just social class as a factor of marginalization in France clashes with the real experiences of post-colonial minorities. This is at the core of France’s postcolonial conflicts. As Robine points out in his analysis of the “*Indigènes*” movement, this is a tricky position. How do I politically highlight “*indigénité*” while not reifying the place of exception induced by history by the term “*indigènes*”? How do I recognize “race” without falling into the trap of reinforcing it? How do I merge recognition and transcendence? How, on the other hand, do I highlight postcolonial racism without downplaying class as a factor of marginalization?

I want to argue for a higher consciousness whereby critically aware of the functioning of differentiated power, people in France embrace society, in its radical plurality, as one. The

real challenge France faces today is to look at itself in the mirror. “[Q]ue cette histoire coloniale, où le colonisé était pensé comme extérieur, ne soit plus transmise comme une histoire du rapport à l’autre, mais comme une histoire du rapport à soi” (Cohen et al. 2007, 68).¹⁶⁰ Decolonization only can take place if society in France becomes aware of the socio-political dynamics that make up itself in a way that is radically open to the plurality of its histories, subjectivities, and identities. Françoise Vergès says:

Je pense qu’il faut que la société française comprenne de quoi elle est faite, c’est-à-dire en grande partie de cette longue histoire de la colonisation. Il y a sur son sol des Amérindiens, des Canaques, des enfants d’immigrés de l’immigration postcoloniale, comme on dit, des descendants d’esclaves, de colons, de bagnards, de migrants de l’époque coloniale et postcoloniale jetés à travers le monde... Si sa langue, sa culture, son histoire, ses arts, sa philosophie, son droit, et ses citoyens sont aujourd’hui pluriels, c’est aussi en grande partie le résultat de cette histoire de la colonisation. [...] On passe son temps à ne pas mettre les morceaux du puzzle ensemble. [...] La transformation, ce serait déjà que la société française se rende compte de quoi elle est faite et que ça pénètre les consciences profondément, qu’on parte d’aujourd’hui et pas du passé, qu’on se demande pourquoi c’est comme ça, qu’on tire les fils et, partant de là, qu’on voit ce qui se passe. (Luste Boulbina and Simon 2012, 151-152)¹⁶¹

Il s’agit surtout... Que la décolonisation fasse l’objet d’une vraie prise de conscience. Une prise de conscience de ce que la France est aujourd’hui. En effet, c’est reconnaître des choses qui sont là. Les traces abondent de la postcolonialité (Hargreaves 2007). Elles sont partout, tout le temps et dans tout, hors de l’espace et du temps. Les identités françaises et les identités en France sont plurielles, indénombrables et postcoloniales. Toutes les voix s’expriment, qu’elles soient au centre ou à la périphérie des choses, qu’elles soient au-dedans ou au-

¹⁶⁰ My translation: “[T]hat this colonial history, where the colonized was thought as outsider, be not passed on as a history of the relation to the other, but as a history of the relation to self.”

¹⁶¹ My translation: “I think that French society must understand what it is made of, that’s to say mainly this long history of colonization. There are on its land Amerindians, Kanaks, children of immigrants of postcolonial immigration, as we say, descendants of slaves, colonizers, convicts, migrants of the colonial and postcolonial era thrown out throughout the world... If its language, its culture, its history, its arts, its philosophy, its law, and its citizens are today plural, it is mostly the result of this history of colonization. [...] We spend the time not fitting the pieces of the puzzle together. [...] Transforming French society should start by realizing what it is made of and that it deeply penetrates the minds, that we start from today and not from the past, that we wonder why it is this way, that we pull the threads, and from there, we see what happens.”

dehors, ou, comme la langue d'Assia Djébar, "à la fois au-dehors et au-dedans" (Luste Boulbina 2007, 24).¹⁶² Imperfect and imperfectly beautiful.

French society will never be able to be as one if the discourse keeps on talking in binary terms of an undefined "we" opposed to a stigmatized "they" even within the very nation. The national/colonial malaise comes from the immense gap between discourse (dominant, hegemonic) and reality(ies). What's more, it comes from the negation of responsibility, the inability of the elite to speak *with*. It is the inability to think beyond borders. While the French elite mostly holds onto an ethnocentric look on race and diversity, transformative decolonization exists for society in order to embrace the plurality of the "*entre-mondes*" (in-between worlds) and to build an open "*entre-nous*" (in-between us).

Ce nous idéologiquement, rhétoriquement édifié affirmativement dans « l'identité nationale » à la française et négativement dans l'invention d'un « bouc émissaire », masque le fait que le politique est plutôt la constitution réglée d'un entre-nous possible. La conséquence est importante : le rapport politique est vertical et autoritaire quand il s'agit du « nous », horizontal et démocratique quand il s'agit de « l'entre-nous » car, dans le premier cas, on distingue « eux » et « nous » alors que dans le second, les « eux » ont disparu, il ne reste plus que la diversité et la pluralité des sujets (Luste Boulbina 2011, 26-27).¹⁶³

For instance, to talk about "immigration" as a *fact* looked at *from above* amounts to blindingly shutting oneself up in a binary vision of social relations where French people are not French *equally*. It is to radically disconnect from the subjective experiences that constitute the multiple faces France shows today.

¹⁶² What matters mostly is... That decolonization be a space of realization. The consciousness of what France is today. Indeed, it is to recognize things that are there. Traces abound of postcoloniality (Hargreaves, 2007). They are everywhere, always and in everything, off space and time. French identities are plural, uncountable, and postcolonial. All voices express, whether they are at the center or the periphery of things, whether they are inside or outside, or, like the writing of Assia Djébar, "at the same time outside and inside" (Boulbina, 2007: 24).

¹⁶³ My translation: "This we ideologically, rhetorically constructed, erected affirmatively in 'national identity' à la française (French-style) and negatively in the invention of a 'scapegoat,' masks the fact that politics rather is to manage the building up of a possible in-between us. The consequence is important: political relationships are vertical and authoritarian when it comes to 'we;' they are horizontal and democratic when it comes to the 'in-between us.' The first case distinguishes 'them' and 'us' while in the second, 'they' disappear, the only thing that remains is the subjects' diversity and plurality."

To decolonize French society and the French state is to recognize that colonization, immigration and multiraciality are intrinsically related *in the whole society*, not only for so-called minorities. Said differently, the relation between race, immigration, and (post)coloniality makes France's moving and plural face. *Les réalités sont imbriquées*. Realities overlap and intertwine. The Republic no longer can talk in binaries and borders. It must embrace the complexity and ambiguity, beautiful, messy, ugly, dynamic, of human relations. The decolonial Republic pushes the borders of identity, to move beyond a view of itself as territorial, cultural, national. In fact, Vergès argues, to break the borders of "national identity" is to re-think the Republic in its relation to time and space, *repenser la temporalité et la spatialité de la République* (Luste Boulbina and Simon 2012). I want to argue for a de-centered perspective that embraces the Republic in its complexities and pluralities, one that resists shortcuts. For instance, the decolonial Republic must recognize the histories of the populations from the French overseas territories as well as its intrinsic ties with and place within French colonial and postcolonial history (ibid.). Slavery and the slave trade are indeed essential to the relation between postcoloniality and "race" in contemporary France (ibid.).

Vergès argues:

La contradiction entre l'annexion territoriale des colonies comme parties de la France et en même temps leur extranéité constante est très importante, elle est absolument au cœur de la façon dont la République, la France même, se constitue. Cette césure temporelle et spatiale est très française, mais elle est artificielle et reviendra par la fenêtre tant qu'on n'aura pas transformé cette cartographie (Luste Boulbina and Simon 2012, 154).¹⁶⁴

In the national (un)consciousness, France still is (white) metropolitan France. In decolonizing imaginaries and practices, France moves beyond fixed notions of time and space, identity and memory, determined by the Hexagon. In so doing, the decolonial Republic is plural not only symbolically but politically in its representativity. Decolonization is democratic. It works on

¹⁶⁴ My translation: "The contradiction between the territorial annexation of the colonies as parts of France and simultaneously their constant foreignness is very important, it is absolutely central to the way the Republic, France even, builds itself up. This temporal and spatial divide is very French, but it is artificial and will come back again as long as this cartography has not been changed."

imaginaries but also institutions and practices of the Republic. And, it also responds to the materiality of people's lives.

France's postcoloniality is made of the multiple dynamics of migration, "race," memory, gender, sexuality, religion, social class, and age, and the ways in which all these elements interact/intersect to make up complex and moving identities. These identities are constituted with and constitutive of power, they are beautiful. The decolonial Republic embraces that a French citizen of Algerian parents is not entirely one and not entirely the other, both at the same time or neither of the two, and many other things. It embraces that my identity is mine and it is people's but/and it is not *fixable*. In his reflection on the beautiful mix of French-Algerian identity in French youth, Mustapha Harzoune says:

Pour en finir avec les assignations culturelles et les raccourcis identitaires, il serait peut-être temps de penser les identités dans leurs complexités symbiotiques et changeantes, de fournir à tous des outils permettant de penser cette complexité et surtout de la vivre malgré le lot d'incertitudes et de doutes qui parfois en découlent. Cela bouscule les catégories ordinaires de la pensée, déplace les frontières, réintroduit des principes d'incertitude et d'impermanence, mais ouvre sur d'autres espaces de liberté, exige de nouveaux rapports d'égalité et passe par une fraternité renouvelée. (Harzoune 2003, 58)¹⁶⁵

Decolonization is liberating. It induces unsettlement and radical openness. It induces embracing the unsettling character of transformation in order to embrace the process. It is important to give ourselves – individually and collectively – the time to think, look, listen, and reflect upon multiple expressions of reality – in everything that surrounds *us* – and imagine differently. Françoise Vergès expresses it in this way:

Je pense aussi [...] à des choses plus « abstraites » : comment aménager des espaces où débattre dans l'apaisement, éviter l'hystérisation qui fait obstacle à toute écoute. On ne comprend pas très bien pourquoi et comment c'est l'apaisement ou l'hystérie

¹⁶⁵ My translation: "To put an end to cultural assignations and shortcuts of identity, it may be time to think identities in their symbiotic and moving complexities, to provide all with tools that make it possible to think such complexity and most importantly to live through it despite the possible share of ensuing uncertainties and doubts. It upsets the ordinary categories of thought, displaces borders, reintroduces principles of uncertainty and impermanence, but opens the way towards other spaces of freedom, requires new relations of equality. and induces a renewed fraternity."

qui domine à un moment donné et qui fait taire les voix qui cherchent comment reconstruire du commun. Ce n'est pas de l'idéalisme ou du gnanngnan sur le vivre ensemble, mais les êtres humains ont besoin de silence, de tranquillité, de temps pour imaginer et penser. (Luste Boulbina and Simon 2012, 155)¹⁶⁶

In decolonizing, we human beings nurture new ways to see and open ourselves to serendipity (Lederach 2005). In nurturing peace(s), we nurture our abilities to feel. Transformation requires *pausing* and *breathing*; letting go of the past and embracing present; *opening* and *sensing*. In decolonizing, we human beings explore the spiritual dimension of transformation (ibid.). We, the people that inhabit this place called France, must allow ourselves to trust and love and dream, and look for a place where we nurture the art of living together as one. As I demonstrated in chapters one and two, postcolonial racism is institutionalized, normalized. Thus, this transformation is hard because it touches deeply ingrained elements of selves. Is society ready to do this? Am I ready to do this? Starting with this very piece of work, I find myself transforming relations yet at times reproducing borders, I see contradictions and I also see power and creativity. It is the very nature of transformation, cyclical, unresolved, and conflictive.

Transformation is not easy; it is tortuous and long. It is a forever re-start where peace(s) and conflict(s) constantly mix in blurry and imperfect ways. Decolonization involves all of society, as a whole and in its radical pluralities; it transcends time and space; it is both symbolic and material, epistemological and political. For all these reasons, it is full of contradictions and ambiguities. Most specifically, in decolonizing, I shall be aware of the real tendencies to recreate/reproduce the binaries that frame our epistemologies and ontologies in the modern world. Deconstruction goes hand in hand with construction – constantly unmaking and remaking. We must interweave the dance of power and the power of dance – we must

¹⁶⁶ My translation: “I am also thinking [...] of more ‘abstract’ things: how to arrange spaces for debating peacefully, how to avoid falling in a hysteria that hinders any possibility to listen. We do not quite understand why and how peace or hysteria dominates at a given moment and silences voices that aim at building something in common. This is not idealism or sentimentality on the art of living together, but human beings need silence, tranquility, time to imagine and think.”

nurture our imagining selves. I understand decolonization as a radically open reflective process that *embraces* difficulties, ambiguities, and contradictions. It aims at bringing society to a higher level of consciousness, similar to Anzaldúa's process of creative resistance and acceptance of self (Anzaldúa 2012). In the foreword to the fourth edition of her transformative "Borderlands," Norma Cantú writes: "that it is possible to both understand and reject, to love and detest, to be loyal and question, and above all to continue to seek enlightenment out of the ambiguity and contradiction of all social existence" (Anzaldúa 2012). Transformative decolonization compels human beings to open themselves to the re-thinking of the frames of mind *normally* used to approach social relations and existences. In my understanding, it is very important that society in France let itself be unsettled by de-centered and renewed perspectives in our ways to see, act, and be.

*Alors qui a peur du postcolonial ? Il n'y a pas de réponse simple à la question qui ouvre ce dossier. Pas d'ennemi principal à dénoncer, sinon l'impensé colonial qui ronge la société française et les hiérarchies sociales dont il assure la pérennité dans une « continuité discontinue ». Pas de complot républicain à découvrir, mais une difficulté spécifiquement française à revisiter les fondamentaux de la République et à les confronter aux faits de sa propre historicité. La décolonisation n'est pas terminée, nous le savons, c'est le principal message porté par le postcolonial. Ce message, il est urgent d'en prendre acte contre les tenants d'une « identité nationale », qui veulent la rendre plus fréquentable parce que prétendument fière de sa nouvelle multiculturalité, affichée dans les ministères. Penser la France postcoloniale, c'est précisément repolitiser ces identités, s'attacher à leur conflictualité, pour construire leur convergence. Ce numéro est donc une critique radicale qui invite à déconstruire nos structures de pensée et d'action pour les débarrasser du pli colonial sur lequel se fondent le racisme et les discriminations aujourd'hui. (Cohen et al. 2007, 12, in the editorial of *Qui a peur du postcolonial ? Défis et controverses*)¹⁶⁷*

¹⁶⁷ My translation: "So, who fears the postcolonial? There is no easy answer to the question that opens this report. No main enemy to denounce, other than the colonial assumptions that eat away at French society and the social hierarchies to which they ensure long life in a 'discontinuous continuity.' No Republican conspiracy to discover, but a difficulty specifically French to rethink the grounds of the Republic and confront them to the facts of its own historicity. We have not seen the end of decolonization, we know that, it is the main message put forward by the postcolonial. In fact, it is urgent to record this message in front of the upholders of 'national identity' who want to make the latter more respectable because it is supposedly proud of its new multiculturalism displayed in the ministries. To think postcolonial France is precisely to repoliticize these identities, to devote to their conflicting nature, in order to build their convergence. Thus this issue is a radical critique that invites to deconstruct our structures of thought and action to liberate them from the colonial pattern on which rest racism and the discriminations of the present-day."

Today a strong malaise has penetrated all parts of French society. As a recent investigation has shown, the young generation feels out of place, unheard (le mouv' 2014). Despite this, society is changing and opportunities for change, that is, serendipity, abound. The new generation, in all its diversity, creates new forms of relating; new ways of being are many. However, distrust may be the most salient symptom of and the most dangerous factor of conflict. France is in a critical moment and it is important that we, society in France, look for a place of consciousness from where we can work as a whole. I understand this necessity not for our individual selves, but for the sake of relations and the consciousness of the intersubjectivity of our existences in society. If we allow the unsettling character of human and social relations to thrive, we will be able to open a discussion that questions the way we have thought relations across diversities until now. It will open "*un espace gigantesque*" in which embracing plurality and decolonizing minds become possible (Blanchard 2009, 126).

*Reprendre le Fond de l'Histoire pour Transformer les Relations...et Conclure,
Momentanément.*

Through these "notes," I have attempted to open the path towards a transformative decolonization of contemporary France. My concern is equality. Decolonization is a process that encompasses the whole society and aims at building new ways to relate across identities. Decolonization touches all disciplines and all areas of life. It is epistemological and political. It simultaneously works on imaginaries, discourses and representations, institutions and practices. Decolonization is complex and tortuous as it bridges realities, transcends borders of time and space, identity, territory, and memory. Most importantly, it leads to re-thinking hidden assumptions of thought – *les impensés de la colonie*. Indeed, I have argued that debate in France, whether academic or public, rests on a deeply colonial and patriarchal, power unequal, epistemological lens. Such a perspective reinforces and creates postcolonial racism or, in other words, the remaking of the colonial project through the figures of postcolonial

minorities, particularly the so-called “French Muslim of Algerian origin.” I claim that it is necessary that discourse displace, that I *embody* my discourse.

Indeed, national imaginaries are deeply ingrained with a “very French” form of universalist narcissism that negates “race.” If France is to critically think its condition and relations of postcoloniality, it is indispensable that decolonization deconstruct French nationalist universalism, the racially-blind arrogance which traces a fixed line between French and francophone and establishes national grandeur on a form of national purity drawn on colonial power, race, and sexualities. Dominant narratives must open to the de-centering character of situated knowledges, the unsettling nature of Thirdspace, the beauty of the *entre-mondes*. Embracing the vulnerability of human existence allows me to emancipate from and wave ourselves through constraining boxes that imprison our thoughts in time and space.

I have argued for a shifting lens that can see through borders. In wearing decolonial lenses, I attempt to free from the coloniality of rational thought. A decolonial vision is a vision aware of itself, that is, situated knowledge(s). In so doing, decolonization radically de-centers the European white male from the universal pedestal where modernity places the norm. A critical positioning is an engaged epistemology. French society is very late in reflecting upon colonialism and the conditions it has created in the present, in the postcolony. It is urgent that critical epistemologies penetrate knowledges in the French political and academic context to unsettle the deep fetishism of its institutions. In my approach, such a shifting lens is post-colonial and feminist. It opens radically to new ways of seeing and relating.

French societal context is “migratory, postcolonial, and transnational.” Traces of postcoloniality manifest in multiple and unlimited ways. They are everywhere; they are diverse and beautifully imperfect. In speaking of postcoloniality, I necessarily speak about

race/religion, class, gender, sexuality, and of course memory, and how all these elements make new and renewed subjectivities, transcending fixed notions of the nation and its relation with identities. This leads me to reassert that it is important that decolonial transformation recognize postcolonial racism, the deeply ingrained differentiation of who is “really” French and who is not. It is important that it recognize “race” (in its intersecting functioning with religion, class, memory, colonial background, gender, sexuality) as real factor of discrimination in 2014 France. French elite must take this *responsibility* in order to transform the national/colonial malaise into a brighter place. In the light of my findings in chapters one and two, it is important that French citizens de-center as French citizens. It is also important, however, that transformation move beyond these borders. If human beings in France, individually and *in relation*, manage to de-center ourselves as human beings in France, we will all together be able to *hear differently* and *speak differently*.

Decolonization is transformative. It is to find a place of encounter – of imperfect peace(s) – where people come together and reframe the present through transforming (recreating) relationships. Unmaking and remaking are simultaneous, cyclical and repetitive. Most importantly, decolonizing is unsettling and opening to the beauty and plurality of human existences. In this process, human beings in France must learn to *see*. Transformative decolonization must lead us to a *higher consciousness* where it is possible to both recognize and transcend, to be critical and believe, to engage and imagine. It is rewarding and liberating to embrace serendipity and the creativity of life. It is urgent that society in France look at itself with multiple eyes and re-conceptualize *France* as a complex, plural, transterritorial, transnational, postcolonial, trans-cultural, inter-subjective, imperfect, and changing, a creatively ambiguous whole of humans in relation, harmonious in difference.

La fracture est là, il faut ouvrir la brèche.

“This is the end of these notes, but it is not an ending” (Rich 1984, 41).

Conclusions

The quality of this phrase [the moral imagination] I most wish to embrace reverberates in [the] potential to find a way to transcend, to move beyond what exists while still living in it.

(John-Paul Lederach 2005, 28)

Dadirri – listening to one another.

(Judy Atkinson 2010, foreword of J. Lederach and A. Lederach 2010, xiv)

This journey has been one towards consciousness, combining my own with my intention to raise one. I have observed that France, as a community, is facing socio-political conflicts that are expressed in the face of a latent malaise that divides people. In these conflicts, the image of the Republic – equalitarian, one, and indivisible – appears as the central reference of discourse. The malaise, I have argued, emerges from the immense gap that lies between discourse and the realities of the populations that inhabit France today. I have started from the assumption that France is a postcolonial place, for it is an actor of the colony, in other words, of the colonial relations. Following from such an observation, society in France needs to decolonize its national consciousness. Indeed, I argue that dominant discourses reproduce colonial racism in present-day France in the way that they approach issues of diversity, postcoloniality, and immigration. Through a set of representations, practices, and discourses inherited from the colonial imaginary, these discourses remake the French colonial project of the civilizing mission. They do so specifically in relation to the so-called *français-e-s de l’immigration*, or *représentant-e-s de la diversité*, the French who descend from the colonized populations who migrated to France in the colonial and postcolonial eras. The functioning of this set of discourses and practices recreates a differentiation within the community that constitutes the nation; this is what I call postcolonial racism. In particular, I have argued that the French who descend from Algeria as a colony and a postcolony usually referred to, in the colonial imaginary, as the “French Muslims,” are

particularly targeted by postcolonial racism. The latter reproduces in them a colonial position of subjects of the Republic.

Through this research, I have embarked on a journey towards a transformative decolonization of myself and of France as a postcolonial and plural place. This has been for me a reflective journey in which I have learnt a lot about myself as a person, myself within France, and the challenges that France – and the world – faces today. I have tried to balance anger and transformation, deconstruction and creation. It is a journey towards discovery and peace(s). My concern is *le vivre-ensemble*. How can we, as human beings, live together in harmony beyond the functioning of factors of inequality, which are constructed socially, politically, and culturally yet matter in the realities of human beings-in-relation. In the French context specifically, I am concerned about the continuities of the colonial domination within the community that makes France. I have attempted to shift the dominant, conventional, uncritical lens towards an open, transformative, and de-centered view of present-day plural France.

I have used a transdisciplinary approach of research that relies heavily on philosophy through the writings of Algerian female author Seloua Luste Boulbina, for example. She has triggered in me a radical process of decolonial reflection. I also have dug into history, as it constitutes the discipline in which the slowly emerging post-colonial approach has stayed so far in the French context. Anchored in Peace and Conflict Studies, I have endeavored to apprehend postcolonial conflicts through the lenses of relations and human beings in relation. I have tried to see the creativity and transformative serendipity that lies in any spacemoment of life. I have approached research in an inter-subjective way, as well as through a feminist ethic. Thus, I have been fully part of this research and have endeavored to be transparent at all stages. I have also pushed the boundaries of research and of myself through it.

In the first chapter, I have explored French colonialism and its relationship with racism in colonial and postcolonial France, focusing specifically on Algeria as a colony and postcolony. I have looked into the place the Republic and its imaginary hold in relation to the colonial/postcolonial projects of France. In doing so, I have also examined its relation with colonial history. I have found that the Republic and its deeply rooted imaginary have been constructed *with* the colonial experience, specifically with Algeria. Colonial France constructed within the Republic a differentiation between nationality and citizenship. In *l'Algérie française*, those constructed as *musulmans français* were subjects of the Republic – those who, by their status of exception, provided France with the narcissistic grandeur characteristic of its nationalistic universalism.

France, specifically, has developed a nationalist, abstract conceptualization of universality whereby the Republic is the symbolic representation of equality in a way that, in the national conscious, the Republic guarantees intrinsic equality. Yet, this tradition rests on “whiteness” as the constructed center that only envisages the Other as the image of oneself. Thus, through the colonial/patriarchal gaze, the Other can only exist as equal if she assimilates to the constructed French, white, male center. This deeply ingrained Republican imaginary concomitantly asserts the inexistence of “races” and invisibilizes the real effects of “race” in France. In so doing, it participates strongly in maintaining a hierarchization of people in France whereby discriminations are vivid and intersectionally racial, memorial, social, and sexual.

The non-recognition of “race” functions as the non-recognition of certain parts of the populations who have historically been assigned identity (and essentialized) in opposition and in relation to the constructed white French center. Indeed, I have found that immigration is closely, inherently related to colonization, or, in other words, colonization has created the conditions for immigration to occur. Therefore, the French of Algerian descent are not any

kind of immigrant in France as much as the relations in question are not any kind of relations – they are the continuities, the living traces of colonialism.

I have found that colonial history has been the object of an “*aphasie coloniale*,” to use the words of Ann Laura Stoler. Up to this day, it is very rare to hear a de-centered, critical version of French colonial/postcolonial stories. The national discourse widely negates the colonial fact, *le fait colonial*. Furthermore, the national imaginary tends to create a division between colonial and national in the way it approaches history, the memories of history, and by extension, the human beings whose subjectivities do not appear in the telling of the story(ies). It leaves outside the scope of the national the French who descend from the colonized stories. In this negation, Algeria as a colony/postcolony, appears as “the tree that hides the forest” (Luste Boulbina 2008). It holds, like in the colony, a place of exception in the national memory. It appears as a “*familiarité étrangère*.” Unveiling Algeria would unveil the abomination of the system of French colonialism across times and places, and it would give leads for comprehension and ways towards a better understanding of the present; in other words, it would unsettle the status quo.

The telling of the colonial story(ies) reproduces the imaginary that sustains colonialism because it reproduces the dynamics of power/knowledge – who can speak and who cannot, who tells the story and who is absent from it. The telling of the story functions as a negation of the legitimacy of the place, within the nation, of the colonized and their descendants who constitute France today. It provokes a deep feeling of marginalization, which seems to combine history/memory and “race.” It coincides in the cases of the *banlieues populaires*, with a social marginalization. As I explain in chapter two, the *banlieues populaires* appear as the peripheral “territories” (in colonial language) of the Republic that show uncomfortably close resemblance to the colonies. I argue that it is necessary to

decolonize history (knowledge) and replace politics – *how* rather than *what* – in the center of concerns to recreate, that is, unmake and remake identities in the present.

Additionally in the second chapter, I have teased out postcolonial racism in everyday discourses that permeate public space – mostly in the media, political discourses, and legal texts. I have tried to understand how these discourses remake colonial relations and the civilizing mission. I have found that through a national discourse of “integration,” the Republic reproduces the differentiation of citizenship within the nation. Such discourses specifically target the so-called “French Muslims,” who, as I argue, the colonial imaginary associates to an Algerian “origin.” In such a discourse, *égalité* and *laïcité* are two aspects of the same package that places the Republic beyond all suspicions. Through the example of the 2004 law on secularity and wearing of religious symbols in schools, I demonstrate how, through discourse, the colonial mission has transformed from the populations to civilize to the populations to discipline. Indeed, it envisages the French of Algerian descent as the Other – Muslim, immigrant, deviant – making invisible the very racialization of itself, the construction of the racial norm as white/Christian, French, and male. In this unconsciousness of oneself and of power in postcoloniality, discourse sees in the French of Algerian descent the reproduction of the subjects of the Republic, who are part of the community to be assimilated to “white French superiority.”

Ascétisme is the consequence of the Republican centeredness, which thinks of tolerance as the correction of a fault – the conceptual roots of the civilizing mission. It is the mask that the immigrant is compelled by the patriarchal/colonial gaze to wear as the condition of her humanity. Yet, assimilation (or integration), the promise of *ascétisme*, is an illusion. It will never be fully reached, for it is impossible to *se défaire de soi-même* (get rid of oneself). The *indigène* always remains *indigène* – and any “mistake” or any expression of the plurality

of herself functions, in discourse, as the evidence of her condition of “natural inferiority,” her deviance, and her superficial belonging to the nation.

Similarly, the discourse of “diversity,” which has emerged as the new paradigm of integration in the last few years, appears as the confirmation of the national dichotomy between the citizens who are “French” and those who are “representative of diversity.” Furthermore, it does not imply a reflection of the challenges of plurality in postcoloniality, such as the need to bear special attention to inequalities inherited from a historical hierarchization of lives, as well as the need to work on the creation of a place of harmony across potential factors of division, “race,” religion, memory, gender, and social class.

I have found that discourse represents the French of Algerian descent, and by extension, the so-called “French Muslim,” as a threat to “national identity.” By looking beyond the visible, I have seen that instead, they are, in the national unconscious, a threat to the white-Christian construction of the Republic. The discourse of *laïcité* rests on a rhetoric that pictures a constant threat of ethnic separatism in a mythical Republic where equality is a taken-for-granted, undisputable fact. The Muslim community in France is particularly targeted by such discourse of fear and hatred. Most specifically, the French of Algerian descent are, in the unconscious conscious, the target of a discourse that essentializes and assigns a constructed (through the power of representation) ethno-religious identity – the prison of racism. I have found that the discourse of “Islamophobia,” which supposedly intends to call attention to the dangerous increase in violence reflecting anti-Muslim racism, tends to function as legitimating such racism. What’s more, the discourse of “Islamophobia” is part of, and is created by, the discourse of the elite to legitimate a reality – anti-Muslim racism – that it has created.

In the unconscious imaginary of the nation, the *banlieues populaires* specifically appear as off spaces, immaterial reality, imagined and imaginary spaces called “territories” as a metaphor for its inhabitants – it appears as the reenactment of the colonial theatre. They are “territories of exception” that, by this account, need “treatment of exception.” This colonial/patriarchal discourse hides racism. It hides that racial assignation determines, along with other intersecting factors – colonial history/memory, social class, differentiation within the national landscape.

Finally, I reflect on the need for the French state and French society to decolonize the deeply rooted national imaginary that supports colonial/postcolonial discourses. I argue that the process of decolonization must include all human beings inhabiting France, yet all differently. Indeed, it implies that French society recognize postcolonial racism and the hierarchization of lives within the Republic as well as the different positions citizens hold on the basis of their relation to the colonial/patriarchal history. It implies, therefore, that French society recognize that France is a postcolonial place, and that we look at history from the present, through the lenses of the present, as a way to re-think identity, memory, and territory in the present. I do argue that there is an important demand on the part of society to understand who we, as a collective whole, are, and how our histories connect in a way that explains where, who, how we are, here and now.

Transformative decolonization must be political and epistemological. It is both individual and collective. I do not propose a how-to of decolonization. Rather, I argue for different ways to *see*. I promote alternative epistemologies to look at life and one another, human beings-in-relation, most specifically in France. These epistemologies aim at embodying knowledge, situating self, and consequently, de-centering self and knowledge from the constructed “white,” colonial (French) center. It is a matter of making the invisible visible, of making the partiality of one’s vision visible. Decolonization requires a critical

contextualized post-colonial lens on French society and history. I claim that part of this reflective effort is the institutionalization of Post-colonial and Feminist Studies in France. Such an approach must engage with marginalized voices and knowledges in the French colonial and postcolonial context. It must place at its foundation the intrinsic intersection between colonization and immigration in this very context.

French society is proud of its universalistic model. Yet, the latter is violent, inherently tied to and permeated with the deeply rooted imaginary inherited from the construction of colonial relations. The effort to undo this unhealthy pride, which intends to revivify the national grandeur, is of extreme necessity in order to create a place of harmony between human beings in France with their plural stories and identities – a place where it is possible to see the beauty and richness that emerges from/lies within the complex intermeshing of people. De-centering and locating the self is the condition of a critical vision, of a vision that recognizes the effects of “race” in the country. The challenge of such vision is to be one that, while being aware of the fictitious nature of “race,” makes the conscious effort to act upon the differentiated functioning of race in relation to colonialism in France.

Further, the challenge of decolonization is to move beyond binary understandings of conflicts. Transformative decolonization is a process that transcends borders of time, of space, and of identity, in order to create a space where it is possible to come together and create new energies to transform and recreate relations. Transformation requires the Republic to unsettle, and to do so in plurality. Transformative decolonization is the movement towards embracing the complex plurality of beings, the multiple expressions of identity that make France. Only then can society in France de-center itself; only then can I de-center myself. Starting from myself, I intend to shift lenses and inspire a wave of consciousness, to create radically open, imperfect, and moving spaces for peace(s) in France. Transformative decolonization is not

easy; it is full of contradictions and tensions, as is my thesis. It is cyclical, constantly changing, and never-ending, yet it is radically open, liberating, and beautiful.

I am honored to write about my home, about myself. Our here and now in France is full of opportunities for change. I do believe strongly that in the coming together of all energies inhabiting France there exists an immense power to transform life. French society rests on a highly conservatist tradition that presents harsh resistances to challenge the status-quo, that is, relations of hierarchy. It tends to resist youth and change and unconventional ideas; it tends to hang on to the ground of established power. This may be one reason why French society seems to be in a deadlock, to be stuck in its own journey, stuck in an old version of itself far from its here and now. It is time for French society to unsettle its status quo, as well as the immobility of its institutions, and rather believe in the transformative, beautiful power of our combined energies. It is time to look beyond the visible, to shift habits, and to push boundaries. Things are changing; the young generation acts and speaks in new ways. Society needs to listen, sense, and embrace the opportunities of the here and now.

Limitations and Future Research

This work bears some limitations, some of which I am aware. To start with, my research question is broad. It might have hidden from me some of the complexity and heterogeneity of postcolonial relations within France. For example, if postcolonial racism functions in an intersectional manner, to what extent does social class have an impact on its functioning? How does postcolonial racism differ between women and men, and across sexualities?

Secondly, discourses and the dynamics of relations are changing rapidly both in France and globally. Most importantly, the study of postcolonial relations in the French context is a very current and emotional topic in France. I have mostly focused on the

discourses and practices of the last ten to fifteen years. Yet, I can picture change in discourse between pre and post-9/11 in terms of the relations the Republic establishes with its Muslim community. To what extent do international relations impact the *vivre-ensemble* across diversities within France? How has the construction of “race” in relation to colonialism changed over the last decade in France? This could be the object of further research.

Furthermore, I have chosen to focus my research on the human beings who, by nationality or culture, are French. In this regard, I have argued that postcolonial racism functions in a way that it recreates a differentiation within the nation on the basis of “race” intersecting with colonial background. Yet, how are the limits between who is culturally French and who is not drawn? I am dealing with imaginaries that are mostly unconscious. So, how can I draw a line between racism towards the “French Muslim” and racism towards first generation immigrants? I have argued for a decolonization that transcends borders and one of these borders certainly is the nation-state. Yet, I think it would be interesting to problematize the nation-state in relation to postcolonial racism and examine how postcolonial racism applies to postcolonial immigrants who are not French by nationality or culture, yet are part of the community that constitutes the country.

For reasons of time, I have chosen not to pursue field research to conduct my investigation. Yet, I do argue that the colonial imaginary of the Republic is deeply ingrained in the minds of the people in France. Thus I do think that primary sources from interviews of the people inhabiting France, with a representation of a wide range of their pluralities, would certainly enrich my understanding of postcolonial conflicts. It would, further, allow me to enter into the spaces of resistance and analyze to what extent “dominant discourses” are indeed dominant. Additionally, it would allow me to evaluate to what extent Algeria as a postcolony still functions as “the exception within the exception.”

I have faced difficulties in reading in French, thinking in French, and writing in English, for both languages come from and reflect different colonial/postcolonial realities. I am not sure whether it has been a limitation, but it has certainly been a challenge. At the same time, it is part of the originality of this work. My plural lenses have allowed me to see different perspectives and create my own.

Finally, I have embarked on a journey towards a higher consciousness. In doing so, an important part of my own process has been to deconstruct dominant discourses. My attempt has been to transform myself and to decolonize my mind through research. My intention has been to open space for discussion from my position, to take a stance, and raise consciousness. Simultaneously, I am also aware that I bear my own tensions and contradictions. I have sometimes deconstructed in violence. This might have limited me at times in understanding relations and humans peacefully, from a place of wisdom where I can go beyond simplistic views and embrace complexity. It could also have made my words appear as a reenactment of the colonial center or as a reproduction of racism. Thus, my limitations have also been to confront myself and my emotions throughout the process.

Besides the openings for research that lie in the limitations of this piece of work, I think it would be interesting to study racism within France in relation to black people. More specifically, I have found that the need for a post-colonial reflection in the light of the place of the citizens of the overseas territories (*les Antilles françaises*) in France is huge. It is the blind spot of the yet limited French post-colonial thought. It would be interesting to investigate to what extent this form of postcolonial racism resembles and differs from the colonial/patriarchal imaginary that objectifies the descendants of Algeria.

Point-virgule.

This is the beginning of a journey I have started to transform myself and others through research. Reading and writing have unlimited power to transform realities. This is only a trace of my own understanding of life and my place within it. I am aware that it comes from my location in the landscape of human and social relations. I hope, however, that through my partial vision, I have been able to contribute to the current discussions and reflections on “race” and coloniality, as well as peace(s) and conflict transformation, in the French context and beyond. I hope that I have been able to offer new perspectives on how we human beings relate to each other in our multiple identities and stories. Music is on hold for a moment, and so is my body. The breath, the energy, and the soul of life remain vivid. This is only the first act of a long dancing piece.

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