

## **Research Agenda**

When studies are made about the future of Islam in the modern world, the focus is often on the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East or Southeast Asia. These nations face the challenges of modernization versus Westernization, fundamentalism versus moderation, and many such internal conflicts. However, the rapidly growing number of practitioners of Islam in the West brings the question even closer to home: how are Muslims living in the West, especially in the United States and deeply secular France, reconciling their strongly held beliefs, deeply entrenched within everyday life, with the increasingly secular attitude demanded by today's society? Furthermore, what problems have and may still arise for Muslims as a result of these interactions, and what might this teach us about international relations between Muslim and non-Muslim countries?

This issue is certainly not one faced solely by Islam. Indeed, a number of cases have been brought forward since the turn of the century questioning everything from whether or not freedom of speech applies to religious hate messages to the constitutionality of forcing children to speak the words "One nation under God" when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in school. Islam will be the sole religious focus of this research because of its strong effect on daily life for most practicing Muslims; from prayer five times a day to a mandatory pilgrimage to Mecca, religion makes more demand on the time and mind of the average Muslim than it does for the average Christian. I am interested in examining how well Muslim daily religious practices fit into Western secular life.

Special attention will be paid to France in this study because of the turmoil caused in recent years by laws, politicians and public attitudes expressing disfavor with public displays of religion in France. The 2005 riots in Paris were a potent illustration of the sharp divide between

many Muslims and non-Muslims in France, a problem which the French often try to overlook. The French now face the very difficult problem of reconciling the Muslim expressions of faith in daily life with the French brand of aggressively secular *laïcité*. However, the conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in France cannot be viewed as a purely religious conflict, but also as a problem related to immigration; young French Muslims rebel not because of their religion, but because of the poverty and low social status inflicted upon the children of immigrants who have been in France for many generations and yet are still viewed as outsiders.

In addition to France, this study will also examine the situation for Muslims in the United States, particularly with relation to the American tradition of separation between Church and State. Increasingly, the display of religion in the public sphere has been seen as “politically incorrect.” This clashes with the relation between religion and social laws of Islam in the daily life of Muslims. Furthermore, there have been a number of incidents that call into question whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear headscarves in identity photos, whether these women can be frisked by male officers in airports, and so on. Contrary to the French situation, however, immigrant status in the United States is not as restrictive for social advancement as it is in France, and so the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in America has more of a religious tone than an immigrant one.

This paper aims to look not only at the effect that Western policies and secular attitudes are having on Muslims living in Western countries, but whether or not this is actually changing the Islam practiced by these people into something different from that practiced in predominantly Muslim countries. It seeks to explore the extent of these changes and the opinions of Muslims in France and America in this respect. The paper’s purpose is also to be a study of the major laws and court decisions made in recent years that directly affect religion, and in particular Islam, in

France and America. I am interested in the differing “styles” of secularism between these two countries, from the so-called “freedom of religion” in America to the “freedom from religion” in France. While the situations in France and America are not as different regarding religion as those of America and Britain, for example, the difference in attitudes towards religion between France and America is quite striking.

Further conflict arises between Islam and secular Western society when considering the issue of women’s rights. A majority of practicing Muslims considers the covering of a woman’s hair with a headscarf to be a religious necessity, and some require not only the hair but the entire face and body to be covered. This practice has come under fire by groups seeking to promote women’s rights, and it has run afoul of a number of laws and regulations passed in certain Western countries, such as the 2004 law in France banning conspicuous religious symbols in schools, or the question in America as to whether or not Muslim women should be required to remove their headscarves for identification card pictures.

Sections in this paper will include a review of some of the literature currently available on the subject, both in terms of international relations research and specifically information on Muslims in Western countries. It will also review relevant laws in France and America dealing with religion and the related court decisions. Furthermore, the roles of leadership figures in France and America will be examined with regards to their effect on the Muslim populations of their countries, primarily the roles of French President Nicolas Sarkozy and American President Barack Obama. The paper will use specific case studies of Muslim versus secularist issues in both France and America to exemplify the issues under discussion.

Finally, the question of how the Muslim population in Western countries is dealing with life in their societies will be viewed through the lens of idealist international relations theory, in

particular the idea that the method of approaching a nation's internal conflicts is related to methods for solving similar external ones. In other words, it is my idea that if issues between individual Muslims and non-Muslims in Western countries can be worked out satisfactorily and the necessary compromises made, then similar methods may be used on an international level to improve relations between citizens of Muslim and non-Muslim countries. This is based on the assumption that changes on the individual level in culture and ideology can ultimately affect relations on an international, even global scale. These assumptions run somewhat contrary to those of the realist school of thought, which would assert that states will continue to act uncompromisingly in their own interest regardless of ethical or ideological considerations.

Previous scholars have noted the problem of Muslim religious issues in secular societies, especially in France and Europe, and have collected a lot of empirical data on the subject. For example, Nadia Kiwan has written about the conflicting policies in French government that both encourage and try to negate diversity,<sup>1</sup> and Frank Peter has studied the particular structure of "French Islam."<sup>2</sup> There has also been a lot of study of the place of religious institutions in political life in the United States, such as the work of Nancy Frazier.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of my research in this context is to examine the effect of these laws and attitudes on Muslims and what sort of changes they have exacted on Islam in the West in recent years. The effect of secularism on Islam in France and America is probably accentuated by modern technology such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Nadia Kiwan, "Equal opportunities and republican revival: post-migrant politics in contemporary France (2002–2005)," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (April 2007): 157-172.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Peter, "Leading the Community of the Middle Way: A Study of the Muslim Field in France," *Muslim World* 96, no. 4 (October 2006): 707-736.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Frazier O'Brien, "Clergy on Politics," *America* 187, no. 14 (November 04, 2002): 16.

internet and television, especially for the younger generations of Muslims. This is why observing recent trends, such as those in the past ten to twenty years, is so important.

In short, this paper aims to explore the relationship between Muslims in the West and Western attitudes towards secularism, and the effect this has on the Western Muslim population. By using the specific cases of France and America, both because of their increasing Muslim populations and policies that encourage secularism, I hope to use these examples to form a basis for a general picture of the Muslim-secular relationship in the West. And furthermore, I wish to see if a resolution of these issues might translate into a betterment of relations on a large scale between people in Muslim countries and the West, especially since the advent of new communications technology has a particular effect on younger generations.

## Literature Review

In this section, I will address some of the scholarly discourse that has already taken place on the subject of Islam's compatibility with the secular societies of France and America, and a few of the authors who have contributed their literature to it. Each one explores a different facet of the relationship between Islam and secular society, Islam and Western religions, Islamic Shariah law and secular law, or several of these topics at once. Furthermore, many of these focus solely on the higher power structures of states and on official policy, rather than looking at the level of the common people. One striking similarity within much of the literature relating to Islam in secular society is that the focus is very often on Europe, and especially in Western European countries like France; this is probably because of the intertwining of religious and immigration issues in much of Europe, and the long-standing nature of these issues. The articles by Frank Peter and Nadia Kiwan focus exclusively on France, while John L. Allen Jr., Matti Bunzl and Esra Ozyurek set their sights on Europe, and Manfred Sing looks at "the West." However, there is a marked lack of significant study on the Muslim population in the United States. The few works that have been published about America have a tendency to shy away from mentioning Muslims specifically, and instead look at the religious community in the United States as a whole in regards to laws and policies affecting it, rather than studying the effects on Islam in particular, thanks to the American sensitivity about being "politically correct."

For example, articles by Nancy Frazier have examined the role of religion in the public sphere, such as the place of religion in political discourse, in schools, in broader ethical considerations, and so on. In her article "Clergy on Politics," Frazier questions whether leaders of any religion can and should take a public stand on political issues not directly related to religion, considering current American laws relating to the separation between Church and State.

Her work groups together not only Muslims, Christians, Jews and other religions, but includes atheists as well.<sup>4</sup> Americans have a tendency to avoid speaking of any one religion or group in particular, for fear of being labeled as racist or insensitive. I believe that further study needs to be done on the Muslim relationship with secular policy in America, because such diverse groups cannot be effectively combined into one category. The place of Islamic Shariah law must also be considered. Thankfully, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has done significant work to advocate for Muslim views and attitudes in America and encourage a cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. They conduct studies and surveys of the Muslim-American population and publish reports on civil liberties and political concerns, such as Muslim voting rates in America.<sup>5</sup>

Where Islam in France is concerned, the works of Frank Peter and Nadia Kiwan stand out as empirical studies of politics and authority.<sup>6</sup> Peter's article talks about Islamic authority and power struggles in the context of French society, which is a crucial point of interest. The lack of a universal Muslim figurehead may be a factor in the chaos within Muslim authority in France which Peter mentions. This article is good for gathering data on official policy and stories of power struggles, especially in regards to conflicts between the French state and Muslim religious institutions over who is "in charge" of French Islam, discussions brought on in part by the creation of the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman. It also mentions some elements which the author sees as changes to the general expression of Islam in France, such as the divergence of thoughts and practices between Muslim immigrants to France and their French-born children.<sup>7</sup> I

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Council on American-Islamic Relations*, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Peter, 707-736; Kiwan, 157-172.

<sup>7</sup> Peter, 707-736.

wish to elaborate on these changes and on the effect of official French policy on Muslims in France as Peter begins to do, rather than looking only at the power structure, which, while important, does not speak for the whole population. Also, Peter's article highlights the immigrant nature of the problem rather than only the religious aspect of it, which is often overlooked.

Similarly, Nadia Kiwan's article on Islam in France looks especially at governmental approaches to Islam, official discourse, and the statements of particular French politicians and policymakers. She addresses the matter of Islam's place in France by examining the stance of the French government, and especially the divergent and hypocritical messages it sends, speaking of equality and then passing legislation detrimental to the Muslim population (such as the 2004 ban on religious symbols).<sup>8</sup> This article is good for data on official policy, but again, it focuses primarily on the government rather than individuals. I wish to use her data in the context of how the attitude of the French government towards Islam and secularism has shaped Muslim feeling about the place of their religion in French society. This article also opens up the area of specific actors and officials who have an effect on Islam in secular societies, such Nicolas Sarkozy in France, whose anti-immigrant and anti-Muslims stances have often been a catalyst for turmoil in France during his time in government.

A number of scholars see Muslims in Western secular societies as an "us versus them" situation, a zero-sum game. John L. Allen Jr.'s article,<sup>9</sup> for example, lists three possible futures for Islam in Europe: either Christianity wins, Islam wins, or the two will join together in the fight against secularism. His article was published in a Catholic journal, and his viewpoint is of different religions and ideas about religion in constant struggle; if it is not a battle between

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<sup>8</sup> Kiwan, 157-172.

<sup>9</sup> John L. Allen Jr., "Christianity Under Siege," *National Catholic Reporter* 44, no. 21 (2008): 5-6.



Christianity and Islam, then the conflict will be between religion and secularism.<sup>10</sup> Allen does not envision a future where every viewpoint is allowed to flourish without being to the detriment of others, and it is the possibility of this win-win future that I wish to examine with my paper. Allen's article is also interesting because of its religious viewpoint, which is one I hope to gather from both Christian and Muslim sources; after all, though these are typically highly biased sources, religion is, by its very nature, subjective.

In the same vein, Manfred Sing's article examines the differences between Muslim discourse and Western discourse, which is an "us versus them" situation where the author is comparing apples to oranges. His article is good for studying the discourse, but he simply compares the arguments of Islamic scholars to "Western" scholars rather than Christians, Jews, or other denominations. Thus, Sing's article is comparing a religion to a region compromising a number of them. As in Allen's article, Sing highlights the need to observe the Muslim situation in America and France through a religious viewpoint as well as a secular one. Interestingly, like Frank Peter, he also addresses the lack of a final authority in Islam.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, scholars like Matti Bunzl and Esra Ozyurek have also argued in favor of a win-win incorporation of Muslims into Western secular society. Bunzl examines the rising trend of "Islamophobia" in the historical context of anti-Semitism, and identifies the former as being more pressing today than the latter. The author separates scholarly debate into two camps, the "alarmists" and the "deniers"; the "alarmists" believe that these conflicts are unsolvable and eternal, while the "deniers" argue that there is no real conflict occurring. Bunzl identifies and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Manfred Sing, "Sacred Law Reconsidered: The Similarity of Bioethical Debates in Islamic Contexts and Western Societies," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36 no.1 (Mar2008): 97-121.

disagrees with an increasingly growing viewpoint that Muslims are too different from Europeans are thus “unassimilable.” This claim, and the French distrust of immigrant populations, were central to the campaign of far-right politician and 2002 French Presidential runner-up Jean-Marie Le Pen. However, Bunzl argues that anti-Semitism has declined, and so will “Islamophobia.”<sup>12</sup> Esra Ozyurek’s article builds on Bunzl’s, referencing its comparisons to anti-Semitism. He asserts that the European Union will not function properly until all are equally allowed to have their own views of religion. However, Ozyurek also argues against the use of terms like “Islamophobia” at all for defining the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, saying that this promotes a sense of “otherness” and masks the real people involved.<sup>13</sup> I agree with Ozyurek on this point, as I intend to study the individuals rather than the phenomenon. Both articles, again, also make reference to the immigrant as well as religious nature of this conflict.

Another interesting area to study when considering the Muslim presence in Western secular society is the role of technology, mass media and the internet in religious discourse. In his article, Charles Hirschkind discusses two divergent viewpoints on the role of technology, wherein some believe that technology and ease of communication will enrich religious discourse, while others think it will ultimately lead to one uniform view of religion. This is related to the debate as to whether globalization will lead to a more homogeneous world or to a rise in fundamentalism as people struggle to protect their unique identities, which is an especially important question in secular societies: will Muslims in countries like France and America eventually integrate fully, or will they strive to maintain a separateness from non-Muslim

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<sup>12</sup> Matti Bunzl, “Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some thoughts on the new Europe,” *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (November 2005): 499-508.

<sup>13</sup> Esra Ozyurek, “The politics of cultural unification, secularism, and the place of Islam in the new Europe,” *American Ethnologist* 32, no.4 (November 2005): 509-512.

populations? Unfortunately, Hirschkind's article uses Egypt as a case study rather than a Western country like France or the United States.<sup>14</sup> Thus, I intend to do a similar study of technology's role in spreading, harming, or changing Islam, but in Western rather than Muslim countries.

The aim of my work is to give a coherent view of Muslim life in the secular societies of France and America, while also incorporating the effects of some of the laws and public policies that affect individual Muslims. I will examine the effects of Western secular society on Muslims in France and America and what sort of change this has effected on their views and practices, incorporating the work of these scholars with their varied theories and visions of the future.

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Hirschkind, "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counterpublic," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (February 2001): 3-34.

## **Research Design**

In order to understand the balance between Muslim expression and life in a secular society, my research will include a mix of scholarly works and primary data gathered from online sources. This information will be accentuated with both Muslim and non-Muslim scholarly research on the subject, Muslim viewpoints expressed online in the form of blogs and other public internet sources, and newspaper coverage of events. Furthermore, my paper will make use of empirical data pertaining to population numbers, mosque distribution, and laws relating to religious issues in both France and America.

As my paper deals largely with the religious aspects in people's lives – an often touchy and delicate subject – some of the necessary research may be hard to come by, if religious-minded people are reluctant to share their thoughts on religion's place in daily life. I wish to examine not simply the straight facts about Muslims in France and America, such as the demographics, but the realities of their practice of Islam in these secular societies.

The quantitative facts that can be found in scholarly research and other sources will be the starting point for this paper. For example, I will be looking into the number and locations of mosques in these countries and attempt to gather information on the number of Muslims in attendance at these religious institutions, as well as the relevant demographics; for this data, it will be useful to look into statistical and survey sources, such as the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) and adherents.com, which track numbers such as religious populations. This data will help to show whether Muslims generally go to mosque more or less often while living in a secular society, which could indicate the effect of secularism on Muslim observance. This will be interesting because it may indicate the areas of greatest Muslim population, levels of integration, and which authorities to talk to for more information.

The research used for this paper will not relate strictly to Muslims and Islam. Many authors have written on the place of any sort of religion in secular life, especially in regards to politics and education. For example, Nancy Frazier's articles on these topics will be useful for examining Islam in the American context, and they may also be interesting when compared to French views and policy with regards to religious expression in public.<sup>15</sup> One case to examine is that of religion in public schools as opposed to the place of religion in private Catholic schools; interestingly, many Muslim students in France are finding the atmosphere and conditions of French Catholic schools to be more conducive to their faith than public secular schools are.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar vein, I will be studying the number and type of laws in place dealing with religion in both America and France, such as the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) which, among other things, allows religious institutions to bypass local zoning laws.<sup>17</sup> On the subject of religious construction, there have been a number of protests across the country to the building of Muslim institutions, such as the controversy and long delays surrounding the building of a mosque in Massachusetts<sup>18</sup> and the accusations by some that an Arab-American school in Brooklyn is a breeding ground for terrorists.<sup>19</sup> The latter article states that, "critics of radical Islam focused largely on terrorism.... have shifted their gaze to... what they describe as law-abiding Muslim-Americans who are imposing their religious values in the

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<sup>15</sup> Frazier, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Katrin Bennhold, "French Muslims Find Haven in Catholic Schools," *The New York Times*. September 30, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Karen L. Antos, "A Higher Authority: How The Federal Religious Land Use And Institutionalized Persons Act Affects State Control Over Religious Land Use Conflicts," *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review* 35, no. 3: 557-591. 2008. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Paulson, "Making Peace, and Prayers," *The Boston Globe*. September 15, 2008 3.

<sup>19</sup> Andrea Elliott, "Critics Cost Muslim Educator Her Dream School," *The New York Times*. April 28, 2008, 1.

public domain.”<sup>20</sup> This data will show the effect of American and French hostility towards religion, and especially Islam, and how it might change the methods of Muslim religious expression. Some of my research, especially in the case of France, will deal with official policy regarding religion and Islam, such as the French “headscarf ban” which restricts conspicuous religious symbols in schools. Nadia Kiwan has done a lot of research in this area, so I will be referencing her work, among others, for information on public discourse relating to religion and official laws and policies in that area.<sup>21</sup>

Next, as it deals with religion, a lot of the data I employ will be qualitative and biased in nature, especially in regards to opinions and beliefs. Some of this research will be in the form of articles and other scholarly sources, but since this is a paper about the general population rather than the scholarly base alone, I will also attempt to examine sources such as youtube videos, web forums and blogs as well, such as the videos of Ali Ardekani, also known as “Baba Ali.” “Baba Ali” is a young American Muslim who uses his video blogs to express his views on what Islam really is and what life is like for Muslims in America.<sup>22</sup> I will be using scholarly sources wherever possible, but the research will necessarily have to include informal sources as well.

Of course, as the paper deals with the effect of the secular societies of France and the United States on the practice of Islam, there will be a section on the facts of the practice of Islam and how its practice in predominantly Muslim countries differs from Muslim expression and practice in the chosen Western countries. The research will include data on mosque attendance wherever possible, though of course the percentage of the population that is Muslim is very

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Kiwan, 157-172.

<sup>22</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “Young Video Makers Try to Alter Islam’s Face,” *The New York Times*. May 8, 2008.

different between the Middle East and most Western countries. This will also include information on daily practices such as the five-times-daily prayer required of practicing Muslims in these countries, and how these practices fit into daily life in secular societies.

The paper will involve many types of data, such as blogs and other primary online media, scholarly research and statistical data, and cover several different areas. Some of these are regional areas, such as France and America; others are different locales, such as Muslim religious expression and comfort levels in schools and other places in society where secularism dominates in France and America. And as for types of research, I will employ both pre-existing research from scholarly and non-scholarly sources.

## Observance and Tenets of Islam

Five pillars stand at the core of Islam and have a significant impact on a practicing Muslim's daily life; these are the five crucial aspects of Islam through which Muslims understand their religion and the message of God. These distinct pillars -- the profession of faith, ritual prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca -- are each embodied in their own words and actions. It is important for every able Muslim to uphold these five pillars to the best of his or her ability, because each one serves an important role in the expression of the Islamic faith.

The first pillar of Islam, the profession of faith, is a simple and yet very significant statement for all Muslims. The *shahada* is spoken as follows when translated into English: "I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is His messenger." This recitation is spoken daily and often by Muslims, and it marks the call to prayer. But while great importance is placed upon the *shahada*, it is meaningless unless the one speaking it has met a number of conditions.<sup>23</sup>

The most basic of these conditions is knowledge, whose importance is often stressed in Islam. The one reciting the *shahada* must understand the significance of these words as put forth in the Quran for them to have meaning. The second is certainty, for one must have an unwavering conviction of the truth and dispel all disbelief. Third is acceptance, which means having belief in every part of what is stated in the Quran instead of rejection. Fourth is truthfulness; those who recite the *shahada* must do so in all honesty, for a false profession of faith has no spiritual merit. Many other conditions must also be met in order to fulfill the first

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<sup>23</sup> Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo, "The Prerequisites of the Declaration of Faith," *USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts*, January 1994.



pillar of Islam, such as a spirit of submission to the will of Allah, sincerity, and especially the feeling of love.

The second pillar of Islam is fulfilled by completing the necessary ritual prayers to Allah. These prayers are said for the spiritual benefit of the Muslim man or woman who performs them; their purpose is to make the Muslim closer to God and to remind the Muslim of His presence. The term *salat* is used to refer to the five daily prayers performed by every Muslim, which are done at dawn, at noon, in mid-afternoon, at sunset, and in the evening after performing an ablution. These prayers each take up only a few minutes every day, but they can have much significance, especially when the Muslim is able to go pray in a mosque with other Muslims. The act of praying in a community reminds the Muslim to have a sense of humility and equality with other human beings before God.

*Zakat*, the giving of alms to the poor, forms the third pillar of Islam. Every Muslim who is able is required to give at minimum 2.5% of their money or assets at the end of the year; this amount is counted in produce for farmers. The amount of alms to be given is calculated after paying family expenses, taxes, personal debts, and other such dues. Those who receive the alms are “the poor, the needy, the new Muslim converts, the Muslim prisoners of war (to liberate them), Muslims in debt, employees appointed to collect *Zakah*, Muslims in service of research or study or propagation of Islam, and wayfarers who are foreigners in need of help.”<sup>24</sup> The significance of this pillar is that alms are given secretly to prevent feelings of pride and selfishness in the giver and embarrassment and envy in the receiver. *Zakat* is about the purity of the heart that is free from these feelings.

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<sup>24</sup> “Introduction to the Articles and Pillars of Islam,” *Compendium of Muslim Texts*, USC Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement, 2008.

The fourth pillar of Islam is *sawm*, the fasting practiced by Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. For the duration of the lunar month of Ramadan, which takes place over a part of September and October by the Gregorian calendar, every Muslim must abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and a number of other activities between sunrise and sunset. During this important month, all but those who have good reasons not to fast -- such as the very old or sick, nursing or menstruating women, or those who have to go on long journeys -- are required to participate.<sup>25</sup>

If the fast is intentionally broken during Ramadan, heavy penalties are incurred, such as additional days of fasting or large compulsory donations to the poor. Penalties for deliberately breaking the fast during Ramadan are more severe than during other Islamic times of fasting, because Ramadan is supposed to be a month during which the Muslim feels most connected to Allah and most aware of this spirituality. While he is fasting, the Muslim should use this time to contemplate his connection to God and to exercise his own willpower.

The final pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*. Any Muslim who can afford the voyage must make it at least once in his or her lifetime, as it is an important spiritual journey for any Muslim. When entering Mecca for the *hajj*, every male Muslim is required to wear a special dress called an *ihram*, because this symbolizes the unimportance of material wealth in the eyes of Allah. Muslims of every rank must wear the same white garment and purify themselves before entering Mecca. They make this voyage in order to feel more connected to God in one of Islam's holiest places, which is said to have been built by Abraham

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<sup>25</sup> *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Ramadan."

himself.<sup>26</sup> The experience in Mecca during the *hajj* is one of solidarity with every Muslim, as is emphasized by the fact that Muslims also direct their daily prayers toward Mecca.

The *sawm*, the fasting of Muslims in particular during Ramadan, seems to be most often misunderstood by non-Muslims because they do not see the significance of this act. A classmate of mine once asked me, “Why do Muslims fast for a whole month? Some religions fast for only a day or two at a time.” But the purpose of the *sawm* is manifold, from instilling a sense of discipline to reinforcing spiritual contemplation. Fasting for an extended period of time as a community lets Muslims feel the pain of the poor and needy as well as patience and self-control. It is also common for non-Muslims to believe that Ramadan is simply about going hungry; however, abstention from tobacco, sexual intercourse, and even from bad behavior are also an important part of this special month.<sup>27</sup> The significance of the *sawm* may be hard to non-Muslims to understand because it is a deeply spiritual and communitarian event among Muslims only, one which cannot be felt by a non-Muslim outsider. However, there are some similarities between Muslim fasting during Ramadan and the Christian practice of self-denial during Lent. Both involve self-discipline and the support of a community to achieve a spiritual goal.

Each of the five pillars of Islam plays an important role in the life of a Muslim. The declaration of faith establishes a Muslim’s belief in Allah; it is something that each person must decide for himself. The daily prayers constantly remind the Muslim of God’s presence and the humility he should feel before Him. The giving of alms serves to purify the heart from feelings of greed and to foster goodwill between classes. The act of fasting focuses the mind on spiritual feeling and a connection to Allah. And the pilgrimage to Mecca, a voyage that each able Muslim

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<sup>26</sup> Bruce Feiler, Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths, New York: HarperCollins, 2004, 171.

<sup>27</sup> Akbar S. Ahmed, Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World, New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999, 34.

takes only when he is ready, is a life-changing experience that should put the Muslim on his true life's path. These five pillars are what Islam is built upon, and together, they serve to teach the Muslim what is a life truly well-lived.

A large issue affecting Muslim daily life today is the level of control exacted by religious leaders and the Muslim community. There is a great diversity among Muslim countries when it comes to religious communities. Some countries, like Egypt, are becoming more orthodox in their practices and have seen a rise in the use of headscarves for women and beards for men, while others have seen a decrease in the influence of the mosque in daily life. In more liberal countries like the United Arab Emirates, many young Muslims have been able to find meaning in their lives outside the mosque. Similarly, Muslims in France and America find themselves with more of a choice as to their manner of practicing Islam than they would have in an orthodox Muslim country, and so they are able to choose whether or not to practice their religion and find their own manner of doing so.<sup>28</sup> For example, some young Muslims in France have said that it is acceptable to condense the daily prayer, which should be said five times a day, into one larger morning or evening prayer to accommodate their secular schedules.<sup>29</sup> Only about 69% of all mosques in America hold the *salat* five times a day, while most hold only one or two, usually in the evening.<sup>30</sup>

The Council on American-Islamic Relations did a study in 2001 of mosque locations and attendance in America and found that they are approximately equally geographically distributed

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Slackman, "Young and Arab in Land of Mosques and Bars," *The New York Times*. 21 September 2008.

<sup>29</sup> *Muslims Against Sharia : Islamic Reform Movement*, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl and Bryan T. Froehle, "The Mosque in America: A National Portrait," *Council on American-Islamic Relations*, 26 April 2001.

between the east, south, and mid-western portions of the country, with a much smaller percentage (15%) located in the west. A great majority of American mosques are located in cities and suburban areas, where there is a greater concentration of the Muslim population. Most of the mosques are ethnically diverse, including Muslims of Arab, Southeast Asian and African backgrounds, so approximately 97% of American mosques use English as the primary language to facilitate communication.<sup>31</sup>

A 2006 CAIR survey of Muslim populations and voter turnout in America found that, of the American Muslims polled nationwide, only 31% said that they go to mosque weekly and 27% seldom or never attend. Interestingly, when asked their denomination, 40% responded that they were “Just a Muslim” without specifying any particular sect. While this may be caused by the respondent’s belief that that their denomination is the only true Islamic one, CAIR is hopeful that the desire for pan-Muslim unity and a reduction of sectarian hatreds and divisions was behind this response. As for voting numbers, CAIR found that a high number of both foreign-born and American-born Muslims take an interest in American politics and vote in elections, and 89% claimed to vote regularly. A great number of Muslims of all backgrounds have taken a keen interest in politics in recent years, especially with the election of American President Barack Obama and the changes he might bring to Muslim and non-Muslim relations.<sup>32</sup> In France, however, the lack of social mobility and segregation of the largely Muslim immigrant population has made it more difficult for French Muslims to have a say in public policy and government.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “American Muslim Voters: A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes.” *Council on American-Islamic Relations*, 24 October 2006.

## **France: Impacts of Immigration**

The question of what is happening to the Muslim and immigrant populations in France revolves around many factors, from social attitudes to long-standing prejudices. In France, Muslim and immigration issues are more often than not heavily intertwined, in part because of the difficulty of assimilation into French society; a minority identity in France is rarely encouraged or accepted. In fact, French law goes so far as to prohibit questions about ethnicity and religion in its census. The present French government and the strongest political parties are potent illustrations of the ongoing presence of this French attitude towards immigrants and minorities, and especially Muslims.

Of special concern is the role of current French President Nicolas Sarkozy in this issue, because his election is a troubling indicator of the attitude of the French people towards Muslims in France. Furthermore, Sarkozy himself has often had a negative impact on the Muslim and immigrant communities. Sarkozy's presidency matters for France, because we have all seen that one person can have a huge impact on the image and behavior of his country – for Europe, because of France's historical forefront position in the European Union and its various issues; and for the United States, because of Sarkozy's stated desire to improve France's relations with the U.S. and the rest of the Western countries and also his pro-American stance. The world may have reason to be concerned about Sarkozy because of the possible effect of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the American War on Terror on Sarkozy's policies, especially concerning immigration and national security.

Everything must be considered in context; what sort of history has France built up in relation to immigration and minorities? Furthermore, France is now one part of a larger whole as a member of the European Union, a position which makes many French people doubt their

security when surrounded by such permeable borders. This section will explore the history of anti-immigrant and conservative sentiment in France, the policies of Nicolas Sarkozy, and Sarkozy's probable effect on the Muslim population in the future by examining his past actions in government. Sarkozy has made it no secret that he wishes to stem the flow of immigration into France. At the heart of the matter is Nicolas Sarkozy's view of the immigrant population in France. He has often been called racist and xenophobic by critics, and one must be concerned about how this might affect his future policies on immigration and integration.

In recent years, the issue of how to address immigration in France has played a central role in the actions and rhetoric of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. This can be clearly seen when one considers the topics of his most-repeated comments in the media, from his aggressive language during the October 2005 riots (*"You've had enough, haven't you? Enough of this scum? Well, we're going to get rid of them for you"*) to his blunt answer to the immigrant problem (*"If living in France bothers some people, they should feel free to leave the country"*).<sup>33</sup> A number of analysts look back on Sarkozy's record with regards to immigrants and see a man who is on the right track, as James Graff explains in his article "The Palace Provocateur" published in *Time* magazine covering the October 2005 riots, which was a rash of violent protests by immigrants in the French ghettos. Graff acknowledges that while Sarkozy may have earned some enemies with his hard-line statements during the rioting, during which Sarkozy called the rioters "scum" and claimed that he would "wipe out" the problem, he also showed himself to be the only French politician with the courage to speak out about the problem and to put himself in the media spotlight. According to Graff, Sarkozy's policy of standing out by being bluntly confrontational

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Ossman and Susan Terrio, "The French Riots: Questioning Spaces of Surveillance and Sovereignty," *International Migration* 44 (2006): 5-21.

when dealing with immigrant concerns, instead of being evasive or adopting an understanding tone like his fellow politicians, was what would win Sarkozy the upcoming presidential election. At the time of the riots, opinion polls showed that “56% of the public supported Sarkozy’s handling of the crisis.”<sup>34</sup>

However, this kind of analysis is short-sighted. An aggressive and confrontational tone is not universally appealing, making for a sharp and damaging division between those who support Sarkozy and those who do not. The atmosphere at the time of the riots may have caused French citizens to feel comforted by Sarkozy’s language, but Graff fails to consider what the French people would think once peace had been restored. With time, many have called Sarkozy’s statements a mistake, and some now fear his bluntness as they come to realize the importance of diplomatic rhetoric. Like many other analyses that support Sarkozy’s current behavior, this article sees Sarkozy’s actions only as if he were an isolated member of the government and not as if he were the president, who is the head and representative of his country. Because a president has to deal with many sensitive issues like immigration policy, integration, and the illegal immigrant problem, it is important to look at his behavior in that context as well.

Similarly, much of the scholarly work written on issues of immigration and integration in France focuses more on the past than on current events. In their article in the 2006 issue of *International Migration*, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Michael J. Balz explore the historical reasons for the current immigration problems in France and the xenophobia shown by policymakers. They argue that French racism today can be traced back to the times of French colonialism, when the concept of the “mission civilatrice” -- the idea that French culture is the

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<sup>34</sup> James Graff, “The Palace Provocateur,” *Time* 21 Nov. 2005: 50. *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.



most superior in the world and should be brought to everyone -- was common in political rhetoric. According to these authors, it is because of the influence of this idea and feelings of French superiority that immigrants to France must “remain on the periphery of French society with little hope for escape.” This is regardless of the fact that many of the Muslims immigrants in France today are from Algeria and other North African countries that were former colonies of the French, and, as a result, these Muslims have an identity that is a hybrid of Muslim and French culture.<sup>35</sup> The situation is rather unusual for Muslims who immigrated to France from Algeria immediately after Algeria was granted its independence from France in 1962, because they were given the choice between full French and Algerian citizenships and chose to be French.<sup>36</sup>

What this article does not discuss in depth, however, is the current context and atmosphere in which these immigration problems are taking place today. Authors who wish to explain why France has so much immigrant violence and racism often refer back to France’s colonialist background as the cause, citing the attitude of superiority that was common among many of the colonial powers at the time. But even though this may be true to a certain extent, these authors should not ignore the fact that the world has changed, especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001. The current atmosphere of fear and insecurity has a significant impact on today’s immigration policies, as the immigrant, the “outsider”, is increasingly seen as a liability and a cause for concern. It seems likely that Nicolas Sarkozy’s position on immigration, which is one of “selected immigration” and zero tolerance for illegal immigrants, was affected by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, perhaps even more so than other French politicians as he is a

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<sup>35</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The October Riots in France: A Failed Immigration Policy or the Empire Strikes Back?” *International Migration* 44 (2006): 23-34.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Marseille, Nouvelle histoire de la France II, Paris : Perrin, 1999, 376.

known admirer of the United States and their political system. Haddad and Balz's article fails to consider the impact of current events on French immigration policy and minority issues.

The article called "Sarkozy's Distorted Vision," which recently appeared in *The Guardian*, contains one of the more forward-thinking considerations of Sarkozy's future effect. The author of this article writes that Sarkozy is being misinterpreted by the media in the U.K. and in the United States because they are only seeing the French President that they wish to see. While a number of people outside of France consider Sarkozy's presidential election a great victory for the United States as well as France, Sarkozy is actually a highly divisive politician whose presidency has not proven to be easy so far. The author goes on to say that Atlantic writers see Sarkozy as merely pro-American and anti-terrorism without looking at his actual, specific policies, which the author describes as being based on a combination of "anti-immigrant populism, middle-class social conservatism and extensive economic deregulation" which would be potentially dangerous. What this article lacks and requires elaboration on are the potentials of Sarkozy's actual policies, specifically with regards to immigration and the Muslim population of France. While this article is short on specifics, it effectively conveys a general sentiment on Nicolas Sarkozy and his policies.<sup>37</sup>

The purpose of this section is to bring together the ideas behind all of these texts -- from France and Sarkozy's history with regards to immigration and French Muslims to the context in which these immigration policies have been and are being formed -- into a look at the current situation of Muslims living in France.

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<sup>37</sup> "Sarkozy's Distorted Vision," Editorial. *The Guardian*. 15 January 2007.

### *A Brief History of French Immigration*

There exists no one definite point in history at which we can point and call the beginning of immigration to France. Unlike the documented history of the United States, which dates back only a few hundred years, the history of France, like the rest of Europe, dates back thousands. France's past is a highly multicultural one, containing a mixture of influences from the Gauls, Romans, Celts, and many other cultures. However, it has been said that the concept of French nationalism did not awaken until the French people had experienced the hardships of the Hundred Years' War in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, of which Joan of Arc served as the figurehead, and the French language became dominant in the region around that same time.

French colonial history dates back approximately to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when France established its first colonies in what is now called Canada. Over the next hundred years, French colonies appeared in what is now Louisiana and in other parts of North America for trading purposes, and a number of colonies were acquired in the West Indies and Africa. Colonies were won and lost numerous times as England, France, Spain and other colonial powers battled for dominance, and France was eventually forced to give up or sell most of its North American possessions, most notably with the sale of the territory of Louisiana to the United States in 1803.

A landmark event in French colonial history was the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, which marked the beginning of a new wave of territorial acquisitions for France, such as French Indochina and much of Northern and Western Africa. During this time, French colonial officials took upon themselves the "mission civilatrice" with regards to their colonies, the principle that it was their duty as Europeans to bring their superior culture, language and traditions to the uncivilized natives, particularly in their African colonies. Africans in the French-controlled territories were strongly encouraged to adopt the French language as their own and to convert to

Christianity in order to be considered true French citizens, though many continued to hold onto their Muslim or other identities. This policy continued until the widespread decolonialization of French territories after World War II, most notably with the French loss of Algeria.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the end of France's colonial rule, however, the effect of the idea of the "mission civilatrice" may still be apparent in France's current attitude towards language and culture, as well as its laws. The current system is based on the "republican model of integration", which demands "that immigrants become culturally, intellectually, and politically assimilated."<sup>39</sup> In its own version of the "melting pot" expression, France forces its immigrant population to completely abandon any language or culture they arrive with in favor of French ones or risk being ostracized from the community. This is especially true for Muslim immigrants, whose highly visible religious symbols – such as the headscarves for women – have often been at the center of controversy in France.

Secularism, or *laïcité*, also plays an important part in the French general attitude towards diversity, as it establishes a policy of non-interference between religions and the state. The French people and political figures are expected to practice their religions discreetly and without letting these affect the workings of the state; this often causes problems within the Muslim population in France, as Islam is such an integral part of the workings of daily life for Muslims. This is best illustrated by the controversy in 2004, when Jacques Chirac signed into law the French ban on conspicuous religious symbols in public schools. This was seen by many as a direct attack on the Muslim population, as it forced Muslim schoolgirls to remove their headscarves, which are considered mandatory by most Muslims, while they are in school.

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<sup>38</sup> Jacques Marseille, Nouvelle Histoire de la France, Paris : Perrin, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Claire Berlinski, Menace in Europe, New York: Crown Forum, 2006.

The republican model in France today takes political correctness to such an extreme that it seeks to remove all ethnic and cultural diversity within its borders in an effort to reduce conflict and to promote understanding. It does this by forcing immigrants to adopt a unified French culture while ignoring that of their countries of origin; because of a law enacted in 1872 which is still in effect, it is illegal for the French National Census to ask for religion or ethnicity. The INSEE (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, or the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) sometimes works around these stipulations by asking for the country of origin and attempting to establish statistics based on these nations' religious distributions; needless to say, these numbers are notoriously unreliable.<sup>40</sup>

Since France joined the European Union in 1957, it has had to contend with the freedom of movement afforded by The Treaty of Rome. The increased mobility throughout Europe was further enhanced by The Single European Act of 1986, which allowed for the free movement of goods, services, and European citizens within its borders according to the French Advisory Immigration Service.<sup>41</sup> The Single Act also served to help integrate human rights and establish environmental standards in Europe. The creation and provisions of the European Union are important to consider in relation to French attitudes towards diversity and immigration because many in France see the EU as a threat to their sovereignty and highly protected national identity, as can be seen by the French rejection of the proposed European Constitution in 2005.

Recent laws and proposals paint a very polarized view of French attitudes. On the one hand, laws are being passed to make France even tougher on legal and illegal immigration, lengthening the time immigrants must spend in the country before they can apply for citizenship,

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<sup>40</sup> *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques*, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> *French Advisory Immigration Service*. March 2007.

creating more background checks, and the like. The number of immigrants and minorities in most sectors -- permanent workers, family reunification, etc. -- is dropping.<sup>42</sup> But on the other hand, INSEE recently conducted a survey called *L' enquête Histoire de Vie* (A Study of Life History), a groundbreaking statistical look at the integration of immigrants and their children into French society, which offered policymakers a unique view into the conditions that immigrants face in their country. The completion of this study showed a new open-mindedness and willingness to address the immigrant and Muslim population by becoming more aware of them that was previously unheard of. With the variety of attitudes to be found today in French society, it may be up to France's policymakers to clearly express their country's position on immigration.<sup>43</sup>

### *Nicolas Sarkozy*

Nicolas Sarkozy is the son of a French mother of Jewish background and a Hungarian father. His father left the family when Sarkozy was four years old, later remarrying and refusing to pay child support to his first wife. Sarkozy was never taught any Hungarian by his father, and was instead raised by his Gaullist and Roman Catholic grandfather. It has been said that Sarkozy often did not feel fully French in relation to his classmates because of his family and background, and he was told that it would be impossible for someone like him to ever become the President of France.

Sarkozy studied to become a lawyer, but he began his political career at age 22 when he became a city councilor in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a wealthy suburb of Paris. He was elected soon

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<sup>42</sup> Francois Clanche, "Une Nouvelle Enquete de systeme statistique publique," *Economie et Statistique* 2006.

<sup>43</sup> *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques*, 2009.

after into the office of mayor and served from 1983 to 2002. He spent most of his career as a protégé of Jacques Chirac, but their relations turned cold when Sarkozy betrayed Chirac in 1995 to support another presidential candidate, who eventually lost to Chirac. Nevertheless, because of Sarkozy's popularity, Chirac appointed the popular Sarkozy to the position of Minister of the Interior upon Chirac's reelection in 2002, then made him Finance Minister in 2004 and Minister of the Interior again in 2005. Sarkozy became the leader of the UMP (l'Union pour un Mouvement Populaire), the leading right-wing political party in France and also the party of Jacques Chirac, in 2004. He ran for President as the candidate of the UMP, and in May 2007 he was elected to that highest office.

In the few short years he had to work in the Chirac government before being elected President, Sarkozy ended the practice of "proximity policing" in French immigrant- and Muslim-populated ghettos, which entails the stationing of police officers in trouble spots for purposes of "communication and prevention". According to Sarkozy, this practice was a waste of time and funds for police officers, as he said that "police people are not social workers."<sup>44</sup> This has caused two major problems for the government: one is the loss of trust that may have developed between the people in the *banlieues* and the police, who now do nothing but chase down petty thieves and conduct random identity checks, and the other is the loss of communication and information gathered about the banlieues, making the government an even more distant and unconnected body from immigrants and minorities than it had been before.

In 2006, Sarkozy made one of his most controversial and contested moves when he issued his "Sarkozy memorandum". This decision proposed a chance for amnesty for illegal

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<sup>44</sup> Olivier Roy, "Opinion: What Sarko Did Wrong; France's top cop has erred in statement and more important, in policy," *Newsweek* 14 Nov. 2005: 18. *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.

immigrant families that had children who were already integrated into French schools and could prove that they were steadily employed and being productive as denizens of France. Thousands of families applied, but most were refused, because Sarkozy had set beforehand a fixed number of families that would be granted amnesty regardless of how many were actually qualified. Those families that were refused were entered into a police database that included their home addresses and children's schools, as this information was required for consideration for amnesty. The police were then ordered to deport some 30,000 young children of illegal immigrants, including many Muslim children. However, in an act that inspires hope, thousands of teachers and school workers united under the banner of Education Without Borders protested the law and declared that it was their duty as educators and French citizens to protect the children, many of whom had been born in France and lived there all their lives. "We will not allow state authorities to commit this infamy against children in our names," one teacher declared. "I will protect as many as I can."<sup>45</sup>

Sarkozy passed several more laws in his time as Minister of the Interior that tightened immigration laws for both legal and illegal immigrants and made life harder for all immigrants and children of immigrants in France, including Muslims. His new laws lengthen the period of time an immigrant worker has to stay in France before he can be granted citizenship or request to bring his family into the country as well as require more vigorous testing and knowledge of the French language before one can become a resident. The purpose of these laws is to stem the flow of immigration into France by giving the French government more choice; as he said

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<sup>45</sup> Julio Godoy, "France: Teachers Fight Order to Deport 30,000 Immigrant Youth," *Global Information Network* 24 May 2006: 1. *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.



himself, "We want to choose those people who are welcomed on to the Republic's soil (...), but we no longer want those people whom no-one else in the world wants." <sup>46</sup>

### *The 2005 riots in Paris*

To examine the state of immigration and life for Muslims in France today, it is important to look back upon one of the most widespread and frightening expressions of minority dissatisfaction in France in recent years. The violence that began in the poor *banlieues* of Paris in late October of 2005 shocked and frightened observers around the world. In the weeks it took for the situation in the *banlieues* -- or poor suburbs or ghettos -- to return to normal, more than 7,500 cars had been torched, and damage to private and public property amounted to about \$235 million in damage in hundreds of cities across France.<sup>47</sup> Was this the form of the terrorist attack long feared on French soil since the tragedies in London and Madrid? Perhaps some well-coordinated effort by the "subversive" Muslim population to destabilize France from the inside out? No; this was simply the reaction of the generations of repressed immigrants who suffer because they cannot feel "French".

The outbreak of rioting in late 2005 came as little surprise to the government of France, considering the trends of urban violence over the previous few years. From January 2005 to 2007, there were more than 70,000 documented cases of urban violence in the *banlieues*.<sup>48</sup> Even

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<sup>46</sup> Catherine Coroller, "France prepares tougher immigration laws, targets marriage," *BBC Monitoring Europe - Political* 2 December 2005 *LexisNexis Academic*, AU Library.

<sup>47</sup> James Graff, "The Palace Provocateur," *Time* 21 Nov. 2005: 50. *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, "Urban Riots in France," *SAIS Review* Summer 2006: 47- . *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.

one week before the October 2005 riots broke out, Nicolas Sarkozy was well aware of the volatility of these areas and called the violence there “a daily fact of life.”<sup>49</sup> He stated that before the riots began in 2005, “stones were thrown at 9000 police cars and each night 20 to 40 cars are torched.”<sup>50</sup> The French government issued a report shortly before the violence in which it stated that there were at that time 751 neighborhoods to be labeled as “Zones Urbaines Sensitives” (sensitive urban zones, or ZUS), that were at heightened risk for violence.<sup>51</sup>

Considering all that was known, then, why was the issue of urban violence in the banlieues of Paris not discussed sooner or more measures taken to avoid it? Simply put, it is because the majority of this violence does not have an effect on the larger French population, because the riots and protests take place largely within communities of immigrants which are segregated from the French cities. This segregation of immigrants to France from the rest of the French community dates back in large part to the policies enacted at the end of World War II, when France began actively recruiting manual laborers, many of them Muslim, from their former colonies in North Africa and from elsewhere to increase the country’s post-war growth. It was largely believed at the time that these foreign laborers would come to France to work until they were no longer needed, and then would return home. However, when this was not the case, it became necessary to build more accommodations for the immigrants and their families, especially as the number of second-generation immigrants increased. This led to the rise of so-

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<sup>49</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The October Riots in France: A Failed Immigration Policy or the Empire Strikes Back?” *International Migration* 44 (2006): 23-34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Dickey, “The Fire This Time; Years of racism and neglect explode in a week of riots across France’s mostly Muslim immigrant ghettos,” *Newsweek* 14 Nov. 2005: 16. *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.

called “bidonvilles” (roughly translated as “cities made of cans”), which quickly became dirty and overcrowded due to poor maintenance and from which it became difficult for poor immigrant families to escape.<sup>52</sup>

It can be said that many of the issues surrounding the violence among the poor immigrant and Muslim population today can be traced back to the living conditions into which they have been placed. The *banlieues* populated by these immigrants, who are largely of Arab or African descent, are purposely out of the sight of what we know as French cities and often have poor systems of transportation for accessing schools and workplaces. The lack of mobility from these ghettos makes it extremely difficult for second- and third-generation immigrants to make a better life for themselves, and leads to high rates of illiteracy and unemployment as well as a sense of alienation from the rest of France.

It is this sense of alienation from society that creates one of the biggest complications to the situation, because French public policy has created a contradiction from which it is difficult to escape. On the one hand, politicians such as Sarkozy demand that immigrants to France be entirely assimilated into French culture in every way, including religion, and recent policies on immigration have enacted the strict testing of prospective immigrants on their knowledge of French history, culture, language and values. According to the government, the loyalties of immigrants should be only to France, and they should be happy to abandon all previous culture and traditions in order to assimilate. However, this is impossible given the current situation. Generations of immigrants have now grown up in the *banlieues*, with no exposure to French culture or society through which to feel French. They can receive only a poor education, and

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<sup>52</sup> Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, “Urban Riots in France,” *SAIS Review* Summer 2006: 47- . *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.

there is little public transportation available to and from the ghettos. In the absence of a national identity, young immigrants have no choice but to find an identity with their local communities, especially their religious communities; however, this is complicated further by the forced mixture of cultures imposed by the outside companies that run the apartment buildings in the *banlieues* which, out of fear, practice discrimination in apartment distribution to “avoid heavy concentrations of any one national community in the same building.”<sup>53</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that poverty and unemployment have nothing to do with the problem and it is solely a matter of cultural clashing. Unemployment levels all across France have been rising in the past years, and the unemployment rate has risen from 8.7% in 2001 to 9.9% in 2005.<sup>54</sup> However, the unemployment numbers jump to 20% for French youth, and 40% for youth in the suburbs.<sup>55</sup> This creates a large concentration of one economic class of people in a very small area, a problem intensified by the fact that the lucky few who manage to become successful usually leave the ghettos and never look back.

The question that arises now is: Why did the rioting explode onto such a huge scale in October and November of 2005 if these social and economic issues are so long-standing? The answer to this is twofold. On Thursday, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005, two teenage boys in the *banlieue* of Clichy-sous-Bois fled from a police identity check and died of electrocution when they tried to hide near a transformer in an electrical relay station. It is widely believed that the police were responsible for the deaths, though the police deny that they were ever chasing the two boys.

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<sup>53</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The October Riots in France: A Failed Immigration Policy or the Empire Strikes Back?” *International Migration* 44 (2006): 23-34.

<sup>54</sup> *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Caldwell, “The Man Who Would Be le President,” *The Weekly Standard* 27 Feb. 2006: 24- . ProQuest Research Library. ProQuest. American University Library.

Within hours of news of the deaths spreading, youths in their neighborhood began vandalizing cars and buildings and hurling stones at the police in anger. The level of violence steadily increased over the weekend as clashes between police and the hundreds of youths intensified, and it soon spread to about three hundred poor cités across France.<sup>56</sup>

The man who many have called largely responsible for the violence is interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy. More widely publicized than his policies, which have already been discussed, are Sarkozy's words. The same week that violence erupted in Clichy-sous-Bois, Sarkozy, on a visit to a different suburb, called the rebellious youths in such districts "racaille", which could be translated as delinquents, scum, or low-life rabble, but also has definite racial undertones. He was criticized by some for his blunt and aggressive language, but he responded that the language typically used by politicians was too soft for such a situation, and he did garner large support from the general French populace for being so tough on the rioters and protesters in the banlieues. However, it cannot be denied that his provocative words and actions served only to put fuel on the fire of the rioters, and in fact a large amount of the hatred during the rioting was directed personally at him.<sup>57</sup>

Some have speculated recently as to whether or not such an explosion of violence could ever happen again. The reality is that it certainly could, and it has been happening on a smaller scale even since then. The problems that brought about the rash of violence in 2005 have not been addressed; in fact, if anything, they have been exacerbated by the government's new laws on immigration. Recent laws introduced by Sarkozy have been aimed at the expulsion of

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<sup>56</sup> James Graff. "The Palace Provocateur." *Time* 21 Nov. 2005: 50. *ProQuest Research Library*. ProQuest. American University Library.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

thousands of illegal immigrants, and especially the children of illegal immigrants, who, unlike in the United States, do not receive French status simply by being born inside the country. And as for the legal immigrants, one effect of Sarkozy's new "selective immigration" law is that "insulting the [French] national anthem or the flag" has become grounds for expulsion, and the ultimate aim is to allow into France only those immigrants who will be "useful".<sup>58</sup>

Sarkozy's comments during and after the riots -- his use of racial slurs, especially against Muslims, in front of Parliament brought forth audible booing from some members of government -- undeniably worsened the situation for everyone involved. He both enraged the young rioters across France and made visible a deep but often hidden divide among the French people over their views of immigration. Sarkozy is a rarity among French politicians: he constantly speaks his mind no matter the consequences, and thus lays bare the prevalent anti-immigrant sentiment in France that is so often kept hidden.

What the French government should have taken away from the 2005 riots is the fact that no public statements came out of the crowd. It is notable that they were not organized, they had no group name, and they did not use well-planned guerilla tactics against the police acting like some subversive anti-government force. They were, and are, just a bunch of young people who dream of something better for themselves, just like French peasants did hundreds of years ago. They deserve the right to find their own way to be French, which is, unfortunately, not an easy task in such a conservative and conformist country as France.

Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President of France on Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007, to the cheering of thousands of fans. However, behind the exuberance of the celebration was also lurking a sense of fear and foreboding. Thousands of extra police officers were sent in to patrol

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<sup>58</sup> Moghissi Abdallah, "La France: Love It or Leave It!" *Index on Censorship* 3 (2006): 54-62.

the most sensitive multi-racial suburbs on Sunday to address fears of another uprising like those which occurred in 2005, and a number of clashes between police and protesters were reported in Lyon on that Sunday night.<sup>59</sup> Police mobilization in these numbers shows that violence was not only feared, but expected. The words of his victory speech after the results of the election were announced must have left a bitter taste in the mouths of the young immigrant children he called “scum” less than two years ago: “I want for everyone in the world -- the oppressed, the suffering women, the children imprisoned or forced to work -- I want them to know that there is a country in this world that will be generous to all those who have been persecuted,” he shouted. “And that’s France!”<sup>60</sup> The Muslim and immigrant populations know what he thinks of them. They have no doubts as to what he intends to do to them, regardless of his charisma and seemingly all-encompassing rhetoric. Sarkozy’s responses to the 2005 riots -- with scorn and insults – taught the country’s alienated young immigrant and minority populations that he is not their ally.

Fortunately, the prospects are not all bleak for young French Muslims. Though religious expression and symbols are not tolerated in public schools in France, private Catholic schools are not bound by these restrictions, leading an increasing number of Muslim families to enroll their children in these Catholic schools. Though the student body in such schools is diverse, especially in terms of religion, many students have found that the atmosphere in Catholic schools is more accepting of their faith than in public schools because Catholic schools are more accommodating of religion to begin with. Some of these schools reserve special areas for prayer, change menus to accommodate religious preferences, and even adjust their schedules due to religious concerns. Thus, students in many Catholic schools across France are able to practice Christianity and Islam

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<sup>59</sup> Crispian Balmer, “Conservative Sarkozy to be France’s next President,” *Reuters* 6 May 2007.

<sup>60</sup> *Nicolas Sarkozy: Ensemble, tout devient possible*. Nicolas Sarkozy.

side by side, helping to expose the Muslim children to mainstream French society and perhaps providing them with the gateway to integration that is so desperately needed.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Katrin Bennhold, "French Muslims Find Haven in Catholic Schools," *The New York Times*. September 30, 2008.



### **United States: Concentric Circles of Community**

As in France and throughout the world, people in America live in search of a community in which to belong. In the United States, increasing ease of mobility has caused a breakdown in geographic communities, forcing people to search for other ways to connect. Secular institutions such as sports and shared interests have often served to give a sense of community, while religion is increasingly pushed to the side or practiced quietly in order to avoid causing offence. However, there exists a balancing act between the religious community and the secular community. Thanks to the process of integration, American Muslims often find themselves juggling their identities as Americans and Muslims to form interlacing communities that try to fulfill all of their social needs.

Naturally, this is not to say that there is one unified Muslim-American culture from which to draw a uniform model of community. Yossi Shain argues that the first sense of “pan-Arab-American solidarity” occurred as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, one which made Muslims feel threatened as a religion and is still ongoing. Today, Muslims are split between integrationists and isolationists, the former wishing to empower the Muslim-American community by integrating into American politics and culture while the latter seek to pursue their own religious goals regardless of American politics. Shain asserts that there is even a certain amount of hatred and racism felt towards Arab-Americans by other Arabs because of their openness to compromise and dialogue.<sup>62</sup>

Scholar Ali Mazrui make a further and interesting distinction between “immigrant” vs. “indigenous” Muslims in America, the former being defined as Muslims whose ancestors have

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<sup>62</sup> Yossi Shain, “Arab-Americans at a Crossroads,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring, 1996), pp. 46-59.

been in America for more than a century.<sup>63</sup> Mazrui argues that “indigenous” American Muslims have a different attitude towards the “American Dream” than “immigrant” Muslims do, leading the former to move into all walks of life and professions while the latter are usually more determined to make their mark on American society by entering high-profile professions like professors and politicians. He also raises the point that America is a nation built by immigrants, unlike such European nations as Britain and France, and has thus become a nation that is generally more open to a community of mixed races and backgrounds than Europe.<sup>64</sup>

Unfortunately, the openness and tolerance of which Mazrui speaks have been buried for the moment by the attacks of 9/11. These attacks have placed Muslims in America into a spotlight of negativity that may linger indefinitely, keeping Muslims in a state of “otherness” to be feared by the rest of the population. This was evidenced by the rash of hate-crimes perpetrated against Muslims in America after 9/11, as well as the heightened scrutiny of these individuals whenever security is an issue.<sup>65</sup> Sadly, this attitude of mistrust has also permeated into the American school system; when Debbie Almontaser recently tried to start a public school in New York City where Arab and non-Arab students could learn Arabic together and share their cultures, protests and bad publicity forced her to resign her post as principal before the first classes had even begun.<sup>66</sup> For the moment, it seems that the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim feelings

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<sup>63</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, “Between the Crescent and the Star-Spangled Banner: American Muslims and US Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Ethnicity and International Relations (Jul., 1996), pp. 493-506.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Louise Cainkar, “No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion after September 11,” *Middle East Report*, No. 224 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 22-29.

<sup>66</sup> Andrea Elliott, “Critics Cost Muslim Educator Her Dream School,” *The New York Times*. April 28, 2008.

sparked by 9/11 are still too strong to allow for a cross-cultural establishment like this to survive without incident.

Researcher Stephen Johnson found that there may be a link between religion, personality traits, and anti-Islamic attitudes in America. His study found that those who practice religion for extrinsic reasons, primarily for social esteem or out of a need for community, rather than for spiritual, intrinsic purposes have a tendency to harbor more anti-Islamic attitudes. This would seem to indicate that these attitudes, when they exist for religious reasons rather than out of fear of safety, stem from a sense of social threat. In other words, the highest rate of religious anti-Islamic attitudes stems from the fear that social hierarchies will be upset and communities will be disrupted rather than from spiritual concerns. According to Johnson, the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 served to focus a huge amount of attention and fear on Muslims as a whole and put a religious spin on a political problem. Of course, this is only possible because of the more active role that religion generally plays in communities in America than in France; thus, anti-Muslim feelings in America are primarily driven by religious communities and fear of attack, while these attitudes in France are centered around immigration issues.<sup>67</sup>

One major effect of the 9/11 attacks has been the increase in racial profiling, causing Muslims and Arabs in America to be singled out by government security officials based solely on their ethnicity and religion. Interestingly, though, Salah Hassan notes in his article that the official racial classification of Arabs in America was “white” as of 2002, despite the ongoing racial discrimination against Arabs through profiling. Some Arab-Americans have tried to make the United States government recognize their race as Arab rather than white to entitle them to the

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<sup>67</sup> Stephen D. Johnson, “Religion and Anti-Islamic Attitudes,” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Sep., 2006), pp. 5-16.

protections of a racial minority, but this might also open them up to further discrimination as a distinct and clearly defined racial group. Of course, not all Arabs are Muslim and not all Muslims are Arab, and the number of either category currently living in the United States is uncertain. And because of the likely risk of increased racial profiling, those numbers should probably remain unclear for the sake of safety.<sup>68</sup> Keith Feldman also addresses the issue of Arab-American racial classification in his article on racial literature, arguing that the official racial classification of Arab-Americans would serve to widen social gaps and enable even more government profiling.<sup>69</sup>

Religion is a primary tool for recent Muslim immigrants to acquire a sense of community and identity in an alien society. The role of religion in identity formation for Muslim-Americans was studied in 2005 by Lori Peek, who identified stages of identity development through first-hand observation and surveys. She discovered a process of ascribed, chosen, and then declared Muslim identity observable in second- and third-generation Muslim-American immigrants which helped them to build communities and support groups as they grew up both Muslim and American. Ultimately, the Muslim-Americans in her study chose the Muslim faith as a community in which they could find commonalities and links to their pasts, allowing them the support base to form additional communities in unfamiliar and diverse spheres.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Salah D. Hassan, "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State," *Middle East Report*, No. 224 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 16-21.

<sup>69</sup> Keith Feldman, "The (Il)legible Arab Body and the Fantasy of National Democracy," *MELUS*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Arab American Literature (Winter, 2006), pp. 33-53.

<sup>70</sup> Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity," *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 215-242.

In other media, the mainstream news media and movie culture in America have not been kind to Muslims. One Muslim video-maker, Ali Ardekani, found that his fellow Muslims were often portrayed as either helpless victims or bloodthirsty fanatics and decided to do his part to change this, assuming the identity of a satirical character named “Baba Ali” to show his view of Islam. He even uses his videos to offer advice about everyday life for young Muslims, answering questions about problems faced by Muslims today trying to fit in to American society while also retaining their Muslim culture and values. His video blogs garner thousands of hits on Youtube and have sparked a slew of dialogue and controversy, often in the form of video responses.<sup>71</sup> Youtube and similar sites on the internet have provided American Muslims with an unprecedented amount of communication between each other and the mainstream culture, allowing them to attempt to counter the negative effects of the press and Hollywood which often misrepresent Muslims as little more than an enemy to be feared. According to Jack Shaheen, “only five percent of Arab film roles depict normal, human characters.”<sup>72</sup>

The internet plays a major role in spreading modern views on Islam and its practice in secular societies. It is a tool used by traditionalists, secularists, and those who wish to reform Islamic *shariah* law to fit modern times. There is much debate online as to whether Muslims should attempt to follow the ancient Islamic laws, which include gender discrimination and slavery but also charity, or *zakat*, and certain human rights, or whether they must abandon these laws entirely and follow only the secular laws of their countries. Those who wish to reform *shariah* law rather than simply abandoning it argue that Western scholars adopted some of their

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<sup>71</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “Young Video Makers Try to Alter Islam’s Face,” *The New York Times*. May 8, 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Jack G. Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 588, Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities (Jul., 2003), pp. 171-193.

ideas of human rights and the rule of law without discrimination from Islam, and now it is time for Muslims to assimilate some ideas from the West.<sup>73</sup> One reformist argument is that religion must have some place in law because it reinforces human laws with spiritual guidance and God's truth, but that laws must also change to fit the times.<sup>74</sup> Amidst all this debate, there are many online communities dedicated to the everyday realities of living as a Muslim and raising Muslim children in Western societies, which address issues like balancing religiosity with integration into secular society and offer advice on teaching about Islamic history and Arabic.<sup>75</sup>

As for the role of America's President in Muslim and non-Muslim relations in America, it is still too early in his presidency to tell the full extent of the changes he will effect on the country. Of course, Obama himself is a divisive character among some who believe that a "Muslim" has worked his way into the highest office in the land to control America through legal means, reminiscent of the fear surrounding the opening of the Arabic-language school in New York City.<sup>76</sup> According to CAIR, a large number of Americans, as much as one fourth of the population, believe in negative stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs despite the strong presence of Muslims in America and Europe and their contributions to Western civilization.<sup>77</sup> CAIR studies have found that many Americans are not very knowledgeable about the beliefs and practices

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<sup>73</sup> *Muslims Against Sharia : Islamic Reform Movement*, 2009.

<sup>74</sup> *Averroes Foundation for Faith and Reason in Islam*, 2006.

<sup>75</sup> *Muslim Parenting*, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Andrea Elliott, "Critics Cost Muslim Educator Her Dream School," *The New York Times*. April 28, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> "Western Muslim Minorities: Integration and Disenfranchisement," *Council on American-Islamic Relations*, April 2006.

associated with Islam and believe that it is a religion centered around violence and hatred, qualities which some Americans have transferred onto their image of Barack Obama.<sup>78</sup>

Obama has gone to great lengths so far to try and reach out to the Muslim world, even giving “his first televised interview from the White House to Al Arabiya, an Arabic-language television channel,” and addressing people of all religions in his Inaugural Address.<sup>79</sup> His attention to Muslims inside and outside America has not gone unnoticed. However, one thing is certain: his actions will speak loudest of all about his character and his intentions. According to Alaa Al Aswany, the new US President will not truly be “heard” by the Muslim community until he takes a serious stand on such issues as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the troubles in Iraq and Iran rather than avoiding addressing the hard issues that concern many Muslims.<sup>80</sup> For the moment, the American Muslim community can only wait, and hope, along with everyone else.

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<sup>78</sup> “American Public Opinion About Islam and Muslims,” *Council on American-Islamic Relations*, 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Alaa Al Aswany, “Why the Muslim World Can’t Hear Obama,” Editorial. *The New York Times*. 7 February 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

Both France and America offer positive and negative possibilities for the future of their Muslim populations. At the moment, France is lead by a racist president, while at the same time French Muslims are finding a place for their religion in Catholic schools. Conversely, many people in the United States are intolerant towards the Muslim population while hiding behind a veil of “political correctness”; however, the current US President has gone to great lengths in his short time in office to reach out to the Muslim community and draw them into American society.

Both the attitude of the government and the attitude of the people in America and France have a profound effect on the lives of Muslim people in these countries, leading young Muslims in each country to react in different ways when their communities and religions are threatened. Because French Muslims and other immigrant groups in France are often forced to the periphery of French society, both physically and religiously, some have turned to extreme ways of attracting attention – for example, the Paris riots of 2005. Young American Muslims, on the other hand, seem to have greater opportunity for integration into a country built by immigrants, and thus are more likely to express their opinions on society and Islam through mainstream media like Youtube and blogs.

The effect on Islam of secular societies such as France and the United States varies greatly depending on the level of Muslim integration into these countries’ societies. While young French Muslims who take issue with French attitudes and policies towards Islam turn to traditional imams and other religious scholars for guidance, for example, some in America are using community forums like Youtube and blogs to discuss ways in which their religion can fit and adapt into American society. The result of technology like the internet is to give a wide-



reaching and peaceful voice to both Muslims and non-Muslims to discuss the place of religion in their communities, leading both to expand their horizons.

It is clear from Muslim experiences in both France and America that integration and communication are the keys to peaceful coexistence. Separation has led to discord, from the social gap between Muslim immigrants and non-Muslims in France to racial profiling in America. Furthermore, the policies on race and religion in France and America show the need for a balance between the French habit of ignoring issues of religion and ethnicity while efforts to classify Arab-Americans as a separate race category, among other efforts, show an overzealousness for recognizing difference. However, the current Presidents of France and America have so far acted opposite their countries' trends in racial openness: Nicolas Sarkozy has taken a divisive tone in his rhetoric and actions as he tries to single out Muslims as a population to be feared and made separate from mainstream French society, while Barack Obama's position so far has been one of reconciliation and unity across racial and religious lines.

Above all, it is crucial that there be an ease of communication and willingness to open religious and social discourse among Muslims and non-Muslims, both in France and America and in the world at large. Harsh, violent means of suppressing conflict, such as bans on religious symbols and segregation, create no permanent solutions for lasting peace. Organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations play an important role in opening interfaith dialogue and ensuring through legal means that civil rights are not infringed upon based on religion or ethnicity. With an increase in communication around the world, aided in large part by the internet and other new forms of technology, we may eventually see the rise of an integrated global community that could have a positive effect on international relations from the bottom up.

In essence, peace between countries with different faiths, Muslim and non-Muslim, religious and secular, can be achieved through the creation of social bonds and communities.