Space, Race, and the City: How Marseille, France Escaped the 2005 Riots

By Trent Buatte

Capstone Advisor: Cathy Schneider

University Honors in International Studies

Fall 2010

Abstract:

In October of 2005, the suburbs of Paris erupted in a flash of violence incited by police brutality and years of social tensions. Within days, riots spread to immigrant communities in Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Lille, and 272 other French cities. After four weeks of violence, 9,000 vehicles were torched, 4,000 rioters were arrested, and 125 police officers were wounded. While riots raged all over France, one unlikely city survived 2005 unscathed. Marseille is France's second largest city and is home to more immigrants than any other city in France. Although many scholars of racial and migration studies have postulated reasons for the outbreak of urban violence in 2005, no one has been able to explain why Marseille remained calm despite all predictions otherwise. Why was Marseille spared? And can other French cities learn from Marseille's example? This investigation combines interviews of Marseillaise community and government officials with historical, demographic, and geographic research in order to understand that unique social boundaries in Marseille. The paper concludes that an even distribution of public housing, a community-based police policy, and a consultation policy between the Mayor and ethnic leaders have helped Marseille diffuse ethnic tensions for the past 18 years.

"Here, the richness of immigration is not economic, but human. For centuries, every person who comes brings something of his culture, his way of being and his way of speaking. Marseille is a melting pot." - Jean-Jacques Jordi, French Historian

On a cool October night in 2005, nine young men entered a large construction site on their way home from a soccer game in Paris. As they crossed the site, they spotted the police's Anti-Crime Brigade. Knowing they would be detained for being out without identification papers, the group decided to run. As two squads of policemen closed in, the boys neared a giant electric substation that supplied electricity to Paris's suburbs. The police managed to apprehend six of the boys, but three, Muhittin, Bouna, and Zyad, escaped by scaling the eight-foot wall surrounding the substation. Once inside the station, the boys desperately searched for a way out, but found none. After eleven minutes of scrambling for an exit, one of the trio grazed the transformer, instantly killing Bouna and Zyad. Muhittin, who had been spared because of a power surge, clamored across the eight-foot wall again. He found the substation deserted. The police had left the boys for dead.

Within hours, the boys' story spread from friends and classmates to the entire *banlieue* (French suburb) of Clichy. That night, hundreds of residents gathered to protest and curse the police who had reluctantly begun to investigate Bouna and Zyad's deaths. In the next four weeks, as the French government refused to take responsibility for the boys' deaths, riots spread from Clichy to other *banlieues*. But the conflagration could not be contained in Paris. The events on the night of October 25th incited violence in nearly three hundred towns across France as well as riots in Brussels and Berlin. After four weeks of violence, nine thousand vehicles were torched, hundreds of buildings were

destroyed, four thousand rioters were arrested, and one hundred twenty-five police officers were wounded.

What could incite such widespread chaos? For many observers of France in 2005, the answer was simple: immigration. For decades, the French government struggled to define its relationship with a growing population of immigrants and their children. Predominately Arabs and Africans, these immigrants challenge the fundamental racial, class, and religious traditions of the French Republic. While other countries across Europe have experienced similar waves of immigration, France became a crucible of violence because of the Chirac government's distinctly anti-immigrant posture in 2005. Just two days before Bouna and Zyad died in the substation, Minister of Interior Nicholas Sarkozy declared that he would use a power hose to clear out the "scum" from the *banlieues*.[1] The *banlieues* had become a thorn in the side of the French government for years. These poor neighborhoods, dominated by Arab and African youth, had become veritable police states, complete with roadblocks, ID checkpoints, and its very own Anti-Crime Brigade. Whether these measures were meant to keep the residents of the neighborhood safe or the rest of Paris safe from the neighborhoods' residents remains up for debate, but what is clear is that by October 2005 there existed a strong animosity between the police and immigrants. The deaths of Bouna and Zyad simply sparked an inferno long stoked by French authorities.

While riots raged all over France, one unlikely city survived 2005 unscathed. Eight hours south of Paris lies the coastal city of Marseille. The second largest city in France, Marseille normally conjures images of sunbathing and sailing on the clear

---

[1] David Black, "Policing the Scum: Order, Insecurity and the Deferral of the Political in France," International Studies Association Conference Papers, 2007.

Mediterranean Sea, but in late 2005 the city became an anomaly as the rest of France was

engulfed in flames. Demonstrators in Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, and every other major

French city vandalized and torched thousands of cars, schools, and government offices,

but the riots did not seem to touch Marseille at all. On one night, a group of arsonists set

fire to 35 cars, but the local government and police as well as every community and

religious leader quickly criticized the destruction. For the rest of 2005, Marseille

remained unruffled by the riots in the surrounding cities. Marseille's relative calm seems

to defy logic: it is France's second largest city, home to more immigrants than any other

French city, including Paris, and it is projected to be the first majority Muslim city in

Europe.[2] Instead of being a mere inconsistency in the description of the 2005 riots,

however, Marseille provides an opportunity to better understand how French cities can

stem urban violence.

For the most part, explanations of the 2005 riots relegate Marseille to a footnote,

noting its exceptional response to the crisis without any further consideration. The

violence in October and November 2005 has generated a large corpus of theory about

French immigration. Rightly so, many authors have noted that the riots call into question

French immigration policy. An official assessment by the International Crisis Group

noted in 2006, "The events of 2005 served as a reminder that the French model of

integration […] is in need of a corrective."[3] To explain the breakdown of the French

ideal of assimilation, scholars have pointed to everything from youth unemployment,

marginalization of immigrants, and radical Islam to polygamy. Unfortunately, these

explanations all fail to explain why Marseille survived the riots while no other city did.

---

[2] Claire Berlinski, "The Hope of Marseille," *Azure*, January 2005.
[3] International Crisis Group, "France and its Muslims: Riots, Jihadism and Depoliticisation," Europe Report: Number 172, March 9, 2006.

In comparison to other French cities, Marseille actually has higher youth unemployment, equal marginalization, and more Muslims. According to these indicators, Marseille should have experienced the most violence, not a complete absence thereof.

Why was Marseille spared while the rest of France was in flames? An analysis of local government, police, and community associations goes beyond the traditional historical lens and explores the relationship between *les Marseillaise*, the government, and other communities. This paper attempts to answer the question of why Marseille remained calm during the 2005 riots despite demographic and social indicators that would suggest otherwise. I first analyze the integration of French immigrants into French society from a theoretical standpoint. French republicanism, I will show, has been applied by national and local governments faced with a burgeoning immigrant population. Then, I will explore the practice of this theory in the 2005 riots. Instead of focusing on employment statistics or radical Muslims to explain the riots, however, I will investigate the geographic space, policing of race, and local politics in Marseille. I posit that Marseille's local social policies have created a unique system of geographic and psychological boundaries that runs counter to segregation patterns in other French cities. While much research has been conducted on boundary activation in Paris, I will apply the inverse of this principle, hypothesizing that a blurring of boundaries in Marseille diffused ethnic conflict. To understand how Marseille has redrawn social boundaries, I use a "thick description" method of compiling personal accounts from government officials, local police, and residents. I conclude that by distributing wealth and resources more evenly across the city, instituting a community-based police policy, and creating a

citywide policy of consultation between the Mayor and local ethnic leaders, Marseille has

avoided violent confrontations between its 250,000 immigrants and local authorities.

The French Integration Model

For centuries, the French have prided themselves on strict policy of *égalité*—a

policy that ignores ethnic or racial distinctions in favor of completely equal social

standings. Although this ideal of universal equality remains the driving force behind

France's immigration policies, it rarely produces the equality to aspires to. If anything,

the riots that overwhelmed France in 2005 served as a wake-up call for French

authorities—their policies towards immigrants simply were not working. The decades-

long tensions between the French government and immigrant communities prompt

several important questions about the way France welcomes immigrants. What is

intégration? How does the French integration model work today? What went wrong in

2005?

Integration, in its modern form, involves social, political, and psychological

incorporation into a foreign country. Adrian Favell, the leading scholar on French and

European integration, defines integration as a "process which invariably includes the

projection of *both* deep social change from the country concerned *and* of fundamental

continuity between the past and some idealized social endpoint."[4] In this sense,

integration is distinct from assimilation and acculturation because is allows immigrants to

become part of a new society without losing their cultural roots. At the same time,

integration represents the crossing of a threshold—crossing the line between 'foreigner'

---

[4] Adrian Favel, "Integration Nations: The Nation-state and Research on Immigrants in Western Europe." In *International migration research: constructions, omissions, and the promises of interdisciplinarity*, eds. Michael Bommes and Ewa T. Morawska (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 42.

and 'national'. Individual nations and cultures develop, over time, a common definition of when someone has successfully traversed this threshold. As such, integration defines the "boundaries and the lines in/out between citizens and foreigners."[5]

Over centuries, French culture has produced its own demarcation of the boundary between citizen and foreigner. After the French Revolution, the ideals of *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité* became the watchwords of French culture. As a consequence, when newcomers arrived at the borders of France, they were, in theory, treated with respect and equality. Once an immigrant became a full citizen, he or she not only had full political rights but also full social rights to participate in French culture and be treated like other French citizens. French scholars Dominique, Pailhé, and Simon argue that this process of equality represents an "implicit contract" by which migrants and their descendants become invisible in public and political spheres.[6] This idea of invisibility repeatedly appears in French integration literature. Geddes describes the French national integration as a process through which immigrants "disappear into a distinct component of French society as they are emancipated from the status of minorities as collectives or communities."[7] According to this model, integration in France supposes a contract between the immigrant and the nation: the immigrant agrees to respect the universalistic values of the Republic, and the Republic in return guarantees full integration and social standing.

---

[5] Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (London: MacMillan Press, 1998), 45.
[6] Dominique Meurs, Ariance Pailhé, and Patrick Simon, "Discrimination despite integration: Immigrants and the second generation in education and the labour market in France," In *International Migration In Europe: New Trends and New Methods of Analysis*, eds. Bonifazi, Okólski, Schoorl, & Simon (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 247.
[7] Andrew Geddes, *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 66.

Although this universal theory of integration continues to animate French policy, the model remains open to both theoretical and practical criticisms. From a theoretical standpoint, the French model of immigration might seem fair. If everyone is treated equally, then everyone must be integrated, right? Wrong. French *intégration* only addresses one out of the three critical elements of integration. Yes, France has provided *political* integration for its immigrants through representation in local, regional, and national elections as well as access to public services. But France simultaneously ignores the *social* and *psychological* sides of integration. The French integration model assumes that by conferring political rights, social integration will follow. However, the large amount of statistics about French unemployment and segregation suggest otherwise.

Even before the riots in 2005, policy-makers and scholars began questioning the social realities created by the official Republican model of integration. In the late 1990's and early 2000's, the French government demonstrated a pattern of producing reports focused on the philosophical issues of membership, cultural pluralism, or 'what it means to be French' instead of addressing what was actually going on in the *banlieus*: rising levels of crime, delinquency, drugs, gangs, and unemployment covered up by widespread discrimination.[8] The French concept of *intégration* created a disconnect between the government and the people. A 2009 study on the integration of immigrants found that France does not practice what it preaches. In a Europe-wide survey of nationals' "readiness to accept immigrants", France ranked 18 out of 24 European countries and was the lowest ranked western European nation.[9] Clearly, the government and everyday citizens do not follow the rhetoric of the French immigration policy. Despite fervent

---

[8] Favell, *Philosophies of Integration*, 186.
[9] Anu Masso, "A Readiness to Accept Immigrants in Europe? Individual and Country-Level Characteristics," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (2009): 251 – 270.

attempts to maintain the official French integration model, the fissure between theory and reality seems to have left large groups of minorities disaffected and prone to violence.

Explaining the 2005 Riots

The night of October 27, 2005 will forever be burned into the collective conscious of French society.   What started out as a routine police identity check in the suburbs of Paris quickly turned into a fit of violence that swept up the entire country. Within days, the riots consumed 274 French towns and caused the government to declare a state of emergency for the first time since 1961.[10] Once the riots fizzled out in December, a great number of studies attempted to find the causes for this bout of social unrest, some with merit and some that border on the ridiculous.[11] For instance, after the riots several French officials suggested that African polygamy caused the riots. The Minister of Education and the president of the majority party in parliament both issued statements arguing that widespread polygamy caused both social upheaval and unemployment. Sociologist Hughes Lagrange even conducted a study on the polygamous practices of Malian immigrants in which he concluded that children from polygamous communities were more prone to violence and crime.[12] However, even Lagrange himself admits that polygamy was too rare in France to have caused the riots.

Another popular explanation following the riots was that radical Islam incited violence in the suburbs. Except for claims by some French government officials like Nicolas Sarkozy and scholars like Alain Finkielkraut, this claim has largely been

---

[10] "La boîte de Pandore de Sarkozy." *L'Humanité*. 3 November 2005.

[11] Cathy Schneider, "Police Power and Race Riots," *Politics & Society* 36 (2008): 133-159.

[12] Hugues Lagrange, "La structure et l'accident", In *Émeutes urbaines et protestations: Une exception française*, eds. Hugues Lagrange and Marco Oberti (Paris: Presses de Sciences-po, 2006), 109.

discredited. In fact, a 2006 study by the International Crisis group into the role Islam

played in the 2005 riots concludes, "The unrest in the suburbs in October-November

2005 took place without any religious actors and confirmed that Islamists do not control

those neighbourhoods."[13] The study actually found the opposite to be true—the

exhaustion of political Islam, not its radicalization, explains the violence. Moreover,

leaders from every Muslim community center and mosque in Paris pleaded daily for the

riots to stop.

Beyond these extreme understandings of the roots of the 2005 riots, three theories

provide a more nuanced and appropriate explanation. The first, which is cited most

often, is the high unemployment rates of immigrants in France, especially among Arab

and African youths. In some parts of France, immigrant unemployment tops 50%, twice

the national average.[14] This vast disparity between Arab and European youths has led

some scholars to conclude that unemployment has created a violent, despised, underclass

that simply cannot enter the workforce.[15] However, the riots eventually enveloped 274

towns in France, only a quarter of which exhibit strong unusually high employment.[16]

What is more, analyses of only employment statistics neglect the underlying reasons for

unemployment itself –isolation and discrimination of blacks and Arabs.

Another approach that looks critically at French culture hypothesizes that the

marginalization of Muslim youths caused the violence. Sophie Body-Gendrot

summarizes this claim by stating, "urban violence in France is the *voice* of a minority of

---

[13] International Crisis Group, 2006.
[14] Timothy B. Smith, *France in Crisis: Welfare, Inequality and Globalization since 1980*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
[15] Roy, 2006.
[16] "Taux de chômage localisés trimestriels par département 1982 à 2009." Institute national de la statistique et des études économiques. 2009. www.insee.fr.

disenfranchised youths of Muslim and post-colonial immigrant origin, unable to emancipate themselves from marginalised spaces."[17] Body-Gendrot and others argue that French policies and culture have stigmatized immigrants, shunted them off to poor suburban enclaves, and caused them to lash out violently in October 2005. While these claims can be supported by evidence of French segregation and fear mongering[18], they do not properly explain why the riots occurred in 2005. Why not in 2002 during the Second Palestinian Intifada? Why not two days before when Nicolas Sarkozy said he would power-hose the "scum" off of the streets of Paris? Theories of marginalization demonstrate underlying conditions in France in 2005 but fail to describe the unique events of 2005.

The final voice in the conversation about the causes of the riots argues that systemic police violence along social boundaries ignited unrest in October 2005. According to this theory, brutal enforcement of categories, both racial and physical, created resentment in immigrant communities.[19] When French authorities failed to immediately investigate and then vehemently denied any responsibility for the deaths of Bouna and Zyad, Arab and African communities across France sympathized. The riots simply released years of social tension precipitated by widespread police profiling and violence. The police, it is argued, monitor the 'categories' of French society. Anthropologist Eric Wolf argues that states create and enforce boundaries that define membership of insiders and outsiders—defining rights and enforcing criteria for

---

[17] Sophie Body-Gendrot, "Deconstructing Youth Violence in French Cities," *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law & Criminal Justice* 13 (2005), 5.
[18] 20% of French people fear living next to an African family and 51% fear living next to an Arab family.
[19] Schneider, 140.

participation and benefits.[20] Racial theorist David Theo Goldberg has adapted a similar

approach to assessing race in France. Goldberg claims that everyone—citizens and

foreigners—are controlled "through the spatial confines of divided space."[21] This

contested urban space defines both geographic and psychological boundaries and

formalizes internalities and externalities.

       The social categorization of space inevitably leads to tension and sometimes

violence when authorities rigidly police boundaries between perceived outsiders and

insiders. In the case of France, the physical separation of foreigners into *banlieus*—

spaces almost exclusively reserved for poor, immigrant families—and the constant

demarcation of boundaries by police identity checks served as constant reminders of

immigrants' otherness. This pattern of shunting off the poor to suburbs created "places

of banishment, refuges which, with just one spark, could explode."[22] The deaths of

Bouna and Zyad on October 25 was that spark, and the resulting inferno activated

tensions along social boundaries all over France. "Riots," according to Schneider, "are

most likely when rigid boundaries are challenged, and then violently policed, enforced,

and defended."[23] This us/them boundary activation calls into question the idealist

assumptions of the French integration model. Much like Favell and other integration

scholars posit, integration hinges on the boundary between citizens and foreigners. The

riots that consumed France for six weeks in 2005 demonstrated the failure of the French

---

[20] Eric Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Domanance and Crisis*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.
[21] David Theo Goldberg, "Migration and the Racialization of the Postmodern City in France," in *Racism, the City, and the State*, eds. Malcolm Cross, and Michael Keith (London: Routledge Press, 1993), 45.
[22] Dominique Duprez, "Urban Rioting as an Indicator of Crisis in the Integration Model for Ethnic Minority Youth in France," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (2009), 11.
[23] Schneider, 152.

integration policy to integrate immigrants and erase the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Marseille in 2005

In October 2005, when the rest of France was in flames, the coastal city of Marseille remained almost completely calm. The tranquility that pervades every immigrant neighborhood of Marseille would seem counterintuitive to anyone familiar with the city. Marseille is the second largest city in France. It has more foreign-born residents than any other city in France. It has unemployment rates equal to or greater than other French cities. According to these factors, Marseille should have been ripe for violence in 2005. Yet, the city experienced the least amount of violence in 2005 and never had a curfew enforced. Soon after the riots died down at the end of November 2005, reports from *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *Le Monde*, and NPR began to tell the story of Marseille, the unlikely survivor of the riots. The worst incident of violence occurred three nights after the initial demonstration began in Paris. That night, arsonists burned 35 cars in the outskirts of Marseille, hardly more than the pre-riots average of 5 to 10 per night.[24] Immediately following the incident, however, local religious and community leaders publicly called for calm in the city. Apparently the *Marseillaise* listened to their leaders because no other episodes resembling the violence in Paris occurred again.

This calm developed in spite of a host of social indices that would normally signal conditions apt for violence. Of Marseille's 800,000 residents, over a quarter are of

---

[24] Martin Arnold, "Geography that helped Marseilles escape the riots," *Financial Times*, November 12, 2005.

foreign origin. While the French government does not permit racial or ethnic surveys, informal estimates indicate Marseille's rich religious and racial diversity: 190,000 Muslims, 70,000 Jews, 65,000 Armenians, 20,000 Buddhists, and 11,000 Orthodox Greeks; 70,000 Algerians, 30,000 Tunisians, 15,000 Moroccans, 70,000 Cameroonians, and 7,000 other black Africans.[25] Its Jewish community is the third largest in Europe (the largest is in Paris) and demographers predict that Marseille will be the first city on the European continent with an Islamic majority.[26] These statistics refute the overly simplistic claim that immigrants caused the 2005 riots. If this assertion were true, Marseille should have had the most violence, not the least.

Other social conditions in Marseille would predict a tendency toward tension. Even though Marseille's unemployment rate has steadily declined from a staggering 21% in the 1990's, the city's 14% unemployment still exceeds the national average by more than 5%.[27] What is more, unemployment among Muslims tops 40%, which surpasses the average unemployment in all of Paris's *banlieues*.[28] Hence, claims that Muslim and youth unemployment incited violence in 2005 cannot account for the isolated peace in Marseille. If unemployment was the strongest factor in agitating riots, Marseille, once again, should have had the most violence, not the least.

Somehow, Marseille survived the 2005 riots untouched despite its high levels of Muslim unemployment and immigration. But this is not the first time the city has defied the odds of social upheaval. In 2002 during the Second Palestinian Intifada, protesters all over France vandalized and set on fire hundreds of synagogues. After one such incident

[25] Berlinski, 2005.
[26] Daniel Williams, "Long Integrated, Marseille Is Spared." *Washington Post*, 16 November 2005.
[27] "Euro area unemployment," EuroStat, 2009.
[28] Laurent Clavel, "Jean-Claude Gaudin: Séntateur-Marie de Marseille." Interview. 2 March 2004. < http://www.polytechnique.fr/eleves/binets/xpassion/article.php?id=28>.

in Marseille, local Imams joined the mayor in publicly condemning the acts. While

incidents of vandalism plagued the rest of France for weeks, no other Marseillaise

synagogues were touched. And this is despite the fact that Marseille is home to both one

of the largest Muslim communities and the third largest Jewish community in Europe.[29]

In July 2004, a 14-year-old boy named Nelson Lobry-Gazelle was killed by a police car

in one of this city's impoverished northern neighborhoods. Instead of burning cars and

buildings, however, 400 people gathered for a silent protest and the policeman was

immediately suspended.[30] In October 2006, a group of Muslim youths set fire to a bus in

hopes of igniting a local chain reaction, but the event hardly garnered front-page attention

let alone mass riots. In other French cities and suburbs, these acts would have incited

protests and destruction of cars and public buildings, but somehow Marseille repeatedly

emerges as the 'Teflon-city'.

Why did Marseille remain calm in October 2005 while the rest of France was in

flames? Why has it been so successful at diffusing racial and religious tension? What can

other French cities learn from the example of Marseille? This paper answers these

important questions in order to uncover the problems of the French integration system.

For the most part, academic explanations of the 2005 riots relegate Marseille to a

footnote, noting its uniqueness but not delving any further. A 2005 report by the

Brookings Institution even noted a significant lack of "systematic comparative studies"

on Marseille.[31] With this paper, I hope to renew the scholastic conversation about

Marseille. The city is unique for its social make-up and its historical resiliency to ethnic

---

[29] Berlinski, 2005.

[30] Michael Kimmelman, "In Marseille, Rap Helps Keep the Peace." *New York Times*. 19 December 2007.

[31] Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, "Understanding Urban Riots in France," *New Europe Review*, 1 December 2005.

conflict. I will argue that Marseille's unique geography, local police policy, and community support have created a unique culture among Marseille's citizens that better facilitates integration across the us/them boundary.

Methodology

A study into the social, racial, and spatial policies of Marseille complements the recent trend in integration literature towards small-scale studies. For many years, nation-state perspectives dominated the integration studies landscape. Inquiries that focus on the state policy use historical analysis of individual nations and their social preferences to create normative models of integration.[32] These studies often involve a 'national difference paradigm' whereby the French policy of *intégration* is positioned against British multiculturalism and German socialization. Nation-state models, however, condense complex and evolutionary social interactions into a single set of predictable characteristics. As well, a models-driven methodology tends to reproduce the ideological fictions each nation has of its own and others' immigration politics. Hence, studies into the French Republican model of integration tend to reinforce immigration practices rather than provide a genuine critique.[33]

Other researchers, on the other hand, suggest that city or neighborhood-level studies are best suited for integration research. In his criticism of nation-state integration models, Favell posits that the city represents the best unit of comparison because it provides "contextual specificity" in understanding the interplay between local, national,

---

[32] Hammer, 1985; Castles, 1995; Heckmann and Schnapper 2003.
[33] Favell, *Philosophies of Integration*, 2005.

and transnational influences while avoiding national politics.[34] Likewise, French

demographer Patrick Simon focuses on individual neighborhoods and *arrondissements* to

"avoid the political implications of an analysis of social interactions carried out at the

national level."[35] A Marseille-specific study allows for an understanding of the

complexities and various factors in social integration without falling prey to the

politically tinged gaffs of nation-state studies.

  In studying Marseille, I employ a multi-disciplinary social science approach,

incorporating ethnographic research and political analysis. In particular, this research

reflects four weeks of personal interviews in Marseille combined with textual and

historical records from October and November 2005. While four weeks is certainly a

limited amount of time to conduct ethnographic research, my interviews with government

officials, local police, community leaders, and everyday immigrants provide preliminary

incites into the extraordinary case of Marseille. Other than social research, this paper

also uses geographic and spatial analyses to study the physical composition of Marseille.

For this method, I borrow the idea of shared "urban, political, symbolic space" from

Simon Patrick's research into the unique culture of Belleville, France.[36] I aim to

understand how the relationship between physical space and ethnicity determines the

us/them boundary in integration.

  The following sections detail my findings on the shared geography, local police

policy, and unique community leadership in Marseille. In the end, I hope to achieve what

---

[34] Adrian Favell, "Integration Nations: The Nation-state and Research on Immigrants in Western Europe," in *International migration research: constructions, omissions, and the promises of interdisciplinarity*, eds. Michael Bommes and Ewa T. Morawska (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 390.
[35] Patrick Simon, "The Mosaic Pattern: Cohabitation Between Ethnic Groups in Belleville, Paris." in *Minorities in European Cities. The Dynamics of Social Integration and Social Exclusion at the Neighbourhood Level*, eds. Body-Gendrot and Martiniello (London: Macmillan Press, 2000) 101.
[36] Ibid.

Clifford Geertz coined "think description"—that which understands a phenomenon of collective human behavior with a 360-degree view of the events.[37] This research represents an interdisciplinary investigation by using personal interviews and historical accounts to explain social science topics such as race and migration studies.

Social Geography in Marseille

Since the Romans first besieged Marseille in 49 BC, it has become famous among Mediterranean cities for its unique terrain. Mountains surround the city on the East, North, and West, while the ocean marks its final perimeter. Thousands of years after Marseille was founded as the first city in France, the heart of the town continues to pulse from the *Vieux Port* (Old Port). This unique city center amalgamates modern restaurants and tourist stands with local shops, ancient Roman ruins, and Napoleonic fortresses. The textured space of Marseille becomes most striking when one looks to the shear size of the city. The town's 800,000 residents enjoy more than 240 square kilometers of land and 35 miles of coastline. Paris on the other hand, compacts its 10.5 million inhabitants into an area less than half this size. And the Marseillaise value this expansive area. "Here I can breathe," says one Algerian store-owner, "In Paris or Lyon, everyone would live on top of me. There would be no room to live—no room to play."[38]

This abundance of space became useful in the 1960's and 1970's when France launched massive public housing projects in every major city. Even though these projects were originally meant as middle-class high-rises, the HLM's (rent-controlled housing) quickly became the most affordable options for immigrant families. Public

---

[37] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 3-30.
[38] Interview with Hassan Massi, August 12, 2009.

projects were almost exclusively constructed outside major cities, shunting away poverty.

Figure 1 illustrates the uneven distribution of public housing across Paris. The city itself

contains only a handful of HLM's, none of which are in the richest parts of the city

center, while more than 70% of HLM's lie on the city's periphery.

*Figure 1: HLM's in Paris*

[Red dot = HLM]
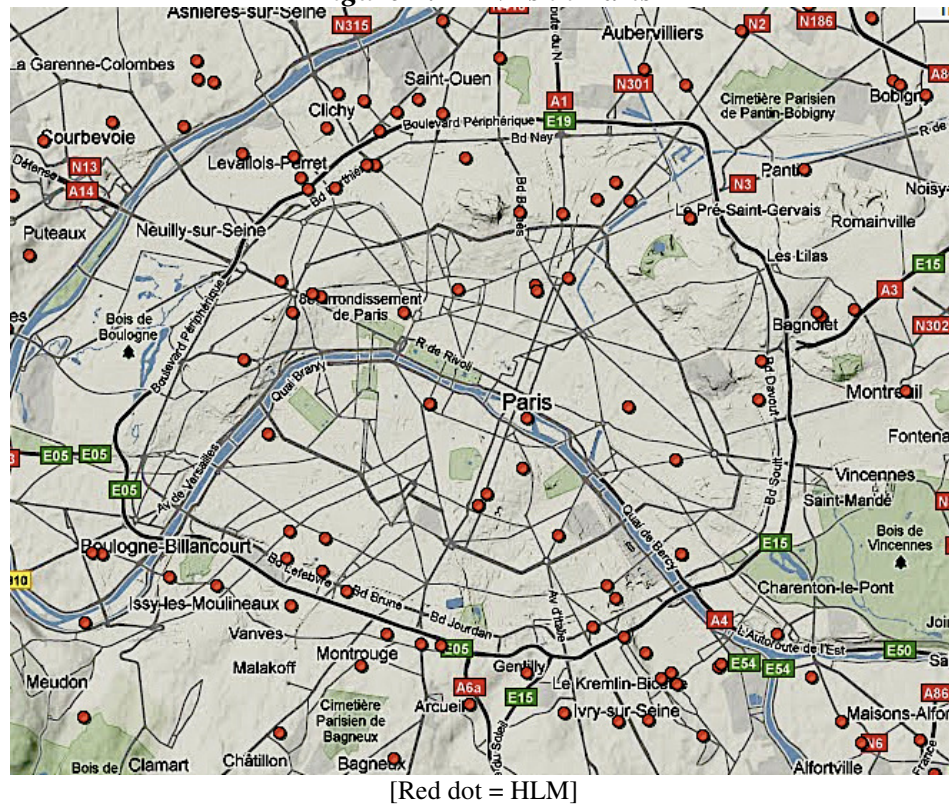
The concentration of public housing outside the city is common in France, but it also

leaves those communities bereft of access to public transportation, common green spaces,

and local businesses. As a result, the French term for suburb, *banlieue*, has almost

become a bad word—it is associated with images of poverty, crime, and violence. In

1975, only 15 percent of households headed by foreign nationals lived in HLM's, but by

1990 that number climbed to 28 percent. In comparison, only 14 percent of French-

national households currently live in HLM's. Several scholars have linked this HLM

movement to the tension between immigrants and the French government.[39] By putting

impoverished populations in concentric circles around the city, French authorities created

a physical separation between citizens and immigrants. At the same time, these clearly

defined boundaries made it easier for the police to target neighborhoods for patrolling

and checking identification.

Nevertheless, Marseille used its vast reserves of land to escape the HLM pattern.

Instead of isolating pockets of poverty in the outskirts of town, city planners evenly

distributed public housing throughout. HLM's and other public resources such as

Maisons pour tous and health clinics now dot the entire landscape of Marseille. As

Figure 2 below demonstrates, a special effort was made to include a public housing

project in each district (*arrondissement*) of the city, regardless of wealth.

Figure 2: HLM's in Marseille

[Red dot = HLM]

---
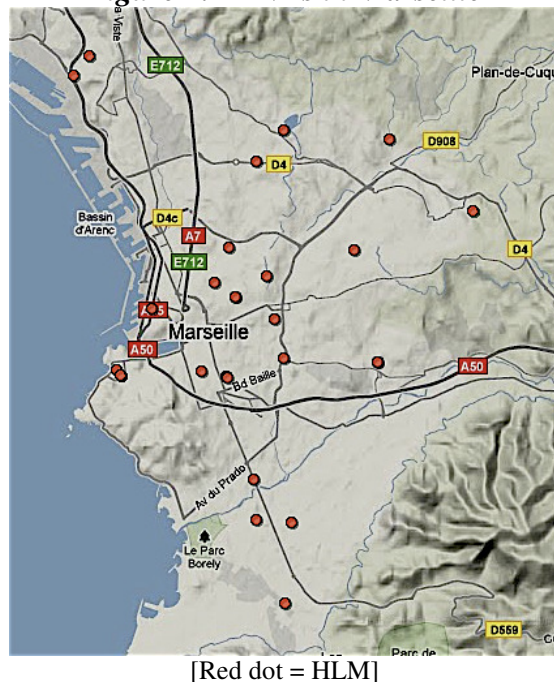
[39] Duprez, 2009; Silverstein, 2004.

This wide distribution of public housing in Marseille has had a major influence of the social interactions within the city. The deputy chief of police told a journalist in 2005, "The fact that the projects are sprinkled through the city means the inhabitants don't feel cut off from civic life or the traditional life of the city."[40] Chief of Police Pierre Carton echoed this sentiment in stating, "The banlieue is in the city itself."[41] And indeed, the city has created an environment seemingly without the normative French definition of 'suburb'. Concentrations of immigrant communities such as Cameroonians, Algerians, or Moroccans still exist, but *within* the city, not outside it.

This unique distribution of public housing helps explain the integration of immigrants despite accounts of widespread segregation. On one hand, many scholars and journalists suggest that Marseille is less segregated than other French cities.[42] They claim that Marseille does not separate its communities along racial or religious lines. On the other hand, however, several multi-city studies of French and European cities have found that Marseille actually has an unusually high level of segregation. Following the riots in 2005, French political scientists André Donzel and Robert Bresson conducted empirical studies of housing segregation in cities across France. Donzel found that Marseille, Paris, and Lille exhibit similar levels of segregation and noted "great disparities within the population by income, employment status and living conditions."[43] Meanwhile, Bresson uncovered large disparities of income divided on a North/South border in the city.[44] Similarly, a report by the Open Society Institute in 2007 Marseille's ethnic communities

---

[40] Berlinski, 2005.
[41] E-mail interview with Pierre Carton, September 2009.
[42] Parodi, 2002. Berlinski, 2005. Williams, 2005.
[43] André Donzel and Alain Moreau, eds. "Ville et intégration: le creuset marseillais," *Fair saviors* 5 (2005).
[44] Robert Bresson, "Les mutations des structures socio-résidentielles marseillaises entre 1990 et 1999," *Faire savoirs* 5 (2005).

tend to stay in enclaves scattered across the city. [45] One commentary by UNESCO

ventured as far as to label this segregation a "triangle of poverty" with the highest

concentration of poverty and unemployment in France.[46]

However, each of these studies focuses exclusively on French census data, which,

at best, can only demonstrate residential inequality based on income. Because the French

cannot collect data on ethnicity, the Donzel and Bresson assessments unfortunately

neglect this important element of segregation. Indeed, previous research suggests that

Marseille separates the population by economic class, but the research here suggests that

this economic segregation does not equate to racial segregation in Marseille. With regard

to the Open Society Institute report, many other reports have also pointed to the existence

of ethnic enclaves in Marseille, but the report glosses over one important feature of

Marseille: the enclaves are "scattered" across the city. In other French cities, these

enclaves would exist but in the banished areas of the *banlieues*. In Marseille,

nevertheless, the economic segregation and ethnic residential pockets do not prevent

immigrants and Europeans from interacting.

Thanks to the dispersal of public housing and foreign populations, Marseille has

developed unique public spaces. Specifically, normally highbrow areas such as the city-

center or tourist beaches are not off-limits to immigrant residents. Youths, whatever their

ethnic origin, congregate in the same neighborhoods: The Vieux Port, the Canebière, St.

Ferréol Street, the Velodrome, and the beaches of Prado. At the same time, all of these

spaces are tourist magnets, something that would normally render them inaccessible to

---

[45] Maren Borkert, et al. "Local Integration Policies for Migrants in Europe," Cities for Local Integration Policy and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007 <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/31/en/1/ef0631en.pdf>.

[46] Damian Moore, "Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities: Marseille," UNESCO-MOST Programme, 1999. < www.unesco.org/most/p97mars.do>.

immigrants. Marseille, however, uses its unique urban space to coalesce ages, ethnicities, and religions. "I can go to the center of the city without thinking I am entering enemy territory," says Abida Hecini, a third-generation immigrant, "We belong to Marseille and Marseille belongs to us."[47] French researcher Patrick Parodi found in 2002 that "center Marseille is not confiscated by social class: there is a significant community of North African immigrants, often poor."[48] This concept of shared space stands in stark contrast with other immigrant cities. Surveys of Nice, Montpellier, Bordeaux, and Paris reveal that young foreigners and young French nationals never attend the same places.[49] Even within immigrant areas of Paris and Lyon people of different ethnic backgrounds do not tend to socially interact. However, *Marseillaise* immigrants socialize in the same, public spaces instead of staying in their ethnic enclaves.   Thus, the city might be economically and residentially separated, but it is not socially segregated.

This integrated social space at the heart of Marseille differs from other images of French cities. The practice of pushing poverty and immigrants to the exteriors of cities has created widespread social segregation among ethnicities. While the concepts of 'race' and 'segregation' remain extremely taboo in French culture, the stigma of the *banlieues* does not. Sociologist Sylvie Tissot describes the French attitude toward suburbs as "Muslim enclaves populated by dangerous fundamentalists potentially prone to terrorism, and by alienated women wearing headscarves."[50] This image is perpetuated both by the French and international media as well as the sensationalized rhetoric of the national government. In his famous book *Le Ghetto Fraçais*, Éric Maurin highlights the

---

[47] Williams, 2005.

[48] Patrick Parodi, "Citoyenneté et intégration: Marseille, modèle d'intégration?" *La Durance*. 31 May 2002.

[49] Parodi, 2002; Berlinski, 2005.

[50] Sylvie Tissot, "The Role of Race and Class in Urban Marginality," *City* 11(2007), 366.

separatism that permeates the whole of French society. Maurin notes a "general tendency to separate one's own group in urban space from lower social and spatio-residential strata" that endangers the immigrant milieu.[51] In this sense, French culture draws social and spatial boundaries along both ethnic and religious lines, formally separating poor and immigrant groups from other classes.

The argument that French cities are segregated by race and contain ghettos, however, has received sharp criticism from most French scholars and politicians.   For the most part, French studies try to distinguish French separatism from American ghettos. "It is not an accident," argues Dominique Schnapper, "that there have never been in France real ghettos of immigrant populations from the same country, on the model of Black, Italian, or Hispanic neighborhoods in the United States."[52] Most famously, Loïc Wacquant distinguishes American ghettos, founded on the basis of race, and French immigrant communities, where social class determines livelihood.[53] According to Wacquant and others, racism does not exist in France. Indeed, this same rhetoric is often adopted by the French government—since distinctions of race are outlawed in hiring practices, housing policies, and national surveys, it must not exist.

However, the belief (in theory and in law) that France has somehow eliminated racism ignores both cultural and pragmatic analyses of French society. Historians Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader have conducted extensive research into the evolution of 'cultural racism' in France. Chapman and Frader contend that what makes racism in France a particularly pernicious mutation of older, more biological notions of racism, is

---

[51] Éric Maurin, *Le Ghetto Français: Enquête sur le séparatisme social* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).
[52] Martin A Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2008), 78.
[53] Loïc Wacquant, "Banlieus françaises et ghetto noir américain: de L'amalgame à la comparaison," *French Politic and Society*, 1992.

the "resemblance to the avowedly anti-racist republican orthodoxy it rejects."[54] The

French collective consciousness recognizes universal rights and *égalité*, but public

attitudes and policies express racism at its lowest level. National surveys reveal that one

French out of five feels nervous living near an African family, and 31 percent fear living

near an Arab family.[55] While these statistics might not equal the American white/black

divide in the 1960's, the evidence still suggests that large portions of French society fear

other races. What is more, these anti-immigrant sentiments have been tacitly transferred

into housing and election policies in France. The same International Crisis Group study

that criticizes the French integration model also uncovered an "unspoken policy of

national preference" through which local authorities allocated housing based on

ethnicity.[56] These policies led to the spatialization of community districts with rates

exceeding 90 percent of residents of the same ethnicity, according to ICG survey data.

Political rhetoric might suggest than France is a post-racial society, but the

frequent ethnicization of housing and public attitudes towards immigrants demonstrates

the persistence of racism in France. After decades, the French have pushed poverty and

diversity away from their city centers, leaving immigrants and other minorities to make

the suburbs their own. The lack of physical integration between cities and suburbs

engenders biases on both sides. Every time immigrants riot against police aggression or

national intolerance, the *banlieues* are demonized as places of crime, radicalism, and

---

[54] Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader, eds. *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspective s on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

[55] Sophie Body-Gendrot, "Deconstructing Youth Violence in French Cities," *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law & Criminal Justice* 13 (2005), 11.

[56] International Crisis Group. "La France face a ses musulmans: émeutes, jihadisme, et dépolisation," Rapport Europe N°172 , 9 March 2006, 24.

destitution. These depictions further ghettoize the suburbs and prevent progressive integration. In this sense, spatial separation begets stigmatization and racism.

The dispersal of public housing and the use of common spaces in Marseille, however, bucks this trend. Immigrants can more easily traverse the lines between 'us' and 'them' because physical spaces have not been declared off-limits. Fears of 'otherness' persist in Marseille, but the social geography of the city mitigates the escalation of violence. The Marseillaise themselves understand the difference that space makes in their city. A white Frenchman who is a member of a local crime-stopping group recalled, "I do not fear my [immigrant] neighbors because they are just that-neighbors. I live next to them. My children go to school with his children. We shop at the same stores. We are neighbors."[57] Similarly, immigrants themselves feel comfortable in areas normally reserved for rich or European populations. "I love going to the beach," states an 18-year-old, third generation Algerian. "People might look at me funny, but that's because I have a yellow bathing suit, not because I'm Muslim. I can go anywhere in town and feel accepted."[58] These accounts are not out of the ordinary either. Interviewees repeatedly revealed the ease at which they traverse social spaces:

- "Here, we all have contact with each other. That's the way it's always been here. We are not separate from each other." - Palestinian store-owner[59]
- "We are neighbors and recognize that neighbors have differences." - Marie-Noelle Mivielle, an aide to Mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin

Since 2005, hundreds of French newspaper articles and academic studies have described the unique Marseillaise culture. The *Washington Post* called the city's center of the Old Port a "spicy stew of nationalities" while the local paper *La Provence* most aptly labeled

---

[57] Interview with Éric Cohen, August 20, 2009.
[58] Interview with Tariq Behar, August 15, 2009.
[59] Interview with Dia Ghazi, August, 2009.

the city an "ethnic bouillabaisse."[60] Indeed, it appears that Marseille, through its

distribution of public goods and socialization of common urban space, has managed to

integrate its hugely diverse population unlike any other French city.

Localized Police Policy

Unique social boundaries alone cannot explain Marseille's calm in 2005. Another

factor that distinguishes the city from other French metropolises is its approach to police

policy. Following the riots in 2005, many scholars questioned the brutal police tactics in

Parisian suburbs. There are numerous accounts of more than three decades of police

brutality and subsequent riots in Paris. For instance, between 1977 and 2002, police

killed 175 young, mostly Arab and African, people.[61] The brutal policing practices under

the government of Jacques Chirac, some argue, exacerbated hostility within immigrant

communities because of increased, many times arbitrary, arrests and identity checks.

Police in Paris and other cities reinforced racial boundaries and inevitably incited

violence by refusing to investigate the deaths of Bouna and Zyad or the officers involved.

Unfortunately, many authors extend analyses of Parisian police politics to all

French cities because of the nationalized French police force. In theory, all local police

forces receive direction from Paris, and in 2005 that would mean that Marseille's police

practices would have been consistent with Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy's guidance.

However, several interviews indicate that the Marseille police operate independently and

differently than forces in Paris. The approach promoted on the streets of Marseille is to

---

[60] "Identité nationale: pour Akhenaton, "la France est un des pays les plus racists." *La Provence*, 15 January 2010.
[61] "Procès Du Rappeur Hamé: La Dénonciation Des Violences Policières En Question," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 12, 2004.

know the community and earn its trust. The same patrol officers in the neighborhoods of

Marseille consistently monitor the same streets, which builds a relationship between the

officers and the residents.[62] Consequently, police are less likely to abuse or neglect

inhabitants. "The police do not act out of line and they always take our concerns

seriously because that same officer will have to return the next day and the day after that.

Everyone will know if he has done something wrong," says the organizer of a local

Algerian Council.[63] Similar accounts appear in 2006 from Siyakha Traoré and Samir

Mihi: "The city is integrated, and there is a strong Marseillaise identity—everyone is

Marseillaise. The police know everyone, so they do not need to chase anyone. They know

who everyone is."[64] These relationships not are the results of a passive presence in

neighborhoods. The heads of the police direct their officers to constantly interact with

the local community:

> "It's permanent contacts among groups, in the schools, among associations. The
> police have a permanent dialogue with neighborhood associations — when there's
> a problem, we go directly to the source. We have personal relationships with the
> Jewish community, with the Islamic community. We have personal contacts at
> many levels: Not only the chiefs, but the cops on patrol have regular meetings
> with community representatives." – Chief of Police [65]

Thanks to these constant contacts among community groups, the police are able to diffuse

tensions before they ignite larger conflicts. In particular, Marseille police arrest half as

many people per year per capita than Paris police[66], suggesting that Marseille police settle

conflicts within the community rather than resorting to arrests. This connection between

the police and the Marseillaise reduces the likelihood of widespread violence because (1)

---

[62] Interview with Pierre Carton, September 2009.
[63] Interview with Mallah Ben Bella, August 20, 2009.
[64] Interview with Siyakha Traoré and Samir Mihi, June 2006, from Schneider, Cathy Lisa. "Police Power and Race Riots in Paris." *Politics & Society*. Vol. 36 No. 1, March 2008. 133-159.
[65] Berlinski, 2005.
[66] Donzel, 2005.

police are less likely to arrest familiar contacts and (2) residents are less likely to lash out

against friendly police officers. Of course, this does not mean that police brutality has

been eliminated. In fact, nearly every resident of immigrant neighborhoods in Marseille

can name the last instance of police violence and the officer involved.[67] But in each case,

the officers involved were immediately suspended until an investigation was conducted.

By contrast, the day after the 2005 riots began in Paris, Nicolas Sarkozy publicly

announced that no investigation was needed because the police had done nothing wrong.

In the case of Marseille, police activity in the community promotes peace and

communication rather than provoking violence and crime.

Community Organizations

The reason the Marseille police emphasize making contact with community

groups is because of the power these organization wield across the city. Hundreds of

immigrant associations facilitate integration because they provide a physical space and a

voice for immigrants. A well-timed study by French scholars André Donzel and Alain

Moreau in November 2005 paid special attention to the wide array and strength of

grassroots organizations that provide immigrants two forms of assistance: (1)

occupational support (unions, societies, etc); and (2) residential support (family networks,

neighborhood associations, sports and cultural groups).[68] In sharp contrast with Paris,

every incoming immigrant in Marseille is encouraged to join a local group, often

organized around ethnicity. For example, a network of local law firms opens its door

once a week to provide a meeting space for local Algerian, Cameroonian, and Moroccan

---

[67] Interview with Salah Bariki, 2009.
[68] Donzel and Moreau, 2005.

councils.[69] Even after families have established roots in France for many generations, they continue to participate in community groups.

One of the best examples of community support is the project of *Espace jeunes* (Youth Spaces). In July 1995, a group of young boys of Algerian origin attacked social workers in the neighbourhood of Saint-Mauront. At the time, the boys claimed they attacked the officials because they needed to draw the government's attention to unemployment and the lack of space for leisure activities.[70] Instead of imposing harsher curfews or increasing police patrols, however, the mayor's office listened to the boys. Within a month, the city erected several *Espaces jeunes*, facilities reserved for youth to study, play soccer, and socialize. Since 1995, the city has constructed similar spaces, under different names, all over the city. This simple act of providing a space for youth socialization and expression has afforded Marseillaise youth a measure of independence from family and local authorities. Similar Arab youths were burning cars nightly in Paris to express their frustration with the system, but in Marseille youths found a space and forum to voice their concerns.

For older residents of Marseille, political participation and organizations have become a way of defending their rights and their culture. Among each ethnic and religious community, a pattern of interlocutors has developed; representatives and spokesmen emerge to convey the concerns of the entire community.[71] The process of decision-making depends on the community, but can represent *de facto* leaders such as Imams and community elders or those elected from formal groups. Of the hundreds of

---

[69] Interview with Salah Bariki, 2009.
[70] Damian Moore, "Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities: Marseille," UNESCO-MOST Programme, 1999.
[71] Cesare Mattina, "Les polities clientéaires comme facteur de recomposition sociale et ethnique à Marseille," *Fair saviors* 5 (2005).

community organizations, one stands out for its multi-faceted approach to integration. *Espace accueil aux étrangers* (simply referred to at "Espace" or "Space") promotes the goal of "better integrating foreigners" with a wide range of resources: a team of immigration lawyers, training for other local leaders to integrate newcomers, a huge library of reference materials, and a meeting space for local groups. The role of *Espace*, according to one project manager, is to make other organizations function better.[72] The best way to help organizations? For the Marseillaise, it is a very simple concept: space. It is no coincidence that the most important immigrant forums in Marseille all contain the word 'space': *Espace jeunes, Espace accueil aux étrangers, Espace culture*, etc. The concept of space is both psychologically and physically important for foreigners. It marks a presence in France just for immigrants—a place to meet, organize, and express concerns.

The best testament to the Marseillaise adaptation of space is the contemporary art center of *La Friche de la Belle-de-Mai* (quite literally the Wasteland of the Belle-de-Mai neighborhood). In 1992, local artists transformed this abandoned tobacco plant into a massive public art space. The organizers in charge of the project have allowed the entire facility and surrounding walls to be plastered with complex and vibrant graffiti murals. Local youths are encouraged to paint whatever they like at *La Friche* instead of on other buildings or on train cars. The huge space is, all at once, a gallery, a concert hall, a cinema, a club and discotheque, a workshop, a studio center and a festival space. With over 500 events every year, *La Friche* coalesces artists, community leaders, and citizens in a very public expression of diversity. Along with the various organizations around Marseille, the reclaimed space of *La Friche* represents an intersection of culture and a

---

[72] Interview with Fatiha Bouzahar, August 20, 2009.

way of facilitating subtle integration. These shared spaces led one French journalist to call Marseille the ultimate Agora—an open place of assembly in ancient Greek city-states.[73] Indeed, the label 'Agora' best captures the unique way that Marseille adapts spaces to organize people behind common religions, ethnicities, and communities.

The development of a rich organizational culture in Marseille, however, is not solely the product of grassroots efforts. In fact, the organization most often tied to Marseille's integrative strength is under the auspices of the mayor. *Marseille Espérance* (The Hope of Marseille) was created in 1990 by Mayor Robert Vigouroux but was not formally institutionalized until 1995 by the current mayor, Jean-Claude Gaudin. *Marseille Espérance* brings together every religious leader in the city —Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist—with the mayor in regular discussion groups. Similar groups exist in cities around Europe, but no other city uses its council to extent of Marseille. Salah Bariki, the mayor's special advisor for Muslim affairs (a startling innovation in itself), recounted that the group meets at least once a month and that the mayor maintains personal relationships with each leader.[74] Indeed, a 2007 survey of French cities found that Marseille is the "only city with an administrative body aimed at maintaining dialogue with resident migrant communities."[75] The group's functions, however, are not just administrative or symbolic. Over the past decade, the council has diffused very serious conflicts in Marseille. After a young Comorian was killed by neo-Nazis in 2002, the mayor and *Marseille Espérance* pacified the riotous community by publicly condemning the acts and attending local vigils. One month later when a young

---

[73] Amandine Dubiez, "Intégration à la marseillaise," *L'Express*, 23 March 2006. < http://www.lexpress.fr/informations/integration-a-la-marseillaise_670313.html>.
[74] Interview with Salah Bariki, August 2009.
[75] Maren Borkert, et al. "Local Integration Policies for Migrants in Europe," Cities for Local Integration Policy and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007), 50.

Frenchman, Nicolas Bourgat, was stabbed to death by a Moroccan immigrant, the group once again calmed city crowds with calls for peace. *Marseille Espérance* also stood by the mayor and the chief of police on September 11th to denounce religious fanaticism and beg for compassion; again, tensions in the city subsided. When Muslims all across France protested the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, the Muslim delegates of *Marseille Espérance* returned to their mosques and called for calm. And in October 2005, the delegates once again assuaged the angry residents of Marseille with calls for peace and civility.

Over the years, the group has become a conduit for the mayor to reach immigrant communities and for the communities to reach him. Though the council was originally created to quell tensions between Jews and Muslims in Marseille, it has taken on a larger facilitation role. Now, before the mayor takes any decision that might affect Marseille's large immigrant community, he first turns to *Marseille Espérance*. The council may not have formal authority, but it has a strong influence on the decisions of the mayor and citizens in the streets of Marseille. Undoubtedly, the reputation that the mayor's office and *Marseille Espérance* built over ten years helped alleviate tensions in late 2005. During the first week of the riots, the group met at least once a day, and every night the religious leaders returned to their communities to calm the outrage stewing in the streets. Unlike other French cities, Marseille has created a direct line between minorities and local authorities, an organization that takes their concerns seriously and responds well to crises. The success during the 2005 riots generated praise from cities all over the world, and the group has subsequently been studied by delegations from other cities with ethnic

or cultural divides; Sarajevo, Barcelona, Montreal, Brussels, Anvers, Naples, and Turin have all modeled similar groups after *Marseille Espérance*.

Unfortunately, there is a major gap in this list: a lack of other French cities. It seems that French towns are reluctant to acknowledge the success of Marseille. The French often dismiss Marseille, arguing, "It's the culture of Marseille, not the culture of France,"[76] or "They did not have riots because they think they are special. They are not at all like Paris."[77] Certainly, the culture of Marseille is uniquely its own, but so is Paris's. What differentiates Marseille's approach to local organizations, however, is its distinctly un-Republican mode of integrating immigrants. Whereas the national model of *intégration* espoused by Parisian authorities disregards ethnicity in order to appear universally equal, Marseille embraces its diversity and supports its expression. Without a doubt, the hundreds of ethnic and religious associations in Marseille represent a mark of difference while *Marseille Espérance* truly contradicts the French model of integration. In fact, a group of Marseille historians recently concluded that Marseille's distinctly anti-Republican model has led to its integration. ""The strength of Marseille," they argue, "is to provide a local framework of an inclusive nature within a national framework rather instead of [the National] assimilative nature.[78] Since the law does not recognize race or ethnicity, Marseille recognizes religion—a euphemism for ethnicity. It affords Arabs— as Muslims—representation in local politics. This system avoids the taboo idea of race but simultaneously empowers minority communities. *Marseille Espérance* and the community police policy create contacts with and spaces for ethnic groups without

[76] Interview with Laure Villepain, Pairs, August 2009.
[77] Interview with Vincent Jacob, Paris, August 2009.
[78] Jocelyne Cesari, Alain Moreau, Alexandra Schleyer- Lindenmann « Plus Marseillais que moi, tu meurs ! » Ed. L'Harmattan, Sjanvier 2001.

blatantly denying the Republican integration model, but in practice, these strong factors in Marseille's integration acknowledge race and diffuse tension where the rest of France remains blind.

Conclusion

The wounds from the riots that started on October 27, 2005 remain very visible in France. Since those fateful weeks in 2005 when the entire country convulsed with anger, hatred, and fear, the French government has done little to ameliorate the plight of France's growing immigration population. The *banlieues* remain wastelands of unemployment and crime, segregated from the cultural and economic opportunities of city centers. Immigrants still feel isolated from French society, and French nationals still fear their unknown immigrant neighbors. Fortunately though, French cities like Paris, Lyon, and Toulouse can learn from the example of Marseille. Instead of being an unexplained exception to the riots or a footnote in studies of French culture, Marseille illuminates a path forward for French urban policy.

The first question that many people asked after 2005 was "Why Marseille?" At a glance, it might be easy to assume that Marseille, with a rich history of immigration and the port of entry for most Arab and African immigrant would naturally welcome foreigners.[79] The city changed over the past two decades because of its complex social boundaries and local policies. Marseille does not shunt off its poor and minority communities to outer zones of the city. Instead, it distributes public goods such as subsidized housing and health clinics evenly throughout. In doing so, Marseille eliminates the rigid us/them boundaries enforced by segregation in most French cities.

---

[79] Jocelyne Cesari, Alain Moreau and Bruno Etienne, 2001.

The simple fact that the rich and poor live, shop, and socialize in similar spaces reduces stigmatization and fear of the 'Other'.

Because Marseille lacks defined boundaries between immigrants and French nationals, the police pose less of a threat to immigrants. A distinctly de-centralized police policy of maintaining contact with community and religious leaders integrates the police force into neighborhoods. Police brutality exists in Marseille, but single incidents do not spark huge riots because immigrants and police are less likely to attack people they know. The police violence that incited uprisings on the streets of Paris activated repressed social tensions because the police had a history of brutally enforcing geographic and racial boundaries. In Marseille, however, neither the geographic nor brutal policing exists.

The final expression of integrated space in Marseille comes in the form of local organizations. Forums such as ethnic or neighborhood councils, *Espace jeunes*, and *Espace accueil aux étrangers* empower local groups and recognize ethnicity. Whereas other French cities downplay race and religion, Marseille seems to face it head-on with consultation between the mayor, the police, and these groups. Even though the city replaces the concept of ethnicity with that of religion, the true power of groups like *Marseille Espérance* lies with its network of contacts within ethnic communities. *Marseille Espérance* boasts a successful record of diffusing controversies because of its respectable connection between community leaders and the mayor. In this regard, community groups and the government policies provide a *space* and a *voice* for immigrant concerns.

These important factors—social geography, police policy, and local organizations—each played a dynamic role in how Marseille survived the 2005 riots. Certainly, other factors likely contributed to Marseille's exceptional calm in 2005, but my interviews and textual research suggest that the government and residents of Marseille believe these three factors are the leading reasons for the peace in Marseille. Together, the geography, localized policing, and community organizations in Marseille have created a unique space for immigrants and French nationals. Immigrants feel more comfortable in Marseille because the city lacks firm boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Hence, immigrants can more easily negotiate the threshold of integration.

This distinctive system of boundaries need not be limited to Marseille. Other cities, particularly in France, can and should pay attention to the policies Marseille uses. Other authors have concluded, unfortunately, that Marseille is *too* unique to be replicated. "Marseille is not a model since it relies on local forces deep rooted in its history and attitudes, which are not replicable elsewhere,"[80] argues Patrick Parodi. Of course, the *arrondissements* of Paris cannot be redrawn and the HLM's cannot be moved, but the city *can* learn to progressively distribute public goods. By extending public transportation, building more HLM's close to the city center, and routing out housing policies based on ethnicity, French cities can begin to achieve an integrated social milieu similar to Marseille. More immediately, local police forces can emulate the trend of the Marseille police: make constant contact with community leaders, have the same policemen patrol the same neighborhoods, and diversify the police force. These policies could help prevent future, unnecessary arrests and police violence. Finally, the mayors of other cities need to create networks of local religious and ethnic contacts. If these groups

---

[80] Parodi, 2002.

already exist, their roles need to be retooled; they should be not only be used to quell crises but also on a day-to-day consultative basis for any decision that might adversely impact minority communities.

Certainly, these suggestions run counter to the French model of integration, but, if anything, the success of Marseille proves that other methods can work in France. Marseille remains consistent with national rhetoric by not recognizing ethnicity, but it also does not ignore its immigrants. Instead of becoming 'invisible' like the French model prescribes, immigrants in Marseille become distinct through community organizations and representation in the mayor's office. Only by recognizing immigrant populations and creating geographically and racially neutral spaces will France begin to mend the wounds of the 2005 riots.

Works Cited

Arnold, Martin. "Geography that helped Marseilles escape the riots." *Financial Times*. November 12, 2005.

Black, David. "Policing the Scum: Order, Insecurity and the Deferral of the Political in France." International Studies Association Conference Papers, 2007.

Berlinski, Claire. "The Hope of Marseille." *Azure*. January 2005.

Body-Gendrot, Sophie. "Deconstructing Youth Violence in French Cities." *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law & Criminal Justice* 13 (2005): 4-26.

Borkert, Maren et al. "Local Integration Policies for Migrants in Europe," Cities for Local Integration Policy and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/31/en/1/ef0631en.pdf>.

Bresson, Robert. "Les mutations des structures socio-résidentielles marseillaises entre 1990 et 1999." *Faire savoirs* 5 (2005).

Castles, S. "How Nation-States Respond to Immigration and Ethnic Diversity." *New Community*. 21 (1995): 293-308.

Chapman, Herrick and Laura L. Frader, eds. *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspective s on the Politics of Difference*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2004.

Clavel, Laurent. "Jean-Claude Gaudin: Séntateur-Marie de Marseille." Interview. 2 March 2004. http://www.polytechnique.fr/eleves/binets/xpassion/article.php?id=28.

Donzel, André and Alain Moreau, eds. "Ville et intégration: le creuset marseillais." *Fair saviors* 5 (2005).

Dubiez, Amandine. "Intégration à la marseillaise," *L'Express*. March 23, 2006. Duprez, Dominique. "Urban Rioting as an Indicator of Crisis in the Integration Model for Ethnic Minority Youth in France." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (2009): 753-770.

"Euro area unemployment." EuroStat, 2009.

Favell, Adrian. "Integration Nations: The Nation-state and Research on Immigrants in Western Europe." In *International migration research: constructions, omissions, and the promises of interdisciplinarity*, eds. Michael Bommes and Ewa T. Morawska. New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

Favell, Adrian. *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*. London: MacMillan Press, 1998.

Geddes, Andrew. *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*. London: Sage Publications, 2003.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Goldberg, David Theo. "Migration and the Racialization of the Postmodern City in France," in *Racism, the City, and the State*, eds. Malcolm Cross, and Michael Keith. London: Rutledge Press, 1993.

Hammer, T. (ed). *European Immigration Policy: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Heckmann, Friedrich and D Schnapper, eds. *The Integration of Immigrants in European Societies: National Differences and Trends of Convergence*. Stuttgart: Lucius and Lucius, 2003.

"Identité nationale: pour Akhenaton, "la France est un des pays les plus racists." *La Provence*. January 15, 2010.

International Crisis Group. "France and its Muslims: Riots, Jihadism and Depoliticisation." Europe Report: Number 172. March 9, 2006.

International Crisis Group, "La France face a ses musulmans: émeutes, jihadisme, et dépolisation." Rapport Europe N°172. March 9, 2006.

Kimmelman, Michael. "In Marseille, Rap Helps Keep the Peace." *New York Times*. December 19, 2007.

"La boîte de Pandore de Sarkozy." *L'Humanité*. 3 November 2005.

Lagrange, Hughes. "La structure et l'accident." In *Émeutes urbaines et protestations: Une exception française*, eds. Hughes Lagrange and Marco Oberti. Paris: Presses de Sciences-po, 2006.

Laurence, Jonathan and Justin Vaisse. "Understanding Urban Riots in France." *New Europe Review*. December 1, 2005.

Masso, Anu. "A Readiness to Accept Immigrants in Europe? Individual and Country-Level Characteristics." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (2009): 251 – 270.

Mattina, Cesare. "Les polities clientéaires comme factuer de recomposition sociale et ethnique à Marseille." *Fair saviors* 5 (2005).

Maurin, Éric. *Le Ghetto Français: Enquête sur le séparatisme social.* Paris: Seuil, 2004.

Meurs, Dominique, Ariance Pailhé, and Patrick Simon. "Discrimination despite integration: Immigrants and the second generation in education and the labour market in France." In *International Migration In Europe: New Trends and New Methods of Analysis*, eds. Bonifazi, Okólski, Schoorl, & Simon. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008.

Moore, Damian. "Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities: Marseille." UNESCO-MOST Programme, 1999. < www.unesco.org/most/p97mars.do>.

Parodi, Patrick. "Citoyenneté et intégration: Marseille, modèle d'intégration?" *La Durance*. 31 May 2002.

"Procès Du Rappeur Hamé: La Dénonciation Des Violences Policières En Question." *Le Monde Diplomatique*. November 12, 2004.

Roy, Oliver. "The Nature of the French Riots." *Riots in France*. 18 November 2005.

Schain, Martin A. *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study*. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2008.

Schneider, Cathy. "Police Power and Race Riots." *Politics & Society* 36 (2008): 133-159.

Simon, Patrick. "The Mosaic Pattern: Cohabitation Between Ethnic Groups in Belleville, Paris." in *Minorities in European Cities: The Dynamics of Social Integration and Social Exclusion at the Neighbourhood Level*, eds. Body-Gendrot and Martiniello. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

Silverstein, Paul A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Smith, Timothy B. *France in Crisis: Welfare, Inequality and Globalization since 1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

"Taux de chômage localisés trimestriels par département 1982 à 2009." Institute national de la statistique et des études économiques. 2009. www.insee.fr.

Témime, Emile. *Histoire des migrations à Marseille*. Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1989.

Tissot, Sylvie. "The Role of Race and Class in Urban Marginality." *City* 11 (2007).

Wacquant, Loïc. "Banlieus françaises et ghetto noir américain: de L'amalgame à la comparaison." *French Politic and Society*, 1992.

Williams, Daniel. "Long Integrated, Marseille Is Spared." *Washington Post*. November 16, 2005.

Wolf, Eric. *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.