



THE REVOLT OF THE YOUTH OF THE BANLIEUES IN FRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The question of the youth of Maghreb and African Sahel ethnic origin in France who live in large majority in the suburbs, so-called la banlieue. The thorny issue of the youth, however, in the banlieues has become a social chronic disease that French governments' right and left alike have been dealing with. The dilemma of the

marginalized banlieues and the youth that are lost in the socio-cultural parameters of French society and the republic at large.

What went wrong? A socioeconomics issue that turned into a national identity issue, which has turned into a political selling point for the right and the far-right parties, media, and elite. Knowing that the issue of Youth, Identity, and Immigration is a topic that inc-

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ludes social, historical, and civilizational phenomena that are intertwined and complex and are related to humanity's constant pursuit of communication, interaction, and sometimes conflict to achieve their aims. Youth is not only an age group and biological stage—it is also a social position that is linked to cultural, economic, and political contexts¹. Recognizing this helps us to analyze and understand its identity and relationship with its society and other societies.

To better understand the latest and not the last Revolt of the Banlieues in France, in effect, the media and politicians were using the noun riot, which is more than a circumstantial event that has been shaking French governments for more than four decades. Chronologically, there were other events which occurred in the banlieues/suburbs in 1979, 1993, 2005, and in 2023, but what is new is that the conflict's dynamic has moved to the center and is no longer a suburb issue. It's a big city issue because tragic events of looting and social chaos took place in the downtown of Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse,

and Bordeaux etc., even in some small and medium -sized cities like Blois in central France².

SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND HUMILIATION

This revolt is the result of long-standing marginalization policies and behaviors, adding to the humiliation feeling that many Arabs, Blacks, and Muslims living in those marginalized cities in particular have been getting ever since. A narrative of being at ease to express its racism used by the far-right towards Muslims in general in the last three decades, notably during the cultural and political clash episode used by French national media: *The Islamic Veil Question (l'affaire du foulard islamique)* in 1989.

1989, a year that shaped and shifted the discourse of racism in France towards Arabs and Blacks, and evidently Muslims, was a societal imperative that was shifted from its ethnic nature to its religious one. Therefore, the issue of French national identity was at the center of every political debate and question concerning Muslims in Fran-

¹ "Concept Of Youth So Difficult To Define Sociology Essay", *UKessays*, 1 January 2015.

² "This Paris Suburb Burned Before. Has Anything Changed?" *The New York Times*, 9 July 2023.



Explanation: Demonstration asking for justice for Nahel in Paris

ce³. Thus, it is a matter of social justice that those youth and their parents in the suburbs of large cities are asking for more equality, and don't care about liberty and fraternity as much as they are worried nowadays about their safety and security.

In the meantime, the police who is an institution has been pretty much anti-Arab and anti-Muslim because of the rise of the far-right parties like RN of Ms. Le Pen and Reconquest! of Eric Zemmour, whose parents were born in Algeria, and another character entered the arena of the xenophobic and hate speech in France, former MP in the Le Pen party (RN) and campaign spokesman of Eric Zemmour, the candidate of the extremist party of Reconquest last year French

presidential election, Jean Messiha, born Hossam Botros Messiha in Cairo, Egypt, who became the voice and the face of racists in the French media, he raised more than one million and a half of Euro in the online fund for the family of the police officer who shot dead Nahel in Nanterre⁴.

The extremist parties, media, and elite are shaping the anti-Arab and Muslim immigrant narrative and the dialectical relationship between police and society in France. The shooting of the teenager Nahel last month by the policeman in the Nanterre neighborhood was only the drop that overflowed the vase because the French police have a terrible record dealing with non-white people, for instance. The infamous one is the 1961

³ John R. Bowen, Why Did the French Rally to a Law Against Scarves in Schools?, *Droit et société* 2008/1, no. 68, pp 33-52.

⁴ "Fundraiser for family of French policeman who shot teen closed after complaints", *RFI*, 4 July 2023.

Muslim women who have an appointment with their local Mayor in his office or who work in the city hall building should takeoff their headscarves at the gate of the building, and many Muslim women are suffering from this dress discrimination.

incident when, as the Algerian Liberation War of Independence was nearing its end, the Paris police brutally repressed a demonstration of French Algerians in the heart of the city. In 1986, French police shot dead a French-Algerian student in a student march in Paris. In 2005, Ziyad, 17, and Bouna Traore, 15, were electrocuted in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois in the department of Seine-st-Denis. A court later acquitted the two police officers accused of failing to help the two boys, whose deaths at a power substation led to weeks of riots.

Consequently, President Macron and the government bet on law-and-order in a sense of prior response to the far-right parties and their affiliated majority police, who did horrify the President Macron administration. Nonetheless, governments from the right and left failed miserably to deal with this issue, which says a lot about the French malaise⁵. How French governments are dealing with integration, post-integration for the left, and assimilation from the right. The right wants the immigrants to be assimilated like the Italians, the Portuguese, and the Spaniards in the 1960s

and 1970s, blaming the North Africans, in particular the ones from the Maghreb, who don't want to be "assimilated."

This is fully wrong because all the children of the North African parents and grandparents are well integrated and less included for instance, their children don't even speak their parents' native language and are intellectually assimilated with republican values. However, one question does indeed sound like the complex number in the equation of social injustice and marginalization/humiliation: is the appearance of religiosity of the large majority of Muslim girls and women.

ISLAMIC HEADSCARF RIGHTS AND FAR-RIGHT ALIBI

The question of the headscarf (al-Khemar in Arabic) in France is more than just a partisan selling point and an electoral agenda. The aim of the matter is to ban it in universities, just as it is banned in public servant offices. For instance, Muslim women who have an appointment with their local Mayor in his office or who work in the city hall building should take-off their headscarves at

⁵ Henri Astier, France riots: Why do the banlieues erupt time and time again?, *BBC*, 3 July 2023.



Explanation: A Muslim Woman in Paris

the gate of the building, and many Muslim women are suffering from this dress discrimination. On the other hand, it is authorized to be worn by Muslim women employed as cleaners in public train transportation, metro stations, and grocery stores.

What is wrong with the white xenophobes and France in general towards their fellow Muslims and Arabs?

A secular country like France has a large number of supporters from diverse sectors, such as the liberals, the feminists, and the anti-Arab/Muslim immigrants' politicians and intellectuals. This political label that is a serious societal topic gives a counter argument to the puritan/Islamists called "Salafists" by the French Parisian elite and media — yet according to them, any devoted

Muslim of either gender is either Salafist or brotherhood affiliated, a generic adjective with a pejorative connotation to denigrate any eloquent Muslim voice to thrive in the public debate⁶.

To some extent, the right and the far-right French elite and the xenophobes ignore the Muslims and the Arabs, who have been living in France for a century, seeing them as lazy and the Republic profiteers, hence an easy target, and Islam and the Arab/Muslim community in France become the origin of the French decline. Nevertheless, the question of al-Khemar (full hair cover) in the eyes of the elite and the xenophobes is an identity marker like a-Neqab (full head cover), which puts women's freedom of expression and submission in doubt. This would

⁶ Michel Gurfinkiel, Islam in France: The French Way of Life Is in Danger, *Middle East Quarterly*, March 1997, pp. 19-29.



Explanation: Two Muslims at an anti-racist demonstration in France

clash with the radical laics/secularists' and the feminists' arguments, who don't want a puritanical ideology taking advantage of the French Republic icon: Marianne's generosity and liberty.

The militants of far-right parties like the RN and the right-wing partisans of the LR party are already jubilant, and they have every reason to be so. According to CEVIOF (Center for Political Research at Sciences Po), as of January 2018, 60% of the French consider Islam a threat to the Republic, 37% think that the immigrants' children born in France are not really French, and 63% think that there are too many immigrants in France⁷.

⁷ "How many immigrants are there in France?", INED, 6 April 2020.

RELIGION, RACE, AND POLITICS

As a matter of fact, French Muslim and Arab anti-sentiment goes back to then-President Chirac's administration, when a fiery tactician was appointed for political goals to be France' Cop-in-Chief to marginalize the score of Jean Marie Le Pen in April 2002, to clean up the neighborhoods (les banlieues), and stop illegal immigration: his name is Nicolas Sarkozy.

These ingredients were a tasty treat on the tongues of the farright. Then-interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy's "tactic" worked in 2007, and he was elected with 10% of Marine Le Pen voters' vote in 2017, though the media and the politicians "buried" the voters of Marine Le Pen, believing they were losing

ground. Consequently, the RN came out as a wounded beast and imposed its presence as a popular winner in the finale of every local and national election in French politics in 2017 and 2022.

Restructuring the mindset of the white xenophobes and anti-establishment radical right-elite to view Arabs/Muslims as uneducated, mean people, not eloquent, and sluggish poses a huge challenge to white French society. As Mounia, a private cardiologist in Seine-Saint-Denis department 93, put it in a phone conversation, "...they want these young women vulgar and half-naked like Nabila" Ms. Nabila Ben Attia, A French-Swiss model and reality TV persona⁸.

To the Arab women I spoke with, Nabila is a product of the tabloid media and paints a portrait of the young Arab women, pejoratively called "Beurettes," as "exotic" to appeal to the young girls of the banlieues. In the eyes of these young women, she is a joke, as Linda, an accountant, put it.

After those tragic events of a real urban violent revolt, President Macron, however,

and his government have been using a demonization tactic to discredit and criminalize the protests in the use of violence. The end game strategy is to sell nationally and internationally the conflict between lost marginalized youth and some lefty anarchists who want chaos. The violence that erupted in large French cities suburbs and center like Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Lille last month for five nights, were not a banal protest; according to many specialists on social movement groups, it was a semi-insurrection⁹.

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of those chronic events that did in fact question the leadership of President Macron, in a matter of how weak he handled one of the most violent political and domestic security crises in two decades, he is cornered between the hammer of the legitimate cause of the youth of the banlieues that is mainly about social justice and the anvil of the far-right parties, media, and elite racist discourse that the narrative is about the OTHER/Muslims, who are scaring their white fellow citizens that are more and more

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⁸ "Beurettes', genealogy of a contemporary insult. Gender and race matters in France.", *European University Institute*, 25 March 2015.

⁹ Charles-Antoine Thomas, Les banlieues ou la dissidence criminelle – Approches comparées et solutions de sortie de, *Revue Politique*, 17 April 2017.



Explanation: Demonstration asking for justice for Nahel in Marseille

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seduced by their discourse. According to news reports, 70% of French people did ask President Macron to order the army to go to those suburbs to end their revolt. Politicians from the LR party president to Eric Zemmour did call for the president to establish a state of emergency; as the far-right leaning police union: Alliance, did use racist terms like harmful and France is in urban guerrilla war. On the other hand, the non-French white origin racist tandem Eric Zemmour and Jean Messiha are shaping the narrative of the big replacement theory of Renaud Camus¹⁰.

France is heading into a serious political crisis following

last Spring's anti-retirement and pension law and the aftermath of the 2023 Youth of the Banlieues Revolt. President Macron does not have much leverage; he has a relative majority in the National Assembly (the lower chamber in French Parliament), and the huge anti-Macron sentiment from his fellow citizens, the left coalition of NUPES, and the far-right of Ms. Le Pen, adding the economic consequences of these tragic events on the French economy in a time of high inflation and the cost of living in France.

The Youth of the Banlieues Revolt would affect the image of France abroad, in light of next year Paris Olympic Ga-

¹⁰ Gillian Brockell. The father of 'great replacement': An ex-socialist French writer. *Washington Post*, 17 May 2022.

mes (Paris 2024), these events have posed the question of safety of millions of tourists, who will be in France during the games, in which they will be set in the large cities of those suburbs that have been burning for five nights, causing great damage to President Macron authority and ruling style is considered weak by large majority of his fellow citizens, France has been in social and violent trouble zones since the summer of 2018 following the BenAlla scandal that followed by the Yellow vest protest in 2019, and last Spring workers and Unions protests, all those events are linked to last month ethnic revolt like the right and far-right wanted to sell to the society on one hand, and a matter of law-and-order matter in eyes of President Macron's administration and his lieutenants in the Renaissance party, whereas the question is a social justice and equal opportunity for all.

In sum, the dynamic of this social crisis and its management will change in the coming days, in the wake of how the president will decide following the report that ordered from the sociologists, which left the analysts to speculate that the president knows well it's a social movement led by spontaneous youth, who don't trust neither politicians nor social workers in their neighbors, wearing hoodie and baseball hats took a form of an insurgent urbanity led by non-partisan dystopian groups have exposed a new Prince world, who wanted to revolutionized the "old" world politics through a political neologism so the spectrum of the banlieues is haunting President Macron like his charismatic predecessors, Francois Mitterrand, and Jacques Chirac, unlike his predecessors, President Macron is caving to the far-right that their hate speech and Islamophobic discourse have been banalized in the French media and society.

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