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The French Conundrum: The Unsettled Relationship between the Colonial Past, Identity  
Construction, and Immigration in the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration

By  
Sierra Newby-Smith

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of  
Claremont Graduate University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in History,  
with a concentration in Museum Studies.

We certify that we have read this document  
and approve it as adequate in scope and  
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## Introduction

*Dans l'Europe de 2004, le lancement du Musée de l'histoire et des cultures de l'immigration en France prendra une dimension politique et culturelle considérable. Ce projet constituera pour tous les citoyens français et pour tous ceux qui vivent en France un instrument de connaissance, de tolérance et d'intégration, de nature à renforcer la cohésion nationale d'un pays dont l'identité est faite plus que jamais de tradition, d'ouverture et de diversité. -Jacques Toubon<sup>1</sup>*

*In 2004 Europe, the launch of the Museum of the History and Cultures of Immigration in France will take on a considerable political and cultural dimension. This project will constitute for all French citizens and for all those who live in France an instrument of knowledge, tolerance and integration, likely to strengthen the national cohesion of a country whose identity is made more than ever of tradition, openness and diversity. - Jacques Toubon<sup>2</sup>*

Former Minister of Culture Jacques Toubon expressed the above goals to then Prime Minister of France Jean-Pierre Raffarin in a 2004 report which outlined plans for a new museum in Paris. The museum, the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration intended to explore how the history of immigration was a key part of French history, synthesize and extrapolate on the history of immigration for the public, strengthen national cohesion, and create a cultural, historical, and social site of inquiry and research.<sup>3</sup> However, the museum's goal of strengthening national cohesion is complicated by its location and a state construction of national identity that is stringent, and at times unaccepting. The building that houses the museum, Palais de la Porte Dorée, was built to house the Colonial Museum for the 1931 World's Fair. The imposing art deco building is identifiable by the bas relief that covers its façade; a celebratory mix of images of France's relationship with her colonies.<sup>4</sup> The various museums that have been housed in the Palais since then have struggled to acknowledge the colonial past and memory of their location, following national norms and often ignoring the colonial aspects completely. While the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration has acknowledged the colonial roots of the museum, it too has

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Toubon, "Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration," (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Toubon, "Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration," (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Toubon, "Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration," (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in Post-colonial Europe," in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012), 17.

struggled to come to terms with its location and the connections between its themes of immigration, identity, national cohesion, and France's colonial past. Between the location whose very foundation is imbued with colonialism, the memory debates about colonialism that inspired the museum in the 1990s, and its theme, the site is inherently political on multiple levels.

The museum functions as a microcosm of France's unsettled relationship between French colonialism and the construction of French identity and thus provides a case study on how the colonial past and the republican construction of identity are not only intertwined deeply, but how French society cannot address major questions about immigration and colonialism without restructuring the state definition of identity in France. The concept of national identity in France is defined through the political and social contract that one has with one's fellow citizens and the state.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the construction of national identity in France, on a political and societal level, is defined through a belief and adherence to the shared values of republicanism, laïcité, and universalism. Identity in this paper is both civic and political in scope, but defined through the ability to be considered French by the state and society at large on the basis of one's adherence to the afore mentioned values. My argument builds on the numerous scholars before me who have explored the contradictions and nuances of French identity and memory, both as explicitly related to the museum and more generally. This thesis aims to show how the museum has attempted to change over time, but is bound by narratives of identity from the French state that are deeply intertwined with France's colonial past. By exploring the coalescing of empire, the 1990s memory debates, and the rhetoric used by politicians that either supported or erased the goals of the museum, I argue that because the museum functions as a microcosm of French

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<sup>5</sup> Jim Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia: The Rise of Respectable Racism in France*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89.  
Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France*, Critical Studies in Racism and Migration, (London: Routledge, 1992), 127,147.

society and the state, that the museum's conundrum about the unsettled relationship between identity and colonialism is in fact a French conundrum.

### **A Note on Terms**

The National Immigration Museum in France has gone by multiple names, which this paper uses chronologically to help highlight how other scholars have written about the museum and its transitory and unsettled nature as a site which is at the heart of discussions about identity, immigration, and colonialism. When the museum first opened it was named the Centre National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI), one because it did not have a permanent collection and therefore was not considered a museum by the state, and two because it was intended to be a site for a museum, archive, research facilities and cultural production, thereby encompassing far more than the museum label.<sup>6</sup> This paper uses the term CNHI when discussing the museum prior to 2013. The museum underwent a name change in 2013 to better reflect its museological mission and became the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration.<sup>7</sup> This paper uses the term to describe the museum from 2013 on or when it is referencing the museum generally as an entity. Third, Immigration Museum will be used to refer to the museum, this will be used to describe the museum across its entire trajectory, and simply is a shortened linguistic reference.

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<sup>6</sup> Caroline Ford, "Museums After Empire in Metropolitan and Overseas France\*," *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 3 (2010): 650.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel J. Sherman, "The Perils of *Patrimoine*: Art, History, and Narrative in the Immigration History Museum, Paris," *Oxford Art Journal*, 39, no. 3 (2016): 459,479-480. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.proxy.library.oregonstate.edu/10.1093/oxartj/kcw033>

## Chapter One

### From Multiculturalism in Europe to the Construction of French Identity

The Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration exists at the cross-roads of two different conceptions of a museum: that of the museum as a physical space, as the Palais de la Porte Dorée, and that of the museum as a conceptual space. While other scholars have addressed both aspects, this thesis intends to highlight how both the physical space and the conceptual nature of the museum as representative of national and societal narratives about immigration, function as a microcosm of French understanding of identity, immigration, and Frenchness. I have scaffolded the works of scholars that focus on multiculturalism, immigration, museums and empire, and memory to show how the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration remains a conflicted site of memory and identity construction, which is ultimately a reflection of larger French preoccupations with the same subjects. Rita Chin's text *The Crisis of Multiculturalism* functions as a commentary and analysis of the role of colonialism and immigration in the construction of French identity. Chin's work focuses broadly on Europe, drawing comparisons between how different European nations have approached the question of multiculturalism, and why it is considered to have failed in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

This work builds on her historical renderings of immigration over time in France, and tracing how that has affected citizenship and identity construction in France. Chin explores the vacillating responses to migration over time, and its trajectory towards an assumed inability to assimilate, and thus further separation.<sup>9</sup> She addresses the ever-present colonial past that haunts conversations about communautarisme, assimilation, and identity.<sup>10</sup> Chin's analysis of the

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<sup>8</sup> Rita C-K Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 237. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400884902>.

<sup>9</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 113, 169, 178.



formation of the Other in France and the connections between immigration and xenophobia are used in this paper to support the assertion that the current state construction of French identity is in discord with nuanced conversations about colonialism and immigration. The construction of French identity is a key point of this paper, as it forms the basis of the argument as to why discussions about the historical and historiographical implications of colonialism and immigration can never come to fruition under current identity constructs. Her analysis of multiculturalism and France's response to it help to explain the political and social response to the museum from both the public and political figures, figures whose rhetoric this thesis utilizes to show the relationship between the colonial past and French republican identity.

This is most aptly seen in the arguments from French politicians concerning *communautarisme*, which politicians and social figures argue is the practice of a group separating themselves on the basis of culture, race, or religion from French society at large. This separation is seen as deliberately in conflict with the universalist French identity and is often used in relation to Muslims in France, as well as individuals that are identified as immigrants, most often from the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>11</sup> Chin notes that immigrants were often pushed to live in certain areas through economic or governmental means, as large housing projects had been constructed for a variety of groups including foreign workers, immigrants, and repatriated *pied-noirs*.<sup>12</sup> This paper uses *communautarisme* in place of separatism because of its usage by political figures to describe groups they consider to be unassimilated and or inassimilable. Multiculturalism will be addressed through the categories of integration and assimilation. Integration implies that immigrants are integrated into the society of the receiving

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<sup>11</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 169.

country, but doing so while being able to maintain certain cultural, social, or ethnic practices. Assimilation implies that the immigrant will adjust and mold themselves to the new country, leaving behind cultural, ethnic, and social practices or identity in favor of the new country's.<sup>13</sup> One must become French to be able to claim French identity; out of this, a Frenchness which has predominately been defined by precepts that do not acknowledge difference and formed before considerable migration from France's former colonies.

As Chin shows in the *Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, while concerns about difference extend back beyond the Second World War, the current discussions about assimilation and integration are predicated on concerns about immigrants from former colonies moving to France permanently.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, many of the arguments of communitarisme hinge on suspicion of Muslim practices, including head coverings. Jim Wolfreys covers this more extensively in *Republic of Islamophobia*, arguing that Islamophobia has been forged by political actors to form a political and social reality in France which has been furthered by neo-liberal and reactionary rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Wolfreys connects Islamophobia to rising social inequality and immigration concerns that are harnessed and utilized by political figures.<sup>16</sup> Wolfreys' exploration of political rhetoric on immigration and identity ground this paper's analysis on how immigration is utilized to explain and circumvent identity simultaneously. While identity in France is not solely viewed through a lens of anti-Muslim sentiment, the formation of us versus them narratives since the 1980s have heavily leaned on religious and cultural tropes of Islam as a

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<sup>13</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 90, 95, 113.

<sup>14</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 67, 78.

<sup>15</sup> Jim Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 127, 203.

way to distinguish true Frenchness and identity.<sup>17</sup> Thus Wolfreys' text helps to situate the French principles of republicanism, universalism, and laïcité in the current political context.

Within the French context republicanism exists on the expectation and assumption that all citizens are equal in the eyes of the state and refuses any specific rights to individual groups.<sup>18</sup> Maxim Silverman notes that republicanism and the push for universalism in France can mask regional and ethnic differences.<sup>19</sup> Republicanism's history extends back to the French Revolution and Enlightenment ideals.<sup>20</sup> It was further solidified as a key aspect of defining identity in the late 1800s as a way to lessen the power of the church in France.<sup>21</sup> French universalism, is similar to republicanism in that it refers to the belief and practice that all citizens are equal and indistinguishable in public space. Citizenship is defined through political and social contract within France, a set of shared values, versus ties through blood or race.<sup>22</sup> This is further supported by *jus soli*, or the right to citizenship on the basis of having been born on French soil, versus citizenship solely being awarded based on one's familial ties (inheriting French citizenship because one has a parent who is French).<sup>23</sup> Thus the concept of the citizen is political in nature and one is tied to fellow citizens through one's participation in French society according to French norms in public space.

Finally, the practice of laïcité, typically translated as secularism in English, is the belief in a separation of church and state. Established by a law mandating the separation of church and

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<sup>17</sup> Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 30, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Abigail Taylor, "Crimes of Solidarity: Libert ,  galit  and France's Crisis of Fraternit ," *The Conversation*., February 21, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/crimes-of-solidarity-liberte-egalite-and-frances-crisis-of-fraternite-90010>.

<sup>19</sup> Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Naomi Schor, "The Crisis of French Universalism," *Yale French Studies* 100, no. 100 (2001): 48.

<sup>21</sup> Edwige Liliane Lefebvre, "Republicanism and Universalism: Factors of Inclusion or Exclusion in the French Concept of Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 7, no. 1 (2003): 31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102032000048684>.

<sup>22</sup> Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 89.

Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 89.

<sup>23</sup> Lefebvre, "Republicanism and Universalism," 32.

state in 1905, laïcité is understood to mean freedom from religion or the imposition of religion, versus solely the freedom to practice religion and the protection of religious entities.<sup>24</sup> While the 1905 law does protect the right to practice one's religion, the contemporary understanding is that religion "must be confined to the 'private sphere.'"<sup>25</sup> Therefore religious symbolism, acts, and clothing, are considered to be an imposition on one's fellow citizens in public space. While the 1905 law denotes the separation of church and state, the most recent and increased use of laïcité as a political device concerns the wearing of head coverings and face coverings associated with Islam in schools and public space more generally.<sup>26</sup> Each of these three concepts are key to understanding how the Other is constructed in France, in addition to how integration and assimilation is challenging because the key precepts of French identity do not reflect the lived experiences of many citizens.

Wolfrey's exploration of the development of Islamophobia ties the three concepts together in the current political climate, highlighting how universalism, republicanism, and laïcité are used to create exclusionary parameters to determine identity and Frenchness. Indeed, the utilization of laïcité since the 1980s highlights how Wolfreys' work on the normalization of Islamophobia in France is built on a history of suspicion and distrust towards immigrant populations that over time have been considered inassimilable, as noted by Chin.<sup>27</sup> The development of Islamophobia and its utilization in French politics is the larger context of the speeches by former French presidents at key moments in the Immigration Museum's history highlighted in this paper. This thesis takes the assertions made by Wolfreys about Islamophobia

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<sup>24</sup> Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, 15, 100.

Michael Barbaro, "France, Islam, and 'Laïcité,'" interview with Constant Méheut, *The Daily*, podcast audio, February 12, 2021. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/france-islam-and-la%C3%AFcit%C3%A9/id1200361736?i=1000508726838>

<sup>25</sup> Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 93-94.

<sup>27</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 6, 123.

and its manifestation through political rhetoric and identity construction in France, and distills it within the museum's context. Wolfreys connects the formation of Islamophobia to immigration and the perception of immigrants in France, highlighting how immigration takes on religious, racial, and ethnic characteristics in political rhetoric that forms identity.<sup>28</sup> This further highlights the concepts of republicanism, universalism, and laïcité in the construction of French identity and the way in which they rest on an assumption of cohesiveness and equality that is disproved by France's colonial past and colonial memory, both in the museum and in French society more generally. This is key to the argument of this paper, as the museum is meant to reflect and support a cohesive and republican French identity. In addition, the museum is utilized to discuss integration and assimilation without always addressing the underlying systemic factors that are at play with determining who is considered French.

### **Memory as a Catalyst, Preoccupation, and Colonial Legacy**

In addition to the work of Chin and Wolfreys, who explore the construction of French identity through responses to immigration and the political rhetoric used to construct a republican identity, scholarship on the memory debates in France concerning the Algerian War for Independence is key to addressing the construction of identity. Itay Lotem explores the memory debates of the 1990s in France that formed early inspiration for the museum and the legacy of colonialism in those debates.<sup>29</sup> This work asserts that discussions about colonialism and colonial memory cannot come to fruition under the current construction of French identity. Instead, colonialism is often disregarded as a historical and historiographical entity which is directly tied to France as a nation economically, politically, and culturally. Lotem argues that the

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<sup>28</sup> Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 38, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Itay Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France: The Sins of Silence*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) 55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63719-4>.

afterlife of colonial history is present and directly tied to political and social discourse at different points over time.<sup>30</sup> This afterlife can be described as a reinterpreting of memory within new political and social contexts to fit the present moment and current concerns and anxieties about race, identity, and the colonial past.<sup>31</sup> This thesis uses his argument about how colonial history is connected to political and social discourse to emphasize its use of presidential speeches and rhetoric, which speak to French preoccupations with colonialism, immigration, and identity as unsettled and divisive topics.

In addition to using the reinterpretations of colonial memory to discuss presidential rhetoric, this thesis builds on his argument to show that the museum is attempting to reinterpret colonial memory so as to have more nuanced conversations about immigration in response to current world events. Lotem's text addresses the formation of the memory debates that had a particularly salient moment in the 1990s, a period of scholarship which increased enthusiasm for a museum on immigration and resulted in the first committee to address the existence of such a museum.<sup>32</sup> In France, the key pivot point of historical memory was the unfinished debates about systemic French military violence and torture, censorship, and commemoration in relation to the Algerian War for Independence.<sup>33</sup> The memory debates were grounded in three key academic moments, the publication of Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, the memory of the Vichy regime, and Benjamin Stora's focus on memory about the Algerian War for Independence and the need for memorial reconciliation.<sup>34</sup> As Lotem notes, with the addition of scholarship from historians such as Pascal Blanchard, Nicholas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire the desire to

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<sup>30</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 17-18, 25, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 55, 66-67, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 62.

<sup>34</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 10-11.

address the shadow of colonialism increased. In the post-2005 era, in which a law to promote the “positive role of the French presence overseas, notably in North Africa,” and the 2005 banlieue uprisings, “a new wave of literature about the relationship between history, memory and contemporary identity” developed.<sup>35</sup> Each of these catalyzed a debate about memory of the war in Algeria and by a larger extension, colonialism as a whole. While not the focus of this paper, the unsettled history of France’s colonization of Algeria, and the subsequent immigration and migration that took place both before and after the war for independence, form key groups of immigrants that the museum addresses, even if not explicitly described as such. In addition, the opening of the museum in the post-2005 political landscape, saw a greater emphasis on immigration and identity in France from both the public and politicians.

Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard’s work builds on Lotem’s to discuss colonial memory and the limits of national and social forgetting. This paper utilizes their work on memory to showcase how the museum contributes to its own conundrum of the unsettled relationship between colonialism and identity. Bancel and Blanchard highlight in *The Meanders of Colonial Memory* how “forgetting has clearly reached its limits,” in relation to colonial memory and legacy.<sup>36</sup>

“Colonial memory” is diffracted. It circulates in narratives told by people with a relationship to colonial history. It can be found in literature, movies, music, the fine arts, but it is also constructed, as such, by public institutions: this is the “official memory” of colonization. Memory, which intercedes between present realities and the recessive logic of the narratives that give them meaning, is a process, a constant reconstruction.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 11-12.

Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 100, 113.

<sup>36</sup> Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Alexis Pernsteiner, “The Meanders of Colonial Memory,” In *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, ed. Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, and Dominic Thomas, (Indiana University Press, 2014), 399. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gh82z.38>.

<sup>37</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, “The Meanders of Colonial Memory,” 400.

Bancel and Blanchard's definition of colonial memory highlights the ephemerality of memory and simultaneously its importance in forming national and historical records. As they note, colonial memory is viewed as both a reflective and exhuming practice which came to a head in 2005, after nearly twenty years of emphasis on memory and the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962).<sup>38</sup> In addition, Bancel and Blanchard view colonial memory as a way to explore the borders between history and memory, especially as narratives of colonial history must be seen as collective history in France.<sup>39</sup> Bancel and Blanchard's assertion that colonial memory functions as a "*process, constant reconstruction*" grounds this work in the shifting and unsettled debates about identity and the role of colonialism and immigration in defining the French populace.<sup>40</sup> The shifting process of colonial memory, which highlights national myths and narratives, showcases how the process butts up against the national, republican construction of identity. Even as the process of memory shifts and adapts it can only move so far in the conversation as it is consistently pitted against a construction of identity that cannot accept those shifts, let alone the memory process itself.

This thesis uses Blanchard and Bancel's assertions that colonial memory is a "complex phenomenon" which cannot be seen as momentary or a blip; an argument often used for the Vichy regime that has been historically constructed as an event that is antithetical to republicanism, and therefore an instance, not a pattern in French history.<sup>41</sup> The argument about colonial memory as a process and "complex phenomenon" helps to support this paper's argument about how colonialism is embedded in the construction of French identity, and that it functions as a site of confusion, disregard, and outright erasure when discussing identity and

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<sup>38</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 399, 401.

<sup>39</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 402-403.

<sup>40</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 400.

<sup>41</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 401.



Frenchness conceptually. Blanchard and Bancel point to how colonial memory and the insistence on its inclusion in historical processes are in direct opposition to existing narratives and paradigms about national identity and French republicanism, which ultimately demands a rewriting of the national narrative.<sup>42</sup> This paper aims to show how that rewriting is not only necessary on the scale of colonial memory as an academic and ideological concept, but that the very institutions that purport to address identity cannot fully do so without breaking the existing paradigms on national identity. The museum functions as a physical manifestation of how narratives on national identity ultimately circumvent colonial memory to maintain a national mythology of cohesion and universalism.

This paper aims to explore Bancel and Blanchard's analysis of colonial memory and French identity through the lens of the immigration museum, using the fact that it is a state sponsored institution and the former colonial museum as a reflection of its conundrum of addressing colonialism and colonial memory. I further explore Blanchard's assertion that the republican ideal of France is in fact built on the forgetting of colonialism, and in the case of this paper, an identity built on such forgetting means that problematizing colonialism and immigration are in opposition with the construction of identity as it exists in France.<sup>43</sup> As Blanchard states, the site of the Immigration Museum prevented the construction of a *lieu de mémoire*, a memory site for colonial memory, effectively supplanting it with a related topic that was still in the state's interest. Blanchard goes on to point out that at the time of the opening of the CNHI that France, in contrast to other former colonial states, did not have a museum of colonization.<sup>44</sup> In supplanting the colonial nature and past of the Palais de la Porte Dorée, the

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<sup>42</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 404.

<sup>43</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 407.

<sup>44</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, "The Meanders of Colonial Memory," 405-406.

CNHI becomes both a link and buffer to the necessary conversations between colonialism and immigration. The museum ultimately reflects the state narrative of a cohesive, subsuming French identity in which all immigrants eventually become French. By circumventing an institution that explicitly addresses colonialism and colonial memory, the museum contributes to the conundrum of the unsettled relationship between colonialism and identity, and how immigration functions as a link between the two.

## **The Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration's Conflict with French Identity**

### **Paradigms and Memory**

This thesis uses the work of Laurence Gouriévidis to link Bancel, Blanchard, and Lotem's analysis of colonial memory's connection to political and social discourse to the immigration museum. She uses the CNHI as a site that represents the interpretation and manufacture of memory for various contexts and needs in a museum.<sup>45</sup> This highlights museums as "catalysts in memory wars," by demonstrating that museums are places in which memory is inscribed and interpreted.<sup>46</sup> Gouriévidis's exploration of the CNHI through the interpretation of memory builds on Lotem's discussion of the memory debates of the 1990s. For the purposes of this paper that exploration further establishes that the museum is a site in which colonial memory and colonialism haunt the interpretation of immigration without fully coming to terms with it. In using the CNHI as an example, Gouriévidis points to larger questions for colonial and immigration museums about how transcultural and national paradigms are tied together and simultaneously in conflict.<sup>47</sup> This further supports this paper's argument that the Immigration

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<sup>45</sup> Laurence Gouriévidis, "Representing migration in Museums: history, diversity and the politics of memory," in *Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics*, ed. Laurence Gouriévidis, (London: Routledge, 2014), 13.

<sup>46</sup> Gouriévidis, "Representing migration in Museums," 14.

<sup>47</sup> Gouriévidis, "Representing migration in Museums," 13-14.

Museum's difficulty in addressing colonialism is a reflection of construction of French identity by the state. The national paradigm established by the state concerning identity does not allow for the presence of colonial memory, nor the analysis of its effect on identity narratives.

Gouriévidis identifies this paradigm within the CNHI, which this thesis builds on to show how the unsettled nature of colonialism in the museum is a reflection of identity construction in France that positions itself in direct opposition to the hierarchical nature of colonialism. In addition, Gouriévidis's approach to the national paradigm and transcultural history provide key conceptual considerations for how this paper addresses what seems to be at times conflicting goals and outcomes within the Immigration Museum.<sup>48</sup>

Dominic Thomas marries the nature of multiculturalism and colonialism debates with the memory of empire in his work *Africa and France*. With a focus on the omnipresence of empire in French society, he shows how this manifests through everything from political engagement and foreign policy to the creation of new state sponsored museums, like the CNHI.<sup>49</sup> This work builds on Thomas's to highlight how political rhetoric from national leaders can be tied to the museum as a representation of the unsettled relationship between colonialism, immigration and identity that is manifested at the museum. Thomas highlights the museum in his text, utilizing it as an example of the omnipresence of empire and the contentious nature of its presence in political life and rhetoric.<sup>50</sup> Thomas's exploration of the CNHI grounds this paper's assertions that immigration, identity, and Frenchness as concepts are muddled and tied to interpretations of France's colonial past.<sup>51</sup> In addition, his work helps to tie together the different forms of

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<sup>48</sup> Gouriévidis, "Representing migration in Museums," 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> Dominic Richard David Thomas, *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism*, African Expressive Cultures, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 13, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 26, 30-31.

decolonization that are at play in the museum. Decolonization of colonies, the process by which colonies separated themselves from colonizing countries and the disintegration of empire on an official scale, often through independence movements, is a key factor in the discussions about immigration, race, and identity.<sup>52</sup> In the case of museums, decolonization is the reframing and expanding of perspectives within museum spaces, and often making the explicit connection between empire and the creation and funding of museums. In addition, for many museums, it is sharing authority with those whose voices were absent from museums previously.<sup>53</sup>

Thomas's edited work *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe* further supports the assertion that the museum is a microcosm of the unsettled relationship between colonialism and identity, and reflective of the two decolonization processes which are intertwined in the museum. This thesis utilizes Thomas's exploration of the goals of the museum as an educational, cultural institution, as well as the language used to describe its impetus, which he notes are muddled, confused and at times in conflict.<sup>54</sup> By building on this assertion this paper shows that the museum cannot fully address colonial memory under current identity constructions, thus that the goals and the reality of the museum would be in conflict is not a surprise, but an inevitability. In addition, the exploration of the nation and the Other within both the political and museological context asserts where the museum's attempts at history without a decolonial lens have failed to address that the museum itself is the extension of a construction and celebration of colonialism in physical form.

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<sup>52</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 44.

<sup>53</sup> "What Does It Mean to Decolonize a Museum?," *MuseumNext*, February 23, 2022. <https://www.museumnext.com/article/what-does-it-mean-to-decolonize-a-museum/>.

<sup>54</sup> Dominic Thomas, "Object/Subject Migration: The National Center of the History of Immigration," in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012), 130-131.

*Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, and more specifically the articles of Mary Stevens and Dominic Thomas ground this paper's assertion that the Immigration Museum functions as a reflection of greater political and social concerns about identity and immigration. Their tracing of the formation of the museum and its direct connection to its contemporary political landscape are a reflection of the thesis of this paper and provide necessary background and context to this argument.<sup>55</sup> Stevens argues that the presence of the Immigration Museum at the Palais de la Porte Dorée highlights the lack of a museum that explicitly contends with French colonialism.<sup>56</sup> While in agreement with Stevens, this paper connects the disregard for the colonial past as an extension and inevitability of the state construction of French identity. In addition, it focuses more specifically on the periods of 2007 and 2014 under different administrations as key moments in which the conundrum of the unsettled relationship between colonialism and identity is exemplified, with immigration as a link between the two. These articles focus on the opening of the museum and the museum as a general reflection of tensions between the colonial past and political rhetoric that utilizes immigration and republican identity.<sup>57</sup> The two moments I've chosen highlight how rhetoric and support for the museum changed with different administrations, but that the inability to fully address colonial memory and its relationship to identity and immigration was a constant. The invocation of the cohesive French identity under republican ideals is consistent under both administrations, how they each understand immigration to form a part of that identity narrative differs.

### **Colonial Imagery and Changing Dynamics**

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<sup>55</sup> Mary Stevens, "Still a Family Secret? The representation of colonialism in the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration," in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012), 118-119.

<sup>56</sup> Stevens, "Still a Family Secret?," 122.

<sup>57</sup> Stevens, "Still a Family Secret?," 117.

Dominic Thomas, "Object/Subject Migration: The National Center of the History of Immigration," in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012), 129.

Robert Aldrich's *Colonial Museums in Postcolonial Europe*, establishes how the Palais de la Porte Dorée became a museum and responded to changes in attitudes toward French colonials during the post-colonial period. His work connects the current Immigration Museum to the history of the building in which it resides, thus tying my arguments about the museum back to the place that contributes so much to its conflicted nature. He focuses on the bas-relief on the outside of the building as well as the Salle de Fêtes as sites in which the colonialism and France's *mission civilisatrice* are still apparent, but little analysis or recognition beyond their art history significance is given to them by the museum.<sup>58</sup> He further contextualizes the restructuring of the museums in the Palais de la Porte Dorée within a larger international context of colonial museums contending with changing colonial dynamics.<sup>59</sup> As a result, his work addresses how post-colonial attitudes were reinforced, or at least interconnected, across a variety of museums.<sup>60</sup> The relational nature of the memory of colonialism in France and museums helps to reinforce or oppose colonial memory, at times resulting in opposition and conflicting narratives in the museums themselves.<sup>61</sup> This further exemplifies the multi-positional nature of museums in postcolonial Europe that must contend with colonial memory, whether it be in art, history, or ethnography.

This thesis builds on Aldrich's work to explore how the Immigration Museum is faced with a conundrum, exploring the multiplicity of people that make up France while still adhering to the state construction of identity. By analyzing the rhetoric of political leaders during key moments of change for the museum, the relationship not only between the state and museum is

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in Post-colonial Europe," in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012), 17,19.

"La salle des fêtes du Palais," Monument du Palais de la Porte Dorée, Accessed April 01, 2022. <https://monument.palais-portedoree.fr/le-palais-des-colonies/la-salle-des-fetes-du-palais>.

<sup>59</sup> Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in Post-colonial Europe," 20.

<sup>60</sup> Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in Post-colonial Europe," 20, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Stevens, "Still a Family Secret?," 115.

made clear, but the shadow and memory of colonialism is exemplified. In addition, Aldrich's work serves as a reminder that the Immigration Museum is not the only museum in France to struggle with addressing the colonial past, but that it is a reflection of larger state and societal preoccupations with identity formation and the role of the Other as an oppositional figure to French republicanism.

## Chapter Two

### The Museum as a Manifestation of Colonial Celebration and Forgetting

The history of the physical site of the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration at the Palais de la Porte Dorée begins with the Exposition Coloniale Internationale, or the World's Fair of 1931. With exhibits from, France, its colonies, and various countries, the world's fair was meant to celebrate France's colonial power and exploits. The exhibition was a celebratory event that highlighted how France saw its colonies as producers of resources and France itself as the purveyor of the *mission civilisatrice*, the civilizing mission.<sup>62</sup> The palais was the only permanent building constructed at the site on the edge of Bois de Vincennes for the world's fair, and the physical building acted as a continued celebration of France's colonial exploits.

The celebration of colonialism was not only present in the exhibition as an event, but in the Palais de la Porte Dorée itself. The entire façade of the building is a bas-relief that displays the colonies' contributions to France and France's positive contributions to the colonies.<sup>63</sup> The bas-relief portrays Marseilles and Bordeaux as the entry point and the doorway between the colonies and metropolitan France.<sup>64</sup> This façade with its explicit celebration of colonialism, showing stylized colonized figures that are toiling for empire, completing "agriculture, artisanal, or mining work, happily offering both their labor and products to France."<sup>65</sup> The bas-relief, designed by well know sculptor Alfred Janniot, shows African and South Asian figures picking and carrying produce. The scenes are mixed with flora and fauna, promoting a harmonious and

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<sup>62</sup> Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-De-Siècle Europe*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 182-185.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 137-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 137-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

<sup>65</sup> Fassil Demissie, "Displaying colonial artifacts in Paris at the Musée Permenant des Colonies and Musée du Quai Branly," in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012),66-68.



sanitized image of the colonies, that gives no indication of the violence and exploitation that was the reality of colonialism.<sup>66</sup> The bas-relief is still on the exterior of the building and has been a point of contention throughout its history as other museums have come and gone in the space.



**Fig. 1.** Bas-relief on exterior of the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, designed by Alfred Janniot. Photograph: October 2015.<sup>67</sup>

This physical display for the Palais de la Porte Dorée has meant that colonialism is not only imbued in its walls, but in its context. The palais is both a physical representation of France's "civilizing mission" in its colonies, but also within Paris itself, as the general commissioner of the Exposition Coloniale and former colonial administrator Hubert Lyautey declared his intention to "'hausmannize' and reform the largely communist area in eastern Paris."<sup>68</sup> The palais is both representative of the colonial exhibition and what was intended after the fact; continuing to promote French colonialism in visual and pedagogical form in the métropole. This is furthered by the fact that the museum was quite literally the Museum of the Colonies and Museum of Overseas France for nearly thirty years.

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<sup>66</sup> Demissie, "Displaying colonial artifacts in Paris at the Musée Permanent des Colonies and Musée du Quai Branly," 66-68.

<sup>67</sup> Sierra Newby-Smith, 2015, Photograph, Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris France.

<sup>68</sup> Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 182, 185.

The Exposition Coloniale closed in the fall of 1931 and a few months later the Colonial Museum, which became Musée de la France d’Outre-mer opened.<sup>69</sup> The museum was a continuation of the original colonial exhibition with its celebration of France’s civilizing mission in its colonies. The choice to maintain the colonial museum was not surprising, in that post-World War I France was coalescing its colonial identity and colonies. The colonial exhibition which had celebrated a France around the world, at least in terms of land, created a national identity that expanded far beyond the métropole.<sup>70</sup> Even with the political pushback from communist and socialist parties, the colonialism of France was celebrated and understood to be key to the French nation.<sup>71</sup> The Musée de la France d’Outre-mer’s opening as an extension of the colonial exhibition was predicated on this. It was reflective of the understanding that France was more than its European borders, often referred to as the hexagon, and that its civilizing mission and colonialism were key to empire. Geppert states the goals of the world’s fair were far more extensive than a display of colonialism, stating “the exposition explicitly aimed at infusing the French public with a colonial consciousness, a mentalité coloniale otherwise considered dreadfully missing.”<sup>72</sup> The museum therefore was not only a representation of colonialism intended for the short period of the world exposition, but a continuous physical manifestation of the desire to infuse the French public of métropole with a colonial consciousness. The museum

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<sup>69</sup> Étienne Féau, “L’art Africain Au Musée Des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie: Collections et Perspectives Pour Le Musée Du Quai Branly (African Art in the Musée Des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie, a Brief History of the Collections and the Prospects for the New Museum of Arts and Civilizations),” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 39, no. 155/156 (1999): 924. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4392987>.

<sup>70</sup> Sandrine Lemaire, “National History and Colonial History: Parallel Histories (1961–2006),” In *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, edited by Sandrine Lemaire, Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Dominic Thomas, (Indiana University Press, 2014), 257-258. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gh82z.40>.

<sup>71</sup> Lemaire, “National History and Colonial History,” 257-258.

<sup>72</sup> Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 195.

focused on the development of the French empire over time, indigenous art that has inspired French art and culture, and agriculture and minerals.<sup>73</sup>

While this celebration of French colonialism was possible in the 1930s and through the Second World War, as more French colonies gained independence and or autonomy, the celebratory nature of a colonial museum seemed at odds with current political and cultural events. Colonial museums more generally were suffering from a lack of funding and visitor ship, which resulted in closures. The minister of cultural affairs, Andre Malraux redirected the museum in 1960 towards a less explicitly colonial theme.<sup>74</sup> An eclectic character known for everything from trying to steal statues from Angkor Wat to anti-fascist activities in Spain, he was appointed minister of Cultural Affairs under President Charles de Gaulle with the charge of making great works of mankind accessible to the French public and to encourage the creation of art.<sup>75</sup> He proposed an art museum of non-European/non-western art, with the purpose of aestheticizing non-western art, elevating the status of the collections of the museum from artefacts to high art.<sup>76</sup> That he proposed an art museum, versus a history or ethnographic museum, prevented perceived competition with ethnographic museums like Musée de l'Homme.<sup>77</sup> Malraux's emphasis on the artistic value of the collections without addressing their colonial roots was part of a larger erasure of the colonial nature of La Porte Dorée. The move

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<sup>73</sup> "Le Palais de La Porte Dorée Après 1931," Palais de La Porte Dorée, Accessed May 13, 2021. <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/fr/le-palais-de-la-porte-doree-apres-1931>.

<sup>74</sup> Étienne Féau, "L'art Africain Au Musée Des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie: Collections et Perspectives Pour Le Musée Du Quai Branly (African Art in the Musée Des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, a Brief History of the Collections and the Prospects for the New Museum of Arts and Civilizations)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 39, no. 155/156 (1999): 924. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4392987>.

<sup>75</sup> Emilie Bickerton, "The Many Lives of André Malraux," *Apollo Magazine*, August 26, 2017. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/the-many-lives-of-andre-malraux/>.

Jean Lacouture and Alan Sheridan, *André Malraux*, First American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 410-411.

<sup>76</sup> Emilie Bickerton, "The Many Lives of André Malraux," *Apollo Magazine*, August 26, 2017. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/the-many-lives-of-andre-malraux/>.

<sup>77</sup> Féau, "L'art Africain Au Musée Des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie," 924.

away from celebrating the colonial nature and roots of the museum was reflective of France's own disconnection from its colonial past as it lost its official control over the colonies.

The transition from the Musée de la France d'Outre-Mer to the Musée des Arts africains et océaniens (MAAO) reflected this slow disconnect that did not address colonialism, but simply distanced it from the museum collection and narrative. This transition from an explicitly colonial museum to an implicitly colonial museum was certainly not accidental and the progression reflects France's conundrum of how to address colonialism as an indelible part of French identity and history. When the colonial museum opened, France was not only in a celebratory colonial period, they were fusing their empire and identity. As independence movements grew and were successful the celebratory nature of the colonial museum was at odds with current realities. In the case Palais de la Porte Dorée, it was not only the collection, but the building itself that was a celebration of colonialism. When it reopened as the MAAO, much of the outright celebratory colonial art had been put into the archives and the hall of colonialist murals had been closed off.<sup>78</sup> This did not change that the collections were still colonial in scope or that the museum rarely addressed the colonial nature of its collection. The MAAO instead became an art museum to celebrate non-western art and artifacts, but rarely interrogated their legacy.

The political nature of the transition to the MAAO speaks to France's on-going struggle with its colonial past and the way in which it emerges in French identity and culture. The combination of the lack of interrogation of the colonial past, the civilizing narrative, and the universalism of the present, has made it difficult to address the ways in which colonialism and racism are still embedded in French society and affect French citizens. As Bancel and Blanchard

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<sup>78</sup> Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 137–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

explain, “To tarry with the issue of colonization is necessarily to deconstruct the discourse that legitimated it, the colonial-Republican discourse. The latter constitutes one of the most firmly anchored political and identity-related points of reference in the collective political imaginary.”<sup>79</sup> In the case of the MAAO to address colonialism would have meant deconstructing that which formed the museum in the first place, its collection and the collection’s subsequent entry into French patrimony.<sup>80</sup> Acknowledging the hierarchical and exploitative nature of colonialism would not only have challenged the existence of the museum, but the republican approach to French identity. The MAAO was certainly not a sole purveyor of this erasure of colonialism, but the lack of discussion about it in such an explicitly colonial space was a disservice to the objects in their collection and the history of the site as a whole. This history has followed the collection to Quai Branly, where it was moved in 2006 when the museum was opened as a collection of “premier arts.” Quai Branly has also been criticized for its lack of a comprehensive lens on colonialism.<sup>81</sup> A pet project of President Jaques Chirac who “admired and collected what some collectors and dealers were still calling ‘l’arte primitif,’” the museum was meant to memorialize his presidency and leadership over the course of two terms.<sup>82</sup> With the support and help of his art-dealer friend Jaques Kerchache, he ordered the construction of the museum, which would eventually bring together collections from multiple ethnographic art collections, including the MAAO and Musée de l’Homme to create a singular museum focused on non-western/non-European art.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bancel and Blanchard, “The Meanders of Colonial Memory,” 406.

<sup>80</sup> France Ministère de la Culture et UMR 7220 (CNRS – ENS Paris Saclay – Université Paris Nanterre), *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics*, Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy. N°2018-26, France, 2018. [http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf](http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf), 18-19.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Aldrich, “Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 137–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

<sup>82</sup> Herman Lebovics, “Will the Musée du Quai Branly show France the way to postcoloniality?,” in *Museums in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. Dominic Thomas, (London: Routledge, 2012), 103.

<sup>83</sup> Lebovics, “Will the Musée du Quai Branly show France the way to postcoloniality?,” 104.

Thus, like other museums that have focused on non-western/non-European aspects in France, the opening of the MAAO sat at the crux of questions about identity and colonialism. After World War I the colonial project of France was propagandized by politicians across party lines who saw the need for a French Empire.<sup>84</sup> As scholars Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, and Thomas note, France utilized universalist principles to justify its colonialism, pointing to its legitimacy and superiority as justification for its *mission civilisatrice*. In affect colonialism became humanitarian to maintain the republican, universalist narrative of France.<sup>85</sup> Under empire France had promoted a national identity, a national unity, and, a singular entity that was composed of both the métropole and the colonies.<sup>86</sup> This republican based narrative only held true however when the colonies and métropole were separate, the hierarchical nature of colonialism maintained. As Blanchard et. al notes, “A palpable contradiction was to be found in the press, with its regular campaigns against these ‘undesirables’ who were often considered a threat to the nation’s unity when in the metropole, whereas the colonies themselves were seen as essential in fortifying the nation’s power and its unity.”<sup>87</sup> Thus France’s national narrative predicated itself on mythologizing republicanism that spoke of unity, while simultaneously maintaining explicitly racist and xenophobic discourse towards the colonies that formed their empire. In addition, the idea of a singular France was pushed by politicians across party lines, linking the métropole and France d’Outre-mer.<sup>88</sup>

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Robert Aldrich, “Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 137–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

<sup>84</sup> Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, Dominic Thomas, and Alexis Pernsteiner, “Introduction: The Creation of a Colonial Culture in France, from the Colonial Era to the ‘Memory Wars,’” In *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, edited by Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, and Dominic Thomas, (Indiana University Press, 2014) 8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gh82z.3>.

<sup>85</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, “Introduction,” 9.

<sup>86</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, “Introduction,” 10,17.

<sup>87</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, “Introduction,” 21.

<sup>88</sup> Pascal Blanchard, “National Unity: The Right and Left ‘Meet’ around the Colonial Exposition (1931),” In *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, edited by Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, and Dominic Thomas, (Indiana University Press, 2014), 222. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gh82z.21>.

With French colonies gaining independence or autonomy, the narrative of a larger national France switched from one that celebrated and aggrandized empire to a process of forgetting. In effect, as Lebovics states, France wanted to be able to “start again.”<sup>89</sup> The political and social forgetting of empire was apparent in the MAAO as an institution, with its collections and administrative direction coming under “Direction des Musées de France and the Ministry of Culture, as a way to symbolically “absorb” them a second time (the first symbolic gesture being their translocation) and affirm their inalienable place as part of French national assets of cultural heritage.”<sup>90</sup> In addition, when the former Musée des Colonies transitioned into being the MAAO under Andre Malraux, the museum transitioned into an artistic focus which downplayed the history of colonialism both in the space and the collection, even as the museum still maintained an emphasis on the Other. The Salle des Fêtes remained closed to the public and labels downplayed the role of colonialism in the acquisition of the pieces.<sup>91</sup> The MAAO’s focus on the Other through art and ethnography reflected the process of colonial amnesia in France by which the country was able to continue to exotify the Other without contending with the clear implications of empire in the collections and in French society at large. In the same way that the country reformed what constituted France, the museum reconstituted what was colonial about their collection. When the collections of the MAAO moved to Musée Quai Branly, which opened in 2006, Palais de la Porte Dorée became home to the newly minted Centre National de

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<sup>89</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, “Introduction,” 26.

Herman Lebovics and Alexis Pernsteiner, “Modernism, Colonialism, and Cultural Hybridity,” in *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, edited by Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, and Dominic Thomas, (Indiana University Press, 2014) 393. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gh82z.37>.

<sup>90</sup> Sarr and Savoy, 18-19.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Aldrich, “Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 137–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI), a project that would encounter its own difficulties in the space as it has navigated the colonial past, memory, and the construction of French identity.



**Fig. 2.** Former Salle des Fêtes, now known as Le Forum, Musée National de l'Histoire de L'Immigration. Photograph: November 2017.<sup>92</sup>

### **From Colonization to Immigration and the Implications of Memory**

The impetus for the creation of the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration did not come out of a singular event. Instead, the basis for the museum was formed over a period of ten years, with inspiration coming from academic focus on memory and identity in France that had gained support since the 1980s. The question of immigration is a contentious one in France for a variety of reasons, notwithstanding a general opposition to immigrants. Immigration is a stand in for race and ethnicity in France, meaning that any conversation about immigration has racial and ethnic components, even if they are unspoken. This is a reflection of the universalist approach to identity, as immigration takes on a racialized and colonial nature, but that nature is not explicitly named, allowing for immigration to appear neutral as a term. As both Lotem and Thomas state in varying forms, both immigration and “remembering empire” are euphemisms for race and racial

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<sup>92</sup> Sierra Newby-Smith, 2017, Photograph, Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris France.



politics.<sup>93</sup> Not only does the use of immigration or colonialism in place of race support a universalist narrative in France, it provides a simpler definition of what it means to be French, thus creating explicit divides between those who are and those who are not. In the case of immigration standing in for race and identity, it disengages immigration from colonialism, thus obscuring the lengthy history between countries of origin and France.

France's history with previous colonies is a defining characteristic of discussions about immigration as the perception of Frenchness and identity are deeply embedded in how immigration is defined socially and politically. As noted by Dominic Thomas and Alec Hargreaves, immigration functions as a metaphorical representation of race and identity in France, and thus any conversations about immigration are also conversations about race, religion, and identity.<sup>94</sup> Like Thomas, Chin also asserts how immigration functions as a facet of larger debates about multiculturalism, which are themselves referendums on definitions of identity in Europe. That the majority of immigrants to France are from former colonies means that the presence of colonial memory is salient and empire is never far away. Instead, colonial memory haunts the discussions about immigration, an often-unspoken actor in the narrative that is recognizable, but not named, reinforcing the republican narrative of a united and equal France under law. As Blanchard et. al note the formation of identity in France during France's colonialism was predicated on a universalist approach to empire.<sup>95</sup> And yet, under the current national construction of identity, which still relies on a republican narrative, France is able to avoid accusations of racism and xenophobia because the "essence" of its identity is an assumed

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<sup>93</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 17.  
Thomas, *Africa and France*, 62.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 62.  
Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, "Introduction," 11.

equality in which all citizens are viewed the same in the eyes of the state. As Blanchard et. al state this “incredibly powerful blind spot effectively discourages a real critique of the colonial heritage in the construction of racism.”<sup>96</sup> This blind spot is further exemplified by the memory debates of the 1990s in which national narratives about the Algerian War for Independence were challenged by academics like Benjamin Stora. The blind spot in relation to colonial heritage is not only applicable to racism, but immigration as a form of continuity with the colonial past. As Lotem notes, addressing colonial history in France first came through the lens of immigration. In addition, a large number of immigrants to France are from former French colonies, highlighting that France has never fully disengaged from the colonial past, even as the country engaged in forgetting empire.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, the questions of immigration, citizenship, and identity are tied to the concept of France as a singular and plural space. Immigration has always held a place in French consciousness, because of its connection to France’s former colonies and the ways in which the colonial past and immigration itself simultaneously challenge and reflect the construction of a universalist French identity. The universalist reasoning used for empire, the *mission civilisatrice* and the humanitarian responsibility are challenged by the reality of the ways in which colonial subjects were treated and how immigration is racialized and used to justify increased state surveillance of those deemed inassimilable. Nevertheless, the responses to immigration in France have changed according to economic, racial, and social concerns, even as there has always been the underlying presence of Empire. In the post-war era of the Trente Glorieuses, a thirty year period following World War Two of significant economic growth, immigration was relatively

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<sup>96</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, “Introduction,” 29-30.

<sup>97</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 34.

welcome, with a significant numbers of people filling jobs in France.<sup>98</sup> There was immigration from both European nations, such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy, as well as colonies and former colonies.<sup>99</sup> Due to restrictions on visas and contracts for European immigrants, France turned to their colonies, specifically Algeria and the DOM-TOM (Départements d'outre-mer, Territoires d'outre-mer, overseas France), to fill a significant worker shortage post-war.<sup>100</sup> Yet the nature of the unequal colonial relationship between Algeria and France remained unchanged when individuals came to France for work. Muslim Algerians were treated as second class citizens, both at home and in mainland France, barred from full citizenship rights and treated with suspicion on the basis of religion.<sup>101</sup>

The Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962) further complicated French identity, both for those in Algeria and those in France. Prior to the war Algerians of non-European descent were formally French nationals.<sup>102</sup> After the war, they were considered immigrants, but through the Évian Accords, afforded a transition period of five years which still allowed for freedom of movement in and out of metropolitan France.<sup>103</sup> The repatriation of *pied noirs* (a person of European origin born in Algeria) meant that colonial dynamics continued in mainland France post-war, as they were often employed directors over the living spaces of Algerian workers due to their former experience with “foreigners.”<sup>104</sup> In addition *pied noirs* were never referred to as immigrants, but known as *repatriés*.<sup>105</sup> Even with the decolonization of Algeria and

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<sup>98</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 36-37.

<sup>99</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 36-37.

<sup>101</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 40.

<sup>102</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2007) 20.

<sup>103</sup> Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 20-21.

Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 116.

<sup>104</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 118.

<sup>105</sup> Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 21.

the changing relationship between the two countries, “France remained deeply reliant on well-established colonial networks to keep its economy supplied with willing laborers.”<sup>106</sup> Hargreaves expands on the conceptualization of immigration as France transitioned out being an official colonial power. “Immigrés (immigrants) had come to be regarded as synonymous with *travailleurs immigrés* (immigrant workers), who were in turn equated with unskilled workers rather than professionally qualified personnel.”<sup>107</sup> The term immigrant became further racialized as the majority of unskilled workers were non-European, thus there was an explicit distinction between immigrant and foreigner, which was used for Europeans.<sup>108</sup> This history of Algerian immigrants in France and racialized parameters of the term immigrant helps to explain the complexity of French citizenship and identity in both a colonial and post-colonial world. The construction of separate identities even under citizenship is still replicated as immigration is not a description of a singular experience, but a label which is carried intergenerationally and which denotes what is *French* enough.

The memory debates, a term which refers to the academic and cultural discussion about memory in France concerning the Algerian War for Independence and the Vichy Regime, functioned as a retrospective on France’s relationship with its former colonies. With a significant push for assimilation, and yet a simultaneous exclusion of immigrants from the DOM-TOM, the colonial past was meant to be brushed under the rug. However, this caused consternation on multiple fronts. To disconnect from the colonial past meant that France had wiped its hands of colonial violence and even more recent systemic violence and torture by the French military during the Algerian War for Independence.<sup>109</sup> The systematic forgetting by the state, while not

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<sup>106</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 68.

<sup>107</sup> Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 67.

necessarily successful, encouraged a distancing that refrained from acknowledging the entirety of French history and identity construction. French veterans of the war also wanted their acknowledgement and organized themselves accordingly.<sup>110</sup> However there still remained a lack of officiality, which precipitated the memory debates.

Benjamin Stora, well known for his work as a historian on the Algerian War, drew clear lines between France's need to come to terms with its colonial past in Algeria and the Vichy regime.<sup>111</sup> In essence, the French public was aware of the past, of the violence, but the state had engaged in various forms of forgetting that resulted in little public outrage or reflection.<sup>112</sup> The concept of the memory debate and the need for memorial justice gained support amongst both academics and activists in France, utilizing much of the same language that was used in relation to the memory of the Vichy Regime.<sup>113</sup> Lotem highlights how the concept of the memory debate was politicized, "The particularity of the French case for introspection was the focus on the state's duty to respect the memory of all its citizens in order to live up to a republican promise of universalism."<sup>114</sup> Marginalized communities utilized the language of memory to assert both a right to information, often archival, as well as their stories being told. This extended from the Algerian War for Independence to October 17, 1961, with memory being used as a way to claim political and cultural agency in French society.<sup>115</sup>

Memory serves as a key function of the museum, as individuals are both represented and projected onto the museum. In addition, the demand for narratives that included the entirety of the French population showcase how the memory debates, in tandem with the rise of political

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<sup>110</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 70-71.

<sup>111</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 78.

<sup>112</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 78.

<sup>113</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 93.

<sup>114</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 95.

<sup>115</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 100.

rhetoric of about immigrants more generally, were used as a basis for the creation of a museum focused on immigration.<sup>116</sup> The political shift to the right in the 1980s, and specifically the rise of the Front National, with their nationalist and anti-immigrant platform, stymied early attempts at a museum, even as immigration was used in political rhetoric about identity, economics, and social expectations in French society.<sup>117</sup> Socialist ministers supported the conversations in the 1990s and early 2000s about the creation of an immigration museum. In attempting to address immigration at both the individual level with singular stories, and at a national level, with an emphasis on national identity, the conceptual rendering of the museum intended for it to be larger in scope than solely a museum, functioning as an archive of information and media, and as a site of research and pedagogical methodology. As a result, it would be a site for cultural and pedagogical production about immigration, complicating the existing narratives and spearheading conversations about immigration and identity in France.<sup>118</sup> The goal was to create interdisciplinary, inter-ministerial partnerships between the museum and government ministries concerned with immigration, identity, and education.<sup>119</sup> President Jacques Chirac, of the center right party Union pour un mouvement Populaire (UMP), took up the mantle of the museum after his second term election, in which he won by a landslide of more than eighty percent against Front National leader Jean Marie Le Pen in 2002. The project was officially approved in 2004 under the direction of Jacques Toubon.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 100.

<sup>117</sup> Suzanne Citron, "The Impossible Revision of France's History (1968–2006)," In *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, edited by Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, and Dominic Thomas, (Indiana University Press, 2014), 412. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gh82z.39>.

Nancy L. Green, "The French Republic: History, Values, Debates," Essay. In *The Immigration History Museum*. (Cornell University Press, 2011), 245-248. <https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9780801449017.003.0028>.

<sup>118</sup> Jacques Toubon, "Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration," (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 19.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Toubon, "Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration," (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 85.

<sup>120</sup> Nancy L. Green, "A French Ellis Island? Museums, Memory and History in France and the United States," *History Workshop Journal* 63, no. 1 (2007): 246-247.

Toubon along with a team of researchers and historians, focused on creating permanent and temporary exhibitions that explored immigration through a multiplicity of lenses and used art and history to explore immigrant experiences.<sup>121</sup> The permanent exhibition *Repères* (Landmarks or Points of Reference) functioned as a thematic tapestry of immigration from the nineteenth century onward in France. With themes such as, “A Place to Live,” “Land of Welcome, Hostile France,” “Roots” and “Athletes” the museum approached the exhibition from the perspective that “the people who have settled in France since the 19th century have encountered the same hardships, undergone the same decisive experiences and held the same hopes.”<sup>122</sup> By approaching the question of immigration through an overarching shared experience, the museum compressed the different experiences of migratory groups that were in fact accepted and treated differently based on origin and the time period when they came to France. However, in many ways this reflected the goal of Jacques Toubon’s 2004 report to Prime Minister Raffarin, which expressed social cohesion and tolerance for integration as major goals.<sup>123</sup> In addition, by placing all immigrant experiences in the same categories and trajectories, the museum reflected the republican and universalist lens through which France has defined its citizens and constructed identity.

The exhibition utilized both historical objects, such as letters and identity cards, in tandem with contemporary art, which forms a major part of the museum’s collection, to convey the immigrant experience.<sup>124</sup> The museum advocated for a subjective, aesthetic, and emotional

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<sup>121</sup> Jacques Toubon, “Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l’Immigration,” (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 19.

<sup>122</sup> “The Permanent Exhibition: Repères, Tout Le Palais.” Palais de la Porte Dorée, Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/en/permanent-exhibition-reperes>.

<sup>123</sup> Jacques Toubon, “Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l’Immigration,” (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 11.

<sup>124</sup> “The Permanent Exhibition: Repères, Tout Le Palais.” Palais de la Porte Dorée, Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/en/permanent-exhibition-reperes>.

interpretation of immigration, which can be seen in the contemporary art that is reflective of the artists' own reading of a migratory experience. The 2004 report by Toubon stated that the museum favored artistic intervention for enhancing the themes outlined in the exhibition.<sup>125</sup> The report outlined a section of the exhibition that would have addressed colonialism and decolonization, as well as the history of the Palais de la Porte Dorée, but over the course of the planning process, both sections were reduced to “underscore the commensurability of all experiences of stigmatization.”<sup>126</sup> An early exception was a temporary exhibition on immigration during the period of the colonial exhibition in 1931, which explored colonial imagery during the World's Fair. However, the museum has rarely explicitly addressed the links between colonialism and immigration as a historical, historiographical, and social process. As Mary Stevens notes, the exhibition succeeded in addressing the colonial imagery of the 1930s, but did not address the “collective imaginary” that developed as a result of the colonial imagery and its ongoing presence in France.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, by focusing on the aesthetic and subjective nature of the<sup>128</sup> immigration experience for all immigrants, the migratory process is separated from the political and historical implications that created the need to migrate in the first place. In addition, the emphasis on a shared experience in the formation of the museum is indicative of the overarching goal of promoting a national French identity which immigrants are able to participate and contribute to, albeit in an existing construction of identity.

Chirac's goal was that the museum would open in April 2007, before the end of his presidential term. In doing so, he would be leaving a legacy of two state museums that explored

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<sup>125</sup> Jacques Toubon, “Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration,” (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 15.

<sup>126</sup> Mary Stevens, “Still a Family Secret?,” 121.

Jacques Toubon, “Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration,” (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 66-67.

<sup>127</sup> Mary Stevens, “Still a Family Secret?,” 120.

<sup>128</sup> Green, “A French Ellis Island?,” 247.



conceptualizations of the Other and that hoped to contribute to the cultural life of France.<sup>129</sup>

Instead, the museum opened in October 2007 under the next president, Nicholas Sarkozy, who, although from the same party as Chirac, had expressed explicitly anti-immigrant rhetoric and run his campaign on the idea that national identity had been eroded.<sup>130</sup> He and the Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux, whose department was responsible for heritage sites including the immigration museum, notably snubbed the opening event and left the museum uninaugurated.

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<sup>129</sup> Green, "A French Ellis Island?," 247.

<sup>130</sup> Green, "The French Republic: History, Values, Debates," 245-248.  
Thomas, *Africa and France*, 68.

## Chapter Three

### Sarkozy's Construction of Immigration, Identity and his Rebuff of the Colonial Past

Sarkozy's approach to the museum was indicative of his approach to immigration and colonial memory as a whole. His lack of support for the museum highlighted his existing anti-immigrant and assimilationist rhetoric, which was both exclusionary and colonial in scope. The complexity of the museum as a site and as a cultural project attempting to explore the mosaic of French identity and memory through immigration challenged Sarkozy's rhetoric about identity that was based in shared republican values.<sup>131</sup> Even as he and members of his administration such as Brice Hortefeux and Eric Besson, argued that France had its roots in republican ideals, there was still an emphasis on two seemingly contradictory elements of French identity, its Christian aspects and *laïcité*.<sup>132</sup> The first emphasized a historical France not associated with immigration and the second emphasized the republican values which have often been used to exclude those deemed as the Other due to racial, ethnic, cultural or religious background. The rhetoric of the three men focused on the pride of being French and the expectation that those that immigrated would assume French values and history as their own, assimilating to the cultural, religious, and social norms of France.<sup>133</sup>

Sarkozy and Brice Hortefeux's snubbing of the opening of a state sponsored museum highlights how the museum served as an alternative narrative to Sarkozy's assimilationist and simplified identity rhetoric, and that their presence at its inauguration would have been seen as tacit support for a national narrative that opposed *their* immigration and identity narrative.

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 74.

Özden Ocak, "Immigration and French National Identity Under Neoliberalism: Sarkozy's Selective Immigration Politics As a Performance of Sovereignty," *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 1 (2016): 91-92.

<sup>132</sup> Ocak, "Immigration and French National Identity Under Neoliberalism," 91-92.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 70.

Immigration functions as an inherently political topic, not only because of the movement of people, but because it's imbued with politics of race and identity that are often not explicitly named in France. Sarkozy's speeches and writings leading up to his election and after his inauguration highlight not only his approach to colonialism, identity, and immigration, but the political climate in which the museum opened.

In July 2007 he gave a speech in Dakar, Senegal that received significant backlash, both because of his suggestion that Africans had not really entered history and his suggestion that the past Africans were nostalgic for was in fact a mythical imagining of the past, saying that the problem of Africa was it "judged the present by the purity of the past that no one could hope to revive."<sup>134</sup> In addition, he argued, without specifying countries, that while there had been colonial violence in Africa, that France had not been all bad in its colonialism. He further argued that not everyone (France) had exploited Africa. "The colonizer came and he took...he took, but I'd like to say with respect, he also gave. He constructed bridges, roads, hospitals, dispensaries, schools...He gave his pain, his work, his knowledge. Not all colonizers were thieves, not all were exploiters."<sup>135</sup> Both quotes highlight Sarkozy's rejection of repentance for French colonial violence, as well as infantilization and generalization of the African continent. By placing responsibility on the "youth of Africa" for their own setbacks, Sarkozy engaged in a practice of colonial forgetting.<sup>136</sup> This rhetoric, the separation between the experienced of the colonized and France's national memory of its own colonialism, functions as an extension and parallel to his rhetoric on immigration, much in the same way that his construction of immigration and identity

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<sup>134</sup>Nicholas Sarkozy, "Allocution à l'université de Dakar, Sénégal," July, 26, 2007, Dakar, Senegal. 46 :32.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xc7llj>.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholas Sarkozy, "Allocution à l'université de Dakar, Sénégal," July, 26, 2007, Dakar, Senegal. 46 :32.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xc7llj>.

<sup>136</sup> Nicholas Sarkozy, "Allocution à l'université de Dakar, Sénégal," July, 26, 2007, Dakar, Senegal. 46 :32.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xc7llj>.

does not address the complexity of French history, colonial memory, and the changing borders and definitions of France and Frenchness. Sarkozy's explicit disconnection from the colonial past was in conflict with the goals of the CNHI, even as colonial forgetting has overshadowed the institution.

His interactions with the colonial past must be analyzed alongside his rhetoric on immigration, as both reflect an understanding of a singular France that is not responsible for the past and therefore the consequences of the present. In the speech in Dakar, he placed the responsibility on "young Africans" to move beyond the nostalgia of the past and the wrongs committed against their parents and grandparents, which he stated are not theirs, and commit to change. By stating that "an Africa that would not change would be condemned to servitude," he was asking his audience to look to the future without addressing the past.<sup>137</sup> These statements are indicative of Sarkozy's anti-repentance stance in regards to France's colonialism, which in turn were reflected in his interactions with the Immigration Museum, because it is both a reflection of the colonial past and thus France's role in the movement of the colonized, and the ongoing relationships between the former colonies and France, as it pertains to culture and identity.

Even under the colonial shadow of Palais de la Porte Dorée, the museum addresses the complexities of immigration with the goal of maintaining a national narrative.<sup>138</sup> For Sarkozy to acknowledge the museum as a national, state sponsored entity by inaugurating it, he would have legitimized the museum's attempts at complicating the history of immigration in France and thus the fabric of identity in France. An inauguration would have given credence to the museum's approach to French identity and French history, which acknowledges the contributions of

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<sup>137</sup> Nicholas Sarkozy, "Allocution à l'université de Dakar, Sénégal," July, 26, 2007, Dakar, Senegal. 46 :32. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xc7lj>.

<sup>138</sup> Gouriévidis, "Representing Migration in Museums, 8.

immigrants and the complexity of migration. There is a specific complexity in the idea of the national narrative and paradigm, as the CNHI during Sarkozy's tenure did not make specific aims to disrupt the national narrative of Frenchness. Immigrants are subsumed into the national identity of France, with the end goal being "republican integration."<sup>139</sup> Integration is not wholly antithetical to Sarkozy's identity constructions, but the process by which that identity is constructed is complicated at the museum. Integration by the museum's standards contrasts significantly with Sarkozy's conceptualizations of Frenchness and the colonial past.<sup>140</sup> The museum legitimizes discussion and connection between immigration and colonialism, the violence perpetuated by the French state, and complexity of identity in France, not only by inhabiting the former colonial museum, but by discussing immigrants that came to France under colonial conditions. Even without directly addressing the colonial past, the museum's presence at the Palais de la Porte Dorée demands that the colonial past be addressed, whether through critique of the museum or within the museum itself. The building serves as a reminder of the colonial past which haunts identity and immigration narratives. By not inaugurating the museum, Sarkozy refrained from legitimizing an institution that was contrary to his and many others' understandings of immigration and identity, which was exemplified by his creating actively anti-immigrant institutions during his time in office.<sup>141</sup>

The clearest form of delegitimizing the goal of the museum and its content was Sarkozy's creation of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Codevelopment upon his taking office in the spring of 2007. A promise he made during his campaign, the ministry was explicitly in contrast to the museum's attempt to complicate the nature of migration and identity,

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<sup>139</sup> Gouriévidis, "Representing Migration in Museums," 8.

<sup>140</sup> "Multiculturalism Doesn't Work in France, Says Sarkozy," *RFI*, February 11, 2011. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20110211-sarkozy-tf1>.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 62, 66.

instead focusing on controlling migration flows and constructing narratives about selected versus uninvited immigrants.<sup>142</sup> Concerns about immigration were not new to Sarkozy's campaign and administration. From the 1970s onwards French concern and disdain for immigration has fluctuated, with inflammatory rhetoric and concern often being connected to economic and political events, including but not limited to the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s, 9/11, the numerous "veil affairs" in French schools that were seen as a challenge to universalism, and the 2005 banlieue uprisings.<sup>143</sup> The ministry was the result of Sarkozy's own rhetoric about immigration, as well as his predecessors, building on his time as the Minister of the Interior during the previous administration.

As the Minister of the Interior and as a political figure more generally he had vehemently advocated against immigration on the basis of reunification and argued for the expulsion of undocumented immigrants.<sup>144</sup> As Özden Ocak notes in her article on the Ministry as a form of performative sovereignty, "the policy of immigration *subie*—more than the selection of economic immigrants—that was the main goal of Sarkozy's immigration legislation."<sup>145</sup> The construction of *Immigration subie*, or uninvited immigration by Sarkozy allowed him to focus on unwanted immigration as a foil to national construction of identity. The ministry's goal to promote national identity was dependent on immigrants "respecting French values," which in reality meant assimilating to French values.<sup>146</sup> When taken alongside Sarkozy's consistently inflammatory comments, which included referring to those engaging in the 2005 uprisings as "racaille" (a racialized pejorative term) and that he would clean out a housing project with a

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<sup>142</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 69.

<sup>143</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 74-75.

Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia*, 2.

<sup>144</sup> Ocak, "Immigration and French National Identity Under Neoliberalism," 85.

<sup>145</sup> Ocak, "Immigration and French National Identity Under Neoliberalism," 86-87.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 69-70.

“pressure washer,” the formation of the ministry exemplifies the French practice of acknowledging French identity and immigration without addressing the omnipresence of colonialism in both.<sup>147</sup>

The inception of the ministry was so antithetical to the museum that numerous historians that had been working on the museum project since 2003 resigned when Sarkozy announced the ministry, citing that the connection that the ministry made between identity and immigration created an implication of the “problem” of immigration for France and French people, effectively associating the two concepts in the mind of the public with negative connotations.<sup>148</sup> The resignation of the historians shows how the museum was attempting to navigate the question of identity, and simultaneously that they knew what did not represent their vision of identity. The stark contrast in approach to identity and immigration from the ministry and the museum exemplifies the unsettled nature of the relationship between the two in France, as well as how both were used in political rhetoric by figures that had influence over the perception of immigration politically and socially. In resigning from the museum, the historians were directly responding to Sarkozy rhetorically connecting immigration and identity, without identifying why connecting the two could be problematic, specifically without the historiographical inclusion of colonialism.

Not only was the ministry intended to promote French identity, it would control migration and utilize neo-colonialist approaches to immigration, focused on “competence.”<sup>149</sup> The ministry was seen as a way of enforcing specific ways of being French and discouraging

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<sup>147</sup> “Nicolas Sarkozy a-t-il vraiment utilisé le mot kärcher?” *Libération*, March 21, 2018.

[https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2018/03/21/nicolas-sarkozy-a-t-il-vraiment-utilise-le-mot-kärcher\\_1653412/](https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2018/03/21/nicolas-sarkozy-a-t-il-vraiment-utilise-le-mot-kärcher_1653412/).

<sup>148</sup> Caroline Ford, “Museums After Empire in Metropolitan and Overseas France\*,” *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 3 (2010): 652.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 72.

immigration. Later initiatives by the ministry including the “What is French?” townhall discussions, which took inspiration from Sarkozy’s presidential campaign and its focus on French identity and pride.<sup>150</sup> The ministry was an extension of Sarkozy’s rhetoric that the French identity was in crisis.<sup>151</sup> The ministry was disbanded in 2010, but the anti-immigrant and identity rhetoric was embedded in discussions of immigration at that point.<sup>152</sup> Sarkozy reiterated support for assimilation in 2011 stating, “We don't want a society in which communities co-exist alongside each other. If you come to France, you agree to base yourself in a single community, the national community. If you don't accept that, you don't come to France.”<sup>153</sup> Indeed, the question of French identity in the light of significantly more restrictive laws about religious garb, head scarves in particular, and terrorist attacks, has meant that the rhetoric that Sarkozy utilized to create an us vs. them dynamic concerning identity is still alive and well, a direct contrast to the “their history is our history” narrative of the museum.<sup>154</sup>

### **The Immigration Museum as an Ideal of Diversity and Social Cohesion**

President Francois Hollande’s relationship with the museum was quite different from Sarkozy’s. The museum was officially inaugurated under Hollande just over seven years after it first opened in October of 2007. The event, in which Hollande gave the inaugural speech, intended to speak to the cultural and educational role of the museum for the French public.<sup>155</sup> Hollande was supportive of less stringent immigration policies and his interior minister spoke

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<sup>150</sup> “France Debates its Identity, but some Ask Why.” *New York Times Company*. November 28, 2009.

<sup>151</sup> Kim Willsher, “Frontrunner Sarkozy Vows to Solve French Identity Crisis,” *The Guardian*, April 3, 2007, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/03/france.international>.

<sup>152</sup> “Ministère de l’Immigration, de l’Intégration, de l’Identité nationale et du Développement solidaire,” FranceArchives, Accessed March 21, 2022. [https://francearchives.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran\\_NP\\_002099](https://francearchives.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran_NP_002099).

<sup>153</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 285.

“Multiculturalism Doesn’t Work in France, Says Sarkozy,” *RFI*, February 11, 2011. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20110211-sarkozy-tf1>.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 57.

<sup>155</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.



out against Sarkozy's "random and discriminatory" immigration policies.<sup>156</sup> Even so his five year presidency was marred by his administration's handling of Romani immigrants, La Jungle in Calais, and his non-fulfillment of the promise for non-citizens to vote, which contrasted significantly with the positive and forward-looking tone of his inauguration speech.<sup>157</sup>

In 2013, the Romani fifteen-year-old Leonarda Dibrani and her family were deported from France to Kosovo, with police taking Leonarda away during a school field trip.<sup>158</sup> Hollande extended an invitation to only Leonarda to return to France to study, excluding the rest of her family from the possibility of return. This came after Interior Minister Manuel Valls supported the expulsion of Romani people, arguing that their life was in "confrontation" with the French way of life.<sup>159</sup> Both instances were seen as a continuation of Sarkozy's hardline policies against Roma communities in France and antithetical to France's commitment to human rights.<sup>160</sup> Like issue of the expulsion of Roma communities, the Jungle in Calais was a case of France being questioned about its commitment to human rights and the treatment of immigrants. La Jungle is located in Calais in northern France and functioned as an unsanctioned refugee camp for migrants and refugees trying to cross the channel to Great Britain. The camp, which has had multiple iterations, had nearly 10,000 individuals in 2016 when the Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, announced that the camp was slated for dismantling and clearing.<sup>161</sup> The camp was a

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<sup>156</sup> "Moving on from Sarkozy's Immigration Policies," *France 24*, July 27, 2012. <https://www.france24.com/en/20120727-new-french-immigration-initiatives-signal-break-sarkozy-policies-france-manuel-valls-interior-minister>.

<sup>157</sup> Sarah Wolff, "Immigration, a Consensual Issue in the French Presidential Campaign?," *EUROPP*, April 15, 2017. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/04/15/immigration-a-consensual-issue-in-the-french-presidential-campaign/>.

<sup>158</sup> "Hollande: Deported Roma Girl Can Return to France Alone," *BBC News*, October 19, 2013, sec. Europe. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24594845>.

<sup>159</sup> "French Minister Defends Policy of Expelling Roma," *AP NEWS*, September 24, 2013. <https://apnews.com/article/a33ff97f5c4c4914b8fb22327c014737>.

<sup>160</sup> Eleanor Beardsley, "In France, Deportation Of Teenage Girl Ignites Fierce Debate," *NPR*, October 18, 2013, sec. Politics & Policy. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2013/10/18/237119851/in-france-deportation-of-teenage-girl-ignites-fierce-debate>.

<sup>161</sup> Maryline Baumard, "La Justice Saisie Sur Les Conditions De L'Évacuation De La 'Jungle' De Calais," *Le Monde*, October 13, 2016. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/newspapers/la-justice-saisie-sur-les-conditions-de/docview/1828136087/se-2?accountid=10141>.

"Cinq questions pour comprendre la « jungle » de Calais, La crise des migrants," *Radio-Canada*, October 25, 2016. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/810566/jungle-calais-demantelement-migrants-illegaux>.

reflection of poor migration policies and services, and with major concerns about unaccompanied minors, the camp was a point of shame and contention for France.<sup>162</sup>

In addition to advocating for less stringent immigration policies during his campaign, which the above situations seemed to disprove and complicate, Hollande had been supportive of legislation that would allow non-citizens to vote. The legislation that would have allowed non-EU citizens who had lived in France for more than five years to vote in municipal elections.<sup>163</sup> However, in 2015 Prime Minister Manuel Valls stated that the vote was no longer a priority.<sup>164</sup> These high-profile events that concerned immigration during Hollande's term showcase the fracture between his celebratory rhetoric of immigration during his inauguration speech for the Immigration Museum and the reality for the most vulnerable of immigrants. In addition, the events speak to how Sarkozy and Hollande utilized significantly different rhetoric during their terms concerning immigration, which reflected in their interactions with the museum, but that immigration and identity were still defined by republican notions of Frenchness that were exclusionary.

While Sarkozy had ignored the museum as a historical and cultural state institution, Hollande emphasized the importance of the Immigration Museum in his speech, indicating that it was a "place of research and space to discuss" as well as being "an expression of diversity and the multiplicity of all immigration."<sup>165</sup> By highlighting the museum as an expression of diversity and its multi-faceted nature, Hollande was touting it as a cultural institution that exemplified an

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<sup>162</sup> "Cinq questions pour comprendre la « jungle » de Calais, La crise des migrants," Radio-Canada.ca. October 25, 2016. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/810566/jungle-calais-demantelement-migrants-illegaux>.

<sup>163</sup> "Foreigners to Vote in Elections If Socialist Hollande Becomes French President," *RFI*. January 26, 2012. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20120126-foreigners-vote-elections-if-socialist-hollande-becomes-french-president>.

<sup>164</sup> "France Ditches Pledge to Give Foreigners Vote," *The Local France*, November 5, 2015. <https://www.thelocal.fr/20151105/france-ditches-plan-to-give-foreigners-vote/>.

<sup>165</sup> François Hollande, "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

ideal of what the conversation between immigration and identity could look like, even as his own administration struggled to fulfill his ideal vision that he outlined in his speech. In addition, by highlighting its multifaceted use, Hollande was celebrating the institution as a site that could be central to engagement with immigration and history, versus being relegated to the sidelines of immigration and identity discussions, except to function as a foil.

Hollande attempted to address the history of immigration in France, emphasizing how immigrants have contributed to France. He specifically cited the *Trente Glorieuses*, a thirty-year period of significant economic growth and development post-World War Two.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, Hollande historicized his speech, pointing out that the movement to stop immigration to France was relatively recent, and that it was not a French value to be so insular.<sup>167</sup> It is here that Hollande dove more readily into the debates about colonialism. Whereas his predecessor had avoided the colonial past in his infamous speech in Dakar, Hollande made an attempt to acknowledge the historical relationship between France and its colonies. As noted previously, colonialism and immigration are intertwined in France conceptually, politically, historically, and culturally. The majority of immigrants that come to France are from former French colonies and France has consistently relied on its former colonies for labor, even after the colonies became independent nations.<sup>168</sup> As a result who has been considered French has changed based on both location and time in France, as well as religion and ethnicity because of the legal and colonial relationship between France and its colonies. Immigration functions as a stand in for discussions about xenophobia and race, used in place of the words but it is imbued with their meaning.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> François Hollande, "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>167</sup> François Hollande, "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>168</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 68.

<sup>169</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 62.

Therefore, when one is discussing immigration in France it is racialized in concept and understanding, but not necessarily linguistically.<sup>170</sup> Hollande noted that the “empire came to save France” during the World Wars and explicitly discussed colonial contributions to the war effort, stating, “they fought for France, for a certain future, for a universal France, a France open to the world.”<sup>171</sup> Hollande does not explicitly address the memory debates that were the impetus for the museum, but his invocation of the colonial past picks at the edge, using memory on the part of the museum to both explain the past and to connect narratives.

Hollande’s invocations of colonialism, decolonization, and immigration speak to a significantly different rhetorical approach from his predecessor.<sup>172</sup> Whereas Sarkozy had resisted acknowledging colonialism, using responsibility and the idea that not all colonizers were exploitative, as seen in his 2007 speech in Dakar, Hollande embraced the use of the words like colonial, immigration, memory, and contribution in his inaugural speech. By utilizing language which linked immigration to the colonial past, he was stepping into the unsettled conversation about their relationship and therefore the greater conversation of what constituted French identity historically and in the contemporary moment.<sup>173</sup> Hollande cites numerous instances in which discrimination and integration mark the historical record, including, the Dreyfus Affair, the Algerian War, and violence of the 1960s and 1970s, noting that the violence was cyclical and reoccurring.<sup>174</sup> With the addition of commentary on the importance of schools as an equitable and accessible space and discrimination around employment and training, Hollande put historical

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<sup>170</sup> Thomas, *Africa and France*, 62.

<sup>171</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>172</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>173</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>174</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

realities in conversation with the ideas of discrimination and integration, thereby acknowledging the connection between the colonial past and the reality of the immigration experience and integration.<sup>175</sup> Even with the choice of a more specific and historically accurate vocabulary, Hollande's invocations still maintained an expectation of a significant degree of integration on the part of immigrants, referencing *laïcité*, as being a way of life in France and a way of respecting one another.<sup>176</sup> Utilizing *laïcité* showcases how Hollande continued to uphold national and political paradigms about immigrants, even if the language was more positive and nuanced than his predecessor. The museum functions in a similar fashion, exploring immigration through historical and artistic renderings, but ultimately still upholding a national identity and paradigm that has not shown a significant shift in definition.

Hollande linked the museum to the political and cultural identity of France as he extrapolated on the “threat of *communautarisme*,” while also discussing racism and antisemitism in France.<sup>177</sup> Under universalist principles in France a bifurcated identity is not possible, which helps to explain why France has such difficulty with discussing immigration, race, and identity as official, systemic aspects of French society. While Hollande refrains from using the word assimilation, the use of the word *communautarisme* suggests that there is still a belief in intentional separation that is distinct from the colonial history and racism that permeates French society, especially in regards to the *banlieues*. Rarely does this acknowledge that many economic

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<sup>175</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>176</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>177</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d’inauguration Du Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.  
Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, 11.

migrants were intentionally placed in separate neighborhoods or that French society's expectation of assimilation is alienating for many citizens that are in fact French.<sup>178</sup>

Towards the end of his inauguration speech Hollande mentioned “the charge of the state is to guarantee cohesion.”<sup>179</sup> While much of the language that he used in the speech highlighted immigration and colonialism were far more nuanced than his predecessor, a cohesive France and identity was still the goal. This language and trajectory of speech is reflective of the museum itself, both as a state entity and as a museological space. While the museum's expressed goal in the 2004 official report from Jacques Toubon, the first director, to the Prime Minister Raffarin, was to explore the multiple dimensions of immigration in France, the museum still expresses cohesion and pride in French identity as an explicit goal.<sup>180</sup> Thus, Hollande's language both showed the museum as an ideal space for more difficult conversations about identity and immigration in France, while simultaneously maintaining status quo. As the museum is meant to represent all immigration to France and function in some ways as a history of France, the underlying message of cohesion is still in line with the French approach to immigration and integration.

Hollande's speech at the Immigration Museum functions as a moment on France's path towards acknowledging race, colonization and identity as intertwined aspects of French society and history that in fact have significant effects on all citizens. While much of the political rhetoric still shies away from acknowledging race, religion, ethnicity, and migratory status as

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<sup>178</sup> Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 56, 177, 262.

<sup>179</sup> François Hollande, “Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration,” December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>180</sup> Jacques Toubon, « Rapport au Premier ministre: Mission de Préfiguration du Centre de Ressources et de Mémoire de l'Immigration, » (report to Prime Minister, Paris, 2004), 19.

Driss EL Yazami and Rémy Schwartz, “Pour la création d'un Centre national de l'histoire et des cultures de l'immigration, » (report, 2001), 6.

systemic entities which are defining aspects in French society, Hollande's approach at the Immigration Museum suggests an administrative turn towards all facets of French society exploring the nuances of diversity and identity. Educational institutions have predominately taken on this role in France, with the public school being the place where French citizens are formed in the image of universalism and republicanism.<sup>181</sup> Hollande energetically suggested in the speech that the charge of addressing diversity and guaranteeing social cohesion is not only the role of educational institutions, but all public institutions and public enterprises.<sup>182</sup> In suggesting such, Hollande brought the tumultuous topic of diversity to the forefront of politics and suggested that it must be addressed socially and culturally.

More recent events, have continued to nudge French society into more urgent conversations about race, colonialism and identity through post-colonial and multidisciplinary lenses. Hollande's use of the Immigration Museum to suggest all public institutions have a part to play inserted the museum into public consciousness, as a necessary component of exploring large social and cultural questions while also promoting social cohesion.<sup>183</sup> For a museum that was effectively ignored, deliberately, by the previous administration, Hollande's assertion is a reminder that the museum is a state entity and that he saw the museum as a way to advance national narratives and goals for cohesion. As a cultural center focused on a heavily politicized topic for France, the museum had the potential, according to Hollande, to contribute to conversations about identity, and ultimately cohesion under French republicanism.<sup>184</sup> As the only state sponsored Immigration Museum in Europe, the fact that the museum had up to this

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<sup>181</sup> Sharif Gemie, *French Muslims: New Voices in Contemporary France*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>182</sup> François Hollande, "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>183</sup> François Hollande, "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>184</sup> François Hollande, "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," December 14, 2014, Paris, France. 52:28. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

point very little pull in the political and social arena, speaks to the complexity of its formation and location.<sup>185</sup> Hollande was effectively suggesting in his speech that the museum take on the interlocuter role between those that have immigrated or have connections to that history, and the French public at large. While this has been its charge since its inception in the early 2000s, its lack of funding and location, along with the conundrum of addressing the colonial past in relation to the national construction of identity leaves the museum in an unsettled, conflicted state in public consciousness.

### **The Museum and the Historian as Political Actors in Changing Conversations about Immigration**

Hollande used the museum as an example of hope for integration within France, which is both political and social in scope.<sup>186</sup> The nature of integration and assimilation cannot be separated from political and cultural policies. Therefore, the aspirational nature of the museum is both political and cultural in nature, working towards a unified French identity. The idea of an integrated France, an assimilated France, is not solely Hollande's. Sarkozy has also argued vehemently for assimilation.<sup>187</sup> Both of their arguments are indicative of the longstanding construction of national identity that is grounded in republicanism. As Blanchard et. al note the idea of the republican French identity stretches across the political spectrum and has been

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<sup>185</sup> Robin Ostow, "Occupying the Immigration Museum: The *Sans Papiers* of Paris at the Site of their National Representation," in *Global Mobilities: Refugees, Exiles, and Immigrants in Museums and Archives*, ed. Amy K Levin (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 243. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315695563>.

<sup>186</sup> "Discours d'inauguration Du Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration - Vidéo Dailymotion," Dailymotion, posted by Présidence de la République, December 15, 2014. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2cm9en>.

<sup>187</sup> "Multiculturalism Doesn't Work in France, Says Sarkozy," *RFI*, February 11, 2011. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20110211-sarkozy-tf1>.

"Sarkozy Réaffirme Son Objectif 'd'Assimilation' De l'Immigration." *Le Monde*, September 26, 2016. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/sarkozy-réaffirme-son-objectif-dassimilation-de/docview/1822936019/se-2?accountid=10141>.

"France's Sarkozy Trumpets 'Gaulish Ancestry' as He Chases Far-Right Votes," *France 24*, September 20, 2016. <https://www.france24.com/en/20160920-france-sarkozy-gaulish-ancestry-far-right-presidential-election>.



utilized to justify colonialism, as well as formed the basis for colonial forgetting.<sup>188</sup> Thus the concept of a universal France does not change much between the two administrations, because it is a necessary construction to maintain the republican identity that France considers one of its defining aspects. Instead, the change in rhetoric reflects the extent to which they are willing to engage in the unsettled debates about identity, colonialism and the meaning of integration for the French state. Hollande's inauguration speech for the museum spent significantly more time speaking about France generally in relation to integration, history, and social cohesion, than the museum itself. But perhaps this suggests that the museum is inherently present in these conversations because it is of the state and of the people simultaneously. Hollande's statement that the museum is a representation of the hope for integration, acknowledges diversity and speaks to the museum's narrative of the multiplicity of immigrants that contributed to the current construction of French national identity. Thus, the museum functions both as a space for past stories, but also as a present backdrop for discussions about individuals' interactions with national identity and integration.<sup>189</sup>

The museum functioning as a microcosm of the political and cultural discussion in French society at large continued with the appointment of Benjamin Stora as the President of the Orientation Council of the museum in 2014. Stora's involvement with the museum up to that point had been extensive, in part because of his contributions to the memory debates of the 1990s. His work on colonialism and memory precipitated many of the discussions that would eventually result in the museum.<sup>190</sup> He was also involved as an expert from the inception of the

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<sup>188</sup> Blanchard, Lemaire, Bancel, Thomas, and Pernsteiner, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>189</sup> Gérard Noiriel, "The Historian in the Cité: How to Reconcile History and Memory of Immigration," *Museum International* 59, no. 1/2 (2007), 15.

Driss EL Yazami and Rémy Schwartz, "Pour la création d'un Centre national de l'histoire et des cultures de l'immigration," (report, 2001), 13.

<sup>190</sup> Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France*, 76.

museum, thus highlighting how the memory debates of the academy would eventually play out in spaces more accessible to the general public.<sup>191</sup> The nomination of Stora by the Minister of Culture Françoise Nyssen, was intended to reflect that France was moving towards addressing the cultural identity of immigrants, with the press release noting that “actions implemented today and the investment of cultural actors in this field, are already exceptional and must be valued, strengthened and extended.”<sup>192</sup> In addition, his appointment was seen as “giving the museum stature and vigor.”<sup>193</sup> The emphasis on cultural actors in the press release from the Ministry of Culture suggests that Stora brought value as an academic and public intellectual who had worked extensively on aspects that contribute to cultural identity, such as memory.<sup>194</sup>

In an interview for the museum’s ten-year anniversary in 2017, Stora recounted how he had come to focus on the history of immigration, his perceptions of the field, and how he viewed his appointment as the President of the Orientation Council. Stora explained that he considered there to be a confluence between immigration history and French history which was ultimately reflective of malleable identity and geographic borders.<sup>195</sup> Stora emphasized his role as a historian, or as he put it, “a very engaged historian,” noting that he came to immigration history through his involvement in concerned citizens movements and his roles in organizations such as

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<sup>191</sup> Elise Vincent, “Benjamin Stora Nommé à La Tête De La Cité De L’immigration:” *L’Historien*, Spécialiste De La Guerre d’Algérie Et Du Maghreb, Succède à Jacques Toubon,” *Le Monde*, August 03, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/newspapers/benjamin-stora-nommé-à-la-tête-de-cité/docview/1550514436/se-2?accountid=10141>.

<sup>192</sup> “Françoise Nyssen Entrusts Benjamin Stora with a Mission to Coordinate Cultural Action for Migrants,” Ministère de la Culture, Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Nous-connaître/Missions-et-consultations-publiques/Francoise-Nyssen-confie-a-Benjamin-Stora-une-mission-de-coordination-de-l-action-culturelle-en-faveur-des-migrants>.

<sup>193</sup> Elise Vincent, “Les Français Ont Du Mal à Se Voir Comme Les Descendants d’Une Immigration ”: L’Historien Benjamin Stora Prend La Tête, Lundi, Du Musée National De L’Histoire De L’immigration,” *Le Monde*, September 16, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/newspapers/les-français-ont-du-mal-à-se-voir-comme/docview/1561982462/se-2?accountid=10141>.

<sup>194</sup> “Françoise Nyssen Entrusts Benjamin Stora with a Mission to Coordinate Cultural Action for Migrants,” Ministère de la Culture, Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Nous-connaître/Missions-et-consultations-publiques/Francoise-Nyssen-confie-a-Benjamin-Stora-une-mission-de-coordination-de-l-action-culturelle-en-faveur-des-migrants>.

<sup>195</sup> “Conversation avec Benjamin Stora,” Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

the association Générique, an early advocate of the Immigration Museum.<sup>196</sup> That François Hollande asked Stora to be the new President of the Orientation Council, reflected not only Hollande's awareness of academic debates that led to the creation of the museum, which Stora stated in his interview, but that Stora's approach was the preferred path forward for the museum. Stora also noted that Hollande acknowledged the October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1961 massacre of Algerian protestors as his first official engagement as president, which speaks to Hollande's attempts to engage with colonial memory, immigration, and colonial forgetting during his presidency.<sup>197</sup>

In a September 2014 interview with *Le Monde*, Stora was asked about the museum's mal-adjusted presence in French society. Stora acknowledged that this was the case and explained that the reason was political.<sup>198</sup> As the incoming head of the museum, Stora fully understood the political positioning of the museum, whether that was that the museum was not promoted and ignored, or the promotion of social cohesion through integration rhetoric, as it would be in December of that year during the inauguration. Stora outlined the conceptual difficulties of immigration in France, with many French citizens forgetting or not acknowledging their immigrant roots, and those referred to as immigrants wanting to cast off the moniker.<sup>199</sup> In his 2017 interview he also highlighted how the descendants of immigrants, who are French and live in France, live like foreigners, referring to how the immigration or the perception of immigration

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<sup>196</sup> "Conversation avec Benjamin Stora," Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

<sup>197</sup> "Conversation avec Benjamin Stora," Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

Kim Willsher, "France Remembers Algerian Massacre 50 Years On," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2011, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/17/france-remembers-algerian-massacre>.

<sup>198</sup> Elise Vincent, " Les Français Ont Du Mal à Se Voir Comme Les Descendants d'Une Immigration : " L'Historien Benjamin Stora Prend La Tête, Lundi, Du Musée National De l'Histoire De l'Immigration."

<sup>199</sup> Elise Vincent, " Les Français Ont Du Mal à Se Voir Comme Les Descendants d'Une Immigration : " L'Historien Benjamin Stora Prend La Tête, Lundi, Du Musée National De l'Histoire De l'Immigration."

status is used to other and stigmatize individuals, calling it “one hell of a problem.”<sup>200</sup> This observation points to how immigration is viewed more generally in France and how immigration is imbued with racial, religious, and ethnic connotations that affect not only immigrants themselves, but anyone who is perceived as an Other. Stora was also asked during the interview about Hollande’s approach to certain immigration measures, including allowing foreigners to vote.<sup>201</sup> That this was asked in an interview about his position for the Immigration Museum shows how contemporary immigration concerns are intertwined with the history of immigration, suggesting that the museum should be able to address both. The museum has struggled at times to present immigration as both a historical and contemporary process that has political, social, and cultural implications for immigrants and their descendants. In addition, both his and Hollande’s support for changing voting laws suggested a change from the previous administration concerning immigration, with the museum functioning as a conduit to discuss these changes.

Both Hollande and Stora use the museum to engage with and connect current political concerns about immigration with its history, suggesting that they see the museum as inherently connected to political discourse occurring at a national level between politicians and their constituents. The museum functions as a conduit through which to approach the concerns, because it functions as a physical representation of the complexity of immigration and identity questions. During the 2014 interview, Stora was also asked about a relationship between the Ministry of Education and the museum, which also speaks to the museum functioning as a

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<sup>200</sup> “Conversation avec Benjamin Stora,” Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

<sup>201</sup> Elise Vincent, “Les Français Ont Du Mal à Se Voir Comme Les Descendants d’Une Immigration : ” L’Historien Benjamin Stora Prend La Tête, Lundi, Du Musée National De l’Histoire De l’Immigration.”

political and social entity in France, outside of its solely museological function. Stora's suggestion that the museum "should follow this direction," indicated that the museum should hold a more prominent social, cultural, and ultimately political role in French society, functioning as a resource and starting point for discussions.<sup>202</sup> Stora's 2017 interview confirmed his belief in the political role of the museum, stating he considered his acceptance of the role as "a logical transition from the academic route to the political route," which only strengthened his assertions that historians must be engaged and political in their work.<sup>203</sup> In addition, his assertion that his role as the director was political implied that the museum itself was a political entity through which to address the conceptualization of immigration and immigrants in France.

Stora's goals for the redesign of the permanent exhibition extrapolated on the point of conceptualization, as he wanted to "make sure the immigrant is not the subject, but an actor in this history."<sup>204</sup> Stora's appointment to the position was indicative of both an administration and institution that were working towards a more central role in addressing immigration as both a historical and contemporary process. Stora's assertion that the redesign should address the post-colonial generation, in this case, the descendants of immigrants, and speak to the genealogy of immigration, highlights how he viewed immigration not only as a historical phenomenon, but a larger political and social concern that could be addressed by the museum.<sup>205</sup> Indeed, by making immigrants actors in the history of the museum, versus subjects, addressing how colonialism and

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<sup>202</sup> Elise Vincent, " Les Français Ont Du Mal à Se Voir Comme Les Descendants d'Une Immigration : " L'Historien Benjamin Stora Prend La Tête, Lundi, Du Musée National De l'Histoire De l'Immigration."

<sup>203</sup> "Conversation avec Benjamin Stora," Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

<sup>204</sup> "Conversation avec Benjamin Stora," Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

<sup>205</sup> "Conversation avec Benjamin Stora," Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

the construction of identity are key to their history, and by extension France's, becomes all that much more important. Stora's statement "how to live together is a burning question in France," further highlighted the unsettled nature of national identity, Frenchness, and colonial memory in France and the museum.<sup>206</sup> The implication that living together as a cohesive society is difficult highlights the constraints of the republican model of identity that both the state and the museum subscribe to. In effect, Stora's suggestion that the museum is the place for conversations about the genealogy of immigration could be extended to address and question the parameters of the state construction of identity.

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<sup>206</sup> "Conversation avec Benjamin Stora," Discussion with Benjamin Stora, Conférence B. Stora pour les 10 ans du musée at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, conference audio, October 14, 2017, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2017-09/conversation-avec-benjamin-stora>.

## Chapter Four

### Acknowledging and Interrogating the Colonial Past with an Eye to the Future

The Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration is not the only museum, nor state institution, that has started to dip its toe into addressing the colonial past, and by extension the national construction of French identity. Current French president Emmanuel Macron has engaged in more explicit confrontations with colonialism than his predecessors, including promising the temporary or permanent repatriation of African heritage to their respective countries.<sup>207</sup> Macron commissioned what would become the Sarr Savoy report on repatriation of objects in France's national collections.<sup>208</sup> The report produced by Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, an art historian and economist respectively, explored the power dynamics of collections and colonialism, arguing that repatriation could establish balance between former colonies and colonial powers.<sup>209</sup> Focusing on French collections, the report suggested that any objects that had a suspect provenance, or they were obtained under violent and unethical conditions, should be returned to their country of origin, even if it was not France that had committed the violence.<sup>210</sup> While the report is not applicable to the objects in the Immigration Museum's collection, which is more recently acquired, it does suggest an administration and society that is more willing to entertain the idea of systemic issues that have resulted in significant inequality.<sup>211</sup> This is only insofar as institutions concerning objects, not people. Macron has openly supported significantly

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<sup>207</sup> Anna Codrea-Rado, "Emmanuel Macron Says Return of African Artifacts Is a Top Priority," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2017, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/arts/emmanuel-macron-africa.html>.

<sup>208</sup> "Art Africain: La France Coloniale Au Rapport," *Le Monde*, November 21, 2018.

<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/art-africain-la-france-coloniale-au-rapport/docview/2135993201/se-2?accountid=10141>.

<sup>209</sup> Sarr and Savoy, 3, 29.

<sup>210</sup> Sarr and Savoy, 53-54.

<sup>211</sup> Hélène Lafont-Couturier, "The Musée National De L'histoire De L'immigration: A Museum Without a Collection," *Museum International* 59, no. 1-2 (2007): 41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2007.00593.x>.

more stringent laws concerning “Islamist separatism.”<sup>212</sup> This rightward turn is arguably an attempt to make himself palatable enough to the right in France that they will not vote for the slew of far-right candidates who have launched presidential campaigns and gained significant political ground over the last ten years.<sup>213</sup> The idea of systemic issues is key when considering how the Immigration Museum has approached racism and xenophobia, as well as identity construction, regardless of the administration in power. The question of systemic racism and xenophobia in France has been amplified by the recent global conversations about systemic racism and the Black Lives Matter movement.<sup>214</sup> This does not prevent the universalist French approach from rejecting the need to discuss these elements as they pertain to identity and immigration, but more so that there is a global conversation that France cannot fully remove itself from.

In contrast to the earlier years’ disconnection from colonialism, the Immigration Museum’s content over the past two years has not only responded to the global conversations about race and racism, but has been responding to critiques of it ignoring its colonial past and not serving the communities it purports to represent.<sup>215</sup> Discussions about race, integration, assimilation, and immigration have been featured in their *Le Musée Part En Live* series, as well as additional online content, in part due to covid-19. The online discussions connect the content

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<sup>212</sup> Emmanuel Macron, “Fight against Separatism – the Republic in Action” (speech, Les Mureaux, October 2, 2020), Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>.

<sup>213</sup> Norimitsu Onishi and Constant Méheut, “Macron, Once a Darling of Liberals, shows a New Face as Elections Near,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 2020, International edition.

<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/macron-once-darling-liberals-shows-new-face-as/docview/2471086936/se-2?accountid=10141>.

Lisa Louis, “Macron’s Right-Wing Gamble,” *The Interpreter*, June 25, 2021. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/macron-right-wing-gamble>.

<sup>214</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, “Will American Ideas Tear France Apart? some of its Leaders Think so,” *The New York Times*, February 11, 2021, International edition. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/will-american-ideas-tear-france-apart-some/docview/2488774901/se-2?accountid=10141>.

<sup>215</sup> “Le Musée Part En Live,” Musée National de l’histoire de l’immigration. Accessed March 16, 2021. <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/le-musee-part-en-live>.



of the museum with more present concerns, including systemic racism, the Americanization of French academia, and migration during the pandemic, using the site and current events as interrogative contrasts.<sup>216</sup> The closure and revamp of the permanent exhibition *Repères*, commissioned by Benjamin Stora in 2017 and slated to open in the spring of 2023, intends to do the same.<sup>217</sup> Historians Patrick Boucheron, Romain Bertrand, and director the museum Sébastien Gokalp, have outlined their goals for moving the museum forward in multiple podcasts available on the museum's website.<sup>218</sup> They hope to articulate the effects of colonialism and the contemporary question of migration. The intention is to have a "history that speaks to the present," and to "speak to today with a historical project."<sup>219</sup> While *Repères* took a thematic approach to the question of immigration, the renovated exhibition will address immigration through a different lens.

The museum proposes a wide approach, from a chronological point of view (from 1685 to the present), geographic (France in the world), and thematic: regulations, migration, demographics, the economy, every day life, culture, art, but also racism, discrimination, the connection between slavery and colonialism.<sup>220</sup>

The exhibition will center on ten large dates, from 1685 to 2015, with a final section devoted to contemporary questions.<sup>221</sup> The goal of historians and the director who are overseeing this change, is to recontextualize the immigration history of France through a post-colonial lens that accounts for colonial memory, the process of migration, and present cultural, social, and political

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<sup>216</sup> "Le Musée Part En Live," Musée National de l'histoire de l'immigration. Accessed March 16, 2021. <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/le-musee-part-en-live>.

<sup>217</sup> "Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration," Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Accessed March 21, 2022. <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/>.

<sup>218</sup> "Faire musée d'une histoire commune," Interview with Patrick Boucheron, Romain Bertrand, and Sébastien Gokalp, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, podcast audio, February 12, 2020, <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/la-museographie/l-exposition-permanente/refonte-des-galeries-permanentes>

<sup>219</sup> "Faire musée d'une histoire commune," Interview with Patrick Boucheron, Romain Bertrand, and Sébastien Gokalp, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, podcast audio, February 12, 2020, <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/la-museographie/l-exposition-permanente/refonte-des-galeries-permanentes>

<sup>220</sup> "The Musée National de l'histoire de l'immigration, Tout Le Palais." Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/en/the-musee-national-de-l-histoire-de-l-immigration>.

<sup>221</sup> "Fermeture Des Galeries Permanentes." Musée National de l'histoire de l'immigration, Accessed March 22, 2021. <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2020-12/fermeture-des-galeries-permanentes>.

concerns.<sup>222</sup> Arguably, while the critiques about the decontextualization of colonialism have existed since the museum's opening, the current political and social climate both globally and more locally in France provide an opportune moment for the museum to make such an intervention.

Up to this point the museum has not featured France's colonial history or concerns about integration and assimilation prominently or permanently. While the Immigration Museum has discussed racism and xenophobia periodically in its exhibitions, often the narrative has neglected their systemic nature and has focused on a universalist narrative that speaks to republican assimilationism.<sup>223</sup> That narrative ultimately supports the ways in which immigrants have contributed, but simultaneously assimilated into France upon their arrival, and disconnects migratory movement from greater structural and historic issues. In doing so, the museum has continued the history of the site in ignoring or glorifying colonialism as a function of the French state. This is in line with the previous two administrations' rhetoric that ultimately called for a universalist France, even if they took significantly different rhetorical approaches. Arguably the museum's current trajectory is in direct opposition to Macron's turn to the political right, and therefore his more vocal support for assimilation, laïcité, and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The Immigration Museum is not the only institution at the site to undergo changes indicative of recontextualizing the colonial past and the construction of national identity. Pap Ndiaye, a historian of African American history and co-author of the report on racial diversity for the Paris Opera, was appointed in 2021 as the new director of the Palais de la Porte Dorée.

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<sup>222</sup> "Faire musée d'une histoire commune," Interview with Patrick Boucheron, Romain Bertrand, and Sébastien Gokalp, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, podcast audio, February 12, 2020, <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/la-museographie/1-exposition-permanente/refonte-des-galeries-permanentes>

<sup>223</sup> Dominic Thomas, "Object/Subject Migration: The National Centre of the History of Immigration." *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (2009): 257–69.

His experience and knowledge of African American history has made him a point person for discussing and evaluating racial inclusivity, with multiple institutions utilizing his expertise. These include the Musée d'Orsay and the Paris Opera.<sup>224</sup> Under his direction the Palais de la Porte Dorée and thus by extension the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration are slated to confront the issues that are at the heart of the building, immigration and colonialism. Ndiaye's appointment suggests that the Palais de la Porte Dorée and the Immigration Museum are intending not only to engage with current political and social concerns about race, identity, immigration, and colonialism, but to knowingly place themselves in the historiographical trajectory of these questions as an institution. As Ndiaye stated in an interview with the *New York Times*, "'This is an institution that is viewed as peripheral...' 'I would like it to be at the center of French cultural life.'"<sup>225</sup> His goal would disrupt the institution's historical trajectory since it transitioned from the Colonial Museum to the MAAO, effectively asking the public to engage with the Palais de la Porte Dorée and the Immigration Museum as a cultural site confronting the colonial past and the construction of identity.

Through the use of online content, the renovation of the permanent exhibition, and the appointment of Pap Ndiaye, the museum and the Palais de la Porte Dorée are attempting to address the long-standing critiques of the museum's handling of the colonial past and its connection to immigration narratives. By utilizing online discussion series and podcasts, the museum has made the explicit transition from being a space devoted to an aesthetic, thematic presentation of immigration to inserting itself into political conversations as an institutional body. This also transitions from the periods of Sarkozy and Hollande, where political invocations

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<sup>224</sup> Farah Nayeri, "In a Palace of Colonialism, a 'Quiet Revolutionary' Takes Charge," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/arts/design/pap-ndiaye-palais-de-la-pont-doree-immigration-museum.html>.

<sup>225</sup> Farah Nayeri, "In a Palace of Colonialism, a 'Quiet Revolutionary' Takes Charge," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/arts/design/pap-ndiaye-palais-de-la-pont-doree-immigration-museum.html>.

and interactions with the colonial past were predominately through temporary exhibitions. In this case, the museum is engaging in longer term conversations and through non-exhibition spaces to take part in political and cultural conversations that are at the forefront of current identity and integration discussions.<sup>226</sup> Whether this will translate into the permanent exhibition when it reopens in the spring of 2023 remains to be seen, but the online content and renovation plans hint at a promising approach that makes the museum more relevant, nuanced, and accurate in its narration of the immigrant experience and contributions to France.

### **Can the Conundrum of French Identity and the Colonial Past be Solved?**

The Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration functions as a microcosm of the unsettled relationship between French colonialism and the construction of French identity. Beginning with the construction of the Palais de la Porte Dorée for the 1931 Exposition Coloniale, as a representation of empire and coalescing colonial French identity, the building through its various iterations has had to grapple with the explicit display of colonial power on its façade. The Immigration Museum has had to contend with the question of the colonial past two-fold, both because of its location and the connection between colonialism and the migratory processes to France. The museum has been imbued with a colonial context since its inception, both because of its location and the role of the memory debates of the 1990s in its creation. Its charge of promoting social cohesion has roots in the republican identity used to rationalize colonialism and the creation of a France that was far larger than its European borders; an identity that has remained a defining aspect of France long after the dissolution of empire. As such, the goals of the museum are still predicated on a republican construction of national identity that

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<sup>226</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, "Will American Ideas Tear France Apart? some of its Leaders Think so," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2021, International edition. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/will-american-ideas-tear-france-apart-some/docview/2488774901/se-2?accountid=10141>.

cannot be disconnected from the colonial past. Thus, the museum's recent attempts to address the colonial past cannot be successful without addressing the state construction of identity.

The museum sits at the crux of debates about immigration, identity, integration, and the concept of Frenchness. Use of the museum as a political touchstone, in positive and negative terms, by different presidential administrations, showcase how the museum is an institutional space and a public platform for exploring these debates. The museum's identity and location place it at the heart of these debates because it represents France's difficulty in addressing its colonial past. In addition, the museum represents formation of and access to French identity. The Palais de la Porte Dorée's construction as a colonial museum and subsequent thematic changes only bolster the more explicit politicization of the museum by Sarkozy and Hollande. Sarkozy intentionally ignoring the museum, while forming the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Codevelopment, which stood in direct contrast to the museum's goals, showcases how the museum was read as a political entity. Hollande's inaugural speech rhetoric that focused on immigration, colonialism, and integration placed the museum in the public eye once again, effectively calling for it to be used as a site for political, social, and cultural rumination. The inauguration of the museum seven years after its opening speaks to the museum's location as a political entity within the French ethos, while simultaneously residing peripherally, much like the people that it purports to represent. The appointment of Benjamin Stora and the subsequent renovation of the permanent exhibition at his direction, highlight how the museum is starting to address colonial memory. As a result, the museum has the opportunity to engage with questions of systemic racism, rising Islamophobia, and colonial memory that are salient and the topics du jour. With global and national conversations in France focusing on the systemic nature of racism and colonialism, the museum's transition towards a post-colonial

approach is indicative of an attempt not only at relevancy, but nuance and accuracy. In addition, it shows the museum is attempting to recontextualize its conundrum of the unsettled relationship between the colonial past and the construction of identity, thereby addressing what it means to be French historically and presently. The question is will France be able to do the same?

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