

Multiculturalism in society: the french issue assignment

[Sociology](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA Faculty of International Relations

Multiculturalism in Society: The French Issue (assessed work) Table of

Contents Introduction3 1 Definitions and different points of view on

multiculturalism in the world4 2 Multicultural background of the French

society5 2. 1 Socio-political regime in France6 2. 2French racism7 2. 3

Discrimination in French society8 3Challenges and crisis of multiculturalism

in France10 Conclusion13 Bibliography14 Introduction

In the beginning of the new millennium the world stands before a?? number of great challenges but also a plenty of problems that result from the ever-expanding globalization. One of the side factors of the latter is a?? massive migration of people throughout the whole planet. Whether it is because of political, social, economical or whatsoever issues, it brings along the emersion of multicultural societies living within one country or state. One of these countries where multiculturalism plays a?? considerable role and to which this working paper is dedicated is France.

Nowadays the French society is a melange of diversed cultures, races and religious beliefs that enrich it but also collide with each other and engender serious problem on different social levels. Yet the relations between persons of the same faith, cultural background or ethnical origin are sometimes complex enough to cause collisions and tensions and so if there are absolutely different people who are supposed to live one next to another it might and it actually does result in much more serious misunderstanding, contempt or even hatred and violence.

Unfortunately, this is one of the recent phenomena that have afflicted the French social milieu and have strengthened the anti-multiculturalism mood in France and in the rest of Europe. The first chapter of this work gives a general review of multiculturalism from diverse angles and its perception in various parts of the world. In addition, it specifies the term multiculturalism itself and describes the social situation in France which is then approached more in detail in the second chapter where the structure of the current French society and its social phenomena are elucidated.

The last but not the least chapter deals with the particular issues that the multiculturalism brought along in the recent times and outlines the vision of the future development of multiculturalism in France. 1 Definitions and different points of view on multiculturalism in the world Multiculturalism is one of today`s most important and intensely debated terms within and outside the academic community.

The term itself emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in countries like Canada and Australia, and, to a lesser extent, Britain and the United States where the immigration rate was very high. However, the sheer presence of more than one culture within a specific society is not sufficient to define a society as multicultural. The vast majority of societies throughout the world history has included more than one culture, and from such a perspective the entire human history could easily fall within the scope of multiculturalism.

What is then required for a society to be considered multicultural is the normative (cultural, legal and institutional) endorsement of such a reality and not only the existence of ethnic heterogeneity. When such a

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

conceptual turn is made, the concept and the reality that this entry aims to outline come closer to what is meant by the term “ multicultural” which represents the cultural reality of mainly Western (North American, Australian and European) societies during the second half of the 20th century.

Hence, in the beginning the multiculturalism meant the policy focus on the children of Asian, Black or Hispanic immigrants and on the extension of the schooling, both in terms of curriculum and as an institution, to include features such as mother-tongue teaching, non Christian religions and holidays, halal food and Asian dress. Gradually the perspective developed to meet cultural requirements in other or even all social spheres and to empower the marginalized groups.

Specifically in Canada and Australia the focus was much wider and from the start multiculturalism included constitutional and land issues and has been about the definition of the nation. This was partly because these countries had a continuous and recent history of ethnic communities created by migration usually from different parts of Europe, partly because there were unresolved legal questions to do with the entitlements and status of indigenous people in these countries, and eventually in the case of Canada, also because of the further issue of the rise of a nationalist and secessionist movement in French-speaking Quebec.

Therefore the term “ multiculturalism” in these countries came to mean, and now means throughout the English-speaking world and beyond: the political accommodation by the state or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined by reference to race or ethnicity. Nonetheless, even today, both in

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

theoretical and policy discourses, multiculturalism means different things in different places.

In North America it can comprise discrete groups with territorial claims, such as the Native Peoples and the Quebecois, whereas in Europe, groups with such requirements, like the Slovaks or the Scots, are thought of as nations and multiculturalism refers rather to a post-immigration urban melange. In addition, while in North America, language-based ethnicity is seen as the major political challenge, in Western Europe, the conjunction of the terms “immigration” and “culture” now nearly always invokes the large newly-settled Muslim populations which collide with the original Christian civilisation.

Consequently multiculturalism has had a much less popular reception in mainland Europe where the traditions have been deeply anchored and in some countries it has been the source of tensions between the immigrants and the aborigines. Some of the latter consider the current situation so serious that they predict the end of the European dominance, a balkanization[1] of heritage and legacy, and presumably the extinction of time-honored western traditions and values. Indubitably, one of those countries that have been severely stricken by social tensions ensuing from the multicultural society is France.

It appears to be surrounded by problems concerning its immigrant population such as racism, discrimination and inefficient secular integration model even despite the fact that it has been one of the foundation members of the European Union that steadily stresses the virtues of multiculturalism

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

with its motto “ united in diversity”. Given the real living conditions and the position of minorities in the French society, France does not seem to be in tune with the above-mentioned political trends and to step onto the successful path of multiculturalism and the integration of its foreign population. Multicultural background of the French society Today`s ethnical and cultural structure of France is far away from the one France once had and most probably it will never regain its traditional image it had had before the “ immigration wave” in the second half of the 20th century. Since the beginning of the 21st century France counts more than 4.9 million immigrants who represent 8.1% of the total French population and 2 millions of them are of the French nationality. The most numerous group of immigrants, 1. million people, are so-called “ Maghrebins” who originated from countries of the northern parts of Arab Africa such as Marocco, Algeria or Tunisia. Regarding the religious structure of the French society, 69% of the population are Roman Catholics, though only 10% claim themselves being practicing. Apart from Christians there is presently more than 5 million French Muslims of which 36% are worshippers and practicing. Finally, there are small Protestant and Jewish communities of about 1 million people and 500?? 000 people respectively who are part of the largest minorities living in France.

If we consider the main criterion of multiculturalism the religious, ethnical or racial diversity of population in a?? country, based on the afforecited data we may assume that France is a?? multicultural country. On the other hand if the principal element of multiculturalism is the fact that the coexistence of each and every group takes place without grave problems and conflicts in

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

everyday life, then it is not evident that France actually is a?? multicultural society right because of racism, discrimination and malfunction of the French socio-political regime. 2. Socio-political regime in France The problem of an effective integration of immigrants into the French society is one of the principal subjects that the French politics has been dealing with since the 1980s when young French of Maghrebi origine, so-called Beurs[2], protested in public against their discrimination at the time when France was confronted with the first headscarf affair in 1989. For that purpose, the French conceived a?? socio-political regime of multiculturalism that would help immigrants to merge smoothly into the French society and resolve the occurring conflicts.

The socio-political regime of multiculturalism in France is based on three different levels. The first one is the one of the immigrants. It guarantees them the right of cultural difference regarding their language, religion and customs. Meanwhile it requests that the immigrants respect the constitutional order of the receiving country and abandon such cultural practices that would infringe the French constitution, for instance forced marriage. The second level concerns indigenous French who are obliged to cease discriminating the immigrants in various domains of public life merely because of their origine.

Alike the indigenous French are constrained to abandon their prejudices and stereotypes which practically means to be able to consider a?? French of foreign origine as any other citizen of the country. The third level of multiculturalism reflects the international context since the question of

improvement of the integration of immigrants is not solely a French issue. As a member of the European Union, France is bound to implement European directives regarding this domain, primarily the Amsterdam Treaty signed in 1997 which directly concerns the integration policy of immigrants in all EU member states and condemns every discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, sex, religion belief, handicap or sexual orientation. Although the present socio-political regime is quite recent, the French integration model has been established in France much earlier. The roots of the French integration model derived from the 1905 law that promoted the principle of secularism which implied the exclusion of the Church and religion from the entire integration model as well as the protection by the state from any pressure from any religious group.

Initially this law recognised the right of everyone to practice his or her own beliefs, including the wearing of religious signs. In theory the idea of secularism and consequently also the integration model were meant to eliminate religious disputes and to promote tolerance and acceptance of differences. However in the French reality it seems to do rather the opposite as it imposes some kind of obligatory atheism and forces one to forget or hide one's religious beliefs. 2. 2French racism Official data suggest that one of the fields where the racism clearly rebounds is the employment.

While the unemployment rate among French nationals stood at around 10% in 2000, it was about 20% among the foreign population. If one looks at the second generation of the immigrants, 26.5% of university graduates of North African origin are unemployed, compared to 5% of graduates of French

origin. Moreover, racism plays its role when choosing among candidates for work. According to SOS Racisme, a French campaigning group, CVs with an African name get far fewer positive answers than CVs with a typical French name.

Even more shocking is the fact that French employers have elaborated special abbreviation system: ' BBR (Bleu Blanc Rouge or Blue White Red (the colours of the French flag), meaning French/white) and NBBR (Non Bleu Blanc Rouge or Not Blue White Red, meaning not French/white) indicating race in employers' databases. Secondly, racism is also widespread around housing. The majority of the French immigrant population lives in so-called "cités", which are characterised by high unemployment, poor-quality housing and neighbourhood infrastructure as well as difficult relations between the police and local inhabitants.

The construction of these districts in the outskirts of big cities, Paris and Lyon in particular, took place in 1970s in order to help poor immigrants and their families with temporary housing. However, at the moment 81% of non-EU nationals reside in these areas. The immigrants' children and grandchildren seem to be stuck there, since there is unwillingness and inaction on the part of the French government to improve and change the situation. Finally, there is racism in public perception and French attitudes towards its foreign population.

For instance, in a recent poll, the proportion of respondents (49%) who held that immigrants were too different to be integrated into the French society was almost identical to the level of support (46%) expressed for repatriation

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

in preference to integration. Since the early 1980s, it has become commonplace in France to claim that immigration is a threat to national identity. Various reasons are put forward to explain racism in France, with economic decline being the most obvious: the frustration and fear of poor white population are more easily directed towards migrants as scapegoats.

The conclusion must be that there are racist sentiments among the French that hamper peaceful and prosperous co-existence and co-operation in French society. It could be also argued that France has not done enough to correct the ethical, racial, and religious discrimination that negatively affect most children of North African immigrants.

2. 3 Discrimination in French society

Lately there were especially two issues that have seriously touched the identity of the 5th French Republic.

One was the so-called “ headscarf affair”, the other one concerned the discrimination of immigrants in many areas of public life in France. The headscarf affair of 1989 ensued from the exclusion of three young girls from their school for wearing the Muslim headscarf in class. This act was not only against the European Convention on Human Rights that recognises the individual’s right publicly to express religious belief, but it also undermined the ability of the French model to bring tolerance as opposed to the exclusion of certain parts of French society.

This was equally proved in 2003 when the government passed the law banning conspicuous signs of religious adherence in public schools. The main argument against the Islamic headscarf in that case was that it meant the oppression of women by men, and was against the law of equality of women

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

and men. Nevertheless, the interpretation of a religious symbol can have different meanings in different circumstances and it can also be the expression of a free belief and of a free choice or a means of protection against the pressure of males.

For that reason the state has no right to interpret religious symbols whatsoever or to choose the meaning it thinks is the accurate one, since this will undoubtedly cause resistance and resentment among the community that does not want to be patronised as far as the understanding of their religion is concerned. Given the number of Muslims living in France and the fact that for the considerable part of its ethnic minority, religion is highly significant and deeply anchored in their everyday life, the disregard of the French integration model raised another wave of resentment and aggravated the social situation in France.

The second problem stemmed from the discrimination of the immigrant population that is usually described by French as the second or the third generation of immigrants. These people were born in France but actually are not always considered being French. The term itself suggests that there is reluctance and unwillingness to accept these Muslim people as a part of indivisible France, as a part of French society and to treat them equally with other French.

What this does is even further division of the society into those inside the community and those outside it, because if one labels someone as different, he risks not only alienating him, but also provoking resentment and frustration. Furthermore, there has always been a?? bizarre tendency in

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

France to integrate someone who was born and has lived all his life there into the French society. It appears extremely paradoxical to speak of the need to integrate people who have been an integral part of the social structure of the country for one, two or even three generations.

The question is how to confront or to minimize particular conflicts, but not how to integrate those who are already inside social structures. The states do not create special policies to integrate each newly-born generation since it is the continuation of the previous generation that absorbs the latter's experience and achievements. Thus, the whole idea of the need to integrate proves once more the inability of the French society and the government to accept its post-immigrant population, to treat them as French, as French who were born in France and have lived in the country all their lives.

The problem with the French immigrant population is exacerbated even further by French society's attempts to integrate them, thus not accepting them as equal citizens and emphasizing their differences. Whereas, in reality, it is not cultural differences that provoked youth riots in 2005 but rather it is anger and hopelessness, sadness and identity confusion, among people who believed their history books which were in raptures over "liberte, egalite et fraternite". 3Challenges and crisis of multiculturalism in France

Although many years have passed since the massive "immigration waves" flew into France, many reforms and laws have been worked out and approved in order to facilitate their integration and many steps have been undertaken to equalize the immigrants with the indigenous French, the

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

reality still does not show the desired effects. On the contrary, it seems that the “ ticking bomb”, like some describe the unsustainable situation of numerous immigrants in France, is about to explode and it might bring along very serious aftermaths on the French society as well as on the European civilisation as a whole.

In fact some seeds of a certain French civil war have already broken out with the rioting in the French capital and a number of cities all over France. “ Bands of youths in cawls start by setting fire to parked cars, break shop windows with baseball bats, wreck public telephones and ransack cinemas, libraries and schools. When the police arrive on the scene, the rioters attack them with stones, knives and baseball bats. The police respond by firing tear-gas grenades and blank shots in the air. Sometimes the youths fire back with real bullets. This scene resembles to one of those in Western films rather than to the reality that happened in November 2005 in one of the underprivileged suburbs of Paris, Clichy-sous-Bois. The question that immediately emerges is: What did go wrong in the French integration system? Did not it promise to assimilate all immigrants smoothly into the French society and provide them with the same standard of living as it does for the original Frenchmen? The response is to be found right in the “ epicenters” of the riots, the French suburbs.

In Clichy itself, more than 80% of the inhabitants are Muslim immigrants or their children, mostly from Arab and black Africa. In other affected towns, the Muslim immigrant community accounts for 30% to 60% of the population. But these are not the figures that matter the most. The main problem

consists in unequal chance, conditions and evaluation of work for the people from poor immigrant suburbs in comparison with the aboriginal white Frenchmen. The average unemployment in the affected areas is estimated at around 30% and when it comes to young potential workers it reaches 60%.

Moreover, in these suburban towns, built in the 1950s in imitation of the Soviet social housing of the Stalinist era, people live in cramped conditions, sometimes several generations in a tiny apartment, and see “ real French life” only on television. As a result, this discrimination and intolerance of the immigrants by the white population increases discontent, fosters apartheid and ends in hatred and violence. Another problem of these neglected banlieus is the fact that more and more of its native French inhabitants leave for “ calmer places,” which makes the assimilation still more difficult and create homogenous ghettos.

In some areas, it is even possible for an immigrant or his descendants to spend a whole life without ever encountering the need to speak French or to let alone familiarize himself with any aspect of the famous French culture. The result is often alienation which in turn gives the radical Islamists an opportunity to propagate their message of religious and cultural apartheid. Some of them are even calling, for the areas where Muslims form a majority of the population, to obtain the right to organize their social, cultural and educational life in accordance with their religious beliefs.

In fact, in some parts of France, this system is already in place. In these areas, all women are obliged to wear the standardized Islamist “ hijab” while most men grow their beards to the length prescribed by the sheiks. The

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

radicals have managed to chase away French shopkeepers selling alcohol and pork products, forced “ places of sin,” such as dancing halls, cinemas and theaters, to close down, and seized control of much of the local administration.

It is now clear that a good portion of France’s Muslims not only refuse to assimilate into “ the superior French culture,” but firmly believe that Islam offers the highest forms of life to which all mankind should aspire. In the end the image becomes even darker if one takes into account the constant decreasing birth-rate of the original population in Europe and in France which is in sharp contrast with the explosive growth of the Islamic population. According to some, one out of three babies born in France is now a Muslim. Around 70% of French prisoners are Muslims.

Hundreds of Muslim ghettos are already de facto following sharia, not the French law. And in twenty years one person out of four in France will be Muslim and almost certainly poor and angry. What are then the future prospects of the multicultural France? Is it really multiculturalism to be blamed for the disastrous situation that has turned out in France? Or are the Muslims responsible for it? Probably not really. The world has already started to discover that beneath the postcard surfaces of the Eiffel Tower and romantic restaurants, the country of arrogance was very sick.

Slums and ghettos in the banlieus, a racism against Arabs and foreigners that dare not speak its name, Muslim youngsters living a thug’s life of radical Islam, violence and drugs, widespread anti-Semitism, high rates of unemployment... Now all of this is actually the outcome of the “ once-

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

glorious" France that has been suffering from its self-centered materialist ideology and the complex of superiority for decades. In addition to that, recent opinion polls show that the French are officially the most anti-capitalist nation on earth and that France has ultimately chosen Socialism and Islam to follow.

Some believe that France will quietly become a Muslim country, others are afraid of a civil war in the near future. All in all, for now there is only one thing unquestionable. France finds itself in an irreversible battle for preservation of its national culture and identity which it has been forming for more than fifteen hundred years. Even though the stake is high France does not seem, at least until for now, to wake up from the dream and defend its original values but rather risks to meet with still greater losses on its own side.

At worst, in the apocalyptic scenario it will have to face the total extinction of the French culture in its proper homeland. Conclusion Undoubtedly, the current situation of the multiculturalism " a la francaise" is not in an enviable position. The collision of two irreconcilable civilisations, the one of the East and the other of the West, that took place in France in the second half of the 20th century appears to have a?? long-term and painful sequel in the coming decades.

Which of these two afforecited societies would eventually prevail and assume the dominant role on the French and most probably the whole European soil will show only the time. However for the multiculturalism it is not impossible that some troublesome times might arrive and could even

<https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-society-the-french-issue-assignment/>

result in another World War with appalling consequences. Bibliography

ROBERT, P. : Le petit Robert - Dictionnaire de la langue française. Paris??:
Imprimerie Alsacienne Jean Didier. 1984. ISBN 2-85036-066-X TROTMAN, C. ,
J. : Multiculturalism: roots and realities. Indiana University Press. 2002. ISBN
0253340020

KRIEGER, J. : The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World. Oxford
University Press. 2001. ISBN 0-19-511739-5 ROBERTSON, R. , SCHOLTE, J. ,
A. : Encyclopedia of Globalization. New York: MTM Publishing, Inc. 2007. ISBN
0-415-97314-7 DREGGER, S. : La France contemporaine (1997-2005) et le
multiculturalisme: rapprochement vers une société française multiculturelle
et crise profonde du concept du multiculturalisme. GRIN Verlag. 2008. ISBN
364013544X POLISCANOVA, J. : What went wrong with multiculturalism in
France? Global Politics Magazine. Online on: TAHERI, A. : Why Paris is
burning.

Catallaxyfiles. 2005. Online on: MILLIERE, G. : The French Disease. Front
Page Magazine. 2006. Online on: GUITTA, O. : The unreported race riot in
France. Dhimmi Watch. 2005. Online on: FJORDMAN: The Fall of France and
the Multicultural World War. Global Politician. 2007. Online on:

————— [1] Balkanization is a geopolitical term originally used to
describe the process of fragmentation or division of a region or state into
smaller regions or states that are often hostile or non-cooperative with each
other. [2] Beurs is a designation of the 2nd generation of Maghrebi
immigration