Chapter 10
The Other Within

The discussion of postcoloniality has so far focused on the evolution of relations between France and its former colonies and the discourses, ideologies, debates and institutions through which they have been articulated. This chapter will now look at further aspects of the ways in which the ideas and debates around issues of concern to the former French colonies and to their relationship with France have evolved since the period of the anticolonial struggles and independence. A major part of the emphasis will be on the diasporic communities from the former colonies, now settled in France, as, in a sense, they have the position on the front line, where some of the key points of tension have flared up, including, notably, the ongoing series of affairs, mobilisation and legislation around the issue of the headscarf in France. In their turn, these have served to focus the debates that form the basis of this chapter. It will also look at those other areas of relevance to people living in territories that, while far-flung across the globe, still constitute part of France and thus remain effectively colonies, the DOM-TOM.

Both of these cases may be considered to come under the rubric of the postcolonial defined as a situation, ideology or discourse in which colonisation still has an ongoing effect and is a primary factor of significance to present-day conditions and debates, and the understanding of those realities and issues. In both cases, the issues raised revolve around the concept of 'otherness' or 'alterity', in a context in which this difference is denied but nonetheless used as a marker.

Alterity and Difference

We have seen how the Republican world view prioritises the unity of the nation, made up of a union of equal citizens. We have also seen how the notion of political equality, in which individual differences were confined to the domain of the private, came to be merged, during the course of the nineteenth century, with a conception of cultural sameness, which brought elements that had been restricted to the private domain into the public, political sphere. The consequence of this process of fusion of unity with identity in the French discourse has been to squeeze the notion of

difference out of the Republican discourse altogether and thus allow it no place in any legitimising discourse of the political status quo.

Yet the elimination of difference in ideological terms did not mean its elimination in reality. Both within the nation and without, difference remained a key category and, if it could not be articulated within the Republican discourse, it nonetheless found its expression elsewhere.

Pre-Revolutionary thinking had clearly prioritised the notion of difference in its hierarchical construct of feudalism and its embryonic view of what differentiated France and the French from other political entities. Remnants of this world view were to persist well into the modern period. Furthermore, the nineteenth century was to see the development of ideas that had their roots in the *Ancien Régime*, but which assumed new forms with the aid of pseudo-scientific credentials, culminating in more or less sophisticated ideological systems founded on the notions of national or racial superiority. It was also to see the emergence of new currents of thought challenging the dominant ideology of formal political equality, through the emergence of Marxism and other political theories stressing the difference and indeed the radical oppositions of class. Indeed, Marxism represents the founding of an entire theoretical system on the dialectical principle of contradiction. In time, this was to lead to the incorporation of difference as a positive constituent of other counter-discourses, such as anticolonialism and anti-racism, as well as the subsequent positive theorisation of gender difference in feminism.

In the French context, however, the Republican discourse emerged triumphant at the end of the nineteenth century after a long and bitter struggle against the forces of anti-Republicanism, which were to continue to pose a serious, if intermittent, threat to the Republic well into the twentieth century. No doubt the need to do battle for the Republic had contributed to its radical pre-eminence and the lesser purchase of more radical ideologies, such as Marxism, which were only to become a serious force in France at a much later period.

Given that the political theory of Republicanism did not allow the space within which to accommodate difference, where did the very real differences that characterised the relation of France to its colonial others find their expression? If it could not be within the domain of political theory, these differences were nonetheless articulated, but primarily in the domains of art, anthropology and religion and mainly through the element of the visual.

Thus the whole artistic, literary and intellectual production that goes under the heading of orientalism (Said 1978) came into being, forming a counterbalancing weight to the undifferentiating discourse of Republicanism, or, to use another metaphor, the other side of the Republican coin. The foundation of orientalism was the basic distinction between us – the European, the Westerner – and them – the non-European, the oriental. In this relation between European and non-European, it is the European who was the subject and the non-European the object: subject and object of knowledge; subject and object of power; subject and object of judgement; subject and object of representation. Underlying all these possible relations was the primordial relation of the subject and object of the gaze (see Chapter 4).

Orientalism was, of course, just one form of the relation to the non-European Other, which could range from extremes of sophistication and intellectual credibility, sometimes linked with real positive contributions to knowledge and culture, to the dregs of a straightforward crude racism. It was, however, the one that allowed the greatest flourishing to the articulation of the gaze.

All forms of the relation were defined by the fundamental inequality between the subject and object. In all cases, the subject was deemed to be the holder of some superior knowledge, power, insight or representational capacity. The European studied the native, educated him, ruled him, judged him and depicted him or her. Imperialism did not countenance the reverse procedure, where the European could be made the object to the native subject.

What is more, the inequality of the relation was reinforced through its definition as an absolute opposition. The native Other was not just any other; the Other was viewed as diametrically opposite to the Western subject. In this relation, all the positive qualities were embodied in the subject, all the negative ones in the object. Yet, for this relation to fulfil its function in bolstering the superiority of the Westerner, there also needed to be a mutual dependency; the Westerner could not exist without his Other. One way through which this was expressed was the process of self-definition of the West itself, which situated its identity, at least partially, in its negative definition vis-à-vis its native Other. A Westerner was defined as a non-native, an anti-native, i.e. negatively according to what he/she was not, rather than what he/she was. W.B. Yeats, for instance, was haunted by Leo the African, whom he saw as his anti-self (see also Maalouf 1986). In addition to articulating European superiority, this problematic has also been used to explain the decadence and decline of Europe, when, instead of asserting its rejection of the anti-self, the West acts as a mirror for all that comes from the East, as in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (Spengler (1918)/1922), which was so influential upon André Malraux and his version of the same problematic in *The Temptation of the West* (Malraux 1926).

In broad terms, it is possible to trace three major historical approaches to the conceptualisation of the Other.

The first, typical of the orientalist world view, arises from an ethnic, racial or gender-based notion, based on the exclusion of the Other from a common grouping and linked to a particularist world view. We shall see that one of the most serious disadvantages of this view of the Other is its vulnerability to the contingencies of relativism. Ultimately its special pleading for particular favours or special treatment can rebound against those who propound it and today's Other may turn the tables tomorrow to exclude the excluder in his turn. It is dependent on other means outside ideology to reinforce the superiority or dominance of the one over the Other.

The second broad type of conceptualisation of the Other is linked to a universalist world view. As such, it avoids the relativism of the first broadly defined approach. However, it leads to two different conceptual dilemmas, in which, on the one hand, alienation becomes inescapable for the individual, who can only escape abstraction by defining him/herself in relation to the gaze of the Other, according to

some, or as part of a social process, in which economic, social, political and cultural realities also have a key role in constituting self-identity.

On the other hand, there is the constant temptation to subvert the universalist discourse through the back door, as it were. In its typical French form, this is what happens when language and its associated culture come into play as primary determinants, as markers of difference of the Other. The universalist discourse was, in fact, even more fundamentally flawed, not least because the universal was defined in terms that took the European male as the universal norm. As such, the non-European and the female were inevitably defined in a negative relation to this norm.

The third type of approach attempts to define the Other in terms of economic position, the only Other that fundamentally matters being the class Other (Balibar & Wallerstein 1988). This approach is typical of the Marxist class analysis of differential economic relations of production and the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour. An essential element of this relation is its dynamic. The opposites are intimately bound together in a reciprocal relation, characterised by Marx and others as a unity of opposites. Neither side can exist without the other. Yet the contradiction, which is the fundamental part of the relation, is the force that will tear it apart and allow a new relation to emerge. In this definition, Marxism represents a theoretical critique of Republicanism (in its French form) from a left-wing perspective. However, in practice, French Marxism has taken pains to ground itself in Republicanism. The reasons for this are mainly historical and have much to do with the ongoing battles for the Republic in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, polarising the nation into pro- or anti-Republican camps.

Of these different approaches, it was the second that was pressed into service to determine the official line on how immigrants settling in France were to be treated. It was assumed that the French way was universally valid, that all newcomers could be, and should be, assimilated into French society. Just as for all other French citizens, there were a number of institutions that had as their mission the manufacturing of this so-called universal, homogeneous citizen, notably the education system and compulsory military service. From the end of the nineteenth century, these had mostly managed to achieve their objective of assimilating new settlers in France (largely immigrants and refugees from other European countries) and turning them into French men and women over the course of two generations (Noiriel 1988; Hargreaves 1995; Tribalat 1996; MacMaster 1997).

When migrants from the colonies began to settle in metropolitan France, starting with demobbed soldiers from both world wars, followed by workers to fill the need for labour after the Second World War, they were first seen as temporary manpower. However, once family regroupment began to take place and more or less permanent settlement became the norm, the issue of how to deal with this phenomenon became highly politicised (Wihtol de Wenden 1988).

Officially, the policy remained what it had been for previous immigrant groups – assimilation into French society. However, the politicisation of the issue of immigration, particularly from the Maghreb countries and particularly from Algeria, resulted in a greater degree of ambivalence than had been the case for the Italians or

the Poles, for instance. Moreover, with the oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent difficulties for the French economy, the need for manpower to meet the labour shortage was drastically reduced and the more or less open-door policy for migrants put into sharp reverse. From then on, the debate raged on a number of fronts, with the rise of the extreme-right National Front premised on the exploitation of the political capital arising from immigration. A variety of pseudo-scientific theories were bandied about, such as the famous *seuil de tolérance* (tolerance threshold), positing a proportion of immigrants in society that could not be exceeded without straining the capacity of the French society to accommodate them (Silverman 1992). Needless to say, the figure was inevitably an arbitrary one.

The question of whether it was possible to integrate the non-European immigrants at all was increasingly posed, with endless variations on the theme of how this assimilation, integration or, simply, insertion, could be achieved. Very often, these debates were solely about how best to describe this process; the terms in which they were conducted were essentially limited to terminological wrangling.

One thing, however, was not a cause for disagreement. At the fundamental level, these debates and political scaremongering were about people who were perceived as Others. At the same time, their difference was not allowed to be officially acknowledged. Even the collection of statistical material based upon ethnic or religious categories was not permitted. This led to a bizarre set of contradictions that still inform controversies and conflicts today (Beaud and Noiriel 2004).

Not least among these contradictions was that between the opposition to the recognition of differences on the internal, national plane, i.e. within France itself, and the growing tendency of France to take the leadership on the external, international plane, within the francophone world and elsewhere, for a policy based on the defence of diversity (see Chapter 7).

Within France, the debate became polarised during the course of the 1980s and early 1990s between those who continued to argue for the assimilationist policy and the safeguard of the indivisible Republic, on the one hand, and those who championed *'le droit à la différence'* – the right to difference. This was an argument that split the French Left down the middle. For the supporters of the extreme Right, things were presented in a more clear-cut manner, in which ethnicity came to the fore. The Other was defined by two factors: skin colour and religion. Bruno Mégret, for instance, of the Front National, had two criteria to define 'Frenchness': the first was whiteness; the second was Christianity or even Catholicism (Taguieff 1997).

Supporters of assimilation on the Left, however, opposing the right to difference, argued that the recognition of difference would amount to discrimination (of both the negative and the positive kinds) and undermine the equality of citizenship. This argument did not deal with the actual discrimination and inequality that existed in fact and which was lived, not as a right, but as a burden.

On the other hand, amongst supporters of the right to difference on the Left were many who saw this as the natural culmination of a real policy of equality, for which the effective recognition of the right to difference (national, cultural, religious, etc.) was a necessary but not sufficient condition. It was clear that the abstract,

universal citizen was not found in reality as a complete human individual. Indeed, Etienne Balibar went so far as to say that this notion of an abstract universal being, without differentiating qualities was more appropriate to the non-citizen, rather than to the citizen. In 1992, he posed the following question:

> Is a political community based solely on the equality of its members possible, if by equality is meant the setting aside of all 'differences' that characterise individuals and connect them to a particular group of people and if the basis of this equality is the universality of 'human rights' alone? In other terms, can the citizen be an indeterminate person, a person 'with no characteristics or qualities'? This is a definition that seems rather to apply to the non-citizen (for instance, the proletarian). (Balibar 1992: 113–14)

Balibar thus proposed doing away with the *homme/citoyen* (person/citizen) dichotomy in favour of a notion of citizenship that would take on board the full gamut of real difference – 'a citizenship, *overdetermined* by anthropological difference' (Balibar 1992: 145).

In this interpretation, the 'right to difference' is viewed as an end in itself, a defining category of the political value system. Other interpretations saw this supposed right as a 'means', a tool in the furtherance of a broader objective. As such, it was a right that could simply be asserted in the line of a programme of action, or else made the substance of a demand. One of the significant actions in this respect was the so-called *Marche des Beurs*, the actual title of which was the March for Equality and Against Racism (Bouamama 1994). On the one hand, this action could be, and was, seen as a dramatic assertion of the right to difference. In the autumn of 1983, young people, mainly descendants of families of North African origin from the Lyons area, carried out a three-month-long march of protest, starting out from Marseilles and arriving in Paris on 3 December. The march was a recognition of the need for specific action on the part of the victims of discrimination and racism whose problems and concerns were not dealt with (or not dealt with adequately) by other organisations. At the same time, the overriding aim of the protest was to achieve equality of treatment and eliminate the differential treatment of the 'Beurs'.

The organisations that developed as a result of this type of action, such as SOS-Racisme in 1984 (Désir 1985) or France-Plus in 1985 (Wihtol de Wenden and Leveau 2001), were often portrayed as typical of the two contradictory positions in the debate. Yet these differences have been greatly exaggerated and the complexities of the issues involved masked by their deceptive representation in terms of an oversimplified polarisation.

The French Way Versus 'Anglo-Saxon' Communitarianism

It has often been the case that the defence of the French Republican integrationist model has been conducted in terms of a threat from 'Anglo-Saxon communitarianism', a danger to which the supporters of the 'right to difference' are considered vulnerable.

It is hard to see what the 'Anglo-Saxon communitarian model' really represents in French discourse, apart from an ideological construct. After all, in no real sense do so-called ethnic minorities have any formalised rights in either the USA or Great Britain. There is no such category of ethnic minority or national minority in constitutional terms, with the arguable exception of the arrangements relative to power-sharing in Northern Ireland, although this is determined by the political parties' share of the vote rather than by the category of religious communities. The most that can be said is that there is a recognition of the specific characteristics of the situation of certain minority groups and that there have been some limited efforts to alleviate some of the effects of the discrimination from which they suffer. While these efforts have been almost entirely focused on achieving equality of treatment, for instance, through anti-discriminatory legislation, there has also been an extremely limited use of positive discrimination or positive action programmes in both countries, though always highly contested, in pursuit of the same goal, i.e. equality, not privilege. There has certainly been nothing like the quota system, institutionalised in India, for example, through which places in the civil service or higher education are reserved for the so-called scheduled castes, previously known as 'untouchables'. The only area where quotas have played a significant role has been in the area of immigration policy, where the rationale was not one of positive discrimination, but more the management of restricted access. Moreover, it has to be said that any acknowledgement of the specific problems faced by the unofficial ethnic minority groups and any measures to alleviate the problems caused by racist discrimination have only been obtained after significant battles and mobilisation on the part of the groups concerned.

In France, the few isolated instances of 'positive discrimination', notably the appointment in January 2004 of Aïssa Dermouche as Prefect, indeed, as a 'Muslim Prefect', to use the words of the then Home Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, have remained just that, isolated instances and not the outcome of any real policy. Nicolas Sarkozy, one of the few politicians to favour the use of positive discrimination was rapped on the knuckles by the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration in its annual report for 2003 (*Libération*, 26 January 2004). Again, there were those who claimed it was merely a matter of semantics. Indeed, one might argue that one of the few real instances of positive discrimination to be instituted has concerned, not any 'postcolonial' minority, but the island population of Corsica, with the agreement between the public shipping company SNCM (Société Nationale Maritime Corse Méditerranée) and the Corsican trade union, STC (Syndicat des Travailleurs Corses), to give preference to Corsicans when hiring new workers. Although not overtly portrayed as positive discrimination, this *'préférence insulaire'* has also been highly contested in the name of 'Republican values' by French trade unions opposed to 'communitarianism' (*Libération*, 21 September 2004), and debates and actions around this issue continue to take place.

At the same time, there have been clear signs of some change in approach in France, or at least an awareness that something needs to be done. In 2002, at a meeting of the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, the then Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre

Raffarin, spoke of a France that 'holds hybridity (*métissage*) dear to its heart' (*Le Monde*, 25 October 2002). The use of the term 'positive discrimination' has so far been anathema to most members of the political establishment, with President Chirac insisting that it was not *convenable* as a method of bringing about integration (*Libération*, 5 October 2004). Yet the establishment in 2004 of a Haute Autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité, following the report of the Stasi Commission on *laïcité*, published in December 2003, appeared to have taken something of a step in this direction, though, as we shall see, this was not the main outcome of the report. In what seems to be a belated attempt to address the problem with a body along the lines of the British Commission for Racial Equality, established in 1976 as a result of the amalgamation of the Race Relations Board, set up in 1965, with the Community Relations Commission, the Haute Autorité appears to have the mission, not just of taking up instances of discrimination and acting against them, but also taking positive initiatives and making recommendations to prevent and eradicate discrimination. Whether or not these amount to 'positive discrimination' appears to depend on whether the quantitative concept of 'quotas' comes into the frame, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, caused such trouble in the case of the 'parity' of political representation for women. Proposals for action framed in more qualitative and thus, arguably, more vague terms were far more acceptable. Thus, in the course of 2004, we saw the then Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, using the term *'mobilisation positive'*, the head of the Haut conseil à l'intégration, Blandine Kriegel, talking of a *'politique positive'*, others using the expression *'mesures correctives'* and Sarkozy himself resorting to *'volontarisme républicain'* to avoid the dreaded term 'positive discrimination' (*Libération*, 5 October 2004).

The same arguments surfaced as in the debate on parity between the sexes. On the one hand, those in favour of parity had argued that political representative bodies should accurately reflect the composition of the nation. Their opponents had recourse to the standard response that the universal French Republic was constituted by non-differentiated citizens. Yet again, the influence of the Anglo-Saxon example was deemed pernicious.

In point of fact, there is very little basis in reality for the linking together of Britain and the USA on this issue, although the use of the terminology 'Anglo-Saxon' implies that the one model applies in both cases. In fact, issues relating to race are grounded in a very different history and politics in the two countries and this has impinged to a very great extent on the way in which they are played out at the present time.

Indeed, there is much more in common between France and Britain in terms of their colonial history, the nature, scale and timing of the immigration from their former colonies and the economic, social and political scenarios that have arisen as a result. Any analysis of the situation on the ground will show that the situation of groups or individuals of non-European origin, whether in France or in Britain, highlights far more similarities than differences in their situation, in terms of employment situations, patterns of housing, racial discrimination and harassment,

both individual and institutionalised, and the existence of an extreme right-wing politics feeding on issues of race. Moreover, those differences that have existed between the two countries as a result of certain historical factors relating to different experiences of colonisation and decolonisation, as well as questions concerning nationality and citizenship status, have either diminished or are in the process of disappearing with the passing of time and the renewal of the generations. For instance, the exclusion of non-French nationals from voting rights meant the disenfranchisement of foreign residents from involvement in mainstream political life in the 1960s and 1970s in a way that was not the case in Britain, where immigrants coming from Commonwealth countries (and Ireland) had been able to vote from the time of their arrival and residence in Britain.

In spite of their involvement in mainstream British politics, or even in a large measure because of it, immigrants to Britain from the former colonies soon became aware that they needed to develop their own political means of expression and organisation to address the issues of specific concern to themselves. It is no doubt because of this autonomous mobilisation that they were able to make some degree of progress, which in fact put them ahead of their counterparts in France. It appeared at the time and well into the 1990s that there was a time lag and that France would in fact follow the British example in due course. This has appeared to be the case, in terms of the acceptance of a certain level of 'multiculturalism'. In the media, for instance, black faces have long been confined to minor, secondary roles in France (Neath 2004). It is only recently, following the report of the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisul) published in 2000 on the extremely low level of representation of 'visible minorities' on French television and action subsequently taken by Catherine Tasca, as Minister of Culture and Communication, in response to this report, that a recognition of the need to 'reflect the diversity of French society' has been incorporated into the policy documents of the audio-visual channels. It was only at the beginning of 2004 that Marc Tessier, president of France Télévisions, appointed a 'Monsieur Intégration' and launched a series of initiatives designed, as he said at the time, 'to encourage the development of talented people, able, for instance, to present the main news bulletin' (*Libération*, 5 October 2004). Sébastien Folin became the first black weatherman on TF1 in 2002, showing perhaps how things had moved on since the mid-1980s, when Rachid Arab only lasted two weeks as a news presenter at the time (www.Afrik.com 13 February 2002). Given that Trevor McDonald has presented the mainstream news in Britain since the mid-1970s and Moira Stewart since 1981, and many other black journalists have followed in their footsteps since, the hypothesis of a time lag appears to be borne out, at least as far as the audio-visual media are concerned.

It is, however, becoming increasingly apparent that there is far more than an historical time lag involved here. Events over the last decade have shown that France is not necessarily going to follow the same path. The original headscarf affair and its sequels have been enlightening in this respect. When the affair first broke in October 1989, with the exclusion of three girls from their school in Creil in the Paris suburbs for wearing what was described as an Islamic headscarf (*hijab*) or, more emotively

and quite inaccurately, a 'veil', it seemed that this was an incident of the same type as those that had occurred in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, when there were a number of conflicts involving school uniform issues, such as the wearing of trousers to school by Muslim girls, or around the ban on Sikh bus conductors wearing their turbans instead of the uniform cap, for instance in Manchester in 1967 and Wolverhampton in 1969 (*BBC News*, 9 April 1969, www.bbc.co.uk). There were also campaigns for the right to wear turbans in the fire and police service, as well as in lieu of motorcycle helmets (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/318934.stm). At the time, these disputes, controversial though they proved, had been resolved through compromises of one kind or another, mainly at the local level. The issues had been defused without blowing up into serious national political issues.

In France, however, the issue did not go away but evolved into a multi-faceted crisis at the national level, which has rumbled on, with intermittent explosions, since 1989 (Silverman 1992; Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995). The headscarf has become the symbol of a challenge to *laïcité*, the particularly French version of secularism, in its bastion, the public school system. On the surface, the impassioned debates around the issue have been about drawing demarcation lines between religion and the public education system (as the agent of the secular state), between the public and the private, personal spheres. For some, it has simply been a clear-cut case of the defence of French Republicanism and all that it stands for. Many who consider themselves progressives and of the Left have seen the ban on the wearing of headscarves as a step to defend the rights of women against what they see as an unwelcome religious tyranny, which, far more than a simple dress code, entails the subordination and oppression of women. Unlike comparable issues in Britain twenty or thirty years ago, the issue has not simply been to make the Other conform, although there is no doubt that this gut suspicion and fear of the Other, which constitutes a major element of most racist attitudes, has also been an important underlying factor. As in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, health and safety issues have also been invoked. The distinctiveness of the issue in France, however, is based on its association, in ideological terms, with universal Republicanism, secularism and the rights of women. The first schoolgirls were excluded because the head teacher of their school claimed that the wearing of the headscarf constituted a form of religious proselytism, which violated the school Republican space, as one from which religion was supposedly excluded. As a number of people have pointed out, this neutrality had never been absolute. The school calendar has traditionally been arranged around the Christian religious calendar. There has always been some element of compromise on the issue of secularism, not with religion in general, but with the Catholic Church in particular. From the beginning, one day per week was set aside to allow schoolchildren to have religious instruction in the catechism. Moreover, Catholic religious personnel have been allowed access to school premises.

An early attempt to defuse the affair was made by the then Socialist Education Minister, Lionel Jospin, who overruled the initial expulsions and referred the matter to the Council of State, which endorsed his position in their ruling of 27 November 1989 that the headscarf was not, in itself, an ostentatious religious symbol (Barkat

2004). However, with the return of the Right to government, the Bayrou Circular, which the Minister of Education, François Bayrou, put out in 1994, formalised a ban on all ostentatious signs of religious belief, but made it clear that it was not directed against Christian and Jewish symbols. This gave a licence to school heads to indulge in a further wave of expulsions, though many of these were subsequently overturned. This was not, however, a case of Left versus Right, or even of different strategies to cope with the rise of the extreme Right National Front, although this certainly played a part in keeping the issue on the boil.

In effect, a cloud of ambiguity shrouded the issue for the next ten years, with the various parties in the disputes pushing to test the boundaries of their position, in an ongoing, simmering stand-off. It was partly in the name of putting an end to the ambiguity and confusion that the new law was enacted. It was not, however, the result of compromise and discussion, but rather a reassertion of the primacy of 'French' Republican values. It was imposed, not negotiated. It was also the recognition, though not the acceptance, of the fact that the policy of assimilation had not worked. The whole debate around the law has been couched or cloaked in ideology. Fundamentally, it was an attempt to put a line under the issue by demonstrating who was in charge and that challenges and resistance would not be tolerated. It was an effort to settle the issue once and for all.

The process was set in motion, with the creation of a committee in June 2003, chaired by Bernard Stasi, which reported at the end of the year (Gemie 2004). Jacques Chirac greeted the publication of the report with a major televised speech on 17 December 2003 on the subject of *'laïcité'*, in which he asked the legislature to pass a law banning the wearing of 'ostentatious' signs of religious identity, singling out what he called the *'voile islamique'*, as well as the Jewish *Kippa* or a 'cross of manifestly excessive dimensions'. As the main outcome of the Stasi Commission, the 2004 law, enforcing *laïcité* in public schools from the beginning of the 2004–5 school year, was, in effect, particularly focused in both its inspiration and its application on the wearing of the *hijab*, or Islamic headscarf, by Muslim girls. This was demonstrated quite clearly by a documentary film, *The Headmaster and the Headscarves*, made by Infocus Productions and screened on BBC2 on 29 March 2005, when it showed that only Muslim girls were targeted for inspection at the school gates.

What was actually at stake was not secularism per se, but the issue of difference and the use of religious ideology and symbolism as a tool of resistance. Although the events of 11 September 2001 and its aftermath had significantly increased the tensions surrounding this issue, related to the fear of Islamic terrorism and measures taken to combat it, it would be short-sighted not to see that the roots of these tensions go back much further in time in the case of France. They have to be unearthed in the precise forms of the Algerian liberation struggle and the role that Algerian women played in that conflict, when the issue of the veil became highly politicised. On the one hand, the French pursued a policy of trying to win over Algerian women on issues concerned with women's rights and attempted an educational and propaganda onslaught to persuade women not to wear the veil, including the use of force when more gentle tactics did not succeed, though a

significant number of Algerian women were in fact recruited to perform social, educational, health and military work on behalf of the French (Seferdjeli 2004). At the same time, many Algerian women took to wearing the veil as a sign of their resistance to French occupation (Fanon (1959)/1970). There was also a practical element to this: the veil was sometimes used to conceal the transportation of arms and bombs and sometimes the *moudjahidate* would dress in European style to merge unveiled in the European quarters.

This is an illustration of the enduring power of representations and notions that have come into being in an earlier epoch to resurface at a later stage. Although perceptions of the 'Others' of imperialism may take on new forms in changed historical circumstances, there remain significant strata of accretions that consciously or subconsciously impinge on the way they are represented and handled. The imagery and rhetoric of the crusades, as well as the ideological paraphernalia associated with slavery, are profoundly embedded in the European psyche and there is no doubt of their influence on later forms of oppression and the way it is articulated. In addition to these key ideological vestiges and imprints on the modern European mind, there are also those that are peculiar to the specifically French trauma of the Algerian War, which can still have such an influence on modern-day manifestations of racism.

A re-examination of the French rejection of the 'Anglo-Saxon model' may also throw some light on these issues. For, although it is true that race issues in Britain and the USA are characterised by considerable differences, there is nonetheless one aspect in which developments in the US have been enormously influential on black people in Britain. This was the development of the struggle for civil rights and then black power and the forms this took in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, there is a strong case for arguing that, when France dug in its heels against the 'Anglo-Saxon model' it was not because it wanted to avoid the establishment of 'ghettos' on the outskirts of French cities. These existed anyway. It was because it wanted to stamp out the possibility of resistance developing on the same scale as in the US and Britain. That this was not about to happen would be graphically illustrated by the serious riots in the *banlieues* that came to a head in November 2005.

We shall return to these events shortly. However, there is another dimension to the headscarf affair(s) that has not been sufficiently explored so far. This is the association with the problematic of vision and visibility that underpins much, if not most, of the dominant French approach to the Other, and the way in which the Other tends to be represented in the symbolic imaginary universe.

The Visibility of Difference

The importance of vision and the gaze in defining the status of the Other has already been touched upon in Chapter 4. It is a key component of the orientalist problematic, as of more general relations involving a powerful, determining subject (individual or collective) and a powerless, subordinate object (again individual or collective). Indeed, one might see the ultimate 'voyeur' in conceptions of God as all-seeing, but invisible.

In present-day France, its most everyday manifestation as far as the diasporic communities are concerned is the basic definition of immigrants and their descendants from the former colonies as the 'visible' minorities. It is because they look different that they are marked out. Their different bodily appearance is what defines them in popular discourse, their skin colour, the shape of their facial features, the characteristics of their hair. Other features are also added, such as the type of clothing worn. Even such things as smells and noisy behaviour become linked in the popular imagination to these Others, as picked up for populist effect by Jacques Chirac in his now notorious comments on 'le bruit' and 'l'odeur', amongst other derogatory references to immigrants in a party meeting at Orléans on 19 June 1991 (*Le Monde*, 21 June 1991). However, it is noticeable that the visual and indeed bodily characteristics predominate in the way the Other is defined.[1] Fanon has analysed in depth the importance of the body in the constitution and definition of the black man, which he sees as fraught with difficulty and negativity.[2] Moreover, it is often assumed that these Others are themselves responsible for their visibility, that they deliberately 'flaunt their differences' (Bancel and Blanchard 1997: 29).

Visibility and vision can assume many different guises. In its most extreme form, that of surveillance, vision is used as a deliberate controlling strategy, as notably proposed by Jeremy Bentham in his design of the 'all-seeing' Panopticon for the institutional control not just of prisoners but also workers, hospital patients, school students and so on, allowing the observer to observe and control without being seen (Bentham (1787)/1995). As Michel Foucault pointed out in *Surveiller et punir* (Foucault 1975), drawing out the implications of 'Panopticism', it was the visibility itself and the inmate's awareness of it that was the essential factor in the control. The system is designed in such a way that the inmate may be seen at all times, yet the inspector viewing him/her cannot be seen. Moreover, it is an essential part of this system that the inspector does not have to constantly view the inmate. The important thing is that the inmate never knows whether (s)he is actually been viewed at any particular moment and yet is always aware that (s)he might be. This becomes what Foucault has called the 'automatic functioning of power', where the effects of the surveillance are ongoing even where it is actually only carried out intermittently. It is thus the creation and sustaining of the power relation that matters, not the actual exercise of power by any particular individual.

Applied to the imperial power relation, surveillance has been defined thus: 'Surveillance – One of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance is that of surveillance, or observation, because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995a: 227). It is not necessary for the viewing to be continuous. It is the overarching condition in which the viewing is always possible but never reciprocal that frames the relation.

While this is certainly helpful as a general outline of a problematic, it does, however, need to be refined in a number of important ways. First, there are situations and practices in which the viewing is quite overt and may indeed be ostentatious, as

in the case of orientalist art and its more modern variants. Secondly, the viewed object does not always exist in passivity, but may engage in his or her own action to subvert the gaze and transform it. Finally, implicated in the voyeurism may not just be patterns of surveillance for purposes of control but also the complex processes associated with desire.

The Image of Difference

While the Republican universalist discourse allows no space for difference, it comes into its own in the representations of various art forms and media, as well as in the iconography of religion, whether these representations take on the form of idealised exotica or the more humdrum negative stereotypes depicted in the media of everyday life, where criminality and violence are the themes of predilection (Beaud and Noiriel 2004). Central to the depiction of difference is its attachment to the body. The characteristic dualism that continues to haunt French ways of thinking and representation situates difference in the corporeal, the fleshly, as opposed to the abstract rationality of the universalist domain of the things of the mind. It is not surprising that the key image of orientalist art is not just the exotic Other, but the oriental female Other – the woman in the harem.[3] These are images in which the body is highlighted as the key element in the composition. Moreover, these are rarely nudes; the depiction of bodies as masked or veiled, only the better to reveal, by suggestion, the flesh beneath, is a crucial part of this imagery. Its resilience today is shown by modern variants on the theme – in photography, fashion, television and cinema. This is a theme that Leila Sebbar has developed in many of her novels, particularly *Shérazade* (Sebbar 1982).

There is a sense in which the images of schoolgirls clad in the headscarf fall within this same tradition and indeed it is significant that it is the girls who have been singled out as the symbols of difference. However, the effect generally produced is not of the oriental woman. The titillating effect of the oriental image of the veiled woman is absent from these portrayals. This is not the land of exotica, this is the public school system, custodian of the values of the French Republic, where such blatant images of difference have no place. There has been a perceived overstepping of the mark, of the boundaries between the private religious sphere, on the one hand, and the world of the secular ideal, where the Word holds sway, on the other.

This may be the perception; the reality is more complex. For the Word has been brought into service, to demarcate these individuals as different, and doubly different because of their origins from amongst the formerly colonised (whether defined as national, racial, ethnic or simply historical difference) and because of their gender. This is a vivid illustration of the concept of the *'corps d'exception'* – the definition of a group of people by their 'difference' and their exclusion from the possibility of assuming their subjectivity as citizens (Barkat 1999). Their difference is situated at the most basic bodily level. Yet the women concerned are condemned, not for their clothing, their masking of their bodies, but for their assertion, their appropriation, of their difference, their defiance and their resistance to the dominant power that claims hegemony over them.

However, there is more to this than the dialectic between the viewer and the viewed and the subversion of the gaze, which has been discussed in Chapter 4. It is now time to bring in another element, just as important to the business of vision. This is the image. The image and the gaze do not exist in a static relation; there is a dynamic of reciprocity between the two. As Régis Debray has pointed out:

> there is not, on the one hand, the image, a unique, inert, stable material, and, on the other hand, the gaze, coming like a mobile sunray to light up the page of an open book. To gaze is not to receive but to order the visible, to organise experience. The image draws its meaning from the gaze, as does writing from reading, and this meaning is not speculative but practical. (Debray 1992: 40–41)

This is not just to account for the effect produced by the gaze. Debray has also explored the active effect of the image. In former times, the image was considered to produce real effects on the viewer and this is still the case today, particularly with regard to pornography and television, as well as being a characteristic feature of certain types of religious or political fanaticism. In such cases, the active effectiveness of certain images is enhanced when these images are viewed not by individuals alone, but through the collective gaze – the *'oeil collectif'* – which is also described as the shared subconscious – the *'inconscient partagé'*. This collective visual representation of the world is subject to modifications in forms, codes and representational techniques at different moments in history. It is also characteristic of a way of relating to the world that does not involve thought as such. As Debray puts it: 'the invisible codes of the visible, which define with extreme naivety and for each age a certain state of the world, or, in other words, a culture. Or how the vision that the world presents of itself to those who look without thinking (Debray 1992: 11).

In this view, then, relating to the world in visual terms is linked to the notion of naivety; it is characteristic of non-reflective thinking or, using a more evolutionary, hierarchical frame, of pre-reflective or pre-conceptual thought. This is akin to Althusser's view of the visual as the characteristic mode of ideology, rather than of knowledge per se (Althusser 1965). As such, visual perception is sometimes seen as second-rate, on a lower level than rational thinking.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the visual really comes into its own in the religious sphere, particularly with the importance of iconography in Christian Catholicism. In Protestantism, on the other hand, there was a significant opposition to visual imagery in religion and the church. Indeed, the degree of hostility to iconography and idolatry was in direct proportion to the radicality of the critique of the established church, particularly in its Puritan, Quaker and Nonconformist strands. Given this hostility to imagery in much of Protestant theology and the fact that Protestantism triumphed over Catholicism in Britain and thence to much of the English-speaking world, it is not inconceivable that it may have had a part to play in the different relations that operate in respect of the visual and the gaze and their associated metaphors in the anglophone and francophone discourses.

However, although Debray has some interesting things to say in respect of the visual relation and the image, his positing of a clear divide between the Puritan preachers of the Word in the north and the Mediterranean devotees of the image in the south rather neglects the cleavages and different world views that have existed within each of these societies. In particular, it fails to give due importance to the fundamental contradiction that exists in the French collective between, on the one hand, the Word of the Republic, with its abstract egalitarian universalism and, on the other, the visual problematic that dominates the representation of relations with the Other within.[4]

Leaving theological questions aside, the so-called headscarf affairs and the responses of the French state are only incidentally about the enforcement of secularism within the public education system and far more to do with the way in which the Other is defined in France and the response that this provokes. The wearing of a headscarf as a sign of revolt, whether or not it implies the acceptance of the religious and political ideology associated with it, may be seen as an inadequate response to the inequalities and inequities faced by those concerned, on a number of grounds. However, the counter-response by the French state and associated institutions represented a far more serious danger. Not only did it fail to address the real problems at stake here, but it also reinforced the very problematic that is at the heart of the cause of the problem.

It is against this background that one has to set the riots of November 2005, which began in Clichy-sous-Bois, quickly spread throughout the *banlieues* of the major French cities and ultimately exposed the threadbare nature of the French Republican universalist ideology in its relation to the postcolonial diaspora living in France. Whilst the particular spark was given by the electrocution of two young men in an electricity substation, where they had taken refuge from the police, the root causes were the long-standing discrimination and harassment experienced by young people in the *banlieues* on a daily basis. The tensions had come to a head following a spate of measures directed against this sector of the population and singling them out in what could be interpreted as a series of provocations. Not only did the law banning the wearing of the headscarf in schools appear to be deliberately targeting Muslim girls; the subsequent law of 23 February 2005, making the questioning of the positive nature of colonialism an offence, added to the humiliation of the postcolonial diasporic communities (see Chapter 8). The most important fuel for the forthcoming conflagration was, however, undoubtedly provided by Nicolas Sarkozy, who had once again been reinstated as Interior Minister. Not only did he institute the intensification of a policy of police repression and deportation of illegal residents to meet his unrealistically high fixed targets (including numbers of young people who had never lived anywhere but France but who found themselves technically without the correct papers), but he also deployed what seemed to be deliberately provocative language to single out in his pronouncements those he termed *'la racaille'*, or scum, who needed to be power-cleansed out of the suburbs, or *'nettoyés au Karcher'*.

Indeed, it can be argued that it was Sarkozy himself who deliberately put an end to the fiction of universal equality. Moreover, some, such as Piotr Smolar (*Le Monde*,

15 November 2005), have argued that this is fully in line with his conception of France, which, unlike the traditional Republican emphasis on the unity and indivisibility of the nation, stresses instead the importance of individuals as the basic unit of society, with all their real and inevitable differences and conflicting interests. While Sarkozy presents this as a pragmatic realism, a view of France as it actually is rather than a utopian vision, there is also no doubt that it is in line with the type of free-enterprise economic and social model he favours for France within the context of the global economy.

The events of November 2005 have certainly exposed the real differences existing within France to the world at large. The existence of large communities living in what have effectively amounted to ghettos in the suburbs surrounding the large towns and cities points to a clear-cut divide between these people and the mainstream white population of France. The reality of their differentiation, whether this is expressed in terms of their appearance, racial characteristics, national origin or religion, can no longer be denied. Indeed, there has been no shortage of politicians and other public figures eager to attribute the problems faced by the suburban youth to their exotic difference. The permanent secretary of the Académie française and expert on the Soviet Union, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, came up with what might have been considered the most outlandish explanation, blaming it all on what she claimed was the widespread practice of polygamy amongst African families in the Paris suburbs (*Libération*, 9 November 2005), if her 'analysis' had not also been taken up by such as Gérard Larcher, a Minister of Employment, as well as Bernard Accoyer, the president of the majority UMP group in the Assemblée nationale (*Le Monde*, 16 November 2005). Indeed, on 10 November, speaking on France 2, Nicolas Sarkozy himself had blamed the difficulties faced by the young people of the *banlieues* on polygamy, amongst other cultural practices (*Libération*, 17 November 2005).

The differentiation has also taken the form of spatial segregation, in which certain parts of France have been designated as 'off-limits' to certain sectors of the population. Just as the suburban ghettos have been described as *'zones de non-droit'*, so too are the *'beaux quartiers'* cordoned off from the inhabitants of the *banlieues*. These lines of demarcation reproduce in a postcolonial setting the former clear boundaries dividing the colonies and the colonised peoples from the metropolitan colonial power and the colonists, much in the same way as the colonial cities were divided into a European quarter and a 'native' quarter, whether it be the Arab kasbah, the black town or the slave quarters of the plantation.

While the riots can easily be understood as the almost inevitable outcome of many years of accumulated exasperation and resentment, a spontaneous combustion sparked by specific events that signified the final straw, it is also instructive to look at the form they took. While there were those who attempted to make the connection between the rioters and militant, political Islam (and the tear-gassing of the mosque in Clichy-sous-Bois has to be seen in this context), in point of fact, there was no religious content to the revolt. What is significant is that, in the absence of a clear political strategy, there was nonetheless an almost instinctual recourse to those actions that would give the highest visibility in the media to the rioters and their grievances.

Torching their own neighbourhoods may make little sense in the light of rational political objectives. However, the sight of flaming cars ablaze night after night on French TV screens provided a literally eye-catching statement that could no longer be ignored, focusing the attention of the media on those whose 'visibility' was itself part of the problem. The difference was that this time it was the young people themselves who were taking the initiative, for once determining how they were going to be seen.

It appears clear that a major rethink of the nature and scope of Republican universalism in France and its relation to the particular is on the cards. At the time of writing, there was lack of clear agreement by the state authorities on how to tackle the issues. The Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, was clinging to the traditional Republican view of the nation, while Sarkozy has proposed a variety of seemingly contradictory initiatives. His apparent belief in positive discrimination is tempered by the fact that it is only ever envisaged for a meritorious, privileged minority from within the ranks of the Others, thus reinforcing the outsider status of the majority. The only apparent area of consensus is on the need for the authority of the state to be reasserted and public order restored. The terms in which this has been done to date have been highly significant. The declaration of a state of emergency and the use of a law dating from 1955, originally framed to deal with public order issues arising from the Algerian War, to permit the declaration of localised curfews, would seem astonishingly politically inept if it were not designed to convey a precise message, in the strongest possible terms, as to who was in charge in France and who the 'outsiders' or 'Others' were.

The issues raised by the crisis of the secular Republican model are not, however, going to be easily put to rest. However, it is time now to move on to another category of 'Others within', some of whom have been described by Raphaël Confiant as living in a state of 'postcolonialism without independence'.

Postcolonialism without Independence: the DOM-TOM

The populations of the DOM-TOM (*Départements et territoires d'outre-mer*) represent the other major category of people who have a status of difference within the overall orbit of the French state (Aldrich & Connell 1992; Aldrich 1993). The DOM-TOM currently include the Overseas Departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, Guiana on the South American mainland, La Réunion in the Indian Ocean, along with a number of Overseas Territories, dotted around the Pacific, Indian and Antarctic Oceans, notably New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and two *collectivités territoriales*, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, off the coast of Newfoundland, and Mayotte, in the Indian Ocean – what some have referred to as the 'confetti of empire'. Although some of the territories included here are counted amongst the oldest of the French colonies (*les vieilles colonies*), they have not, unlike most of the former French empire, achieved independence. The TOM enjoy a greater degree of autonomy, while remaining under the overarching French umbrella. New Caledonia, in particular, is on course for further transfer of power away from France.

Since 2003, there has been a change in the official terminology used to refer to the DOM-TOM. The DOM are now DROM (Département et région d'outre-mer) and the TOM are COM (Collectivité d'Outre-Mer), though within the last category, there is a further division between the Collectivité d'Outre-Mer départementale (Mayotte) and the Collectivité d'Outre-Mer territoriale (Saint Pierre-et-Miquelon). French Polynesia and New Caledonia are now both POM (Pays d'Outre-Mer), though Polynesia is a Collectivité d'Outre-Mer and New Caledonia a Collectivité Spécifique until 2014, when a local referendum is supposed to decide on the question of independence. In a further twist, all of the above are PTOM, or Pays et Territoires d'Outre-Mer, of the European Union (see http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/francophonie/dom-tom.htm).

The problems and issues of the DOM-TOM also vary, with the presence to a greater or lesser extent of a sizeable proportion in the population of European settlers and their descendants constituting a major political factor in some cases. Their strategic importance to France also varies. For many years, the use of the French Pacific territories for nuclear tests was a source of great controversy, culminating in the affair of the *Rainbow Warrior* in 1985. The protest ship was blown up by French secret service agents in New Zealand waters to prevent its sailing to the testing ground at Mururoa. The tests were later halted after much local and international outcry. The siting of space facilities in Guiana has been less controversial and has no doubt been beneficial to France's broader objectives of maintaining its prestige and status as a major world power.

However, it is the issues raised by the Caribbean island territories that are perhaps most relevant here, given that it was in the Caribbean that the first struggles against French colonialism were successfully waged and that there has been no lack of powerful advocates against colonialism in the years since. And yet Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guiana, like La Réunion in the Indian Ocean, remain attached to France, as integral parts of its territory. Why should this be so and can it be considered a successful application of the doctrine of assimilation?

The crucial step was the decision to opt for the *départementalisation* of 1946. In effect, this amounted to a choice to go down the path of 'equality' rather than 'independence'.

The willingness of France to maintain a presence in the Caribbean is characteristically linked to its perceived global interests and the importance of prestige on the international plane. Given the cost in terms of subsidies, there is no doubt that the priority is not any economic benefit, as in the earlier stages, when the sugar islands of the Caribbean contributed massively to the French economy. With the decline of the sugar industry and the problems faced by other sectors, which, in addition to the difficulties arising from the way in which the world trade system is organised, also face the extra problem of higher wage expectations than for other Caribbean producers as a result of the connection with France, the end result has been the development of heavily subsidised economies and societies in the Caribbean territories, in which the dependency on France has become almost total.

If the continuation of the French connection makes sense for France in terms of its wider global strategy, the question remains as to whether it is in the interests of

the Caribbean territories themselves and how their populations perceive their present and future relations with France.

There is no doubt that there have been significant expressions of resistance and revolt at various stages in the relationship, culminating in demands for independence. Aimé Césaire, himself, for many years the major political figure in Martiniquan politics, has been one of the most eloquent opponents of colonialism. Yet it was also Césaire who brought in the *départementalisation* policy. There is no doubt that this was seen as one way to bring about the end of colonialism, by becoming full members of the French nation, just like any other *département*. In some ways, the history of the islands had predisposed them to favour this solution. As we have seen, the effects of the French Revolution had been dramatic in the Caribbean islands and summoned up the vision of a France synonymous with the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, in direct opposition to the reactionary, colonial France, synonymous with the slave trade and colonial slavery, which reasserted its power in the colonies.

This dichotomy came to be articulated through the notion of the 'two Frances', representing, on the one hand, the best, most noble, progressive aspects of its ideology and, on the other, the bloody, racist repression of imperialist France at its worst. In this scenario, the triumph of the Second Republic, along with the abolition of slavery and the introduction of universal manhood suffrage, was seen as the triumph of the 'good France', as the subsequent setbacks under Louis Napoleon were seen as the reassertion of the 'bad France'.

This division into the two Frances, however unrealistic it may have been, was also reinforced by the position of the *Békés*, the whites who had settled on the islands from the earliest periods of slavery, and who were more inclined to defend their own interests, as plantation owners and one-time slave owners, than to subscribe to the ideals of the French Republic. Indeed, many had seen British rule preferable to the abolition of slavery (James (1938)/1980; Geggus 1982). Amongst the rest of the island population, these attitudes reinforced the notion of a divide between the 'bad France' associated with the local white planters and the happy land of the 'good France' of the Republic, far, far away, which through the establishment of the Third Republic in the 1870s brought back into effect the formal rights of French citizenship for all male adults in the old colonies, enabling them to participate in French national, as well as the subsequent local, elections, in line with the inhabitants of mainland France. At the same time, a number of factors ensured that their status remained that of a colony. With notable exceptions, such as Gaston Monnerville, from 1932, the majority of elected representatives were chosen from the white, or partially white, inhabitants. Moreover, the existence of a colonial governor ensured direct French control over the islands' affairs. This arrangement suited the *Békés*, as it ensured some opportunity for influence and manipulation of policy at local level, as well as their ongoing control of the local economy (Burton and Reno 1995: 3).

The problematic of the two Frances was brought into play once more in the Second World War with the triumph of the (good) Free French, which included so

many Caribbean volunteers, over the (bad) supporters of Vichy. This was, in some respects, a continuation of the so-called *impôt du sang*, or blood tax, whereby, in the absence of any formal requirement for the islands' inhabitants to do military service, they nonetheless demonstrated their loyalty to France. It was, however, also a clear case of taking sides, with the 'good France' of de Gaulle and against the 'bad France' of the Vichyite Governor Admiral Robert.

The support for the full integration of the former colonies as *départements* of France has also to be seen in this light. In opting for this solution to the problem of colonialism in 1946, Aimé Césaire, newly elected as *député* as well as mayor of Fort-de-France, along with Léopold Bissol, a Guianese *député*, and Raymond Vergès, from La Réunion, hoped to build on the wartime alliance with the Free French to become fully integrated into the 'French family'. The scenario was one in which the ideological weapons provided by the 'good France' would be used against the 'bad France', perceived as the colonial enemy. It was a challenge to end colonialism from within the French hegemony.

Unsurprisingly, it was from the *Békés* that the main opposition came to the *départementalisation* of 1946. In fact, however, this was not such a radical transformation, as had been feared, or hoped. Already, the colonies had been declared *'partie intégrante'* of France in the French Constitution of 1795 (Burton and Reno 1995). Moreover, even after *départementalisation*, the Caribbean *départements* remained differentiated from those of mainland France in a number of ways. On the one hand, this difference has been perceived as insufficient equality, and major struggles were necessary to extend the full and equal application of French legislation to the DOM, particularly in the fields of social security and the minimum wage (Burton and Reno 1995: 4). On the other hand, there was also a concern that the specific needs of the islands could not be catered for by one-size-fits-all legislation. The DOM were clearly not the same as any other *département* of France in a number of respects. However, their new constitutional status did not allow recognition of this fact and put obstacles in the way of differential treatment, even where appropriate.

There is no doubt that the hoped-for benefits of integration as a French department have not materialised to the extent that may have been envisaged in 1946. The most serious consequence has been the catastrophic decline of the economy, with corresponding social collapse. The old sugar-based economy went into rapid collapse, unable to compete with the European sugar-beet industry. There is now little production of any significance, and what there is is largely uncompetitive on world markets, given the high labour costs in line with expectations of French rates. The islands survive on imports from France, from which practically everything, including basic foodstuffs, is brought. This is made possible, in its turn, by the injection of French subsidies, increasing the dependency of the population, many of whom are unable to find employment and rely on social welfare benefits. Investment has been largely speculative in character, with the promotion and development of retail, leisure and tourist facilities that have severely damaged the environment in many cases and have led to great resentment of what is known as the *bétonisation* of the islands (Burton and Reno 1995).

Even so, there is nowadays very little popular support for independence and not all the economic and social problems can be attributed to *départementalisation*. Indeed, the political life of the islands is marked by a high level of apathy, with massive abstention rates from electoral politics (Burton and Reno 1995: 14). In spite of the ravages suffered by the economy, the undoubted material benefits of the association with France are there for all to see. The overall standard of living is extremely high in comparison with other islands in the Caribbean, such as Saint Lucia, and particularly the dire situation of a country like Haiti. Car ownership, in particular, per head of population is higher than in France itself (Confiant 1996). This has, on the one hand, encouraged some feeling of superiority amongst the inhabitants, who are proud of their link with France and consider themselves French. The high levels of emigration to metropolitan France, estimated at 400,000 or so and thus surpassing the population of Martinique, have also reinforced these ties, with constant movement back and forth across the Atlantic (Anselin 1990). At the same time, there is also a simmering feeling of resentment at the dependency that is the corollary and a distinct sense of alienation, characteristic of the state of mind expressed by the islanders. All of this is well recognised.

In January 2000, Patrick Chamoiseau, along with Gérard Delver, Edouard Glissant and Bertène Juminer, published a 'Manifesto to provide a new start for the DOM', in which they described this alienation in these terms:

> Departmentalisation has undeniably set in motion processes of modernisation, raising the standard of living, general improvement of conditions of existence and social relations, but it has also been perverted into a syndrome of generalised welfare benefits, increased dependency and an anaesthetisation of the population which took deeper and deeper hold, the more the transfer of public money increased in volume. (Chamoiseau et al. 2000)

On 3 May 2000, Raphaël Confiant gave a talk at the French Institute in London, in which he described the relation to France as one of a woman to a man, where the woman is entirely kept. The man (France) may eventually want a divorce. If so, the woman will then have to work to earn her own living, but, until then, she will be happy to stay in this situation of total dependence.

Whether one feels inclined to reject this rather old-fashioned view of relationships as a suitable metaphor for this 'postcoloniality without independence' or not, there is no doubt that there is little real independent political control over decision-making, either in respect of internal, local policy or with regard to relations with neighbours or as part of the wider world. On the international stage, the DOM are represented only through France, which has consistently vetoed their classification as colonies at the United Nations, with the support of other former colonies, including Senegal under Senghor. They are part of Europe, by dint of being part of France, and yet have no voice of their own in determining European policy. Relations with their Caribbean neighbours are still undeveloped, in spite of attempts

to forge closer ties with the Caricom trading partners, ironically by France becoming a member of this body. It remains easier to travel between Martinique and France than locally within the Caribbean. Even within the world of *La Francophonie*, they are seriously under-represented.

There is some support for full independence, and greater support for more regional autonomy. The Martiniquan nationalist and President of the Conseil Régional de Martinique, Alfred Marie-Jeanne, has campaigned along these lines, along with the representatives of Guadeloupe and Guiana. Earlier nationalist movements, such as the OJAM (*Organisation de la jeunesse anticolonialiste de la Martinique*), created in 1962, were quickly repressed.[5] However, to a certain extent, there appears to have been a transfer of political energy into the cultural domain. Indeed, since 1946, it has been the importance of cultural difference that has been highlighted rather than the grounds for national independence. Césaire and other Caribbean thinkers, while warning of the dangers of 'cultural genocide',[6] have accepted that the political battle has to be waged on the terrain of equality, substantial not formal, within the framework of the French nation.

The Caribbean territories have thus become something of an 'exception' within the overall contours of the anticolonial struggles and there is a certain irony in the fact that two of the great thinkers of the anticolonial national liberation struggles, Césaire and Fanon, who had such an impact elsewhere in the world, did not put their theories to the test on their home soil. In Césaire's case, it is notable that his most important writings denouncing colonialism were produced after *départementalisation*, yet one would be hard-pressed to find any specific analysis or strategy for the Caribbean in texts such as the *Discourse on Colonialism*, published in 1955. Although there was palpable disappointment with the outcome of assimilation, there is no suggestion of going back on that choice, and Césaire's political strategy remained limited to seeking further reforms to improve the economic and social situation of the population. His disillusion comes through, nonetheless, in his poetry, where he notably described Martinique as an 'absurdly botched version of paradise' (*'une version du paradis absurdement ratée'*) (Césaire 1982).

The development of theories of *créolité* and creolisation (see Chapter 7) has also had an impact, albeit more limited, in the political sphere, where they have contributed to the development of a new perspective on the position of the Caribbean territories in the world. In this conception, borders are fluid; relations of interaction extend to the international plane, where they take place between different peoples, cultures and ideas.

In the 'Manifeste pour refonder les DOM', mentioned above, it is made clear that the issues that concern the Caribbean territories cannot be resolved through the bilateral relationship with France alone. Just as there is a global dimension to the problems, so too are the options available for their solution global in scope. 'The world, and not only France, is on our horizon,' the authors proclaimed. 'It was through *départementalisation* that France gave us access to her world. We ourselves must now gain access to the world's horizons' (Chamoiseau et al. 2000). However,

there was nothing utopian about this text. Instead, the key approach was characterised by realism, combined with a recognition of the importance of synthesis and inclusivity and a desire to face up to the very specific situation of the Caribbean territories.

At the same time, a redefinition of the relationship to the land has also been characteristic of this type of thinking. Where alienation and exile from the ancestral lands of Africa had formed the dominant paradigm in the past, the new thinking emphasises the importance of acknowledging organic ties to the soil of the Caribbean territories, within an ecological perspective that respects the unity and interdependence of all aspects of the environment and its living organisms. This is in stark contrast to the exploitation of men and nature characteristic of the plantation economy and also a response to the effects of *bétonisation*.

There is, of course, a certain irony that this should be so in what are, in reality, some of the last colonies of France.

Notes

1. As Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard have put it: 'Cet aspect de la "visibilité" des immigrés issus de l'ex-Empire colonial français reste profondément ancré dans la société française contemporaine' (Bancel and Blanchard 1997: 29, note 26).

2. 'Dans le monde blanc, l'homme de couleur rencontre des difficultés dans l'élaboration de son schéma corporel. La connaissance du corps est une activité uniquement négatrice. C'est une connaissance en troisième personne' (Fanon (1952)/1975: 89).

3. In fact, the harem was normally confined to a small urban elite and did not represent the reality of the situation of most 'oriental' women (Clancy-Smith and Gray-Ware Metcalf 1993).

4. 'L'image est produit de son temps mais aussi révélateur des non-dits d'une société, de ses fantasmes, de ses phobies. Elle rend possible une reconstitution du contexte mental dans lequel s'inscrit sa relation à l'Autre' (Bancel and Blanchard 1997: 9).

5. Their manifesto appears as an appendix in Confiant 1996: 313–16.

6. Speech by Césaire in the Assemblée nationale, February 1978.