



# Decolonization in the Heart of Empire: Some Fanonian Echoes in France Today

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**Abstract:** This paper offers a translation of key texts by the contemporary *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* (MIR) and its key intellectuals: Sadri Khiari and Houria Bouteldja. Following Khiari, post-colonial situations are best understood as recompositions: territorially mediated re-articulations of colonial pasts with other social relations. To respond to the complexities of this post-colonial recomposition, MIR propose an ambitious politics of “autonomy” and “mixity”. “Autonomy” (externally in relationship to the state and organized politics and internally for feminist groups) is seen as an indispensable precondition for a socio-politically mixed, and potentially universalizing, political formation politics. More counter-colonial than post-colonial in orientation (Hallward), MIR attempt to give direction to three decades of revolt emanating from France’s racialized popular neighbourhoods, including the uprising of 2005. I argue that MIR’s interventions take up themes from the analyses by Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Suzanne and Aimé Césaire to make countercolonial critique “live” in France today.

**Keywords:** Mouvement des Indigènes de la République, Sadri Khiari, Houria Bouteldja, Frantz Fanon, post-colonial situation, countercolonialism

In August 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy gave a speech in Dakar, Senegal. He denied that colonial legacies are responsible for what he described as current developments in Africa (corruption, militarism). According to Sarkozy, the problem with “African man” is that “he” has not yet fully left the state of nature and “entered the course of history”. As Sarkozy argued, in a gendered manner typical of civilizational racism, “he” (African man) has not sufficiently embraced the imperative of progress and the “European” values of emancipation, liberty, justice and equality (*Libération* 2007). Six months later, Sarkozy presented his government’s response to the uprising of African youth in late 2005: the *Plan espoir banlieues*. The plan added little to the existing arsenal of containment strategies and will not change conditions in the *quartiers populaires*<sup>1</sup> (*Le Monde* 2009). This did not stop Sarkozy from describing his strategy to “reinvent the city” as a project to save “civilization” and promote “Republican values”. Reasserting his infamous remarks during his time as interior minister under Chirac, Sarkozy proposed that “reinventing cities” requires “cleaning up the scum” (*racaille*)

and the “delinquents” (*voyous*) (*Le Monde* 2008; *Libération* 2008). With these coded references to young male *banlieusards*, Sarkozy mixed a geopolitical discourse of civilizational clash with racialized and gendered fears of the *quartiers populaires* (Coutras 2003; Guénif-Souilamas and Macé 2004).

Sarkozy’s interventions (which stand in a long tradition of deploying Eurocentric and patriarchal claims to civilization against French colonies and subaltern social spaces in the hexagone; Stovall 2003) are a stark reminder that, in France today, any discussion about colonial legacies is of immediate political pertinence. Indeed, the latest wave of scholarship about (post-)coloniality has been particularly intense, shaped as it is by a sense of urgency to reflect upon policy debates and media panics about Islam and terrorism, national identity and immigration, French and North African football, the legacies of colonial history and slavery, and the recent mobilizations in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and La Réunion. In this latest scholarship, there is considerable skepticism about the capacity of Anglo-American post-colonial theory to come to terms with the historical specificity and political salience of France’s colonial past and present (Chivallon 2007; Coquio 2008; Gupta 2007). Current debates are open to the works of Spivak, Bhabha, Said, Hall, Gilroy (and Derrida, Foucault and Lacan),<sup>2</sup> but many interpreters insist on building on previous rounds of historiographic and philosophical engagements with French colonialism, including the counter-colonial legacies of l’Ouverture, C.L.R. James, Yacine, Djébar, Memmi, Fanon, Sartre, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, the resurgent interest in Frantz Fanon is also not bound by the deconstructive, genealogical or discourse-theoretical protocols of post-colonial theory, which have been so influential in Anglo-American Fanon scholarship until recently. Instructive in this regard are the biography by Fanon’s one-time comrade and colleague, Alice Cherki (2006 [2000]), a special issue by the journal *Sud-Nord* (2008), and a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* (2005), which places Fanon squarely in the new humanist tradition this journal helped shape in the postwar era.

This paper intends to translate one non-academic attempt to make counter-colonial analysis “live” in contemporary French politics. Its focus is on texts, public appeals, website and magazine articles by *Le Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* (the Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic—MIR), and its key intellectuals: Sadri Khiari and Houria Bouteldja.<sup>4</sup> In their texts, MIR makes a forceful case for a “post-colonial anti-colonialism”. For this, Khiari and MIR provide a broadly materialist analysis of the contemporary post-colonial situation as an economic, socio-political and cultural-ideological *recomposition* of colonial legacies. This recomposition is achieved in part with forms of *spatial organization* that help

confine post-colonial subjects and their—reified and gendered—bodily relationships to the world in a patchwork of segregated territories. In response, MIR proposes a politically and ideologically *autonomous* form of anti-colonial practice which does justice to the temporal and spatial disjunctures between the situation of post-colonial subjects and white political space. To address the complexities of post-colonial conditions in the metropole, the principle of autonomy must be modified through a practice of *mixity*. This implies linking anti-colonial concerns with broader anti-capitalist forces, on the one hand, anti-colonial forms of *feminism*, on the other. Of acute importance in this project of autonomy/mixity is *territorial reappropriation*. The goal of “post-colonial anti-colonialism” is a form of emancipation with universal implications.

While influenced by Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Otto Bauer, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin, the texts by MIR and some of its leaders are selective appropriations, not interpretations of these intellectuals. They do however constitute responses to post-colonial conditions in the metropolitan core which resonate well with the counter-colonialism defined by Fanon and some of his French-speaking contemporaries. This becomes evident provided one treats Fanon as an advocate of *liberation* informed by radical Black, Marxist-Hegelian, and proto-materialist phenomenology, not as a precursor of the post-structural linguistic turn, as is common in post-colonial theory.<sup>5</sup> The proposals by MIR reverberate with a Fanonian perspective that, first, puts forward an *integral* understanding of colonization as a multi-dimensional process incorporating macro- and micro-dimensions of reality; second, analyzes racism as a crucial *modality* of wider, political-economic dynamics of colonization; third, treats colonization as a multi-scalar *spatial relation* that begs for strategies of territorial re-appropriation linking national liberation to spatial transformations at various scales; fourth, sees gender and patriarchy as crucial to analyze colonial rule and differentiate between “true” and “false” forms of decolonization; and, finally, ushers in a new, dialectical, and cautiously universalizing *humanism* to transform the subjectivities of colonizer and colonized alike. Adapting these Fanonian insights, the proposals by MIR attest to the relevance of counter-colonial analyses of post-colonial situations. They are of interest to anyone concerned about the tension-fraught relationships between anti-colonial and other struggles in imperial metropolises today.

### **The *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République***

We are the indigenous of the Republic!” . . . France was a colonial state . . . France is still a colonial state! . . . The treatment of people from the colonies prolongs (but is not reducible to) colonial policy . . . The

colonial cancer takes over the mind . . . Decolonizing the Republic is a must! (From the manifesto of the *Indigènes de la République*, 24 January 2005; MIR 2005).

MIR formed in early 2005 in a conjuncture of sharpening political conflict, after the headscarf panic and before the uprising in late 2005. Founded by activists with strong links to pro-Palestinian networks (Robine 2006:126), MIR was conceived as an “intellectual movement” to find a political language that would resonate with the latest cohort of non-European youth while rearticulating the concerns of previous generations of activists (Khiari 2006:127). The goal was to contribute to “the emergence of a political and organized expression of the rage of immigrant populations” (2006:12). To invert the dominant ways of denigrating non-European youth as “scum” (*racaille*), MIR wanted to “invent a politics of *the racaille*” (2006:12). In the midst of a new period of reactionary politics led by then interior minister Sarkozy, MIR was founded to intervene in the 2007 Presidential election and change the relations of force in French politics as a whole (Khiari 2007b). MIR see themselves as a specifically political group that intervenes in France’s centralized public sphere and exercises leadership vis-à-vis issue-specific movements (Bouteldja 2008). While its relationships to activist milieus have not been without tension, MIR have in fact gained a significant public profile, occasionally giving way to veritable moral panics in France (D’Elia, 2008). After long preparations (Khiari 2008b; Walou 2008), MIR were constituted as a political party (Parti des Indigènes de la République [PIR]) in March 2010.

Why the term “*indigène*”? *Indigène* refers to those treated as sub-human “natives” under French colonialism. Up to 1946, colonial subjects in various parts of the Empire were governed by the *Code de l’Indigénat*, which instituted a legal hierarchy of citizenship. Choosing the term *indigène* is meant to draw a parallel between the fate of French colonial subjects and the situation of those who immigrated to France from the colonies. As Houria Bouteldja, the spokesperson of MIR who is credited with the term, argues, “*indigène*” names a particular form of social relegation in France:

When they refuse to accept us as French citizens, they deny us equality. We need to name this reality: we cannot be French, so we are native. We are second-class citizens; ours is a lumpen-citizenship, just as at the time of the colonies. This imaginary linked to colonization and the history of slavery continues to determine how they perceive us, for the body of the indigenous was constructed during the colonial era. As long as this imaginary is alive, we remain native (2006:3).

The name “*indigènes*” draws attention to the fact that the French Republic, that repository of supposedly colour-blind values of equality, fraternity and liberty, continues to treat some of its residents and

citizens as quasi-colonial subjects who are “relegated to the margins of society” (cited in Khiari 2006:9; MIR 2005). With the name *indigène*, MIR violate the rules of “respectable” anti-racism in France, as the angst-ridden demonizations of MIR and Bouteldja by politicians and journalists indicate (Delphy 2008a:161–173).

### **The Post-colonial Situation as Recomposition**

Khiari sees the post-colonial situation (which relegates some French citizens to “indigenous” status) as a recomposition, an articulation of colonial legacies with other social relations:

The notion of the post-colonial indicates that the historical rupture with colonialism is far from complete. It refers to this continuity, and, beyond that, the recomposition of forms of domination and their goals, the persistence and reproduction of procedures of domination inherited from the colonial period, which are deployed against people from the old colonies in the middle of France. These procedures are not simply residues or expressions of an unfinished post-colonial transition. But the notion of the post-colonial does in no way suggest that colonial relations are left intact, nor does it refer to the simple importation of management methods from the former French colonial territories to the metropole. These colonial practices themselves differed from colony to colony and evolved over time. The post-colonial also refers to the invention of new forms of ethnic discrimination that are applied to immigrants and other sectors of the population . . . Finally, the post-colonial points us to the way in which these forms of domination are entangled with other forms of oppression and exploitation (Khiari 2006:20–21).

The post-colonial situation is neither mere historical residue nor simple replication of colonialism in the metropole. It refers to the selective transformation and re-inscription of colonial forms in the wider metropolitan social formation. The “post-colonial” does not describe the social totality as a whole; only crucial aspects thereof.

Khiari adopts an integral conception of (post-)colonial relations as multiform, ideological, cultural, social and economic at the same time. In this he follows Fanon, Memmi, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, who, in their various ways, understood colonization not only as a political economic relationship of exploitation and a state strategy of territorial organization but also as a form of racialized humiliation: the lived experience of being reduced to a mere object-body (Fanon 1967a [1952], 1975; Memmi 1985 [1957]:16, 43). Khiari insists that “post-colonial relations are characterized not only by their historical roots in colonial history but also the differentiations and hierarchies constructed according to racial, ethnic and cultural criteria” (2006:33). Post-colonial racism itself is not a matter of representation and ideology only. As a pervasive, caste-like

relation of domination, racism contributes to a post-colonial situation which is “fractured” in its various, social, economic, institutional and cultural dimensions (2006:22).<sup>6</sup> In its many dimensions, racism is bound up with bodily experience. As such, it is at the heart of post-coloniality (Bouteldja 2008).

How does Khiari link colonial history and the “fractured” present of post-colonial France? In the first instance, Khiari traces the colonial dimensions of contemporary France to the era of the Third Republic. This period brought intensified colonization, inter-imperial competition and the formalization of migration control together in one single movement of imperial state formation (2007a). To a significant extent, colonial legacies in contemporary France are not accidental but formative of the French Republic itself, a claim well documented in other literatures (Bancel, Blanchard and Vergès 2007; Paligot 2006). Secondly, Khiari refers to twentieth century migration from the former colonies as the central mechanism linking de-structured colonial social formations with the metropolitan heartland. On the one hand, these migration flows point us to realities in the former colonies: the role of agricultural transformations (colonial property law regimes, the shift to export-oriented cash crops) in displacing peasants and the incapacity of colonial cities to absorb relative population surpluses. On the other hand, migration allows us to see how metropolitan capitalism came to be dependent on post-colonial populations for its internal reproduction. Key for this was colonial racism, which helped form the immigration system that came to regulate the lives of migrants themselves (see also Blanchard and Bancel 1998; Rosenberg 2006). Colonial legacies thus live on in the lives of non-European residents, who tend to be relegated to particular segments of labour and housing markets while being confined to carefully managed cultural and religious enclaves.

Khiari points to the centrality of urban policy in managing the life of migrants in the shantytowns (*bidonvilles*) of the 1950s and 1960s and the social housing projects (*HLM*) since the 1970s (2006:17–34). As he reminds us, the strategy to herd migrant workers into shantytowns and transitory housing was an explicit continuation of late colonial city planning in Algiers (particularly the so-called *Plan Constantine*). Since then, the colonial dimensions of urban policy may have become less explicit, but they have not disappeared. They have played a formative role in how the French state re-invented *la banlieue* in the 1970s and 1980s (Lapeyronnie 2005; Pitti 2008:109; Ross 1995). Borrowing language from the *Mouvement de l’immigration et des banlieues* (MIB), Khiari describes French urban policy since the 1980s (even the “progressive” aspects of the *politique de la ville*) as a “colonial treatment of *les banlieues*” (stigmatized suburbs with large non-European populations) (2006:32). This is a powerful way of recasting Fanon’s insight (voiced notably in *Algeria Unveiled* and *The*

*Damned of the Earth*) that colonization represents a form of spatial “compartmentalization” (1963 [1961]:37–38). Khiari takes this insight to analyse the way in which the relations between former colony and imperial centre are recast within metropolitan urban regions in France.

Of course, the post-colonial situation is no carbon copy of the colonies. Khiari detects a shift in the scale and intensity of violence which shapes colonial social relations. While mob and police violence continues to shape post-colonial relationships, these relationships are more pervasively mediated by “legitimizing institutions” than was the case under formal colonial rule (Khiari 2006:113). It thus matters that today, the modality governing the “indigenous” of France is implicit and informal, not legal and codified (Bouteldja 2008a). Khiari also points to the fact that in France itself, people with family ties to the former colonies are in a demographic minority. As a result, the lines of demarcation between “native” and “non-native” are more porous than in formal colonies (2007:24) and social relations in the metropole must be analysed with particular care to isolate their specifically post-colonial aspects. Khiari mentions the recent wave of security legislation restricting civil liberties while increasing the powers of prosecutors, the police and immigration authorities. This legislation has the effect of making many more peoples’ lives more precarious. But securitization *is* post-colonial insofar as it has been modeled on colonial law, is applied primarily to non-European populations, and helps manage the geopolitical relationships between metropole and the global South (2006:22–23).

Khiari’s sketch of post-colonialism as a recomposition of colonial forms in the metropolitan heartland allows him to analyze the contemporary conjuncture as a “colonial counter-revolution” (2007:11–16; 2009). From the late 1960s onwards, France faced a triple “shock”. The violent shock of decolonization brought to an end far-flung imperial economies and their attendant socio-cultural and institutional features. The shock of permanent mass migration from the colonies (and the consequent wave of contestation by movements of immigrants from the 1960s to the 1980s) made it impossible to hold onto the illusion of a separation between an internal, “national” Republican identity and a global imperial economy. Finally, the shock of economic globalization undermined Atlantic Fordism and the achievements of the French labour movement (which have not been without benefits for non-European immigrants themselves; Bouteldja 2008a). According to Khiari, neoconservative and neoliberal policies are reactions to this triple shock. Anti-immigration measures, neoliberal strategies to dissolve the Fordist social pact (where non-European workers are used as wedges to render social and economic life more precarious for everyone), and urban policies (which stigmatize and criminalize select older suburbs, *banlieues*) all have post-colonial overtones. The Sarkozy regime signals

a new phase in this colonial counter-revolution (Khiari 2008a),<sup>7</sup> which, far from being a vestige of the past, (re-)invents racist and quasi-colonial social forms.

### **For an Autonomous “Post-colonial Anticolonialism”**

How do MIR propose to act on this post-colonial recomposition? With a “post-colonial anti-colonialism” that remains politically and intellectually autonomous from the organizations of the left. In Khiari’s words, “the push for “autonomy” by movements of immigrants expresses an attempt to deal with the specific dilemmas faced by those resisting post-colonial oppression” (2006:34). Three specific problems are targeted: the common experiences of humiliation at the hands of authority and mainstream society; the role of racism in facilitating economic superexploitation; and the necessity to link post-colonial aspirations in France to internationalist horizons of liberation (2006:103–111). With their quest of autonomy, MIR continue a longstanding anti-racist political position in France, which emerged historically because of the difficulties anti-colonial movements had getting support from metropolitan political forces. Despite promising moments of resistance (in the mid 1920s, the early 1950s, and the early 1960s), anti-colonialism remained a minority current in France, even on the left (Liauzu 2007:271; Merle 2003:815). Aimé Césaire and Fanon, for example, saw their hopes for solidarity with the metropolitan left disappointed when the socialists prolonged the Empire under the 4th Republic and the *PCF* proved reluctant to support decolonization in Algeria (Césaire, 1956; Fanon 1967b [1964]:76–90).

MIR’s position for an autonomous political strategy entails a critique of what Khiari calls the “White political arena” (*le champ politique blanc*). The roots of France’s racialized political system date back to the “*indigénat*” statutes, which denied the colonized citizenship rights up to 1946. In post-colonial France, this tradition lived on in the legal restrictions on immigrants’ rights to join unions and form associations (which were abolished, respectively, in the mid 1970s and in 1981). Since then, it has survived in informal mechanisms of preventing political self-organization: alliances with party politicians, patronage appointments, state-sponsored anti-racist organizations (*SOS-Racisme* and *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*), and officially sanctioned Islamic organizations (Khiari 2006:53–64; MIR 2005). For Khiari, this “*politically White*” space (2006:90) is defined by a politics of integration which has no fundamental problem with the French Republic (2006:37). Integration treats racism as an aberration rooted in individual mentalities, reduces affirmative action to a strategy of recruiting leaders, and reduces the aspirations of post-colonial people to a set of particularistic demands (Khiari 2007a). Pursuing a politics

of liberation rather than integration, MIR are intent on keeping their organizational and ideological distance from the “White political arena” (2007:46).

Khiari takes up arguments by previous generations of activists (Bouamama, Sad-Saoud and Djerdoubi 1994; Boubeker 2008; Hajjat 2008a). He traces MIR’s quest for autonomy to the efforts of immigrant workers in the 1960s and the 1970s (exemplified by the *Mouvements des Travailleurs Algériens*, MTA) and movements of second- and third-generation inhabitants of suburban housing estates in the 1980s (including the *Marches pour l’égalité et contre le racisme* in 1983 and 1984) and the 1990s (the *Mouvement pour l’Immigration et la Banlieue*—MIB founded in 1993; Khiari 2006:37–49; Kwatari 2008a, 2008b). Instead of hastily reading anti-racism into anti-capitalism, as has been the practice of the Communist trade union *CGT* and neo-Trotskyite parties like *Lutte Ouvrière* (Bouamama 2008; Hajjat 2008a), Khiari recognizes disjunctures between oppositional forms:

Equating antiracism, anticapitalism and internationalism is elegant. But the reasoning behind the equation is false: these struggles are not necessarily located on the same plane and in the same temporality. To thus reduce the plurality of times and spaces to one simple time/space of anticapitalism, as complex as it may be, ultimately relegates anti-racism to a secondary struggle . . . A willful effort, anti-racist consciousness, or a sufficiently enlightened class consciousness are not enough to resolve the above equation; it is important to think unity and division together and accept convergence and antagonism as paradoxical paths [towards emancipation] (Khiari 2006:74–75).

An autonomous “post-colonial anti-colonial” politics expects that the *differential temporalities* and *uneven geographies* of the social order yield similarly differentiated modalities of resistance. Proper decolonization thus cannot be a product of a dialectic that moves in *one* revolutionary time/space, as Sartre once infamously stated (Fanon 1967a [1952]:132). It requires transformations that operate in multiple temporalities and articulate various, non-contemporaneous social spaces in both metropole and colony.

### **Reappropriating Time and Space: Territory and Memory**

If a “post-colonial anti-colonialism” takes to heart uneven development as a problem of political strategy, it must pursue strategies of appropriating time and space. Fanon himself located national liberation strategies at the interface between strategies to transform relationships between city and countryside and within urban regions, on the one hand, and international—continental (Pan-African) or tricontinental—horizons of political action, on the other. As he famously outlined in *Algeria Unveiled* (1965 [1959]:59), the ultimate goal of these

multi-scalar avenues of liberation was a profound recasting of the relationship between body and the world, which is so profoundly shaped by colonial segregation strategies. Khiari, too, sees the importance of territory as a mediation of social relations (2006:116) and thus links decolonization to territorial appropriation. In contradistinction to tricontinental or third-worldist conceptions of anti-colonial politics, however, MIR's emphasis is on the decolonization of the imperial heartland itself. For Khiari (2007), post-colonial anti-colonialism wants to bring about a profound "recomposition" of the French nation and its structurally exclusionary state. Centred on the national scale, such a recomposition should link up with inter-national, anti-imperial efforts, on the one hand, and, strategies against segregation in urban regions, on the other.

For Fanon and Memmi, territorial re-appropriation was vital to deal with the "dichotomization" and "standardization" of the colonized (Fanon 1965 [1959]:126) and their concomitant exclusion from the history and politics (Memmi 1985 [1957]:111, 114, 116). In post-colonial contexts, this exclusion remains "intimately linked to territory" (Khiari 2006:119). Re-appropriating territory is still a medium to establish new social relations and unhinge colonized bodies from their object-like state. But given the material differences between post-colonial subjects in France and those in the former colonies (Bouteldja 2008), the problem of territorial appropriation poses itself differently there. It takes place in a context of transnational displacement: post-colonial subjects face a double exclusion from colonial motherland and metropolitan nation-state (2008:119). Their territorial dispossession is double and permanent, and also more mediated than in the original context of formal colonization (2008:114–115). "The imperative of territorial reconquest in the post-colonial territorial framework is shot through with contradictions akin to a Swiss cheese" (2008:119). Since inhabitants with links to the former colonies cannot extricate themselves from this territorial patchwork of post-colonial space, territorial re-appropriation cannot be modeled on a strategy of national unification. Strategies of re-establishing a quasi-territorial link to the homeland by means of community and religious organizations may be inevitable responses to external pressures but they cannot transform the sandwich-like situation of post-colonial subjects (2008:117–188).

In a post-colonial metropolitan context, territorial decolonization is more uncertain, ambiguous. It involves a search for territory understood as imagined, lived space (to speak with Henri Lefebvre). The double exclusion of post-colonial migrants posits the problem of re-appropriating territory symbolically, as memory:

In a post-colonial framework, the question of territory must also be posed in different terms (even if these terms are not completely severed

from the meaning of territory in a colonial situation). Territory is not pure materiality, a parcel of land which produces vegetables, a few watermelons, and zinc . . . Territory is also a social relation, a mediation between humans. It is the site of “living together” in history. Territory is a social bond which is constructed in space but equally in time, with previous generations, ancestors, history; temporal relations are themselves mediations of social relations in space. They are the still active history of these relations. Understanding the role of territory is to understand how the conquest of territory remains in some ways imperative for immigrants to France, who are excluded from history and civic life and asked to integrate into a different history while forgetting their own (Khiari 2006:116)

The struggle for a “territory” of historical memory is thus a key ingredient in the fight against the exclusion from history and politics in France. In contrast to ethno-communitarian responses, this search for an imagined, decolonized space should not romanticize pre-colonial traditions and religions, however. It must foreground memories of political resistance in the former colony and in France itself (Khiari 2006:121–123; MIR 2005).

The scale at which the post-colonial territorial context resembles most closely that of the colonial world is the intra-regional scale: the territorial relations among social spaces within urban regions. There, the processes by which inhabitants are “indigenized” by means of segregation, policing, and bodily confinement are most evident today (MIR 2005). This is true even though the lines of demarcation between “indigenous” spaces and French society are more porous than in the former colonies:

The severing of the social bond [in the post-colonial metropole] is also exclusion from collective territory, confinement to the territory of the *banlieues*, the territory of elevator shafts and caves, confinement in a deterritorialized reservation. The body of the native is his own reservation. He is black and his blackness is his/her reservation. He can leave his bodily reservation only by breaking free of the social relation which transforms his body into a reservation (Khiari 2006:116).

At the urban-regional scale, the relationship between (post-)colonial spatial organization and bodily experience is clearest. Strategies of spatial confinement (and, one might add, visual reification in streets and on transportation routes) are responsible for reducing colonized bodies to thing-like prisons. As we will see, these forms of confinement are gendered in more than one way. Strategies of de-segregation are thus needed to create the conditions for proper decolonization. On the basis of this insight, MIR have lent their qualified support to desegregating efforts such as the *Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires*, which

emerged in the wake of the “anticolonial” revolt of 2005 (Bouteldja 2008; Khiari 2007a; Kipfer 2009).

### **Mixity and the War of Position**

Decolonizing strategies of appropriating time and space presuppose a dialectical transformation of the colonial world. In Francophone counter-colonial traditions, this transformational perspective represents a new, “true” humanism (Césaire 1955:35, 63; Fanon 1963 [1961]:316; 1967a [1952]:231; 1967b [1964]:44; Memmi 1985:161). This new humanism is not the product of diffusing the enlightenment from a European core (as in the “false” universalism of French republicanism, for example). Nor is it the result of simply asserting or excavating pre-colonial cultures and legacies. It can only come into being through a tortuous, uncertain process by which counter-colonial success manages to decolonize colonizer and colonized alike. There are hints of such a new humanism in the project of MIR to “recompose” the French republic. This project critiques the Republic in part by universalizing Republican claims: pursuing a politics of rupture with the Republic aims at a radical transformation of that same Republic (Robine 2006:129–132). Aimed at dignity for post-colonial subjects, MIR’s project might yet yield a “veritable universalism” (2006:121) and a “genuine” egalitarianism (MIR 2005). We may be closer to such a point of veritable universalism once all French citizens see “Dhien Bien Phu” as a victory, not as a defeat: the beginning of the decolonization of France.

Focused on the national scale, MIR’s emancipatory perspective thus follows more closely counter-colonial traditions than writing in the antihumanist and liberal-cosmopolitan register of Anglo-American post-colonial theory. The obstacles in the way of a new, universalizing humanism are considerable, however. They can be found in the various economic, socio-political, cultural and territorial dimensions of the post-colonial situation. This situation raises the problem of “mixity”:

The post-colonial subject is no longer completely separated from French society; prisoner of the (post-)colonial regime (*l’indigénat*), he is from now on a hybrid being, half-animal and half-human, half-subject and half-citizen; he remains fixated, enclosed in this intermediary status. Adaptation, cultural intermixing, as well as the opposite attitude of returning to “the roots” are not only ways of subordinating oneself to the norm; they are also attempts to resist and circumvent oppression. But whether he wants it or not, the native is neither on one side of the border nor on the other. He is caught between two frontiers, approaching one or the other to different degrees. He is in a no-man’s land. At times, half-white himself, he himself is the White world. He lives in its heart and cannot extricate himself from it. . . (Khiari 2006:140)

In the current post-colonial context, it is especially clear that the search for socio-cultural purity is bound to fail. Even more so than in the case of Malcolm X and the African-American politics of black power of the late 1960s, the boundaries between “inside” and “outside” of anti-colonial movements are difficult to draw (2006:140).

Khiari wants to push this question of socio-cultural impurity—*mixité* or *métissage*—in a specifically political direction. In this vein, mixity does not describe a given cultural state of fluidity or an indicator of the limits of linguistic representability (as in Bhabha’s hybridity). It refers to the challenging process of building anti-colonial alliances.<sup>8</sup> As such, mixity is directed against implicitly ethno-centric, falsely universal Republicanism as well as narrowly nationalist counter-claims:

It is not enough to proclaim equality of all in the abstract, for *mixity, too, is a struggle*. And every struggle is an experiment . . . The question of alliances, that is also the question of the *limits* of autonomy, poses itself in perhaps different terms, less transparent, more uncertain too, than in the Afro-American case. But the problematic remains the same. How to produce convergences and complicities with “well-meaning” anti-racists and other social movements without reproducing, within the moment of convergence itself, the hierarchical relations which traverse society as a whole? (Khiari 2006:141).

To name MIR as a “mixed movement” names a political perspective, not a culturally descriptive, quasi-ontological claim. It entails grappling with and transforming the social-political limits of the autonomy of post-colonial subjects and the material obstacles to true equality in a porous post-colonial situation.

Khiari presents the politics of mixity as a *war of position*. He does so without mentioning Fanon (or Gramsci),<sup>9</sup> for whom a multi-pronged counter-colonial strategy entailed qualifying the spontaneity of revolt with the “practical realism” of organization and leadership (1963 [1961]:126, 134). For Khiari, post-colonial anti-colonialism is a war of position insofar as it extends to a patient strategy of constructing alliances between those at the autonomous centre and those at the amorphous periphery of anti-colonial projects.

I would like to return to this idea in a context of “internal colonization” where the colonized are in a minority, where the boundaries between native and non-native are porous, where one cannot be separatist, where the war we are waging is asymmetrical, where this war can perhaps only be a war of position and not a war of movement; under all these conditions, the strategic horizon must be thought of as a way to *construct an anticolonial camp*, that is a position whose anticolonial dimension is central, and powerful enough to break through and dismantle the racial-colonial system. In short, I will call this position

the broad anticolonialist camp (*le pôle anticolonialiste large*) (Khiari 2007b:2).

In a context of internal colonization, “indigenous political power is not political power of the indigenous alone . . . it results from multiple dynamics of struggles, which are shouldered by various social groups, one result of which is to weaken racial domination” (2007b:2). To effect an anti-colonial shift in the balance of power requires a precarious relationship between an (imperfectly) autonomous core of anti-colonial organizations and a broader political constellation with anti-colonial horizons. Such a complex formation may yet usher in an anti-colonial united front—a *tous ensemble anticolonialiste*.<sup>10</sup>

### Gender and Double Militancy

The challenges of working through the tensions between the imperatives of autonomy and mixity become particularly evident in matters of gender and patriarchy.

A prominent objection to MIR has come from *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises* (NPNS). This feminist organization achieved a high public profile during a mass demonstration in 2003 (which was held to protest the murder of 17-year-old Sohane Benziane) and subsequent campaigns (against highly publicized gang rapes in housing projects and for the controversial ban on religious symbols, notably Islamic headscarves in schools). Led by activists with a past in the socialist-affiliated and state-supported *SOS Racisme* (Fadela Amara and Mohammed Abdi), NPNS quickly adopted officious positions (Brüggmann and Piriot 2009). NPNS had originally signed MIR’s manifesto, but in 2006 Amara and Abdi wrote *La Racaille de la République*, in part to counter Khiari’s *Pour une politique de la racaille*. Based on a defense of a feminism rooted in French republicanism, Amara and Abdi took MIR to task for playing into a mentality of “victimization”,<sup>11</sup> minimizing the rise of patriarchal Islam in France and refusing to address “home-grown” male violence against women in suburban housing projects (2006:132–147). After the 2007 Presidential election, Amara accepted Sarkozy’s offer to work as secretary of state responsible for the *banlieues* under Christine Boutin, minister of housing and conservative, anti-abortionist Catholic.

Contrary to what *La Racaille de la République* implies, Republicanism does not have a monopoly on feminism in France. In Francophone anti-colonial traditions, feminism has played an important, if unevenly recognized role. Paulette and Jane Nardal and Suzanne Césaire, for example, played a decisive role in the transatlantic circles of the 20s and 30s which gave rise to the *négritude* movement. At that time, they argued that black internationalism and a politics of *métissage* must come to terms with the specifically gendered, exoticizing aspects of French anti-black racism (Sharpley-Whiting 2002; Hayes

2003). At that time, anti-colonial feminism also had to face pseudo-feminist arguments which buttressed the Republican civilizing mission in the colonies while helping to “domesticate” women and enforce patriarchal divisions of labour there (Bancel, Blanchard and Vergès 2006; Delphy 2008a:141–144; Gautier 2003:773–774). In the late 1950s, at the time of the Battle of Algiers, Fanon himself adopted positions, which, while overly optimistic, nonetheless qualify as proto-feminist.<sup>12</sup> In his *Algeria Unveiled* and *The Algerian Family*, Fanon highlights the gendered character of colonization. Noting the complicity of certain kinds of European feminism with colonial policy, he also treats the transformation of familial patriarchy and the status of women as indicators of true decolonization (1963 [1961]:202). More so than Fanon, explicit feminist arguments for decolonization—including those made by migrant women in France—recognized that women had to engage in “double militancy” against French feminism as well as masculinist opposition (Lessellier, 2008:159).

Khiari’s texts hardly mention patriarchy and feminism; indeed, his own narrative is gendered. But intellectuals in and close to MIR have reformulated MIR’s manifesto of the indigenous of the Republic in clearly feminist terms, through the *Collectif des féministes indigènes* (2008) and the contributions of Houria Bouteldja (the MIR spokesperson and founder of feminist collective *Les Blédardes*) and Christine Delphy (a member of the editorial committee of MIR’s defunct monthly, *L’Indigène de la République*). They provide a strong counter-critique of NPNS as a state-dependent organization, which, like *SOS Racisme*, is under the tutelage of the Socialist Party. They see Fadela Amara’s appointment to secretary of state as a logical consequence of a politics that aligns French feminism with “gender policies typical of the colonial order”. In this alignment, patriarchy is reduced to a problem of non-European inhabitants while “White society” is “exonerated of its own sexism” (Bouteldja and Delphy 2007:3). Acknowledging the importance of struggling against patriarchy in all social spaces, *Collectif* still refuses this Eurocentric feminism:

As women living in France, we inherit the achievements and the struggles of French feminists. But as racialized women, we question the *diktats* of White male universalism and the universalism of White feminism, which refuse all other visions and experiences of the world. Western feminism does not have the monopoly over resistance to male domination (*Collectif des féministes indigènes* 2007b).

In contrast to NPNS, the *Collectif* refuse to serve as a “Trojan Horse of White supremacy” (2007b) and critique the habit of focusing anti-patriarchal arguments exclusively on communities of colour. These strategies are anti-feminist for ignoring France’s own, deep and violent patriarchal traditions (Tissot and Delphy, 2008; Wadji 2006). Indeed,

they engage in “virtuous racism” which mobilizes feminist arguments to stigmatize racialized men *in toto* (Guénif-Souilamas 2005, 2006a, 2006b) and treats non-European women paternalistically as helpless victims of their fathers, partners and brothers (Brüggmann and Piriou 2009:192). In response to such views, MIR intellectuals call for an “indigenous” feminism.

From the vantage point of “indigenous” feminism, the opposition between anti-racism and anti-sexism is false (Delphy 2008a:174–216). Instead, the problem of autonomy and mixity must be reformulated along gender lines. Consistent with the “double militancy” of immigrant women’s movements (Lessellier 2008), autonomy is a political form applicable not only to the White political arena but also to anti-colonial organizations. As the *Collectif* put it: while “we will not step away from our anti-racist struggle to serve as a relay-station for a pseudo-feminism that treats already racially stigmatized black, arab and muslim populations as diabolic”, “we will not silence our feminist struggle under the pretext that anti-racism has priority” (Collectif des féministes indigènes 2007a). In this logic, Christine Delphy argues in favour of “*non-mixité voulue*” (chosen non-mixity) as a central organizing principle:

In mixed groups (Black and White, women and men, and, in general, dominant and dominated), the dominant interpretation of prejudice tends to prevail. The oppressed must not only direct their struggles against their oppression but also start by defining this oppression themselves. This is why “chosen non-mixity” (*la non-mixité voulue*), political non-mixity must remain the basic practice of each struggle; only in this way can mixed moments of struggle (which do and must exist) stop being susceptible to soft, creeping ways of re-enacting domination (Delphy 2008b)

Taking up elements in her earlier materialist feminism (1984, 1988), Delphy’s position is parallel to Khiari’s argument about socio-politically mixed social movements. In this sense, mixity appears as a struggle concept from both anti-colonial and feminist perspectives. In both cases, it can only be achieved as a result of autonomous struggles against the specific dynamics of domination emanating from patriarchy and racialization.

The political perspective of mixity represents a suggestive opening to think about oppositional spatial strategies. For both Khiari’s and Delphy’s uses of the term run counter to the policy term social mixity, with which the French state has tried to manage—break up, disperse and politically disorganize—racially homogenized (but socially mixed) spaces in French urban regions since the late 1970s (Belmessous 2006). In Delphy’s terminology (2008b), the state-centred use of social mixity in French urban policy is an example of enforced mixity (*mixité subie*).

It is no less problematic than the strategy of enforced segregation (*non-mixité subie*), which characterized the vulgar modernism of the postwar era. In contrast, oppositional post-colonial anti-colonialism must balance mixity as a principle of alliance formation with the double (feminist and anti-racist) imperatives of voluntary non-mixity (autonomy) (see also Tévanian 2008:90–91). In this light, defending oppositional capacities in the *quartiers populaires* against strategies of enforcing social mixity from above—public housing demolition and state-led gentrification—is an important socio-spatial component of anti-racist politics today (Kwatari 2008a; Tissot 2008).

## Conclusion

Slavoj Žižek holds that the uprising in Paris and across France in late 2005 was an indicator of our “post-ideological” era where opposition to “the system” only articulates itself in “meaningless outbursts” (2007:14). Contrasting the event with the “positive utopian” character of May 1968,<sup>13</sup> he characterizes the uprising as a “‘zero-level’ protest . . . which ‘wants nothing’” (2007:13). Žižek does not just take issue with the rioters’ refusal to put forward an explicit political programme. He is categorical: “there is no potential in these outbursts for the rise of a properly political agent” (2007:15). Žižek’s commentary stands in a long tradition of denigrating riots—the voice of the unheard—as sub-political, less-than-rational acts of the lumpenproletariat. His views have the paternalist overtones of all those on the French organized left which made similar commentaries during the events (Bouamama 2008:247). In fact, they resonate with the *raison d’état* of French urban policy, which has been built precisely upon the assumption that rioting by *banlieusards* is nihilistic, irrational, or pathological (Dikeç 2007; Tissot 2007). But as many rioters and sympathizers pointed out, the riots were not “meaningless”. They expressed an unmistakable quest for dignity and respect (against the everyday experience of “50,000 daily humiliations” at the hand of authorities)<sup>14</sup> as well as for justice and equality (against super-exploitation and segregation).<sup>15</sup> The “voicelessness” of the riots was not a function of an inexplicable, natural force (“outburst”). Rioting as a non-verbalized repertoire of action has a well analyzed history of dis-articulation between recent generations of *banlieusards*<sup>16</sup> and political organizations (left-wing, anti-racist, communitarian or religious).

Next to other formations (the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France*—CRAN)<sup>17</sup> and the aforementioned *Forum social des quartiers populaires*, MIR have tried to do what Žižek thought impossible: propose a politics that would resonate with France’s three-decade-old history of post-colonial revolt. I have argued that MIR and the texts by Khiari, Bouteldja and Delphy rearticulate older counter-colonial

traditions (represented by Fanon, Memmi, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire, for example) to do justice to the post-colonial situation in France today. Following Khiari, this situation is best understood as a recomposition, a re-articulation of colonial pasts with other social relations. To respond to some of the complexities of this post-colonial recomposition—most notably the territorial and social porosity between the colonized and non-colonized—MIR propose a double politics of autonomy and mixity. Autonomy (externally in relation to the state, organized politics, and the left and internally for feminist groups) is seen as indispensable precondition for a socio-politically mixed, and potentially universalizing anti-colonial politics. This politics aims at everyday dignity and a world beyond global imperialism and racialized super-exploitation.

In practice, it is difficult to hold together the dual imperatives of mixity and autonomy. In particular situations and under pressure from the political mainstream and the left, MIR often emphasize colonial continuity (not recomposition), the specifically post-colonial (not its relation to the social totality), and the imperative of autonomy (not mixity). For this, MIR have received their share of criticisms, even from anti-racist activists and sympathizers.<sup>18</sup> Some of the former have taken issue with MIR's media interventions and their anti-colonial language. MIR's self-conception as a political formation operating "above" issue-oriented or neighbourhood-based movements has led some to accuse MIR of engaging in a symbolic struggle while neglecting to confront the precarious, racialized, gendered *and* class-based realities faced by inhabitants (Hajjat 2008b:258–259; Kwatari 2008a, 2008b:214). Operating at a distance from these realities makes it difficult to build a social base for an autonomous politics (Boubeker 2008:187–188) and could produce an impasse for anti-colonial discourse. Inverting colonial stigmata may bind MIR to the shackles of racialization they try to subvert (Hajjat 2008b:263). As Cherki (2008) put it, with Fanon: without the work of actively *appropriating* memories of colonization in a context of official denigration, raising the colonial question risks totalizing these very memories.

These warnings notwithstanding, MIR's intellectual interventions (with all their nuances, which many critics ignored) have produced highly suggestive insights about post-colonial situations and the relationship between anti-colonial and other forms of emancipation in a metropolitan context. Particularly important in this respect is MIR's view that anti-colonial and other struggles relate to each other not as moments in a singular dialectic (as some claim, Herrera 2006) but through spatio-temporal disjunctures:

By necessity, the indigenous participate in other struggles. But the temporalities and spatialities of these struggles and the struggle against post-colonialism do not match in the same way as struggles of railway workers and nurses would. The struggle against oppression is not a

segment or a moment in a homogenous space–time of the struggle for emancipation . . . The idea of a dynamic community only makes sense if it includes the notion of autonomy of the anti-post-colonial struggle and allows for internal conflict within common struggles. One struggles together with, separately from and against others . . . A perspective which takes into account the *gap between the forces, times and spaces* produced by the post-colonial relation implies that one integrate the “against” . . . A common struggle is only sensible if it contributes to indigenous political autonomy at the same time as it creates the possibility for a common, *anti-post-colonialist* dynamic (Khiari 2006:142–143).

The post-colonial situation is not the same as the one Fanon analysed in Algeria, sub-Saharan Africa and the French Caribbean (2006:145). But today, too, it is important to recognize how post-colonial realities represent material supports for capitalist development (Bouteldja 2008). As a result, anti-neoliberal or anti-capitalist currents require bending every time post-colonial questions are raised in today’s imperial metropolises, to paraphrase Fanon’s famous phrase about marxism. The same is true for the patriarchal aspects of the post-colonial situation. There is no smooth path to a “united front” (*tous ensemble*).

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Today, *quartier populaires* denote socially mixed but racially stigmatized social spaces inhabited by working class and subproletarian groups.

<sup>2</sup> Bancel, Blanchard and Vergès (2003); Baneth-Nouailhetas (2006); Blanchard and Bancel (1998); Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire (2005); Cusset (2005); Durpaire (2006:34–41); Hargreaves (2007); Mbembe (2001, 2005, 2007); *Mouvements* (2007); Pouchepadass (2007); Racine (2006); Samoyault (2008); Smouts (2007); Vergès (1999, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Boubeker and Hajjat (2008); Cooper (2005); Coquery-Vidrovitch (2009); Coquio (2008); Dubois (2006, 2009); Ferro (1997 [1994], 2003); Lacoste (2006); Liauzu (2007); Majumdar (2007); Wilder (2003a, 2003b). The distinction between post-colonial and counter-colonial traditions is clarified by Hallward (2001).

<sup>4</sup> All translations are by the author.

<sup>5</sup> I am borrowing from a wave of English-speaking scholarship rooted no longer in post-modern postcolonial theory (best exemplified by Homi Bhabha) but in a combination of the marxist-hegelian and phenomenological currents closer to Fanon himself. Most important in this wave is Ato Sekyi-Otu’s exemplary *Dialectic of Experience* (1996). For

attempts to redirect this scholarship into spatial and urban directions, see Hart (2006) and Kipfer (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Khiari's comment is directed against Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire (2005).

<sup>7</sup> This aspect is largely missing from Badiou's analysis of Sarkozy's *néo-Pétainisme* (2007).

<sup>8</sup> These formulations resonate with currents in the French counter-colonial tradition. As a cultural and literary successor to *négritude* as well as an alternative to "mixophobic" racism and nationalism, the notion of *métissage*, more than the English hybridity, is steeped in long traditions of struggle against colonial dependency and for genuine equality. Although the problem of *métissage* also appears in African contributions (by Kateb Yacine or Léopold Senghor), the term is most "at home" in the political history of Martinique, Guadeloupe and La Réunion (Majumdar 2007:151–155, 128–146; Vergès 1999:8–17). Today, MIR and Bouteldja evaluate claims to cultural *métissage* according to their (uncertain) capacity to break with racialized inequality (Bouteldja cited in *Diasporiques/Cultures en Mouvement* 2009:30).

<sup>9</sup> On Gramsci's 'precocious Fanonism', see Sekyi-Otu, 1996; also Hart, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> MIR's manifesto may itself have been a step in this direction. It was supported by human rights groups (*Ligue des droits de l'homme*), social movement groups involved in housing and (un-)employment (*Droit au logement, Agir contre le chômage*), Trotskyite parties (*Luttes Ouvrières, Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire, Ligue communiste révolutionnaire*), and a Jewish student organization (*Union des étudiants juifs de France*).

<sup>11</sup> Ironically, Albert Memmi, whose postwar work on racism and colonization serves as a principal inspiration to MIR and Khiari, has taken very similar conservative positions lately. Like Amara and Abdi, Memmi now rejects anti-colonial arguments as outdated and dangerous, an example of an irresponsible mentality of self-victimisation (2006 [2004]).

<sup>12</sup> For particularly incisive interventions into these debates, see Sharpley-Whiting (1996, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> MIR have defended the legacy of May 1968 against Sarkozy. Pointing to the role of immigrant workers during and after the events, it sees "1968" also as a product of anti-colonial politics (Khiari 2008a).

<sup>14</sup> Gamthety et al (2006:92).

<sup>15</sup> See the long interview with six inhabitants of Clichy-sous-Bois, the municipality where the 2005 uprising began (Gamthety et al 2006). On the events and their precursors since the late 1970s, see *Annales* (2006); Autain et al (2006); *Contretemps* (2005); Dell'Umbria (2006); *Herodote* (2006); Kollektiv Rage (2009); La Grange and Oberti (2006); *Le Monde Diplomatique—Manière de Voir* (2006); *Mouvements* (2006); Mucchielli and Le Goaziou (2006); Shahid, Warschawki and Vidal (2006).

<sup>16</sup> See Bachmann and Le Guennec (2002); Beaud and Masclet (2006); Hajjat (2008b); Jandi (2006); Krishnan and Thomas (2007); Masclet (2004); Tissot (2007:184–185).

<sup>17</sup> See Pap Ndiaye (2008) for an intellectual perspective close to CRAN.

<sup>18</sup> For sympathetic critiques, see Beaud and Masclet (2006:843); Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire (2005:24); Castel (2006:798); Dell'Umbria (2006:64–68).

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