



# France through the Eyes of African Migrants in France

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## Abstract

The impacts of French colonization can be felt worldwide. In the continent of Africa, numerous nations have had their native livelihoods turned on its head during and after the second French colonial empire. During France's regime over several African nations, France has morphed the traditions of the native's people and forever left its mark on the continent. Years after their independence, many African nations such as Algeria, Senegal, and Morocco are still affected by the changes implemented during the colonial era. These changes such as suppressing local culture in favor of French ideals resulted in internal turmoil and rampant corruption in many African nations. Many individuals flee the violence or poverty in search of better opportunities. These immigrants typically flee to their former colonial power due to their shared language. The art of writing has an easy and wide world appeal, allowing readers of any origin to share or read the life, experiences, or ideals of another. Francophone African authors are an important facet of francophone literature as their experiences are told through their novels. Faïza Guène in *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* (2006) explores her view of France and what it means to be French. This project seeks to explore the relationship between African migrants and France through literature.

## Historical Context

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the wave of independence movements in Africa, the newly independent citizens faced a variety of issues from their newly established governments. Numerous people left their countries in favor of new opportunities and a better life. Many immigrants from former French colonies such as Algeria, Senegal, and Morocco moved to France's *banlieues* or suburbs in search of opportunities such as jobs, housing, or asylum.

## Context in Time

Faïza Guène along with other authors of her time, used story writing as a means to tell the story of their experiences living in France. In *Reimagining North African Immigration*, the author explains that French citizens often go without knowing the true history or extent of France's colonial history in Africa (Machelidon et al.). Because of this, many "pure" citizens may be unaware of the context of those living in immigrant communities such as the suburbs in Paris. According to a 2013 interview, Guène's appartement was "sickening" which she used as inspiration to describe her experiences in *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*. Her novel was a massive success when it debuted in 2004 and has been released worldwide. The proliferation of this work throughout France has spread awareness of the culture and difficulties immigrants face when moving to France, especially from nations in Africa.

Initially, the suburbs, often referred to as "*banlieues*" were created after WWII in the wake of a housing crises (Hanlon et al.). In the 70's and 80's, policy shifts allowed an increasing number of immigrants to move to the suburbs. These neighborhoods grew, but the state of their communities, even today, is one of the poorest. The average income of individuals living in low-income housing is "less than €11,250 per year (Lefebvre)."

## Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow

Faïza Guène's book *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* describes the life of a teenager living in Paris's suburbs. Guène storytelling not only tells the story of adolescence, but of life as the child of immigrant parents living in the outskirts of Paris. She explores the challenges immigrants, and their families face ranging from racism to poor housing conditions all in a manner that seeks to humanize those who are often stereotyped. Throughout the novel, the main character Doria discusses her school life, homelife and her relationship with other people. In this, the theme of "la francité" or, essentially, "frenchness" is explored through the eyes of Doria and her experiences. Guène touches on the racism many from the suburbs experience. Several instances of racism include interactions with a social worker who is surprised that "people like you" have only one child, referring to Doria's mother as "Fatma" instead of her name, and the subtle degradation of Doria by those in authority.

In 2005, a year after *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* released in France, the French government passed a law requiring teachers to teach colonialism in a positive light ("France: New Law Requires Teachers to Present a 'Positive' Account of French Colonialism"). This law demonstrates the proliferation the prejudices immigrants and their descendants face in France.

Despite this, for Doria, and perhaps for Guène, there is still a connection to France and the African culture of her mother. Doria juggles the two cultures, but when discussing France and its language she says, "They're going to teach her to read and write in the language of my country, this country (Guène)." Doria, despite feeling unrepresented through a blond doll named Francine, still considers herself French.

## Conclusion

France has had a tumultuous history regarding its migrant population and citizens of foreign descent. There were several riots in which citizens in the suburbs demonstrated their discontent with the system, one of which occurred in 2005 (Lagrange). The riot lasted several days and resulted in thousands of dollars worth of destroyed property. The riots were a result of the mistreatment many of foreign origins faced in regard to French policies. The youth who participated in these riots did not want citizenship, as they were already citizens of France, but acknowledgement of the inequalities that existed. These individuals are not renouncing their French citizenship or the entirety of French culture but are discontent with racial inequality. They, along with Guène, want a change for immigrants and foreign-born citizens.

## References

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