

The Call of the Indigenous of the Republic

We are the Indigenous of the French Republic

"We are the Indigenous of the French Republic,"

A call for an anti-“postcolonial colonialism” Congress in France¹

By: Mouvement des Indigènes de la République/Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic

<http://www.indigenes-republique.org/spip.php?article1>

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Translator’s note:

The call first circulated informally in late 2004, but was originally published publicly on January 16, 2005. The following text was signed by several thousand people and gave birth to the decolonial organization in France known as the Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic. Due to its continuing relevance, and recent formation of a political party of the Indigenous, we are circulating the original call internationally in various languages.

Discriminated in hiring, housing and health, at school and even at leisure, people from the colonies, former and current, and of postcolonial immigration are the first victims of social exclusion and precariousness. Independent of their actual origins, the inhabitants of the "quartiers"/popular neighborhoods are "indigenized", relegated to the margins of society. The "banlieues"/suburbs² are called "zones of lawlessness" that the Republic is called upon to "reconquer".³ Controls on our “facies”/appearance,⁴ various provocations, persecutions of all kinds are multiplying, while police brutality, sometimes extreme, are rarely sanctioned by a justice which operates at two speeds. To exempt the Republic, our parents are accused of resignation when we know the sacrifices, the efforts made, the suffering endured. The mechanisms of the colonial administration of Islam are back on the agenda with the establishment of the French Council of Muslim Faith under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior. Discriminatory, sexist, and racist, the anti-headscarf law is a law of exception with colonial overtones. Equally colonial, is the warehousing of harkis and the children of harkis.⁵ The populations descended from colonization and immigration are also subject to political discrimination. The rare chosen few [who are government officials] are usually confined to the role of “beur” or “black” service.⁶ The right to vote is denied to those who are not “French” and at the same time “the roots” of those who are is also denied. The right of the soil [jus solis] is questioned.⁷ Without rights, nor protection, permanently threatened with arrest and expulsion, tens of thousands of persons are deprived of their papers. Freedom of movement is denied; a growing number of Maghreb and Africans are forced to cross borders illegally at a risk to their lives.

France has been a colonial State... During more than four centuries, it has actively participated in the slave trade and the deportation of the African sub-Saharan populations. At the price of terrible massacres, the colonial forces imposed their yoke on dozens of peoples which they robbed of their wealth, destroyed the cultures, ruined the traditions, denied the history, erased their memory. The African infantrymen [incorporated into the French military], cannon fodder during

the two world wars, remain victims of a scandalous inequality in treatment [in comparison to “French” veterans].

France continues to be a colonial State! In New Caledonia, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Reunion, Polynesia repression reigns, as does contempt for universal suffrage. The children of these colonies are, in France, relegated to the status of immigrants, of second-class French without their full rights. In some of its former colonies, France continues to pursue a politics of domination. An enormous portion of the local wealth is sucked up by the old metropole and international capital. Its army conducts itself in Ivory Coast as in an occupied territory.

The treatment of the peoples descended from colonization extends, without limitation, colonial politics. Not only is the principle of equality before the law not respected, but also the law itself is not always the same [for everyone] (double penalty, application of personal status to women of Maghrebian, sub-Saharan origin...)⁸. The figure of the “indigenous” continues to haunt political, administrative and judicial actions; it innervates and imbricates other logics of oppression, discrimination and social exploitation. So today, in the context of neoliberalism, there are attempts to have immigrant workers play the role of deregulators of the labor market to extend even more precariousness and flexibility to all salaried workers.

The colonial gangrene seizes minds. The exacerbation of conflicts in the world, particularly those in the Middle East, is refracted immediately within the French debate. The interests of American imperialism, the neoconservatism of the Bush administration, coincide with the French colonial legacy. An active part of the French intellectual, political and media world, turning its back to progressive struggles in which they prevail, transformed into agents of Bush-ian “thought”. Investing in spaces of communication, these ideologues recycle the theme of “clash of civilizations” in the local language of the conflict between the “Republic” and “communitarianism”.⁹ As in the glorious times of colonization they attempt to oppose the Berbers to the Arabs, the Jews to Arab-Muslims and to Blacks. Thus, the youth descended from immigration are accused of being the vector of a new anti-Semitism. Under a term of “fundamentalism” never defined, the populations of African, Maghrebian or Muslim origin are now identified as the fifth column of a new barbarism that threatens the West and its “values”. Fraudulently camouflaged under the flags of secularism, citizenship and feminism, this reactionary offensive seizes minds and reconfigures the political scene. It produces havoc in French society. Already, it has managed to impose its rhetoric within the progressive forces, like gangrene. To assign the monopoly of the colonial and racist imaginary only to the extreme-right is a political and historical sham. The colonial ideology continues, crossing the main currents of ideas that make up the French political arena.

The decolonization of the Republic remains the order of the day! The Republic of Equality is a myth. The State and society must make a return to a radical critique of their colonial past-present. It is time that France interrogates its Enlightenment, the egalitarian universalism, affirmed during the French Revolution, repressed nationalism buttressed against the “chauvinism of the universal” that is supposed to “civilize” wild savages. It is urgent to promote radical measures of justice and equality that put an end to racial discrimination in access to employment, housing, culture and citizenship. It must finish with institutions that bring people from the colonization to a status of sub-humanity.

Our parents, our grandparents were put into slavery, colonized, animalized. But they have not been crushed. They have preserved their human dignity through the heroic resistance that they have led to tear off the colonial yoke. We are their heirs, as we are the heirs of the French who resisted Nazi barbarism and all who are involved with the oppressed, demonstrating by their commitment and sacrifices that the anti-colonial struggle is inseparable from for social equality, justice and citizenship. Dien Bien Phu is their victory.¹⁰ Dien Bien Phu was not a defeat but a victory for freedom, equality and fraternity!

For these same reasons, we stand with all peoples (from Africa to Palestine, from Iraq to Chechnya, from the Caribbean to Latin America...) who are struggling for their emancipation against all forms of imperialist colonial or neo-colonial domination.

WE, the descendants of slaves and African deportees, daughters and son of the colonized and of immigrants, WE, French and non-French living in France, activists who are engaged in struggles against oppression and discrimination produced by the post-colonial Republic, launch an appeal to those who are stakeholders in these struggles to meet in a Congress of anti-colonialism¹¹ in order to contribute to the emergence of an autonomous dynamic that challenges the political system and its actors, and beyond, all of French society, from the perspective of a common struggle of all oppressed and exploited for a truly egalitarian and universal social democracy.

On May 8, 1945, the Republic revealed its paradoxes: the same day the French celebrate the Nazi capitulation, unprecedented repression falls on the colonized Algerian of North Constantine: thousands of deaths!

On next May 8th [2005], 60th anniversary of the massacre, we continue the anti-colonial struggle with the first March of the Indigenous of the Republic!

[Original](#) Written Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic – MIR
English Translation by Roberto Hernández, [Spanish](#) Translation by Guille
(Both translations available at: <http://www.decolonialtranslation.com>)

¹ This call was published January 16, 2005. The Congress on anti-“postcolonial colonialism” took place in Paris, France on April 16, 2005 and alongside the March of the Indigenous of the Republic on May 8, 2005 constitutes the founding events of the Movement. The notion of indigènes (indigenous) used here has a particular referent in French colonial history. The French empire used the term indigènes to refer to colonial subjects in all its colonies across the world. The Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic in France is composed principally of French youth of African, Arab, Muslim, Maghrebian and Antillean origin, born and raised in France, who live the experience of colonial racism and its consequent social marginalization and exploitation.

² In France, the “suburbs” are home to the marginalized neighborhoods of African, Maghreb, Arab, and Antillean communities that one would refer to in the U.S. as the ghettos, barrios or slums. Since the 1980s the media has also charged the term with a negative connotation signifying dangerous, violent and poor neighborhoods.

³ The use of the language such as “zones of lawlessness” has a long history in various colonial contexts whereby the frontier, peripheries or “unexplored” lands are rendered wild, savage, dangerous and consequently in need of “taming” or “civilizing” via colonization by “the civilized” who are presumed to adhere to the “rule of law”.

⁴ Amongst the indigenized In France, “facies” signifies controls on one’s appearance, including being harassed by police on the basis of the “crime” of making a “bad face” or giving colonial authorities a “dirty look”.

⁵ Harkis are Algerian combatants of the French army during the French colonial war in Algeria whose rights as war veteran and citizens were never recognized by the French state. In fact, upon their arrival to France after the victory of the National Liberation Front, they were segregated and interned in military camps for many years. Nowadays the survivors and their children are a discriminated population much like the great majority of the Arab-Muslims in France.

⁶ The term “beur” refers to Maghrebs/North Africans. It emerged in the slang, verlan, created through inversions of syllables. The French word for Arabs, “arabe”, thus becomes “be-ar” which in turn is pronounced as “beur”. While today the term is regularly accepted in the French language, youth have taken to the terms “renoi” (an inversion of “noir”/black) and “rebeu” (Arab twice invert; from “arabe” to “beur” and “beur” to “rebue”).

⁷ “Jus solis” refers to birthright citizenship, whereby nationality or citizenship is granted to someone born in a given territory. While a long-standing principle of France’s claim to republican equality, jus soli has been debated and modified in recent years to prevent children born to “non-legal immigrants” in France and its territories from demanding citizenship. The consequences of this maneuver are part of the process MIR identifies as “indigenizing” the children of former and current colonial subjects and migrants.

⁸ “Double penalty” is applied to foreigners who commit a crime; after serving their sentence in the corresponding jail, they are expelled to their country of origin. In particular, this applies to “extra-communitarians”, that is, those who do not originate from any of the member nations of the European Union, whose citizens, despite not being French, still benefit from special treatments. The “personal statute” is in reference to differential treatment that women receive with respect men.

⁹ The accusation of “communitarianist” in the French context means to be accused of defending particular claims of one’s one group to the detriment of the “equality” of all the citizens similar to charges of particularism or relativism in an American context. Much like notions of white privilege in the U.S., in France, a white male communitarianism conceals and represents itself as the defender of “equality” and accuses of oppressed groups of being “communitarianist” for protesting racial and patriarchal domination.

¹⁰ Dien Bien Phu was the decisive battle in 1954 that led to the victory of the Vietcong over French colonial forces in Indochina (former French colony composed of Vietnam, Laos y Cambodia). A few months later, the Geneva accords were signed, which led to the departure of French troops and the formal recognition of independence for the former French colony.

¹¹ See footnote 1.