

RETHINKING FRENCH IDENTITY  
THROUGH LITERATURE:  
THE CASE OF FOUR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

In France, the present moment intensifies a strong, at times violent, identity crisis that the nation has been suffering for the past thirty years, and which has been largely attributed to the immigration policies of the 1960s and 1970s. In this dissertation, however, I argue that this crisis is not simply the effect of immigration, but rather the result of a conservative strand of Republicanism and its attendant colonial ideology within France. I analyze four novels – JMG Le Clézio's *Révolutions* (2003), Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre* (2011), Azouz Begag's *Le Marteau pique-coeur* (2004), and Éliette Abécassis's *Sépharade* (2009) – that show that the current state of affairs stems from France's post-Revolutionary interpretation of the ideal of equality. My analysis of texts that represent fractures in, and challenges to, French national identity is largely informed by postcolonial theory because the writings of scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Alec Hargreaves, Michel Laronde, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak offer a methodological framework through which the complicated interaction between the individual and the forces that participate in the construction of individual and group identities can be understood. According to these theorists, identities are produced out of relations of conflict, oppression, and assimilation, between a dominant ideology (here, French Republicanism) and the individual's multiple local, regional, religious, or international allegiances.