French politics and society are currently undergoing a tumultuous transformation with an unpredictable future ahead. Professor Hussey, in his 2014 book *The French Intifada: The Long War between France and its Arabs*, argues that the conflicts between France and its former colonies in North Africa still have an impact in the modern era. Since 2014, moreover, France has experienced a drastic increase in civil unrest and violence, most notably through the Charlie Hebdo attacks and the aggressive opposition to President Macron’s policies from the Gilets Jaunes.

Recalling October 2018, Professor Hussey discussed his first encounter with the populist Gilets Jaunes movement for economic justice. Caught up in a street demonstration, Hussey was surprised to see the perpetrators of this protest as mainly middle-aged middle-class individuals protesting pension reform. Before Hussey’s eyes, groups of masked youth snuck through the crowd and escalated the situation by throwing stones at the police, who then retaliated with tear gas. Upon escaping from the scene to a café, Hussey discusses his shock at realizing its inhabitants were untouched by the ‘mini civil war’ occurring right down the road. Here Hussey begins to explore what has changed in France to make even its respectable classes attack their own forces of order with such anger and hatred, and what this change means for French society.

The root of the answers lies in the research Hussey conducted for *The French Intifada*, beginning with the Gare du Nord riots in 2007. Unlike the 2018 protests, these rioters were primarily Black and Arab from the *banlieues*- the immigrant suburbs of Paris. The Gare du Nord riots were hailed in the French press as a popular uprising following the French tradition of revolt. Yet Hussey interprets what he saw during those 2007 riots quite differently, instead recalling the immigrant youth as calling out derogatory chants against France that had nothing to do with French tradition. These riots actually had to do with the poisoned roots of French colonial history. Whereas in 2005 the riots had demanded their rights as French citizens only a few years later they were turning away from France altogether, a trend which led a small minority actually to engage in major terrorist violence against their own citizens in 2015-2016.

France has the highest Muslim population in all of Europe, with the Gare du Nord neighborhood being a meeting point for many of the Muslim youth. The station occupies the space as both a hub and an invisible wall for the youth, a meeting place between the affluence of Paris and the wretchedness of the *banlieues*. Paris is as inaccessible as America for this subset of the younger generation, despite the Gare du Nord being on the edge of the city centre. The police actions in the
Gare du Nord during the 2007 riots for them seemed like a foreign, even colonial force, and the youth responded in kind by denouncing France itself in visceral terms. This is, in Hussey’s term, ‘anticivilization in action’.

This was also where, Hussey believes, it becomes apparent that these conflicts are not just about politics and religion, but are also about extreme emotions. For many immigrants from former French colonies, the banlieues act effectively as open-air prisons, where they are ‘othered’ and kept away from French society both physically and culturally. This in turn can lead to, and indeed has led to, the route of extremist views becoming more attractive to the marginalized youth in France - which has increased attacks and unrest on French society. In the aftermath of various recent attacks, the atmosphere in France has taken on an almost solid shape, something that weighs down the soul and disrupts normal ways of thinking.

Since The French Intifada was published in 2014, France has experienced levels of civil unrest unprecedented since 1968. Hussey argues that these protests are, at their very core, more about social division than about the specific grievances of petrol or money. They relate to the ‘politics of atmosphere’ that has emerged over these divisions in society. The uprisings in the banlieues and the more recent Gilet Jaunes movement are connected through the effects of extreme emotion, through the perceptions of ‘derided humanity’. Borrowed from Georges Bataille, this term sees the power of a mass uprising akin to that of a storm, turning even the most hesitant person into a frenzied being. A derided humanity will experience these surges of power, leading to rebellion and civil unrest. A continually derided humanity, as seen in the banlieues, is likely to continue to produce serious problems for France.