

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF UN-ASSIMILATION: SECOND-GENERATION NORTH AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN FRANCE

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From late-October to mid-November of 2005, France experienced its worst episode of urban violence since the 1968 student-worker riots. In approximately three weeks, “9,000 vehicles were torched, hundreds of schools and public buildings attacked, and more than 3,000 people [were] arrested” (France Deports African). In his first televised address to the public after the riots, President Jacques Chirac stated, “I want to tell all the children of the difficult neighborhoods that no matter what their origin, they are all the daughters and sons of the Republic”¹ (Chirac). Five days earlier, however, the headlines of the British Broadcasting Corporation (*BBC*) read “France to Deport Foreign Rioters,” reporting that the Minister of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy was going to immediately deport “120 foreigners [who] had been found guilty of involvement,” including those who possessed residence visas (France to Deport). It was eventually ruled that only ten of the 120 “foreigners” who were slated for deportation could actually be deported, as the remaining individuals were minors born in France. These persons, who hold residence visas and are eligible for French citizenship, were protected from deportation by French law (Arsenault). Although indicative of deep-seeded social fracture, the riots were ignited by a number of high-profile events involving government officials and youth in the Parisian suburbs. These included Minister Sarkozy’s October 25 pledge “to clean up the ‘scum’ of the suburbs,” issued while visiting the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil, and the October 27

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¹ My translation of the French: “*Je veux dire aux enfants des quartiers difficiles quelle que soit leur origine qu’ils sont tous les filles et les fils de la république.*”

electrocution of two teenage boys from immigrant families who were hiding from police in an electrical sub-station in the Clichy-sous-Bois suburb (France to Deport).

The primary actors in the “race riots” were young second and third-generation immigrants living in poor suburban areas (Timeline). Although youth of other ethnicities were involved in the rioting, individuals of North African² descent or *beurs*³ were given a central role in the media frenzy surrounding the clashes. In the aftermath of the riots, reactions toward the population of North African descent have been far from uniform. However, it appears that most of the media, government officials, and scholars do agree upon a single point: that the riots illustrate the failure of the French model of assimilation. The November 2005 cover of *The Economist* called the riots “France’s Failure!” French Parliament Member Jacques Myard of the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (Union for a Popular Movement, UMP) agreed, stating that the “violence [was] a failure of the French model of integration” (Henegan). Professor Alain Bentolila, a linguistic sociologist at Descartes University in Paris, linked this failure explicitly to the education system (Bentolila). The assessment of a ‘failure,’ however, means adhering to an integral underlying assumption: the French model of assimilation was actually applied to the population of North African descent in the first place.

In this paper, I will challenge this assumption and argue that the French model of assimilation did *not* fail in regards to North African second-generation immigrants because it was never applied to them—at least not with the same coherency, uniformity, and force as it was applied to other populations. I will focus on French education policy, specifically on the introduction of the teaching of “native languages and cultures,” to show that the current French policy to integrate North African immigrants is closer to a deliberate process of *communautarisme* (or communal

²For the purposes of this paper, “North African” and “Maghreb” are used interchangeably to refer to the specific countries of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

³French slang (Verlan) word meaning “Arab.”

fragmentation) than assimilation. Hence, in direct contradiction to established republican assimilation policies, French and immigrant youth have been grouped together and managed based on their ethnicity. This system placed the individual into a particular community that was tied to another culture, a process that functioned with the implicit, and sometimes explicit, goal of eventually introducing that individual to another “*Patrie*” (fatherland). Effectively, there occurred a conscious fracturing, an institutionalized balkanization, that has come to mark particular populations as “inassimilable” and “foreign.” An analysis of the education policies targeted at North African second-generation immigrants confirms the French government’s role in creating a separate and increasingly expendable *immigrant community*—a community containing both immigrants and French nationals (of North African descent) alike.

I. ASSIMILATION?

The integration of immigrants into a society is a multidimensional process that occurs in different spheres of public life, including socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic integration, as well as a population’s incorporation into the host society’s legal and political systems. Integration is achieved characteristically through public policies, such as housing, education, employment, and social security programs. The state structures these policies and programs to reflect its conception of citizenry, as well as its belief regarding the best way of managing diversity within that citizenry. There are two dominant frameworks for integration found in theory and practice today: cultural assimilation or unity models, and multicultural plurality models. In theory, an assimilation policy manages cultural diversity by absorbing different subjects into a larger, unified identity (Chebel d’Apollonia; Jennings). This usually presumes the elimination of the characteristics that make individuals—immigrants or people who subscribe to regional identities—different. Assimilation regimes, as in the case of France, are typically associated with “ethnic-blindness.”

Today, France is one of the few countries that self-consciously identifies assimilation as its official state policy. In principle, French identity maintains a political rather than ethnic base to which citizens voluntarily adapt themselves in the public sphere in order to form a social contract. The assumption is that differences (whether religious, ethnic, or linguistic) can be relegated to the private sphere. In France, this mechanism has translated concretely into laws such as the prohibition of ethnic data collection in census taking, *Laïcité* (a distinctive separation of church and state),⁴ and a constitutional amendment (Article 2) making French the “language of the Republic” (Gordon and Meunier 52).

There are many critics of the French assimilation model, and scholars argue that the notion of a “race-blind” government is a myth (Brown et al.; Gagnon and Tully 2001). They posit that discrimination persists in subaltern ways and only multiculturalism, which positively marks populations based on their ethnicity, can counter-act the effects of social and political exclusion. James Tully, in his book *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*, argues that one cannot solve the problem of recognizing cultural diversity in a modern constitution by avoiding cultures because this “hides from view the imperial culture embodied in most liberal constitutions” (7). For him, there must exist other ways of creating “mutual recognition” for multiple cultures within a society, because even when the constitution does not explicitly refer to a particular race or culture one is inadvertently embedded in it. This argument holds that French Republicanism, a central force behind the *Mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mis-

⁴ *Laïcité* was established in 1905, imposing four new measures on the relationship between the church and state in France. These included the provision that no religions could be supported by the state, either by financial aid or political support; that everyone had the right to follow a religion, but no one was obligated to do so; that religious education was strictly forbidden in public schools; and finally, that no new religious symbols could be placed in public places. Although in theory religion could be followed “as much in public as in private” as long as it did not disturb the public order, many historians view the onset of this law as the privatization of religion in France.

sion) of French imperialism, displaced the very ethnicities and nationalities that it must now represent.

On the other side of the spectrum are those who argue that universal republicanism devoid of cultural practices and “different rights for different people” is the only true form of anti-racism (Badinter; Finkielkraut; Jelen 1997, 1998; Todd). Unity demonstrates that all the citizens are fundamentally equal, thus subject to the same legal rights and free to pursue the same opportunities. Some argue that in the current failure of integration, it is not the republican system that is at fault, but rather the unwillingness and inability of the new immigrants to accept that system. For example, they posit that Islam is incompatible with democracy or secularism, or that the immigrants from North Africa become French “despite themselves”⁵ and want special rights, adulterating the system (Badinter 312). According to both Gérard Larcher, the French Deputy Minister of Employment, and H  l  ne d’Encausse, a member of the French Academy, second-generation North African immigrants may be discriminated against but that discrimination is explained as being a natural reaction to the “disconcerting” practices of the population (Bentolila). For example, argues Larcher, the alleged underground polygamy of Muslim families in France explains the discrimination against them in employment, as children grow up without strong father figures and thus do not develop the necessary social skills for the workplace (Bentolila).

This debate begs the question of whether cultural assimilation or multiculturalism should be pursued. It must be noted that commentary on the subject assumes that rhetorical subscription to assimilation equates the actual implementation of assimilation policies and practices. In reality, argues Ariane Chebel d’Apollonia, while universal assimilation has always been the official doctrine, “many public policies were unofficially based on [ethnicity] at different levels and in different fields [housing,

⁵ Political parties on the right used this argument particularly in the 1985-1986 attempts to reform the citizenship law (Feldblum 1992).

education, access to civil and social rights] in the 70s and 80s” (1). In the case of second-generation North African youth, this inconsistency is most significant and telling in the realm of education policy.

II. EDUCATION: A CENTRAL PILLAR OF THE FRENCH REPUBLICAN MODEL OF ASSIMILATION

Public education plays a key role in integrating young immigrants and the children of immigrants; through the school system, the subject population and the host society come into direct contact. Schools have a monopoly over the time and knowledge of individuals from the critical ages of three to sixteen, the legally obligated period of schooling in most of Europe, granting the government a direct arm to exert its control over individuals and shape how they perceive the nation and their place within it. This is especially significant in France, where language and schooling are explicitly linked to political unity and the French identity. France’s assimilation policy, known as the Republican Model since its inception during the Third Republic of 1871-1944, is characterized by the:

...central role attributed to rational and political factors [instead of to cultural and sociogeographic factors] in the construction of citizenship; and the unifying function assigned to state institutions, and particularly the school, in the building and the reproduction of these features (Zanten 353).

Conceptually and in its application, the French educational system was the central tool in the “civilizing mission” and construction of the French nation, transforming peasants with various regional identities (i.e. Breton, Basque, and Corsican persons) into “French citizens” (Weber).

Schools became responsible for creating the “unified linguistic community” that was “achieved throughout France only by the middle of the twentieth century” (Hazareesingh 166). This association began with the French Revolution when the Conven-

tion agreed with the Jacobins' assertions: "The unity of the Republic demands the unity of speech" (Brun 111-112). Further, the Convention decreed that throughout the Republic children must learn "to speak, read, and write in the French language," and that everywhere "instruction should take place only in French" (Weber 72). Even today, former French culture minister Jacques Toubon views the French language the "primary capital" of the French people, "the symbol of their dignity, the passageway to integration [and] part of the French dream" (Gordon and Meunier 58). Whether for political concerns or romantic nationalist sentiments, one thing is certain: the French language continues to hold a primary position in the conceptualization of the French citizen.

The primacy of language and unity in the French identity explains the relevance of education as the arena for assimilating immigrants. Indeed, as Agnes van Zanten states, "the perception and treatment of immigrants in French society have been strongly influenced by an ideology of integration [...] that relies on state institutions and particularly on schools for its transmission" (351). In the republican model of assimilation, the social, economic, and cultural integration of immigrants, like that of individuals ascribing to regional identities, is diffused through a common and centralized curriculum:

Educational policies constitute a central dimension of the Republican model of integration; for in France, even more than in other European countries, the school system was explicitly construed from the onset as a central agency of the nation-state. It became one of the main vehicles for the transmission of a unique, national culture, of a lay ethic, and of patriotic values. It was also conceived as a democratizing agency. [...] Immigrants, as all others, were expected to assimilate culturally and to integrate socially and economically into French society through the common school (Zanten 357).

The examination of French education policy is integral to understanding the assimilation of North African second-genera-

tion immigrants. In addition to being the most significant internal assimilating agent, the French school system has also been recently politicized as the stronghold of republicanism in the face of cultural and religious diversity. The most recent example of this clash involved the banning of Muslim headscarves and other conspicuous religious symbols in French public schools. Those supporting the law argued that the egalitarian and universal nature of the French citizen was in question. They did not want *le droit à la différence* (the right to be different) to become *la différence des droits* (the difference in rights), arguing that giving concessions to particular populations would lead to *communautarisme* or social fracturing through the creation of inequalities between French citizens and a plurality of allegiance (Sa'adah). Republican values, the government argued, could not be compromised at school for the sake of accommodating diversity. The centrality of the school in the Republican project, French identity, and French unity were thus legally (and very publicly) reaffirmed as late as 2004. Away from the spotlight however, the French government has implemented provisions targeting immigrants in schools that go against far more fundamental Republican values since the 1970s.

III. NORTH AFRICAN IMMIGRATION

During the post-World War II era, France implemented guest-worker policies in order to meet the demand for labor that could no longer be satisfied domestically. Unskilled workers, usually single males, from France's colonial stronghold in the Maghreb region began to stream into the country. Patrick Weil, Director of Research at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, notes that post-1930 France was on the verge of adopting an American "racialist" model of immigration as a "mechanism for selecting immigrants from the 'white race' according to ethnic and national origins through quotas" (Weil 2003: 281). Although ruled out as a codified strategy, it was attempted unofficially. In the 1950s, the French government attempted to avoid

admitting migrants from North Africa by having the National Office of Immigrants establish bureaus exclusively in southern Europe. The eventual “inability to secure workers from Europe, however, meant that policy-makers had little choice but to rely on (or, which was more often the case, to tolerate) colonial migrants” (Hansen 26). In the early 1970s, the impending economic recession ended the guest-worker labor migration regimes across Europe. Although efforts to attract workers were halted in France in 1972, colonial migrants had by then already entered the country and claimed the right to family reunification. It was at this point that European governments attempted to limit family reunification and even encourage repatriation (Hansen 26-27). Furthermore, in the early 1980s, attempts to change the citizenship law in France to prevent second-generation immigrants from gaining citizenship began.⁶

The mass immigration of individuals to France from North Africa may have climaxed with the guest-worker policies; however, it would be misleading to limit a historical analysis to that era. Specifically, French colonialism and its lasting effects on subject populations, rather than assuming “fundamental differences” in culture or values, significantly differentiates North African immigrants from other European immigrants. France exerted authority in the Maghreb region beginning in the early-nineteenth century. Algeria was the first country to fall to French rule in 1830. In 1881, Tunisia became a French protectorate, which was followed by Morocco’s incorporation into the French colonial system in 1912. French colonial occupation reshaped the Maghreb region in a manner that would have lasting influence in the years beyond the French departure from North Africa, especially with the imposition of French as the official language of Algeria fol-

⁶ In 1985 and 1986, Jacques Chirac led the right government’s efforts to introduce the *volontaire* or “will-and-choice” system as a replacement to automatic *jus soli*. This meant that instead of automatically obtaining citizenship at the age of majority by virtue of being born in France (a principle established in 1889), the children of immigrants would have to undergo an application process (presenting among other things a clean police record). This law passed in 1993.

lowing the Republican Revolution in 1848.

In reference to the colonial relationship, twentieth century French anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon argues that “the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man’s reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations” (Fanon 42). These sentiments can still be found lacing attitudes toward North Africans today; for example, President Chirac slandered immigrants, specifically “blacks” and “Muslims,” in his infamously dubbed “*le bruit et l’odeur*” speech. He painted the image of the stereotypical foreigner as having “three or four wives” and “twenty kids” who take advantage of the public housing and social security benefits and taunt the French worker. Chirac adds, “If you add the noise and the smell [of the immigrant], well, the French worker on his landing goes insane” (Chirac 1991).

Much in the same way that the French peasantry lived in poverty on the periphery of the France’s economic and political center before the French Revolution, the North African immigrants are likewise spatially and economically segregated in urban areas. The housing projects constructed for guest workers known as *Habitation de Loyer Modéré* (HLM) restructured the social organization of class relations:

In just over a decade, the working class was virtually eliminated as a significant social and political actor. The *banlieues rouges* were replaced by the *quartiers d’exil*. A new underclass emerged, marginal in every sense: living on the edges of France’s urban areas, left out of the new economy, unrepresented in politics, unsuccessful in the educational system, unloved by the police and the courts (Sa’adah 201).

The HLM have been referred to colloquially as “*poubelles à peuple*” (trashcans of people). The new underclass that emerged in the suburban *Banlieus* known as “*quartiers d’exil*” (neighborhoods of exile) has been overwhelmingly composed of immigrants specifically of North African, African, and Turkish descent. This

spatial, economic, and political exclusion leads to a sense of helplessness and frustration (Sa'adah). Accordingly, most areas suffer from a 25 percent school dropout rate and an even higher rate of unemployment (French Muslims). According to a study conducted by the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (INSEE), the most recent statistics indicate a 9.2 percent unemployment rate for people of French origin, 14 percent unemployment for people of foreign origin (adjusted for education), 5 percent overall unemployment for university graduates, and 26.5 percent unemployment for North African university graduates (French Muslims).

These statistics beg a number of questions to be addressed in the following section: how, for instance, was the peasant “civilized” and integrated, and why are the “Bretons” accepted as French, while the French second-generation immigrants from North Africa continue to be seen as *different, foreign, and inassimilable*?

IV. FRENCH EDUCATION LAW

The greatest function of the school was “to teach not so much useful skills as a new patriotism beyond the limits naturally acknowledged by its charges” (Weber 332). It is clear that politics were never far removed from the French education system. At the centerpiece of this indoctrination was language instruction, which F. Brunot points out in his *Histoire de la Langue Française*, “language is surely what makes patriotism” (Boyzon-Fradet 152). This was not only because a common language reinforced the notion that separate individuals who had never seen one another shared an intangible common allegiance, but also because it was the means for ingesting other nationalistic ideas, of creating an institution of civic education.

There are many inconsistencies that mark the teaching of language to the children of peasants with that of North African immigrants in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. What differed for the immigrants was not only the stringency of the

government's application of the "Republican mode" of education, but also its sudden adoption of an underlying rubric that was the polar opposite of the official universalist doctrine. In contradiction to the fundamental rule that all children, regardless of their ethnicity, would be subject to the exact same centrally-regulated educational material, even in private schools, the French government introduced a new curriculum that only targeted the children of immigrants from specific countries. The teaching of "native languages and cultures" which began in 1973 (one year after the guest worker programs were halted) was made available only for the children of immigrants whose native countries have bilateral arrangements with France, those being: Algeria, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yugoslavia. I argue that this measure directly contradicts previously established educational practices in four ways: it proscribes to a different model of integration (plurality instead of assimilation), its official treatment of languages other than French differs, it goes against the centrality and ultimate authority of the state to determine the instruction of pupils, and, most importantly, it emphasizes the individual's belonging to a particular population instead of the sole entity of the French nation.

One contradictory aspect of this program is that it is based on a "multicultural" mode of integration even though ethnically-based laws have always been vehemently denounced as a cause of *communautarisme* or "balkanization." In the *circulaire* (official communication that is an administrative directive or guideline) explaining the measure to the heads of educational districts (*recteurs*), the program is explicitly espoused as the best way to ensure integration:

[T]he minister of education has been concerned for a number of years with considering, in a specific way, the educational needs of foreign children. [The minister] strives to provide the best conditions for their insertion into the school and French society and the possibility of *readapting, if the need arises, to their countries of origin* (Circular, my italics).

This law is built upon the notion of “special needs for special populations” which is precisely what was hitherto considered the obstacle to the French nation’s ability to be “one and indivisible” (*Circulaire*). More importantly, it also demonstrates that part of the motivation behind instituting this law is to facilitate the repatriation of the children of immigrants.

This program contradicts how the French classroom has previously engaged with languages other than French. There was a systemic devaluation of regional dialects in the French educational system throughout the nineteenth century. This was not only because of the prestige that was associated with the French-speaking city dwellers, or the fact that employment opportunities and profit became increasingly tied to the French language; usage of language other than official French itself was targeted and debased in the classroom. Eugen Weber explains how “Breton was hunted out of the schools, children caught using it were systematically punished- put on dry bread and water or sent to clean out the school latrine” (313). By the turn of the century there was already a stigma developing around the use of regional dialects, such that an “anonymous Breton patriot could decry ‘the systematic exclusion of the Breton language,’ which helped discredit it in the eyes of those speaking it, who saw it as a badge of ignorance and shame” (Weber 313). The teaching of “native languages and cultures” directly contrasts this devaluation; in fact Section Three of the *Circulaire* explaining the law is dedicated entirely to the “Valorization of the languages and cultures of origin”. The *Circulaire* argues that the experience of learning one’s native language and about one’s culture is enriching; the law “strives, consequently, to valorize these cultures at all levels of instruction.”⁷

A third way that the teaching of native languages contradicted established principles is through its relinquishment of the government’s ultimate control over the students’ educational

⁷ My translation from the French: “*D’autre part, l’expérience a fait apparaître que le maintien des enfants étrangers dans la connaissance de leur langue et de leur culture peut constituer un élément positif pour leur adaptation dans les établissements scolaires français. On s’efforcera, en conséquence, de valoriser ces cultures à tous les niveaux d’enseignement.*”

content. Most French teachers are, unsurprisingly, not versed in the “native languages and cultures” in question (Weber 314). This barrier was also a problem in the nineteenth century when “most of the teachers (didn’t) know French” since they were almost always from the rural villages themselves (Weber 314). It was not until the government actively trained and granted the benefits of “profit and prestige” to school teachers that French acquisition began to spread (Weber 315). The French government in the twentieth century took an entirely different course of action. Instead of training its teachers or other French citizens (including naturalized immigrants from the country of origin in question) to teach these lessons, it enables other governments to provide the teachers and pay their salary. In doing so the French government is granting other nations control over not only the language, but also the content of what certain French citizens are learning. This means that the content could go “against the secular, neutral principles of public school, as the control of French academic authorities often is hampered by the language barrier” (Boyzon-Fradet 157). This directly opposes one of the most emphasized principles underlying the foundation for a centralized educational system;

[F]or the state schools to play their role in ensuring stability, it was above all necessary that no rival institutions should exist, for these might threaten to undo the work that the state schools were accomplishing. The state therefore had to have *total* control of education so as to assure the training of the young in a manner that conformed to Napoleon’s doctrine (Suleiman 19).

Hence, much of what was not only avoided but considered poisonous for the assimilation of minorities and the unity of the state has been actively pursued in the case of second-generation immigrants during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

One of the most important differences in the educational integration of peasants and second-generation immigrants deals with the structure of the educational programs. The teaching of “native languages and cultures” upset the traditional republican

school structure in two ways. Firstly, until now the integration of the students has been dependent on their common experience and grouping based on age. As Boyzon-Fradet explains, “elementary school operates on a simple principle: a group of children of a certain age range and a given education level [equals] a class.” The native language program means that this unity is broken as only members of ethnically distinguished populations are removed from the group at certain times and placed “with children from other classes, other levels, at other age groups, under a foreign teacher, with pedagogic methods that are often very different.” The content missed is also significant; the children of immigrants go to their special classes during the times when the rest of the group is learning topics most associated with “acculturation.” This included geography and history (among other subjects) in 1973, and expanded to replacing “all or part of one the regular curriculum subjects at the discretion of the teachers” since 1985 (Boyzon-Fradet 155-156). I argue that this removal of ethnically distinguished populations from a unified system creates more than just a “stigma;” it essentially changes the structure of integration from the individual as part of the united “whole” to the individual as part of a specifically ethnically-based “population.”

A specificity of the French educational system in its integration of the peasants was the emphasis it placed on individual discipline. The students became *soldiers of the Republic* both literally and figuratively. They spoke its language and were indoctrinated with nationalism, patriotism, and an ultimate allegiance to the state. This was achieved through the state’s direct exercise of power on each and every individual militaristically.

The school became a copy of the regiment. It was divided into companies, each of twenty-five pupils, with a sergeant and four corporals. The school-life was regulated by drum-signals and in many lycées periodic route marches, to the accompaniment of military music, were a regular feature of the curriculum (Weber 21).

Undoubtedly this practice no longer persists today, but the phi-

losophy and basic structure behind it remains the same: the school is the state's most powerful and direct tool for the indoctrination of its citizens, and it cannot be compromised by accommodating diversity, which will only lead to fragmentation. What is most striking about the phenomenon of the "teaching of Native languages" is that the French state has deemed that for some citizens the valorization of other languages and cultures relating to one's background is depicted as "enriching" at the same time as it is actively targeted as being both unconstitutional and harmful to the unity of the state for other citizens. The importance of linguistic unity and centralized education was established during the French revolution, extended in the Napoleonic era, codified and institutionalized in the nineteenth century, and constantly reaffirmed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The French language continues to be presented as, in Prime Minister Jospin's words, the "cement of the republic and the values it is founded on." In June 1992, this assertion was further codified. The French parliament amended Article Two of the Constitution to state that "the language of the Republic is French." Gordon and Meunier observe, "This was intended not only as a protective measure against the intrusion of foreign words, but also against the growing popularity of some minority and regional languages (such as Breton, Corsican, Alsatian, Occitan, and others)" (Gordon and Meunier 58).

1992 is the same year that the Council of Europe's Charter on Regional and Minority Languages was created. For a number of years France was the only Western European country to not sign the charter. When the Jospin government eventually did sign it in 1999, it was deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council (hindering its ratification by parliament) so that France is still not party to the agreement today (Gordon and Meunier 58). The purpose of the charter is primarily cultural and educational: according to the text of the charter, it aims to "protect and promote regional and minority languages as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage and on the other hand to enable speakers of a regional or minority language to use it in private

and public life.” The rejection of the Charter on Regional and Minority languages in the 1990s as a source of possible fragmentation demonstrates the French state’s continued subscription to the importance of linguistic unity and centralized education. In this context, the teaching of native languages and cultures, that is, appropriating the assimilating tool for the use of other nations, demonstrates the republic’s ambivalence towards indoctrinating certain citizens. In other words, there is a decision *not* to make certain citizens “French.” Instead of using the integrating tool of an education to exercise power directly on the individual, that individual is being institutionally encouraged to foster ties with another population, another culture, and another national belonging. They are being given a civic education, where the citizenship outcome is not one of French inclusion.

V. FROM FRENCHMEN TO FOREIGNERS: EXPENDABLE POPULATION?

The categorization of individuals into a separate community is not simply a benign social construction when it is instituted within the framework of a republican state. What does this mean for the way we understand assimilation and multiculturalism? The balance of the right to be different with the right to be equal is a complex and delicate process. Assimilation policy eradicates difference for the sake of equality, but one may argue that this process is unfair to those being assimilated. Indeed, the process by which peasants were assimilated has been likened to occupation (Weber). We may agree or disagree with assimilation or multiculturalism, but we have to understand the way in which they can overlap. If our conceptual framework is dependent on a dichotomy between an eradication of difference through assimilation and a celebration of difference through multiculturalism, then there is no room for understanding the way that difference has been emphasized in order to be eradicated. In other words, there is no way of understanding how the government can have a role in creating and politicizing an ethnic enclave of individuals

and then reflect upon that community as naturally and inevitably conceived. This is a process I have dubbed institutionalizing “*unassimilation*,” and the case of education policy in France illustrates its application.

The education policy targeted at North African immigrants institutionally encouraged their allegiance to other countries, cultures, and languages. At the same time, legal and political mechanisms, such as repatriation, attempts to curb family reunification, citizenship revisionism, and deportation, targeted the same population justifiably, in republican discourse, because of their allegiance to entities outside the state. The current notion of France’s failure to assimilate its North African populations is a misnomer; an analysis of France’s educational policy reveals that an inclusive citizenship education policy was, in essence, never applied. The French state’s incoherency regarding its population of North African immigrants and even French nationals of North African descent is not conducive to political stability as it not only alienates, but institutionally *creates* and *perpetuates* the “other.”

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