PART I. OLD HOST COUNTRIES

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CHAPTER 1. FRANCE

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Introduction

France is a country of immigration and diversity is an important component of the society. Immigration waves from 1900 to the Second World War included flows from Northern Europe (Belgium), Eastern Europe (Poland) and Southern Europe (Italy and Spain). After the Second World War, while a significant number of immigrants came from Southern Europe (Spain and Portugal), the post-colonial component of immigration increased (Algeria, Morocco and other African countries). The demographic fact of diversity in contemporary France is a product of both labour and post-colonial migration. In the post-war period, France signed bilateral agreements with Southern European countries to attract European immigrants whom the French authorities regarded as more likely to adapt to French society than post-colonial workers. However, the dismantling of the colonial empire and the treaties that France signed with the newly independent countries included articles that favour the circulation of former colonial subjects to the Métropole. As a result, the post-colonial input represents an important part of French cultural diversity today.

The State’s response to the diversity of the French population has been to make difference invisible, or more precisely to leave ethnicity and religious expressions in the private sphere. It is based on the French conception of citizenship, inherited from the 1789 Revolution, which is civic and not ethnic, and it is anchored in the Republican values that structure the national discourse on diversity. Moreover, since the 1905 law separating Church and State, it has been argued that by keeping official differences in the private sphere everyone will be considered the same and will, therefore, enjoy equality. Religious affiliations are kept private, and laïcité (the French version of secularism) is a central principle of the modern State. It maintains a strict separation between religious matters and public life. As a consequence, discourses on cultural and religious diversity are hard to pin down in the French public space and are usually understood as conflicting with Republican values.

This chapter describes the diversity of the French population and explores the institutions that try to accommodate diversity in France.

1. The French colonial empire consisted of colonies, protectorates and mandates in Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. Migrants of former colonial countries came mainly from Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Cambodia.
3. The term Métropole refers to French territory in Europe (continental France and the adjacent islands such as Corsica) as opposed to French territories that are located outside Europe (‘Overseas Territories’).
It also shows how the notion of cultural diversity has emerged in national debates and when. First, we will outline the main historical events in the formation of the State and national identity to understand the challenge of cultural diversity in the French context. It will be seen that the formation of the French State is connected to the idea of national identity in a manner that emphasizes the notion of the individual over the group and, formally, does not allocate space for the acknowledgement of diversity in the public arena. Secondly, we will explore how issues have emerged which were perceived as resulting from the diversity of the population and how they have been approached and dealt with. This will lead us to identify what kinds of identities are perceived as different and/or challenging in the French context. Thirdly, we will explore the concept of tolerance in France. We will look at the concept of laïcité and see how it has been used to accommodate religious diversity in France. Does it foster tolerance towards religious expression? We will see that laïcité has been used to deal with tensions resulting from the purportedly religious character of post-colonial migrants and we will discuss its reassessment in response to the concern about Islam.

**State formation and national identity**

**Historical elements on the formation of the French Nation-State**

The formation of the French nation dates back to the French Revolution of 1789. It is based on the idea of a nation composed of citizens as opposed to the addition of groups that characterised the Ancien Régime: the nobility, the clergy and the Third Estate. As argued by Gerard Noiriel: ‘[the] context of anti-aristocratic and anti-clerical mobilisation explains, far beyond the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the essential aspects of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens. Behind the haunting theme of equality is found a violent rejection of all privileges (and all stigmatisations) based on origin’ (Noiriel, 1999: 46). The French conception of citizenship is civic and implies a vertical relation between the citizens and the State. It does not recognise the intermediate level of a group or a specific community based on origin. The State should consider each individual regardless of his/her origin, race or religion. Even though the events took place two centuries ago, this universalist principle is considered as guiding the understanding of the relationship between each citizen and the State (cf. article 1 of the Constitution of 1958: ‘All citizens shall be equal before the law, regardless of their origin, race or religion’). The myth of the French Revolution that embodied the victory of the people over the nobility laid the emphasis on the universalist principles that linked citizens with one another, rather than their original membership of a group.

The 19th century was marked by an effort to unify French territory and French culture (mainly through the teaching of French as the first language for all French people) and suppress regional identities. Transforming ‘peasants into Frenchmen’ (Weber, 1976) was the goal of the Third Republic from 1870 to 1940. It anchored the conception of a French population as a product of a fusion of people into one common language and identity. Ethnic specificities – understood as regional identities – were to be subsumed in the larger French national identity through
the practice of the French language. From this founding period of French society there has remained until today the conviction that additional forms of identity such as regional, religious or immigrants’ origin are to be kept in the private sphere. As a result, little room is left for the articulation of minority claims in the public sphere.

However, throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries, the creation of the colonial empire induced a breach in the universalist principle of French equality. The French State allocated differential status to indigenous populations and European expatriates. Nowhere was this differentiation stronger than in Algeria, where European settlers from Italy, Spain or France were granted French nationality and citizenship whereas the indigenous populations were kept in a specific status with different political and legal rights. In the colonies, indigenous populations were nationals but not citizens. Ethnicity, then, worked as a ‘juridical category’ to distinguish the ‘Metropolitan’ from the ‘Indigenous’ (Kastoryano, 2003: 67). After the Second World War, the French Empire was renamed the French Union and colonial subjects became citizens of the French Union. They only enjoyed a truncated version of citizenship, however, and they did not have any political rights in the colonies (Weil, 2008).

The case of differential status in the French colonies offers an example of a breach in the continuity of the universalist principle. It demonstrates that, in the colonial context, the Republic made distinctions between individuals on the basis of their belonging to a specific group considered as ethnically different. Furthermore, post-colonial immigrants who came to France in the second half of the 20th century carried this complex system of status with them. Being born in a French colony gave them special access to French nationality. The story of the various colonial statuses established during the French Empire is still important today to understand the post-colonial migrants’ complex relationship with French nationality and identity.

France and the European Union

France was a founder member of the European Economic Community and signed the 1957 Treaty of Rome. It was an active member of the Community until 1993, when it became the European Union. Since 2000, France has been the target of many criticisms regarding issues of diversity and pluralism. In the first case, when confronted with the imperative to open civic rights to European citizens, France was one of the slowest countries to adapt article 8 of the Maastricht Treaty (Strudel, 2007). The French authorities argued that the link between nationality and citizenship was primordial and prevented the granting of civic rights to non-nationals. Furthermore, France was also slow to implement anti-discrimination legislation even though some of its architects were French politicians (Guiraudon and Geddes, 2004).

Finally, France is proud to see itself as a country of Human Rights. The number of refugees who are granted political asylum each year is high and, in 2008, France was in third place after the US and Canada. However, it has been criticised for its actual application of Human Rights. For instance, in 2010, the French government was admonished by the members of the European Parliament for its treatment of the Roma
people coming in from Eastern Europe (Le Monde, 7 September 2010). Voices of protest are also emerging in French civil society that criticise policies seen as contrary to the European Declaration of Human Rights. The European Union serves as a constitutional recourse in cases of Human Rights violations related to discrimination.

The main cultural diversity challenges that France has faced in the last 30 years

The formation of a diverse population

A diverse population is one that encompasses groups with various origins from a geographical and cultural point of view. In the case of France, its long experience in receiving and incorporating immigrant populations makes it a diverse country. Limited population growth and a shortage of labour have made it a migration destination – and not a country of departure – since 1880. For instance, when the United States imposed quotas to limit entries (1924), the flow of immigrants from Southern Europe was ‘diverted’ towards France, and by 1931 the increase in foreigners in France was greater than in the United States (Noiriel, 2006: 21).

Moreover, like most of its neighbours in Western Europe (Belgium, Germany, Great Britain), France experienced massive post-war immigration flows during the period of reconstruction, coming, in her case, from Southern Europe (mainly Spain and Portugal) and North Africa (mainly Algeria, but also Morocco). 5

In 1974, in line with other industrial countries, the French government brought economic migration to a halt and the authorities ceased to deliver work permits to immigrants. After this ‘closing’ of economic migration, family members of immigrants could still come to France under the family reunification regime. However, immigrants who had no family ties in France started coming illegally or, if coming from countries in conflict, they tried to enter under the refugee regime. Despite the official ‘closure of immigration doors’, the migration influx has continued over the past decades, with a diversification of immigrants’ origin. In addition to constant flows of immigrants from Europe, the arrival of immigrants from North Africa has continued to be significant and there has been a slight increase in immigrants coming from other African countries.

Successive waves of immigrants have settled in the country and increased the diversity of the French population. However, official statistics only record nationality, and the progressive integration of immigrants into French nationality results in statistically concealing people’s origin. There are, therefore, few means to reflect the diversity of the French population that results from decades of immigration. Official statistics only identify immigrants who still hold foreign nationality. Figure 3 shows the development of the immigrant population according to country of origin from 1962 to 1999. Countries of origin, however, are grouped together for clarity: Spain and Italy; Portugal; Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia); other African countries; Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam; Turkey; and other countries.

5. From 1954 to 1968, Spanish people went from 289,000 to 607,000; Portuguese, from 20,000 to 296,000; Algerian, from 212,000 to 474,000 and Moroccan, 11,000 to 94,000. (Source: National Census, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, INSEE).
Since 1999, the proportion of sub-Saharan immigrants in total inflows rose from 10% to 17% (Beauchemin and Lessault, 2009). The migration of sub-Saharan Africans is, however, still vastly outnumbered by immigrants from Europe and North Africa. The numbers of immigrants coming from Mali and Senegal are far behind immigrants from Algeria, Morocco and Portugal.

Finally, the latest estimation by EUROSTAT reckoned that, in 2009, foreigners made up 5.8% (i.e. some 3,675,000) of the French population and that 2% came from the EU27 countries and 3.8% from outside EU27 (Eurostat Press Release, 16 December 2009).

The understanding of cultural diversity through the lens of nationality

The French naturalisation process tends to conceal cultural diversity

In France, the official census classifies the resident population under three categories:

- French-born;
- Naturalised French;
- Foreigners.

In 2007, 89.9% of the population were born with French nationality, 4.3% were naturalised French and 5.8% were foreigners (INSEE, 2007). The Nationality Code establishes statistical categories that exclude ‘origin’ once French nationality is obtained. Thus, once foreigners are naturalised, they are no longer referred to according to their origin; they have become French by naturalisation. As for their children, they become French automatically when they reach the age of 18 (provided that they have lived in France for five years by that age).
Therefore, ethnicity is invisible in French official statistics (Kastoryano, 2007: 69) and the very idea of recording ethnicity is usually deprecated with the argument that this would go against the universalist principle guaranteeing the equal treatment of individuals regardless of their religion, origin or race. However, the census of 1999 did introduce a distinction of origin in the sense that the ‘previous’ nationality of immigrants who had acquired French nationality started to be recorded in the system. In French statistics, nationality matters: officials draw lines between French nationals, naturalised French, and French with foreign ancestry. Instead of ethnicity, French official statistics make nationality, and to a certain extent national origin, visible.

The statistical device chosen by the State authorities to render the features of the French population reflects the framing of French discourse on immigration in the sense that it focuses on the question of nationality. According to the French model of integration, becoming a French national remains the pivot of the integration process (Guiraudon, 2005: 163). France keeps an open code of nationality allowing for a sizable number of foreigners to become French nationals according to several criteria (essentially five years’ residence, legal status and knowledge of the French language).

From the possibility of becoming a French national given to foreigners, the official discourse on immigration in France has shifted to the necessity for immigrants to become French. Adrian Favell has demonstrated how a ‘philosophy of integration’ spread out in French national discourse on immigration during the 1980s (Favell, 1998). He also points to the novelty of such a framing: ‘previously [before the mid-1980s], there was no connection of immigration with the idea of republican citizenship’ (Favell, 1998: 46). This can be explained by the fact that, before the 1980s, immigrants were essentially perceived from a socio-economic point of view and their incorporation in society was mainly an issue from an economic perspective (they were unskilled and more likely to be unemployed). Moreover, their stay in France was considered temporary.

Having said that, it is necessary to distinguish, on the one hand, immigrants from southern Europe, such as Portugal and Spain, whom the French authorities regarded as an important input for the population of the country at the beginning of the century and between the two wars; and, on the other hand, post-colonial migrants who were considered temporary workers and were not expected to assimilate easily, such as Algerians. In the early 1980s, when it became clear that post-colonial migrants would stay in France, their presence started to be perceived as problematic. The fact that their children automatically became French when they turned 18 became a focus of political discussion. Issues related to nationality and the process of nationality acquisition started to represent an important dimension of immigration issues.

**Immigration and the ‘national question’**

The topic of immigration publicly emerged in connection with the ‘national question’ in the late 1980s. Subsequent events testify to a reading of immigration issues that focuses on the process of nationality acquisition. In 1986, the government of Jacques Chirac (right-wing) introduced a new bill that would stop the automatic naturalisation of...
Although the declaration was easy to make, studies have shown that children of immigrants born in France did not always do so, for lack of adequate information on the issue (Weil, 2008: 272). Indeed, the belief that being born in France is sufficient to make one French (jus soli) is widespread among French people and second generation immigrants (Simon 2010).

These developments regarding nationality laws on the part of right-wing and then left-wing governments also demonstrate how the issue became politicised: on the one hand, the right-wing parties who advocate a more selective approach to nationality acquisition and on the other hand, the left-wing parties who stress the need to preserve open access to French nationality for the children of immigrants born in France.

The questions of citizenship and the naturalisation process have been at the core of the debates on diversity and integration for 30 years now. After the necessity for second generation immigrants to ‘declare’ their desire to be French, the French government tackled the possibility for all foreigners who have been living legally in France for a minimum of five years to acquire French nationality. With an open code of nationality, France does not grant nationality automatically to those requesting it: the average rate of acceptance from 2000 to 2004 was 77.4% and in 2004, for instance, 64,695 requests were granted out of 81,680, i.e. 79% (Ministère de l’Emploi, 2006: 81). The administration expects applicants to fulfil ‘assimilation criteria’ such as knowledge of the French language, stable financial resources and current residence in France, and also loyalty to and sharing of Republican values.

A 2003 law reinforced these conditions and added the requirement of proving sufficient knowledge about the rights and responsibilities of French citizenship. These rules leave major discretion to officials, and applicants can be subject to judgement as to whether their application is ‘suitable’ or not (Spire, 2005).

Regarding the possibility of adding new requirements to demonstrate the applicant’s commitment to French nationality, one should note that this is in constant discussion. Following a European trend, the French government considered the possibility of introducing civic tests when implementing the New Reception and Integration Contract (Nouveau contrat d’accueil et d’intégration). The tests were not introduced but, since 2007, the integration of immigrants has been supervised by the National Office for Immigration and Integration (Office français de l’immigration et de l’intégration). Newly arrived immigrants – with a legal status – are encouraged through this ‘contract’ to learn French and acquire knowledge of French laws. While naturalisation is not obligatory the compulsory steps that each foreigner should take make it clear that it is a desirable outcome.

In 2007, the newly elected President Sarkozy created a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, clearly articulating the link between the issue of immigration and that of nationality. However, the Ministry oversaw activities pertaining to immigration regulation and social aid that had previously been dealt with by existing administrative units. In 2009, the Minister launched a series of debates to take place in all regions of France.

7. Although the declaration was easy to make, studies have shown that children of immigrants born in France did not always do so, for lack of adequate information on the issue (Weil, 2008: 272). Indeed, the belief that being born in France is sufficient to make one French (jus soli) is widespread among French people and second generation immigrants (Simon 2010).

the country on French national identity (*Le Monde*, 2 November 2009). The creation of such a ministry was much criticised and the campaign of debates attracted considerable negative coverage. After three years, the Ministry of Immigration and National Identity was abolished and the regulation of immigration flows was re-assigned to the Ministry of the Interior in November 2010.

Finally, in a speech delivered in response to violence which occurred during the summer of 2010 in Grenoble (south-east France), President Nicolas Sarkozy announced the possibility of stripping offenders of their French nationality provided that they had been naturalised in the previous ten years. This last attempt not only to limit access to nationality but to threaten to withdraw it shows how the process of nationality acquisition is again and again called into question in response to what is perceived as a challenge related to the diversity of the society.

**The understanding of religious diversity through laïcité**

*The enforcement of laïcité aims at organising the co-existence of various religious faiths*

There are no official statistics that record religious affiliation in the French population. However, it is fair to say that the French population is mainly Catholic. Jews, Protestants and Muslims are ‘religious minorities’ in France. As a matter of fact, according to D. Lochak while the official discourse rejects the notion of minorities, the term ‘minority’ has appeared in legal texts in reference to ‘religious minorities’ since the 1789 Revolution (Lochak, 1989).

Laïcité, defined as the separation of Church and State in all things pertaining to public life, seems to be the principle that provides for the co-existence of various religious faiths in French society. It is embodied in the 1905 law separating Church and State and rules out any official representation of religion in public places. It also implies that religious affiliations are not considered a legitimate basis for the identification of groups.

In other words, there is no official recognition of religious affiliation. This is understood as a way to guarantee the neutrality of the State and the equal treatment of individuals on the basis of citizenship.

*The reassessment of laïcité to tackle the challenge of Islam*

In a context where the acknowledgement of various religious affiliations is little articulated in the public sphere, the formation of a Muslim minority is mainly tackled through the scope of laïcité. As such, although laïcité as a principle emerged from the Enlightenment and was designed to diminish the power of the Catholic Church over French society, the notion has been increasingly discussed in connection with Islam in the past two decades. It is given a narrow interpretation in the public debate: although it is a tool to deal with religious diversity in general, it is mainly used as a mean to target Islam. This focus on Islam when laïcité is discussed is an important feature to understand how religious diversity is perceived in French society.
The approach to issues pertaining to Islam in terms of laïcité can be traced back to the first headscarf affair that took place in 1989 in Creil, an outer suburb of Paris, when the principal of a secondary school took the decision to exclude three girls because he considered that their Muslim headscarves were religious symbols and undermined the principle of laïcité. The State Council, however, ruled that the wearing of the headscarf was ‘not contradictory to the values of the secular and republican school’ and left it to the teachers and school heads to decide whether or not pupils were using this as an instrument of proselytism and disturbance of school activities. The 1989 interpretation of laïcité by the State Council was later challenged and given a more restrictive twist with the establishment of the Stasi Commission in 2003 and the passing of the 2004 law forbidding the wearing of ‘ostentatious’ religious signs such as Muslim headscarves in schools.

The restrictive interpretation of laïcité was confirmed in 2010 with the debate and the passing of a law banning the wearing of the full Islamic veil in public. Despite the limited number of women reported as wearing the full Islamic veil, the phenomenon was widely constructed as an issue by the media and politicians. In contrast with the headscarf affair and the sequels that first arose from the practice of teachers in school and then reached the political agenda, the ‘burqa affair’ was brought about by members of parliament (on the initiative of André Guérin, Communist deputy from the Lyon region of south-east France), in connection with a declaration in 2009 by President Sarkozy, who was reported saying that ‘the burqa was not welcome in the Republic’. That the media played an important role in spreading the image of a threatening Islam in the previous headscarf affairs has already been demonstrated (Deltombe, 2005; Lorcerie, 2005; Tevenian, 2005). However, in the case of the ‘burqa affair’, the role of the media and politicians is even stronger in the sense that the number of women wearing the full Islamic veil is limited.

Moreover, it is important to note that the wearing of the full Islamic veil is advocated mainly by Salafist groups. These are Islamic groups who advocate a strict observance of Islam developed in the past ten years and come from Saudi Arabia. Their practice of Islam has little to do with the more traditional forms of Islam practised by North African immigrants (Roy, 2010). The presence of women wearing the full Islamic veil in France is thus related to the internationalisation of fundamentalist forms of Islam rather than with the successive waves of immigrants who came from North Africa. Yet the presentation of the ‘burqa ban’ in connection with immigration and the question of national identity point at the Muslim population in France and contribute to their construction as foreign to French identity.

The difficulties in accommodating Muslims in France stem from this construction of Islam as foreign to French identity. Even though the French State has found ways to accommodate Jews and Protestants in the past, it is making it harder for Muslims. It has been integrating Islam in a ‘pragmatic handling of differences’ that consisted of ‘gradually introducing the minimal dose of institutionalisation needed for a concrete resolution of the practical problems created by the existence of “minority groups”’ (Lochak, 1989). As such, the Council of Moslems of France was recognised by Interior Minister Charles Pasqua in 1994 and, in 2003, the French Council for the Muslim Religion (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman) was created.
Although the principle of laïcité emerged in 1789 as a way to exclude the power of the Catholic Church from the French State and has been associated with a strong anti-Catholic stance in France, it is now increasingly discussed in connection with Islam. The reassessment of laïcité in public policies and public debate is an important feature of the understanding of religious diversity in France. It also shows how Islam is perceived as a challenging dimension of French religious diversity.

**Challenging identities in the French context**

In this part, we list the different groups that contribute to the diversity of the French population in order to bring out the types of identities that can be considered as challenging. In the French republican context, there is no recognition of the existence of sub-groups and the only difference recorded in official statistics is that of nationality (cf. supra). Thus, with these constraints in mind, we will detail the various groups of immigrants according to their nationality, but we will also go beyond this juridical view and discuss the existence of ‘visible minorities’ in French society that are not recorded by the census. We will discuss Islam and skin colour as essential features of the construction of the Other in France. Lastly, we will detail the specific case of the Roma community in France.

**Immigrants**

Immigrants are individuals who were born abroad to non-French parents and are currently residing in France. Immigrants may hold French nationality that they acquired after immigrating to France (in 2004-05, 2 million immigrants held French nationality). There were 4.9 million foreign-born in 2004 (INSEE, 2006), i.e. 8.1% of the population. Of those foreign-born, 1.7 million are from Europe (40%), 1.5 million from the Maghreb (31%) and 1.4 million from the rest of the world. 570,000 are from sub-Saharan Africa (of which 70% come from a former colonial country); 48% are Asian and 16% are from Turkey. (See Figure 1 supra.)

Immigrants from the EU are the largest category but fall into a variety of nationalities. Moreover, considering the construction of the Other in the French context, immigrants coming from outside Europe are the most likely to be seen as different and as tending to challenge the perception of diversity in French society. The largest groups are therefore: North-African immigrants, Sub-Saharan Africans, Asians and immigrants from Turkey.

1. **North-African immigrants (1,500,000 in 2004)**

North-African immigrants are mainly composed of nationals from Morocco and Algeria and, in smaller numbers, nationals from Tunisia. During the colonial time, Algerians, but also Moroccans, were identified as the indigenous population and were recruited to work in low-skill jobs (construction, mines, agriculture) starting in the interwar period. The end of colonial rule, in 1956 for Tunisia and Morocco and in 1962 for Algeria, did not stop the influx of immigrants to France, because of difficult economic conditions in the newly independent countries and the fact that former colonial subjects enjoyed a specific status in France (especially Algerians). Despite common representations of immigrant populations as essentially composed of male workers, families settled, starting in the 1960s. The end of economic
migration in 1974 only intensified immigrants’ recourse to family reunification but did not start the process of settlement per se. Despite the restrictions on immigration into France, the number of Algerians and Moroccans is still growing: + 100,000 since 1999, for each nationality. The family members that nationals from Algeria and Moroccans may have in France allow them to come to France under the family reunification regime. This can account for their growing number, along with the strong links that the countries still have in the economic and educational fields.20

2. Sub-Saharan African immigrants (570,000 in 2004)

Seven out of 10 immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa come from country formerly ruled by the French State (Mali, Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire and Cameroon).21 In the 1960s, France signed bilateral agreements with the newly independent countries that secured French economic interests in those countries, while, in exchange, it guaranteed the free circulation of their nationals (Viet, 1998: 219). This favoured the migration of African immigrants to France, although in small numbers. In 1962, there were 22,000 immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa against 570,000 in 2004. Today, Senegalese and Malian nationals account for the larger groups of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa (57,000 and 48,000 in 2005 respectively).

Sub-Saharan African immigrants have been present in small number in the past decades. Their number has however been increasing since the last census of 1999 (+45%) and they have attracted much media and political attention, with the common figure of the clandestine immigrant who embarks on a long and dangerous journey to reach France, often illegally. However, it is important to note that contrary to the common image circulated by the media, sub-Saharan African immigrants only accounted for 30% of the illegal immigrants who applied for a regularisation procedure between 1999 and 2006; 30% were from North Africa, 16% from Asia and 12.3% from America (Beauchemin and Lessault, 2009).

3. Asian immigrants (258,000 in 2004)

The number of immigrants from Asia has been increasing since the last national census of 1999. While the number of immigrants from Vietnam is stable, the Chinese community is growing (from 27,826 in 1999 to 61,000 in 205). Immigrants coming from South East Asia and political refugees fleeing the conflict in Sri Lanka also account for a growing number of Asian immigrants in France (mainly concentrated in the Paris region).

4. Immigrants from Turkey (222,000 in 2004)

Immigrants from Turkey account for 4% of the immigrant population as a whole. Since France signed a bilateral agreement in 1966, there has been a constant and growing community of immigrants in France (see Figure 2).

Visible minorities: French of North African and African descent, French of Caribbean ancestry

As French nationals, descendants of immigrants and people from the overseas departments are not recorded in official statistics. Yet, surveys on portions of this population show that they can be the target of
discriminatory practices (Beauchemin et al., 2010). We argue that they belong to ‘visible minorities’ and for this reason should be analysed as carrying challenging identities. What are their main features? Why are they perceived as different from the rest of the society? We argue here that skin colour and a construction of Muslims as ethnically different from French identity have created visible minorities in France that are perceived as challenging identities.

The example of a recent survey on discrimination in France is an interesting case in point to outline the main features that are regarded as challenging for the rest of French society.23 According to this survey, children of French persons born in the overseas departments and also sub-Saharan African immigrants mention skin colour well ahead of ethnic origin or nationality (73% and 88% respectively) (Beauchemin et al., 2010: 4). This shows that when French people are black they are perceived as different from the rest of the society and that this might expose them to discriminatory practices. It confirms that being ‘black’ in France is perceived as a challenging identity (Ndiaye, 2008). Furthermore, second generation immigrants who are not black declare that ethnicity – phrased in terms of origin or nationality in the survey – is the main reason why they suffer discrimination. Among these second generations, the majority were born of North African parents.

Can we speak of a North-African minority in France, and what is the role of Islam as a distinctive feature for this minority? Can we speak of a Muslim minority in France?

In France, North Africans are perceived as different because of a process of differentiation that dates back to the colonial period and the decolonisation wars (Stora, 1998). Islam played an important role and was used more as an ethnic marker than in reference to a religious practice in constructing North Africans as essentially different (Weil, 2008). Ethnicity and religious affiliation have been used to differentiate North Africans from the French population in a manner that parallels a process of racial construction. The category ‘race’ is seldom used in the French context. However, considering that race is a social construct that has a close connection to ‘racism’ as an ideology or an attitude, one may argue that North Africans have been ‘racialised’ because of their ethnicity and religion in France. Moreover, in current political and media discourses the category ‘Muslim’ operates as a ‘neo-ethnic’ rather than a religious category to refer to immigrants with an African or Asian background (Roy, 2010).

However, we would point out that the category ‘Muslim’ belongs largely to the English-speaking world.24 Only 59% of French people with North African, African and Turkish descent identify themselves as Muslim (Tiberj and Brouard, 2006). This stems from the fact that there is a low level of assertion of religious affiliation as a form of political identity in France and respondents mainly link Islam to a religious practice. When they do not consider themselves practising Muslims they tend not to identify themselves as Muslims (Tiberj and Brouard, 2006). This should lead us to take the figure ‘6 million Muslims living in France’ with caution.25 This number derives from the number of immigrants and their descendants who come from a country where Islam is the predominant religion (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and to a certain extent Senegal). It does not, however, entail that 6 million people in France identify themselves as Muslim, or as belonging to a Muslim community. It is therefore difficult to speak of a Muslim minority in France and it seems more accurate, historically, to speak of a North African minority.

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23. TeO - Survey on the impact of origins: life histories of immigrants, immigrants’ descendants and native French people. Launched in 2005, the TeO survey covered a large sample of 24,000 individuals composed of immigrants, descendants of immigrants, French citizens from the overseas departments and members of the majority population. For more information, see: http://www.ined.fr/en/current_researchs/research_projects/majors_projects/bdd/projet/P0835/ [last access: 15/12/2011]


Finally, regarding Blacks, African immigrants may be Muslims or Christians, and so, as a visible minority, they overlap with the Muslim minority. Despite attempts to identify a ‘Muslim effect’ among Africans in France (Adida et al., 2010), skin colour might be a stronger marker than their religion.

Therefore, it is appropriate to talk about a North African minority (immigrants from North Africa and French people of North African descent) on the one hand, and a ‘black’ minority (immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, French people of African descent and French people from the overseas départements) on the other hand. Furthermore, the emergence of a recent discourse on diversity in France has been connected to the affirmation of a black identity.

The Roma community

The Roma community in France is composed of French nationals who are usually referred to as ‘travellers’ (gens du voyage) in administrative documents so as to avoid the derogatory term ‘gypsies’ (gitans). It also refers to one of their specific traits, which is to be nomadic and to have no permanent residence – although this is changing and 85% of them are settled. While they may be referred to as the ‘Roma community’ of France, the ‘travellers’ encompass various minorities (Rom, Gitan and Manouche). They trace their roots to the nomadic people who came originally from India and speak a language different from French.

There are no official statistics that record the number of people from the Roma community in France and estimations vary. A 1969 law defines a specific status for ‘travellers’, who can hold a ‘travel pass’ (titre de circulation). In 2002, 156,282 people held this document. However, pass holders have to be older than 16 and some settled families do not have passes. The number of 156,282 is therefore an underestimation of the Roma community in France. Estimates for the total Roma community vary from 250,000 to 400,000 people, that is 0.5% of the population (Robert, 2006: 11).

The Roma community of France is not homogenous but composed of different minorities; they are, however, all exposed to discrimination and suffer from socioeconomic disadvantages (Robert, 2006: 9). The expulsion of Roma people of Romania by the French government has introduced some confusion regarding the different Roma communities and there has been an increase in the stigmatisation of the community in general (Le Monde, 20 October 2010).

How are tolerance and equality understood in France?

Notions of equality and tolerance towards diversity

In France, it is usually assumed that the best way to achieve equality is to ignore cultural and religious differences. There should be no recognition of differences. This is linked to the belief that all matters pertaining to public life should be considered outside of the articulation of group identities, in a vertical relationship between the individual and the State.
The French strategy to reach equality: making difference ‘invisible’

The Republican creed is that equality will be achieved by making difference invisible. This is generally done by excluding any means of recording differences among individuals in their interaction with public authorities (social security, local office for social housing, education, employment). By rendering difference invisible, the official discourse bypasses the acknowledgement of differences.

One may point out to an exception to this prevailing view: in 1981, the Socialist Party won the presidential election with a programme that advocated the ‘Right to be Different’. This discourse did not directly designate immigrant groups. It was used to implement various types of policy (for instance, giving more power to regional governments in a perspective that valued the ‘regional differences’ of the country). Yet it had implications for the acknowledgement of the diversity of the population resulting from immigration to France. At the level of political discourse, the recognition of the multicultural character of the society emerged, especially when the demand for equal treatment of second generation immigrants made itself heard (Leveau and Wihtol de Wenden, 2001; Escafre-Dublet, 2010).

At the level of public policies, one may observe a higher level of concern for minority issues. The expression of regional cultures, for instance was favoured by the Ministry of Culture (Giordan, 1982). A report to establish the cultural needs of immigrants in school was commissioned by the Ministry of Education (Berque, 1985). Claims for the representation of minority interests were able to be articulated and this resulted in the emergence of a prolific anti-racist movement with organisations such as SOS-racism and France plus. The experience was short-lived, however. The extreme right parties turned the discourse on the Right to be Different against anti-racist groups and claimed the ‘Right to be Different, yes, but at home’, calling for the exclusion of immigrants and their return to their country of origin.

The short-lived experience of the promotion of the Right to Difference in France had a long lasting effect. It was marked by the success of the extremist party, the National Front (Front national), whenever difference is acknowledged. Today, it remains an important dynamic to bear in mind when considering discourses on difference in France: the racist discourse articulated by the Front national is still seen as the reverse side of the recognition of cultural differences. This is, for instance, exemplified in the distrust towards communitarianism (communautarisme), i.e. a form of cultural separatism considered as the inevitable outcome of group recognition and the promotion of cultural differences.

The French understanding of tolerance towards religious diversity: laïcité

The notion of tolerance is linked to religious tolerance. The Edict of Nantes (1598), for instance, was labelled an Edict of Tolerance and it recognised freedom of religious belief for Protestants in France. Subsequently, the concept of laïcité has been the main notion through which to understand tolerance for religious diversity in France. It is not a passive acceptance of the practice of the Other, but an active principle that keeps all religious expressions in the private sphere (Kintzler, 1998).
The concept of laïcité emerged from the thinking of the Enlightenment and the need to expel the power of the Church from all matters pertaining to public life. Throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries, advocates of the implementation of laïcité in France have also been anti-religion militants. They have conveyed the idea that by making religion invisible in French public life, the State could ensure that individuals could be treated equally. Because of the power that the Catholic Church used to represent in French society, they have contended that religious expressions are a threat to the good functioning of democracy. As such, laïcité provides for the right to belief and disbelief of all individuals, so that no member of a religious group can be favoured over individuals who do not profess any religious faith. It is also a way to protect individuals from the intolerance of religions. The state of tolerance in France is seen as best achieved through the invisibility of religious expressions in public debates and political life. This guarantees the neutrality of the State and makes the equal treatment of individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation, possible.

Laïcité and equality in practice

Despite a well-articulated discourse on equality in France, instances of discrimination are reported (Meurs et al., 2006). Moreover, strategies to implement positive actions towards specific groups have been deployed, although they have targeted individuals identified mainly on socioeconomic criteria. The analysis of policy results and attitudes towards difference demonstrates the downside of making difference invisible: a low level of articulation of ethnic and cultural difference lead to situations of double standards and ethnic ascriptions.

The policies to promote equality and combat discrimination

In practice, a long history of racist incidents and the recent exposure of discrimination on the labour market through statistical surveys have pointed to the difficulty of guaranteeing equal treatment of individuals in French society (Meurs, Pailhé and Simon, 2006). Already in 1998, the left-wing government of Lionel Jospin had acknowledged the failure of the strategy of integration (Haut Conseil à l’Intégration, 1998) and a critique had emerged (Belorgey, 1999). Following the impetus of the EU, the French government established a High Authority to fight discrimination and promote equality (Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l’égalité, HALDE) in 2004. Despite a change in framing (from integration to anti-discrimination), the High Authority remains reluctant to adopt a strategy to acknowledge differences among individuals (Lépinard and Simon, 2008). Moreover, the EU directive advocates the monitoring of discrimination practices, which is difficult given the lack of ethnic data in France. The debate that emerged in 2008 on the collection of ethnic statistics is another example of the challenge to address issues resulting from the diversity of the population (Simon, 2008). In a country where colour blindness is the rule, the difficulty of identifying individuals according to their ethnic traits prevents the measurement of the scale of discrimination practices. The difficulty of collecting ethnic data stems from the fact that the racial construction of visible minorities is little acknowledged.
because the category of race is banned from scientific discourse on differences (Badinter and Lebras, eds: 2010).

Finally, in the implementation of policy to enforce equality, France has designed positive actions targeting specific groups, but policy makers have relied exclusively on social criteria. This is the case for Priority Education Zones (ZEP), which were created in 1984 to bring more educational resources to specific areas that were identified as disadvantaged (Glasman, 2000). It was in keeping with the official discourse on republican integration and the refusal of any specific treatment according to ethnic or cultural difference. The policy consisted mainly in a redistribution of resources (concretely, schools that fell into the ZEP category had extra budgets) and did not entail tackling difference from a cultural or even a religious point of view. However, sociological studies have shown that educational practitioners resort to powerful categorisation in terms of ethnicity, cultural traits and religious affiliation (Lorcerie, 2003). One may therefore argue that the official silence on migration-related diversity has favoured the unofficial development of ethnic and cultural categorisations in educational practices.

**Laïcité in practice**

In practice, *laïcité* means that there are no religious signs in public places. Civil servants, also, should not wear religious signs because the exercise of public service should be done regardless of any political or religious affiliation. *Laïcité* does not only apply to the expression of religious faith, it is a law that is linked to the notion of freedom of expression and therefore also applies to the expression of political opinion. As such, the application of *laïcité* in French state schools prevents teachers from expressing religious and political opinions in class.

However, *laïcité* has been put into practice in a mainly Catholic country. This means that since its inclusion in the Ferry law of 1882 and its institutionalisation in the 1905 law, the Catholic Church has fought to maintain some of its positions (for the preservation of its patrimony and its network of parishes). Protestants, Jews and Muslims were not as numerous and as powerful. This explains why Catholicism is more present in French society. For instance, while religious education cannot take place in state schools, it has been the practice to establish chaplaincies for Catholics where pupils can discuss religion and have prayer groups as long as they do not proselytise or disrupt the normal functioning of the school.

Moreover, although the application of *laïcité* is incumbent on all citizens in France, exceptions were made in the colonies. For instance, *laïcité* was not applied as such in Algeria. The State had a say on the organisation of Islam because the colonial administration wanted to keep its control over the administration of the Muslim religion (Achi, 2004). Thus, from a historical perspective, the enforcement of *laïcité* has had slightly different applications depending on the religion (Weil, 2007).

The fact that the application of *laïcité* is currently mainly targeting Islam in France is therefore a manifestation of the different treatment that each religion receives and shows that the state is not neutral towards all religions (Laborde, 2008). Some argue that it is problematic because the debate on *laïcité* has fostered a sharp return of assimilationism and
has formed part of a growing ‘Islamophobia’ (Geisser, 2003). One can observe that laïcité has been mentioned several times by government officials to address the question of Islam in France. This was the case with the President’s advocacy of a ‘positive laïcité’ (laïcité positive), arguing that laïcité was not enough. Philosophers and political theorists, however, have answered that the concept of laïcité is in itself positive, in the sense that it is substantial and protects the right of belief and unbelief (Kintzler, 1998).

Furthermore, public opinion surveys show a change in the understanding of laïcité in the French population. Whereas laïcité used to be linked to leftist political orientations and mainly associated with people who were in opposition to the Catholic Church, in recent years, people who recognise laïcité as an important value for them are also people who declare anti-immigrant feelings and position themselves on the right of the political spectrum (Barthélemy and Michelat, 2007).

Concluding remarks

France’s response to the formation of a diverse population has been to leave particular identities outside the public sphere and promote the neutrality of the State towards any kind of religious and ethnic affiliations. This has been seen as the best way to guarantee the equal treatment of individuals, in a vertical relationship between them and the State. In practice it has prevented the expression of religious and ethnic affiliation in many instances of public life, such as education and politics. The promotion of equality through invisibility has had some shortcomings, however, and the exposure of discrimination or the identification of racial bias against Muslim populations in France shows how processes of ethnic ascription and racial construction are in play.

In this report we have listed the different groups that contribute to the diversity of the French population and put in historical perspective the various features that make the identities of these groups challenging (from a religious or ethnic point of view). We have identified the elements of French discourse that pertain to the question of diversity and tolerance. In particular, the notions of national identity and laïcité have been put forward in recent years to deal with issues that are related to the diversity of the French population.

The analysis of the discourse and of historical developments regarding national identity and laïcité makes it possible to identify the main elements that structure toleration and the logic of recognition in France.

- Toleration in France is not so much about passively accepting that others may have practices that the majority population disapproves of. Rather, the practice of tolerance, toleration, is an active principle that excludes the expression of religious and/or ethnic affiliation from the public space in order to guarantee its neutrality. This is, for instance, conveyed through the notion of laïcité.
- The exclusion of religious practices from the public sphere should not be mistaken for the disapproval of religious affiliation in general. The goal is first and foremost to guarantee the equal treatment of all individuals in the public sphere; in the private sphere one is free to express any kind of religious or ethnic affiliation. However, due to the special

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28. “Toleration: Individuals, groups and practices who seek or for whom/ which claims of toleration are being made and to whom/which toleration is granted, and the reasons given in favour of or against toleration” (Dobbernack, Modood 2011: 32).
position of the Catholic Church in the implementation of laïcité, one may identify a difference of treatment towards minority religions in France (Islam, Protestantism and Judaism). This may lead to claims of non-toleration\textsuperscript{29} of certain religious practices in specific cases.

- The promotion of equality through invisibility represents a challenge in analysing the question of recognition in the French context. There is no such thing as the identification of groups, and the recognition of groups’ affiliations or the acknowledgement of their specific needs is not relevant for how the society operates. To develop the discussion beyond the notion of toleration therefore requires extending the concept of recognition to the notion of respect as equal and admission as normal.\textsuperscript{30} The challenges then lies in the acknowledgement that the diversity of the population is represented in the national community and is seen as normal. The value discourse on national identity, for instance, is deeply connected to that logic: by pointing to differences that are not compatible with the national identity, actors are drawing invisible boundaries. Islam does not make up the whole challenge of diversity in France. Cultural diversity encompasses broader challenges such as the recognition of immigration as a valuable input to the French national narrative.

### Bibliography


