



A French Dilemma

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A French dilemma:

Anti-discrimination policies and the “Republican model”

Introduction

It is widely assumed that integration policies and identity politics in France have been shaped by a specific conception of nationality and citizenship (the so-called republican model) that entails a direct State-individual relationship and a moral commitment to universal values (the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen since the French Revolution, and later on, secularism). The ideal of universalism founding the construction of the nation at the time of the French Revolution has legitimised assimilationist policies for foreigners and minorities. The French republican legend that made France the birthplace of fundamental human rights has fuelled the belief that all men would benefit from belonging to the nation embodying universality. In the French republican definition of citizenship, any ethnic or racial distinctive identity is therefore essentially regarded as an obstacle to emancipation

(Citron, 2008). The opposition between this model and one of multiculturalism, which would allow for the expression of distinct cultural and religious communities in the public space, is pervasive in French discourse on immigration and immigrants. Domestic minorities and colonised peoples are to be grateful for the assimilationist policies that put them on the right track to civilisation and modernity.

This paper explores the gap that exists between the principles put forward by the French model and how these are effectively implemented in immigration policies. The focus is on how the attempt to overcome this contradiction has led to anti-discrimination policies that have in return produced what could be characterized, in the words of G. Myrdal (1944), as a French dilemma. The paper will then move onto examining the identity claims developed by two ethnic minority organizations, by means of a Barthian Us and Them dichotomy.

The Republican model: myths and reality

A wide gap exists between the supposedly typical French model of assimilation and its actual implementation throughout the history of France. At the very least, this model has been applied in different ways depending on the era and/or the target populations. In the inter-war period, immigration specialist Georges Mauco, a scholar as well as a politician, did not use the word *assimilation* to refer to an ideal inclusive conception of the nation, but instead the word *assimilability*, in a quite opposite meaning, i.e. a property attached to different immigrant groups, based on ethnic and racial criteria (Mauco, 1932). In the 1970s, the French State not only recognized specific sub-identities amongst immigrants, but also put this recognition

into institutional practice (e.g. introducing special TV broadcasts for foreigners or special school classes for immigrant children in their mother tongue), in anticipation of these un-wanted populations returning (after a short period) to their country of origin.

Only during the 1980s, with the economic crisis and the growing awareness of the stable settlement in France of populations from the former French colonial empire, did the reference to ‘assimilation’ as a French model become widespread in political discourse. In 1984, the book by Griotteray, a right-wing conservative politician, used this notion not to contrast it with a foreign model such as American or British multiculturalism but instead to oppose past and present immigration in France and underline the gap between former European immigrants willing to integrate in French society, and more recent ones, from the Maghreb, supposedly less willing (Griotteray, 1984).

In other words, the so-called French model of assimilation was exalted as typically French when used in rhetorical discourse of exclusionism. Even the left wing, which was aware of the possible racist use of this notion and preferred the more neutral word of integration, nevertheless became trapped in the linguistic game of the so-called “crisis” of the French model.

During the 1980s, the whole debate on immigration focused on this rhetoric of the crisis of the French model, either to deny the will and ability of new migrants to follow the same trajectory of integration so successfully achieved by their Italian, Belgian, Polish and Spanish predecessors, or, in a liberal and optimistic view (see

other books published in the same year as Griotteray's: Gaspard et Servan-Schreiber, 1984; Stasi, 1984) to assert the will and ability of new migrants to do the same.

Facing the rise of the National Front and worried by the electoral success that the migration issue was yielding to this ultra-right party, the whole political community soon adopted the vision of immigration as a "social problem" and made proposals for its resolution.

The measures proposed by right-wing politicians aimed to preserve the purity of French nationality by limiting the conditions of its acquisition to those who really "deserve" it. In this aim, proposals were made in 1986 to reform the Nationality Act, planning to replace the automatic acquisition of nationality (granted by the *jus soli*) with voluntary adherence by the candidates. This measure (passed in the Nationality Act in 1993) was supposed to correspond to the French republican, elective conception of the Nation. However, its main effect was to raise a strong feeling of suspicion towards the youth of the second generation. They were implicitly (or explicitly in the ultra-right anti-immigration rhetoric) accused of being false citizens, seeking to acquire nationality only for identity documents.

According to the left wing, new measures were to be more inclusive than exclusive and efforts had to be made to improve the conditions of integration of immigrant populations. At the beginning of the 1990s, the socialist government created a State Secretary for Integration (the direction of which was symbolically attributed to a Frenchman of African origin, depicted as a model of successful assimilation), and the

task of rethinking integration policy was attributed to a special institution, the High Council for Integration (HCI).

Beyond the ideological and political opposition between these two exclusive or inclusive orientations, both the right and the left implicitly assumed that the failure of integration was due to the immigrant population itself, to their cultural (religious, familial) specificity or lack of adherence to the social contract linking members of the nation.

We could therefore almost contend that the French model emerged as such in the public space simultaneously with the awareness of its crisis, the constant reference to the model being used to summon immigrants to save it from its crisis state. It is not enough to underline the gap between the (assimilationist) ideal model and the (culturalized or racialized) actual State practices (Schain, 1999). It must be added that during this period the rhetorical use of the republican model in the so-called integration policies took part in the social representation of the newcomers as, if not explicitly belonging to a different race, a radically different cultural species.

There is clear evidence for this in the reports of the HCI (see Bertossi in this volume), created during the 1990s under left-wing government. The task of the Council was to make proposals about the social conditions of immigrant integration, but the leading topics of the reports focused on the cultural and familial peculiarities of the immigrant populations (especially those linked to Islam, such as polygamy), and failed to consider the conditions favouring social mobility and economic

integration or the policy changes that might be needed to prevent racism or discrimination.

In fact, the HCI attempted to renew the republican model, by reconciling the need for recognition of cultural diversity and the call for minority group members to comply with French norms, particularly concerning the status of women and family relationships.

In its 1995 report, the HCI strongly reaffirmed the inviolable principles of the republican model and its superiority over a model promoting community identities, while developing a conciliatory and tolerant attitude toward immigrant cultures, in particular Islam which should not, the report insists, be considered incompatible with integration. The report nonetheless shows a picture of “African” and “Maghreb” immigrant families from which stem the stigmatising stereotypes that were recycled ten years later in comments regarding the revolts in the outer-cities. Such stereotypes include the breakdown of familial ties encouraged by polygamy, the failure of the father to take responsibility for the children who are “raised in the streets” and generally an anomic familial situation to such an extent that for these children of immigrants, “the first encounter with the rules of social life takes place in the school” (HCI, 1995: 21).

The inventory of practices “contrary to the fundamental rules of French society”, which the immigrants must consequently banish in return for the benevolent hospitality of their culture by the Republic, centres exclusively on cultural specificities attributed to Muslim or African populations : the forced marriage of

girls, the seclusion of housewives, the repudiation of wives or the withdrawal of girls from school, polygamy (of which the study by Michelle Tribalat (1995), drawn upon by the HCI, nonetheless points out the statistical insignificance), the caretaking of other family members' children (assumed to be a source of mistreatment), the influence of "traditional chefferies and groups" (HCI, 1995: 23).

We thus find in the debates on the crisis of the republican model, and the efforts to overcome it, evidence of hostility toward those that do not conform to the universalist political culture. This hostility, according to Lamont (2000), is a particular form of racism generated by the French model. What allows qualifying this hostility as racism, particularly when directed toward citizens of former colonies, is that opposition to this model is not viewed as an alternative proposition to integration from within a "community of citizens" (Schnapper, 1994), but rather as incompetence (with a trace of archaism) on the part of those who remained under "the empire of traditions" (Amselle, 1996).

A French dilemma: saving the "republican model" and fighting against racial discrimination

Only at the end of the 1990s, when the gap between this culture-based conception of integration and the reality of social exclusion became clear, did the issue of racial discrimination emerge for the first time in France as a social problem requiring specific policies. The 1998 report of the HCI entitled *Lutte contre les discriminations* (Fight against discrimination) contrasted sharply with the previous ones (on this shift, see Bertossi in this volume). It was followed by two official meetings on the

topic of discrimination organized by the Ministry of Employment: a “workshop on racial discriminations at work” in May 1999, and a meeting on “citizenship and the struggle against discriminations” in March 2000.

The speeches of the socialist Employment Minister of the time, Martine Aubry, clearly marked a turning point. Not only the break with the former culture-based conception of integration was clearly and plainly acknowledged, but also the concept of integration itself was rejected as contrary to the republican model:

"To tell the truth, we should think of another concept : today, the question is not so much about integration – the people we deal with have been culturally integrated for a long time – but is about the struggle against discrimination and for equal rights" (Aubry, 1999, our translation).

Such an assertion changes dramatically the public representation of the “immigration problem” as it emphasizes the process of exclusion by members of the majority rather than the cultural inadequacy of minority groups. It must be noted that this frame shift from the problem of integration to that of discrimination was in no way a conversion to policies of multiculturalism which continue to be regarded as “un-French” and stigmatized as overly community-oriented, or “communautariste”¹.

¹ This ideological rejection of the so called “communautarisme” doesn’t prevent policy makers from making use of quasi ethnic categories in the actual management of social problems. Since the beginning of the 1990s, it has become usual to set bearers of a particular ethnic identity in a professional role (“grand-frères”, “femmes relais”, “médiateurs”) aiming at social pacification in the inner cities or in public transportation. It would, however, be misleading to attribute this kind of ethnic management to the influence of “foreign experiments” (expression used in the French political

"I have always said that foreign experiments, mainly Anglo-Saxon ones (...) could not be imported into France. But, if we are unable to react, such claims will become more and more pressing" (Aubry, 1999, our translation).

Anti-discrimination policy was therefore to be understood as an attempt to preserve the myth of a French republican model based on individual commitment to the national contract. By giving young people of immigrant origin the tools to fight against inequality and racism, the new policy aimed to restore faith in the nation-state, trust being the basic condition for their self-identification as individual citizens rather than as members of any given minority group².

The commitment to fighting racial discrimination while attempting simultaneously to

vocabulary to dismiss the model of multiculturalism). As Amselle (1996) pointed out, the French assimilationist doctrine has always taken cultural difference into account, and we have seen that a diffuse culturalism (associating stereotyped cultural features with "ethnic" populations) pervaded the whole assimilationist discourse of the HCI.

² This individual-based understanding of the anti-discrimination policy in terms of the republican assimilationist model might have worked successfully, had it occurred twenty years earlier. The speech by Martine Aubry would have been a perfectly appropriate answer to the republican-spirited rallying of the second generation North African immigrants in the 1980s (i.e. the March for Equality, *la Marche pour l'égalité*, 1983). Yet between these movements requesting citizenship and the acknowledgement of discriminations by the French government in 2000, there was a chronological gap, similar to the "missed appointment" suggested by Olivier Masclet (2003) in reference to the relationship between outer-cities and the political left on a local level. In those twenty years, disillusion and the feeling of betrayal grew among the second (or even third) generation faced with racism, police harassment and job discrimination. The discontent, expressed sporadically through urban riots, eventually led to the "outer-city revolt" of fall 2005.

preserve the foundations of France's traditional republican model of integration led to an ambiguous definition of the issue (i.e. racial discrimination vs. social exclusion) and persistent ambivalence about which policies to pursue and which social groups to target specifically (Simon, 2000).

Looking at anti-discrimination discourse and policies since the early 2000s, there is strong evidence of such ambivalence and indecision in terms of how to label those suffering from discrimination. The latter are often readily ethnically or racially categorised when referred to in the general context of the 'moral crusade' against racism, which calls upon people's mobilisation to fight racial discrimination. Categories such as "Arabic", "Gypsies", "Blacks", "Asians" or "Coloured People" appear for instance in Martine Aubry's speech in March 2000. In that particular context, ethnic and racial labels are often presented as indirect utterances –as emphasised at times by the use of inverted commas in written statements– and a testimony to the government's determination to break down existing taboos in order to face the harsh reality of discrimination.

On the contrary, any reference to specific ethnic or racial groups is carefully avoided when undertaking to identify those eligible for anti-discrimination policies. Under the provisions of the anti-discrimination law of May 2000, target beneficiary groups were referred to as "youth", then in a later paragraph as "youth, often of immigration background", then again as "youth in underprivileged neighbourhoods". This continuous avoidance of ethnic and racial labelling is obvious in the discursive contortion by Jean-Pierre Chevènement (the by-then Minister of the Interior) at the national convention on citizenship, where he spoke of "young inhabitants of

underprivileged neighbourhoods, especially those born from the last immigration waves” (everyone of course accurately understood North African or Black) (quoted in Simon, 2000: page 28).

The new anti-discrimination policy was therefore intrinsically self-contradictory: it broke the taboo of acknowledging the relevance of race and ethnicity in classifying individuals in French society, without lifting the ban on racial and ethnic designations.

This discrepancy had been foreseen by a demographer of the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED), Patrick Simon, who published an article in the newspaper *Le Monde* in 1993 which raised the following question: how is it possible to fight against ethnic and racial discrimination while forbidding at the same time the construction of ethnic and racial categories that would allow to measure the scale and negative effects of the phenomenon? (for arguments against such categories, see De Zwart in this volume). This article triggered an academic controversy about “ethnic statistics” that has continued ever since. According to those opposing ethnic statistics, the simple act of designating minority individuals by a collective name is equivalent to making them prisoners of the socially stigmatised and undervalued status, a process by which the original stigma would then become their essence (Blum, 2006, Badinter *et al*, 2009). For proponents of ethnic statistics, on the other hand, the collection of statistical data on race and ethnicity is necessary to assess the extent of discrimination and to monitor the actual impact of antidiscrimination policies (Simon, 2007).

Such dilemma has deeply structured the French debate on discrimination over the recent years. One particular answer has been the attempt to formulate a euphemistic approach that would allow for the consideration of race and ethnicity while avoiding to name those explicitly. The making of this was twofold and entailed the following:

- concealing race and ethnicity by placing discrimination under the umbrella of territorial inequality. In the last few years, a number of public and private affirmative actions have developed in favour of residents in the “disadvantaged” (socially deprived) neighbourhoods. For instance, special admission routes into the prestigious School of Sciences Po have been created to increase the recruitment ratio of undergraduate students from working-class suburban districts. One important feature of this kind of voluntarism is to replace the notion of discrimination towards a group with the notion of promotion on individual merit, the figure of the “Beur” (the popular nickname for the children of Maghreb immigrants) withdrawing besides the racially and ethnically neutral figure of the deserving scholarship holder.

- The emergence and stabilization in official political discourse of the term “diversity” alluding to the variety of “origins” in the French citizenry, while again avoiding any specific racial or ethnic denomination. The notion was applied first to contemporary French society as a whole in order to stress its diversification. Soon this resulted into the construction of a distinct sub-category of French under the label of “*issus de la diversité*” (coming from diversity) in reference to politicians or civil servants whose common trait is to be marked by cultural or perceptual characteristics (phenotypical features, religion) differing from those in the majority.

In spite of all efforts to derive categories of otherness compatible with the republican model, the categorization to be used to name and count the victims of discrimination is still a matter of disagreement in French society. This public controversy has expanded far beyond the world of academic institutions and antiracist associations. The collection of data on race and ethnicity has become an issue of tremendous political and legal importance within the higher spheres of the State³.

Yet one additional question is whether this controversy does not in fact conceal more than it does reveal about the contradictions inherent in the “French model”, which were apparent long before the salient issue of “ethnic statistics” came to the forefront of the political debate.

Categorising Us and Them

By raising the threat of Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism, the nationalist rhetoric against ethnic statistics masked the failure of the republican model to activate its own conception of nationhood. Simultaneously, in focusing their criticism on discrepancies that exist between the social reality of discriminatory practices and the ideal of the republican model, proponents of ethnic statistics implicitly acknowledge the universalistic colour-blind conception of citizenship underlying such an ideal.

³ In September 2007, two MPs proposed a legislative provision that would include the topic of ethnic statistics on the immigration bill for discussion by the National assembly. This proposal was later dismissed by the Constitutional Council.

And yet, it contains its own set of categories for establishing social differentiation and hierarchy between Us and Them. Even if the grid of legal categories (Français/Etrangers/Naturalisés; (French/Foreigners/Naturalized) says nothing about race and ethnicity, it says a lot about who has the legitimacy to be on French soil.

The frequent use of the metaphor of hospitality to symbolize the relationship between nationals and foreigners shows that this distinction is not simply a matter of legal status but rests upon a social hierarchy that distinguishes between natives and newcomers. French Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debré epitomized this rhetoric of hospitality by stating: “if someone came to settle in your house and empty your fridge, shouldn’t you have the right to get him out?” (Biffaud, 1997 our translation). This representation of the nation as private property (both house and home) entails the representation of foreigners as guests from whom one is entitled to expect reserved and polite behaviour (see Sayad, 1999). This opposition between natives and newcomers can also be found in the recurrent reminding, in the political rhetoric of both the right and the left wing, that immigrants have rights as well as duties⁴. The interconnection of rights and duties applies to everyone in any democratic society and would normally go without saying. So the question here is: what other purpose does this quite obsessive manner of stating the obvious about immigrants

⁴ For example, the link between rights and duties is emphasized by right-wing proposals to attribute family allowances on condition that immigrant families control their children (see <http://www.projet-ump.fr/participez/immigration/les-defis-de-limmigration/conditionner-les-prestations-sociales-au-respect-des-obligations-scolaires-ou-de-celles-des-contrats-d'accueil-et-d'integration-et-renforcer-les-sanctions-existantes-en-cas-de-non-res>, consulted November 2011). This link is also suggested in the correlation between discrimination and juvenile delinquency (see the circular letter by Home Minister Chevènement dated 18/01/1999, analysed by Eberhard, 2010).

serve, but to remind them of their status of newcomers and the subaltern position assigned to them in the national order?

Considering the official lexicon categories in this grid reveals how perfectly appropriate they are : what for instance could be a better word than “naturalized” to indicate that the immigrant is no longer perceived as a newcomer but as a native of the place? Similarly, what other category could be more accurate than “French by acquisition” to describe the transitory phase whereby the former guest walks the path toward full property rights, considered not entirely legitimate but a would-be owner of the house of France?

What is described as a crisis of the assimilation model is in fact the maintaining of a part of the population of France in this state of on-going transition (neither Frenchmen nor foreigners, neither immigrants nor natives, neither guests nor hosts).

The emergence of in-between intermediate categories was the first symptom of this crisis. Instances include the *Beur* label which was created by children of Maghreb immigrants, but encountered widespread popularity and was soon to enter French dictionaries. Another significant example is that of the official acknowledgment of labelling such as “jeunes issus de l’immigration” (youth of immigration background) and “jeunes d’origine étrangère” (youth of foreign origin), which started to be used in official reports in the early 1980s⁵.

⁵ For example in the report entitled “Les jeunes d’origine étrangère dans la société française”, written in 1982 by André Lebon, a civil servant of the Labour Department.

Categorisation schemes have their own grammar, and once created, ethnic labelling such as “Beur” or “youth of foreign origin” call for the construction of complementary categories labelled on the same ethnic bases, in the same way as White complements Black in the US or European complemented Indigenous in colonial Algeria. The next step was the officialisation of the label of “French roots” (*“Français de souche”*) which appears in a book presenting the results of a survey conducted by two public research institutes (INED and INSEE) (Tribalat, 1995).

The introduction of these new labelling contradicted the very meaning of the official classification system: even if it has been used, at certain periods of time, to differentiate among several categories of Frenchmen (Noiriel, 2002), the distinction between foreigner, naturalized and French drew a continuum of membership that is set apart by the opposition between two exclusive categories : being of French roots *versus* being French with an ethnic background.

It is useful to discuss here the notion of “French roots” which, although somewhat controversial, has nonetheless become common in ordinary conversations as well as in the media and academic writing (generally embellished in the latter with quotation marks). The objective is not to denounce the racialising connotations of this notion or the ulterior political motives of its use (see Le Bras, 1998), but to focus on the classification process that it generates. This process is strictly speaking the process of ethnicity— in Barth’s sense of classification of persons along lines of origin and background (Barth, 1969, p. 13). It therefore contradicts the notion of assimilation which consists of a blurring process of the Us-Them dichotomy.

It is thus perfectly appropriate to describe the evolution of contemporary French society as a process of ethnicisation (Poutignat et Streiff-Fénart, 1995; De Rudder *et al*, 2000; Amselle, 2011). Not that the ethnic and racial denomination had never existed before. The French language acquired, throughout the history of immigration, a vast lexicon of specifying terms, often insulting, to designate others (Ritals, Polaks, mètèques, Noirs, Arabes...) ⁶, and during the Algerian war, expressions such as “Muslim French” or “French with North African roots” were commonly used by public services. Moreover the current move towards an ethnic framing of the French community has simply not replaced the old rhetoric of hospitality. The latter is enduring ⁷ and can actually be combined with the ethnic conception of society. One example of such process of hybridization is found in the statement by high-ranking French Senator Gérard Longuet in March 2010 (Le Monde 2010). In order to express his opposition to the appointment of a French Algerian president to the French Commission for racial equality, the HALDE (Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l’Egalité, High Authority of the Fight against Discriminations and for Equality), he suggested this post be given to “former Bretons or Lorrains [people from Lorraine in northeast France, Longuet’s constituency]”: “It is better that the task of welcoming all our compatriots be the responsibility of the traditional segment of French society” (our translation).

⁶ That is, Wops, Polaks, Dagos, Blacks, Arabs...

⁷ This is manifest for instance in the proposition of a provisional bill (finally rejected in March 2011) to implement deprivation of citizenship for naturalised French who are sentenced for major crimes (speech by the President Sarkozy, Grenoble 2010). In other words, to throw uncivil guests out of the house.

The novelty is that the ethnicising designation now applies to the majority. In acquiring “French roots”, the Frenchman is now recognised as being differentiated from the others: ethnic French. In labelling the majority itself with the seal of specificity (Guillaumin, 2002), the label of “French roots” and especially its officialisation ends the fiction of an abstract Frenchness. Indeed, the French notion of assimilation was precisely built on this abstraction of a Frenchness independent of any particular group.

In addition, by embedding the dichotomy between members and non-members in the history of the nation, the notion of “roots” brings those who find themselves excluded from this continuity to make a complementary link between their current segregation and the history of their own colonised or enslaved ancestors. This notion therefore reinforces the “subjective belief in common descent, i.e. in a shared history based on a common point of origin”, sentiment in which Weber saw the specific mark of ethnicity.

This process of ethnicization, meaning the acknowledgement of different components of French membership based upon origin, has logically tended to give relevance to the use of ethnicity as a basis for collective action. This has in turn led to further expansion in the perceived crisis of the republican model.

Contesting the French model: discourse, ideologies and strategies of minority groups

The anti-discrimination policy implemented by the socialist government during the 2000s aimed at re-establishing equality between individuals discriminated against due to their membership to an ethnic group, without however recognising the existence of such groups. Yet, over the past decade, this breach in the principle of “blindness to racial and ethnic differences” has led to more radical change than that which was officially desired”.

Be it welcomed, tolerated or denied, the presence of racial and ethnic minorities expressing themselves in the public arena has become an indisputable fact. Different ethnic entrepreneurs try to impose their own selection of criteria for self-definition, strive to organize minority members within French society under their banner and request the recognition of such identities and groups.

The first movement of this kind emerged in the early 1990s, by the girls claiming the right to wear their headscarves at school (see Lettinga and Saharso in this volume). In 2005, two minority associations, the “Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France” (French Representative Council of Black Associations or CRAN) and the “Mouvement des Indigènes de la République” (The Natives of the Republic Movement, or MIR), appeared in the French public space. During the year 2005, several events brought migration, race and colonisation issues to the foreground, such as : the February 2005 law encouraging schools to highlight the “positive effects of colonisation”; the outer-city unrest developing into urban riots in November 2005; the trouble caused by Black teenagers at the secondary school student demonstrations on March 2005, the death of 17 African immigrants in the fire that broke out in their overcrowded housing, on April 2005.

Although these minority movements differ greatly in the identity markers mobilised and the type of claim put forward⁸, all have revolved around the flaws of the republican model, unveiling the fictions on which it rests: the fiction of secularity which has concealed the hegemony of the population of Christian background; the fiction of assimilation which has concealed colonial domination; the fiction of colour blindness which has masked racial discrimination.

It must be noted that both the CRAN and the MIR built minority group identity on a responsive ground: the protestation against being ascribed to a stigmatized category of Black or colonized people and the discriminative treatment that ensues.

“In societies where they are minorities, Black is the person who is reputed to be so; Black is the population of men and women whose shared social experience is that of discrimination based on the colour of their skin. Blacks have in common the fact of living in societies that consider them as such. More often than not, they do not have the choice to be or not to be as they are seen. To paraphrase the words of Sartre, a Black is a man that other men consider to be Black”(Lozes, 2008 our translation).

⁸ We can most notably distinguish symbolic claims regarding the image of minorities in society in general and the compensation for injustices (recognition of wrong regarding slavery or colonisation) from claims of being deprived of specific liberties, such as the right to wear the headscarf (on these different types of claims, see Jacob Levy, quoted in Sabbagh, 2004: page 28).

“When we use the terms ‘Blacks’, ‘Arabs’, ‘Muslims’, we are not disregarding their degrading connotations, but are highlighting in this way which populations constitute today the principal targets of racial stigmatisation (Khiari, 2007, our translation).

Apart from the shared non-essentialist approach to identity mobilisation, the two movements contrast strongly in terms of their identity politics, discourse and strategies.

The difference first appears when considering the labels they use to designate themselves and others. It is noteworthy that, in the CRAN discourse, the self-designated label “Black” has no clearly identified counterpart. Blacks are not opposed to another category, which might logically be Whites, but are rather placed side by side with such categories as “our fellow citizens” or the “racist Frenchmen”. In the MIR discourse, on the other hand, the minority and the majority are contrasted with each other. They are both designated, named and opposed according to religious, racial and ethno-geographical criteria: on one side, the European, White Christian group that is constituted as if it were a French version of the WASP; in opposition, the minority group constituted by three components (Arabs, Blacks, Muslims) which correspond word for word to the three criteria used to define the majority group. The Us of the MIR appears broader than that of the CRAN because claiming to bring together all “those who are not White-European-Christian”. However, although the movement explicitly includes Blacks among the Natives, the Christian/Muslim opposition which partly structures the majority/minority opposition thereby excludes a large fraction of Blacks in France who identify themselves as Christian. By putting the Israel-Palestine conflict and the support of girls with

headscarves at the heart of their fight, the MIR appear in the public space essentially as an “Arab-Muslim” movement, causing them to be stigmatised as “Islamic leftists”.

The difference in marking out Us-Them boundaries expressed through these labelling processes also comes to light through the relationship that each of the movements establishes with the French State and institutions, and the archetypical figures they select as their representatives.

The strategy of the CRAN, a movement headed by intellectuals, professionals and politicians, clearly involves organising as a lobby entitled to negotiate with the government and political parties, in order to improve the participation of Black people in the areas from where they are excluded or under-represented. The aim of their struggle against discrimination is to remove the obstacles that prevent the Black elite from finding their proper place in French society.

“Where are the fictional stories showing a Black executive eating breakfast with his wife and children before going to work? This typical scene, this image of happiness, is today in France inaccessible to Blacks and other minorities”
(Lozes, 2008; our translation).

This is precisely the strategy designated as “integrationism” (the fiction of integration model) by the MIR:

‘Integrationism is simply a republican illusion. In other words, the illusion that Blacks, Arabs, Muslims and all the non-White-European-Christian populations can

find their place in France without upsetting the society and the State (...)

Integrationism is also the defence of an elitist “positive discrimination”. Measures must be taken to allow the social and political promotion of some of us in order for us all to be progressively recognised as full citizens”(Khiari, 2007, our translation)

The demands made by the CRAN and the MIR do not break from the republican political code in the same way. The former asserts its willingness to play the game according to the rules. For them, the issue is not so much a matter of changing the republican model as it is a matter of taking it at its word.

“France is an admirable Nation, which nonetheless tolerates unacceptable discriminations from within, until the day that they are revealed, which generally leads to awareness and the establishment of corrective actions. The CRAN has taken on this work of revealing. (...) We, the Blacks of France, brought together by the CRAN, wish to be recognised as full citizens. In what name would one wish to prevent this? Certainly not in the name of the Republic!” (Lozes, 2008; our translation).

The CRAN asserts its membership in the national community and identifies itself as being included in a French “We”. By proclaiming to be French republican and proud of it, CRAN activists present the need for recognition and the anti-racism struggle as being proper to the republican model itself.

The coordinators of MIR have set out on a radically different path. This entails racialising the social issue, which tends to consolidate the boundary between a White

French mainstream and a colonised France. They characterize their own action as a drastic challenge to the “deceiving” values the French republic glories in.

The radical challenging of the republican model is also obvious in the way the MIR turns the mainstream representations of the issue of women upside-down by putting women forward as defenders of distinctive identity instead of as the spearheads of assimilation. By denouncing the representation of minority women and girls as victims of their male counterparts, they challenge the conventional wisdom that holds the treatment of women as a symbol in the formation of a seeming civilization divide between Muslim and Western worlds (Abu-Lughod, 2008)⁹.

In this way, these two movements have brought to light two different ways, respectable or scandalous, legitimate or condemnable, to question the republican model. The differential reception is evident by the differential treatment that the French State accords to them. The founding meeting of the CRAN was held in a room of the National Assembly, for example, while *Les Indigènes* are “closely watched by the internal intelligence service and the legal system” (Le Figaro, 14-15 June 2008). During a talk show in June 2008, Immigration Minister considered taking action against Houria Bouteldja, for having used in a television debate the word “souchiens”, ironic neologism built on the label “Français de souche” (with French roots), that can be understood as “sous-chiens” (underdogs) as well.

⁹ By doing so, they take the opposite course of the political (republican) correctness of the movement of the NPNS (Neither Whores Nor Submissive) whose former leader Fadela Amara entered the Sarkozy government as a minister in charge of the outer cities.

Conclusion

The analysis of French immigration policies has shed light on the dissonance between the public recognition of ethnic/racial discriminations on the one hand, and the belief that the core universalist principles of the republican model are sufficient to safeguard equality of rights among individuals and citizens, on the other. While attempting to resolve this contradiction, anti-discrimination policies have in fact emphasized racial and ethnic categories and therefore moved away from the norm of color-blind policy-making inherent in the Republican creed. This process of ethnicization has given rise to virulent public controversy, with a particular focus on the issue of ethnic statistics.

The lift of the longstanding social taboo on ethnic and racial denominations has also given more power to identity claims made by ethnic minority organizations such as the CRAN or the MIR. The comparison of these two movements reveals a huge dissension in the conception of the minority status and its recognition by French society. While they may both share in the struggle against racism and discrimination, they show deep divergences in how they attempt to bend the boundaries between Us and Them inside the national community, depending on how they connect the issue of race with class and gender issues, and above all depending on how radically they challenge the mainstream representation of French identity.

One could therefore wonder if the conditions in which these two movements try to surpass the “republican model” do not reinforce another specifically French

characteristic of the relation to the Other. The survey conducted by Michelle Lamont (2000) with French workers reveals that these latter raise weaker barriers with Blacks than with North African immigrants. The Us-Them polarization, Lamont argues, is stronger with the North African population because of the combination of the immigrant status with the religious difference, and also because they are accused of breaching civility and refusing to integrate in French society. The different ways that the French workers speak about their fellow Black or Maghreb citizens, according to Lamont, are directly determined by the republican model which censures reference to skin colour as the basis of differentiation, yet encourages the discrediting of behaviours that do not comply with the republican code.

By differently inter-positioning the types of identity claims, the relations to the State and the positions of interiority/ exteriority along the lines of membership and origins, the CRAN and the MIR movements tend to reproduce and make publicly visible the division between two types of minorities (Blacks and Muslims) with which French society has not established the same boundaries.

In so far as this comparison does not concern Blacks, Muslims or the descendants of North African immigrants as real groups but focuses rather on the success in the mediated public space of the identity entrepreneurs who establish themselves as spokespersons¹⁰, little is said here of the actual situation of Blacks, Muslims or

¹⁰ Although there are black movements which radically emphasise the racial opposition between Blacks and Whites and the lobbying movements led by North African executives, they are less visible in the public space. A recent publication did, however, highlight themes (diversity, promotion of the elite of minorities) similar to those of the CRAN, in a “a manifesto for real equality” at the initiative of a manufacturer from Algeria, Yazid Sabeg.

individuals of North African origin, the racism they experience, their respective chances of social mobility, or the conditions favourable to reception of these identity propositions by those to whom they are addressed. It simply encourages reassessment of the notion of the “republican model” by considering it seriously, not as a blueprint for political action, but as a set of historical representations and myths about self and others that have drawn a path dependency between the boundaries that the majority component of French society raised against the minorities, and the strategies imagined and implemented by the latter to challenge and overcome these same boundaries.

Nonetheless, this was an individual initiative which led to Yazid Sabeg’s entry into government in December 2009 as “commissioner of equal opportunity”.

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