Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in France

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Work Package 1 – Overview of National Discourses on Tolerance and Cultural diversity (Literature and Realities)

Deliverable 1.1 Country Reports on Tolerance and Cultural diversity Discourses
Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)

ACCEPT PLURALISM is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators’ Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country’s performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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Executive Summary

This report describes the diversity of the French population and presents the institutions that accommodate diversity in France. Drawing on historical analysis and recent survey on immigrant populations in France, it shows the main dimensions of cultural diversity that are perceived as challenging and explain why. It recalls some of the main events in the past decades when cultural diversity emerged as an issue and how this has been dealt with. It maps out the state of the institutional arrangement that is in place to accommodate cultural diversity in order to define the main axis of analysis for the subsequent stages of this research project.

The diversity of the French population

The demographic fact of diversity in France is a product of both labour and postcolonial migration in the post-war period. On the one hand, France established recruiting offices in Southern European countries (Spain and Portugal) to attract European workers and their family. On the other hand, the dismantling of the colonial empire in between 1953 and 1962 led the French government to sign bilateral agreements to secure its economic interests that also favoured the circulation of former colonial subject to the Metropole. Successive immigration waves created a diverse society i.e. a society that encompasses populations with various origins from a geographical and cultural point of view.

Yet, the diversity of the French society is hard to capture in figures. The official census only classifies the resident population under three categories: French by birth, French by naturalization, Foreigners. In 2007, they were 61,795,000 people living in France, out of which:

- 89.9% were French by birth,
- 4.3% were French by naturalization,
- 5.8% were Foreigners.

The fact that official statistics only records nationality results in statistically concealing the diversity of the population after a few generations.

This leads us to distinguish two levels of analysis of cultural diversity in France:

- the first level of analysis is objective; it looks at the breakdown of immigrants according to their nationality in the national census (see figure 1), it includes the historical minority of the Roma community in France;
- the second level of analysis is subjective; it looks at visible minorities in France i.e. French people of immigrant descent who are perceived as different by the majority population and are likely to be the target of discriminatory practices (their number are not recorded in official statistics); another category is that of regional identities, individuals who identify themselves as belonging to a regional identity and who may be challenging the state for their practice of a regional language.

Individuals of North African descent, French citizens however, are targeted as different by the larger society, authorities, etc. which leads to their ethnicisation. This process dates back to colonial times. French people who are “black” are also targeted as different by the rest of the society. We argue that physical appearances and the ethnicisation of North African origin are challenging dimensions of cultural diversity in France.

Even though the figure of 6 million Muslims in France is often presented in the media, we would like to take this figure with caution, as this number derives from the number of foreigners and French nationals of immigrant descent from North-Africa, Turkey and Africa. Owing to a 2006 survey only 59% of French people of immigrant descent identify themselves as Muslims. Moreover, the notion of “Muslim immigrants” is mainly in use in the English speaking world. This is also due to the fact that, in France, there is a low level of religious identification as political belonging.
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Country diversity profile

Figure 1: Largest Immigrant groups in France in 2004 by country of origin (in thousands)

- 2 000 (40%): Europe (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom).
- 1 500 (31%): North Africa (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia)
- 570 (17%): Sub-Saharan Africa (Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Mali)
- 222 (4%): Turkey
- 608 (12%): Rest of the World (including China)

Source: National Census, INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

Figure 2: Dimensions of difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of difference</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Racial</th>
<th>Ethnic</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
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<td>Sub-Saharan Africans</td>
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<td>Asian migrants (China, Cambodia)</td>
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<td>Native minorities</td>
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<td>Occitan, Breton, Alsacian, Corsican</td>
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<td>French citizens of North African descent</td>
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<tr>
<td>French blacks (French citizens of African descent or Caribbean ancestry)</td>
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</table>

* These are subjective categories. They are identified for the purpose of the research only. They are not recorded as official categories in French statistics.
Understanding diversity in France

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 leaves the belonging to minority group to the private sphere (should it be on the basis of religion or culture). It dates back to the French revolution of 1789 when the idea of the nation emerged from the unification of citizens as opposed to the addition of groups (which characterized the Ancient Regime). It is expressed in the French notion of citizenship which is civic and not ethnic, and encompasses all citizens regardless of their origin, race or religion. Immigrants have been able to become French citizens through an open code of nationality and the naturalization process has been a pivot of their integration in France. The French strategy to guarantee equality among the citizens is to make difference invisible.

In the process of immigrants’ integration, their belonging to different cultural and religious groups has been kept in the private sphere.

Two essential features can be highlighted to understand the understanding of cultural diversity in France: the scope of nationality and laïcité.

- The questions of citizenship and naturalisation process have been settled at the core of the debates on diversity and integration for 30 years now. In response to the debate over immigration issues, the French government modified the nationality code successively in 1986, 1993 and 1998.
  - 1986: the Chirac government (right-wing) introduced a new bill to put automatic naturalisation of second generation immigrants to a halt.
  - 1993: the Pasqua laws were passed (right-wing government), they included that second generation immigrants should actively declare their desire to be French.
  - 1998: the Guigou law (left-wing government) suppressed the necessity to make an express declaration that second generation desired to be French.

In 2007, the government created a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity clearly articulating the link in between the two notions. The same year, it introduced a New Reception and Integration Contract for newly arrived migrants to follow (it consists in language learning and knowledge acquisition). In 2010, however, the ministry having launched a series of debates over national identity and having received many criticisms, it was dissolved and the administrative units to oversee the regulation of immigration flows were reassigned in the interior ministry.

- Laïcité is the French understanding of secularism and it guarantees that religious beliefs are kept in the private sphere. It is enclosed in the 1905 law of separation of church and state, and it states that the state will not fund any activity related to a religious community. It also rules out any official representation of religion in public spaces. It is an active principle to protect the right to belief and disbelief in the society.

Accommodating religious diversity in France

The reassessment of laïcité has been used to tackle the challenge of Islam since the first affair of the veil in 1989, when two girls in the suburbs of Paris (Creil) insisted in keeping a Islamic veil in class. The State Council, then fostered a progressive understanding of the laïcité law and let it to the school supervisor to decide whether or not to live pupils wearing religious symbols in the class room. In 2004, however, a law was passed issuing a more restrictive understanding of laïcité and banning the conspicuous display of religious signs in schools (including Islamic veil, Jewish kippah and large Christian cross).

That laïcité has been presented as the main institutional arrangement to deal with the challenge of religious diversity in France will have to be analysed in a critical perspective. As a matter of fact,
some analysts have argued that the debate on laïcité has fostered a sharp return of assimilationism and forms part of an increasing rise of “Islamophobia”.

**Accommodating cultural diversity in France**

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*). Despite a change in framing (from the promotion of equality to anti-discrimination), the High authority remains reluctant to adopt a strategy to acknowledge differences among individuals. Furthermore, the racial construction of visible minorities is little acknowledged in the sense that the category of race is banned from the scientific discourse on differences.

**Axis for further analysis**

In the subsequent stages of the project we will attempt to analyse the state of tolerance or acceptance or respect in the French society.

- In one axis of analysis, we will take the example of laïcité to see if it is a code word for tolerance in the sense that the presence of religious expressions are only tolerated or if it qualifies for an instrument of acceptance or, even, respect as a mean to recognise religious claim. In particular, we will see if laïcité operates as an organisational tool that contributes to the process of institutionalising differences and can represent an instrument of official recognition.

- Our understanding of diversity will encompass religious and cultural diversity. In a second axis of analysis, we will tackle the recognition of immigration as a valuable input to French national narrative. Here the analysis of how immigration and cultural minorities are introduced in education curriculum will help clarify what room is allocated to the immigrant experience in the general understanding of the national culture.

**Keywords**

Immigration, national identity, tolerance, cultural diversity, equality, minority claim, cultural pluralism, post-colonial, Islam, laïcité
1. Introduction

France is a country of immigration and diversity is an important component of today’s society. Immigration waves from 1900 to the Second World War included population from northern (Belgium), eastern (Poland) and southern Europe (Italy and Spain). After the Second World War, while an important number of immigrants came from Southern Europe (Spain and Portugal), the postcolonial 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 postcolonial migration. In the post-war period, France signed bilateral agreements with Southern European countries to attract European immigrants that 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 Metropole. As a result, the post-colonial input represents an important part of French cultural diversity today.

The State’s response to the diversity of 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 of 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 of the separation of State and Church, it is argued that by keeping official differences in the private sphere everyone will be considered the same and will, therefore, enjoy equality. Religious belongings 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 of which, discourses on cultural diversity are hard to pin down in French public space and are usually understood as conflicting with Republican values.

This report describes the diversity of the French population and explores the institutions that try to accommodate diversity in France. It also shows how the notion of cultural diversity emerges 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. We will see 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. Second, we will explore how issues emerged which were perceived as resulting from the diversity of the population and how they were 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. Third, we will explore the concept of tolerance in France. We will look at the concept of laïcité (the French version of secularism) 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 towards Islam. In conclusion, we will draw the main axis of analysis that we believe should be pursued to enhance the understanding of tolerance towards cultural diversity in France.

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1 The French colonial empire consisted of colonies, protectorates and mandates in Africa, Middle East and South East Asia. Migrants of former colonial countries came mainly from Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Cambodia.
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2. State formation and national identity

2.1. 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 characterized the Ancient Regime: the nobility, the clergy and the Third Estate. As argued by Gerard Noiriel: “[the] context of anti-aristocratic and anti-clerical mobilization explains, far beyond the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the essential aspects of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens. Behind the haunting them of equality is found a violent rejection of all privileges (an all stigmatizations) 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 their 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 nobility laid the emphasis on the universalist principles that linked citizens with one other, rather than their original belonging to 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 French men” (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 belongings -understood as regional identities- were to be subsumed in the larger national identity that is French identity through the practice of the French language. From this funding period of French society, remained the conviction until today that additional forms of belonging such as regional, religious or immigrants’ origin are to be kept in the private sphere. As a result, it leaves little room for the articulation of minority claims in the public sphere.

However, throughout the 19th and the 20th century, the creation of the colonial empire created a breach in the Universalist principle of French equality. The French state allocated differential status to indigenous population and European expatriates. Nowhere was this differentiation as strong as in Algeria where European settlers from Italy, Spain or France where granted French nationality and citizenship when 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, 1999: 67). After the Second World War, the French Empire was renamed French Union and colonial subjects became citizens of the French union. They only enjoyed a truncated version of citizenship, though, and they did not have any political rights in the colonies (Weil 2008).

The example 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 operated 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

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For instance, children born in France of Algerian immigrants born in Algeria when it was a French colony are automatically French when they reach 18 (Weil 2008: 368).
during the French Empire is still important today to understand the post-colonial migrants’ complex relationship with French nationality and identity.

2.2. France and the European Union

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

Finally, France praises 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 position behind the US and Canada. However, it has been criticised on its actual application of Human Rights. For instance, in 2010, the French government was called upon by the members of the European Parliament in reaction to its treatment of the Roma population in France. Voices of protest are also emerging in French civil society that criticize policies and argue that they go against the European Declaration of Human Rights. The European Union serves as a constitutional resource in case of Human Rights violations that are related to discrimination.

3. Main cultural diversity challenges that France has faced during the last 30 years

3.1. The formation of a diverse population

A diverse population is a population that encompasses populations with various origins from a geographical and cultural point of view. In the case of France, its long experience in receiving and incorporating immigrant population makes it a diverse country. A limited population growth and a shortage of labour have made it a destination of migrations – and not a country of departure – since 1880. For instance, when the United States issued quotas to limit their entries (1924), the flow of immigrants from Southern Europe was “redirected” towards France, and in 1931, the proportion of foreigners in France was higher than in the United States (Noiriel, 1983). Moreover, similarly to most of its neighbours from Western Europe (Belgium, Germany, Great Britain), France experienced massive post-war immigration flows during the period of reconstruction coming from Southern Europe (mainly Spain and Portugal) and North Africa (mainly Algeria, but also Morocco). See numbers below.

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5 Ranking of the top 10 receiving countries in UNHCR, *Asylum levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries*, 24-3-09, p. 7.
In 1974, in line with other industrial countries, the French government put economic migration to a halt and French authorities ceased to deliver working 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, for those who were coming from countries in conflict, they tried to enter under the refugee regime. Despite the alleged “closure of immigration doors”, the migration influx continued over the past decades with a diversification of immigrants’ origin. In addition to constant flows of immigrants coming from Europe decreased, the arrival of immigrants from North Africa continued important and there has been a slight increase of immigrants coming from other countries of Africa. In between 1999 and 2004, the share of sub-Saharan immigrants among total inflows rose from 10% to 17% (Beauchemin, Lessault, 2009). The migration of sub-Saharan African increased. However, they are still vastly outnumbered by immigrants from Europe and North Africa (see figure 2 below).

Successive waves of immigrants have settled in the society and increased the diversity of the French population. However, official statistics only record nationality and the progressive integration of immigrants into French nationality result in statistically concealing people’s origin. There are, therefore, few means to reflect the diversity of the French population that result of decades of immigration. Official statistics will only give a description of immigrants who still hold foreign nationality. Figures 2 and 3 describe the evolution of French population according to immigrant nationality. They are the last figures issued by the National Institute of Economic and Statistic Studies (INSEE) on the immigrant population. A subsequent estimation by EUROSTAT, stated that, in 2009, foreigners made up to 5,8 % (i.e. 3,675 thousands) of the French population and that 2% came from countries from the EU 27 and 3.8% from outside the EU 27.

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7 Eurostat « Le ressortissants étrangers constituaient 6% de la population de l’UE 27 », communiqué de presse, 16 décembre 2009.
Figure 2: Breakdown of immigrant population by country of origin, from 1962 to 1999

Thousands

Source: National Census, INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

Figure 3: Breakdown of immigrant population by country of origin 1999-2005 (INSEE 2005)

Source: National Census, INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)
3.2. The understanding of cultural diversity through the lens of nationality

3.2.1. The French naturalization process tends to conceal cultural diversity

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

- French by birth;
- French by naturalization (*Français par acquisition*);
- Foreigners.

In 2007, 89.9% of the population were people with French nationality, 4.3% were naturalised French and 5.8% were foreigners (INSEE 2007). The Nationality Code establishes statistical categories that exclude the “origin” once French nationality is obtained. Thus, once foreigners are naturalized, they are no longer referred to according to their origin but they become French by naturalization. As for their children, they become French automatically when they reach 18 years of age (provided that they have lived in France for five years from 0 to 18).

Therefore, ethnicity is invisible in French official statistics (Kastoryano 2007: 69) and the very idea to record ethnicity is usually rebuked with the argument that this would go against the universalist principle that guarantees 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. One may therefore argue that in French statistics *nationality matters*; officials draw a line in between French nationals, naturalised French, and French with foreign ancestry. Instead of ethnicity French officials statistics make nationality, and up to a certain extent national origin, visible.

The statistic device chosen by state authorities to render the features of French population reflects the framing of the 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 amount of foreigners to become French nationals according to a number of criteria (essentially five years of residency, legal status and knowledge of French language).

From the *possibility* to become a French national given to foreigners, the official discourse on immigration in France 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 80s (Favell 1998). He also points out to the novelty of such a framing: “previously [to 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 the society was mainly an issue from an economic perspective (low-qualified 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, that 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 as temporary workers and were not regarded as likely to assimilate easily, such as Algerian*. In the early 1980s, when it became clear that post-colonial migrants were to stay in France, their presence started to be perceived as problematic. The fact that their children became automatically French when they turned 18 became a focus of political

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* See demographic studies on immigrants conducted by the National institute for demographic studies, cf. Girard Stoezel 1952.
discussion. Issues related to nationality and the process of nationality acquisition started to represent an important dimension of immigration issues.

3.2.2. 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 second generation immigrants when they turn 18. A strong mobilisation followed and the National Assembly did not vote the bill. Yet, in 1993, the so-called Pasqua Laws were passed: they included that second generation immigrants should “actively declare their desire to be French” by going to the city hall and ask for French nationality. In 1998, the necessity to make a declaration was cancelled by the Guigou law during the government of Lionel Jospin (left-wing) (Weil 2008).

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 for a more selective approach to nationality acquisition and on the other hand, the left-wing parties who maintain the necessity to preserve an open access to French nationality for the children of immigrants born in France.

The questions of citizenship and naturalisation process have been settled at the core of the debates on diversity and integration for 30 years now. After the necessity for second generation immigrant 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 demands went through, out of 81,680, that is: 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 and sharing 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 administration employees and applicants can be the target of judgement as to whether their application is ‘suitable’ or not (Spire 2005).

Regarding the possibility to add new requirements to demonstrate the dedication of the applicant to French nationality, one should note that this is always in discussion. Following a European trend, the French government discussed the possibility to introduce civic tests when implementing the New Reception and Integration Contract (Nouveau contrat d’accueil et d’intégration)1. The tests were not introduced but, since 2007, the integration of immigrants is supervised by the national office for

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9 G. Noiriel argues that the interpretation of immigration through the national lens started out in the late 19th century (Noiriel 1983). Here we would like to point out to the novelty of the discourse in the 1980s in contrast with the 1960s and 1970s. However, a perspective of longue durée does provide for earlier manifestation of such a nationalist reaction against immigration issues.

10 Even though the declaration was easy to perform, studies have shown that children of immigrants born in France did not always do it because of little information on the issue (Weil 2008: 272). As a matter of fact, the belief that being born in France is enough to be French (jus soli) is widely spread among French people and second generation immigrants (Simon 2010).

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 in 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 be taking place in all regions of the country on French national identity in 2009. The creation of such ministry received much criticism13 and the campaign of debates attracted a lot of negative coverage. After three years, the ministry of Immigration and National Identity was suppressed from the government and the regulation of immigration flows was assigned to the Interior ministry in November 2010.

Finally, in a discourse pronounced in response to some violence which occurred during the summer of 2010, President Nicolas Sarkozy announced the possibility to strip offenders of their French nationality provided that they had naturalised in the past ten years14. This last attempt to, not only limit access to nationality but to threaten to take it back, demonstrates the process of nationality acquisition is once again called into question as a way to respond to what is perceived as a challenge related to the diversity of the society (in this case gun shootings towards policemen in the suburbs of Grenoble attributed to children of immigrants).

3.3. Tackling the challenge of Islam through the reassessment of laïcité

The construction of the public issue of Islam in France has mainly been focused on the wearing of the veil in public spaces, and more precisely in French public schools (the majority of French schools are state-run15). The first “affair of the Muslim headscarf” took place in 1989 in Creil, a distant suburb of Paris when the school director of a secondary school took the decision to exclude three young girls because he considered that their Muslim headscarf were religious symbols and undermined the principle of laïcité i.e. the separation of church and state, and more concretely the fact that religion is not mentioned in school (there are no religious classes, for instance).

The State Council (Conseil d’Etat)16 however, ruled that the wearing of the headscarf was “not contradictory to the values of the secular and republican school” and let it to the teachers and school directors to decide whether or not pupils were using this as an instrument of proselytism and disturbance of school activities17. This liberal interpretation of laïcité was later confirmed by the State Council when Education Minister François Bayrou issued a circular (circulaire) requesting school directors to be particularly watchful for the “conspicuous display” of religious signs in schools. The

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14 “Nationality shall be withdrawn from any person of foreign origin who have deliberately harmed the life of a police officer or a military officer or any other person with authority to enforce police order (…) We are going to reassess the criteria under which a person might be stripped of his or her nationality”, speech of President Sarkozy prononcèd in Grenoble on July 30, 2010 Libération July 30, 2010).
15 In 2007/08 only 2,030,741 out of 12,016,484 pupils attended private schools in France, i.e. 16.89% of the school population.
16 The State Council, (Conseil d’Etat) is the highest administrative authority in charge of advising the French government. It is composed of 350 High Civil Servants, among which 80 can be assigned outside the State Council at high administrative positions.
17 State Council ruling of November 27, 1989.
State Council confirmed, on 10 July 1995, that the headscarf was not “a conspicuous sign in itself and that there could be neither a general interdiction nor a systematic exclusion of girls wearing the Muslim headscarf”.

The 1989 interpretation of laïcité by the State Council was challenged in the past decade 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. The Committee to Reflect on the Implementation of the Principle of laïcité in the Republic, presided by Bernard Stasi18, issued a report in 2003 arguing that the display of religious signs such as Muslim headscarves (but also Jewish kippas, Sikh turbans, etc.) were ‘ostentatious’, not only apparent, and considered as carrying a political message. The Committee consisted in twenty members (teachers, scientists, specialists in law, politicians, school directors) and reported their willingness to relay the disarray of school directors, young women and local association confronted to Islamic groups (Commission de réflexion sur l’application du principe de laïcité dans la République 2003: 58).

A law was passed in 2004 and an evaluation of its enforcement was conducted in 2005 under the supervision of Hanifa Chérifi, general inspector of National Education and former member of the Stasi Commission, (Ministère de l’éducation nationale 2005). The report states that “on the basis of information directly received from the heads of establishments or transmitted by academic correspondents”, a number of girls and parents felt that “the application of the law was a relief”. However, this positive assessment of the law is disputed by “A School for everybody” (Une école pour tou-te-s), a gathering of several associations, amongst which the Centre of Studies and Initiatives for International Solidarity (Centre d'études et d'initiatives de solidarité internationale, Cedetim)19. According to this group, it is necessary to add, to the official figures of exclusions and withdrawals, the “quiet exclusions”: “These invisible victims […] simply did not present themselves at school in September, they are not able to plan to remove the headscarf and do not wish to be subjected to the humiliating procedure of the disciplinary board”. An association, the Committee against Islamophobia in France (CCIF 2005), denounced the harmful effects of the law for girls (abandoning of schooling, schooling in private schools, schooling in schools abroad) and points to abusive extension of the law to public service users and employees in general.

The restrictive interpretation of laïcité was confirmed in 2010 with the debate and the passing of a law banning the wearing of full Islamic veil in public20. Despite a limited number of women reported as wearing the full Islamic veil21, the phenomenon was widely constructed as an issue by the media and politicians. In contrast with the headscarf affair and its sequels that emerged, first, from the practice of teachers in school and, then, reached the political agenda, the “burqa affair” was brought about by members of the parliaments (on the initiative of André Guérin, communist deputy from the Lyon region), in connection with a declaration of President Sarkozy in 2009 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.

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18 Ombudsman of the Republic from 1998 to 2004, Bernard Stasi was a member of the center right party, UDF.
20 2010 law banning face covering in public space ( loi du 11 octobre 2010 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public)
21 A group of memebr of the National Assembly were in charge of enquiring on this issue and they concluded that is is a limited practice. (Rapport d’information fait en application de l’article 145 du Règlement au nom de la mission d’information sur la pratique du voile intégral sur le territoire national, National Assembly, January 2010).
Furthermore, it is important to note that the wearing of the full Islamic veil is advocated mainly by salafist groups. They 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 practiced by North African immigrants (Roy 2010). The presence of women wearing full Islamic veil in France is thus related to the internationalisation of extremist 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.

Finally, France is a secular state but a catholic one. It has found ways to accommodate Jews and Protestants in the past but it is making it harder for Muslims. It is not because Muslims represent a minority in France. In fact, while the official discourse rejects the notion of minority, the term does appear in legal texts in reference to religious minorities since the 1789 revolution (Lochak 1989). France has had difficulty accommodating the Muslim minority because of the construction of Islam as foreign to French identity. It has been integrating Islam in a “pragmatic handling of differences” that consisted of “gradually introducing the minimal dose of institutionalization needed for a concrete resolution of the practical problems created by the existence of ‘minority group’” (Lochak 1989). In 1994, the Council of Moslems of France was recognized by Interior Ministry Charles Pasqua and in 2003 the French Council for the Muslim Cult was created (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman).

Moreover, the successive French governments have thrived to channel the increasing number of religious associations in France. Religious associations, along with immigrant associations, have used the space of associative life to articulate specific claim in dialogue with the French authorities. The “negotiation of identities” (Kastoryano 2007) has actually been taking place albeit at the margin of the political process of representation. It can therefore hardly account for a policy of recognition.

3.4. 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 identify the type 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 constrains in mind, we will detail the various groups of immigrant according to their nationality, but we will also go beyond this state of fact and discuss the existence of “visible minorities” in the 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.

3.4.1. 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 millions of immigrants held French nationality). There were 4.9 millions of immigrants in 2004 (Insee 2006) that is 8.1% of the population. Among those immigrants, 2 millions are from Europe (40%), 1.5 millions are from Maghreb (31%), 570,000 are from Sub-Saharan Africa (70% of them come from a former colonial country) and 830,000 come from the rest of the world (among them Asian immigrants who amount to 48% and Turkish immigrants who amount to 16% of the immigrant population). See figure 4.

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22 About the criteria to acquire French nationality in France, cf. supra, part 3.2. of this report.
23 In 2005, the French population amounted to 60 millions.
Figure 4: Largest Immigrant groups in France in 2004 by country of origin (in thousands)

- 2,000 (40%): **Europe** (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom).
- 1,500 (31%): **North Africa** (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia)
- 570 (17%): **Sub-Saharan Africa** (Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Mali)
- 222 (4%): **Turkey**
- 608 (12%): **Rest of the World** (including China)

Source: National Census, INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

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 considered as different and as likely to challenge perception of diversity in the French society. The largest groups are therefore: North-African immigrants; Sub-Saharan Africans, Asians and Turks.

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

North-African immigrants are mainly composed of nationals from Morocco (469,000) and Algeria (483,000), and, in smaller numbers, of nationals from Tunisia (146,000). During the colonial time, Algerians, but also Moroccans, were identified as indigenous population and were recruited to work in low-skill jobs (construction, mines, agriculture) starting in the interwar period. The end of the colonial rule, in 1956 for Tunisia and Morocco, and in 1962 for Algeria, did not cease the influx of immigrants to France because of difficult economic conditions in the newly independent countries and the fact that former colonial subject enjoyed specific status in France (especially Algerians24). Despite common representations of immigrant populations being essentially composed of male workers, families settled starting in the 1960s. The end of economic migration in 1974 only intensified that immigrants resorted to family reunification but did not start the process of settlement *per se*. Despite the restrictions to immigrate to 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 strong links that countries still have in the economic and education field25.

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24 The Evian agreements of 1962 which ended the Independence War of Algeria stated that Algerians could circulate freely in between Algeria and France Two years later, the Nekkache-Granval agreements limited the number of Algerians who could come to France (Weil 2005: 87)

25 Even though Algerians who were born before 1962 ( Algerian Independence) held French nationality at the time of their birth, if they chose to take the nationality of the independent country in 1962, they do not have French nationality anymore.
3.4.1.2. Sub-Saharan African immigrants (570,000 in 2004)

Seven out of 10 immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa come from a country that was formerly ruled by the French state (Mali, Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire and Cameroon). In 1960, 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. 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. Yet, their number has been increasing since the last census of 1999 (+45%) and they have attracted much media and political attention with the common figure of the illegal 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 regularization procedure in between 1999 and 2006, 30% were from North Africa, 16% from Asia and 12,3% (Beauchemin, Lessault 2009).

3.4.1.3. 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 coming from Vietnam is stable, the Chinese community is growing (from 27,826 in 1999 to 61,000 in 2005). 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).

3.4.1.4. Turkish immigrants (220,000 in 2004)

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

3.4.2. 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, Hamel, Lesné, Simon 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 to the rest of the society? We argue here that skin colour and a construction of Muslims as ethnically different to 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 deemed as challenging for the rest of the French society. According to this survey: “Children of French persons born in the overseas départements and by sub-Saharan African immigrants, mention skin colour well ahead of ethnic origin or nationality (73% and 88%, respectively)” (Beauchemin, Hamel, Lesné, Simon 2010: 4). This shows that when French people are black they are perceived as different from the rest of the society and that might expose them to

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26 African countries that were not under French rule during the colonial period but that are represented in the immigrant population in France are Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo and Mauritius.
27 TeO _Survey on the impact of origins: life histories of immigrants, immigrants’ descendents and native French people._ Launched in 2005, the TeO survey covered a large sample of 22,000 individuals composed of immigrants, descendents of immigrants, French from the overseas départements and mainstream population. For more information, see: [http://www.ined.fr/en/current_researchs/research_projects/majors_projects/bdd/projet/P0835/](http://www.ined.fr/en/current_researchs/research_projects/majors_projects/bdd/projet/P0835/) [last access: 31/01/2011]
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 talk about a North-African minority in France and what is the role of Islam as a distinctive feature for this minority? Can we talk about 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 belonging have been used to differentiate North Africans from the French population in a manner that parallels to a process of racial construction. The category of race is seldom used in the French context. However, considering that race is a social construction 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 of “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 like to point out that the category of “Muslim” applies largely to the English speaking world. Only 59% of French people with North African, African and Turkish descent identify themselves as Muslim (Tiberj, Brouard, 2006). This comes from the fact that there is a low level of religious identification as a form of political belonging in France and respondents mainly link Islam to a religious practice. When they do not consider themselves as practicing Muslims they tend to not identify themselves as Muslims (Tiberj, Brouard, 2006). This should lead us to take the number of “6 millions Muslim people” living in France with caution. This number derives from the number of immigrants and their descendants who come from a country where Islam is a predominant religion (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and to a certain extent Senegal). It does not, however, entail that 6 millions of people in France identify themselves as Muslim, nor as belonging to a Muslim community. It is therefore difficult to talk about a Muslim minority in France and does seem more accurate, historically, to talk about a North African minority.

Finally, regarding Blacks, African immigrants are Muslims and Christians, so, as a visible minority, they overlap with the Muslim minority. Despite attempts to identify a “Muslim effect” among Africans in France (Adida, Laitin, Valfort 2010), skin colour might be a stronger marker than their religion.

Therefore, it is relevant 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.

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28 “Whereas studies published in French talk of ‘people of immigrant origin’, those carried out by English-speaking institutes routinely speak of ‘young Muslims’, or of ‘Muslim riots’.” (Roy 2010: 83)


30 See for instance, the creation of the Representative Council for Black Association in France (Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France, CRAN).
3.4.3. The specific case of the Roma community

The term “travellers” (gens du voyage) refers to a category of people in France with a specific legal status. It consists of people who have French nationality and trace their roots to the nomadic people who came originally from India. They speak a different language than French. What can be referred to as the “Roma community” encompasses various minorities (Roma, Gipsy, Manouche). Only 15% are actually nomadic, and most of them are settled. With the recent expulsion of Roma people of Romania by the French government (Le Monde, October 20, 2010), it is important to note that such a minority exists in France, that it is attached to a specific legal status.

4. How is tolerance and equality understood in France

4.1. Notions of equality and tolerance towards religious diversity

4.1.1. The French strategy to reach equality: making difference “invisible”

The Republican credo is that equality will be reached by making difference invisible. This is generally achieved by excluding any means to record differences among individuals in their interaction with the public authorities (social security, local office for social housing, education, employment). By rendering difference invisible, the official discourse bypasses the acknowledgement of differences. Can we talk about a tolerance of difference when those differences are not acknowledged? This will be one axis of analysis in this research project on tolerance and acceptance.

One may point out to an exception to this state of rule: in 1981, the socialist party won the presidential election with a program that advocated the “Right to be Different”. This discourse was not directly targeting 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 an implication for the acknowledgement of the diversity of the population resulting from immigration to France. It resulted in the formation of a prolific anti-racist movement with such formations as SOS-racism and France plus\(^\text{31}\).

The experience was short-lived, however. The extreme right parties used the discourse on the Right to be Different against anti-racist groups and claimed the “Right to be Different, yes, but at home”, namely calling for the exclusion of immigrants and their return to their country of origin. Even though the experience was brief, it signed the success of the extremist party, the National Front (Front national) and remains today an important dynamic to bear in mind when considering discourses on difference in France. The racist discourse articulated by the Front national is still considered today as the flip side of the recognition of cultural differences. This is also 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.

4.1.2. The French understanding of the separation of church and state: laïcité

The institution of laïcité, i.e. the separation of church and state in all things pertaining to public life, is an institutional arrangement to foster tolerance towards religions and religious practices in principle. It is enclosed in the 1905 law of separation of church and state. It states that the state will not fund nor give wages to representatives of the Church. It rule out any official representation of religion in public

\(^{31}\) The creation of anti-racis groups has been critised as speaheaded by institutional parties (Juhem 2001). However, they are still a distinctive feature of this period.
spaces (no religious signs in state and local government buildings, for instance). The 1882 law of Jules Ferry is also considered a pillar of the enforcement of *laïcité* in France: it makes school attendance mandatory and the teaching of religion only possible *outside*.

It is important to note that while tolerance is understood as the passive acceptance of differences, *laïcité* on the contrary is the active principle to deal with (religious) differences and provide societies with the tool to guarantee the co-existence of various religions in one society (Kintzler 1998). Concretely, *laïcité* in France represents an institutional arrangement to deal with religious diversity: it sets the conditions for the exercise of the cult and sets the limit for religious forms of expression. Based on principles, it has a concrete and practical application that we will discuss in the following part.

### 4.2. The practice of equality and attitudes towards difference

#### 4.2.1. The breakthrough of anti-discrimination policies

In practice, a long history of racist incidents and the recent exposure of discrimination on the job market through statistic surveys have pointed at the difficulty to guarantee the equal treatment of individuals in the French society. 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). Despite a change in framing (from the promotion of equality to anti-discrimination), the High authority remains reluctant to adopt a strategy to acknowledge differences among individuals (Lépinard Simon 2008). Furthermore, the racial construction of visible minorities is little acknowledged in the sense that the category of race is banned from the scientific discourse on differences (Badinter, Lebras, dir: 2010).

#### 4.2.2. The various interpretations of *laïcité*

Issues pertaining to Islam have mainly been read through the lens of *laïcité* over the past decades. What does this imply? Some argue that it is problematic because the debate on *laïcité* has fostered a sharp return of assimilationism and formed part of an increasing rise in “Islamophobia” (Geisser, 2003). *Laïcité* can be used as a tool to reject religious expressions although the definition of the concept stipulates that it should protect the right to belief as much as the right to disbelief. As an example of the tensions in-between the various interpretations of *laïcité* one may recall the attempts by which the State Council tried to maintain a liberal interpretation of the concept in 1989, and in 1994, and then, how the council was later contradicted by a stronger political will to ban the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in schools (2004).

Subsequent events during which *laïcité* has been put forward with attempts to give various interpretations include 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 protect the right of belief and unbelief.

Furthermore, public opinion surveys show a change in the understanding of *laïcité* in the French population. Although *laïcité* used to be linked to leftist political orientations and mainly associated to people who were in opposition to the Catholic Church, in the past years, people who recognize *laïcité* 32 Despite the 1973 law condemning racist speech and acts, anti-racist movements have denounced the consistency of racist crimes over the past decades, regularly pointing at specific cases that were not receiving the adequate penalty.

as an important value for them are also people who declare anti-immigrant feelings and position themselves on the right side of the political spectrum (Tiberj 2008).

5. Concluding remarks

While some authors favour a return to the definition of laïcité to deal with issues of tolerance towards religions in France, and more broadly towards cultural differences, a project that can analyse the concepts of tolerance, toleration and acceptance, will open up new perspectives on the political and institutional arrangements possible for a society confronted to a very diverse population. The debates around the notion of laïcité show how the word is interpreted differently, depending on the actors involved and the issue at stake. Looking at secularism in discourse and in practice through the scope of tolerance and acceptance can help break down the notion when it is put forward in the public discourse.

Is laïcité a codeword for tolerance in the sense that the presence of religious expressions are only tolerated but do not imply the recognition of religious claim? Or is laïcité an organisational tool that contributes to the process of institutionalising differences and therefore represent a powerful instrument of official recognition? Here the analysis of different religious claims (Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and Muslim) might be helpful to clarify what is or is not different about the Muslim claim. One should note that the 2004 law banning the ostentations religious sign targeted all forms of religious expression even though the “law banning Islamic veil in Schools” was a common phrase used in the media and political discourse. The confrontation of the discourse of the policy-makers, community leaders and the implementation of the law (e.g. the 2004 law on religious signs in Schools) will help clarify the practice of laïcité in the public space.

The concept of laïcité has been a longstanding institutional arrangement to accommodate religious diversity. Albeit a powerful instrument of cultural differentiation, Islam does not summarise the challenge of diversity in France. Cultural diversity encompasses broader challenges such as the recognition of immigration as a valuable input to French national narrative. Here the analysis of how immigration and cultural minorities are introduced in education curriculum will help clarify what room is allocated to the immigrant experience in the general understanding of the national culture. These challenges will be explored in a subsequent stage of the research project focusing on the tolerance to cultural diversity in schools.
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Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in France


