



## CHAPTER 3. THE INTEGRATION MODEL: THE CASE OF FRANCE

*Jean-Pierre Obin*

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Gudmund Hernes,  
in collaboration with **Michaela Martin and Estelle Zadra**

#### **Introduction**

France is one of the countries in which a state preceded the constitution of a nation. So the question of the political treatment of religious, linguistic, social and cultural diversity has been posed for a very long time, even as early as the Middle Ages. In this historical context, the use of the school as a tool of unification and social control to serve this political purpose - the constitution of a nation - appeared at the end of the 17th century along with the concurrence of the Counter-Reformation and the development of schooling. Under these conditions, can it be maintained that the French school 'model' of social integration is 'republican', as is often asserted, or that it is simply national?

To answer this question, we will examine the approaches and concerns with which this model was created, and what its characteristics and effectiveness are today. In the first, preliminary, part we will clarify the meaning of the concepts generally used: integration, assimilation, insertion, and the multi-ethnic and multicultural society, notably when the fate of populations that come from immigration is dealt with. In the second part, we will analyze how, and to what extent, the various authorities that have succeeded each other since the 18th century have used the school, and also what the ambitions of the reforms were that gradually gave birth to the current system. In the third part, we will examine the current problems of this school model as affected by various factors - notably

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the emergence of an urban segregation of the habitat, the progress of utilitarian conceptions of the school, the European comparison of school models, the development of international migrations and the emergence of international law.

**The meaning of the words: multiple views on immigration**

In France, immigration - and as a consequence, the integration of immigrant populations - is being debated. The French see it as one of the major problems they are confronted with, along with unemployment and fear of crime, a trio of worries that favours amalgams and excesses. The extreme Right has made this question its political stock and trade. The parties of the Right and the Left, when they are in power, are often divided on the policy that promotes the welcoming of immigrants and their acquisition of French nationality. A dispassionate and objective approach must therefore start with a clarification of terms and the way in which they are used.

The word 'immigrant' deserves first to be clarified, as numerous ambiguities, inaccuracies and misinterpretations abound. Immigrants are people living in France, born abroad of parents who are not French. This definition excludes both French people born abroad and foreigners born in France. Some immigrants are therefore of foreign nationality, others of French nationality obtained through acquisition or naturalization. In the 1999 census, France counted 3,260,000 million foreigners and 4,310,000 million immigrants, 1,560,000 million of whom were French. Whereas the foreign population has decreased (-9 per cent since 1990), the immigrant population has increased, although its proportion has remained absolutely stable since 1975 at 7.5 per cent of the total population (Obin and Obin-Coulon, 1999).

As for the word 'integration', it seems no longer to need a direct object to be understood: In the press, on the radio, in everyday language, this term most often designates the fate of immigrants and their children, the place they occupy in society as well as that which their cultures of origin should hold in it, the legal measures regarding their rights and obligations and, more generally, the public policies that concern them. The terminology concerning immigration, however, continues to waver and still does not seem totally stabilized. The term 'integration', like those that complement it, compete with it or have preceded it in the preferences of researchers or politicians - 'insertion' and 'assimilation' - are in fact often invested with moral connotations or are carriers of political projects.

Historically, the word 'assimilation' was the first to be used. Through metaphor, it designates for the demographers and ethnologists the disappearance of the characteristics of certain human groups, through 'incorporation' for some of them, or 'absorption' for certain others. The individuals and their descendants do not disappear physically; but gradually, most often, the cultural characteristics that distinguish the assimilating populations fade, then vanish altogether. Only an exotic surname remains as a witness to foreign ancestry, more or less distant. Assimilation would then tend to designate the irreversible processes of the loss of the distinctive cultural characteristics of an immigrant population, or one having been subjected to an invasion, colonization or dominant cultural influence. This term, however, is controversial because it is burdened with a dual suspicion - moral and political. From a moral viewpoint, wishing to assimilate means trying to make the other person's culture disappear and imposing one's own traditions, standards and values. But in the name of what, one can wonder. Of an implicit or explicit hierarchy of cultural standards that the anthropologist has definitively discredited? Of an alleged supremacy of Western civilization that

served to justify the conquest of America and Africa by Europe and its trail of massacres and deportations? Politically, the term is still marked by the use that the partisans of French Algeria made of it at the end of the Algerian war. However, 'being assimilated' refers to an objective process: the loss of cultural traits of origin; what the sociologists, perhaps with less ambiguity, call 'acculturation': the gradual adoption of behaviors and standards borrowed from the culture of the host countries, losses and loans being very obviously connected. For the sociologist Schnapper (1991), this acculturation takes place gradually, over several generations, beginning with social and public practices and continuing through family and private behaviors. There is a certain amount of reciprocity: A culinary practice such as the preparation of the North African *couscous* has been widely assimilated by French cooks. Lastly, it can be partial or unfinished, as for the Jews, some of whom have been on 'French' soil for at least twenty centuries (in Narbonne), and the Gypsies, who arrived in France over five centuries ago. The demographers, therefore, observe the traits that identify and distinguish, at the same time, the foreign populations integrated into indigenous populations, and their evolution: Family practice of a foreign language, religious, matrimonial, cultural behaviors, etc. From this viewpoint, the conclusions of recent studies tend to show that the assimilating processes continue to function efficiently in France, and have even accelerated for the latest waves of immigration. Only the populations of Turkish origin, marked by a community tradition acquired in Germany, seem to present a certain resistance to assimilation (Tribalat, 1995).

The term 'insertion', which is more neutral, imposed itself in the 1980s with policies concerned with breaking with the colonialist or ethnocentric connotations borne by certain past uses of the term 'assimilation'. Metaphorically, it designates the introduction of a

particular object, which keeps its identity and its characteristics while contributing to the coherence or harmony of a group, an operation that assumes that the process can be reversed. Foreigners or their children can in fact choose to go back to live in their country of origin and, while waiting to do so, continue to practice in France, if they wish, their language, religion and customs. The requirement of a 'right to difference' for immigrants suits the connotations of this term, to the point that it was used almost exclusively for a certain period. Its advantage is that it borrows from both the republican imagination and libertarian ideology. The idea of insertion refers in fact to a certain conception of secularism: a state committed at the social level but neutral in terms of culture, active public policies on education, social security, jobs or housing, but absent in linguistic, matrimonial and religious areas. This also satisfies the libertarian and anti-authoritarian spirit, which was highly developed in France in the 1970s and which, despite an ebb, has remained active on certain cultural fronts like education, immigration and the social status of women. Any social constraint for this trend, especially if it is relayed by the state, appears suspect or even marked by illegitimacy. This obviously poses ethical, political and legal problems. This is the case for the teaching of languages and cultures of origin (ELCO), reserved for children who come from certain emigration countries, criticized on several occasions by official authorities as not satisfying the constitutional principle of equality or the principle of political neutrality because it is sometimes carried out by foreign civil servants more concerned with religious proselytization or political control than -with pedagogy (Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, 1997). Not to mention questions that were and still are debated on the moral and legal levels: In the name of respect for the equal value of cultural traditions, must polygamy, the forced marriage of young women or excision be tolerated? Very quickly, it thus appeared that the authorities could not ignore cultural questions, including religious

ones, without letting groups whose political project was basically anti-secular, even anti-democratic, thrive on this terrain. The ideological combat against the partisans of the 'right to difference' has thus contributed little by little to reserving the term 'insertion' for measures that notably affect the professional sphere and social aid. Today the so-called policies of 'insertion' (minimum insertion revenue, insertion contract, etc.) are meant for publics defined more by their position on the margins of society ('exclusion') rather than by their cultural origin, and only partially include groups originating from immigration; precariousness and exclusion not of course being exclusive to these populations.

The word 'integration', whose use was developed in the early 1990s, has other connotations. In the social sciences, the term refers as much to the cohesion of a group or a social system as to the relations that individuals have with it. It is the opposite of 'segregation'. For Durkheim (1991), a group is integrated "to the extent that its members have a common consciousness, share the same beliefs and practices, interact with each other and feel devoted to common aims". Unlike the terms 'assimilation' and 'insertion', which imply a relationship of inequality between the object and the group, that of 'integration' introduces the idea of reflexivity and interaction: The integrated individual is certainly no longer the same, but the integrating group has also changed. Each of them is therefore concerned by how to live together. It is also undoubtedly what the image, very much in fashion, of 'cultural intermingling' gives. The idea of integration therefore refers dialectically to the integrating group and the integrated group. People are not integrated abstractly, but integrate or are integrated into something. We cannot talk about integration without specifying at what level social reality is situated: family, professional, cultural, religious, national, so many forms of sociability and belonging, and so many possible degrees of integration. In fact, the idea of integration

contains two dimensions: The first, more objective, consists of individuals belonging to conditioning institutions, structures and frameworks (the first of which is perhaps the linguistic framework); the second, more subjective, is the consciousness of the existence of shared standards and values, the feeling of belonging to the same social or political group.

The recent evolution of the use of the term bears witness to both the interest in uniting these two dimensions, as well as the semantic sharing with the neighboring terms 'assimilation' (which now refers more to cultural data) and 'insertion' (which has stabilized on a specifically social plane). It is increasingly the national and political dimension that is designated by 'integration'. An individual who, on one hand, would 'be' French, benefiting from all the rights and fulfilling all the obligations related to citizenship and, on the other, would 'feel' and would claim to be French, would be 'integrated'. Speaking of the integration of immigrant populations would therefore be evoking their entry into a political group that has taken a historical form, the 'French nation'. This semantic clarification must not, however, be too schematic or simplifying. There is not, nicely separated, on one side the cultural (assimilation), on another the social (insertion), and on a third the political (integration). If these three aspects can be distinguished on the conceptual level, in reality, there are many interactions. The fact of having a job and cultural practices accepted by one's neighbors because they are considered 'normal' (meaning in conformity with social standards) necessarily plays a role in the feeling of being French. Cultural, social and political dimensions, even if they cannot be superimposed, are nevertheless connected.

Under these conditions, can French society be described as 'multicultural'? On the one hand, it is unquestionably much less so

than it was a century ago when a variety of 'provincial' languages, traditions and customs was still the rule in a society that was still primarily rural. On the other hand, the migratory flows, which have not run dry, no longer attain the force they had during the 'glorious thirty years' (1945-1975) and especially in the 1920s, after the brutal drop in population due to the First World War. And we must not forget that the enormous diversity of degrees of assimilation, insertion and integration of immigrant populations, or those originating from immigration, makes it virtually impossible to define them today, either uniquely or even principally by their 'culture of origin'; an idea to be handled, moreover, with a great deal of caution, as the immigrant populations have often not had access to the wealth of their culture of origin. For some of them, departure and exile interrupted the process of acculturation; for many of them, social position was incompatible with access to the depth of their civilization. Referring certain groups having trouble integrating to their 'culture of origin' most often amounts to leaving them faced with the violence of dispossession: that of their own tradition. That is why the aspiration to rebuild a cultural identity is growing, for certain young people of the second generation, on the most unconscious elements of a vague 'culture' of impregnation on the ossified fragments of an imperfectly or partially transmitted tradition, which then creates a passionate, even desperate attachment, and functions more as an identity affiliation support than as a sharing of a living culture.

It is on this reality that certain sociologists have forged the curious concept of 'ethnicity', as an identity construction of a group, in a determination to be distinguished from others based on a supposedly different origin; a construction that is often based on a mixture of natural (physical appearance, skin color, etc.), cultural (foreign or regional origin, religion, tastes in music or clothes, etc.) and specifically social (profession, income, place of residence, etc.)

elements. What does it mean when we speak today about a 'multi-ethnic' society? Are we referring to the existence of ethnic groups, with the meaning that the ethnologists give this concept (a group sharing the same language, the same culture and the same history and living on the same territory), or do we really mean those identity patchworks that characterize certain groups of young people? For France at least, the explicit absence of an answer should encourage us to be wary of using this term, all the more so as the spreading of its use by the media ('ethnic' classes, 'ethnic' art, etc.) can make it, depending on the context, the substitute for 'racial' or the equivalent of 'exotic'.

#### **The French school: a school that is more 'national' than 'republican'**

In the French conception, citizenship is a political and not an ethnic idea: One is not born a citizen, one becomes one. It is, according to the tradition inaugurated by Condorcet, less a question of birth, age, or becoming a legal adult than of education. Although it was the Revolution that first turned over the mission of training citizens to the school, the Republic was not the first regime to have given it a political role. This evolution began to take shape in fact in Europe starting with the Reformation, when Luther first assigned schools a political-religious function and sought to control teaching through 'normal' schools that trained teachers in the spreading of his doctrine. The Counter-Reformation then attempted, with the same weapons, to combat this movement. Not only did congregations open schools, but King Louis XIV signed the first text that assigned a political mission to the school 13 years after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In the edict of 1698, which has remained celebrated because it seemed to define an obligation to provide schooling until the age of 14 (which would only take effect in the middle of the 20th century), the king asked each parish to open a school for boys. This order was in fact

meant for those parishes that had families practicing the 'so-called reformed religion'. It was simply a question of eradicating, through the school, Protestantism and putting an end to what appeared to be a state within a state! The consequences of this edict are well-known: The Protestants emigrated or hid, created clandestine schools deep in the woods, 'hedge schools' (*ecole buissonniere* in French, which has come to mean playing truant). This persecution would give rise to the secular trend and even, for a historian like Le Roy Ladurie, the French Left.

So in a certain way, the Republic contented itself with following the kings of France and adopted as its own the political determination to unify the nation, but with one notable difference being that it made national sovereignty reside in citizenship. It was to exercise this new responsibility that several texts of the revolutionary period put the school in charge of training citizens. The Convention, for example, in the Decree of 12 October 1792, proclaimed that "in the primary schools, knowledge necessary for all citizens will be taught. The people responsible for education will be called *instituteurs*". That is where the title of *instituteur* (primary school teacher) comes from: He is the one who 'institutes' citizenship. The Decrees of 30 May and 6 June 1793 proclaimed: "An *instituteur* is in charge of teaching students elementary knowledge in order to exercise their rights and fulfill their duties, and to administer domestic affairs." In this phrase can be recognized the ideas of Condorcet, for whom 'elementary' education was the condition for exercising the rights of citizens freed from the intellectual guardianship of the privileged, capable of thinking and making up their minds freely. The elementary school represented the very condition itself for the exercise of citizenship.

All the regimes in the 19th century would also consider the school as a political tool. The imperial decrees of 1806 instituting the state's monopoly on teaching indicated that: "All the schools of the imperial

university tend to train citizens attached to their religion, their prince, their homeland, their family." In 1833, one year after the first worker's rebellion in Lyon, Francois Guizot founded the public primary school stating that it had to become the "government of minds", and that "universal primary instruction is henceforth a guarantee of order and social stability" (Guizot, 1833). "The government", he wrote, moreover, "must take care to spread, in terms of religion, morality and politics, the doctrines that suit its nature and its management" (Guizot, 1816). Objectives without the least ambiguity! Fifty years later, Jules Ferry and the Republicans pursued this action in two directions. First they secularized primary education by removing its religious dimension, but keeping its moral scope and annexing its political mission. They next opened school to girls because, for them: "Whoever holds the wife, holds everything, first because it holds the children, then because it holds the husband ... It is for that reason that the Church wishes to keep hold of the woman, and it is for that reason that democracy must remove her from the Church ... penalty of death." (Ferry, 1870) Ferry, because of the mythic weight of the individual, warrants an extra moment's attention. We often come across rather erroneous representations of his conception of secularism. Let us therefore go back to the texts and notably to what he said to the primary school teachers:

There are two things to which the state cannot be indifferent, morality and politics; because in morality as in politics the state is in its rightful place. It is its domain and consequently its responsibility. You must teach politics because the law makes you responsible for civics, but also because you must remember that you are the sons of 1789, which freed your fathers, and that you live in the Republic of 1870, which freed you yourselves. You have the duty to make the Republic, and the first Revolution, loved.

A little farther on, we read concerning civics books controlled by the ministry: "Can we see in a measure of this kind a violation of the neutrality promised by the government? No, Messieurs, I promised religious neutrality, I never promised political neutrality" (Ferry, 1883). For the Republicans, school secularism was first a political weapon in the service of their cause.

As for public technical education, it would be naive to think that its creation corresponded to the necessities of technological evolutions or economic growth. Let us first listen to Astier, a radical deputy and promoter of the first law on apprenticeship voted in 1918: "When the state will have taken responsibility for their technical education", he wrote concerning young workers, "developing in them both the man and the citizen, it is a whole new mentality that will replace the old one. The worker will obey his nerves less than his judgment, the agitators and popular sycophants will have a lesser part in his decisions than his true interest."<sup>1</sup> The reasons why Carcopino, minister of education of Vichy, opened 'professional training centers', ancestors of the French professional high schools, in 1941, are equally clear: It was a question, during the Occupation, less of supplying professional workers to industry than "collecting young people aged 14 to 21 who are unemployed or without a defined trade," and who, as a result, "find themselves exposed to numerous dangers." In less veiled terms, Petain's objective was to remove unoccupied working-class youths from the temptations of opposition to the regime, by providing them with political supervision and ideological training. Initially, the six-month training programme would moreover be focused on "the moral and political requirements of the national revolution."

The unification of the education system would be the major project of the Fifth Republic. It drew its inspiration from political reflections ripened during the two world wars: In 1918, the manifesto of the Companions of the New University appeared; in 1947, the report of the commission presided over by Paul Langevin, then Henri Wallon, was published. These two texts defined a determination to transform the school, to unify its segregating courses of study, in order to move towards a fairer and more democratic society. But it was necessary to wait for the beginnings of the Fifth Republic to achieve the implementation of these orientations. When the Algerian war was over, General de Gaulle, the President of the Republic, set three priorities for his new Prime Minister Georges Pompidou: "Firstly, prices [...] secondly, worker integration [...], thirdly, national education: It is a major affair, immediately and for a long time to come. It must moreover contribute to little by little eradicating social classes, provided that all the young French enjoy equal opportunities and that its opening to the masses is compensated for by an orientation and an appropriate selection":<sup>2</sup> a vast political project!

It was the same conception of the relations of the state and society that guided the great school reformers down through the centuries: the role of politics is to control, guide, modify, even reform or 'reintegrate' society, and the school is one of the tools - a privileged one - of this determination. Like religion, it can shape minds, and give a splintered community the feeling of unity that transcends the objective differences of cultural origin and social class, religious beliefs or the political opinion of individuals belonging to the French nation.

1. Quoted by Lelievre (1990).

2. Council of Ministers of December 12, 1962, quoted by Lelievre and Nique (1995).

This determination does not go as far, most of the time, as claiming social equality: The cohesion of society is conceived most often as the acceptance by all, and primarily by the most disadvantaged, of their condition. Another constant of political thinking on the evolution of the school since the 18th century is in fact to see that school reforms do not unduly disturb the established social order. In this way Condorcet justified the 'natural' inequality *vis-a-vis* the school by the necessity for certain children to work at a very young age. Ferry illustrated his vision of the social and school hierarchy by evocative military metaphors: the 'soldiers', the 'non-commissioned officers', the 'officers' of the Republic respectively trained at primary school, central school and high school; we even find this social conservatism, in a form that is certainly different, in the Langevin Wallon plan of 1947 which stated: "Teaching must thus offer to all equal development opportunities, open to all access to culture, become a democracy less through a selection that separates out the most gifted people than through a continuous rise in the cultural level of the whole nation." For these two fellow travelers of a Communist party strongly opposed to the single school during the inter-war years, mass teaching ought not, above all, lead the most brilliant of its sons to separate themselves from the working class!

From this rapid historical survey, we can undoubtedly glean that the school has had, in France and for a very long time, a political vocation. The result has been that through a whole series of cultural (teaching contents, teacher training, etc.) and structural (courses of study, their structure, student orientation, etc.) effects, the school has integrated political aims and concerns. The French public school tends historically to uproot children from their origin, their community, their family and from all of their particularities, in order to introduce them to something vaster, that it calls the universal, in its cultural and scientific dimensions of course, but also in its political

dimensions. Although legally 'indifferent to differences', as it only recognizes students that are equals in terms of rights and obligations, the French school, on the pedagogical and educational level, is in fact very attentive to differences: Students who have just arrived are integrated as quickly as possible into a normal class, especially if they are French-speaking and have already been to school. The 'students with learning problems' who benefit from various aid, support or individualization systems are in the great majority of cases from the working class, which is very strongly marked today by immigration. It is, however, on the basis of their individual difficulties or the economic or social problems of their neighbourhood ('priority education zones') that they benefit from this 'positive discrimination', never on that of their national origin or 'racial' characteristics.

Today, the French school no longer has plans to eradicate particularities or fight religious obscurantism, but it insists that traditions and religions remain limited to a strictly private domain and that they do not interfere in what is taught in school. This is the area in -which the school sometimes comes up against individuals and groups that wish to preserve, even disseminate, these particularities as competing universals. It is felt that compromises could be found when it was a question, for a group, of preserving its attachment to a regional or foreign language and culture of origin; now they are all recognized and taught on the secondary level. It is difficult to see, on the other hand, what school compromises could be made with those who base the claim for particular political rights on religious or cultural specificities, notably concerning the status of women. This is unquestionably where the frontier lies that supporters of a 'national education', the great majority among the teachers and in all likelihood in public opinion, are ready to defend tooth and nail.

### A school model in trouble

The effectiveness of the 'Republican' school model in terms of integration has now become, in France, a recurring question. Of course, its effectiveness (the regionalists accuse it of being too effective) is most often acknowledged in the modernization of French society, in the transformation of a rural, peasant, piecemeal and community-oriented society into an urban, economically developed and culturally unified one. But the challenge today seems different: some people wonder to what extent the immigrant populations can still be integrated. Are the new immigrants, who come from the Third World, notably the Muslims, as capable of being assimilated as their predecessors were, Poles, Italians, Spaniards or Armenians, coming from European, or at least Christian countries, themselves successors in terms of integration to the Bretons, and those from Auvergne and Provence? For a historian like Maurice Agulhon, the answer is clear: "The integration of Arabs, French West Indians and Vietnamese, even if it is somewhat more difficult than that of the Occitans or the Alsatians, has some chance of occurring under the same conditions, which are eminently cultural, and which, as a result, are not without precedent or law" (Agulhon, 1989). In other words, for the historian who has a long view, the conditions under which the nation was formed and has evolved over the centuries •were so different, and the cultural mechanisms of the integration of populations so similar, that one cannot see why, all of a sudden, when they are placed once again in a new situation, the integrating processes would no longer function. For such a historian, historical continuity lies both in the variability of situations and the characteristics of the populations to be integrated, and in the constancy of the political conditions of integration: "A powerful state has founded a well-defined nation, administered according to uniform rules and frameworks from one end of the country to the other; and in the end it has superimposed on this political construction a consciousness of French belonging

that was accepted by the vast majority of people, and even interiorized" (Agulhon, 1989). One is tempted, however, to contrast this analysis to the particular conditions of our period, in which certain people think that these conditions could really harm the French model of integration.

The first is the development, under the dual effect of economic precariousness and the progress of individualism, especially in the conceptions of the habitat, of urban segregation based on 'territories'. The case of the Parisian region is exemplary: Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century social differentiation functioned on a vertical reasoning - the bourgeois occupying the lower floors, the workers and servants the upper floors - it now operates on a territorial reasoning, working class neighborhoods being found east and north, around industrial zones, the 'nice neighborhoods' stretching west and south, protected from pollution by dominant winds, along with office areas. The Republican egalitarian model, with its public elementary and middle schools recruiting their students on a territorial and not social basis, is destabilized by this evolution. The second factor of concern is the 'conspicuous consumer' behavior of a growing number of families (who turn to private schools or, through various legal or fraudulent means, send their children to schools outside their own school districts), which results in an 'over-segregation' in schools in working-class neighborhoods. In fact, this behavior is only one of the effects of a much greater evolution concerning conceptions of the school: From a 'political' school guaranteeing equal access as an effect of the social contract, we seem to be moving to a 'utilitarian' school ensuring the quality of a service defined by a commercial contract. In the end, when these two factors are combined, the social homogeneity of certain schools sometimes appears as the effect of true racial segregation. Obviously, this does not constitute an integration factor.

International models are a last source of questioning, and even concern, for the French school model. On one hand, the context of international migrations has profoundly changed. The development of communications and the freedom of exchanges, both real and virtual, places emigrant populations in a cultural environment that is completely different than before; emigrating is much less of a separation, a rupture: The ease of travel, satellite dishes and the Internet are permanent links with the country of origin and make it possible to envisage maintaining, in the host country, a culturally alive and - why not - enduring 'community of origin'. On the other hand, the growth of political, cultural and educational exchanges, notably within Europe, is making France gradually emerge from a certain autarchy, and making France's leaders aware of the country's isolation: in terms of centralism in system management and human resources management, the separation between contents and teaching methods, the cleavage between instruction and education, and secularism as well. Lastly, the emergence of international law, in the past still seen by the French as the 'export' of their Universalist model of human rights, can now be perceived as restraining, sometimes illegitimately, their 'Republican' conceptions, especially concerning the school. This is notably the case in the very lively debate that is now focusing on the refusal or acceptance of wearing signs of religious membership, by certain students, in public schools. Two conceptions of secularism are in confrontation: the first more sensitive to individual freedoms and rights, the second more concerned with equality and worried about the dangers of multiculturalism. It is revealing that the two camps draw their arguments from multilateral treaties signed by France, the first based on the European Convention on Human Rights to argue for the impossibility of prohibiting the wearing of the 'Islamic scarf' at school, the second leaning on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to uphold the obligation of prohibiting it.

Whatever the case, France seems to be emerging from its isolation and, without abandoning the belief in the legitimacy of its integration model, is raising questions on its effectiveness in today's open world, with nevertheless, two certainties.

The first is that foreign origin is not (or no longer) now, in France, a discriminating factor in the differentiated academic success of the students. These discriminating factors in academic performance have been the subject of many studies, which came to the same conclusions. These factors are gender (girls do better than boys at every level), region (those geographic inequalities, which set a France comprised of the south and Brittany (regions of academic success), against a France comprised of the north and east (regions of academic failure), have been reduced in the last few years by a policy of intentionally unequal distribution of resources) and social class of origin. Foreign origin is apparently only one inequality factor: In fact, when gender, region of residence and socio-professional category are identical, students of foreign origin globally do as well as their classmates of French origin and even, if a difference could be observed, slightly better (Vallet and Caille, 1996). This differentiated success may be correlated with the expectations of families *vis-a-vis* the school: higher than French parents in parents from a sub-Saharan African country and especially from North Africa, not as high in Turkish and Portuguese parents.

The second certainty stems from the relative effectiveness of integrating communities. The village, the city, the region, which used to play a powerful role, notably thanks to the strength of social and cultural standards that they transmitted, are obviously no longer in a position to do so. Europe is still not, as an entity, integrating for those who have settled there, and we may ask if it will have the means to be so one day. Only the nation remains, even if its integrating power is unquestionably diminishing: the children of Portuguese, Chinese or

Moroccan workers who move to France do not become Bretons, Parisians or Europeans; notably through the school, thanks to the school, they become French. France is a country of immigration. This is nothing new, over a quarter of the population has at least one grandparent born abroad. What is new is the context in which these migratory movements, generally that of 'globalization', are continuing, a context that could propel France in the future, perhaps paradoxically, faced with competition based on the Anglo-Saxon community model, to seek the means of preserving its school model of national, individualistic, secular and egalitarian integration in European co-operation.

### Roquefort and Camembert

France has over 300 varieties of cheese. Among the most famous and the most eaten are Camembert and Roquefort. All scientific studies prove it: The academic performances of students whose families prefer Roquefort are better than those of students whose parents are partial to Camembert! Aware of these inequalities, France is hesitating: Should specific classes be created to strengthen the learning of Camembert eaters or, taking an entirely different approach, should positive discrimination be implemented in their favor?

Naturally, this premise is a joke ... or rather a half-joke, because as Roquefort is made in the south of France and Camembert in the north, and the former is more expensive than the latter, their differentiated consumption de facto covers two discriminating factors in academic success - the region and incomes - and the inequality of performances has every chance of being real!

The parable is obvious. It is meant for those who, on the basis of duly observed inequalities of academic performance between students of different 'races' or 'ethnic groups', rarely raise questions on the relevance and use of these ideas, and do not verify, notably by multi-factor analysis, if these natural or cultural parameters are effectively discriminating or if they conceal real inequality factors.

*Question:* what would the effects be of a positive discrimination school policy that used criteria that were in fact non-discriminating in the production of academic inequalities? There is obviously no certain answer to this question, but a hypothesis may be risked: Such a policy could well strengthen the stigmatization and prejudices whose beneficiaries are the victims, and stoke the frustrations of those who would be unfairly excluded.

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