

Imagining the Republic: Nation, Citizenship and Belonging in France

¹Mohammed Agzar, ²Mohammed V-Agdal

¹Language, Culture and Society Doctoral Unit, ²Rabat, Morocco

Abstract: France has a mode of national belonging that emphasizes the Universalist values of the French republicanism inscribed by the French revolution. This claim to a universal and secular French citizenship that confounds ethnic and racial particularity has enabled France to maintain a seemingly distinct national tradition and distinguish its model of citizenship from those of other European nation-states. However, political, social, economic and cultural transformations that France has witnessed since World War II expose some key limitations in the Universalist ideology of French republicanism. In this article I will argue that, contrary to the republican claim to universal “citizen” defined primarily in the realm of the legal and political, the provision of French citizenship has operated along strict lines of race and ethnicity. Integration in France is equated with socialization and assimilation while patterns of implementing the secular law favored more “normative” and “mainstream” ethno-religious expressions in the public space.

Keywords: Ethnicity, *Laïcité*, Race, Nation, Republicanism, Citizenship, Dual Nationality, *affaire du foulard*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Unlike most of EU member states, France maintains what must be, in its implications, one of the most problematical and equivocally abstract nationalist traditions. This makes it very difficult for a “French” person to define on what basis he or she can be considered so. In this article I highlight some of the sources of ambiguity surrounding the French citizenship model. By drawing on the recent debates around the Islamic headscarf *l’affaire du foulard* and dual nationality, two issues largely associated with North African settlement, I argue that, contrary to the republican claim to a universalist French citizenship based on Enlightenment philosophies of human rights, the provision of substantive French citizenship has always operated along lines of race and ethnicity, leading to an exclusionary national tradition.

There is a longstanding tendency in both France and Germany to regard as unique their respective national traditions, although it is much easier for a German to define the basis on which he is so. Not until 2000, Germany had accentuated an ethnic mode of national belonging based on German bloodline whereby direct blood relations with German parents (*Jus Sanguinis* principle) was compulsory to gain admission to the German citizenship.¹ In France the claim to the specificity of the French citizenship model starts, first, from the idea that in France, unlike Germany, membership and belonging are a matter of consent and “free will” of the French people. This idea originates in the text of a lecture by historian, philosopher and nationalism ideologist Earnest Renan entitled *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (what is a nation?), and is a key emphasis in the Republican tradition today. “A nation” writes Renan “is the consent; the clearly expressed desire to continue communal life...The existence of a nation is a daily plebiscite” (qtd. in Weil 75). Thus, unlike the German blood-based version of citizenship, the French model is presented as a matter of a collective consensus expressed through

¹ On 1 January 2001, the German parliament introduced a new reform allowing immigrants with an extended residence as well as German-born children of immigrants (*Jus Soli Principle*) to acquire German citizenship. See Hailbronner and Farahat. K. Hailbronner, and A. Farahat. *Country Report on Citizenship Law: Germany*. Florence: The European University Institute, 2015, pp. 1.

the “free will” of French citizens. The second premise posits that, unlike Germany, France has had a tradition of *Jus Soli*² (law of the soil) established in 1889 (Weil, 75). However, a brief sketch of the historical developments in the politics of membership and belonging in France will highlight some of the ways in which these founding principles of French citizenship can be challenged.³

Although the philosophical notion of “free will” expressed by Renan and his peers in 1882 helped to maintain a distinct national Republican tradition and distinguish the French nationality from for instance an overtly ethnocentric German nationality, this principle has hardly informed the actual provision of French citizenship. In practice, the principle of “free will” came only secondary to a set of other more crucial prerequisites which, in their implications, all seemed to secure the more primary aim of “socialization” and integration into the French cultural mainstream life. Today, 95 percent of naturalized French have never been required to state their individual desire to obtain French nationality. Rather, “for those who can express such desire, they can only do so under certain tangible social conditions” such as residence, marriage, knowledge of the language. “Free will,” Patrick Weil argues, was mainly a philosophical invention that served to achieve a particular strategic role: that of differentiating “the French nation from the German nation to illegitimate the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by the German Empire, regardless of the ethnic ties that could be seen as tying it to the Empire” (81).

Historically, a blend of *Jus Soli*, *Jus Sanguinis*, marital status and extended residency served as the basis for granting French citizenship. *Jus Soli*, which is much relevant today, was first dominant during the *ancien régime*, prior to the French Revolution. Although *Jus Sanguinis* began to be adopted at the beginning of the 17th century (no longer emphasized today) the birth principle still took precedence. Children of French parents who were born outside France sought the king’s permission to become French nationals; but children of foreign parents who were born in France smoothly became French nationals (76).

With the outbreak of the French Revolution, however, these *ancien régime* criteria came under the onslaught of the social contract philosophies which inscribed the modern meaning of citizenship. The 1791 constitution instituted the new and modern definition of “Frenchness” based on the notion that anyone could be granted citizenship if they participated in “national sovereignty.” Emphasizing extended residence with active social and political participation, this new conception of “French national” was defined primarily at the legal-political level of belonging, allowing previously excluded groups such as Jews and non-Catholics access to French nationality (76).

However, the period between the issuing of the Code Napoleon in 1804 and 1889 witnessed a new a return to *Jus Sanguinis*. Against Napoleonic will legislators held that birth in a French territory was not enough guarantee of loyalty to France and rather suggested reintroducing direct blood relations as a precondition to admission to the national community. However, in 1889, the judiciary commission of the *Chambre des Députées* proposed to reintroduce *Jus Soli* since it believed that “a child born in France of parents who themselves were born in France was French from the point of view of spirit, inclination, habit and morals”(78). This return to *Jus Soli* was motivated by a fear of collective separatism as well as a need for workers in the industry and the army. Instead of extending earlier contract-based or ethnic origin-based citizenship models, this concept of nationality was based on a notion of socialization as “a process and therefore neither an ethnic ‘given’ nor a simple voluntary act” (80).

Applicants to French citizenship through marriage to a French national also have to meet certain conditions of assimilation and socialization. The French citizenship law requires a would-be French citizen married to a French national to fulfill a minimum marriage duration of four years if they are legal resident of France. Applicants not living permanently in France or living abroad are required to fulfill a minimum of five years marriage period. An applicant must also show evidence of their legal status; their request is declined if they have been “subject to a deportation order still in effect or a ban from French territory not fully enforced.” Another condition is what the *administration Française* website calls “community of life” [*communauté de vie*]. This stipulates that “the emotional and material community of life must not

² *Jus Soli* in France as defined by *Le Code de Nationalité* refers to “being born to at least one parent born in France”: quoted in INED. “Trajectories and Origins” Survey. *teo.site*. Web. 21 July 2015.

³ At the larger European level, France’s and Germany’s claims to distinct national traditions have been viewed as stumbling blocks on the way to EU citizenship envisaged by Maastricht Treaty (1992) and to the implementation of international treaties on deterritorialized human rights. See Yasemin N. Soysal, “Changing Citizenship in Europe: Remarks on Postnational Membership and the National State,” *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe*, ed. David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook (London: Routledge 1996).

have ceased with your marriage partner and your spouse must retain their French nationality.” A third condition is “assimilation” according to which the applicant “must provide proof of knowledge of the French language, especially the language understanding needed to manage situations in everyday life.” This emphasis on assimilation also requires applicants to specify the nationality (or nationalities) [they] already have and if [they] want to keep or abandon it.” Finally, the acquisition of citizenship through marital status requires applicants to keep a good criminal history record. Acquisition of citizenship is denied to applicants who “have been convicted of a crime or offense constituting a breach of the fundamental interests of the nation or an act of terrorism [and who] have been sentenced to at least 6 months of suspended prison (whatever the offense)” (*service-public.fr*).

Weil also draws attention to residence as an overlooked criterion of granting French citizenship through which sociability and adoption of “French” values and lifestyle are ensured. Applicants of French citizenship through an extended residence period are required by the state to meet relatively strict criteria of socialization which include a minimum of five years spent in France, knowledge of French language, stable financial resources, and current residence in France (80). However, this formal process of naturalization has involved exclusionary requirements such as linguistic and civic tests that a substantial number of native citizens seemed to be unable to fulfill, consolidating the boundary separating “us” from “them” (Simon 16).

Whether through birth, bloodline, residence, “free will,” or marital status, the French model of integration has sought to ensure “socialization” into the French societal mainstream. As Weil aptly puts it: “French republican law bases French nationality more on the acquisition of certain codes of sociability than on the expressions of one’s will, one’s origin or one’s birthplace. In the end these are nothing but tokens of this acquisition” (80). It is crystal clear, therefore, that citizenship and assimilation into the mainstream ethnic culture are inextricably intertwined. Extension of French civic party to immigrants and their descendents, despite the republican claim to the contrary, is strictly contingent on their acceptance of the mores of the dominant white ethnic culture posed as a “uniform national culture”. However, this fundamental nexus between the so-called political-legal mode of belonging and ethno-cultural norms is effaced through what Max Silverman describes as a “process of depoliticization and naturalization” (153-154).

Although the republican demand for sociability as a precondition for admission into the national community has been traditionally secured through the above principles but also via other mainstream institutions such as the military and school (Weil 78), France maintains a long tradition of state interference with the cultural and social lives of its citizenry. For immigrants and their descendents this interventionist role has involved policing of their minority cultures and their ethnic attachments.

Contrary to the Enlightenment ideals of a democratic public space of minimal state intervention and a more independent role of civil society in issues of culture, the French state has an entrenched role in regulating social and cultural questions (Silverman 148). The national debate surrounding the Islamic headscarf or the so-called *l'affaire du foulard* may be a useful background for understanding the French state’s intrusion into cultural and social domains. We shall see below how the state’s ban on wearing headscarves in French public schools offers the best and the most recent illustration of the erosion of “minimal state” as a founding principle of the French secular democracy. Together with the polemic over dual nationality which I will discuss later in this article, the *headscarf affair* will help highlight some of the contradictions between “race/ethnicity” and “nation” in the French model of integration.

2. THE ISLAMIC HEADSCARF AFFAIR

The recent polemic over the *foulards islamiques* exposed the French “nation” to itself. The ratification of a new law in 2004 barring Muslim schoolgirls from wearing headscarves in public schools, though vehemently condemned by many ethnic spokespeople and liberals, was largely endorsed in media and formal politics circles which rather viewed the legislation as necessary to the preservation of France as a “secular” nation.⁴ The ban was based on a report by the *commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de Laïcité dans la république* (Commission for Reflection on the Principle of Secularity in the Republic) appointed by president Jacques Chirac on 3 July 2003.

⁴ Although the *headscarf affair* dates back to the suspension of three headscarf-wearing Muslim schoolgirls on 18 September 1989, that is, more than one decade before the speech by the Minister of Interior Nicholas Sarkozy in April 2003, this occasion will stand out for its legal outcomes—it culminated in a law barring any display of religious identity in public schools. See Asad 93.

One principle of French republicanism that, according to the Stasi's commission (named after chair Bernard Stasi), was violated by wearing the headscarf is the distinction between the "public" and "the private" domains. This principle holds the public space as a "neutral, unitary and enlightened realm" that confounds all particularisms (tribalism, ethnocentrism, etc) which it associates with the private realm. It originates in the triumph of the republican consensus at the end of the nineteenth century on the nature of the citizen and the appeal of Ernest's Renan's "free will" expressed in his famous speech "What is a Nation?" (*qu'est ce que une nation?*) (Silverman 152). This distinction is also anchored in the modern definition of citizenship inscribed by the French Revolution, which emphasized the notion of "abstract citizen" (*citoyen abstrait*), one who is detached from all forms of belonging, including religious belonging (Baubérot 29).

On the other hand, this new definition of "citizen" equates him, in an apparently unproblematic conflation, with the universal concept of "Man." The problem with this construal is that in confining "Man" to discrete political units—nation-states (nation itself is equated with humanity, confusing national law with natural law) it reduces him to the realm of the legal and political while it denies the social and cultural (e.g. ethnic and racial identity) dimensions of his *humanité*.

This confusion has enabled the state to maintain a "depoliticized" space of citizenship, where particularist features and expressions of ethnic culture are compromised for a so-called neutral public realm. It has led to what Silverman aptly describes as "the uniformization of national culture by means of the state" (Silverman 146-147).

The ratification of the state ban on wearing headscarves to public schools is very illustrative of the so-called neutral universalism at work. The universalist principles mentioned above provided the "legal" imprimatur for ratifying the ban and casting a veneer of legitimacy on the state's suppression of virtually one of the most potent expressions of Muslim, and more particularly, an undesirable "North African," ethno-religious presence in France. A closer look at the commission's report on the banning of the so-called "religious symbols" in public schools can help tease out further elements of ambiguity and contradiction in the universalist postulation as a founding myth of French republicanism and the French model of integration. Analyzing it will help problematize questions of ethnic difference beyond the easy binarisms of the "universal/particular", "progressive/primitive," etc. to which they have been reduced in the homogenizing logic of French republicanism.

First, as expressed clearly in its title, Stasi's commission was tasked with reflecting upon a definition of *laïcité* and conceiving ways of implementing it. However, like "citizen" and "Man", *laïcité* has rather been an ambiguous reference in the French political discourse. In both theory and practice, invocation of it has been dauntingly equivocal. As the French version of secularism, *Laïcité* in the modern sense⁵ came into usage after the French Revolution and the abolition of the *ancien régime* in 1789. It was later inscribed in the 1905 law separating the church from the state and in the 1958 *Constitution française*. The 1905 law stipulates that 1) "no religion can be supported by the state either financially or politically (hence the state's neutrality), 2) everyone has the right to follow a religion, and 3) religious education at school is strictly forbidden (qtd. in Ali 3). The Nineteenth century philosopher Ferdinand Buisson pointed out that a *laïque* state is neutral in matters of religion and maintains independence from religious institutions, but this neutrality is only a means to ensure "the freedom of all religions" and the "equality of all citizens before the law" (qtd. in Baubérot 27).

In the introduction to Stasi's report, the commission states that, "as the corner stone of the Republican pact, *laïcité* hinges on three inseparable values: "freedom of conscience, equality in terms of spiritual and religious choices, and the neutrality of the political powers" (Stasi 9). This formulation is problematical, first, because it subsumes freedom of conscience and the legal equality of religions under the category of "secularism," even though the laws protecting those liberties exist independently and even predate debates on *laïcité*. They were for instance recognized by the 1789 and the 1791 Constitutions, respectively, that is, long before public discussion on secularization began in earnest. This reductivism is also oblivious to the fact that countries which may not be described as "secular," say, Scandinavian countries, have maintained a long tradition of religious freedom (Barbier 4).

What the report refers to as the "neutrality of political powers" also remains abstract and its aspects undefined. As we shall see below, this ambiguity contributed to an ambivalent implementation of the "*laïque*" law in the case of the headscarf. Additionally, the report's claim to neutral public schools appears starkly antithetical to, for instance, the definition of neutrality in education proposed by 1989 *Conseil d'Etat* which include "neutrality of teachers and the school curricula, respect for students' liberty of conscience as well as students' right to display their belief inside educational institutions"(4).

⁵ On the meanings of *laïcité* in the medieval France see Jean Bauberot

French secularism also reserves to the state the final authority to decide whether given signs have a 'religious' meaning and whether they can be tolerated in public. This process of defining and categorizing codes of appearance is the object of considerable misappropriation and subversion by the state, some aspects of which are reflected in Stasi's report. By calling for the ban of what it views as "symbols" of religious identity in public schools, the report confines all religious appearance to the realm of symbols, holding all wearables as signs which are also "displaceable signs." Thus, for the commission, the headscarf is a mere "sign" or "symbol", nothing more than large crosses, stars of David and hands of Fatima, and is therefore "displaceable." For Asad, this relegation of the headscarf to the status of a "sign" leaves out the more essential feature of it: the view that headscarf is a "religious duty", especially if the wearer "assumes the veil as an obligation of her faith" that is, "if her conscience impels her to wear it as an act of piety." In this way the veil is not "a sign intended to communicate something but part of an orientation, a way of being" (Asad 95-96). Applying the *Laïque* law in the case of Muslim headscarf involves thus more than a mere removal of allegedly displaceable signs. It also involves is a serious infringement of their rights (including their freedom of conscience which *Laïcité* is allegedly said to protect) and an act of *compulsion* by placing limit on the students' religious-sanctioned behavior and religiously informed social practices of which the wearing headscarf is not only a symbol but rather a *religious act*.

Since the task of secularism is to prevent two different forms of transgression "the preservation of politics by religious forces", and "the state's restriction of religious freedom" (105), the legal ban on the Islamic headscarves in the French public school reveals just how distant French secular model is from fulfilling those basic secular goals. Far from neutral, the secular state enforcement of the principle of *Laïcité* only deepened its interventionist role in ethno-religious choices of its citizenry. In fact, the secular state-focused regulation of the public space, including the state's criteria of which religious expressions, symbols and forms can be allowed in public, follows, despite the official claim to the contrary, an ethnocentric schemata. In Asad's analysis, the French secular state abides by a *cuius regio eius religio* principle (the religion of the ruler is the religion of the subjects), although no overt reference to a particular religious allegiance is made by the state which rather claims to govern an irreligious society (94).

The history of *laïque* France reveals a substantial bias in state tolerance of various religiously-identified groups. Patterns of the state's treatment of religious appearance in the public space reveal a fundamental tendency to favor Judeo-Christian codes of appearance which are viewed as more normative and more commensurate with national culture (106). This ambivalence can be traced to the nineteenth century applications of secularism which, although emphasizing separation of religion from the state, failed to dissociate national identity from Judeo-Christian morality. The 19th century secular state for instance stipulated that French primary schools include compulsory courses in *morale religieuse* (religious morality). Thus, although it was held that the law was secular, the morality was still religious. Likewise, the 1801 Concordat that Napoleon Bonaparte signed with the Pope to subordinate the Catholic church to the government and to confine its role to religious matters, inscribed Catholicism, Lutherianism, Calvinism and Judaism as official religions. Thus, though they were relegated to the private domain, they still constituted "the foundation of public morality" (Baubérot 30-31).

What also remains critically lacking in Stasi's commission's "reflection" is an understanding of the historical developments that first led the emergence of *Laïcité* in political discourse in the first place. The emergence of the *Laïque* law in the context of bourgeois hostility to the Catholic Church and the entrenched role of the clergy in the state during the *ancient regime* raises many questions on the relevance of the secular discourse in a postcolonial context marked by a substantial Muslim settlement.

The debate surrounding the headscarf affair is broad in scope and its intricacies can by no means be covered fully in this paper. I have emphasized it only in as far as it serves the task of delineating the problematic nature of the French citizenship model and the many difficulties one inevitably runs into in locating and delimiting the meanings of being "French." Its importance germinates from the fact that it tests the limits to which the French liberal republicanism could go. The *headscarf affair* typifies a wider set of difficulties associated with the "new immigrants," namely North African immigrants whose presence has been depicted as something of an "invasion." The arrival of these immigrants and their descendents is widely viewed to have been accompanied by an invasion of arguments and demands about race and anti-racism into the "neutral, individualist, and universalist French public sphere, ushering in 'the racialization of French society'" (Silverman 154).

In the rest of this article I will discuss the question of dual nationality as another overlooked area where the contradictions between nation and race/ethnicity in the French integration model have been most evident.

3. DUAL NATIONALITY

Traditionally dual nationality was avoided in Europe and was viewed in as getting in the way of citizenship as an exclusive contract between citizens and the state.⁶ In many countries, especially in Western Europe, dual nationality is viewed as a challenge to the modern notion of the nation-state as “the largest group of people”—what Rupert Emerson called “terminal political community” (qtd. in Marc Morjé Howard 698). This conception of nationality as the commitment to a single nation enabled these nation-states to maintain their authority for centuries.

One reason dual nationality has been highly overriding to recent debates is its connection to the question of political participation. States with dual nationals are confronted by cases where these citizens may still well be interested in political life of their countries of origin. However, advances in human rights, mass immigration and rapid globalization in the second half of the twentieth century ushered in more permeable national boundaries. Faced with an increasing number of foreign children born to parents with different nationalities, West European countries started to develop more permissive attitudes toward dual nationals (Howard 698). These profound changes made the 19th century definition of nationality and citizenship seem increasingly difficult to maintain. However, the question over dual nationality is still a significant presence in public debate.

Not until 2009, France refused to liberalize dual nationality policies, now accepting citizens with two passports. Although French naturalization now does not require renunciation of another nationality, dual nationals have historically been the object of official hostility. Unlike the American and Canadian multiculturalist models, “dual belonging” is opposed to in France. It is believed that commitment to minority culture or a foreign country gets in the way of one’s commitment to the French nationality. Concern over “hyphenated identities” and plural belonging emerged under different guises in France and not a single time did it translate into discriminatory policies. We have seen some of its implications in the *affaire du foulard* (the Islamic headscarf affair) above. In 2007, the Sarkozy’s government created the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development with the aim of “promoting national Identity.” Two year later, in 2009, the government launched “the Great Debate on National Identity” with the aim of codifying “what it means to be French” . For immigrants and their descendents, the debate, which cut across party lines, suggested the overriding doubts cast upon their loyalty to France (Simon 2-3).⁷The Great debate suggested that, for more than a century after Renan’s “*que’est que une nation?*” speech, “Frenchness” was still an ambiguous concept that still defied clear-cut definition.

In the autumn of 2010 the conservative party radicals issued a parliamentary amendment opposing dual nationality. Although the amendment failed to become policy, the concern the surrounds it rekindled later on in the spring of 2011. This time, the debate over dual nationality appeared beyond formal venues of immigration legislation and party politics in the field of sports culture when officials in the French National football team opposed dual-national players who chose to play for their home teams instead of the French one. However, the controversy sparked by this incident is not unprecedented. Concerns over French football players’ multiple allegiance have a long history in the French football culture.

The national unease surrounding the loss of high-profile French players who were also Algerian nationals during the Algerian War of Independence (1958-1962) is a significant historical background for analyzing the more recent debate on bi-national players. Two months before the 1958 World Cup, colonial French-Algerian players Mustapha Zitouni and Rachid Mekloufi, who were expected to represent France in the world tournament, together with twelve other Algerian players left France to Tunisia to join the team for the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*)

⁶ A case in point is the Council of Europe’s 1963 Convention of Reduction of cases of Multiple Nationality. The convention held that individuals acquiring a new citizenship out of their own free will require renunciation of their former citizenship. See Guild 30.

⁷ Traditionally a central theme in the populist discourse of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, immigration has become a key issue in mainstream politics. After economic policies ceased to be divisive questions, the left and the right alike turned to immigration and the notions of “moral panic” with which it became associated to differentiate their respective political orientations. However, interest in immigration in the politics of the French left is not new to the Grand Debate. It dates back to the early 80s when the newly elected socialist-communist government (1981) faced vehement opposition from the right and right-aligned media over rising unrest in the suburbs of the main French cities known as *les étés chauds* [the hot summers] (1981-1983). These riots involved North African and Afro-Caribbean *banlieues* dwellers in the main who protested against police authoritarianism and racial discrimination in housing, education and employment. Awakened to the populist potential of immigration, the leftist government began to embrace a more hostile attitude toward immigrants. See Minnaert 80-98.

independence movement known as *Equipe FLN* to support the Algerian war of independence that had started four years before. The *Equipe FLN* was the invention of Mohamed Boumezrag, who played professionally in France and who had first conceived of the political potential of sports as another front for the liberationist struggle. Boumezrag's idea of a FLN team was fully endorsed by the FLN leader Ahmed Ben Bella who later became the first president of independent Algeria.

Unsuccessful pleas in retaliation were made by France to the FIFA to sanction teams that faced the *Equipe FLN*. Furthermore, players who "were still theoretically covered by the French military service rules—including Mekloufi—were sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison for desertion" (Ross 2014). In Britain this is reminiscent of the public malaise surrounding Decathlete Daley Thompson's refusal to hold the British flag at the Commonwealth Games in September 1982. Thompson's act was interpreted by some as evidence of his "partial commitment to "Britishness" (Gilroy 66).

More recently, a series of attempts were made by the Algerian Federation to include Algerian players holding a French nationality. The federation urged the FIFA to change its eligibility rules for under-21 bi-national players. Eventually, in 2009 the FIFA consented to liberalizing its rules, enabling players to switch their eligibility. The resultant national lineup which *Le Monde* pathetically dubbed "the other French team" led Algeria to qualify for the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil (Ross).

However, it was not dual national players opting to play for Algeria that engendered all of the debate on dual nationality in the French football. The numerous episodes of police-youth confrontation that took place in the aftermath of various sports events helped fuel the ongoing polemic on the multiple allegiances of North African immigrants and their descendents. Following the Algerian national team's victory over Russia in June 2014, resulting in a historic qualification for Algeria to the World Cup playoffs, tens of thousands of Algerian youths took to the streets of various French cities in jubilation. What seemed to be processions of ecstatic crowds joyfully spilling downtown and waving Algerian flag morphed into bitter clashes with the police force culminating in over 74 arrests and several incendiary acts.

Propelled by the ensuing clashes, the extreme right anti-immigration Front National (FN) Marine Le Pen, the successor of the anti-immigration FN founder Jean Marie-le-Pen, made an immediate plea to ban dual nationality, blaming the so-called youth "violence" on laxative nationality laws: "This is the demonstration of the total failure of immigration policy in our country, of the refusal to assimilate by a certain number of bi-nationals...They must choose: they are Algerian or French, Moroccan or French, they can't be both" (*lexpress.fr*).

The youths' partial commitment to France, their deficient "Frenchness," is suggested first by the greenness of their appearance that resonated with the Algerian flags they waved—the flag itself is a potent symbol due to its historical significance as a color of protest, namely its connotations with urban struggle in many French cities during the Algerian liberation struggle. Nice's mayor's ban on "ostentatious use" of foreign flags in the eve of Algeria's match against Germany in the last 16 round of the 2014 World Cup particularly cements these meanings and is redolent of the official awareness of the long history of protest expressed through Algerian flags.

The image of diverging, if not antagonistic, national cultures openly acknowledged by Le Pen is also galvanized by the symbolic significance of the locations in which the confrontations took place as well as those from which the youths emanated. In Paris, where the major confrontations occurred, the massive processions of qualification-frenzied youths set off largely from the impoverished *banlieues* of Cliché-Sous-Bois to iconic "national" sites, namely the Champ Elysees where they were met by metropolitan riot police with tear gas.

Like the North American and British ghettos and projects, the French *banlieues* are peripheral housing projects hosting pauper North African, Turkish, Afro-Caribbean and Sub-Saharan migrants. Etymologically speaking, the *banlieues* connote spatial segregation and exclusion. They "are separated from the center by rigid boundaries that emphasize their non-belonging to the system" (Horvath 93). The French state fails to recognize these spaces as vibrant ethnic spaces whose complex ethnic geography cannot be leveled down to mere manifestation of national culture

In a *Front National* coupon entitled "La Double Nationalité: Il faut En Finir" (Dual Nationality: It Must be Ended) Le Pen explicitly blames the rise in lawbreaking in the French *banlieues* on dual nationality laws (*Frontnational.com*). Dual nationality for Le Pen made for imperfect, simulated citizens who benefited from the rights France offered but whose real affiliation lied elsewhere. By bringing the police-youth confrontations to the forefront of the ongoing debate over dual nationality, Marine Le Pen is able to reaffirm a longstanding stereotype that views North Africans as a pathological settler community. The coupon's call to "strip bi-nationals engaging in delinquent and criminal acts of their French nationality"

(*Frontnational.com*) is a clear suggestion that their “delinquent” predilections stem from their “other” nationality which is recast as incompatible (and, by extension, excludable) with “Frenchness.”

The image of incompatible Maghrebi youths is particularly reinforced by their fundamental antipathy towards the police, an important theme in the sub-cultural politics of the young *beur* in France dating back at least to the “hot summers” of the early 80s. The social protest movements that erupted in the suburbs of key French cities between 1981 and 1983 marked the emergence of the Second Generation Maghrebi young male as a law and order issue in national politics. This racialized image of the young “*beurs*” as “lawbreakers” is integral to the new cultural racism of the French new right, but not without support on the left. It has helped to recast the xenophobic discourse of earlier racisms under the more acceptable garb of cultural difference, circumventing accusations of racism. Thus, not only are these descendants of immigrants *unwilling* to invest fully in their French nationality but they are also *inherently unable* to do so, due to their fundamental propensity toward lawbreaking which is explained in terms of their belonging to an alien ethnic culture.

I would like to round up by considering a number of pointers towards what I see as the basis of a more pluralist conceptualization of the French model of integration, one that accommodates the social, political, cultural and economic changes that France has witnessed in the recent decades.

Applications of the French secular model of laïcité have been exclusionary to minoritarian groups and rather favored Judeo-Christian forms of religiosity which are cast as “national” religions. The state hostility previously evinced towards the clergy and Jews has been directed toward Muslim immigrants. This development is linked, in the words of Etienne Balibar, to an “image of Islam as a ‘conception of the world’ which is incompatible with Europeaness and an enterprise of universal ideological domination, and therefore a systematic confusion of ‘Arabness’ and ‘Islamicism’” (Balibar 24). In the *affaire du foulard* discussed above, the headscarf symbolizes for the so-called secular state the larger threat of Islam coming to compete with the “Judeo-Christian values” as the basis for the state’s education of secular citizens (Asad 106). In the words of UOIF’s (the Union of Islamic Organizations of France) president, the state ban on headscarves in public educational institutions law meant a move from a “tolerant, open and generous secularism, that is to say a secularism aiming at integration [*une laïcité d’intégration*], to a secularism of exclusion [*une laïcité d’exclusion*]” (96).

The debate on dual nationality is premised on a conflation of allegiance with nationality. In seeing acceptance (or refusal) of French nationality as necessarily an evidence of allegiance (or detachment from) to France, the dual membership debate oversimplifies the rather complex dynamics of “migrant” identity formation and presents it as a “zero sum game” (Simon 1). According to a recent survey, two thirds of immigrants holding a dual nationality are Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians (the South East Asians making the least group to include bi-nationals). Maghrebi second and third generation immigrants make the second largest group (more than one third) after the Turkish maintaining attachment to the nationalities of their parents. Overall, over 50 % of immigrants who acquired French nationality retained their original nationality (Simon 6).

Needless to say, questions of belonging and allegiance are too complex to be gauged through strictly quantitative methods. However, some aspects of dual nationality investigated by the survey further complicate the matter of immigrants’ allegiance. For instance, the survey has shown that bi-nationals feel “French” as much as those who gave up their original nationalities. Another difficulty arises from whether the absence of dual citizenship can be enough testimony of affiliation to the host country. As in the case of Algerian players, legal restrictions that the FIFA and the French nationality laws had placed on national eligibility hardly barred bi-national Algerian players from expressing their willingness to play for their home teams.

Another dimension of belonging investigated by the survey involves the distinction between one’s “feeling of being French” and “being perceived as French”. This distinction is crucial since “being French” depends not merely on the individual’s *own* “feelings of belonging and attachment” but also by “external perceptions of identity”, that is, through recognition by fellow nationals. Nearly a half of immigrants with French nationality reported their being *not* perceived as “French.” These numbers are even higher among “visible” minorities who still feel their skin and appearance are barriers on the way to feeling really “French.” These informants have reported that “looking and sounding French are more important dimensions of feeling French”. What this also suggests is that interest in the preservation of ethnic identity is not only a question of migrants’ preference but is also “a consequence of the repeated experiences of discrimination and stigmatization” (Simon 1-3).

Besides, the distinction between “feeling French” and “feeling at home in France,” bearing in mind that the latter may hold without entailing the former, is equally an important one. The survey further reveals that immigrants’ sense of “feeling at home” in France is higher and more powerful than identifying with France (Simon 4). Especially important

here, but beyond the scope of this article, is the role of community, locality, regionalism, ethnicity, and diaspora as alternative axes for identification and differentiation which may not coincide with the lines of “nation” and “national culture,” geographically, politically or ethnically defined.

The link between multiple allegiances and lawbreaking common to the populist discourse the *Front National*, which is not without support on the French left, locates lawbreaking as something of “alien” to France, while abiding by the law becomes synonymous with “being French.” Among the many other implications of this simplistic binarism is that, in pitting North Africanness against Frenchness, it recasts them as mutually exclusive categories. North Africans ethnic presence is thus relegated to an ahistorical status of “problem,” effacing the preponderant roles North African settlement has in defining “national culture”.

On the other hand, the tendency to explain delinquency in terms of perpetrators’ dual nationality fails to account, for instance, for why so-called delinquent acts of Maghrebi youths are common among the white working class youths of the *banlieues*. It is clear from urban history of the *banlieues* that the “violence” currently associated with these locations was commonplace *prior* to the mass arrival of postcolonial North African immigrants. For instance, the several clashes recorded in several *banlieues* during the 50s known as *les Blousons Noirs* (the black jackets), involved French working class youth gangs of rural origins, although what distinguished the urban “violence” associated with Second Generation North African youths from *les blousons noirs* is that it involved direct confrontation with the police (Moalic-Minnert 23). Arguments about a so-called North African “law and order problem” are thus oblivious to the role that racial discrimination and socioeconomic disenfranchisement historically have in creating potentially disruptive suburban communities.

Particularly lacking in the current attempts to define “Frenchness” is a willingness to discuss colonialism as the overarching juncture in which the theorizations and rationalizations of nation-building took place. The role of French republican civic values in creating a segregated colonial Algeria where vote in French elections was reserved to French citizens occupying autonomous territories is nowhere present in the debate. Similarly, there is a tendency to dissociate the recent ban on the Islamic headscarf from the racialized applications of *laïcité* in *l’Algerie Coloniale* where the French settlers closed religious schools and libraries, and confiscated the property of the Islamic foundations that supported them. Extension of naturalization to Arabs during the colonial era forced them to forsake their “‘indigenous status,’ which in part required renouncing Islamic law” (Huma 6). This failure of French integration model to integrate colonial history reflects a tendency to separate the homogenizing impacts of today’s racism from those of *l’imaginaire colonial*.

Seen against this background, notions of a “shared” history, sentiment and memory which for Renan and his peers would allow the French to imagine the “nation,” and which ever since have become integral to of republican integrationist model have time and again proved inadequate to guarantee an “integrated” France. To argue of a “national history,” univocally conceived, is to be silent on subjects for whom that “history” is also a memory of colonial exploitation and suffering. Where the racial picture remains somber, at a time reference to “race” as such is vehemently criticized,⁸ and where colored postcolonial minorities seem, by virtue of the visible stigmata of otherness they bear, unable to make important alterations in their status as second class citizens, discourses of “nation” and “national culture” seem to be not only practically untenable but virtually inappropriate.

4. CONCLUSION

The controversies around the Muslim headscarf and dual nationality (and the question of youth delinquency inextricably linked to it) thrust into stark relief the contradictions around “race/ethnicity” and “nation” in present-day France. They expose the limitations of the received definitions of Frenchness which for so long have informed inclusion to (and exclusion from) the national community. They testify to the fact that, despite the official tendency to dismiss “race” from political discourse, a deep sense of *French race* is engraved into national borders, determining who might belong to national community.

The vaunted ideal of France as a secular democracy has given way an entrenched state role in civil society. The state ban on the headscarf exemplifies this surveillance of culture and state preoccupation with creating a national citizenry that is

⁸For instance, in the spring of 2013 Socialist candidate Francois Holland has for dismissing “race” from French discourse of integration altogether. Alana Lentin and Valérie Amiraux.

indifferent to its ethno-religious origins. It is also illustrative of how policing of immigrants' identities for symptomatic indices of multiple allegiances may translate into discriminatory policies.

Rather than viewed as expressive of immigrants desire to navigate a plurality of allegiances, naturalized immigrants' choosing to retain their former nationalities, preferring a dual status as binationals is thus viewed as a sign of a deficient contradictory Frenchness.

The so-called national debates on the meaning of national identity and membership, which date back to the high era of the modern period, have barely succeeded to support a straightforward definition of Frenchness, which remains rather evasive and historically volatile. The Eighteenth century and Nineteenth century definitions of a French national are too superficial and formalistic to integrate the complex dynamics of identity formation in a postwar migrant context tinged by experiences of racism and postcolonial indenture.

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