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Paper - EUSA Conference 2007, Montreal

France, immigration, and the policies of Culture: understanding the “French Integration Model”.

Abstract:

The common understanding of immigration in France tends to emphasise republican principles as a critical element to approaching the integration of immigrants in France. This gives major agency to republican institutions, such as the educational system, and assumes that the state has been blind to any specific ethnic belonging. Immigrants have been given, equal access to republican institutions thus allowing equal chances of success. However, in an effort to bring historical perspective to the practice of integration policies in France, I argue against the myth of the republican model. Policy makers have made practical decisions to cope with various situations, and as a result have often contradicted republican principles. Immigrants have been considered according to an underlying hierarchy of origin and cultural programs have been designed to approach each national group differently. I provide concrete evidence for the argument that highlights a discrepancy between the political discourse of a French model of integration at the core of the republic versus the reality of the policy making. By focusing on the cultural components of immigration policies I argue that discussions around cultural diversity are critical to understand the formation of French integration policy. Drawing on extensive research in the governmental archives from the 50's to the 80's, this paper investigates the state's position on cultural diversity throughout the years in order to provide direct insight on integration policies.

Firstly, the paper focuses on the cultural component of social programs designed to ease immigrant integration into the country during the post-colonial period. Secondly, the paper explores the state's position on cultural diversity by investigating the discussion on immigrant culture in the Ministry of Culture. Thirdly, the paper provides a comparative perspective with the United States.

This is a first draft, comments are most welcome

The common understanding of immigration in France tends to emphasise republican principles as a critical element to approaching the integration of immigrants in France¹. This gives major agency to republican institutions, such as the educational system, and assumes that the state has been blind to any specific ethnic belonging. Immigrants have been given, equal access to republican institutions thus allowing equal chances of success. However, in an effort to bring historical perspective to the practice of integration policies in France, I argue against the myth of the republican model. Policy makers have made practical decisions to cope with various situations, and as a result have often contradicted republican principles. Immigrants have been considered according to an underlying hierarchy of origin and cultural programs have been designed to approach each national group differently. I intend to provide concrete evidence for the argument that highlights a discrepancy between the political discourse of a French model of integration at the core of the republic versus the reality of the policy making². By focusing on the cultural components of immigration policies I argue that discussions around cultural diversity are critical to understand the formation of French integration policy³. Drawing on extensive research in the governmental archives from the 50's to the 80's, this paper investigates the state's position on cultural diversity throughout the years in order to provide direct insight on integration policies.

Firstly, the paper will focus on the cultural component of social programs designed to ease immigrant integration into the country during the post-colonial period. I will argue that although the strong assimilationist stance of the colonial period was abandoned, the State failed to re-conceptualise its position on cultural diversity and integration of immigrant populations

¹ SCHNAPPER, Dominique. *La France de l'intégration : sociologie de la France en 1990*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991; BRUBACKER, Rogers. *Citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

² FAVELL, Adrian. *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1998.

³ This paper draws from research for a PhD dissertation entitled « Culture, Migration and the State: cultural diversity and French migration policies, 1959-1989 ».

during the immediate postcolonial period. Social movements have recently returned to the question of cultural diversity in the public debate, leading the State to reassert its stance in order to control “civil unrest”.

Secondly, the paper will explore the state’s position on cultural diversity by investigating the discussion on immigrant culture in the Ministry of Culture. I will argue that a universalist agenda along with general sceptic feelings towards community arts have undermined the acknowledgment of cultural diversity in the framing of cultural policies. The changes in the social and cultural context, however, have forced the issue onto the agenda, while discussions over cultural diversity in the 80s have shaped the definition of the French integration model.

Thirdly, the paper will provide a comparative perspective with the United States. Some elements from the literature on American immigration history will be highlighted to qualify the idea that the French approach to immigrant culture is specific.

1. Practical matters over principles: receiving and controlling

In the 60’s, France was experiencing unprecedented growth and was badly in need of foreign labor. Hence it actively solicited immigrants. While Algerian foreign nationals were granted a special status after independence in 1962 (including free circulation and the ability to settle in France but no political rights), this was tied to the French state’s belief that this group in particular, needed to be monitored. In fact, records show that workers from European countries (Portugal, Spain, and Italy) were sought out over Algerian workers.⁴ This political practice does

⁴ Archives Nationales CAC 1979 0259, art. 1. « Les Portugais (...) présentent un intérêt de peuplement et des facilités d’assimilation. Il semble qu’il y ait avantage à poursuivre l’immigration portugaise » Lettre du directeur de l’Office national de l’immigration au directeur de la Population et des migrations, 16 novembre 1967.

not abide by the principle that the state should be blind to people's ethnic belonging or heritage?
in the implementation of policies.

In the immediate postcolonial period, the state failed to re-conceptualise its position on the assimilation of foreign populations that had thus far guided policy making towards colonial subjects. The Social Action Fund (*Fonds d'action Sociale*, FAS) was the body largely responsible for managing Algerians in France before 1962. After the Independence of Algeria, its official mandate was to oversee all foreign worker populations. Created in the 1950's as a funding and administrative umbrella for various social and cultural associations whose goal was to assimilate Algerians into French culture, its life was extended beyond Algerian independence. In the postcolonial period, assimilation of Algerians, however, was no longer the objective. Instead, the FAS focused on facilitating the arrival of all foreign workers in France, supporting groups like the Alliance Française, which offered French language classes, and the Comité Lyautey, which installed guides in train stations and airports to help new arrivals with everything from instructions on how to use public transportation to contact information for other groups that might be of service. In this regard, associations previously funded by the FAS were encouraged to extend their activities beyond North African populations in order to include all foreign workers in France. Hence, the state, preoccupied with its labor shortage, failed to re-conceptualise its position on cultural diversity and integration of immigrant populations. Questions of how to deal with cultural difference became subordinate to the very practical needs of immigrants in France – things like language acquisition and information about the French welfare system.

Furthermore, the state did not give up on some colonial patterns. Although the role of the FAS was no longer defined in colonial terms, a colonial mentality persisted. While all immigrant populations were incorporated into the FAS mandate, it nevertheless maintained a specific pattern

in the handling of former colonial subjects. The emphasis with respect to these populations was often more on surveillance, than aid. Algerian workers, for instance, were the target of cultural initiatives launched by their consulates through the network of associations entitled *Amicales des Algériens en Europe*. The *Amicales* were in charge of controlling Algerian workers' loyalty to the nationalist project of their newly independent country. Activities such as literacy classes, soccer games or discussions of popular songs were aimed at keeping Algerian workers tied to their community and loyal to the main goal of their stay in France: to work and send money back to their home country in need of foreign currency. All immigrants who settled in France in the 60's maintained strong links within their community. The authorities of the country of origin were instrumental in controlling their social and cultural activities. The Spanish Catholic Mission, receiving funds from the Spanish Consulate, was responsible for organizing cultural activities, as was the Italian Catholic Mission. The Algerian consulates, however, along with other official representatives of formerly colonised countries (Mali, Senegal and Madagascar) were under close watch by the French state. Suspecting unrest and political opposition, the French government relied on the implementation of social programs in order to compel immigrant workers to live in settlement houses managed by local institutions and to attend literacy classes taught by government run associations⁵. Immigrants from formerly colonised countries received a different treatment and were the target of increased social control than those from Southern Europe. Concerns over how to ease and control adaptation of new immigrants to France dominated the policy makers' agenda in the late 60s leaving little room for conceptualising a model of

⁵ In 1964, Sally N'Dongo, the head of a Senegalese workers group supported by its consulate approached the Director for Population and Migration, Michel Massenet with a project of a cultural center for African people in the Northern region (Roubaix). Michel Massenet opposed the project on the ground that the group was not constituted on a legal basis and re-direct their initiative to a local organisation already supported by the State. However, records from the ministry of Interior show that police authorities wanted to avoid at all cost the self-organisation of foreign workers, especially when they came from countries that had recently been opposed in a war against France.

integration. As such, no mention of any guidelines to operate as a framework for the building of social programs was to be found in administrative archives.

The State was called upon to address the cultural diversity of immigrants when immigrant movements brought the issue to the public sphere. The social struggles of the latter part of the 60's set the framework for the birth of immigrant protests in the 70's. Restrictive legislation was enforced by the state starting in 1972 (*Circulaires Marcellin-Fontanet*) leading to immigrant protests through demonstrations and hunger strikes. Free expression of their culture of origin was a central claim with which immigrant groups opposed the French government and denounced the complicity of the authorities of their country of origin in aiding their exploitation. Immigrants resorted to theater to illustrate their harsh living conditions and claim their own form of cultural expression, entrenched in their life in France. The First Festival of Immigrant Theater was held in a suburb of Paris, Suresnes. Theater troupes of Portuguese, Spanish, Algerian, Tunisian, Senegalese and Moroccan workers gathered and performed in their foreign languages sketches and comedies describing their living conditions. Most of these troupes were supported by political movements opposing the governments of their country of origins: the dictatorship of Salazar in Portugal or the Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan Regimes. Their mobilisation was strongly connected to the politics in their country of origin. However, the festival was supported by two major Christian associations concerned with a cause that appeared legitimate in the French context: immigrant claims to cultural autonomy⁶.

⁶ The two organisations are the CIMADE (a protestant association organizing relief for displaced populations) and the Comité Catholique contre la Faim dans le monde et pour le Développement (a catholic association supporting development abroad and organizing literacy classes for immigrants in France). [VAZ, Manuel](#). *Expressions culturelles immigrées : 1^{er} festival de théâtre populaire des travailleurs immigrés, Suresnes, juin 1975*. Lisbonne : Silvas, coopérative de travailleurs graphique, 1985.

Facing growing protest over the issue of immigrant culture and rights in general, the French government created a Secretary of State for immigrant workers in 1975⁷. It was meant to balance a restrictive legislation towards migrants – immigration on economic and familial grounds was banned in 1974 – and to address the issue of immigrants’ integration into society. The Secretary of State was to oversee migration flows, housing issues and cultural matters. An office for the promotion of immigrant culture was created. However, after looking at its mandate, its staff and the way programs were fashioned; it appears that immigrants were still regarded as a population under control. Immigrants coming from Southern Europe were considered less troublesome than ones coming from former colonised countries. The reassessment of the value of their culture was organised with the help of their embassies in the framework of the French cultural cooperation policy as designed to be implemented in formerly colonised countries. National theatre troupes from Morocco, Portugal and Senegal were invited to tour in France while immigrant theater initiatives mentioned above were not asked to take part to any event. A television show, *Mosaïque*, was designed to broadcast information and cultural products of the countries of origin but it did not cover the political struggles of some immigrants in France⁸.

Furthermore, the strategy to reassess the value of immigrants’ native cultures became part of the government’s policy of return that started in 1976 as a response to the economic crisis. The State Secretary Lionel Stoleru passed drastic measures to restrict document renewal for temporary immigrants. He also launched a policy of return encouraging immigrants to go back to their country of origin in return for a fixed amount of money. *Mosaïque* became instrumental in

⁷ Records from the ministry of Interior show that the immigrants’ workers groups and their activity were closely watched.

⁸ In 1978, some journalists from *Mosaïque*, covered the Third Festival organised by immigrant workers. However, the political debates at the core of the event did not appear in the program. The head of the governmental institution in charge of producing *Mosaïque* explained that it was a program aimed mainly at entertaining its audience. Catherine, Humblot. « Un divertissement sans politique ». *Le Monde*, 12-13 mars 1978.

maintaining the immigrants' links with their countries of origin and for giving a platform to the Secretary of State to justify his policy. He tried to present an image of a state accepting the cultural diversity of society while, in fact, it pointed out their otherness and bound them to return to their country of origin. Moreover, such a cultural policy towards immigrants tended to distinguish them according to their origin, a feature that contradicted the republican assumption that the state should remain blind to religious or cultural belongings.

This focus on the cultural components of social programs towards immigrants allows a direct insight into policy making that operates on practical grounds - either to ease the adaptation of a needed workforce in the 60's or to prepare the return home of immigrants who were no longer wanted - rather than following a republican model. The difficulty in addressing cultural diversity resulting from immigration needs to be further investigated in the specific framework of French cultural policies.

2. Discussing cultural diversity, building integration policies

To understand the French state's position on cultural diversity, it is necessary to investigate the relationship of the Ministry of Culture to immigrant culture. I argue that in the French context, as long as immigrants' cultures are referred to according to the anthropological definition of culture, they are not acknowledged for their potential artistic quality. This way, immigrants are restricted to their foreign status and prevented from incorporating elements of their culture to French identity.

Established in 1959, the ministry's official mandate was to democratise culture. Why then did it not look to include the culture of France in all of its diversity? Why in 1964 did it not get involved with the FAS when other ministries did, like the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry

of Youth and Sport? When the State Secretary created the Office for the Promotion of Immigrant Culture in 1975, the Ministry of Culture was barely associated in the venture.

Firstly, I argue that the answer to this problem lies partly in the universalist agenda of the Ministry of Culture. The ministry emphasised that the works of art to be privileged were those universal works that appealed to all of mankind. Works based on regional or provincial affiliations were assumed to be of lesser importance; not to mention works from immigrant groups. This was puzzling given that French officials, and the minister of culture himself, André Malraux, had long testified to their interest in works of art from foreign cultures. An explanation of this comes from the fact that French universalism was bound up with an examination of works of art that took place outside of the contexts in which they were produced, so that South Asian or African works of art were universal examples of artistic excellence rather than testaments to cultural diversity. These works of art were entirely divorced from the South Asian and African populations living in France at the time. Moreover, while in the colonies, French civil servants had found themselves serving a universalist ideal. When decolonisation put them out of job, many of them were recruited to the Ministry of Culture, bringing with them an even stronger devotion to the universalist agenda of the ministry.

Furthermore, the emphasis was not on the democratisation of artistic value, but rather on the democratisation of access. It wasn't that works of popular art were to be appreciated, but rather that works of artistic excellence were to be made available to the populace. And in the pursuit of this goal, no distinction was made in between individuals born in France and immigrants from a different cultural background.

Secondly, the work of the French Ministry of Culture operates within the framework of a definition of culture limited to its artistic component. Its activities range from maintaining artistic heritage to supporting artistic production and performances in music, dance or theater. Rather differently, when looking at cultural programs towards immigrants designed by the State Secretary for immigrant workers, I found that they often operated within the framework of an anthropological definition of culture, ranging from language to cooking to religious habits. Therefore, administrative officials in the Ministry of Culture called to attend meetings with their counterparts in the Social Action Fund did not think the kind of community art activities that the Fund sponsored required their specific funding. They considered the few artistic events immigrant associations had organised had a folkloric tone that was far from meeting the artistic quality expected from state funded art⁹.

However, the evolution of the demographic profile of the immigrant population changed the way cultural diversity was reflected in society. In the early 80's, young adults who had been raised in France and wanted to express their experience of living in France with foreign parents emerged on the public scene. Resorting to cultural means of expression to convey their experience, they created radio, theatre troupes and associations. Their initiatives met the new Ministry of Culture's desire to sponsor innovative forms of creation.

In 1981 the changes in the government brought a different approach to the democratisation of culture and the new minister, Jack Lang, put a stronger emphasis on the democratisation of artistic value. More means were allocated to the funding of cutting edge projects that were to explore new forms of creation, and more room was made for the expression

⁹ Sources: Archives of the Fund for cultural intervention of the ministry of Culture (1971-1983); interviews with administrative officials in the ministry of Culture.

of minorities' cultures¹⁰. Administrative officials in the Ministry of Culture started to meet more often with their counterparts in the Social Action Fund (FAS), further elaborating on the necessity to give opportunities to immigrants and children of immigrants to reflect their mixed identity through art¹¹. They agreed that the emphasis should be laid on the interaction between elements of different cultures. They thrived to break with the assimilation model that only favours contact with French culture. They also took a strong step against previous attempts to design a cultural policy towards immigrants that only focused on elements of their culture of origin. Overall they allowed immigrants to bring elements of their culture to French artistic production. In doing so, they granted the possibility that state supported artistic productions could reflect France's cultural diversity.

I argue that the definition of a French model of integration in 1991 reflects the evolution described above. First, it rejects the experience of assimilation connected to the post colonial period. Second, it takes a step against the 1970's model of insertion that asserted that immigrants could maintain their cultural identities within French society, which was associated with a policy of return. It is defined as such: "Integration is not a middle-way in between assimilation and insertion but a process where the active participation in the national society of varied and different elements is encouraged"¹². The latest definition given by the High Council for Integration in 2005 operates in the same framework: "Neither assimilation, nor insertion, integration refers to the participation of all French people along with French people of immigrant

¹⁰ In the ministry of Culture, the Direction for Cultural Development was created, granted 6 times the budget it used to have to support innovative cultural initiatives. An office in charge of « minority cultures » was created as part of the new Direction.

¹¹ This analysis draws from extensive interviews conducted with administrative officials in the Social action Fund and in the ministry of Culture.

¹² « L'intégration n'est pas une voie moyenne entre l'assimilation et l'insertion, mais un processus spécifique, par lequel il s'agit de susciter la participation active à la société nationale d'éléments variés et différents » HAUT CONSEIL A L'INTEGRATION. *Pour un modèle français d'intégration*. Paris : La Documentation française, 1991.

descent, in the public space of the national community.”¹³ The French model of integration carries the legacy of three decades of policy making rather than drawing from principles lying at the core of the republican ideal. On the contrary, policy makers have made decisions following ideas such as the preferences of immigrants from Southern Europe over Algerians and the necessity to control immigrants coming from former colonised countries through social programs. However, the republican myth of citizenship has been called upon extensively to justify the definition of the French model of integration.¹⁴ As a result there is a major discrepancy between a political discourse holding to the principle of equality justifying that few efforts should be made to acknowledge diversity, and administrative officials who have resorted to specific treatment when faced with diverse issues related to immigration.

Analysing concrete examples of cultural policies allows us to reframe the discussion around the definition of a French model of integration. It shows us that it is a reflection of the difficulties encountered by government and administrative officials to acknowledge cultural diversity in French society. It also brings the cultural argument back in the picture with concrete examples taken from three decades of policy making in order to avoid vague statements about the issue. It highlights the necessity to consider the French model of integration in relation to a legacy of policies that have evolved through historical circumstances rather than the “natural product” of a French exception.

¹³ « L'intégration n'est pas l'assimilation ou l'insertion, mais la participation de tous, et non seulement des Français issus de l'immigration, à l'espace public de la communauté nationale » HAUT CONSEIL A L'INTEGRATION. *Bilan de la politique d'intégration 2002-2005*. Paris : La Documentation française, 2005.

¹⁴ FAVELL, Adrian. *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1998. p. 43.

3. Comparative perspective

A comparative perspective provides a necessary escape from the framework of the French model of integration in order to highlight some similarities in the handling of immigrant culture. Some elements taken from the literature on American immigration history echoes with the history of cultural policies sketched above. They offer relevant points of comparison between two dramatically different countries.

It is common to hear statements that the French model of integration is opposed to the American model of integration. On the one hand, the French stance tends to see in the American model the embodiment of multiculturalism¹⁵, yet a closer look at the historical debate proves the many nuances that can be found in between partisans of multiculturalism and those advocating for a more “assimilationist” stance¹⁶. On the other hand, the United States tends to see France as a country that encounters a unique situation because of its colonial past and its republican notion of citizenship. Yet, in both countries a certain colonial stance can be observed in the way immigrant populations that have been used for their workforce have been understood. Some American historians call for a deeper colonial perspective in immigration and ethnic history¹⁷. Colonial origins in immigration policy patterns, along with the general assumption that immigrants’ stays will remain temporary are factors fundamental to understanding how immigrants can be constructed as eternal strangers to the country they live in.

¹⁵ Green, Nancy. « Le Melting-Pot: Made in America, Produced in France », *Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No.3, The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History: A Special Issue (Dec., 1999), 1128-1208.

¹⁶ Smelser, Neil J., Alexander, Jeffrey L. *Diversity and its Discontents. Cultural Conflicts and Common Ground in Contemporary American Society*. 1999.

¹⁷ Sanchez, Georges. “Race, nation and culture in recent immigration studies,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Summer 1999, pp. 66-83.

Despite the uniqueness of the French colonial history, comparable dynamics can be found in the history of the United States. As a matter of fact, cultural issues related to immigration have been acknowledged and tackled through Americanization programs in the thirties¹⁸. Resorting to cultural activities, Americanizers organised events taking elements of folklore from the immigrants' countries of origin. But the program seemed to target primarily European immigrants, and the way Mexicans were treated echoes the way immigrants coming from former colonised countries were treated by French policies of the 60s. The American authorities intended to keep a close watch on Mexican workers. The revolution in Mexico had brought ideas of social justice and strengthened on the workers' unions. Americanization programs were also aimed at controlling Mexican social and cultural activities. Moreover, they were not supposed to blend into the American identity¹⁹. According to an underlying racial hierarchy, they were not considered as likely to become American as European immigrants were. The weight of this belief created "a kind of imported colonialism, as which constructed Mexicans working in the US as a foreign race and justified their exclusion from the polity"²⁰. Furthermore, these "colonial-like practices" took place in the context of the history of the Southwest where Americans conquered and established themselves in former Mexican areas, enforcing the supremacy of the white race over indigenous populations. Although the situation of Mexican Americans in the United States and French people with North African descent in France can seem different at first sight - different people and cultures, different hosting country - they share some common history in the

¹⁸ Posern-Zelinski, Alexander, « Americanization Programmes for immigrants and ethnic cultures in the US during the inter-war years » *Ethnologia Polona* Vol.9 1983, pp 149-182.

¹⁹ "American reformers were genuinely interested in solving the [Mexican problem] by assisting Mexican immigrants and working-class Mexican-Americans to adjust and become more integrated into American life, most Americanizers (...) seemed unable to imagine Mexicans as even potentially part of American civic culture" Gutiérrez, David G. "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the 'Third Space': The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No.2, Rethinking History and the Nation-State: Mexico and the United States as a Case Study: A Special Issue (Sep., 1999), 481-517.

²⁰ Ngai, Mae. *Impossible subjects. Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

way the host countries have dealt with their cultural identities. Just as in France, the United States immigration policy professes an ideology of equality, which is often neglected due to racial biased.

Conclusion

France and the United States have both denied access to a national cultural identity through social and cultural programs aimed at certain specific immigrant groups. Focusing on the cultural component of immigration policies in both countries allows us to take one step further in the discussion over integration issues. It highlights the major role played by issues of cultural integration and leads us to think of cultural policies as a crucial venue for integration policies.