Multiculturalism in France[1]

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ABSTRACT

Can the individual successfully maintain double citizenship and plural allegiances? This article discusses how multiculturalism in France may seem odd amidst French political values, and how some trends of multiculturalism have managed to impose themselves on the French model of citizenship and integration. Going back to the Revolution of 1789 and the days of Jacobins and Girondins, Catherine de Wenden traces the development of republicanism and identity in Europe.

France is, de facto, a multicultural country, but the notion has been much contested. Until the revolution of 1789, it was made up of provinces with their own cultures, languages, parliaments, systems of measures, although the compulsory use of French in administrative and judicial rules (Edit de Villers Cotterets, 1539) and the defense and unification of the French language (creation of the French Academy in 1635 by Richelieu) as well as the centralization of civil service occurred very early. The French revolution tried to change the definition of the French community, from an addition of cultures and institutions constitutive of the State, to a philosophical and political definition of national cohesion around the Nation ("Vive la Nation", Valmy, 1792) and the citizens, free and equal regarding rights (*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789). During the republican periods of the 19th century (first, second and third Republic), the references to republican values embodied by an evolving citizenship, as well as the birth of ideologies canceling particularistic belongings (class struggle model, universalistic values) blurred the frontiers of communities and progressively built France on the myth of national homogeneity. The recent appeal to republican values and to national cohesion during the last presidential campaign of May 2002, along with the permanent need to redefine French identity faced with the challenge of the National Front, testify of the accurateness of the French model of the national citizen.

Multiculturalism in France has acquired some legitimacy very recently under the pressure of immigration, of Europe and of globalization, but also from the desire to assert the weight of local cultures in the patrimony of national culture. Many French are reluctant to admit it and oppose it to the exclusiveness of Jacobinist values: secularism, formal equality, legal freedom, civic values of living together ("fraternité"), with an exclusive allegiance to the Nation-State republican model ("patriotism"). The right to be different, the pluralism of allegiances, the plural citizenship model (and reality), the intercultural relations projects, the expression of groups and minorities are referring to a France of minorities which is quite a taboo. They are often opposed to assimilation, integration (more used today in official discourse), social cohesion (Jacques Chirac during the 2002 presidential campaign), republican and national citizenship (Jean-Pierre Chevenement), equality of rights (the French reference to fight against discrimination), social contract of rights and duties (*La communauté des citoyens,* of Dominique Schnapper), public order and public security for living together (Home Ministers' definitions). An illustration of this can be found in the ambiguities of the freedom of associations and of the recognition of regionalism in France: during the revolution of 1789, corporations were prohibited (Le Chapelier Law of 1791), and the freedom of associations was acquired in 1901 while regionalism had waited for two centuries to be rehabilitated in the State institutions (1982).

But some features of multiculturalism finally penetrated the French model of citizenship, due to its evolving content since the French revolution. First confronted with the class struggle (the "question sociale," in 1848), then by gender equality rights (since the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th), it has been more recently challenged by immigration and by Europe which brought new values such as anti-discrimination (article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty, 1997), citizenship of residence including plural citizenship, expression of ethnic and religious belongings. Multiculturalism belongs to this generation of new contents for citizenship: a multiculturalism "à la française", included in a citizenship which is the result of a permanent compromise with communautarism in a neo-colonial management of differences.

How can France define itself as multicultural?

Before the revolution of 1789, the early unification of France remained compatible with the diversity of "provinces." There was a distinction between the "Five big farms" having internal customs and freedom of circulation for goods – Normandy, lle-de-France, Picardie, Anjou, Maine, Champagne, Bourgogne, Bourbonnais, Berry, Poitou – the so-called foreign

provinces, and the provinces under foreign allegiance – Alsace, Lorraine, Three bishop ships – the provinces under feudal links with the King of France – Brittany, Béarn, Provence – a small kingdom – Navarre – and a province requiring to be ruled by its own natives – Artois. Brittany and Provence were claiming for their autonomy. They spoke their own language made up of various "langues d'Oil" in the north and "langues d'Oc" in the south, had their own taxes, tribunals, parliaments and systems of measures. This diversity introduced some discrepancies into the exercise of royal power at the eve of the revolution, namely the reluctance of regional parliaments to abide by the law, the difficulty of understanding amongst the population and the obstacles to exchanges due to various customs rights. As Mirabeau said, "le royaume n'est encore qu'un agrégat de peoples désunis" (the kingdom is still but an aggregate of disunited peoples). The behaviour towards minorities was expressed by the Comte de Clermont Tonnerre: "Donnez aux Juifs tous les droits en tant qu'individus mais aucun comme communauté" (Give to the Jewish all rights as individuals but none as a community) at the meeting of the États Généraux in 1789.

During the revolution, the pluralist trend, inspired by federalism, was expressed by the "Girondins," referring to regional identities against the centralized, authoritarian and Jacobin governance of Paris. But the Girondins lost their battle against the Jacobins, and the centralization and unification of the State was reinforced by Napoleon the First. He reformed and unified the laws, granting France a civil and penal code, and centralized the administration. His work was continued by Napoleon the Third, although along the 19th century, the defense of regional autonomy was still alive as a rightist position, represented by Auguste Comte (1851) or Frederic Le Play. The feeling of a French identity embodied by a Nation began to emerge, namely after the loss of Alsace Lorraine in 1871 (Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulanges and namely Ernest Renan in his famous essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?,* 1871).

The Third Republic gave to the people of France the feeling of unity, defended by universalistic and republican values mixed with patriotism, owing to a compulsory, secularized and free of charges education in primary schools. This pedagogic enterprise was illustrated by Gaston Bruneau's famous book *Le tour de France par deux enfants,* where two young boys are traveling and discovering France, the maps of France in every school made by Paul Vidal de La Blache (although he was in favor of some federalism around several regional metropolis) and took effectiveness by the compulsory military service for each male citizen.

The celebration of republican values also became visible with the rising of statues, city halls, schools in every town and village and the invention of a national feast in 1889, for July the 14th referring to the revolution of 1789. School and army became powerful tools of homogenization and socialization of a very culturally diversified France, recently crossed by migration flows (Germans, Belgians, Italians). However, the unification of cultures was not so easy to reach: in his book *La guerre des boutons,* for example, Louis Pergaud shows that one century after the adoption of the metric system of measures, the rural French still used the old measures, even among young children.

But some nostalgias of the former regions and regionalist trends were remerging, such as Frederic Mistral's movement in Provence trying to provoke a revival of the culture and language of "langues d'Oc" regions. In 1876 he created the Felibrige movement (1854) which inspired Charles Maurras and then Maurice Barres who transferred those particularistic identities to Lorraine. Mistral also inspired Alphonse Daudet, who tried to restate the authentic and specific culture of Provence and to vulgarize it in his famous *Lettres de mon moulin* (Letters from my mill) and later Jean Giono's novels celebrating rural and local values in *Regain* or *Un de Baumugnes.* In Brittany, the localism revival was illustrated by a coming back to the genuine Celtic culture and language. But these trends were marginal compared with the expression of republican patriotism encouraged by the First World War.

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Two very different periods really gave legitimacy to the expression of cultural diversity in France: the Vichy regime, when Philippe Petain tried to play regionalism and plurality against the leftist and unifying values embodied by Paris, the Parliament and more broadly the political milieu of the dying Third Republic (1940). He found some echoes in the regions where a tradition of autonomy was early existing such as Brittany, Alsace and Provence. But this rightist and traditionalist trend failed after the second World War when the Fourth and the Fifth Republics fought against any remaining values and tried to reconcile the French around the Resistance and overall the "Trente Glorieuses" (1945-1974), a period of economic growth where the class struggle also blurred some other belongings.

A second revival of regionalism turned towards French internal cultural diversity promised to be more successful and appeared with the left wing with some eighty-six activists, like Robert Lafont. They claimed a regionalism mixing a culture of bottom-up diversity with the radical socialist rurality and hate of Paris. The coming back to the land of some fans with a program called "Vivre et travailler au pays" (Live and work in the land) and the successful fight for the liberation of Larzac land (a place in Cevennes dedicated to sheep herds) from army settlement (1972-1973) belongs to this move, more recently expressed by the anti-globalization mobilization of Jose Bove at the left, and at the right by the traditionalism of Philippe de Villiers. This former Minister of Culture and MP tries to give legitimacy to the counter-revolutionary past of Vendée. Brittany and Corsica go on to lead today some regionalist

and separatist fights on the topics of cultural diversity of languages which has been accepted at schools and political autonomy made official with the settlement of a Corsican Parliamentary Assembly by Lionel Jospin in 2001.

But this last region also wanted recognition of a "peuple corse" in the 1990s, which was defined as contrary to the Constitution by the Constitutional Council (9 May 1991: "La Constitution ne connait que le people français, compose de tous les citoyens français sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion"), while an armed faction went to practice terrorism at local level. This same High Court also condemned the European Chart of Regional and Minority Languages as contrary to the republican principles of the Republic in 1999 ("indivisibilite de la République, égalité devant la loi et unicité du peuple français"). However, immigration and Islam have long been quite absent from these expressions of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism against exclusiveness of cultural identity

The turning point for the expression of multiculturalism referring to migration is mainly the eighties. The freedom of associative rights for foreigners in 1981 and the emergence of the "beurs" (Arabs in slang) gave legitimacy to the claims of cultural pluralism, intercultural projects and to the right to be different ("droit a la difference", namely proclaimed by SOS Racisme, born in 1984). Some years before, the Council of Europe was already requiring more intercultural education for immigrants' children and French public schools began to implement special courses added to the compulsory cursus (Langues et Cultures d'origine, settled since 1974 by bilateral agreements with the embassies of the countries of origin in order to allow an easier return of the second generations to their parents' countries).

The return of the left to power initiated public debates on a new definition of French identity (with the book *L'identité française,* 1985) under the pressure of the National Front which tried to impose its image of French identity ("Bleu? Blanc Rouge" mixed with an ethnic approach to the nation – "les Français de souche" – contrary to the philosophical definition of French citizenship). The "affairs" – the scarf affair in 1989, the debate on the reform of the nationality code from 1987 to 1993, the Gulf war in 1991 – stressed a more multicultural definition of French identity, referring to the plurality of allegiances, the legitimacy of collective identities inside the republican frame and the dissociation between nationality and citizenship around the topic of the new citizenship launched by civic associations in 1988: so many taboos in the French assimilationist model.

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While most political leaders stressed French identity, citizenship, secularization and social contract with few variations between right and left and tried to conduct public policies of integration (with the central role of the Fonds d'Action Sociale), many civic associations born with the emerging civic movement of the "Marche des beurs" in 1983 were mixing at the local level these republican values with communitarian forms of management in inner cities. They fought against racial discrimination and social exclusion while aiming at recognizing ethnic and even religious belongings, which sometimes weakened their discourse on universalistic principles and equal rights. This contradiction was raised namely by Pierre – Andre Taguieff in *La force des préjugés. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles,* 1988) who argued that pleading for the right to be different would lead to exclude once more the sons of immigrants, giving arguments to the extreme right on the impossible assimilation of Islam. So other civic associations such as the very legitimist France Plus stressed the right to indifference and the respect of republican and assimilation values – secularism, rights and duties, registration and eligibility on electora1lists for those second generations having French citizenship.

Some confusion appeared on the public policy landscape of integration. Islamic associations, born with the same law of 1981 granting freedom to associations creation, rapidly understood *JQ*. Partnership offered by municipalities to secure social peace. The recent territorialization of integration policy ("Politique de la Ville," settled in 1990) offered new opportunities in this regard. This positive discrimination tool was set up to fight against local discrimination at school (with the ZEP, "Zones d'education prioritaire" in 1981), in housing and in access to employment. Although it partly failed, it opened an exception to the republican myth of equality of rights and opportunity.

Has multiculturalism adapted to the French model of citizenship?

In France, citizenship is a philosophical concept expressed namely in the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen,* mostly inspired from universalistic ideals of freedom, legal equality and property, while nationality has a legal definition with the civil code. But citizenship is evolutionary: first limited to well-to-do males having financial "capacities"(the "cens", with active and passive citizens), it was progressively extended to men ("suffrage universel masculin" in 1848) and more recently to women (1944) and to younger people (from 21 to 18 years old). Some populations were prohibited from the exercise of citizenship, such as the penally condemned, the army ("la grande muette" during all the Third Republic) and the colonies (in Algeria, a French "department," the second college for indigenous

voting rights survived until 1960). One could so be national without being a complete citizen.

On the contrary, some have been citizens without being nationals. During the revolution citizenship was not linked with nationality; those who did not share the values such as the priests attached to the monarchist regime (called the "prêtres réfractaires") were considered as non citizens, traitors to the new values. But some well known foreigners such as William Payne or Anarcharsis von Clootz were elected at the Convention in 1792. This recognition of citizenship for civic activism was formalized in the Constitution of 1793 which enunciates the various forms of civism granting access to citizenship independent from the possession of French nationality.

The link between nationality and citizenship was totally sealed with the Third Republic (1875), mixing civic values (fraternity) with the exclusive allegiance to national identity (patriotism). The famous monuments to the dead ("monuments aux morts") which, as many symbolic places for the celebration of a homogeneous and collective memory, were erected after the First World War in all villages, towns and cities of France and its colonies are one of the popular expressions of this linkage between citizenship and nationality around the celebration of patriotic and civic values. In the meantime, other forms of nationalism rapidly became anti-republican, canceling citizenship from the reference to the Nation, such as the Action Française of Charles Maurras created in 1899 and the extreme rightist leagues between the two wars (colonel de la Rocque's *Croix de Feu*).

Concessions to minorities, differences and specificities in the French model

Since 1968, many exceptions have been introduced into the supposed assimilation centralized French model of Jacobinism. First, regional languages were authorized to be taught in public schools and universities in Brittany and in Corsica. Alsace, which never lost its German dialect, also uses it in local administration and in religious celebrations and Basques still speak their language, as well as Catalans (in the region of Perpignan, all names of villages, roads, streets and towns are in French and Catalan). In Alsace and Lorraine-Metz (the three "departments" of Haut-Bas Rhin and Moselle which were owned by Germany after the defeat of 1870 to 1918) religion is ruled by an agreement between the State and the three religions: Catholic, Protestant and Jewish (the "Concordat" of 1801) because it did not depend on France when the separation between the State and the Church was decided in 1905. One could also find other newer specific treatments, such as in the TOMS ("Territoires d'Outre Mer") and other autonomous territories, namely regarding to religion (acceptance of polygamy, for example).

Decentralization, settled in France in 1982, has introduced much autonomy in the regional management and some subsidiary can be seen in the centralized administrative system: a debate opposing the tough republicans of left and right sides to the liberal ones of left and right. So, the specific representative assembly of Corsica granted by the socialist Government in 2001 provoked the resignation of the former socialist Home Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement (who created the Jacobin and republican "Mouvement des Citoyens").

As for immigrants, the real debate, initiated as soon as an integration policy began to be implemented in 1974 (we were speaking then of intercultural policies), was really set up in the middle of the eighties when the visibility of Islam emerged in the cities, in the firms, at school (with the scarf affair of 1989) and raised the question of the dubious allegiances of those French having double citizenship (namely the French of Algerian descent doing their military service in France or Algeria), especially when some young of inner cities claimed their sympathy to Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war of 1991. Again a Montesquieu-like question was asked: "How can one be French and Muslim?" and this debate remains very up-to-date now in political debates, although one cannot perceive either an Arab or ethnic vote nor a penetration of external allegiances among the majority of Muslims in France.

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The rule is not the same for all minority religions: Protestants and Jews are benefiting from a long tradition of living together with French monarchic and republican institutions and today, the revival of Jewish Sephardim identity is considered as compatible with them: boys can wear the kippa in public schools, be absent on Saturdays or close their shops on Saturdays and open them on Sundays. The Muslims are suffering from the rise of security feelings about their presence and mostly from their visibility in France as the religion of the poor, the former colonized, the immigrants coming from Third World countries, all the more that the oldest who practice most frequently and claim for a recognition of Islam in public life are excluded from the right to vote (demands of larger prayer rooms, special places for Muslims in cemeteries, organization of the hallal meat market and slaughter).

Some expressions of dissent linked with exclusion and discrimination, such as extremist Islamism (alike terrorism practiced in Paris Metro and RER stations or on the rails of TGV by Khaled Kelkal in Lyons in 1995 or the involvement of Zacharias Moussaoui in the September 11th attacks) or the refusal of allegiance to French symbols (such as the denial of the French flag during a friendly French/Algerian football match in 2001) give weight to Jacobin arguments, even if they remain at the margins.

However, contrary to other European countries, if religion is seen in France as a serious concern, language is not considered as a problem: in spite of globalization of new immigration trends, most immigrants and their children are perfectly French-speaking (Maghrebians, Sub-Saharan Africans, Indians from Pondichery and Vietnamese) as well as Francophile elites. An evolution of the public discourse occurred after September 11th due to the presence of four million Muslims, the most important concentration of Muslims in Europe. France did not show an aggressive discourse towards this new challenge, in contrast to Germany or the United Kingdom, while it has always been more restrictive in admitting radical Islamites as refugees who found a better shelter in these two countries. Inversely, France was reluctant to involve itself in a war in Iraq: the will to maintain a good relationship with Maghrebian regimes and a relative social peace in inner cities may explain such equilibrium in diplomacy.

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Multiculturalism: new identities or neo-colonial management?

French identity is also questioned by Europe and by immigration. Europe is isolating the French assimilationist model compared with other countries that are much more open to multiculturalism and to diversity. The United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands all went very far in the recognition of communities and ethnic and religious identities, although these two last countries have seemed to abandon multiculturalism as a unique integration project for their urban areas during these last years. Furthermore, Europe imposes in a top-down method, new multicultural values as part of its identity: anti-discrimination (article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty), cultural diversity (recommendations of the Council of Europe).

European citizenship, defined in the Maastricht Treaty (article 8) is proposing an alternative model to classical citizenship, less exclusive than the national one, compatible with other belongings (including double citizenship and plural allegiances) and enriched with new concepts (citizenship of residence) giving room to multiculturalism. Since new citizens from immigrant origin have had access to French nationality, they can negotiate their difference in exchange for their vote, maintaining transnational networks and ethnic or religious identity while reasserting their allegiance to the French Nation State.

This situation is not deprived of ambiguity, an ambiguity which lies less at the bottom than at the top of French institutions. For a long time, France has managed its minorities in the colonial past with the complicity of civic and religious mediators (Caids, Bachagas, Marabouts) who expressed communitarian identities while accepting republican values and granted social peace. This local management, formerly implemented in Algeria was then applied to immigrant areas in collective housing for workers ("foyers") and in French suburbs. Associative leaders and local elites from the community were appointed cultural mediators, a very up-to-date role of frontier men at the beginning of the nineties, expressing both civic universalistic and ethnic group values. Civic values (anti-discrimination, fighting against social exclusion, registration on electoral lists, cultural programs of leisure, sport) were necessary to obtain public subsidies from municipalities and national social funding (mostly from the Fonds d'Action Sociale). But the activities of associations may also be turned towards more communitarian identities and have religious inputs (such as learning Arab language).

More frequently, ethnicization comes from the representations and incentives of municipalities, political parties and public powers than from associative leaders or local elected young elites themselves: they have been chosen to give visibility to public policies as the "Arabe de service" and they are required to stick to multicultural aims in the republican frame, but not to apply for more ambitious and non ethnic jobs or goals. This game remains very assimilationist in France; it often refers to the values of the French State because Maghrebians, and namely Algerians, are the main actors. They are totally socialized in the French culture of administration and republican values which they know how to play with. They "give the tune" of all French integration policies and dialogue with the immigrant populations in France because it is us and because they are them. No other group, Chinese, Turkish, African or Portuguese can bargain multiculturalism inside the French values and is so successful with the State, which subsidizes most of its multicultural activities. The republican model is questioned by the ambiguities of multiculturalism "à la française", long time hidden by the public discourse on citizenship, equality of rights, and social links deprived of any ethnicity, or blurring it around the confused terms of social mix ("mixité sociale") and diversity .

Its perverse effects lie in the creation by public powers of a multiculturalism "par defaut" (unwilling and artificial) due to exacerbated policies of recognition of ethnic visibilities in public space. However, today most political and administrative elites are conscious of the multicultural dimension of urban societies: a discourse which would have been inaccurate twenty years ago. In overseas DOM TOMs ("departments et territories d'outre mer"), the obsession of communitarian identity also emerges in republican consensus: recently, the French Minister of DOM TOM refused to speak of "peoples" and preferred the term "population" for these peripheric regions, which choked the MPs and local representatives. The difficulties of collective identities in defining themselves faced with republican values show that French political space is poorly integrative and

hardly permits the emergence of communitarian groups. Multiculturalism in France has a long way to go in order to be more explicit and acquire full legitimacy.

Conclusion

One could argue that the French model appears reluctant to implement multiculturalism because it is designed for Maghrebians who are themselves playing very republican cards in their negotiations with French institutions. They are expected to receive a delegation of competences from public powers to maintain order and assume cultural identities in the French frame. This equilibrium, which looks like a French compromise, can be defined as "multiculturalism 'à la française'". In this evolving model, Europe has a large play to part in order to make it acceptable in the political homogeneous myth of most French opinions. Multiculturalism is the only way to maintain a strong and vibrant French identity, open to the new challenges of globalization and of cultural identities: migration flows, diversity of religions, attractiveness of communitarian belongings, localism and transnational networks, soft and plural allegiances to political institutions, Nations and States. As France is concerned like most democracies by the rise of claims for difference, the republican model of integration has no other choice than negotiating with multiculturalism.

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Note

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