THE DISCOURSE AND TEACHING OF IMMIGRATION HISTORY IN FRANCE:
NEGOTIATIONS OF TERMINOLOGY, IDEOLOGY, AND SCHOOL SPACE

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LIST OF FRENCH TERMS

Baccalauréat: Exam taken at the end of High school in France. It is mandatory to pass the “Bac” exam in order to pursue higher education in France.

Banlieue: Suburb

Bidonville: Shanty town

Cité: Literally means “city” but often has a negative connotation and is used to describe French housing projects.

Collège: Middle School

Commission de préfiguration: Organizing committee

Foulard (hijab): Scarf, often used to refer to the Islamic headscarf worn by practicing Muslim women.

La plus grande France: A reference to France’s colonial empire

Laïcité: Uniquely French term for secular or the separation of Church and State

Lettre de cadrage: A document outlining a framework or guidelines, often of a political nature

Lieu de mémoire: A site or place of memory

Lycée: High school

Mission civilisatrice: The French civilizing mission in reference to how the French viewed their role in their colonies, especially in regards to educating the native populations.

Palais: Palace

Première: The second year of high school in France, equivalent to the American “junior” year.

Prof-relais: Liaison teacher, a teacher working at a museum in an educational capacity in France.

Programme: Curriculum

Question socialement vive: Controversial issue

Republican: Ideals that support the French Republic. In France this entails a belief in the social contract between individual citizens and the State that supersedes any group identity or belonging

Salle des fêtes: Ballroom

Sans-papiers: Undocumented (immigrants)

Seconde: The first year of high school in France, equivalent to the American “sophmore” year.

Terminale: The final year of high school in France.

Travailleurs immigrés: Immigrant workers
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: IMMIGRATION HISTORY, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SCHOOLING

Before entering the newly opened National Center of Immigration History (CNHI) in Paris, visitors are greeted by a plaque mounted on one of the palatial columns of this former Museum of the Colonies that now houses the immigration history museum. The panel states that the CNHI’s goal is to “change the current view of immigration by showing immigrants’ place over the last two centuries in the construction of the diverse and open France of today.”¹ One of the CNHI’s primary means of achieving this goal is education. Since this primarily government-funded museum/center’s public opening in October 2007, scholars, often in collaboration with the CNHI’s Education Department, have begun to research the teaching of immigration history in France and to stress its importance throughout the education community. France has received significant numbers of immigrants for centuries, with immigration levels consistently exceeding those of most other European nations (El Yazimi and Schwartz 2001); yet France has been reluctant to call itself or view itself as a nation of immigration (Lewis 2007; Rea and Tripier 2003) and, as a result, the topic of immigration history has received only marginal scholarly

¹ Author translation. Entire quote: “Elément majeur de cohésion sociale et républicain, la Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration a pour objectif de changer le regard contemporain sur l’immigration en faisant connaître la place que les immigrés ont pris depuis deux siècles dans la construction de la France diverse et ouverte d’aujourd’hui.” Photograph of panel taken by author in May 2008, emphasis in original.
attention from French historians. This omission has been attributed by some to the republican national ideology, which espouses equality among citizens without regard to ethnicity or origin (Noiriel 1988) and which does not incorporate the long history of immigration into the founding myth of the nation (Hollifield 1994 cited in Lewis 2007). It is, therefore, not surprising that contemporary scholars and educators find that immigration history has not been incorporated into the national school history curriculum.

The CNHI’s goal to change French citizens’ views of immigration and the role immigrants have played throughout French history implies that the current general perception of immigration is problematic. “Immigration” and all the word conjures in the French popular imagination and media (e.g. refugees, terrorism, Islam, ghettoized suburbs, Africans, delinquent youth, and a general threat to traditional French cultural identity) is a taboo subject, simultaneously shrouded in silence and overly mediatized through social and political debate. The perception of immigration or immigrants as a threat to the nation, to the French or to traditional French national identity is not new. Historians of immigration have shown that whether it be Jewish trade workers in the late 19th century, Italian, Spanish, Armenian and Russian dock workers in the inter-war period, or North African factory workers throughout the 20th century, immigrants of various backgrounds have been the target of nationalist and protectionist movements, policies and rhetoric as the country faced economic and political crises, questioned its place in the world, and defined its national identity (Green 1986; Lewis 2007; Maillot 2008).
Today, what Maillot (2008) terms the “dangerous liaison” between immigration and national identity remains at the forefront of public and scholarly discourse.

In 2007 the new Sarkozy government rechristened the Ministry of Immigration the Ministry of “Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development,” replacing what had previously been a ministry devoted solely to immigration policy with a body additionally charged with addressing a purported national identity crisis and the integration of immigrants and their descendants, who, by association, were deemed to be at the root of the crisis. The newly minted Ministry had four objectives: 1) control immigration into France, 2) promote development in the poorer countries of emigration, 3) encourage integration of immigrants within French society, and 4) foster French identity. In line with this mission, in October, 2009 Eric Besson, the Minister then at the head of this body, launched a public debate on French national identity. The aim of this debate, according to the Minister, was to “validate the contribution of immigration to national identity and to propose ways in which to share the values of national identity at each step of the integration process.” This statement echoes the CNHI’s stated goal of changing the current view of immigration by showing how immigrants have contributed to the history of the nation. Following the launch of the national identity debate, newspapers, television shows, web sites and blogs were full of responses to the debate from public officials and the general public.

Nowhere are the tensions this national identity debate raises more salient than in the French republican school, where traditional ideological understandings

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of equality, universalism, and secularism are often at odds with more recent theories of recognition and difference such as those posited by philosopher Charles Taylor in relation to minority rights in pluralistic societies. Luc Chatel, the Minister of Education at the time when the national identity debate was launched, indicated a vague desire for the French school system to take part, and heated discussions in response to this debate continue to this day and often address the role of education, and history education in particular, in relation to national identity. Faced with numerous challenges posed by increasingly diverse and growing student populations, the republican model’s applicability in the 21st century school has been called into question. The January 2008 edition of the education review, *Le Monde de l’Education*, for example, presents and critiques the new practices of some schools and teachers who have chosen to draw upon the immigrant family history and culture of their students in order to help them overcome academic difficulties. The view, held by some educators, that certain students’ problems at school can be traced to the “painful history of migration” of their families, is countered by the more traditional republican view that pedagogical practices that rely on differentiating students, “could lead to a worsening of the situation and confine students to their presupposed identities” (Truong in *Le Monde de l’Education* p. 28).

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3 Luc Chatel is quoted on the Ministry’s Public Debate web site as saying “Yes, we are going to participate. I will participate. [...] I have total confidence in our teachers in this matter” Author’s translation of « Oui, nous allons participer. Moi-même, je vais participer. [...] Je fais totalement confiance aux enseignants en la matière » (Source : I-Télé, Nov. 04, 2009)
5 Author translation: “cette pédagogie de l’intégration peut conduire à l’aggravation de la situation, et assigner les élèves à leurs identités présupposées.”
Many scholars (Schnapper 2000; Nora 1984, 1987, 1992) have addressed the topic of history and memory, particularly when it comes to national political discourse on sensitive subjects such as war, colonization, racism and discrimination, but far less is known about classroom discourse, the teaching and learning of these sensitive topics and the role history and memory play in teaching and pedagogy. By examining the case of how the French republican school is responding to shifting national demographics, ideologies, and State demands in regards to the teaching of immigration history, this study contributes to theoretical discussions on the meaning and role of difference, identity and recognition in schooling in pluralistic societies. Through this qualitative study I situate current curricula, classroom practices and teacher and student discourse within the broader framework of a shifting national identity amidst tensions and movement between ideologies and policies of assimilation, integration, recognition and multiculturalism so present in France and other pluralistic, liberal democracies today.

Research Questions

Given the tensions in France between national ideals of abstract equality and citizenship and the realities of an increasingly multicultural, heterogeneous population, how does the State’s primary institution charged with citizenship and national identity formation, the public school, address cultural diversity? Through

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6 In this study I understand “cultural diversity” to include differences in language, ethnicity, race, religion, and social class. Since immigrants and their descendents have introduced diversity in all of these categories into French society, and many of these categories are interconnected, my study will take all of them into account. It is important to note that the category of “race” is not typically used in French social scientific research. I use this category in my study with the awareness that my
an analysis of the treatment and reception of the topic of immigration history in French high schools this study examines how teachers conceive of and teach about cultural diversity in relation to the nation and, to a lesser extent, how students interpret and respond to these lessons.

As I embarked on this inquiry, many questions arose. How do history curricula and textbooks portray immigration and immigrants? Existing literature indicated that the answer to this question was not much at all. In classroom lessons, how are immigrants presented in relation to the French nation and national identity? How do teachers and students address the plurality of cultures (linguistic, ethnic racial, religious) in France? How do teachers and students identify themselves and each other as French and how do they situate their national identity in relation to other collective belongings (social class, religious, ethnic, regional)? How does the diversity of the student population shape the way the same curriculum is taught in different classes or schools? How does the diversity of the student population shape student perceptions of their place in the nation?

These questions initially guided my research, but as I plunged into fieldwork, two other important questions emerged and took precedence in the study. The teaching of immigration history is a new issue in France and I soon realized that this novelty presented an interesting point of entry to my question of how French schools are addressing cultural diversity amidst shifting demographics. My understanding of race is shaped by the American social context of both my upbringing and academic training. I understand race to be a socially constructed category that is the product of historical, social and political context. Like Amanda Lewis (2003) I understand that despite the fluidity and social nature of race, racial categories “are potent social categories around which people organize their identities and behavior and that influence people’s opportunities and outcomes” (p. 6) in multiracial societies such as France and the U.S.
research at the CNHI and in schools, therefore, investigates how recent attempts to
introduce and incorporate the history of immigration into teaching are conceived by
teachers and CNHI staff, as well as how these efforts are perceived by students.
Secondly, this study seeks to uncover what the discourse surrounding the teaching
of immigration as a school topic tells us about how teachers and students, the main
actors of the republican school (and by extension French society), perceive French
national identity and cultural diversity as part of that identity.

Significance of the Study

The controversies over a 2005 proposed law requiring school curricula to
teach about the “positive role” of colonialism7 and President Nicolas Sarkozy’s 2008
proposal to revise the fifth grade history curriculum so that each student is assigned
to the memory of a child victim of the Holocaust8 are indicative of the high stakes
and sensitivities associated with history education today. How France and other
European countries should officially recognize and teach past atrocities conducted
by and against their citizens is a concern that has reached far beyond the education
community. While state-controlled curricula and textbooks have been an important
part of nation building over the past two centuries in Europe, since the second
World War there has been a growing call for textbook and curricula revision,

law, which was opposed by most educators, called for curricula to “particularly recognize the positive
role played by the French presence overseas, notably in North Africa, and grant to this history and to
the sacrifices of the combatants in the French army who came from these territories the place of
preeminence to which they have a right” (cited in Scott 2007).
8 The proposal made by President Sarkozy to have all fifth graders assigned to the memory of a
French child victim of the Holocaust, was met with much critique from the education community as
particularly of history texts, in order to better address sensitive topics such as war, decolonization, human rights and globalization (Schissler and Soysal 2005). As this acknowledgement has grown over the past half century, so has the visibility of the immigrant population and their descendants, many with former colonial ties to France, whose presence is calling into question the national historical narrative and its inclusiveness (or lack thereof) of various members of French society.

Since the French government does not collect statistics on ethnicity or race, other criteria have been used to measure the cultural diversity of the population. The primary measure used in French national statistics is nationality, but the 1999 national census, for example, polled a sampling of the population on what language or languages they spoke at home until the age of five. *L’enquete Famille* (Family survey), developed by the National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) and conducted by the National Institute for Economic and Social Studies (INSEE), found that 26% of the adult population remembered a parent speaking to them in a language other than French (Héran, Filhon and Deprez 2002). Hargreaves (2007) argues that, “by focusing on nationality to the exclusion of immigration status or ethnic origins, official data have made it extremely difficult to conduct reliable analyses of the impact of immigration on French society at large” (p. 11). French government statistics, which distinguish only between foreign born immigrants and

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9 It should be noted that language is an imperfect proxy for immigrant origin, as it does not take into account “native” French who speak regional languages at home as well as those immigrants’ whose native langue is French. However, these findings still speak to the significant diversity of contemporary French citizens.
citizens,\textsuperscript{10} show that in 2003, immigrants hailed from North Africa (44 percent), Sub-Saharan African (23 percent), Asia (16 percent) and South America (six percent) (Ministère de l'emploi, de la cohésion sociale et du logement cited in Benson 2013). These statistics speak to the significant diversity of the French population today. As immigration is inexorably linked to cultural diversity, examining how the topic of immigration is presented and understood in the classroom sheds much needed light on the related issue of how a society largely conceived in assimilationist terms addresses ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious minorities within the public school space.

With growing numbers of ethno-religious minorities fleeing public schools for private, religious institutions (\textit{Le Monde de l'Education} January 2008), and concern over studies that show France’s second generation students significantly underperforming in comparison with “native” students in reading and math (PISA 2003\textsuperscript{11}), more research is needed on how public schools address cultural diversity in the classroom. My research seeks to better understand how the topic of immigration, which in many ways has served as a catalyst for the perceived identity crisis of the school and nation (Rea and Tripier 2003; Maillot 2008), is being taught and internalized. As questions are raised about inequalities and discrimination against ethnic minority populations in schooling, I set out to examine what messages about the various components of cultural diversity (ethnicity, race,

\textsuperscript{10} This means French citizens from overseas territories who move to metropolitan France are not counted as immigrants.

\textsuperscript{11} Study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) \url{http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en_32252351_32235731_111111,00.html} (accessed 4/10/2010)
religion, social class and language) are transmitted through teachers and how students from different cultural backgrounds interpret these messages. I hope my findings will contribute to discussions on how best to adapt education curricula, pedagogy and policy to meet the needs of diverse student populations, as well as add to our general understanding of the roles that history education and teachers play in shaping national identity and in responding to societal change.

As I formulated my research questions and conducted background research I realized that most of the scant literature on the teaching of immigration history in France has been conducted or published in affiliation with the CNHI and mostly under the direction of the same scholar, Benoit Falaize. My study, therefore, adds an important, external voice and perspective to the literature. To the best of my knowledge at the time of this writing, this dissertation is the only existing scholarly study of the CNHI’s Education Department, and the only non-French study of the teaching of immigration history in France. On a broader level, this study contributes both empirically and theoretically to the growing body of literature on the teaching of controversial issues, particularly addressing sensitive socio-political topics in culturally diverse classrooms.

**A Qualitative Study of the CNHI and Two Schools**

Between January 2010 and May 2011, I conducted 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Ile-de-France (Paris) region. I split my time as evenly as possible between two public high schools (lycées générales et technologiques) and I followed the activities of the Education Department and its staff at the CNHI. I
spent hundreds of hours observing high school classes, the teachers’ lounge, the school cafeterias, libraries, hallways, and the surrounding neighborhoods. I interviewed 25 secondary teachers and 14 high school students in the Paris region. I also interviewed all five of the Education Department staff working at the CNHI between January 2010 and May 2011.\textsuperscript{12} I observed CNHI teacher training sessions, workshops, staff meetings, exhibit tours, school visits to the CNHI and teacher and student presentations of immigration related projects. For a detailed list of my observations and interviews please see Appendix B. I attended public debates on national identity, attended and presented at conferences on “school and nation,” post-colonialism, race and multiculturalism in France, and engaged nearly everybody I met, including friends, taxi drivers, landlords, French PhD students, and scholars on my research topic. I read the French press, watched French TV and spent significant time with French friends and colleagues, immersing myself as much as possible in French society as part of the ethnographic approach.

The Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration (CNHI)

The CNHI was in many ways the starting point for my research on the teaching of immigration history in France. Intrigued by an October 2007 \textit{New York Times} article entitled “Ready or Not, France Opens Museum on Immigration,” which presented a highly cynical view of the new institution, I began to follow the CNHI, first from afar, and eventually as an integral part of my fieldwork.

\textsuperscript{12} For more information on interviewees see Appendix A. I interviewed five CNHI staff. These five staff members represent all Education Department staff working at the CNHI between January 2010 and May 2011. It is important to note that these CNHI staff members are also teachers.
The CNHI is located in the Palais de la Porte Dorée, a palatial, art deco building in the 12th arrondissement on the far, east side of Paris. The monument sits just two steps from the Porte de Vincennes (one of Paris’ city gates) and at the entrance to the Bois de Vincennes, the lesser known of Paris’ two great parks that sit like bookends on the east and west sides of the city. The CNHI is an easy twenty-minute metro ride from the center of town; however, upon exiting the Porte Dorée metro station you quickly realize you are no longer in the heart of the Parisian universe. There are fewer crowds, less noise, and not nearly as much glamour.

The 12th arrondissement has a rich history of immigration. In the interwar period, the periphery of Paris attracted large communities of migrant and immigrant workers from both rural France and neighboring countries, recruited to work in new factories, such as one built by Renault, that had sprung up around the outskirts of the city. Polish workers, for example, made up forty-two percent of the labor force in 1930 (Popkin 2006 p. 233). In the early twentieth century, the peripheral strip on the eastern border of Paris was known as “the Zone” due to its official Latin categorization of “zone non aedificandi” or an area where construction was not allowed (Morton 2000). The area was inhabited by an extremely poor and marginalized population of those who could not afford housing in Paris, many of whom were migrants who constructed ramshackle homes in the “Zone,” creating a “bidonville” or shanty town similar to those constructed en masse outside Paris and other major cities after WW II, which became home to many immigrants.

Today the 12th is a quiet, working and middle class neighborhood. The contemporary “Zone” has been pushed farther away from the center to the now
infamous suburban housing projects. I lived in the 12th, not too far away from the Porte Dorée, during the 2001-2002 academic year, but had no idea the Palais de la Porte Dorée existed at that time. The 12th arrondissement is not prominent on most tourist maps and when living there I appreciated the fact that I was immersed in a section of “ordinary” Paris as opposed to the overcrowded touristy and artistic fantasies of Montmartre and the Latin Quarter. The Palais de la Porte Dorée had largely fallen off the map when I lived in the 12th, but it had once been a prominent tourist destination. During the 1931 Colonial Exposition, from May through November, more than 30 million tickets were sold to Parisians eager for a glimpse of France’s colonial empire (Morton 2000). The Palais was the only permanent structure built for the 1931 Colonial Exposition, and the building still stands as a manifestation of France’s colonial empire.

School Site Selection and Access

In order to examine how French history teachers address the topic of immigration and immigration history in particular, and how students of diverse backgrounds (recent immigrant descent and non-immigrant descent) perceive these lessons, I originally set out to conduct a qualitative, comparative case study of three school sites in the Paris region. The idea behind the three-school comparison was to select three school sites with different student demographics -- one with students primarily of recent immigrant decent, one with a mix of students including a significant percentage of students of recent immigrant decent, and finally a school

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13 30 million tickets were sold, but historians believe this represents about eight million people who visited the exhibition an average of four times each (Green 2007).
where the majority of students are not of recent immigrant decent. I designed this comparative case study in order to analyze how and if student diversity shapes how the same national curriculum is taught and internalized by different members of society. In her book *Race in the Schoolyard* (2003), Amanda Lewis makes a strong case for studying race not only in schools populated predominantly by racial minorities, but also in an all white school in the United States. Pointing to the fact that most research on race and education has been conducted in schools with predominantly minority populations, Lewis argues that, “Understanding how white students develop their racial subjectivities and understandings is crucial to understanding future possibilities for racial equity in the United States” (p. 12). Similarly I argue that a study of how immigration history (a subject comparably fraught with sensitivity in France as race is in the United States) is taught and internalized in French schools should not be limited to the Priority Education Zones (ZEP) in the suburbs where most students are of recent immigrant descent, but should also look at schools where the student demographics are mixed, as well as those where the majority of students do not consider themselves to be of immigrant origin.

Once I entered the field I quickly learned that gaining access to predominantly non-immigrant schools in Paris was extremely difficult. I gained access to schools primarily through two means: existing connections (an American professor who knew the principal at a Paris high school and put us in touch), and through teachers I met at the CNHI. I first contacted the CNHI about my study in the fall of 2009 and was enthusiastically welcomed and supported by the Education
Department staff who, during my first pilot study trip to Paris during January of 2010, started to put me in contact with various teachers who they thought might be interested in having a researcher at their schools. As soon as I said I was studying the teaching of immigration history, CNHI staff as well as other teachers I met repeatedly recommended contacts and schools in the heavily immigrant Paris suburbs. The CNHI works particularly closely with the Creteil school district that covers the heavily immigrant and ethnic minority populated Seine-St. Denis department and Creteil schools were often suggested to me. When I explained I was also interested in a school in the center of Paris, the suggestions petered off. From January through November of 2010, I tried without success to gain access to a mostly non-immigrant high school either in central Paris or in one of the less diverse Western suburbs. Despite letters written on my behalf by the principal of one of the schools where I was already conducting research and from the President of a prominent Parisian university whose son attended one potential school site, I did not receive so much as a polite decline. I spoke with numerous teachers, scholars and contacts to no avail. I made phone calls and wrote emails. I visited schools with NYU students who were working in the school as English language teaching assistants. I had no problem finding teachers in these schools who were eager to be interviewed, but in order to conduct ongoing research in a school I needed the approval of the principal, and these principals were uniformly not responsive to my requests.

Like Lewis’ argument about the lack of research on predominantly white schools in the United States, I found that research on immigration is heavily
correlated with schools in predominantly immigrant and/or ethnically diverse neighborhoods in France. I was intent on including a study of the teaching of immigration history in a predominantly non-immigrant or homogeneous setting, but I realized I would not be able to do this through a school site at this time. Since I was not able to do a comparative case study among three schools, I approached my research questions from a slightly different angle. I focused a large section of my study on teachers who do represent a predominantly non-immigrant or ethnically European, racially white, majority group, and I chose to conduct fieldwork in two ethnically diverse schools that, rather than serving as a comparison, provided a broader context for and generalizability of my findings. Therefore, I do not often identify or distinguish between the two school sites in this study, but rather view them together as one larger sample or case study.

The Schools

I chose two schools that I had identified and gained access to during my initial pilot study in January of 2010. In both cases, my first point of contact was an enthusiastic English teacher who spoke to the principal on my behalf. At one school the principal was used to having researchers around and welcomed me unconditionally. At the second school, the principal was more resistant at first, but soon warmed to the idea and seemed quite pleased that her average school in an unknown suburb would be of interest to a scholar from New York. I purposefully chose two schools with certain similar features: general high schools whose students are preparing to take the baccalaureate exam and are therefore considered
to be on a college track. Because of France’s centralized education system, all general high schools follow the same national history curriculum. Both schools are home to about 800 students with extremely mixed student demographics in terms of immigrant background and ethnicity or race. Both schools draw students from lower to middle class neighborhoods, have low to average baccalaureate scores and correlated school rankings\textsuperscript{14} and, as I was told by several teachers and students at each school, both schools are often fall-back schools for students who did not get into their first choice high school either because of their grades or because of where they live. The primary difference between the two schools is that one is in Paris proper, albeit near the edge of the city limits, while the other is nestled deep in the southern suburbs of the Versailles school district. The geographic and cultural differences between the schools were often apparent, but these differences did not weigh heavily on my particular research questions. Students in the Parisian school were more worldly, politically engaged and sophisticated. Students in the suburban school by contrast were not as well traveled and in many cases a school field trip to Paris was their first or only time to take the RER and/or visit the capital, despite it being only 35 kilometers (about 22 miles) away. The differences between the two schools did provide a wide range of teacher experiences from which to draw. The suburban school housed a number of young teachers who were assigned to the school as a first or second teaching post, whereas the Parisian school housed many

\textsuperscript{14} Each year the French press publishes the "palmarès" rankings of all high schools in the country. These rankings are primarily based on baccalaureate exam results and rank the schools nationally as well as by department and school district. In 2011 both of my schools were dropping in the rankings. According to Le Figaro’s 2011 rankings, the Parisian school ranked 1288 out of 1935 schools nationally and the suburban school ranked 1109 out of 1935 nationally, with only 2% and 5% respectively of graduating seniors receiving a “mention très bien” the highest marks, on the baccalaureate exam. See: http://www.lefigaro.fr/palmares-lycees/ (accessed 9/3/2013).
more seasoned teachers who, being near the end of their careers, were rewarded with a Parisian post. Viguier (2006) points out that “teaching in a ZEP school has become an imposed stage in teachers’ careers; 25% of teachers in ZEP schools are thirty years old or younger, whereas this figure falls to 15% in non-ZEP neighborhoods” (p. 64).

Students from a variety of immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds attend both schools and both school sites are located in neighborhoods that are heavily influenced by immigration and the accompanying cultural diversity. Sitting near the edge of the freeway that forms a periphery around Paris, the Parisian high school is easily accessible by RER, metro and city bus. The metro line that serves the school is widely known to be the worst in Paris, always overcrowded and breaking down. As a result I spent significant time on the bus and on foot traveling to and from the school. The school sits just beyond a classic tree-lined Parisian avenue with Haussmann-era apartments sitting atop various shops and businesses. Patisseries and boulangeries display tantalizing piles of North African and Turkish pastries in their windows alongside traditional French croissants and baguettes. Numerous butcher shops and restaurants, including several Chinese restaurants, on the avenue advertise “Halal” offerings written in both French and Arabic on their front windows. A construction site wall is plastered with posters that announce upcoming political demonstrations and a “concert to fight discrimination.” Moroccan funeral homes and travel agents also line the street. During a typical bus ride up the avenue, passengers include a mix of men and women in traditional African dress, tailored European suits, students, and a few tourists/backpackers,
who I assumed had either wandered far off the beaten tourist path or were staying at one of the few budget hotels in the area.

My commute from central Paris to the suburban school by metro, RER commuter train and city bus took about an hour and a half. Once I left the Gare de Lyon on the RER D I never saw tourists -- only tired commuters, many of whom spoke to each other in languages other than French. The only other Americans I ever spotted were a pair of Mormon missionaries. Most of the teachers at the school either lived in nearby suburbs or drove in from Paris. Once in awhile I would run into one of the younger teachers on the train or bus. The RER ride traveling from Paris through the southern suburbs provides a glimpse into a less glamorous side of French scenery. As the train leaves Paris behind, grey industrial complexes and large HLM public housing projects dominate the landscape. Tall signs for MacDo (McDonalds) and KFC tower above the industrial wasteland with block housing towers in the background. Slowly these are replaced with small towns, most of which look like their heyday was 150 years ago. Between these towns are large-scale garbage dumps, recycling centers and abandoned warehouses. About halfway through my ride there is a small shantytown where a few shacks made of scraps of tin and boards stand. At first I thought it was abandoned, perhaps a remnant of the infamous “bidonvilles” of the 1950’s – 1970's where so many immigrants to France spent their first years in the country, living in squalid, make-shift conditions akin to the third world while they waited for low-income housing (Benguigui 1997). But during a subsequent train ride I noticed laundry hanging between the shacks and children running around. After this bleak RER train ride, I descended into the fairly
large city of Evry-Courcouronnes. Evry is an extremely diverse community. From where I caught a local bus I could see the tips of both the modern Cathedral of the Resurrection and the Grand Mosque of Evry. The bus ride to the school was another 20 minutes. Once on the bus and away from the train station and downtown Evry the scenery improved. The bus wound through leafy green suburban neighborhoods with modest, but well cared for houses interspersed with wooded areas. The school itself sits back from a main road, sandwiched between two low-lying factories, but with ample green space between the buildings.

The physical surroundings of the two schools differ greatly; however, once inside the classrooms the schools were largely indistinguishable. The classrooms housed the same style desks and chairs set in rows, the same relatively bare classroom walls, and the same horizontal windows along one side looking out onto the school grounds.

Methodology: Choices and Reflections

Ethnographic Observations and Interviews

Lofland et al. (2006) write that, “only through direct observation and/or participation can one get close to apprehending those studied and the character of their social worlds and lives” (p. 3). To get close to the “social worlds and lives” of the teachers and students in my study and to better understand how they make sense of their daily interactions I conducted numerous observations of history and other classrooms during the course of the 2010-2011 academic year. For a complete list of my classroom and other observations see Appendix B.
In addition to those observations, I conducted 44 semi-structured interviews and numerous informal interviews, which took the form of casual or concerted conversations with teachers in the teachers’ lounge, at CNHI training sessions, etc. Seidman (2006) describes interviewing as, “a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues” (p. 14). During my time in the field I interviewed three groups of teachers, those I recruited from my two school sites, those I recruited from other schools in the Paris region, and teachers then working as staff in the Education Department at the CNHI.

In her study of youth and national belonging in contemporary Germany, Miller-Idriss (2009) argues that to best understand everyday conceptions of the nation and how these conceptions are shifting with a new generation, scholars must “include an analysis of what people actually say when they talk about the meaning of citizenship and national belonging” (p. 43). Interviews, therefore, play a critical role in my analysis of student and teacher perceptions and how these views may vary across different populations. For detailed information on my interviewees and my interview protocols see Appendix A.

**The Role of the Researcher: Reflexivity and Insider vs. Outsider Status**

Coffey (1999) points out the importance of recognizing that “fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity work” (p. 1) and therefore my own identity undoubtedly influenced my observations, interviews and interpretation of data. Shortly after arriving in Paris in the fall of 2010 to conduct dissertation fieldwork on
how the topic of immigration is addressed in French classrooms, I had a conversation with a French academic, an expert in bilingual education and sociolinguistics. As I explained my plans to conduct ethnographic research in high schools in the Paris region, interviewing teachers and students of various immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds about how the topic of immigration is taught and understood in schools with different student demographics, to my great relief, she responded with excitement about the project, and then, a bit to my surprise, exclaimed that only a foreigner (such as myself) could conduct this particular research in France.

This anecdote illustrates the high level of sensitivity surrounding the topic of immigration in France today, the extent of which only became clear to me after years of researching the issue. Often, with sensitive topics, research subjects are more likely to reveal intimate information to a researcher they perceive to be similar or from a like-minded background. However, some topics are so sensitive that people actually open up more to those they perceive to be fully outside their community. Seidman (2006) argues that social distance between an interviewer and interviewee can be a methodological advantage since, “[i]nterviewing requires interviewers to have enough distance to enable them to ask real questions and to explore, not to share, assumptions” (p. 100). This is the position I found myself in as an American researching the topic of immigration as it is addressed in French schools. Particularly with interviews, as an American and, thus, an outsider to French society, I was able to ask teachers and students questions that a French person would never ask, either because the question involved information that is
considered to be common knowledge among the French, or because the subject is considered taboo in French society.

Other times, I used my outward appearance of insider status, to my advantage. As an early 30s white woman who speaks near-fluent French, I blended in with the majority of other teachers in schools, and as a doctoral student in the education field, I was perceived to be an insider in that I have similar interests to many of the teachers and could easily make small talk on school and general education matters. This gave me an important insider status, or at least an appearance of insider status, during my school observations. I blended in to the point where teachers felt comfortable speaking freely around me and in larger schools, where teachers do not all know each other, I was often mistaken for a substitute or fellow teacher in the teachers’ lounge. Furthermore, because of the large amounts of time spent in the schools, I found that teachers often considered me part of the landscape and in the informal settings of the teachers’ lounge and the school cafeteria, they spoke freely around me.

A researcher always impacts those she studies and it is therefore crucial to be cognizant of the often imbalanced researcher-subject relationship, and of the “distortions [that] are embedded in the very structure of the research relationship” (Bourdieu 2000 p. 608). From the anthropological study of isolated tribal societies halfway across the globe to the cultural sociology of social groups within one’s own neighborhood, ethnographers grapple with their own role as a researcher and how their own views and experience influence their interpretations of others. Geertz (1973) rightly points out that the fact that “what we call our data are really our own
constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” is often obscured. While collecting ethnographic data it is, therefore, important to maintain a certain reflexivity and self-awareness of one’s own position as a researcher in the setting under study. Throughout my research and fieldwork I was keenly aware of my outsider status as an American and, thus, a foreigner in France. Being a foreigner would influence any type of social research, but is particularly salient to my research, since it involves questions of national identity and immigration. As an American I will never be able to fully understand my interviewees’ feelings of French identity and I cannot expect to fully dispel my own biases and American-informed perspectives when it comes to conceptualizing and talking about issues such as multiculturalism, immigration and the roles of social class, religion and race in education. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) argue that, in studying other countries, American social scientists impose American-specific understandings of race and multiculturalism as universals in their work. While I cannot completely shed my own “doxa,” I do my best throughout this study to reflect on my own assumptions and to try to understand French conceptions of national identity, immigration history and education within the French socio-historical context.
Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter Two I situate my research within the historical and theoretical contexts of the existing literature on French nationhood, identity and schooling. In particular, I examine republican ideology in relation to schooling in France and how this ideology shapes the French school’s universalist approach to education, shunning multiculturalism and recognition of differences among students in the school space. Next, I examine history education and the literature on teaching curricular topics such as immigration that are perceived to be highly sensitive to address in the classroom. I then turn to an examination of the history and historiography of immigration to France and the omission of immigration history as a topic in the French national history curriculum. The chapter concludes with a review of literature on museums and their roles as educational institutions and producers of state sanctioned national narratives.

Chapter Three is dedicated to my study of the National Center for Immigration History (CNHI) and, in particular, its Education Department. I first place the CNHI within its own historical-political context, examining this symbolic site and the controversies surrounding it, from the decision to house the museum in the former Museum of the Colonies to its “occupation” by 500 illegal immigrants for nearly four months between October 2010 and February 2011. I then explore the ambitious mission of the CNHI to change the public’s view of immigration and immigrants and to instill a more inclusive understanding of French national identity by recognizing the contributions of immigration over the years to the construction
of the French nation. I argue that the CNHI struggles to achieve this lofty goal in great part because its work is strictly confined within the republican model that does not allow for expression and recognition of differences and avoids confronting controversial issues such as discrimination that might undermine the existing socio-economic hierarchy within French society.

In Chapter Four I turn to the schools and how teachers choose to address the topic of immigration history in the classroom. I contend that teachers are experiencing a significant societal transition in terms of how difference is understood and discussed in the school setting and that the study of immigration highlights the tensions raised during this transition. I find that, since immigration is such a highly problematic topic for many teachers, when they do address the topic of immigration, they do so from a distanced perspective, one that unwittingly works against the CNHI goal of incorporating immigration into the collective identity of the nation. I conclude the chapter with a classroom case study of an immigration-related project. This project highlights the distanced and problematic approach to immigration outlined above. Furthermore, through an analysis of teacher and student motivations and perceptions, this case study provides a nuanced and detailed window into how actors within the institution of the French school adapt to societal change -- in this case the ever-diversifying student population and French citizenry.

In Chapter Five I examine the taboo and stigma expressed by teachers in regards to an ongoing debate in the French education community over whether or not teachers should engage students on their own family history or immigrant
background as part of teaching about immigration history. I first discuss how the CNHI Education Department, teachers, and students respectively address and understand the debate surrounding family history in the classroom and the contradictions that exist between the official stance of the CNHI and the rhetoric of many teachers on one hand, and the daily practices of teachers on the other. The students’ voices add a previously absent and nuanced perspective to this debate. Next, I address the assertion made by most teachers and CNHI staff when discussing family immigrant history that asking students to address their own immigrant background in class violates the divide between public and private spheres. Drawing on Kenji Yoshino’s (2006) theory of “covering” and Bourdieu’s (1970) conception of “symbolic violence” the chapter concludes with an analysis of teachers’ stated fear of stigmatizing students of immigrant descent and of imposing a non-French identity on them by asking them to speak about their family background.

Chapter six addresses the complex and controversial topic of “race” in French society and schools. Starting with an examination of the unique relationship between race and national identity in France, I then move to discussions of color-blindness in French schools and the amalgam or conflation of immigrants and racial minorities in France today. I conclude with an analysis of whiteness among teachers in color-blind France. Focusing on the mostly white teachers in my study, I argue that much work is necessary to uncover the “common sense of color-blindness” (Lewis 2004) in French schools.
I conclude the dissertation with a summary of my main findings on how and why the teaching of immigration history is particularly challenging for teachers in France and I discuss avenues for further research.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMING

Introduction

In this chapter I review the theoretical and empirical literature on French nationhood and schooling, starting with historical conceptions of the French nation and school. This literature is crucial to understanding the disconnect between the reality that France is, and has long been, a nation that attracts high numbers of immigrants and the historically-rooted and persistent, albeit contested, national narrative of France as a nation that is culturally homogeneous and blind to difference. A plethora of literature exists on French nationhood, citizenship and identity, and how these have been instilled in the French through schooling over the years (Balibar 1988; Brubaker 1992; Favell 1998; Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Weber 1974; Weil 2004). However, little empirical research exists on how teachers and students in diverse settings negotiate this disconnect in the classroom.

Next, I review the literature on schooling and, in particular, history education to better comprehend how traditional French republican ideology reinforces a universalist approach to education in France that dissuades recognition of cultural difference within the school space. I draw on scholars such as Benhabib (2002), Parekh (2006), and Taylor (1994), who theorize the importance of official recognition of minority and immigrant groups within multicultural societies such as
France, and contrast these theorists with French scholars such as Abdallah-Pretceille (2003) and Falaize (2009) who argue that this type of recognition in the classroom setting only serves to stigmatize students of immigrant background and reify stereotypical conceptions of cultural categories. Next, I explore the literature on history education and the teaching of controversial topics.

The chapter concludes with a review of the literature on the history and historiography of immigration to France and the place of immigration in French history curricula and textbooks. The glaring omission of immigration history in the national history curriculum, as evidenced by the literature, and the recent efforts of certain educators, most notably the CNHI Education Department, to increase knowledge and teaching about immigration is the starting point for this research.

**French Nationhood and Identity: Historical and Intellectual Perspectives**

France is thought of as having the “most ideologically elaborated tradition of assimilation” (Brubaker 2001 p. 535). This tradition is largely attributed to France’s concept of nationhood, originating with the Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and which grew conceptually and ideologically throughout the 19th century, anchoring the republican values of universalism, equality, rationalism and secularism in the collective national identity (Brubaker 1992; Favell 1998). Notions of citizenship in the nation-state were developed with an emphasis on political participation, rather than ethnic heritage, as the essential criteria. Brubaker (1992) points to the revolutionary political figure Tallien’s 1795 statement that “the only foreigners in France are the bad citizens” (p.
7). This sentiment is further elaborated by Rousseau’s notion of the “social contract” in which citizens, by deciding to join the political community of the nation, in exchange gain individual freedom (Meuret 2004). For Rousseau (1762), the social contract is the solution to the quintessential problem of how to balance social cohesion and individual liberty, the result of which provides an equal footing for all citizens. It is precisely this balance that is in question when it comes to how French schools should handle a diverse student population. This is evidenced by recent public controversies such as the ongoing headscarf debate involving practicing Muslims who wish to wear the headscarf in public schools and claim that French societal norms, as expressed through school policy, do not allow for the expression of a fundamental part of their identity, namely their religious belonging. The headscarf debate has sparked volumes of studies and musings by French and foreign scholars alike on “Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves” (Bowen 2006; Bauberot 2004; Scott 2007; Weil 2004), yet little exists in this body of literature on how teachers understand and address these issues in the classroom setting. The wearing of “ostentatious” signs of religious belonging is banned from the public school in France, but not the discussion of the ban.

Rousseau’s philosophy stresses political participation in the institutions of the nation as the basis for citizenship, a notion that was further developed by Ernest Renan in his essay and lecture “What is a nation?” delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882. In his essay Renan expresses the French concept of nation as being based on political and institutional allegiance as opposed to “ethnographic considerations”
such as race, religion or language (Noiriel 1988; Brubaker 1992; Todorov 1989). It is these three “ethnographic” factors that have been and continue to be at the heart of political debates surrounding national policy and schooling since the 19th century. Today the French state purposefully turns a blind eye to race, refusing to collect statistics on the racial or ethnic make-up of its citizens; it claims to officially separate itself from all religions; and, finally, it has and continues to use the French language as an assimilationist tool, as the Durkheimian social glue to bind its citizens together into a cohesive society (Scott 2007; Weber 1974; van Zanten 1997).

From Colonization to Immigration: Questioning a “Color-blind” Republic

While Renan lectured on national belonging without regard to ethnicity in Paris, France was in the midst of colonial expansion in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean where racial, ethnic and religious criteria were placed at the heart of social stratification and citizenship rights. Postcolonial theorists such as Appadurai (1996) have demonstrated how racial classification under colonial rule persists in today’s postcolonial societies, shaping policy, and attitudes. Likewise scholars of French history and society have shown how the French “civilizing mission,” originally introduced as colonial ideology and policy to civilize indigenous populations, did not end with decolonization, but rather is part of France’s republican, national ideology and has been reformulated over the years; it is used to assimilate French regional populations and is exercised, in particular, in the

integration of post-colonial immigrants (Conklin 1997; Scott 2007; Shepard 2006; Weber 1974). Simon (2006) points out that thinking about the links between immigration and colonization is very recent in France and that, “[t]his movement announces the end, to a certain extent, of a form of amnesia that was tolerated by all and which considered as dissociated objects both the history of migrations, and the historical constitution of the French nation” (p. 207).

In January 2005, in response to persistent discrimination, an association called “The Indigenous of the Republic” launched a public manifesto claiming that descendents of postcolonial immigrants are the primary victims of discrimination in employment, housing, healthcare and education in France today, and that this is because France has not shed its colonial structures and ideologies of inequality.16 From its role at the heart of the French colonial civilizing mission, to that of assimilating French peasants, the republican school continues to take center stage in these public debates and, as Scott (2007) argues, “since the Third Republic, schools have been considered the key to disseminating and stabilizing republicanism, to creating France as a nation one and indivisible” (p. 107). As post-colonial immigration raises new questions on how colonial mentalities persist within contemporary France, the school remains central to investigating how teachers negotiate the tensions between national ideals of abstract equality and citizenship in increasingly heterogeneous classrooms.

The French Republican School: Historical and Theoretical Context

History of the French Public School

The national narrative of the birth of the republican school starts with the Jules Ferry laws of the 1880s, which rendered school mandatory, free and secular. It was under the Third Republic (1871-1944) that what has become known as the republican socio-political model took root in France. Schnapper (1991) spells out the following characteristics of the model: emphasis on “high culture (considered not only as superior but as universal),” “individual rather than group participation and integration,” “rational and political factors in the construction of citizenship,” and “the unifying function assigned to state institutions, and particularly to the school, in the building and the reproduction of these features” (cited in van Zanten 1997 p. 352-3). This model, which reflects the national values attributed to the Revolution, has been employed in France for more than a century and continues to guide public policy, specifically in relation to immigration, integration and public schooling (van Zanten 1997). As the French school system belatedly expanded in the 1960s and 70s, the opening of secondary education to the masses17 corresponded with growing societal concerns over youth and immigrant populations, which were presented as risks to the nation (Artières and Zancarini-Fournel 2008). Faced with the challenge of adapting a school that was designed to teach a select, homogeneous elite, so that it can now serve the entire nation, the

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17 It is important to note that secondary education in France was not widespread until the 1970s. For a comprehensive history of the process of the “democratization” of schooling in France, see Merle, P. (2002) *La democratization de l’enseignement*. Paris: Repères, La Decouverte.
public school continues to function as a key institution of the secular, equalizing, republican state.

Schooling, Cultural Capital and Reproduction

The universality and equality of the French republican model, specifically as it pertains to schooling was famously called into question by Bourdieu's 1964 work, *Les héritiers*, in which he critiques the perceived meritocracy of the school system and argues that inequalities among students of different social backgrounds will persist as long as schools continue to reward those students who arrive in the classroom with a certain set of cultural capital, such as having visited the Louvre or attended theater productions with family, that is, paradoxically, not taught in schools. The reproduction of this system, according to Bourdieu, serves to maintain inequalities in society and is perpetuated in great part through this cultural capital that is held by the dominant classes and which is treated by teachers as legitimate. Therefore, Bourdieu argues, handing out scholarships or other forms of financial assistance to those who lack economic capital is not enough to change the system, but rather, schools must do away with pedagogies that only recognize, legitimate and reproduce the success of students from the dominant social classes. This view is echoed by educators and scholars today, who claim that despite its emphasis on equality, with equal access and free admission, the republican school has been unable to ensure equality of opportunity for all students (van Zantan 1997; Schnapper 2003) and that it may be time to “reinvent the education community” (Truong in *Le Monde de l’Education* January 2008). With this study I hope to add
empirical research to the growing body of literature on education in pluralistic societies by examining how ideology, such as French republicanism, held by teachers shapes classroom practice when it comes to teaching about controversial topics such as immigration, which invites discussion of and assumptions made regarding cultural differences.

**The Republican School and Multiculturalism**

While over the last thirty years, the traditional republican model has come up against theories and policies of recognition and multiculturalism, the school system has remained largely resistant to these foreign models (Bleich 1998). During the 1970s and 1980s, as an increased number and diversity of immigrant children entered the classroom, France underwent what Brubaker (2001) terms a “differentialist” period. During this time, expressions such as “the right of difference” that reflect a recognition and claiming of multiculturalism made inroads in French society. In the realm of education, this was evidenced by programs such as Language and Culture of Origin (ELCO), which were set up in cooperation with significant immigrant-sending nations such as Morocco and Portugal, which provided teachers for these classes. However, these programs reflected the widely held belief of the time, both among immigrants and the French government, that most immigrants would return to their home countries and, therefore, should maintain their native languages so they would be able to reintegrate into their “home” society (Benguigui 1997; Sayad 1991; Scott 2007 van Zanten 1997).
The differentialist period did not last long and, within the span of just a few years, France returned to its assimilationist roots (Simon 2006). Today, overtly multicultural programs are mostly dismissed by French educators, who see them as following a societal model that leads to segregation and “communitarianism,” creating ethnic neighborhoods and defined minority groups such as one finds in England and the United States. Parekh (2006) describes the French resistance to multiculturalism as a reflection of a belief in the universality of French culture:

Furthermore, the French nation is supposed to embody and protect the French culture, which its citizens are expected to accept as a condition of their citizenship. Indeed, since the values of the French culture are believed to be not peculiarly French but universal in their validity, France feels justified in requiring its ‘minorities’ to abide by them. In such a view minority cultures have no claim to public recognition let alone acceptance. For both conservatives and liberals, France is not a multicultural society (p. 6-7).

The French largely believe that multiculturalism contributes to the exclusion of immigrants and their descendants who are now understood to be settling in France and expected to integrate into French society. While academics and politicians debate the merits of “multiculturalism” in education policy, little empirical evidence exists on how the actors (teachers and students) who make up the cultural diversity of schools and society, address and experience recognition of difference on a daily basis in schools. Examining how teachers and students in today’s republican school recognize (or not) the multicultural nature of the French citizenry while working within the republican framework may shed much needed light on how institutions, ideologies and identities adapt to societal change. History classrooms and the historical narratives taught to students present an ideal entry
point into understanding how different members of society are portrayed, identified and placed within a supposedly shared national identity. This study examines who is recognized as “us” or “them” in the history of immigration in order to better comprehend the place assigned to and/or taken on by immigrants and their descendants within the national narrative.

Recognition of Difference and Symbolic Violence in Schools

During the post World War II era, international and European declarations of rights and recognition of cultural identity began to permeate education theory, raising awareness and understanding of the (potentially harmful) power of education, specifically history education as it relates to nations, war and the portrayal of “the Other.” The struggles of immigrants and other minority groups for political rights and cultural recognition have led some North American scholars (Taylor 1991; Kymlicka 1995; Benhabib 2002) to discuss a theory of recognition in relation to these groups’ roles and rights within multicultural societies. Canadian philosopher, Taylor (1991) elaborates that, “Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it…” (p. 49). Pankhania (1994) in her study on the British national history curriculum, in line with Taylor, claims that it is the “disregard for the independent history of black people and the history of the political economic relationship between Britain and black people that has legitimized racism and continues to contribute towards the oppression of black people today” (p. 42).
In contrast, some French scholars argue against emphasizing cultural difference, in the classroom and in scholarship. Abdallah-Pretceille (2003) argues that education scholars whose work focuses on one immigrant group or “cultural category” reduce students to their community and conflate the focus on the student with the focus on the characteristics attributed to them by the scholar, teacher or other authority (p. 58). Likewise Falaize et al. (2007) in their study of the teaching of immigration history in France, argue that pedagogical practices that identify students’ own immigrant background reify the supposed identity of the students and confine them to a certain group of belonging. This rejection of the recognition of cultural difference in the classroom can be viewed within the larger French socio-political context where staunch republicanism continues to pit difference against equality and recognition of difference is viewed as dangerous to the stability of the nation (Scott 2007).

The argument that too much emphasis on the recognition of difference serves to reify certain groups or “cultural categories” (Abdallah-Pretceille 2003; Falaize et al. 2007), is in many ways not a counterpoint to, but a variation on, Taylor’s (1994) argument about the dangers of misrecognition and of inflicting social-psychological damage on others. Therefore, the lens of recognition remains relevant to the analysis of how teachers and students perceive cultural differences and to what role, if any, recognition plays in history education and national identity formation. As Asad (2003) argues, “[m]ore than ever before identity now depends on the other’s recognition of the self” (p. 161 emphasis in original).
Both concerns over the lack of recognition and the reification of cultural differences may be viewed through the lens of Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence” within the education field. Bourdieu (1970) points to the unequal power relations involved in any act of teaching or pedagogy, arguing that: “All pedagogic action (PA) is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (p. 5 emphasis in original). The misrecognition of a student by a teacher can be viewed as an act of symbolic violence. This study provides empirical evidence on recognition, misrecognition and non-recognition within the school space. By examining who is recognized in textbooks, museum exhibits, and classroom practices and how students perceive this recognition, or the lack thereof, this study contributes to our understanding of what messages the nation and its education system are sending students, as well as how students interpret and internalize the information, developing world views and their own place in school and in society at large.

History Education and Teaching Controversial Topics

History education is often assumed to play a role far greater than simply conveying historical knowledge or learning how to critically analyze historical documents. For proponents of increased recognition and inclusion of minorities in curricula, history education, in particular, has the power to shape how students view themselves, others and their place in the nation. While opponents of this brand of multicultural education in the United States argue that using history to therapeutically foster racial pride or self-esteem defeats the objectivity of the
discipline (Schlesinger 1992; Moreau 2003) other scholars, like Epstein (2009), contend that “teaching and learning history is much more than a cognitive or academic exercise about argumentation or evidence; teaching and learning are cultural and political acts in which schools promote state sanctioned knowledge and silence alternative interpretations of history and society” (p. 6)

History education and particularly the revision of history curricula and textbooks has been a topic of much concern in Europe since World War II and has largely been addressed by supra-national institutions such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe (Pingel 1999; Schissler and Soysal 2005). UNESCO conventions held in 1974 and 1995 called for action to revise textbooks in order to do away with “negative stereotypes and distorted views of ‘the Other.’”18 UNESCO takes the view “that textbook and curriculum design and review can play an important role in the long-term strategy to develop a culture of peace” (Pingel 1999 p. 3) where history education, in particular, is charged with tasks of identity and citizenship construction as well as transmission of values, knowledge and self-understanding (Slater 1995; Schissler and Soysal 2005). While much of the textbook research conducted since World War II has focused on the portrayal of the national “other,” for example, the portrayal of Germany and Germans in Israeli textbooks, less is known about shifting definitions of the “other” within the national context. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by examining how the “other within” or the presence of students perceived to be of immigrant descent shapes the teaching of immigration history in France today. Education for citizenship and

democracy has continued to gain momentum throughout the latter half of the 20th century and, in some countries such as the United States and Great Britain, the movement for citizenship education has become intertwined with issues of minority rights, race relations and immigration. Thus, because of the heated political nature of these topics, citizenship education has concerned itself with how best to teach controversial issues in the classroom.

The existing literature on teaching controversial issues is largely practice and policy oriented. In the post-civil rights era, as a growing awareness of the cultural diversity of students in schools dovetailed with the development of curriculum studies, ministries of education and other government bodies, especially in the United States and Great Britain, began issuing reports and recommendations on how best to teach tolerance, democracy and citizenship in pluralistic societies (Fraser 1963; Stenhouse 1970; Crick 1998). In 1963, education scholar Dorothy Fraser authored a report for the National Education Association on “Deciding What to Teach” in which she devotes an entire chapter to “controversial issues in the school program” (p. 152-179). Likewise, in England, the 1970s Humanities Curriculum Project examines how to teach controversial topics in secondary school classrooms (Stenhouse 1971), and the government-commissioned Crick Report (1998) entitled “Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools” devotes an entire section to “Guidance on the Teaching of Controversial Issues” (p. 56-61). These foundational policy reports are fairly consistent in how they define controversial issues. Fraser (1963) defines a controversial issue as one that:
Involves a problem about which different individuals and groups urge conflicting courses of action. It is an issue for which society has not found a solution that can be universally or almost universally accepted. It is an issue of sufficient significance that each of the proposed ways of dealing with it is objectionable to some sector of the citizenry and arouses protest. The protest may result from a feeling that a cherished belief, an economic interest, or a basic principle is threatened. (p. 153).

Stenhouse (1971) summarizes this definition as an issue that “divides teachers, pupils and parents” (p. 154). Crick (1998), in turn, defines a controversial issue as one, for which “there is no one fixed or universally held point of view” (p. 56). The public and scholarly discussion of teaching controversial issues did not emerge in France until the late 1990s (Cardoso, Bride and Thenard-Duvivier 2008). Legardez (2008) proposes the following definition of a “question socialement vive (QSV)” or controversial issue: “a hot topic in society, one that questions social practices and actors [...] a topic that is seen as an issue for society and one that elicits debates.”

Legardez further postulates that controversial issues receive heavy media coverage and, therefore, most students in schools are at least somewhat familiar with the topics.19

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) 2001 survey of citizenship and education across 28 countries found that it is common for secondary teachers in many countries to be afraid of addressing controversial issues in the classroom (Torney-Purta et al., 2001 cited in Cowan and Maities 2013). The report’s authors contend that it is essential for teachers to

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19 Conference proceedings accessed online at: http://www.adapt.snes.edu/spip.php?article557#introduction (accessed 11/16/2013) Original quote: “Il s’agit d’une question vive dans la société, c’est-à-dire qui interpelle les pratiques sociales des acteurs scolaires [...] elle est considérée comme un enjeu par la société et suscite des débats. Son traitement médiatique fait que la majorité des acteurs scolaires en ont, même sommairement connaissances. […]”
address controversial topics in the classroom and that failing “to omit informing about and discussing them is to leave a wide and significant gap in the educational experience of young people, and is to fail to prepare them for adult life” (p. 57).

Likewise, Parekh (2006) posits that “dialogue is the only morally acceptable way of settling controversial issues” (p. 305) and Hess (2009) contends that democratic education is essential and should include the teaching of controversial political issues (p. 162). My research explores how teachers and students in one multicultural society are working within this paradox of teacher reticence when it comes to addressing controversial issues in the classroom.

The History and Historiography of Immigration to France

A long history and short historiography

For millennia, people have migrated across the earth; however, the relatively recent creation and expansion of the nation-state throughout the world has placed immigration within a specific national, legal and social context. Heightened globalization and transnational networks increasingly challenge the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis. However, the nation-state remains the lens through which immigration is viewed and addressed in today’s world. Since the creation of the French nation-state in 1789, immigration has been a part of the Republic and throughout its history the French State has served as a destination for those seeking asylum or better economic opportunities, while also making immigrants and foreigners the object of hostilities, blame and distrust during periods of national crisis (Lewis 2007; Témime 1999). The first census of foreigners in France was
conducted in 1851 and counted 381,000 foreigners residing in France. Among these 381,000, the census counted 128,000 Belgians, 30,000 Spaniards, 63,000 Italians, 25,000 Swiss and 135,000 miscellaneous (Le Moigne and Lebon 1999 p. 6).

From the onset of the industrial revolution, and through the first half of the 20th century, neighboring Europeans immigrated to France in large numbers seeking both work and political asylum. Between World War I and the Russian revolution and civil war (1914-1923) for example, 400,000 refugees settled in France. In the five years following the first World War, the French government “facilitated the entry of over a million foreigners” from Eastern Europe to work on reconstruction (Moch 2003 p. 166). During the interwar years, which drew neighboring Europeans to the post-war years where workers were recruited by French industry from colonies and former colonies, immigrants and their descendents have literally and symbolically helped construct and reconstruct the French nation.

By 1931, foreigners made up 6.58% of the French population (Le Moigne and Lebon 1999 p. 6). The percentage of foreigners (often used as a proxy for immigrants) in the French population remained fairly constant from the 1930s through the 1960s at six to seven percent. The censuses of 1975, 1982 and 1990 placed the percentage of foreigners in the French population at 6.54, 6.47 and 6.35 respectively (Le Moigne and Lebon 1999 p. 18). However, the geographical origin of the immigrants has shifted over the course of the 20th century. Until the early

\[\text{[Other sources, such as the Migration Policy Institute, indicate that since the 1960s, the foreign-born population in France has steadily risen to just over 10% in 2006. See Online Table (1.1) from Rodney Benson, \textit{Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Available at http://rodneybenson.org/ (accessed 12/27/2013).}\]
1980s Europeans made up the largest number of immigrants to France (Le Moigne and Lebon 1999; Témmime 1999). For example, in 1954 the census counted 289,000 Spaniards and 212,000 Algerians in France. In 1990 the census showed a slight decline in the number of Spaniards at 212,000 and an exponential increase in Algerians, with 614,000 residing in France (cited in Témmime 1999 p. 150). This shift in the demographics of immigrants to France is significant, as it has led to the rise of popular concepts such as “visible minority” used in relation to non-white post-colonial immigrants and their descendants.

**The Critique of French Historians**

Despite this long and rich history of immigration to France (Green 1997; Témmime 1999 Moch 2003), until the late 1980s a surprising dearth of scholarly work existed on the subject (Noiriel 1988; El Yazami & Schwartz 2001 Falaize). In his groundbreaking 1988 work, *The French Melting Pot*, Gérard Noiriel attacks his fellow French historians for having blatantly ignored the topic of immigration over the years. In particular Noiriel critiques historian Fernand Braudel of the Annales School, whose work on French identity, Noiriel claims, relegates immigrants to a space outside of France’s collective history. Noiriel claims that Braudel, in his three volume set, *L’Identité de la France*, glosses over the history of immigration in France, ironically stating that: “The list would be too long of ‘foreigners’ who have accepted to become part of us” (my translation cited in Noiriel p. 51) and continually employs what Said (1979) terms “Orientalist distinctions between ‘them and ‘us’” (p. 327), a
distinction that inherently conflicts with republican notions of equality and avoidance of distinctions.

Noiriel describes the study of the history of immigration as a “non-lieu de mémoire,” a direct reference to historian Pierre Nora’s 1984 colossal *Les lieux de mémoire* (the title roughly translates as “sites of memory”), which Noiriel also critiques for its treatment of immigration. Noiriel often compares France to the United States, where the history of immigration has been internalized into the national identity, and where “lieux de mémoire,” such as Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, abound. On the other hand, in France, the subject remains externalized and, as such, an “illegitimate object” (Noiriel 1988). It is not coincidental that this “illegitimate object” corresponds to a group of people, immigrants and their descendants, often themselves considered illegitimate or illegal in society, a fact that, as scholars note, has contributed to the lack of scholarly research on the subject (Amiraux and Simon 2006; Falaize 2007; Lewis 2007; Rea and Tripier 2003; Sayad 1999).

**Immigration in the French History Curriculum**

**Curricula and Textbooks**

In France the “programme” or national curriculum is all-important. Established and handed down by the Ministry of Education, the “programme” provides teachers with a detailed curricular framework for their discipline and in general high schools varies slightly, based on the different academic and technical tracks. Textbooks, while privately published, are closely keyed to the national
curriculum in order to remain competitive in the market place. Since all academic subject “programmes” are designed to prepare students for the baccalaureate exam, the textbook publishers do not stray far from the national curriculum. Teachers often expressed to me that they have little time or room to stray from the programme in the final two years of high school, since their primary job is to prepare students for the baccalaureate exam.

An in-depth content analysis of National Ministry of Education (MEN) history curriculum and privately published history textbooks is beyond the scope of this study; however, it is important to note the central role that the “programmes,” or national curriculum and textbooks, play in French high school history classrooms. Originally, I intended to focus this study on “première” and “terminale” (the last two years of high school) general academic tracks. It is in these last two years of high school in which the curriculum covers French, European and World history from 1850 to the present day, coinciding with the primary periods of immigration to France. However, once in the field, many teachers urged me to observe “seconde” history classes (the first year of high school) since the new 2010 curriculum was being introduced in that grade (and subsequently would be rolled out to cover all three years of high school). Textbooks, while not a principal source of data for this study, are heavily relied upon by history teachers and, therefore, present a particularly rich data source when studied while in use by teachers and students.

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21 It is important to note that history and geography are taught as a unit and by the same teacher in France and, therefore, when I refer to history curricula or classes I am including geography as well. 22 Textbooks in France are usually written by teams of high school and university history professors and, while they are independent (privately published) from the Ministry of Education, they tend to be written to coordinate with the national curriculum. Only a few publishers, such as Nathan and Hachette, dominate the field and their books are widely used throughout France. Nasr’s study (2001) of French history textbooks, for example, examines books from four main publishers.
interacting with the books’ texts, images and primary source documents in the classroom. Studies of textbooks reveal official narratives and priorities, but it is what teachers then do in their classrooms with those officially sanctioned narratives that has the most impact on students. History teachers, in particular, rely heavily on textbooks. As one teacher I observed drilled into her students on the first day of class in September, “you absolutely need the textbook in every class. It’s indispensable in history class” (Observation Sept 9, 2010). Throughout my classroom observations, I was often handed a copy of the textbook being used by the class and, following along with the lesson, I paid particular attention to how the teacher referred to the textbook, and on the rare occasion when the texts portray immigrants, I looked to see which immigrants (if any) are included in the “us” of the nation as well as how they are incorporated into the national historical narrative presented by the text.

In her study of the construction of race in U.S. high school biology textbooks, Morning (2008) argues that textbooks “constitute a strategic research site for examining the formulation (and reformulation) of the notions of human difference that underpin our system of racial stratification” (p. 107). Likewise, in this study I examine the representations of immigrants and their descendents, paying particular attention to how immigration is portrayed in relation to the nation and how the textbooks construct and portray French national identity. My analysis is informed by postcolonial scholarship (Foucault 1975; Said 1979) that emphasizes the importance of language and discourse in shaping knowledge. As Said argues, this knowledge contains the power to construct and perpetrate stereotypes of the
“other,” drawing on Foucault’s conception of power as productive -- giving us systems of classification and the means to understand and interpret ourselves. The prevalent strand of negative discourse on immigration in the French public sphere has deep historical roots and has been well documented over the years. Kastoryano (2002), for example, points to an opposition set up between “collective fear” and “collective identity” which has often been manipulated by extreme-right political groups such as the National Front in their claims that foreigners are a dangerous, invading enemy that threatens the nation. This discourse analysis of curricular materials and textbooks provides an essential baseline understanding of the place (or lack thereof) officially accorded to immigration in relation to the nation in schools today.

A Formal Omission

Noiriel’s critiques of French historians have not fallen on deaf ears; however, much controversy and silence still surround the study of immigration history in France and this, in turn, has trickled down from scholarly work to school curricula and texts. Along with his critiques of fellow historians and scholars, Noiriel talks of “collective amnesia” when it comes to the theme of immigration and, more specifically, immigration history in French school textbooks. He is not alone in this claim. Hélot (2003) argues: “As to the value of immigration to French Society, one is hard put to find it in the curriculum” (p. 268). Messaoudi (2006), for example, finds that school syllabi only address the connection between North African immigration to France and the history of colonization “in a marginal fashion, as something supplementary” (p. 298). The 4th edition (1999) of the book Immigration in France
(part of the Que-sais-je encyclopedic series heavily referenced by French students as well as the general public) divides the entire history of immigration to France into two sections: “from its origins to 1946,” which it covers in just over one page, and “From 1946 to the present day.” The vast majority of the book is dedicated to immigration since 1990. Immigration in the curriculum, just as in public discourse and debate, is presented as primarily a contemporary phenomenon without the context of its deep historical roots (Falaize et al. 2007).

Furthermore, Noiriel critiques the treatment of the subject in school textbooks, suggesting that the minimal coverage of immigrants and immigration, just like his fellow historians’ works, subjugates the immigrant to the role of “Other,” – one excluded from the national identity. “The pedagogical simplification renders the merely caricatured presentation of the immigrant as a foreign body to the nation…” (Noiriel 1988 p. 19). Falaize et al. (2007), in their study of the teaching of immigration history in France, take Noiriel’s sentiments even further, claiming that lack of critical thought on the subject of immigration history in France is perpetuated by the school and that this concerns not just the immigrants, but the entire nation, which has created the foreigner as an “indomitable Other” and has rendered the immigrant and his children “a figure evocative of the national question” (p. 183).

It was not until 2007 that the French government recognized the omission of immigration history in the nation’s history curriculum and attempted to rectify the situation. In an April 2007 “lettre de cadrage” Jean-Louis Nembrini, then Director of
the Ministry of Education’s Direction générale de l’éducation scolaire (DGESCO), makes the case for incorporating the history of immigration into the nation’s history curriculum, writing that “immigration history permeates all of the humanities [...] through History, the analysis and the narrative of the slow construction of the French nation, with all of its human components and with all of its social and economic dimensions” (cited in Legris 2010 p. 552). Since 2007, some material on immigration has began to trickle into the history curriculum through subsequent curriculum reforms; however, as I will detail in Chapter IV, very little of this new material actually focuses on immigration to France.

The CNHI Education Department has been a driving force behind these reforms and its library and support of scholarly work aim to increase the small amount of existing literature on all aspects of immigration in France, including the teaching and learning about the topic. This study adds to the small, but growing, body of literature on the teaching and learning of sensitive societal subjects or “questions socialement vives” (QSV) in France, among which immigration is key. Many thorough historical and contemporary studies exist on immigration policy in

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France (e.g. Weil 2002), and an increasing number are produced on the children of immigrants and education (Keaton 2006; Lorcerie 2003), but this study represents one of only a handful that address immigration as a curricular topic in relation to non-immigrant actors.

Museums and Education: Politics and Pedagogy

The school is the primary educational and citizen-forming institution in France; however, museums also play an important role as expressions of state-sanctioned history, culture and memory. In this study I examine the interplay between one museum, the CNHI, and the education community. Macdonald (1996) points out that, “despite the fact that museums clearly act as ‘staging grounds’ (Annis, 1986) for many questions which are also at the heart of debates in social and cultural studies, the social scientific study of the museum is still relatively under-developed…” (p. 3). This study aims to add generally to the growing body of literature in museum studies, and, in particular, will address the nexus of museums and schools in regard to teaching about controversial, political subjects. Museums and their exhibits are inherently political in nature and pedagogical in aim. Museums throughout the world have been constructed over the years as political testaments to national wealth and glory, as well as politically crafted representations of nation and national identity (Anderson 2006; Reigel 1996; Zolberg 1996). Whether it is a museum of art, natural sciences or history, these institutions share the fundamental educational goal of introducing a certain set of knowledge to visitors. When museums are tied to government agencies, as is mostly
the case in France, a museum’s exhibits can be viewed as analogous to national school curricula, both of which credit their very existence to a particular political will and their content to a political agenda. In this light, the CNHI mission to contribute to and shape the collective identity of the nation, is nearly identical to that of Jules Ferry’s political project of the republican school. Weber (1974) shows how the French school as an institution was in many ways a political tool to assimilate and politically unite the diverse regional and linguistic groups that inhabited 19th century France. The CNHI does not aim to stamp out languages and cultures of origin like the 19th and early 20th century public school did, but it too, albeit indirectly, aims to assimilate or integrate diverse immigrant groups into the collective history and identity of the nation. Scholars have long noted that museums and their exhibits reinforce a version of the past that contributes to a nation’s collective memory, and that museums reinforce categories of who is included and who is excluded from the national narrative and identity (Anderson 2006; Zolberg 1996). This study takes the museum, the school, and the interplay between museum and school as vantage points to examine how museum educators and teachers are shaping and responding to societal change and challenges to traditional conceptions of national identity.

In the following chapter I turn to an in-depth look at the CNHI, a museum that exemplifies the delicate balance between history, politics and memory in French society and schools.
CHAPTER III

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR IMMIGRATION HISTORY: INCORPORATING IMMIGRATION INTO FRENCH HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH EDUCATION

“If we manage to really spread this concept of French History through immigration history and visa versa, that the two are indistinguishable and closely linked, well I think that we will really contribute to an evolution of society in a good way”25
- CNHI Education Department Staff Member

“A French museum of immigration can only be conceived within republican logic”
- Report on the creation of a national center of the history and cultures of immigration (2001)

Introduction

Just as immigration continues to be a politicized flashpoint in French society, the National Museum of Immigration History (CNHI) has been endlessly mired in controversy, politics and critique that pre-date its official opening in October 2007 and that in many ways reflect the public and political discourse surrounding immigration in France today. Through an in-depth study of the CNHI, the political history of the institution, and the mission and activities of their Education Department, as well as interviews with CNHI staff and interactions with teachers

25 Original quote: “si on arrive vraiment à faire partager cette idée que l’histoire de France passe par l’histoire de l’immigration et réciproquement d’ailleurs hein que les deux sont indissociables qu’elles sont vraiment liées étroitement et bien je crois qu’on va vraiment contribuer à faire évoluer la société dans le bon sens voilà” (Interview CNHI Staff, January 18, 2010).
and students at the museum, I examine the incorporation of immigration history into the education system and the national narrative from an institutional perspective. Loar (2013) argues that national museums can either “reflect or help define the architecture of a nation” (p. 202). The CNHI clearly aims to redefine the French nation through its mission to change the public’s (currently problematic) image of immigration and to incorporate immigration history into the collective identity of the nation. However, it is my contention that the CNHI does not merely reflect or define the nation. Rather, the institution embodies a societal evolution paradoxically confined within traditional parameters. The very existence of a museum dedicated to French immigration history is seemingly revolutionary in that, until 30 years ago, the topic of immigration history had no scholarly standing in France. Likewise, the very notion of recognizing difference or foreignness as part of the identity of France is anathema to longstanding traditions of assimilation and an emphasis on the collective forgetting of past differences. On this score, Benedict Anderson (2006) points to Renan’s 1882 call to his French compatriots “to have already forgotten” the fratricidal atrocities of the past.26 The existence of the CNHI, however, does not reflect so much a revolutionary break with tradition as it does a political acknowledgement of a changing society. Despite this political recognition and will, it is often politics that stops the CNHI from working successfully toward its mission. I contend that politics and ideology present significant hindrances, both internal and external, to the work of the CNHI, which place the CNHI and its staff in a

26 Anderson quotes Renan’s Qu’est-ce qu’une nation? In which Renan says: “Or, l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. … Tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthelemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle” (cited in Anderson 2006, p. 199).
bind because their work is strictly confined within the republican model that does not allow for expression and recognition of cultural differences and avoids confronting controversial issues that might undermine the existing status quo of French society.

In this chapter, I first place the CNHI within its own historical-political context, examining the Palais de la Porte Dorée, the symbolic and historic site that houses the CNHI, and the controversies surrounding the building’s latest incarnation as a museum of immigration history. From the decision to house the CNHI in the former Museum of the Colonies to its “occupation” by 500 illegal African immigrants for nearly four months between October 2010 and February 2011, the building, the mission, and the existence of the CNHI as an institution have been political. I argue that these events highlight the socio-political or external roadblocks placed on the CNHI that hinder the institution from achieving its goal to redefine national identity and public perceptions of immigration. Furthermore, the socio-political history of the building that houses the CNHI, from colonial times to the present, sheds light on the problematic continuity between French colonialism and public perceptions of post-colonial immigration in France. However, I find that the CNHI and its staff often distance this problematic colonial legacy from their work, an omission that inadvertently works against the CNHI’s mission. I conclude this section with an examination of the “occupation” of the CNHI building in 2010-2011. I argue that the CNHI and its mission to change the view of immigration and immigrants in France, is caught in the political crossfire and thereby largely
immobilized by a combination of external political constraints and internal ideological forces.

The second section of the chapter explores the ambitious mission of the CNHI through the work of its Education Department. The CNHI aims to change the public’s view of immigration and immigrants and to instill a more inclusive understanding of French national identity by recognizing the contributions of immigration over the years to the construction of the French nation. I argue that the CNHI struggles to achieve this lofty goal in great part because of two internal constraints. First, the CNHI confines itself within traditional museum conventions whereby the visitor is distanced personally, emotionally and intellectually from the exhibits (from the immigrants), and second, the Education Department confines the roles it ascribes to teachers and students within a similar, distanced perspective, heavily shaped by traditional republican ideology. I argue that traditional republican ideology firmly structures how the CNHI as an institution works to incorporate immigration into the collective imagining of the nation (Anderson 2006), creating a paradoxical situation whereby abstract, universalist ideology and discourse is employed to foster recognition of difference and inequalities within the French nation and instill a more inclusive understanding of French national identity.

**The Museum’s Political and Pedagogical Past and Present**

In this section I trace the political history of the CNHI, taking the highly problematic continuity between France’s colonial past and its current struggle to integrate post-colonial immigrants and their descendants as the backdrop to my
analysis. I argue that persistent colonial mentalities continue to shape immigration policy in France and that these policies in turn place external political pressures on the CNHI. This situation places CNHI staff and the institution as a whole in a paradoxical bind where politics continually hinder the CNHI from working toward its goal of changing the very mentalities that drive much of the political discourse surrounding immigration and integration in France today.

Contrary to many memorials and museums in France and around the world, such as Ellis Island, Versailles, or Anne Frank’s House that are housed in, and are symbolically and historically rooted in, their physical home, the CNHI began as a homeless institution. The idea of creating a site dedicated to the history and cultures of immigrants in France was only initiated in the early 1990s by historians of immigration and civil society associations. It received the first sign of government support (necessary for any national museum in France) when Lionel Jospin, then Prime Minister, requested a report drawn up on a potential “site” or “museum” to “recognize the valuable role immigration has played in the economic, social and cultural development of our country” (El Yazami and Schwartz 2001 p. 1). Following the government’s support (or lack thereof) and its relationship to the institution that became the CNHI over subsequent years, is convoluted at best and highlights the inability of the French State and society to exist comfortably with their child of immigration: a diverse citizenry.

With the re-election of President Jacques Chirac in 2002 amidst the rising voice of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his extreme right, anti-immigrant National Front political party, Chirac’s centrist-right government decided to take on the project that
had begun under Jospin’s socialist government. Chirac turned the project over to an inter-ministerial committee on integration (emphasis mine) in 2003, which, in turn, appointed Jacques Toubon, former Minister of Culture, as President of an exploratory committee for a “Center of Resources and Memory of Immigration.” Toubon then delivered a report outlining the objectives, scope, target audiences and offerings of the proposed center to then Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin. In July 2004, Raffarin officially launched the “Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration” and announced that it would be housed in the Palais de la Porte Dorée in the 12th arrondissement of Paris. Designed and built as the only permanent structure for the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris, the Palais was originally referred to as the Museum of the Colonies and housed exhibits highlighting France’s colonial empire, as well as a large aquarium filled with tropical fish from colonial areas. In his July 8, 2004 speech officially launching the CNHI project, Prime Minister Raffarin stated that the CNHI should be housed in “an emblematic and prestigious site” and that the Palais de la Porte Dorée was that chosen locale. Raffarin went on to acknowledge that this site was not neutral, as it was not so long ago the Museum of the Colonies, but Raffarin contended that colonization and decolonization are part of French history and have strong links to immigration. Therefore, “the site will

27 It is interesting to note that Toubon made headlines in the early 1990s when, as Minister of Culture, he spearheaded a law (la loi Toubon) intended to defend the French language from the onslaught of English, limiting the amount of airtime for English language songs on French radio and producing a list of French vocabulary to be used instead of commonly adopted English terms. Today, the permanent exhibit of the CNHI includes a display highlighting the foreign origins of various words adopted by the French language. The CNHI bookstore sells magnets featuring these words and their foreign origins.

symbolize this part of the history of immigration.” Yet, ever since the CNHI opened its doors at the Palais in 2007, Raffarin’s acknowledgement of the symbolic and historic connections between immigration and colonization and between the CNHI and its physical home, have gone largely unaddressed.29

The Colonial – Post-Colonial Transition

Built as the only permanent structure for France’s world renowned 1931 Colonial Exposition, the Palais de la Porte Dorée, or the Museum of the Colonies, as it was first known, and its embodiment of colonial glory makes it a fascinatingly ironic (or inappropriate? or ideal?) choice of location for an immigration history museum today. The Palais was designated as a “historic monument” by the French government in 1987, so by the time the site was proposed as a home for the new immigration history museum, any altering of the frescos depicting a glorified and nationalistic French conquest of Africans and Asians was out of the question. Since its inception as a monument to “la plus grande France” the Palais has undergone a series of transitions that parallel the nation’s historic trajectory through periods of colonization, decolonization, and immigration.

In 1961, under Minister of Culture, Andre Malraux, the Museum of the Colonies was transformed into the Museum of African and Oceanic Art, a transition that paralleled the decolonization en-masse of former European territories, and most importantly, for France in 1962, the end of the Algerian War. This transition represented a subtle shift, rather than a clean break, from colonial times and

29 A notable exception was the first temporary exhibit at the CNHI, which was entitled “1931. Foreigners at the time of the colonial exposition.”
African art was still relegated to a peripheral space in a secondary museum on the outskirts of town, and housed in a building whose bas-relief façade prominently depicts subjugated, colonized peoples of Africa, with an emphasis on the resources they provided the French empire. As Green (2007) points out, these colonial depictions that remain today are “offensive yet historic and legally preserved thus untouchable, a legacy to the French hubris of its ‘mission civilisatrice’” (p. 244).

In 2003, President Chirac opened a prominent new home for the Museum of African and Oceanic Art at the Quai Branly on the Seine in the center of town. The Palais de la Porte Dorée was then left empty (except for the aquarium of tropical fish) until the building was claimed for the CNHI and the new institution officially opened in October of 2007. Many have suggested that placing a museum of immigration in this former colonial monument was problematic.

The New York Times journalist whose 2007 article first brought the CNHI to my attention quotes Jacques Toubon as saying that despite the CNHI being housed in “a building that is a memory site for colonization,” the history of immigration is quite separate from the history of colonization. For the American journalist from the Times, this was tantamount to “devising a museum for African-American or American Indian cultures but skipping gingerly over slavery, segregation and Manifest Destiny” (Kimmelman 2007 para. 12-13). A stronger analogy for Americans would be if the newly established Smithsonian National Museum of
African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)\textsuperscript{30} had chosen a prominent Southern plantation house such as Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello as its home, but besides a few references to antebellum architecture and slave quarters, none of the primary exhibits addressed slavery nor the institutional racism that resulted and that persists to this day. The analogous rationale for this would be that not all African Americans were slaves and not all slaves were American; therefore, the history of African Americans is separate from the history of slavery. While there is truth in this statement, just as there is truth in the fact that not all immigrants to France were colonial subjects, the stated separation of immigration from colonization is indicative of a tendency among French politicians and educators alike to distance controversial, sensitive aspects of the nation’s history from national identity and the collective telling of the national narrative. Because immigration in contemporary France is so strongly associated with poor, non-European, post-colonial immigrants from North and Sub Saharan Africa in the media and the contemporary public’s mind, Toubon’s statement implies that the CNHI is trying to remind the public that immigrants have also come from places that today’s population does not consider to be as culturally different, like Poland, Italy and Belgium. But this only reinforces the notion that these European neighbor-immigrants are superior, as if by placing them alongside Algerians and Senegalese, they will raise the level of respect for their African peers. This technique, based on a

\textsuperscript{30} The NMAAHC is prominently and symbolically due to be housed on the National Mall next to the Washington Monument. The building currently under construction is set to open in 2015. The first museum dedicated to African American history and culture is the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, which opened in 1961. See http://www.dusablemuseum.org/about/history for more information. (accessed 4/13/2013).
republican logic of placing all immigrants of all backgrounds and all time periods on an equal footing within the nation’s history, glosses over the fact that European immigrants, while fleeing horrific conditions, had not been colonized by France and, therefore, were not part of the same civilizing mission and its associated racist ideology and hierarchy that conceived of them as second-class citizens within “la plus grande France” of the French colonial Empire. I argue that this critique, that the CNHI does not pay adequate attention to France’s colonial past and the strong links between colonization and today’s largely post-colonial immigrant populations, is indicative of a larger trend in French society, and particularly in the realm of education, to render sensitive topics like racism and inequality as taboo, leaving the “neutral” or “public” space of a national museum or a school classroom free of any critical questioning of the status quo of social hierarchy. The CNHI and its education department very much embody this trend.

During my time at the CNHI, I observed numerous guided tours of the museum’s permanent and temporary exhibits in which CNHI staff guided groups of teachers through the exhibits and accompanying pedagogical materials. During these teacher-training tours, rarely did the CNHI staff mention the colonial history of the Palais in any depth. For the French, and especially for French history teachers, the building’s history is common knowledge. The 1931 Colonial Exposition is almost always covered in premiere high school history classes and most of the history textbooks I observed in use include images and exercises of some sort highlighting the event, often in a full page spread (see Hachette’s 2011

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31 Arguably the situation of Jews in France under the Vichy regime would be an exception to this.
edition p. 260\textsuperscript{32} for one example). However, it is precisely that which is considered common knowledge and, therefore, never questioned that needs to be deconstructed. Green (2007) further argues that the “structural elements of the [Palais] building need to be seriously ‘deconstructed’ in order to explain (away) their stereotypical representations of the colonial other...” (p. 244-5). This is particularly critical, because the colonial “other” has since migrated to France and today embodies an internal “other” residing within French society and national boundaries. Amiraux and Simon (2006) point to the “troubling analogy” between the “‘inferiorization’ of the post-colonial immigrant within the framework of the republican model of integration” and the subjection of the colonized to the colonist and the metropolis (Memmi 1957 and Guénif-Soulaimas 2005 in Amiraux and Simon p. 307). The deconstruction of this troubling colonial legacy, as embodied by the CNHI and its physical home in the former Museum of the Colonies, remains essential and yet, I found, largely unaccomplished outside of academic circles.

I observed this lack of reference to, and critical discussion of, the building’s history with school groups visiting the CNHI. The words of one high school history teacher highlight this tend to gloss over or ignore the colonial past and its deep ramifications for immigration to France today. Before beginning her tour of the permanent exhibit, the history teacher stopped the group of high school students in the lobby area and gave them a brief overview of the building’s history. She explained that the building was originally part of the Colonial Exposition of 1931

\textsuperscript{32} Current textbooks are now accessible online. To see the Hachette example referenced above, visit http://www.enseignants.hachette-education.com/lycee_Disciplinesgenerales_Histoire-Geographie_1re/pages/livres-pour-marche-et-criteres/index.php (accessed 1/4/2014).
and that afterwards it housed the Museum of Arts and Civilizations of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, which has since moved to the Quai Branly. She then continued on, speaking quickly and without pause for questions, stating that one might think it is not a coincidence that the museum of immigration is housed in a former colonial space but, in fact, it is indeed a coincidence; it just happened that this is where there was room for the museum (Field Notes November 10, 2010). The inaccuracy\(^\text{33}\) of this statement aside, it is likely that this quick glossing over of the colonial history and attribution of the choice of location to pure coincidence is not indicative of the teacher's lack of historical knowledge.

**Constructing an “Other” within the Nation: The Colonial Legacy**

Since its debut, the Palais de la Porte Dorée has been steeped in debates over national identity and the “other.” In her study of architecture and representations at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Morton (2000) points to early discussions surrounding the design of the building during, which Exposition organizers rejected a North African architectural design and insisted that the museum be “a national and a colonial monument.” Morton argues that “national” in this case refers to “La plus grande France” or France’s colonial empire (p. 277). The chosen architectural design by architect Albert Laprade is described as a “synthesis of Art Deco style, classical French architecture, Moroccan architecture and other elements loosely

\(^{33}\) The Palais was chosen to house the CNHI after much discussion and debate “because of its striking character as an historic monument” (Green 2007 p 244). See also Prime Minister Raffarin’s July 2004 speech referenced above.
inspired by art from the colonies” (CNHI web site).34 Morton argues, however, that in designing the Palais, “The desire to unify the colonies and France was countered by a correlative fear of mixing their separate representational norms” (p. 310). Here we see the paradoxical tension between wanting to be inclusive of diversity but remaining fearful of those perceived to be different. Morton’s architectural analogy is highly relevant when applied to post-colonial immigrant populations in contemporary France. This tension was expressed to me numerous times by CNHI education staff and teachers in regard to teaching about immigration history in classes made up of students of immigrant descent.

Some scholars argue that decolonization has not done much to change the power dynamics between former colonial powers and former colonial subjects who today cohabit Metropolitan France or, from a macro perspective, the globalized world. In postcolonial France, immigrants and, more problematically, their descendants have largely taken the place of former colonial subjects in the societal hierarchy. They do the work the “French” do not want to do in order to keep the economy afloat and they help maintain the existing power structures and republican ideologies by serving as an “interior other” in need of assimilation (Guénif-Souilamas 2006 p. 11). This need to assimilate the “other” allows for the continual reinforcement of a national identity constructed in opposition to these “others.”35

This makes it nearly impossible for the children of immigrants to identify as, and to be perceived as, truly French.

Just as today’s immigrants are pushed both figuratively and literally to the margins of French society, Morton (2000) points to the fact that Palais de la Porte Dorée architect Albert Laprade “abdicated the burden of representing the colonies in architectural terms” to the sculptor Alfred Janniot, whose bas-reliefs of the colonies cover the building’s façade. Morton posits that this inability to represent the colonies through the architecture of the building itself highlights French society’s inability to be truly inclusive of the colonies without compromising its status as metropolitan, dominant, and primary. The taint carried by the colonial was relegated to the supplement of ornament to contain its threat to that primacy. This status of margin or supplement corresponds to the relative place given the colonies: as margins of French civilization, sites of the most threatening and alluring things, and sources of supplementary labor, materials, and sexuality (p. 312).

The same could be said of the French media’s portrayal of the heavily post-colonial immigrant suburbs today where the media and political discourse emphasize violent riots, delinquent youth, battles over women and girls’ bodies and attire, and refugees in need of France’s humanitarian assistance.  

Careful historical analyses of colonial situations such as Conklin’s study of West Africa (1997) and Shepard’s study of Algeria (2006) highlight the links between colonial discourse, ideology and practice and present-day national discourse, specifically in relation to post-colonial immigrants and their descendents.

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36 It is important to note that media coverage and political discourse on immigration in France varies significantly across the different media outlets and political parties. See Benson 2013 for a detailed analysis of French and American news coverage of immigration.
The Algerian “battle of the veil” and the French headscarf affair illustrate how French colonial policy and discourse surrounding colonial subjects -- in this case, Algerian Muslim women being “educated” to not wear the hijab -- mirror present day policy and discourse surrounding post-colonial immigrants and their descendants -- in this case, French Muslim girls being banned from wearing the hijab in public schools (Scott 2007; Shepard 2006).

Caught in the Political Crossfire

Since its inception, the CNHI has been associated with political battles over integration and culture. Nancy Green, an historian of immigration and former member of the CNHI scientific committee (comprised of historians of immigration), begins an article (2007) on the CNHI with the following question: “Can a museum save the suburbs?” (p. 239). From riots to fears of Islamic fundamentalism and communalism, the suburbs and the youth of immigrant descent who live in these relegated neighborhoods and housing projects, have come to represent the failure of integration and the corollary fear, which receives high media attention, of immigrants destroying traditional French culture (Maillot 2008).

Following another major political shift, the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as President in May 2007, the CNHI opened its doors to the public without an official Presidential inauguration, a sure sign that the new government chose to symbolically abandon the sentiments expressed by Prime Minister Raffarin in his 2004 speech. With Sarkozy’s rise to power, the Right’s attempt to differentiate
themselves from the National Front following the 2002 election, later shifted to an embrace of the National Front’s extreme nationalist views, especially in matters of immigration. Although the son of an immigrant himself, Sarkozy, as Minister of the Interior, made a political name for himself as being tough on immigrants and their descendents, especially during the November 2005 riots that broke out in the Paris suburbs after two teenagers of North African immigrant descent were killed by the police.

In the months preceding the October 2007 opening of the CNHI, the new Sarkozy government formed the highly controversial Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity and proposed using DNA testing to ensure that immigrants requesting residence via family reunification actually had family living in France. This political decision brought the CNHI into the fray of political discourse and discontent surrounding contemporary immigration and national identity when the majority of the “scientific committee” of historians who had been working with the CNHI as part of Toubon’s “Commission de préfiguration” since 2003 symbolically resigned from their official role with the CNHI in protest over Sarkozy’s new Ministry. In an editorial published in *Le Monde* in May 2007, the protesting scholars argued that President Sarkozy’s Ministry presented immigration as a threat to national identity and ran counter to the original spirit and intent of the CNHI (Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard, Genevieve Dreyfus-Armand, Nancy Green,  

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37 In the 2002 French Presidential election National Front leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen won an unprecedented share (17%) of the votes in the first electoral round, ousting socialist candidate Lionel Jospin and advancing as the only candidate running against Jacques Chirac in the final round. Chirac won the election with more than 80% of the vote, but the National Front’s success forced Chirac’s centrist-right party to position itself against the FN in the second round of the election instead of trying to court far-right voters away from third-party candidates who would never vote for a socialist competitor.
Gerard Noiriel, Patrick Simon, Vincent Viet, Marie-Christine Volovitch-Tavares and Patrick Weil in *Le Monde* May 21, 2007). The same group of scholars of immigration history published an editorial in *Le Monde* on October 10, 2007 lamenting the lack of official inauguration by President Sarkozy for the CNHI and cautioning against the use of this “lieu de memoire” for purposes other than its original intent. Indeed, the CNHI continues to be used as a staging ground for political disputes over immigration. These usually take the form of controversial immigration policies implemented by the political right, followed by political activism in protest of these policies from the political left. Ironically, it is often this political activism that takes the CNHI hostage in these battles over immigration policy, thereby hampering its function and mission as an educational institution. The union-backed “occupation” of the Palais building by 500 undocumented immigrants in 2010-2011, which I will discuss below is a prime example of this. This political act and the response (or lack thereof) by the CNHI Education Department staff together form an illustrative case study of how both external political constraints and internal ideological constraints\(^\text{38}\) impede upon the CNHI and its mission.

### The Present “Occupation” of the Past

The CNHI has been hindered by politics and confining ideology since its inception. This hindrance has largely ranged from bad press to lack of political

\(^{38}\) I distinguish between *external* political constraints and *internal* ideological constraints in regards to the CNHI and its staff. I label the political constraints as external to reflect actions and policies that the CNHI and its staff have little to no control over and/or with which they often disagree. I label ideological constraints as internal since these constraints stem from the expressed beliefs of the CNHI staff. In other words external constraints are acknowledged as constraints by the CNHI staff. Internal constraints go unrecognized by the CNHI staff.
support, but in late 2010, socio-political forces literally shut the institution down. From October 7, 2010 to February 1, 2011 the CNHI was “occupied” by an estimated 500 “sans-papiers” or undocumented immigrants, primarily sub-Saharan African men, facing deportation despite having worked and paid taxes in France for years. Like many of the controversies surrounding the CNHI that I came across during my research, I discovered that this “occupation” was not a first for the CNHI and in fact, the building had been the site of protest by illegal immigrants before. Soon after the Palais de la Porte Dorée was chosen to house the new CNHI, a group of undocumented immigrants occupied the site, “arguing that money should be allocated to living immigrants, not dead ones” (Green 2007 p. 248). In 2010, with the support of the CGT, one of France’s main labor unions, this latest group of undocumented workers who had been staging ongoing protests around Paris for years (most recently in front of the Opera Bastille), literally moved into the CNHI demanding that the government provide them with papers and legal work permits.

The CNHI’s role in this occupation was ambiguous. At the beginning of the occupation, the CNHI management officially but unceremoniously welcomed the group of immigrant men, allowing them to sleep in the great hall on the main floor of the building and to “occupy the great hall and entry space” of the museum. The African immigrants therefore were housed ironically in the former “salle des fetes” that during the 1931 exposition was used for official functions to celebrate French colonialism. On October 8th, a CNHI press release announced the occupation, simply stating that the CGT and 500 undocumented workers are occupying a portion of the
CNHI for an indeterminate amount of time and reassured the public that this would not in any way affect the museum and that the CNHI would remain open as usual.\footnote{Original press release states: “La CGT et plusieurs centaines de salariés sans papiers (500 environ) occupent une partie de la Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration depuis jeudi 7 octobre et ce pour une durée indéterminée. En accord avec les organisateurs de l’occupation, la direction de l’établissement public a mis en place des mesures pour garantir la sécurité des biens et des personnes pendant la durée de l’occupation. Les organisateurs de l’occupation ont fait respecter les consignes, limitant l’occupation strictement au forum et au hall d’entrée, l’accès au Palais étant fermé pour la nuit” (accessed 3/24/2013).}

The CNHI initially supported the CGT and the group of undocumented immigrants in their “occupation” of the building, but soon the already scant visitors started disappearing and the task of maintaining the building’s grounds and facilities with 500 people living in them became too onerous. On November 30, 2010, the CNHI closed to the public, releasing a statement explaining that although the institution supports the undocumented immigrants, their “occupation” had cost the CNHI over 100,000 Euros and that many group visits had been cancelled (cited in \textit{Le Monde} December 8, 2010). On December 10, 2010 the CNHI announced that after a week of negotiations with the CGT they had come to an agreement whereby the “travailleurs sans papiers” could still use certain work spaces and the entry hall but they could not sleep overnight in the building and they must abandon all public spaces both day and night. With this understanding in place, the CNHI reopened to the public on December 11, 2010. (CNHI press release accessed online 3/31/13).

The occupation persisted however, and on January 28, 2011 the CNHI once again closed its doors and released a statement citing increased troubles with the “sans-papiers” and claiming that the CNHI and aquarium staff were having recurring problems dealing with the protestors including: threats made towards staff, not
respecting the rules of the institution, unsanitary conditions, etc. The press release concluded that, “[a]s a consequence, to guarantee the security of staff and of the museum’s holdings, the CNHI has decided to end the previous agreement and to put an end to the occupation.”40 (CNHI accessed 3/31/2013). On February 1, 2011 the museum reopened and the “occupation” finally came to an end. Most of the 500 illegal immigrants who had made the CNHI their home still had not received papers from the government, the CGT accused the CNHI of going back on its agreement to host and support the group, and visitors to the CNHI had dwindled, in what seemed to be a lose-lose situation for all involved.

Shortly after the latest (and final) reopening, I attended a teacher training session. Just before the afternoon break, a CNHI staff member came in to announce that although the CNHI had welcomed and supported the group of demonstrators, the museum could not continue to function with them here and had finally had to ask them to leave the previous week, but some of them were still trying to come back and that today a group of 30 of them would be coming back to resume their “occupation.” Therefore, the staff member informed us, there are police outside and they have had to close the front gate. She then assured us that we could continue working as planned, but that we would have to enter and exit through the administrative entrance to the side of the building. Besides the CNHI staff, nobody seemed too concerned. Apparently the dead immigrants had won this battle over

40 “En conséquence, pour garantir la sécurité des personnes et des biens, les instances de la Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration ont décidé de mettre fin, ce jour, aux accords antérieurs et de fermer l’établissement au public pour mettre un terme à l’occupation.”
the living ones, but not without significant damage to the image of immigration that
the CNHI staff work so hard to change.

Political Forces Meet Ideological Constraints

The occupation made a powerful statement; a monument to French colonial
power turned museum of immigration uneasily hosting descendants of the colonial
Empire turned illegal immigrants threatened with deportation. The “occupation”
was a striking example of the CNHI literally embodying the tensions and the
struggles of France’s colonial past as these tensions are still very much intertwined
with immigration in France today. In short, the occupation could have been turned
into a powerful teaching tool, an opportunity for the Education Department staff
and teachers visiting the museum or addressing related topics in their classes, to
expose students to the powerful legacy of colonialism, the forces of globalization,
and enduring racism in society. However, when it came to the occupation, just as
the CNHI was literally shut down, the Education Department staff and teachers I
spoke with during this time period were relatively silent on the topic, at least within
their professional capacity. Throughout the occupation all of the CNHI staff
members I spoke with sympathized with the plight of the illegal immigrants, but did
their best to continue working as usual amid such a significant disruption. It was
this “business as usual” attitude that I argue worked against the institution’s
mission.

When prompted, CNHI staff commented on the significance of the
“occupation” and, while generally supportive of the “occupation” and the plight of
the undocumented immigrant protestors on a personal level, the staff did not appear eager to incorporate into, or relate this demonstration to, the Education Department’s work. When I asked staff about the “occupation” they were quick to tell me that they were not authorized to speak on behalf of the institution and that what they said to me reflected their personal perspective. One CNHI staff member mused that the occupation highlights how the past and present were mapping onto each other, and we had the following exchange:

CNHI Staff X: I don’t think I’ve had the chance to ask the question of teachers visiting with their students, but I would imagine that this [interaction between history and the current situation with illegal immigration] would engage them.

EH: yes, maybe inspire some discussions or debates in class?

CNHI Staff X: I admit I, I haven’t had the chance to ask that question of groups that have come here but I think that yes, it should elicit some debate I would think. (laughs)41 (Interview CNHI Staff October 27, 2010)

When asked about the “occupation” this CNHI staff member reflected upon it, but had not actively sought to incorporate it into her lesson or in any way push it to the forefront of teachers’ and students’ attention.

The relative silence surrounding the “occupation” was not limited to teachers. Many people I spoke with had no idea the “occupation” was going on or had happened. This was because the CNHI was not on most people’s radar, and

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41 X: Bah y a l’actualité et l’histoire qui se télescopent hein qui vraiment sont rentrent comme ça en relation de manière très forte et uh je pense que j’ai pas eu encore l’occasion de poser la question à des enseignants venus avec des élèves mais je pense que ça doit aussi les interpeller ça doit interpeller les élèves j’imagine
EH : Ouais si ça a suscité des discussions des débats en classe
X : J’avoue je j’ai pas eu l’occasion de poser la question à des groupes qui seraient venus ici mais je pense que ça oui ça doit susciter le débat j’imagine en tout cas (sourires)
even this “occupation” did not garner much mainstream media attention. The attention it did receive was largely skewed to the political left with *Liberation*, immigrant rights associations and blogs of local communist politicians covering the event much more than the mainstream media.42

The CNHI staff’s reluctance to raise politically sensitive issues was evident in most CNHI activities and exhibits I observed. Their avoidance of the issue in this case, literally directly under their noses, highlights the internal constraints posed by republican ideology on the CNHI mission. As one astute high school senior I interviewed, notably the son of a North African immigrant and history teacher, explained to me, he is bothered by what he perceives as the politics behind the CNHI. When asked what he would do if he were to recreate the CNHI, he said he would make it “purely historical” because history is not “politically correct.” In his eyes, the museum currently presents an extremely narrow, one-sided and politically sanitized view of history (Interview May 2, 2011). Ironically, the CNHI education department staff also argues that the best way to address immigration history is from a disciplinary standpoint. While history is not the only discipline they draw on, it is given primacy, and underpins all of the teacher training sessions and exhibits to date. The head of the Education Department has always been a history teacher. During these sessions CNHI staff consistently remind teachers that in order for immigration to be incorporated into the national narrative, it should be addressed through legitimate and official curricular means. This is to avoid what

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42 For example, during the “occupation” *Libération* published 5 articles, *Le Monde* 3 and *Le Figaro* 2. Associations that covered the “occupation” included: Collectif de vigilance Paris 12, La Clmade, La Ligue des Droits de l’Homme, Témoignage Chrétien, and on the opposite extreme, Français de Souche.
Falaize et al. (2009) find to be a common practice among teachers of treating the topic as primarily a contemporary and highly politicized phenomenon. By placing immigration within a historical space, the CNHI and many teachers aim to avoid heated political discussions in the classroom.

The CNHI and their Education Department staff are in a particularly difficult position. The staff at Paris’ many art museums, for example, do not have to deal with this type of politics on top of pedagogy. For some CNHI staff, the politics surrounding the CNHI places them personally in a difficult situation. The following quote from an interview with a CNHI staff member illustrates the difficulty that the CNHI’s politicized position places on staff members of the Education Department:

It’s with the Cité within the current context of hardening immigration legislation that it becomes difficult, it’s not about the teaching, it’s about the CNHI itself, how to continue to exist with a message, with such an ambitious goal, that of changing the negative image of immigration and providing the most up-to-date knowledge and research, if at the same time, politics and the media persist with prejudices, stereotypes, and instrumentation. So it is really difficult, at least for me as a teacher, as a civil servant, this puts me in a position that is difficult to maintain. If I were to be extreme, I’d say it’s almost like schizophrenia. On one hand the government gives us this mission for the CNHI to transform prejudices and the negative associations linked to immigration and at the same time the government’s actors reinforce them, they reinforce this stigmatization. So we are in a very difficult situation. And it’s even more so, it was even worse this year with the occupation of undocumented immigrants during three months where the contradiction was very, very violent. I guess everybody feels these things in different ways, but for me at least it was very violent (Interview CNHI staff April 8, 2011).  

43 Original quote: « c’est la Cité dans son contexte uh actuel de durcissement de la législation concernant l’accueil des immigrés donc ça c’est vraiment y a, y a vraiment une difficulté mais qui est pas propre à la pédagogie qui est propre à la Cité elle-même de comment perdurer exister uh avec un, un message uh avec un objectif très ambitieux qui est de changer les représentations négatives en mettant à la disposition de tous les connaissance uh les acquis de la recherche les plus récent si dans le même temps eh du point de vue politique et médiatique uh les préjugés les clichés perdurent et l’instrumentalisation politique aussi donc là c’est vraiment, c’est une grosse difficulté qui ’fin moi en
It is within this challenging political climate that the CNHI Education Department works to change the public's perception of immigration and to incorporate diverse immigrants and their history into the national narrative.

Changing Perceptions Through Education: Confines of Museography and Ideology

In this section I explore the ambitious mission of the CNHI Education Department to change the public view of immigration and immigrants and to instill a more inclusive understanding of French national identity through education. I argue that in addition to the political constraints placed on the CNHI as an institution, the Education Department in particular is confined by the combined forces of its own museography and ideology that work in tandem to distance the viewing public, including student groups and teachers, from the immigrants on display. I posit that the CNHI struggles to achieve its goal of changing public

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44 I employ the term museography to refer to the layout, design and choice of objects in the CNHI exhibits. The International Council On Museums (ICOM) defines museography as, “the practical or applied aspect of museology, that is to say the techniques which have been developed to fulfill museal operations, in particular with regard to the planning and fitting out of the museum premises, conservation, restoration, security and exhibition. In contrast to museology, the word museography has long been used to identify the practical activities associated with museums. The term is regularly used in the French-speaking world, but rarely in the English-speaking one, where museum practice is preferred. ... In French the use of the term museography identifies the art (or the techniques) of exhibitions.” (ICOM Key Concepts of Museology) http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Key_Concepts_of_Museology/Museologie_Anglais BD.pdf (accessed 11/2/2013).
perceptions in great part because it confines its message within narrow republican boundaries that inhibit the institution and its staff from addressing controversial topics from multiple perspectives and constrain the very definition of immigration itself. The CNHI, like many of the teachers it works to train, finds itself in a bind between republican, abstract, universalist ideals, and particularist practices that arise both voluntarily and involuntarily in reaction to differences and inequality among the French population.

The Education Department: Balancing Universal Ideals with Particularist Practice

Education and pedagogy have been central to the CNHI mission since its creation. The initial 2001 report for the creation of a “national center for the history and cultures of immigration” prepared by Driss El Yazami and Remy Schwartz for then Prime Minister Jospin clearly defines the pedagogic mission as central to the proposal with school groups, teachers, students, and researchers named as core constituencies the institution is designed to serve. The report further called for activities aimed specifically at school groups and teacher training and, with the backing of the Ministry of Education, called for the new institution to work on revising how the national curriculum and textbooks address the topic of immigration (p. 25). In his 2003 report to the Prime Minister, Jacques Toubon reaffirmed the central role education was to play at the CNHI and outlined the following “pedagogic vocation” of the institution that includes: promotion of university research on immigration and related topics and ensuring that this research is made available to secondary teachers; teacher training activities;
development of student and class projects; revision of existing curriculum on immigration history; producing resources such as lesson plans for teachers; and running workshops and other activities for school groups (Toubon 2003 pp. 85-89).

The CNHI Education Department today does all of the above. Four overworked, and very dedicated secondary teachers staff the department. One of the teachers is given leave from teaching to work full-time as the head of the department and the other three work part-time as “professeur-relais” or liaison teachers who maintain their regular teaching posts half-time and are appointed by their school district to work half-time at the CNHI. The CNHI profs-relais each represent one the three large school districts that make up the Ile de France region: Paris, Versailles and Creteil. The Education Department staff work with teachers nation-wide, sometimes traveling to hold workshops in other major cities such as

45 During my fieldwork there was some staff turnover in the department. Therefore I interviewed and/or interacted with a total of six Education Department staff and former-staff during my research. Many of the former staff remained heavily involved with the CNHI after their tenure with the institution. Most cited a desire to return to teaching and/or teacher training as their reason for leaving their post with the CNHI. Current staff mostly cited civic duties and intellectual curiosity as reasons for wanting to work with the CNHI.

46 The Versailles school district is the largest in France with over one million students or roughly 9% of the nation's children (http://www.ac-versailles.fr/public/jcms/c_5013/l-academie (accessed 4/9/2013). The district covers four departments to the West and South of Paris and includes a wide range of socio-economic and ethnically diverse areas, from affluent communities such as Saint Germain-en-laye to working class, heavily minority communities such as Nanterre.

The Creteil school district to the North and East of Paris is also quite large with over 800,000 students http://www.ac-creteil.fr/academie-creteil-chiffres.html (accessed 4/9/2013) and has a high percentage of “zones education prioritaires” ZEP and “zones urbaines prioritaires” ZUP. These districts with high levels of poverty are designated by the government to receive extra funds for their schools.

The Paris school district covers the city of Paris proper and is quite small compared to its suburban counterparts with roughly 250,000 students http://www.ac-paris.fr/portail/jcms/piapp1_12549/quelques-chiffres-sur-l-academie?cid=piapp1_6619 (accessed 4/9/2013). The Paris schools range widely from the prestigious Henri IV and Louis le Grand in the Latin Quarter to a number of professional high schools across the city that cater to those not headed on an academic path.
Lyon and Nantes. However, the majority of their activities are based in Paris and serve educators in the Ile-de-France region.

The profs-relais organize and run teacher training sessions and workshops, and design curriculum resources such as lesson guides and student work sheets to accompany school visits to the museum exhibits. During the 2010-2011 school year, schools made up 57% (421/738) of group visits to the CNHI, and over 60% of the school groups came from high schools. During one teacher training workshop I observed, Luc Grusson, the President of the CNHI, addressed the audience of teachers and lambasted persistent critics of the CNHI who often attack the museum’s low attendance figures as being primarily made up of school groups. Grusson countered this with a call for even more school groups to visit the CNHI, saying that he would be happy if the percentage of school groups was even higher, as reaching students is a core component of the CNHI mission. Despite and sometimes because of the seemingly endless barrage of critiques of the CNHI, the Education Department staff members I spoke with and observed were extremely dedicated to their work with the CNHI. Many expressed a strong civic engagement or mission at the heart of their decision to work with the CNHI Education Department. As one staff member put it:

I am here maybe because I’m part of those people, a majority of people at least I hope, who understand that the history of immigration is the history of France and that the history of immigrants is also the history of the French, and in these troubled times that almost all great democracies are experiencing, maybe even including the United States, I think that if we at least manage to slightly change the images or mentalities of our citizens and especially our students, well then we

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47 CNHI internal document handed out as part of the Comite Pedagogique meeting at the CNHI, May 2011.
would have already made a step towards living together (Interview CNHI Staff January 18, 2010)

Many museums in Paris provide resources for teachers and welcome student groups, but most are not under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (and the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of the Interior/Immigration) like the CNHI. As one CNHI Education Department staff member explained the reason for this close relationship with the Ministry of Education, “it is because the teaching of immigration history is something particular” (Interview CNHI staff November 30, 2010). The CNHI Education Department staff and their activities exemplify this republican bind as they work to help teachers address the “particular” topic of immigration in France. Although CNHI education staff members are quick to point out that immigration history is a crucial part of French history and should be taught to all students equally, the CNHI Education Department works mostly with teachers whose schools have high numbers of students of immigrant descent. This contradiction was evident in my observations of school groups visiting the museum, and also through the stronger institutional ties the CNHI maintains with the Creteil

48 “je suis ici c’est peut être parce que vraiment je fais parti de ces gens majoritaire en tout cas je l’espère qui ont compris que l’histoire de l’immigration c’est l’histoire de la France et que l’histoire des immigrés c’est aussi l’histoire des Français et dans une période troublée je prétends pas que ça va être la réponse à tous les problèmes de la société française mais dans cette période un peu troublée que connaissent presque toutes les grandes démocraties occidentales et peut être même les États-Unis aussi hein je me dis que si très modestement on arrive à faire un petit peu évoluer les représentations ou les mentalités de nos concitoyens et à fortiori de nos élèves et ben on aura déjà fait un pas pour mieux vivre ensemble”

49 “Pour uh parce que justement comme le, l’enseignement de l’histoire de l’immigration c’est quelque chose de particulier”
school district. In 2010-2011, students from the Creteil and Versailles school districts made up 52% of school visits to the CNHI compared to just 15% from Paris (CNHI internal document). Time and time again when I spoke with teachers about my research, assumptions were made that I was only interested in studying classes with students of recent immigrant descent. Likewise teachers in schools with predominantly non-immigrant descent students often assumed I would not be interested in observing their classes, and when I interviewed them, they usually spent a good deal of time telling me about their previous experiences teaching in more diverse schools.

A Confined and Confused Message: Critiques of the CNHI

Housed in one half of the second floor of the immense Palais, the permanent exhibit, entitled “repères: deux siècles d’histoire de l’immigration” or “reference points: two centuries of immigration history,” is scattered at best and has received a lot of criticism from educators and the general public. The permanent exhibit begins with a “prologue” of giant world maps hanging from the ceiling with arrows marking the trajectory of immigrants over the past 200 years. Visitors have to crane their necks for an extended period of time to view them with any clarity, making it difficult to garner much information. The rest of the exhibit proceeds along a slightly disorienting counter-clockwise L-shape. The day I first visited the permanent exhibit I was the only one there and a friendly guard approached me and

50 The Creteil school district has an extremely high minority population, many of whom are of recent immigrant decent. There are no official statistics on this.
gave me a very thorough introduction and explanation as to how to best visit the museum, without which I would have been lost.

The CNHI permanent exhibit does not present immigrants to France by ethnic, national or geographic origin, nor does it present a strictly chronological history of immigration. Rather all immigrants who have journeyed to France over the previous two centuries are presented together, thematically across nine sections: emigrating; border crossing and facing the State; land of welcome, hostile France; here and there; living; working; putting down roots; sports; and diversity. Many teachers I spoke with were critical of this approach that ignores chronology, just as they were critical of the thematic approach to history that was being introduced in the new 2010 national history curriculum. In addition to these thematic sections, the permanent exhibit intertwines panels providing purely historical information and photos with artistic works and minimally interactive displays. Moving through the first few sections, the visitor walks among colored glass cylindrical cases that house items such as suitcases, photos and books, belonging to immigrants when they first arrived in France. A variety of photos are displayed on a nearby wall. One contemporary photomontage traces the immigration trajectory of Kingsley, a contemporary, illegal immigrant from West Africa as he journeys to France. Nearby a well-known Robert Capa black and white photo captures the plight of Spanish refugees being transferred to a camp in France in 1939. In the “Facing the State” section a display of mounted political cartoons span a century and critique the government’s post-WW I implementation of identity cards and “papers” and the public’s often xenophobic views in the 1980’s. Just
beyond this, large photographs of cars heaped with suitcases strapped to their roofs are displayed across from a towering structure that resembles multiple bunk beds stacked on top of each other, and next to this structure a silent film screens images of an Algerian countryside. Turning the corner of the L shape, large black and white images of labor protests are followed by photos of sports stars and multi-ethnic children playing soccer in the suburbs. One can walk through a tent-like structure from which various household and food items of foreign origin, now commonplace in France, are hanging. Finally, an interactive station aimed at children allows visitors to play with common French words and identify their foreign origins.

I first visited the CNHI and its permanent exhibit in May of 2008, only seven months after the museum’s not-so-grand opening. I still remember being confused as I entered the enormous building that I thought would be entirely dedicated to the museum of immigration history, only to find that the main exhibit inhabited a small section of the second floor, as if it were itself a temporary installation. Although the CNHI has greatly expanded its offerings and exhibits since 2008, the CNHI has not successfully inhabited its space, either physically or symbolically. Like the struggle of many immigrants and their descendants to be recognized as French in France today, the CNHI seems to be fighting itself internally to exist within its own space.

Interestingly, a description of the original colonial exhibit housed in the Palais during the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 could just as easily describe the CNHI permanent exhibit today:

Rather than the neat distinction between art works and artifacts, as in an art museum, or between historical and contemporary objects, as in the natural history museum, the Museum of the Colonies mingled things of native and French, historical and modern, utilitarian, and
artistic provenance. [...] The indistinct, overlapping mandates of the museum's two sections and the split authority for their organization produced a disordered, confusing 'potpourri,' according to Laprade. In a memo on the interior's organization, Laprade lamented the 'bizarre' division of sections and lack of logic in the exhibits' layout (Morton p. 306-8).

Many of the teachers I interviewed and spoke with had similar qualms or critiques of the permanent exhibit's layout, contents and/or pedagogical utility. Some expressed concern over the pedagogical value of the CNHI exhibit, some saying there was too much text to read through for their students, others found that the panels with historical text were the only pedagogically (and historically) valuable part of the exhibit. Several fixated on parts of the exhibit such as the stacked bunk beds or the encased suitcase and belongings of an immigrant, being either particularly enthralled with these displays or harshly critical of them. Rarely did I meet somebody in Paris who did not have a critique of some sort of the CNHI, apart from those who had never heard of it.

When studying a museum, the building and collections cannot be taken out of context from their viewing audience. Green (2007) hints at this point when she notes that the "project's directors and historical advisory board have argued (optimistically? too academically?) that housing a museum of immigration history in a former museum of the colonies will be a clever, symbolic, thumbing of the nose at France's colonial past" and then follows this with an unanswered, perhaps rhetorical question, "but will everybody get it?" (p. 245). Clearly not everybody "gets" the CNHI. Riegel (1996) in her study of a 'western' museum's exhibit that used verbal irony to critique colonial collecting practices in Africa, finds that the
curator’s intent to critique colonialist practices backfired, as many of the museum visitors, and especially those who “cannot accept the distanced position required by the [museum] text in order to read it as verbal irony” were offended by the exhibit. Riegel posits that those who “felt an emotional or political affinity with the images and objects on display” were not able to view the exhibit from a dispassionate or distanced standpoint, and therefore the curator’s intended irony and critique were misinterpreted and negatively received (p. 94). The CNHI faces a similar challenge of presenting the histories (and cultures) of a wide range of French citizens to an equally diverse audience.

In this vein, critiques of the CNHI often revolved around the portrayal and definitions of immigrants in the exhibits. One teacher said she would not bring her students to the CNHI, not only because she found the exhibit layout confusing, but because she worried about how her students would react to certain parts of the exhibit:

There’s a series of photographs by Denis Darzacq that were taken in Bobigny actually [...] Pictures of youth. During one of my visits [to the CNHI] I overheard some people from Bobigny looking at these photos who recognized the spot where the photo had been taken and they were really upset by the photo, saying we’re not in a zoo, well they seemed to have the impression of being part of some sort of spectacle that had invaded their privacy and they were not happy about it. I don’t feel like going through that with my students. [...] and then the museography is terrible and it’s too bad because I had high hopes for this project despite it being launched by Chirac [...] it’s important that it exists even if it has failed, it still can be improved upon (Interview History Teacher March 25, 2011).

51 For more information and to view the photos from this exhibit see: http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/musee/collections/bobigny-centre-ville-de-denis-darzacq (accessed 11/9/2013).

52 Original quote: “y a une série de photos de Denis Darzac qui ont été faites à Bobigny en fait [...] C’est des photos de jeunes en fait. Et c’est des photos qui ont été faites à Bobigny et moi dans une de
This teacher’s concerns highlight the museographical and ideological constraints facing the CNHI Education Department. The museum layout and display, in its hodgepodge of contemporary and historic, art, artifact and historical record fails to reach its intended audiences in any meaningful way. An old suitcase enclosed in modern colored glass does little to draw the visitor in to empathize with the immigrant experience. Abstract art displays such as the “Climbing down” bunk bed installation distances the visitor from the artist’s symbolic meaning as viewers are forced to step back literally and figuratively to ponder what this display is about and how it relates to immigration history. Likewise, contemporary images of ethnic minority youth (who knows if they are actually immigrants?) such as the Bobigny photos mentioned above only contribute to the persistent and pernicious conflation in French society between immigrants and ethnic minorities. I will address this amalgam in greater detail in Chapter VI. Reigel (1996) argues that museums tend to distance the museum visitor from the exhibit and that “this distancing takes the form of a personal, emotional and intellectual disengagement” (p. 87-88). Reigel further argues that “museum visitors expect this cognitive distance from an exhibit, although they may not always take it up.” As a result, it is very difficult for museums like the CNHI to create, what Reigel terms, a “shared communicative space” (p. 100).
The lack of this shared communicative space at the CNHI is also evident in the institution’s sometimes, narrow definition of immigrant. Ironically, in trying to broaden who is included in the French nation, one exhibit in particular at the CNHI limits who is included in the history of immigration to France as the following example illustrates.

In 2010 the CNHI hosted a temporary exhibit entitled “Allez La France! Soccer and Immigration: an intertwined history” in collaboration with the National Museum of Sports exhibit entitled “Allez La France! The African soccer players are there!” A few months after the exhibit closed I was put in touch with a staff member of the National Museum of Sport who had worked on this collaborative exhibit with the CNHI. She told me that during the planning phase the CNHI was extremely particular about the terminology used in the exhibit and what could and could not be included. For example the CNHI refused to include mention of soccer players from the French overseas territories (DOM-TOM), including 1998 national soccer champion Lilian Thuram who was born and raised in Guadeloupe, because people from these overseas French territories are not technically (i.e. legally) immigrants in France. To the contrary, the Musée du Sport exhibit that focused on players from Africa, included DOM-TOM players since they are also of African origin. This question of whether or not to count French citizens, primarily of African origin, from the overseas territories as immigrants also points to the conflation between ethnic minorities and immigrants in France. As the Musée du Sport staff person saw it, the DOM-TOM soccer players may have French passports, but they still are immigrants in many other ways and should have been included in the exhibit. This
terminological concern over who to count as an “immigrant” is yet another example of the CNHI constraining itself within strict traditional republican framework as it attempts to address a changing present.

The CNHI approach to immigration through strict republican historical and abstract (art) lenses, leaves its exhibits (and raison d’être) open to much (mis)interpretation that can work against its founding mission and principles, reinforcing colonial mentalities and stigmatizing or overlooking the “Other” within French society. Those visitors of immigrant descent, looking to see themselves or their families proudly displayed as an integral part of French history may instead take offense at the exhibits, and those visitors whose preconceptions the CNHI hopes to alter, are forced by the museography to take an even more distanced perspective in order to intellectually comprehend the exhibit. This leaves little room for emotional and empathic connections between visitors and museum subjects, relied upon so heavily, and I would argue, successfully, in other immigration museums and memorials around the world. In New York City’s Tenement Museum, visitors crowd together into a tiny recreated apartment as they learn about a real immigrant family who lived in the neighborhood over a century ago. The recreation includes family photos and belongings that allow the visitor to truly visualize and for a few minutes imagine what it must have been like to live and work with so many other poor immigrants in a tiny, unhygienic space\(^{53}\). In Belgium, Le Bois du Cazier immigration museum, housed in a former coalmine, now a World Heritage Site, invites visitors to “traverse the grounds to understand how migrant

laborers made their livelihood there.” Likewise the Galata Museo del Mare in Genoa, Italy allows visitors to “choose a passport and walk in the shoes of emigrants who left Italy for the Americas a century ago” (Museum 2012 p. 28), and Ellis Island invites visitors to search ship manifest records for the names of their family members who may have passed through the now iconic immigration station. The CNHI however, does not provide visitors any such interactive or identity-based activity.

The closest the CNHI comes to delving into personal memory is its “Galerie des dons” or Gift Gallery. Situated in a hard-to-find corridor off the main exhibit, the gallery features a small collection of personal objects, photographs, and letters donated to the museum by immigrants and their descendants. The CNHI web site describes this space as follows:

The Museum of immigration history is conceived as an interactive place. Each visitor wishing to share a piece of his/her family’s migration story, is invited to give the museum a piece of his personal history, whether it be individual, collective, personal and unique. The objects and photographs, often passed down from generation to generation, are presented in the Gift Gallery. In this unique space, these objects join a collection that makes up the shared heart of the nation, and tell stories that make history.54

Despite the claim that these personal stories are an essential part of the national narrative, these family artifacts are not presented as a central part of the permanent

exhibit. Furthermore they are presented in a very impersonal way, housed behind glass, set back into the museum walls, making the photos hard to see and handwritten letters nearly impossible to read. The Galerie des dons display is yet another example of the CNHI’s museography working against its stated goals.

Museum vs. Memorial: Counterpoints of History and Memory

Since the teaching of immigration history is so often lumped together by French educators with other “sensitive subjects” including omnipresent references to the Holocaust, a comparison of the CNHI with the relatively new Memorial de la Shoah (Holocaust memorial) in Paris is instructive. Like the CNHI, the Memorial is relatively new. It opened in January 2005 with a ceremony attended by 1000 people and was inaugurated by President Chirac. In his inaugural speech Chirac said, “I count on all the teachers of France and I invite them to bring their students here to the Holocaust Memorial so that our children see, understand and never forget. The memory of the Holocaust is not only the memory of a community. It is our shared memory. It is an obligation of the nation to remember its history” (Memorial de la Shoah).55 Both institutions were born of much delayed political will, and both place great importance on education and the role that teachers can play in shaping national perceptions of the past and present. Like the CNHI, the

55http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/b_content/getContentFromNumLinkAction.do;jsessionid=738273B38E167DB50B19403142DE4096?itemIdP=313&type=1&itemId=313#211 (accessed 12/12/2010) Original quote: "Je compte sur tous les professeurs de France et je les invite à amener leurs élèves ici, au Mémorial de la Shoah, pour que nos enfants voient, comprennent et n’oublient jamais. La mémoire de la Shoah n’est pas seulement celle d’une communauté. Elle est notre mémoire commune. Elle est l’obligation pour la Nation, de se rappeler son histoire."
Memorial offers teachers and students pedagogical resources and teacher training sessions, as well as a research and documentation center for scholars. Both have associated scholarship and activities specifically aimed at children and students of various ages. On the surface, both institutions are also similarly designed with one permanent exhibit that covers the entirety of immigration to France or the Holocaust in France, and rotating temporary exhibits that focus on a particular person, event or related theme such as Polish immigrants in France or the Holocaust in Film. Similar to the CNHI Education Department and the teaching of immigration history in general, the Memorial’s web page that provides resources for teachers discusses the topic’s troubled past and difficult present in the classroom. The page notes that the Holocaust was largely ignored in the curriculum through the 1980s, and while it now is given a more prominent place, it remains difficult for teachers to address the subject with their students (Memorial de la Shoah).

Despite these similarities, striking differences exist between the CNHI and the Memorial. Visiting the CNHI feels like a trip to a relegated slightly awkward piece of French history. Entering the CNHI, you are outside of the center of Paris in an impressive, beautiful building, but then the immigration history museum is small and unassuming within its mostly empty, palatial shell of the colonial past. There is

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56 http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/b_content/getContentFromTopNavAction.do?navId=70 (Accessed December 12, 2010)

57 My translation from “Si l’histoire de la Shoah fait partie du programme scolaire et est abordée à l’IUFM et dans les manuels, elle n’en reste pas moins un sujet historique difficile à aborder auprès des jeunes générations.” http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/b_content/getContentFromTopNavAction.do?navId=71 (accessed December 12, 2010)
nothing to draw the visitor in and many wander around slightly confused before finding the museum section of the building.

Entering the Memorial one literally descends into a tomb in the center of Paris. Located on a quiet side street in the heart of the historically Jewish Marais district, the entrance is intentionally obscured and heavily fortified. Once the entrance is identified, visitors must pass through airport-style security to enter. Passing through security the visitor is immediately surrounded by Memory; first by the wall of names in a front courtyard, a tribute to the dead, reminiscent of the Vietnam memorial in Washington. Inside the main building, the atmosphere is solemn and quiet as visitors descend first down a flight of stairs to a tomb that houses ashes of Holocaust victims under a symbolic torch, and then down another level to the permanent exhibit. Memory dominates History here.

The exhibit is clear and easy to follow as it traces the history of Jews in France and then provides a detailed chronological timeline of the Holocaust and how the Jews of France were affected. Throughout the exhibit there are documents and photographs with individual stories and video interviews with survivors that accompany the museum’s narrative text. There are sections that really play on your emotions as visitors proceed through pictures from the camps to the overpowering conclusion of the exhibit, the children’s wall; a small room tiled floor to ceiling with photos of French children killed in the Holocaust. There is nothing at the CNHI that plays to emotion, and almost nothing that puts faces and personal stories at the forefront like this. The CNHI “gallery of gifts” does not come close. The CNHI in its attempt to present immigration as a purely historical phenomenon and to avoid the
political snares so often associated with immigration, has distanced memory from its exhibits and its pedagogy. In museums such as Ellis Island and the Holocaust Memorial visitors can search for names and faces, retrace the steps of their ancestors and imagine what it would have been like to be a newly arrived immigrant in NY or a French school child deported during the Holocaust. After a school visit to the permanent exhibit of the CNHI, I overheard one student (of North African descent) comment to another how she had found a previous fieldtrip to the Holocaust Memorial more compelling.

The CNHI intentionally steers clear of this type of memory or emotional triggers and advises teachers to do the same. This leaves teachers and students thrown together in the study of a highly emotionally charged topic without the tools necessary to connect history and memory. It is not surprising that many of the teachers I spoke with choose to avoid the topic of immigration in their classroom whenever possible.

In this chapter I have argued that the CNHI struggles to incorporate the history of immigration into the history of France as its work is significantly hindered by both external political and internal ideological constraints. First, persistent colonial mentalities continue to shape immigration policy in France and these policies in turn place external political pressures on the CNHI as manifested by the

58 This is in part due to the CNHI’s disciplinary grounding in history. During several teacher training sessions, invited artists, writers and filmmakers shared their work - for example, a documentary film on Spanish immigrants fleeing Franco that followed a member of the filmmaker’s family. These works often met with critique from some of the history teachers at the sessions who said they would not use material like the documentary film in their teaching because the film plays too much on emotion, which in their view has no place in a history classroom.
2010-2011 occupation. This situation places CNHI staff and the institution as a whole in a paradoxical bind where politics continually hinder the CNHI from working towards its goal of changing the very mentalities that drive much of the political discourse surrounding immigration and integration in France today. From an internal perspective, the CNHI confines itself within traditional museum conventions whereby the visitor is distanced personally, emotionally and intellectually from the exhibits. I find that this museography confines the work of the Education Department as well as the roles the Department ascribes to teachers and students working within a similar, distanced perspective, heavily shaped by traditional republican ideology.

In the next chapter I turn to those teachers who do choose to address immigration in their classrooms. Similar to the Education Department staff in their work at the CNHI, these teachers are attempting to incorporate a highly politicized and sensitive topic into their lessons, and in examining these efforts the teachers also take a distanced approach to the topic.
CHAPTER IV

A TIME OF TRANSITION IN SCHOOLS: ADDRESSING IMMIGRATION IN THE CLASSROOM

“The [CNHI] must be precise in how it addresses the public in order to combat the double skepticism of those who don’t think the topic of immigration interests anybody and those that think it’s better not to talk about immigration”59

-Jacques Toubon, Mission de Préfiguration
2003 Report to the Prime Minister p. 18

“[Immigration] is a topic that I was never able to place, I didn’t know if it was history, geography, or civic education and since I didn’t know where it belonged I never taught it...”

- History Teacher60

Introduction

The “double skepticism” described above by Jacques Toubon was evident throughout my fieldwork. When talking to anybody other than scholars interested in similar questions of immigration and education, responses to my research topic (the teaching of immigration history) were almost always reflective of this

59 Original quote: “Il faudra préciser non seulement ce qu’attendent les publics, mais également répondre a la question “comment le dire?”, afin de combattre un double scepticisme: celui qui consiste a croire que les questions d’immigration n’intéressent personne et celui qui consiste a penser qu’il vaut mieux ne pas en parler.”

60 Original quote: “je crois que c’était une question que je n’arrivais pas à ranger, j’arrivais pas à savoir si c’était de l’histoire, de la géographie ou de l’ECJS enfin de l’éducation civique et comme je savais jamais où placer cette question finalement je la traitais jamais quoi...” (Interview History Teacher March 14, 2011).
skepticism. Most people, whether they were teachers, friends, my landlord, a taxi
driver or the woman cutting my hair, responded in one of two ways. The first
response I got was an expression of mild confusion tinged with disinterest or
disappointment, stating that immigration is not taught in history classes in France.
“Why study something that is not taught?” was the question just below the surface
of these responses. Often the subsequent question posed to me was whether I was
doing a comparative study with the United States. While a valid question, I always
felt the implicit message here was that immigration history is an American topic and
that I was conducting my study in the wrong country.

The second response I received was more enthusiastic. These people
immediately assumed my choice of topic to be a study of immigrants, integration,
and all the perceived problems and social issues associated with immigration in
contemporary France. Many of the teachers I interviewed fell into this category and
often assumed that my primary interest lay with their students of immigrant
descent. Before one of the first interviews I conducted, the teacher introduced me to
her colleagues in the teachers’ lounge saying that I was conducting research on
“integration.” I thought it was a slip of the tongue at the time since I had never said
anything in my correspondence with her about integration, but I later realized it
was part of a larger pattern of assumptions and conflations of terminology
surrounding immigration in France.

Together, the two responses outlined above, paint a picture of the current,
transitional state of affairs when it comes to the incorporation of immigration into
both the national curriculum and the national consciousness. The first response is
representative of the old guard, those who do not view immigration as an important or legitimate topic to be covered in school, at least not in history classes, or simply those who, thinking out loud, note the fact that they themselves never studied immigration in school and/or that they do not teach much about it now. The second response is representative of a nascent but growing consciousness in France, one that was prevalent among the teachers I spoke with who assumed a connection between teaching about immigration and the grave societal and educational inequities that they struggle to address on a daily basis in their classrooms. These teachers are at the forefront of a national transition as they start to recognize and teach about France as a multi-ethnic nation.

In this chapter I examine this transition as it is understood by teachers and how it plays out in their high school classrooms. Based on my analysis of high school history textbooks, teacher interviews, and classroom observations, I argue that immigration is a highly problematic topic for many teachers and, as a result, when they do address the topic of immigration, they do so from a distanced perspective, one that unwittingly works against the CNHI goal of incorporating immigration into the collective identity of the nation. More often, teachers choose to address immigration in forums distanced from French history class proper while the national curriculum continues to distance immigration and its associated issues of racism, discrimination and multiculturalism from the French nation. I conclude this chapter with a classroom case study of an immigration-themed project that I followed during my time at Lycée X. The project highlights the problematic and distanced approach used by teachers addressing immigration in a classroom setting.
Immigration: Problematic for National Identity. Problematic for Teachers

The topic of immigration to France is largely absent from the history curriculum that covers periods of extensive immigration to France, such as the late 19th century and inter-war periods; however, the curriculum does usually address the topic in the post-World War II “Trente Glorieuses” period of reconstruction through the present day. When immigration is finally highlighted in relation to France, it is almost always presented in a contemporary and problematic light. The following examples drawn from a recent high school history textbook61 provide several instances of the omnipresent problematic association of immigration and immigrants with national identity in France today.

A National Identity Crisis

The 2002 Hachette edition of the “terminale” history textbook includes a series of photos of French families with the question for students, “Since 1945 has the French family changed a lot?” (p. 352). In her discussion of the importance of textbook study, Itti (2006) points out that the choice and placement of images in relation to the text can be extremely revelatory (p, 13). Such is the case with these family photos. All of the people portrayed are white. One image overtly presents the French family as Catholic as the image shows the family saying grace with a

priest around the dinner table. Another photo shows a more implicit image of a Christian family: a mother with three children at the television in the foreground and a picture of Jesus hanging on the wall behind them. Next to another family picture under a section on baby boomers is a pro-natalist propaganda poster from 1945 that shows all white children holding up the country. It is only at the very bottom of another page in the chapter, far from the images of smiling French families, but rather under the headline “The End of the ‘Easy Years’” and across from images of the unemployed and soup kitchens that the text mentions immigrants, pointing to the “difficulties of integration” of new generations of immigrants in the suburbs and the fact that immigration contributed to the continued growth of the population after the baby boom subsided (p. 346). These photos present an image of the French population that excludes immigrants from primary, positive aspects of the nation such as family and relegates them to problematic aspects such as unemployment and urban decay.

Building on Noiriel’s original critique of French historians’ treatment of immigration, scholars and observers of French history education continue to claim that lack of critical thought on the subject of immigration history in France is perpetuated by the school curriculum and that this concerns not just the immigrants, but the entire nation which has created the foreigner as an “indomitable Other” and has rendered the immigrant and his children “a figure evocative of the national question” (Falaize et al. 2008 p. 183). The Hachette textbook provides several examples of this problematic association of immigration and immigrants with national identity. The chapter entitled “The 5th Republic Faces
the Test of Time (1981-2002)” includes a primary source piece that addresses the October 2001 France-Algeria soccer game in Paris, the first to be played between the two countries since Algerian independence in 1962, where Parisian fans of North African descent booed the French national anthem and rushed the field, resulting in the cancellation of the game. The piece is written by Lilian Thuram, then a member of the French national soccer team, and was published in L’Equipe, a sports newspaper a few days after the game was cancelled. Thuram, a black man of Antillean descent, addresses the youth, presumably of Algerian or North African descent who were considered largely responsible for the troubles at the game asking, “Why would these youth who were born in France boo their country’s anthem? They are French, aren’t they?” (p. 327)

This question of whether or not French citizens of immigrant descent have been successfully integrated into the nation permeates public and political discourse in France today. This concern over the integration of immigrants and their descendants is similarly framed as a national “identity crisis” in the Hachette textbook. Under the subheading “An identity crisis?” the text first talks about the spread of English as a dominant world language and as a threat to France’s “cultural exception” and continues, “France, traditionally a land of welcome and asylum is now divided by debates over how to receive immigration flows and over the functioning of integration that until now have allowed populations from around the world to be absorbed into the French melting pot”62 (p. 380). This passage is

62 Author’s translation of: “la France, traditionnellement terre d’accueil et d’asile, s’interroge, à travers les débats qui divisent la nation, sur les flux d’immigration qu’elle peut accueillir et sur le fonctionnement des mécanismes d’intégration qui, jusqu’ici, avaient
remarkable in three ways. First, it is only near the very end of the last chapter of this “terminale” textbook, i.e. the students’ study of French history, that France is first referred to as a country of immigration in a historical context. Second, the text presents the “debates that divide the nation” over immigration as a new phenomenon, while scholars of immigration history would quickly correct this point citing debates that go back as far as the history of immigration to France, at least two hundred years (Lewis 2007; Noiriel 1988; Témime 1999). Finally, the passage presents immigration as a simplified, negative phenomenon that threatens the nation, in this case dividing the nation and contributing to an identity crisis.

The identity crisis presented in the textbook referenced above has been internalized by French society and manipulated by politicians and the media as highlighted during the government-initiated public debates over national identity (2009-2010) and “laïcité” (2011). The textbooks mirror and reinforce contemporary political and public discourse on immigration, and while teachers are free to ignore or critique imagery and implicit messages in textbooks, it was within this highly charged socio-political context that the teachers I spoke with and observed were operating.

Remaining “Neutral”

Throughout my fieldwork, teachers described addressing immigration in the classroom as problematic, as if explicitly addressing the topic would turn their otherwise orderly classroom into a minefield of student explosions, especially in a

permis l’absorption dans le creuset français de populations venues du reste du monde.” (Hachette p. 380).
class with students of immigrant descent. Some chose to skirt the topic entirely out of fear of student reactions to such a controversial, politically charged issue, and others chose to address it through various circuitous means, all of which I argue, are forms of distancing couched in concerns over “neutrality” and “objectivity.” As one history teacher explains, she doesn’t broach the topic much:

Maybe I’m afraid of their [students’] reactions but also because it’s hard for me to address recent French immigration history because it’s true that I try to address it in a very neutral way and if there are student comments, well I’ll hear them, but I still try to teach as if I’m speaking in front of a totally neutral audience who is not at all implicated by the topic (Interview History Teacher March 2, 2011).63

This teacher, like many others I spoke with, conflates neutrality with a certain demographic of students – those not perceived to be of immigrant descent.

Other teachers I spoke with expressed their difficulty in addressing the topic of immigration in class in terms of the problems it presents in maintaining neutrality as teachers. While some teachers clearly acknowledged that history is never a neutral subject, many teachers I spoke with, when specifically reflecting on the topic of immigration said they try hard to remain neutral and in order to do so, they avoid singling out students in their class who they perceive to be of immigrant background. As a result, when teachers do address immigration, it is often from a distanced, pseudo-neutral perspective. Another teacher, in his interview, spoke at length about how history as a subject is anything but neutral and is by nature highly

63 Original quote: “peut être que j’ai peur aussi de ces réactions donc peut être aussi que j’ai du mal à aborder les sujets de l’histoire de l’immigration récente uh Française parce que c’est vrai que donc j’essaie de l’aborder de façon très neutre et si y a des remarques d’élèves bon ben voilà je je prends mais en essayant de faire voilà comme si je parlais sur devant un public totalement neutre qui est pas forcément concerné par la question voilà”
politically charged. However, when it comes to teaching about immigration history he notes that although immigration is not at all a neutral subject, teachers often try to address it from a neutral perspective (Interview History Teacher, November 23, 2010). The importance of teachers maintaining neutrality while addressing immigration with their students was repeatedly reinforced during teacher training sessions at the CNHI where teachers were frequently cautioned against engaging students on their personal immigrant background, which was conceived as straying from the teacher’s neutral role. I will address this particular form of emotional distancing in detail in Chapter V.

**Immigration: Distanced from French History (Class)**

In France, the response to the sensitive nature or illegitimacy of the topic of immigration to France has long been omission and silence. Recent studies of history textbooks and “programmes” (Legris 2010; Falaize et al. 2008) have all noted the glaring, formal omission of the topic that continues to this day. One of my first classroom observations presents a classic example of this omission. I had just been introduced to the teacher, had briefly explained my research on the teaching of immigration history, and had asked if I could observe her class that afternoon. She frowned and said that I was welcome to sit in, but that she was not going to talk about immigration in this unit at all since they were starting with the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution spurred large numbers of immigrants from neighboring European countries such as Belgium, Italy and Spain as well as large numbers from Portugal and Poland to settle in France, where they hoped to find
jobs and/or political refuge (Le Moigne and Lebon 1999; Témime 1999); yet this was rarely mentioned in the classes I observed where the industrial revolution was covered. Teachers cannot realistically cover everything, especially in a 60-minute class where 20 of those minutes are spent on classroom management, as was often the case in this and many other classes I observed. However, this omission is revelatory and still prevalent in French classrooms and has been well documented in recent years by scholars and educators from Noiriel to those now working with the CNHI. Blanc-Chaléard (2007) calls for a rethinking of these key points in history curricula and texts suggesting that, "You cannot address the industrial society or the "Trente Glorieuse" without talking about foreigners, that one must think of the inter-war France as a country of peasants as well as of immigrants, as it owed its demographic growth to foreigners more than the United States at the time" (author’s translation p. 95). In the following section I focus not on these omissions, but rather on the when, where, why, and how teachers do address the topic of immigration during this pivotal period of transition in French society.

**A “Useless” American Topic**

Making small talk in an Yves Rocher salon one day, I told the young woman attending to me that I was in Paris for the year researching how the topic of immigration is addressed in high school classes. To my surprise this seemed to really animate her and she began to vent about how in her high school English class (in Southern France) they didn’t learn anything useful; the teacher spent most of the class time talking about “immigration and racism.” This, she indignantly exclaimed,
was not exactly what she needed to know for a real conversation in English! She said she would have preferred to learn something more practical, more useful, like how to order a beer in London. She added that she had not been to London yet, but hopes to go someday soon. I agreed that foreign language classes could be more practically oriented and the conversation drifted on to other things, but her remark about “immigration and racism” dominating English class stayed with me. In many ways this young woman’s remark simplified a complex phenomenon I observed throughout my research: the extent to which immigration and related topics such as cultural diversity and racism were associated with the Anglo-American world and integrated into the English (and other foreign language) curriculum in France, while remaining starkly absent from the French history curriculum and history classes proper.

In order to get a sense of where history classes fit into the larger school landscape I made sure to observe a good number of non-history classes in both schools. As an American, I was often quickly befriended by English teachers and invited into their classes, and many times I was asked to participate or teach a lesson, placing me in more of a participant-observer role. Just as I did in history class observations, in English classes I followed along with the lesson, which often involved reading passages from the textbook. While French history textbooks rarely feature a non-white person on the front cover, and photos of Africans and Asians are most common in sections on colonization, the English textbooks were filled from cover to cover with photos, passages and information on non-white historical civil and human rights figures such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi.
In one English class I sat in on, relying heavily on the textbook, the teacher spent the entire session on the civil rights movement in the United States and the biographies of a variety of influential African Americans. To my surprise, even former Mayor of San Francisco Willie Brown had his picture in the textbook. I identified him for the class since nobody, including the teacher, knew who he was. This was not an exceptional class. Other English classes I observed spent significant time discussing the genocide of Native Americans, the Harlem Renaissance, and of course, Ellis Island and immigration. One teacher proudly showed me the “I Have a Dream” speeches that her students wrote in English while studying Martin Luther King Jr. Interestingly, the students wrote about the struggle for racial equality in the United States, not France. Yet another English teacher asked me to give a presentation in her class on Ellis Island and immigration to the United States. Another showed her class Charlie Chaplin’s classic film “The Immigrant.” The focus on these issues within English as a foreign language classes is indicative of this association, but also revelatory of the continued distancing or disassociation of immigration and immigrants from the French nation.

With all this talk of immigration in English classes, I thought, and hoped that sometimes the classroom discussion would veer towards a comparison with France. This usually did not happen during my observations. One exception was a project launched by an English teacher (who regularly attended teacher trainings at the CNHI) that involved a comparative study of “the French nation and the American Melting Pot.” The project put more emphasis on a study of immigration and integration in the United States (the students even traveled to New York over Spring
Break where they visited Ellis Island and the various ethnic neighborhoods of NYC) however the teacher also brought her class to visit the CNHI and asked them to reflect on the diversity of the French population. As part of this yearlong project the students produced a world map with pins stuck into every location where various students and teachers from the school volunteered to indicate their origins. From each pin a string was connected to a second pin in France. The map illustrates the diversity of the French population rarely acknowledged in classrooms. This teacher expressed to me that creating this map highlighting the foreign ancestry of students and staff was one of the more difficult aspects of her project on immigration.

Concepts such as multiculturalism, minority rights and “race” are largely associated with the Anglo-American world and shunned by the current, dominant assimilationist strand in French society (Bleich 2000; Wieviorka 1996). Therefore I was not surprised to see that immigration was a more common and seemingly acceptable topic in foreign language classes and particularly English classes, than in the history classes I observed. However, immigration and its association with the Anglo-American world is not limited to English classes. Most teachers I spoke with, regardless of discipline, automatically and primarily associated immigration with the United States. Over and over again in interviews when asked about teaching immigration, teachers would first mention that they use the United States as an example to teach immigration, often referencing Ellis Island or the Mexican-American border. Near the beginning of the school year I was introduced to various history teachers to whom I explained that I was interested in observing classes where immigration was covered. Many of these teachers suggested that I observe
their “seconde” class, explaining to me that with the new curriculum implemented that year, their “seconde” class started with a study of “Europeans in the settlement of the world” and provides teachers with case studies of Irish and Italian emigration to the United States in the 19th century. While the topic of immigration had been newly added to this part of the history curriculum, it was done so in such a way that continues to distance immigration from France by primarily associating it with the study of other nations.

The 2010 Nathan “seconde” edition, a common history textbook used by some of the classes I observed, provides a good example of how immigration history, especially immigration history pre World War II, is heavily focused on immigration to destinations other than France and particularly focused on the United States. The initial 26-page section of the book on the place of Europeans in populating the world contains 23 images, 15 of which are images of immigrants going to or newly arrived in the United States. While it makes sense to focus on countries of heavy 19th century emigration such as Ireland and Italy as opposed to France, which relative to most other European nations has never produced a sizeable number of emigrants, the almost exclusive focus on the United States as a receiving nation overlooks the vast number of European immigrants arriving in France during this time period.

This textbook section contains two case studies, one on the United Kingdom and one on Italy. The Italian case study, entitled “Leaving Italy in the 19th Century” includes a table listing the destinations of Italian emigrants during different time periods. The destinations are broken down as follows: Europe, Africa, Oceania, Asia
and Americas. The latter is further broken down into United States, Argentina and Brazil, but the Europe section is not broken down into countries and therefore does not identify or display France as a primary country of immigration as it does the United States, Argentina and Brazil. Rather, the table allows the French nation to be absorbed into the broader category of Europe, despite record numbers of immigrants from neighboring nations coming to France at this time. In 1891 for example, there were 150,000 Italian immigrants living in France (CNHI “repères” exhibit). France as a nation is largely non-existent in this chapter, while nations such as the United States are explicitly referenced as nations of immigration. This reinforces the message that immigration itself is a foreign topic and one that is studied in foreign language classes, but not necessarily in French history class.

**Immigration: A Global Issue, Tangential to French History**

The topic of immigration is certainly addressed more in classrooms today than it was even ten years ago; however, the topic is still mostly relegated to less prestigious courses such as foreign languages, civic education and a special project class, newly introduced into the “seconde” curriculum in 2010, that students are required to take, but do not receive a grade for. Most high school history teachers are responsible for teaching geography and civic education classes in addition to history. When I asked history teachers to tell me about the teaching of immigration history, they often noted that they covered immigration more in geography or in civic education than in history class proper. In geography classes teachers likewise distance immigration from the French nation through their talk, in generalities, of
“les flux migratoires” or migratory flows and large-scale demographics, as they cover broad geographical areas rather than pinpointing immigration within the French national context. As one history teacher put it when I asked how he teaches about the topic of immigration:

So immigration um I talk about it more as mobility actually in geography class. In history class we don’t address immigration directly like that I don’t think. I address it in geography and in history it’s more the colonies and decolonization and migration issues are more a geography topic where we talk more about mobility within the context of globalization and in relation to the study of Europe. (Interview History Teacher April 4, 2011).64

As this teacher puts it, immigration is not a topic associated with the French nation, let alone its history. It is distanced in the curriculum that presents it as a European or global phenomenon, or associates it with other nations. In geography classes I observed, units on the Mexican-American border, NAFTA, and flows of people and goods, for example, were commonly pointed out to me as examples of teaching about immigration, as were lessons on migration to and from Europe. France as a nation was largely absent from these lessons.

Like the global migration lens discussed above, immigration is often viewed through a European rather than a national frame, thereby distancing immigration from French national Identity. Studies show a similar distancing of related problematic aspects of French history in textbooks. For example, Nasr’s (2001) study of the treatment of the Algerian War in French textbooks finds that the French

64 “Alors l’immigration uh moi je parle plutôt de mobilité en fait en géographie alors uh en histoire uh on aborde pas l’immigration comme ça à première vue non je ne pense pas moi je l’aborde en géographie uh en histoire on aborde les colonies les la décolonisation mais on n’aborde pas les problématiques migratoires c’est plutôt en géographie et donc on parle plutôt de mobilité donc uh dans le cadre de la mondialisation dans le cadre de l’étude de l’Europe.”
are distanced from the conflict through the designation of the various actors involved. Nasr points out that the texts rarely refer to the French in Algeria as “French,” but rather as “Europeans” and the Algerians are referred to as “Muslims.” This discourse, Nasr claims, “drowns the Algerians in the Muslim community and the French in the European community” thereby masking the “national character of the confrontation” (p. 183). As Shepard (2006) charts in his book on the decolonization of Algeria, the terminology employed by the French to refer to the various French and Algerian actors corresponds to the significant reformulation of the French and Algerian nations and who is included and excluded and on what grounds before and after independence in 1962. Often the grounds for discrimination both historically and in contemporary France are those criteria that the French nation officially ignores on the basis of republican principles. This paradoxical relationship between colonization, decolonization, and the French nation is even more evident when the focus is shifted to the related analysis of immigration. Not only is immigration distanced from the French nation and identity through globalization and Europeanization of the topic, but immigration is also distanced from its historical roots by the contemporary focus that most educators take when addressing the topic in class.

In interviews with French primary and secondary school teachers, Falaize et al. (2008) find that controversial, contemporary political issues such as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and equally controversial historical topics such as the Algerian War, tend to guide teachers’ handling of immigration history as a topic, and as such immigration is largely taught within a contemporary rather than historical
context. This contemporary focus, Falaize et al. (2008) argue is evidenced by the fact that teaching about immigration history is largely dominated by subjects/classes other than history classes (p. 189). I found this to be true in my study as well. I spoke with many history teachers who were actively addressing the topic of immigration; however, they usually chose to do so outside of history class proper. In civic education classes, immigration is mostly addressed as a contemporary, problematic phenomenon, the focus on integration and related seemingly ambiguous and politically correct goals such as “le vivre ensemble” or “living together.” It is within these less academically prestigious, distanced school spaces such as foreign language and civic education classes that some teachers are beginning to experiment with immigration to France and immigrants in France as topics of study.

In the following section I turn to a case study analysis of an immigration-themed class project that I followed during my time in Lycée X. This provides a detailed study of the distanced and problematic approach to immigration outlined above. Furthermore, through an analysis of teacher motivations and perceptions surrounding this immigration-themed class project, the case study provides a nuanced window into how actors within the institution of the French school adapt to societal change, in this case the ever-diversifying student population and French citizenry.
Classroom Case Study

Exploratory First Steps

The 2010 revised “seconde” curriculum introduced a new, interdisciplinary, exploratory class that all first year high school students are required to take. The objective of this new course is to expose incoming high school students to a range of disciplines and study options so they would make better informed decisions when, later in their first year they must choose an academic track\(^\text{65}\) that will determine the course of their studies, and for many, the course of their careers and lives. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of these courses, they were often team-taught by teachers from two different disciplines. One of the course options provided by the MEN is entitled “literature and society” and aims to help students, “understand the interactions between literature, history and society,” and is often team taught by French, History and/or SES teachers. Within this category, the national curriculum gives teachers six topic options. From these, the teachers at Lycée X developed four course options from which students could choose: cinema and literature, journalism, urban planning and architecture of a suburb, and last but not least, the topic of this case study, “Views of the other and the foreign.”

“Views of the Other and the Foreign”

The Official Bulletin of the MEN provides an overview of what the exploratory study of this topic should entail and then it is up to the teachers at

\(^{65}\) See the MEN description of these courses: [http://eduscol.education.fr/cid52208/enseignements-d-exploration.html](http://eduscol.education.fr/cid52208/enseignements-d-exploration.html) (accessed February 16, 2013)
individual schools to narrow the topic down. Two teachers at Lycée X chose to
develop two of these semester-long modules - the first focused on views of “the
other” and the second on immigration. Drawing on some of the language provided
by the MEN, they described their course as follows in a document shared with the
school staff toward the beginning of the school year:

Views of the other and the foreign: the objective is to awaken the
students’ curiosity about cultures, traditions and foreign civilizations,
and to examine the various ways in which these others are studied by
ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, writers, explorers,
reporters, historians and geographers. The class will include visits to
and workshops at the CNHI and Quai Branly museums, reading novels
and essays, viewing documentary films, interviews with writers,
group work and oral presentations. The teaching of the class will be
in partnership with the CNHI. The students will present their final
projects at the end of the year at the CNHI. The class will be followed
by a researcher from New York University (2010 Lycée X
administrative document explaining the new “exploration” courses).

At Lycée X Florence and Virginie, veteran SES and French teachers, respectively
taught this “exploration” course. Florence seemed to have a particular interest in
teaching about immigration. She had been involved in a project with the CNHI the
previous academic year and she also did a unit on the sociology of immigration in
her SES classes, and took her students on a field trip to the CNHI as part of the unit.
She also attended several of the teacher training workshops offered at the CNHI.

66 “Regards sur l’autre et sur l’ailleurs : l’objectif est d’éveiller la curiosité des élèves pour les cultures, traditions
et civilisations étrangères et de les faire s’interroger sur les différents regards dont elles peuvent faire l’objet :
celui de l’ethnologue, de l’anthropologue, du sociologue, de l’écrivain, de l’exploration, du reporter, de l’historien
et du géographe. Visites et ateliers à la Cité Nationale d’Histoire de l’Immigration (CNHI) et du Musée du Quai
Branly, lectures de romans et d’essais, visionnage de films documentaires, interview d’écrivains, travaux de
groupes, préparation d’expositions. L’enseignement se fera en partenariat avec la CNHI. Les élèves présenteront
leurs travaux en fin d’année à la CNHI. L’enseignement sera suivi par une chercheuse d’une Université de New
York.”

67 I use pseudonyms for all teachers and students referenced by name in this study.
Virginie was not as heavily involved with the CNHI. Before joining forces with Florence on this project she had never brought students to the CNHI or worked with them in any way.

From the start, the teachers seemed hesitant about this course and were clearly disappointed with the level of student interest. When I asked Florence one day if the students get to choose which Exploration course they take, she responded that they can indicate preferences and that she suspects most of the students in this class did not get into their first choice. She added with a smile that on the first day of the course several students said they thought they were signing up for a course on aliens and appeared very disappointed to discover that the course was actually on immigrants.

When Florence first told me about this course, I was very excited to be able to follow it, since it was the only course fully devoted to the topic of immigration that I had come across in my research. I planned to observe all the sessions, review student work and interview the teachers and students. I soon discovered however that the students were too disengaged with the course to provide any real insight into how they understood and interpreted the subject matter. The teachers often spent significant amounts of class time chastising students for not having done the reading and for talking amongst themselves during class. The students were assigned to read one novel for the course’s final project and when they met in small groups to discuss the book, I circulated from one group to the next, only to find that almost none of the students had read the book and some had not even obtained a
copy. Student discussions in these small groups provided a few fascinating slices of adolescent life, but rarely touched upon my research interests.

A disinterested class of 15 year olds can afflict any teacher and any school subject. Given my observations of other student projects and student reactions to other lessons on immigration, I found it was not the topic of immigration itself that caused the disinterest among these students. Virginie offered one explanation of the disinterest, which she whispered to me during class one day: the course isn't graded and that’s why the students don’t care. This sentiment was echoed by other teachers I spoke with in the Paris region who were teaching exploration courses for the first time; since these courses are not graded, it is extremely hard to motivate the students. Motivated students or not, it is mostly in these liminal curricular spaces that teachers are starting to experiment with immigration as a topic of study.

This exploration course, while disappointing in terms of student engagement, provides an excellent case study of how teachers, many teaching about the topic of immigration to France for the first time, approach the subject. Florence and Virginie, like almost all teachers I interviewed and spoke with, expressed three primary objectives when it came to teaching about immigration: 1) clarify terminology surrounding immigration 2) break down negative stereotypes held by students; and 3) fulfill a civic duty. Virginie and Florence approached these three goals from different disciplinary and pedagogical perspectives, but with both teachers, the distanced and problematic approaches to immigration as a topic of study underpinned their teaching about immigration.
Shortly before the course began, Florence sent me an email with an outline of the course, indicating that much was subject to change, but that she would begin the course with a session dedicated to definitions of terms such as “étrangers” “immigré” “refugié” “sans-papier” and “intégration”. Florence was not alone in starting with this terminology-focused approach in teaching about immigration. Time and time again, both in classroom observations and interviews, teachers stressed the importance of students learning to define and differentiate between the terms “immigrant” and “foreigner.” In Florence’s exploration class, as well as in her other classes, she drilled the students on the correct use of these two words, having them define the terms and then answer questions based on a Venn diagram that shows the overlapping categories of foreigners, foreigners born in France, naturalized French born abroad, immigrants and foreigners born abroad. Students were asked to answer questions such as “are all immigrants foreigners?” The students were confused. I was confused. I understood the legal distinctions the teacher was trying to impart, but Florence was fighting an uphill battle in that the terms “foreign” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably throughout French society. As sociologist Didier Fassin (2009) points out, confusion surrounding these terms exists even in official studies. As I will discuss further in Chapter VI, amalgams of terms surrounding immigration and “visible” minorities abound. Teachers like Florence tried their best in the classroom to untangle these amalgams, but outside the classroom, they use the terms “foreign” and “immigrant”

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68 In France, jus soli applies; however those born in France to foreign parents must claim their French nationality when they turn 18. Therefore, many high school students are technically considered “foreigners” even though they were born in France and have lived in France their entire lives.
interchangeably themselves, referring to second and third generation non-white French students as "of foreign" or "of immigrant" origin, or even just as "immigrants". It is difficult to preach something you are not yourself practicing, yet this is precisely what I observed many teachers unwittingly doing during their lessons on immigration. This schism between teachers’ classroom instruction on terminology and their everyday usage of the terms in question is one of several examples of a decoupling between teacher classroom discourse, which tends to align with republican, universalist ideology, and daily informal discourse, which reflects a more particularist world view.

The second common goal expressed by teachers associated with teaching about immigration, was to break down students’ widely held stereotypes about immigrants. Discussing immigration through the lens of inherently negative stereotypes, while good intentioned, further frames immigration within a problematic light. When I asked teachers why they think students hold these stereotypes, they often blamed the media and the press’ overemphasis on illegal immigration. Teachers often noted that they had to explain to their students that most immigrants are not in France illegally, or that the negative association attached to immigrants comes primarily from the misconception that they are all illegal. In Florence and Virginie’s exploration class, Florence tried to address these misconceptions through a presentation of statistics. Creating her own handouts (there are no textbooks or set curricular materials for the exploration courses) she provided students with various graphs and charts drawn from sources such as the National Institute for Demographic Study (INED), the French National Office of
Immigration and Integration (OFII) and the CNHI, showing numbers and percentages of immigrants in France vs. other countries over the years, numbers of asylum requests, the primary sending countries, etc. In reviewing the handout in class, she drew students’ attention to facts that run counter to stereotypical representations, such as the large number of British immigrants in France, nearly double the number of immigrants from Senegal, for example. These facts were often a surprise to students and grabbed the students’ attention at the time, but this fact-based lesson did not allow for any exploration or analysis of why these stereotypes persist, despite these facts that run counter to popular notions.

Sticking to facts and figures is another form of pedagogical distancing that I observed particularly among history teachers. Numbers are less likely to be questioned and allow teachers to maintain their “neutrality” and (pedagogical) authority in front of the class. As one history teacher put it, “in history we spend our time trying to distance from emotion, to present things in a neutral way and uh either we try to keep things separate, so as not to plunge into emotion and then of course to try to avoid political things and to keep everything really neutral, just like we don’t give our political opinions” (Interview History Teacher March 2, 2011).69

Virginie, took a different disciplinary approach to her exploration lessons, having the students analyze photos of immigrants (drawn from a CNHI collection) and discussing two contemporary novels that feature illegal immigrants as

69 “en histoire on passe notre temps à essayer d’éloigner quand même un peu l’émotion fin de de présenter les choses de façon neutre etc. alors uh soit les choses durent de pas essayer vraiment de d’être un peu à l’écart fin donc de pas tomber dans l’émotion et puis après que ça soi dans les choses politiques et tout être vraiment neutre pareil pour pas donner un avis politique.”
protagonists.\textsuperscript{70} In our interview I asked Virginie about her approach to teaching about immigration, and her response echoed those of many other teachers from other disciplines who spoke simultaneously of the ability of the topic of immigration to reach and engage students who might have an immigrant background, but at the same time the importance of distancing the lesson from the intimate lives of students (and teachers). For Virginie, the study of literature presents an ideal forum for this practice of distancing:

> when I teach immigration in literature class I never have them share personal stories, I never encourage them to use their own experience, I really want them to study the topic through the study of a poem say by Aimé Césaire and then I can see their process of recognition and distancing as they read, but for me it’s important to keep this distance...\textsuperscript{71}

(Interview French Teacher December 7, 2010)

Virginie went on to explain that despite the distance she imposes on her students, she can tell when they connect with the literature on a personal level by the way they pay attention during certain lessons and that when she asks them at the end of the year, which classes they liked the best, they cite those in which they study topics they could relate to. The question of whether or not to engage students about their own immigrant background in class or as part of the lesson is an important and recurring one in this study and is addressed in detail in Chapter five.

\textsuperscript{70} The books she chose were \textit{Le ventre de l’Atlantique} by Fatou Diome and \textit{Eldorado} by Laurent Gaudé.

\textsuperscript{71} “quand je l’étudie en littérature je n’ai jamais recours à un témoignage personnel je ne les amène jamais à utiliser uh leur propre expérience je veux vraiment que ça passe par l’étude d’un poème d’Aimé Césaire et je je vois bien quel parcours intellectuel de reconnaissance et de distanciation ils font mais je je pour moi c’est important qu’il y ait ce travail de distanciation par là”
When Viriginie taught the exploration class, she remained true to her desire to teach through texts and images while retaining a certain distance from the students. Through a classroom analysis of a selection of historic photos, Virginie also seems intent on challenging commonly held beliefs or stereotypical images of immigrants in France. She starts her lesson by showing the class two photos, one from 1917, a family having a picnic in the French countryside and the other of women standing in a factory. She tells the class that she took these two photos from the CNHI collection, but if you didn’t know that, what would you not know by just looking at them? A boy in the class shouted out, “that they’re immigrants!” Virginie, pleased with his answer, went on to explain that except for the foreign looking hats worn by some in the picnic photo, the family doesn’t look any different than a traditional French family. This approach breaks stereotypes of what immigrants look like, but at the same time it reinforces the stereotypical image of what a “traditional” French family looks like, or more to the point, what a “traditional” French family does not look like.

Breaking stereotypical images and assumptions about immigrants was key for most teachers I spoke with, and often described teaching about immigration as part of a larger civic duty they as teachers must perform. For some teachers this came in the form of emphasizing the positive contributions of immigrants to French society. In discussing a project she designed on immigration, one teacher noted that the most important aim for her was, “to get the students to understand that it [immigration] is an asset for the nation and that there is no shame in being of
immigrant descent, that to the contrary, it’s an advantage...” (Interview Foreign Language Teacher, November 30, 2010) 72

For many history teachers, the importance of teaching about the history of immigration resides in its instruction for understanding the present day situation. Many teachers took this belief a step further, insisting that one must teach about immigration “without taboo” in order to resolve today’s problems of racism and integration, and to live in a more tolerant society. As one history teacher put it:

I think that there is a civic element that is important, that is to make the students understand that immigrants are not necessarily the enemy and that they understand the reasons why immigrants come [...] I think that there is an aspect of citizenship there, so we all get along, so students are tolerant and look beyond their initial notions about immigrants and see that we are not being invaded and that quite the opposite, we need immigrants... (Interview History Teacher November 25, 2010)73

Those teachers who chose to address immigration with their classes ascribed great importance to the topic, but ironically, like the teacher cited above, they target the teaching of immigration to students who are perceived to be of immigrant origin, i.e. those students who are arguably the least likely to view immigrants as an invading enemy of the French nation.

72 “Au fur à mesure uh uh voilà je crois le plus important c’est uh comprendre que c’est une richesse ouais que l’immigration est une richesse pour la nation et que uh y a pas de honte à être issu de l’immigration et qu’au contraire c’est une richesse...”

73 “je pense que y a y a un enjeu civique citoyen qui est important justement de faire comprendre aux élèves que l’immigré n’est pas forcément uh l’ennemi et donc uh je pense que quand ils prennent conscience des motifs pour lesquels ont vient [...] je pense là il y a un enjeu de citoyenneté important pour uh le vivre ensemble la tolérance et puis bah dépasser justement un petit peu leur première idée et voir que bah non on n’est pas envahi que bien au contraire on a besoin d’immigrés.”
In this chapter I have argued that the topic of immigration is highly problematic for teachers in several significant ways. First, the teachers themselves rarely have had any formal education on the topic since it was for so long omitted from history curricula and academic scholarship. Second, for many teachers, teaching about immigration in the classroom puts them in a vulnerable position, since the topic of immigration brings up so many sensitive issues in society that students often react negatively to. Students’ reactions create classroom management challenges for teachers, and as a result many teachers choose to avoid the topic altogether. For those who do address immigration, a distanced perspective is preferred. This distancing of immigration from the French nation, history and history classroom is evident in the continued absence of the topic in history classes proper and the relegation of the topic to less prestigious subjects such as SES, civic education and foreign language classrooms (subjects that hold less weight on the baccalaureate exam). Especially in foreign language classes, immigration if largely taught in relation to other countries, thereby further distancing the topic from France. In the next chapter I turn to a discussion of one particular form of distancing in the French classroom as manifested in the recurring debate over whether or not to ask students to address their own family’s immigrant background as part of the lesson.
CHAPTER V

TABOO AND STIGMA IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: DISCOURSE AND INCORPORATION OF FAMILY IMMIGRATION HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM

When you are of immigrant descent we have a tendency in France to make it known that it’s better to hide that, to live with it in the private sphere74

- Foreign Language Teacher

Introduction

In this chapter first I discuss how the CNHI Education Department, teachers, and students respectively address the debate surrounding family history in the classroom and the contradictions that exist between the official stance of the CNHI and the rhetoric of many teachers on the one hand, and the daily practices of teachers on the other. The students’ voices add a previously absent and nuanced perspective to this debate. Next I address the assertion made by most teachers and CNHI staff in discussing this issue, that asking students to address their own immigrant background in class violates the divide between public and private spheres. Drawing on Kenji Yoshino’s (2006) theory of “covering” and Bourdieu’s (1970) conception of “symbolic violence” the chapter concludes with an analysis of teachers’ stated fear of stigmatizing students of immigrant descent and of imposing

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74 “quand on vient de l’immigration on a plutôt tendance en France à faire comprendre qu’il vaut mieux cacher ça vivre avec dans la sphère privée” (Interview September 30, 2010)
a non-French identity on them by asking them to speak about their family background.

The January 2008 edition of the education review *Le Monde de l’Education* features a dossier entitled “Muslims, Jews, Catholics, the Temptation to Withdraw” (La tentation du repli) on religious schools as well as on some of the new practices that teachers employ in classrooms with large numbers of students of immigrant descent. One article addresses the “ethnopsychiatric”\textsuperscript{75} approach of some teachers who choose to draw upon the immigrant family history and culture of their students in order to help them overcome academic difficulties. The author of the *Le Monde* article critiques the “numerous teachers who try to draw on the immigration history and cultures of origin of their students to help them teach” and argues that this practice should be used with caution because, “this pedagogy of integration can lead to an aggravation of the situation, and confine students to their presupposed identities”\textsuperscript{76} (Truong in *Le Monde de l’Education* p. 28).

Debates over national identity and “laïcité” have dominated public and political discourse on immigration in France in recent years. The mostly left-leaning education community often dismisses these public debates (initiated by the Sarkozy government) as conservative political pandering. However, I found that teachers often engaged in similar discourse and debate surrounding how to broach the topic of immigration in the classroom. The teachers’ debate centers on one issue:

\textsuperscript{75} Ethnopsychology is a relatively underdeveloped discipline in France.
\textsuperscript{76} Author translation of the original: “Pourtant, de nombreuses équipes pédagogiques cherchent à puiser dans l’histoire de l’immigration et dans les cultures d’origine de leurs élevés des leviers pour les aider à entrer dans les apprentissages. ... Cette pédagogie de l’intégration peut conduire à l’aggravation de la situation, et assigner les élèves à leurs identités présumées.”
whether or not teachers should invoke and incorporate students’ personal family histories of immigration as part of the lesson. I first encountered this issue before entering the field, while reading Benoit Falaize et al.’s 2008 study on the teaching of immigration history in France. The Falaize study (as far as I know, the only one of its kind to date in France) was commissioned by the CNHI and was published by the National Institute of Pedagogical Research (INRP)77, a national research body charged with the study of education and pedagogy. One of the study’s co-authors is a high school history teacher, who was the first head of the CNHI education department. Soon after the study’s publication, the work became what I half jokingly came to refer to as the Bible for the CNHI education department staff and teachers who were interested in the topic and had read the report. In numerous interviews and observations at the CNHI, teachers referenced the report when they needed to justify a certain approach to the teaching of immigration history, or when they expressed uncertainty as to the ethical implications surrounding the teaching of this topic. In their study, Benoit Falaize et al. (2008) find that that the practice of asking students to talk about their family’s immigrant background in class is quite common among teachers of all disciplines and that this practice represents “an inversion of the schooling structure/hierarchy where the teacher no longer teaches disciplinary content, rather the students teach the ‘others’ (the other students and teacher) about a part of his or her story of immigration” (p. 170). Falaize et al. strongly critique this practice as a “pedagogical reversal” that often results in teachers imposing a stigma on the students asked to share their family’s story. Furthermore,

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77 The INRP went through a major restructuring and became the Institut Français de l’Éducation in 2011. The Institute is based at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon.
the study argues that teachers who engage in this practice assume that the singled-out student can speak for a certain culture or nationality with which he or she does not necessarily identify or possess much knowledge about. The education system in France is decidedly not child-centered, in that teachers lecture and students take notes, so the practice of having a student teach the class about his or her immigrant background is indeed a pedagogical reversal. Yet I argue that there is much more to the critique of this particular “pedagogical reversal,” since the concerns center around non-pedagogical issues such as stigma and identity. I argue that the fear of this practice within the education community is indicative of larger questions surrounding the taboo nature of difference within French society.

Upon entering the field, I was not entirely surprised to find that this pedagogical inquiry was in fact at the forefront of almost all my discussions, interviews, and observations with teachers and CNHI staff. Superficially, teachers often present the issue as a question of pedagogy; however, below the surface teachers are grappling with an ethical dilemma. This internal struggle results from the clash of French republican values engrained in teachers’ thinking, pedagogy, and understanding of their role as teachers, and the reality of having diverse students in their classrooms.

Across the board, teachers and CNHI staff used terms such as: “delicate,” “sensitive” and “dangerous” when discussing the idea or act of having students discuss their immigrant background or family history in class. Likewise, teachers described their perception of the impact of such discussions on students as being “painful” and “personal” for the students. The following quote from a teacher
interview illustrates common teacher sentiment and use of terminology in this regard:

... I don’t want to touch the personal stories of students. As a teacher one is not... uh it seems to me that it’s dangerous to do so. It’s not within our role... it identifies the student in a certain way ... I think it’s something that uh (pause) that is potentially sensitive, that could even be dangerous and that it would be to step outside our job as teachers, which is to transmit knowledge. (Interview History Teacher Oct 27, 2010 emphasis mine)78

My classroom observations and interviews with students as well as examination of student school work shed much needed perspective on this issue and illustrate the tensions between republican rhetoric and the lived experiences of average citizens, in this case teachers and students. I argue that the existence and contradictory nature of this debate largely stem from the societal taboo placed on difference and corresponding societal pressure to assimilate to certain French norms imposed on those members of society who are perceived to be different, such as ethnic or religious minorities.

In the following section I explore how the CNHI Education Department staff and secondary teachers maintain the taboo through teacher training sessions and discourse surrounding the dangers of teachers drawing on their students’ personal immigrant background in the classroom. I then turn to the all-too-often silenced student voice on the topic. I find that while teachers maintain and students

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78 “que moi je ne veux pas toucher aux histoires personnelles des élèves. En tant que professeur on n’est pas... uh il me semble que c’est dangereux de le faire. Ce n’est pas dans notre position ... c’est renvoyer les élèves a une identité ... Je crois qu’il est quelque chose qui uh (pause) qui est potentiellement sensible, qui peut être même dangereux et en plus qui nous faire sortir de notre rôle d’enseignant qui est de transmettre un savoir.”
internalize the taboo, both parties continually contradict and question their own
discourse in daily classroom practice.

**Mixed Messages: Taboo Officially Supported by the CNHI**

Nowhere is the family history debate more present than at the CNHI. The CNHI Education Department in many ways embodies the contradictions and tensions that make up the debate. During teacher training sessions, workshops and events, the official rhetoric of the CNHI staff was consistent: do not personalize immigration history. History must be taught from a “neutral” historical perspective. The CNHI staff emphasize that teachers often resort to asking students to talk about their own experiences because they themselves do not posses sufficient knowledge on immigration history to France. Since immigration had been largely omitted from history education at all levels until quite recently, even the youngest teachers I spoke with said they do not remember ever studying immigration in high school or at the university level. This is where the CNHI teacher training and curriculum resources come into play, providing teachers with the tools necessary to incorporate immigration history into their lessons without resorting to the aforementioned “pedagogical reversal” where the students of immigrant descent teach the lesson.

However, I did not observe a single CNHI teacher training session when this stance was not questioned or contradicted, either directly by teachers participating in the session or indirectly by the CNHI. Teachers often shared activities they were working on that involved having the students explore their own family background,
and, without fail, these comments were met with a cautionary message from CNHI staff. As one Education Department staff member said to a group of teachers in response to such a comment,

> At the Cité we are very open to projects. But you must not impose an identity on the student [...] guest speakers are okay but to send students to research their own family history is to stray from our role as teachers. We should not stray from the neutrality that we are so attached to. (Observation CNHI Stage Creteil March 10, 2011)

In interviews as well, CNHI staff expressed the belief that it is their job to ensure that well-intentioned, but misdirected teachers do not wander into the “dangerous” territory of eliciting students’ family histories in class. According to one CNHI staff member, one of the main objectives of the Education Department in working with teachers is to:

> ... provide them with training on immigration history in order to help them avoid awkward missteps in addressing these, these questions for example avoiding what happens in some classrooms, personalizing the migratory experience of students or of their families and using these as examples. (Interview CNHI Staff January 18, 2010)

Every May, the CNHI Education Department organizes an event to showcase some of the immigration-themed projects led by teachers in the Paris area. Most of the projects presented at this event stay clear of personal references. Projects have included for example, French class students acting out a scene from a play that

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79 “Nous sommes à la Cité très ouverts aux projets. Mais il faut pas renvoyer... [l’élève a une identité assignée?] [...] les témoignages c’est bien mais envoyer inquieter les élèves sur leurs propres histoires familiales, c’est d’éloigner de notre rôle d’enseignant. Il faut pas s’éloigner de la neutralité auquelle on reste attachée”

80 « ... leur proposer un module de formation sur l’histoire de l’immigration pour mieux les aider à aborder ces ces questions en évitant les maladresses par exemple en évitant ce qui se fait dans certaines classes de de personnaliser les parcours de migrations des élèves ou de leurs familles pour en faire des exemples... »
features immigrant characters, and Physical Education class students creating a film on soccer and immigration in their town. One of the class projects presented at the May 2010 event stood out from the others on several accounts. The middle school French teacher, notably a “visible” ethnic minority herself, introduced her project, explaining how each student was asked to choose a family object and then write a poetic text about the object that evokes their family origins. Her students, many donning traditional African or Middle Eastern outfits, then took the stage. The group was very well rehearsed and polished in their performance, especially in comparison to previous groups. One by one they took the microphone and recited a short, often witty poem about their personal object. All but one spoke of an object and corresponding family history from another country, and they all radiated pride in their performance and their heritage. The applause and appreciation of this project from the teachers in the audience was palpable. This project and its showcase is just one of many examples of the contradictory messages espoused by the CNHI. The CNHI education department staff consistently cautions teachers against mounting projects like this, yet they continue to showcase this and similar projects that draw on students’ personal stories.81

Internal Debate: Taboo Maintained by Most Teachers

Despite their visceral approval and appreciation of the project described above, most teachers I spoke with expressed reluctance to spearhead projects like

81 This project as well as the others presented in 2010 are available online on the CNHI web site: http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/restitutions-de-projets-en-video/frissons-d-objets (accessed 9/16/2012) The videos are edited and do not contain the entire presentation.
this that would require students to speak of their own families and highlight their cultural background or identity. I argue that this reluctance stems from republican ideology that aims to minimize cultural difference among students. As psychologist Rebecca Duvillie puts it when describing why the field of “ethnopsychology” is so underdeveloped in France, teachers find it “unthinkable to do something different for immigrant children” (cited by Benoit Floc’h in *Le Monde de l’Education* 2008 p. 44). Across the board in interviews, when asked if they ever ask students to talk about their family’s immigrant background as part of a lesson on immigration history, teachers responded that it is not their position to delve into students’ private lives, where they may inadvertently dig up painful memories associated with the immigrant experience that the students themselves do not fully understand. As one teacher put it:

Personally I’ve always refrained from addressing this through a personal or family angle because it’s not, I don’t feel authorized to do so because it’s something very personal and I don’t want to touch the personal stories of students, as a teacher it seems dangerous to do so because it’s not our position to do so (Interview History Teacher October 27 2010)82

Many teachers expressed their reservations in terms of their professional position as a teacher, claiming that to ask students about this topic would be to step outside of their professional role. However, many indicated that if students were to

82 “moi je me suis toujours gardée de, d’aborder ça sous l’angle personnel et familial parce que c’est pas, je me sens pas autorisé à le faire parce que c’est quelque chose de très personnel que moi je veux pas toucher aux histoires personnelles des élèves en tant que professeur on est pas, il me semble que c’est dangereux de le faire parce que c’est pas dans notre position.”
volunteer the information themselves, then that would be a welcomed, and perhaps even a useful addition to the lesson. This caveat is telling because it contradicts the teachers’ remarks about family history belonging to the private sphere. It is not that the teachers see no place for a discussion of students’ own immigrant background or experience in the classroom, it is that they don’t want to initiate the discussion. In fact, many teachers I spoke with indicated their desire to have students talk about their immigrant background, that they thought it could be interesting for the lesson, or that students might be more engaged with the lesson if they could relate it to their lives, but teachers still clearly stated that they should or that they do refrain from doing so. One history teacher explained his role as follows:

I don’t think it’s my place to ask these types of questions [of students] because there as well I try to remain universal in my approach and to always insert some distance in order to allow for reflection, now if the student brings it up, it’s clear that I would be thrilled and that adds a very personal and human dimension to the lesson, but I am always very prudent about this…83 (Interview History Teacher, March 30, 2011)

Several teachers I interviewed indicated that they used to have students talk about their backgrounds in class, but have since come to see the error in their ways and no longer do this. One CNHI staff member told me that before working at the CNHI she used to ask students to talk about their family history in class, but “after

83 “uh je ne crois pas que ça soit mon rôle d’aller les solliciter uh sur ces questions-là parce que là encore une fois je vise plutôt l’universel et la mise à distance pour permettre la réflexion maintenant si l’élève sollicite il est évidemment que j’en suis tout à fait content et que ça permet d’illustrer le cours de manière très personnelle et humaine donc uh mais uh je suis toujours prudent par rapport à cela”
speaking with Benoit Falaize I realized that for some it must be extremely painful”

so now she only engages students on their own history if the student herself brings it up. The following teacher expresses the complexities and contradictions surrounding this issue for her and her colleagues:

I never dare ask a student directly, for example a student of African descent, where do you come from, why did your parents come etc. I never directly do that... and I think that obviously you should not reference the immigrant background of a student because uh well because actually it’s like I was saying that I think it’s really true and that it’s important that everybody understand that the history of immigration is our history in general... so better not to favor the individual approach but also at the same time if it comes spontaneously from the students why not, it could be very interesting.

I think that high school students are still very shy though ... I’m not sure that it would come from them... (Interview History Teacher January 2010)

Teachers usually couched their own resistance to broaching this topic in a concern for the student (assumed to be of immigrant descent), not wanting to interrogate their private lives, to bring to the surface painful memories associated with the immigrant experience, and perhaps most importantly, to stigmatize the student by singling her or him out in class and thereby labeling the student as “of immigrant descent.” However, the contradictions in the teachers’ statements point to deeper taboos and contradictions in French society. In many interviews, teachers use

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84 “après en avoir parlé avec Benoit Falaize je me suis rendue compte pour certains ça doit sûrement être douloureux même”

85 “j’ai jamais ose pose a un élève directement mais toi, parlant d’un élève d’origine africaine, mais tu viens d’ou, pourquoi tes parents sont venus etc. j’ai jamais fait ca directement ... et je pense que évidement il faut pas en fait forcement renvoyer l’élève a son passé eh d’immigre parce que uh ben parce que on effet c’est comme je disais ça je pense que c’est vraiment vrai et qu’il faut que tout le monde le comprenne, l’histoire de l’immigration c’est notre histoire en générale... donc ne pas privilégier l’approche individuelle en rappelant uh même si, si ca peut venir spontanément des élèves pourquoi pas, ça peut être très intéressant. Je pense que les élèves au lycée sont encore très réserves ... je ne suis pas sur que bon ca viendra forcement d’eux ...”
words that express “fear” and “danger” in discussing this topic. These terms were most often used in relation to (usually white / of European descent) teachers’ stated concern that, in asking students (usually assumed to be of post-colonial, non-European descent) to talk about an immigrant past, the teacher will impose a certain, unwanted, non-French identity on the student by assuming he or she is of immigrant descent. This assumption is rife with implications. Since most of the teachers I spoke with were white and spoke about their experiences teaching majority non-white students, the teachers are equating white appearance or European descent with Frenchness. The teachers are aware that in French society ethnic minorities are often not viewed by the majority as being truly French, and there is fear that some harbor more allegiance to other countries or to other cultures and religions than to secular France. The teachers’ intentions are to treat every student as equally French, following the traditional, abstract republican color-blind approach. But in doing so the teachers perpetuate an extremely narrow conception of French identity that excludes precisely those students they do not want to stigmatize.

One of the few non-white teachers I interviewed articulated this dynamic in more explicit terms, positing that teachers assume that students with certain “physical traits” are of immigrant descent, and that the act of asking those students to talk about their assumed immigrant background represents a “persistence of certain neocolonial representations” insofar as many teachers assume, based on physical appearance, that certain students are immigrants when really they may be second, third, or fourth generation French (Interview Foreign Language Teacher
interview April 8, 2011). This teacher hits upon an important point -- the omnipresent amalgam in French society of non-white" and “immigrant” or “foreign,” but strikingly glosses over the more pernicious piece of this neocolonial mentality--that non-white is not acceptable, that it is considered to be different by the dominant majority of French society, and that it should therefore be downplayed or ignored in the public space of the classroom.

I did speak with a few teachers who unabashedly claimed to have their students talk about their immigrant backgrounds as part of the lesson. These teachers are outliers in their whole-hearted endorsement of the practice, yet the reasons they gave for asking students to talk about their immigrant backgrounds remained heavily rooted in republican notions of theoretical equality, as evidenced by teachers’ framing of the issue as “we are all immigrants” or, in line with CNHI rhetoric, “the history of immigration is the history of France.” As one high school history teacher in a working class, heavily immigrant, second and third generation neighborhood told me, “I explain [to my students] that being “pure French” does not exist, it doesn’t exist if you trace our genealogy back far enough we all have quote unquote foreign origins since borders have fluctuated so much over the years and France has always been a crossroads where different populations meet.” He said he often asked students about their family background in class, claiming that it is

86 Although this teacher never once used an explicit racial term in her interview, this is what we both knew she meant - See further discussion on the role of race and amalgams in Chapter VI
87 “Alors on explique que ça n’existe pas ça oui mais ça n’existe pas être Français de souche si on remonte dans notre arbre généalogique on a tous des origines étrangères entre guillemets à un moment donné ne serait-ce que parce que les frontières ont beaucoup fluctuées beaucoup variées et que la France à toujours été un pays de transition de carrefour de rencontre de différents peuples...”
important “to show them [the students] that they themselves are actors in this history, that they are part of history and that history is always moving, always alive. And then there is the need to break stereotypes that ‘pure French’ don’t exist”\(^{88}\) (Interview History Teacher April 1, 2011).

When teachers and CNHI staff spoke of these issues, students’ voices were strikingly absent. Teachers spoke of their perceptions of what students must be feeling, and the Falaize study includes transcriptions of classroom observations where teachers ask students about their immigrant background, but no scholarly literature exists on this topic where researchers give voice to students outside of the classroom setting. Given the omnipresence of this debate among teachers in general as well as among those in the education community working specifically with the topics of immigration and the teaching of “sensitive subjects,” an analysis of this issue cannot be complete without the students’ voices.

**Taboo Internalized but Questioned by Students**

Since the teachers’ comments were heavily based on teacher perceptions of students’ hypothetical feelings of everything from pride to stigma, and national identity, I decided to ask every student I interviewed how they felt about being asked to talk about their own immigrant background (or lack thereof) in class.\(^{89}\) I

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\(^{88}\) “de leur dire leur montrer que eux-mêmes sont des acteurs de cette histoire qu’ils la continue que l’histoire est toujours mouvante, toujours vivante et que uh et puis encore une fois cette volonté de briser des clichés hein Français de souche ça n’existe pas...”

\(^{89}\) It is important to note here that while the vast majority of teachers I spoke with were of European descent (white) and rarely referenced their ethnic or immigrant background during the course of the
found that although the taboo surrounding teachers directly asking students to talk about these issues had clearly been internalized by all the students I spoke with, most students, regardless of their ethnic or immigrant background, voiced opinions that challenge the teachers’ concerns over breaching personal space, stigma, and imposed identity.

When asked if their teachers ask students in class to talk about students’ family history, some students said that only happens if the student volunteers the information. Others said they couldn’t think of any time this had been brought up in class. One student I interviewed expressed to what extent a teacher asking students about their family history is internalized as taboo by the students, stating that “only if the student himself talks about it, I think that teachers can’t, well in my opinion it’s not allowed... the teacher can’t force a student to talk about it, it’s something personal” (Interview Student TS May 5, 2011)

Some students also expressed an internalization of the relegation of immigration to the private sphere, as the following interview excerpt illustrates:

EH : Yes and does it ever happen, for uh talking about this topic that the teacher asks students to talk about their own family...

X : Ah to be honest it’s very rare, it’s very rare

EH : stories?

X : It’s very rare, really

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90 For a breakdown of student interviewee demographics see Appendix A
91 “au moins que l’élève lui même il en parle, je crois pas que les profs peuvent, mais a mon avis c’est interdit fin... le prof ne veut pas forcer l’élève a en parler, c’est du domaine personnel...”
EH : And if you were the teacher would you do it?

X : Well I don’t know I don’t know if the students would want to, if they wanted to why not but then some might well it could get into their private life so I don’t know if they’d like to expose that but why not if there are some who want to try why not

EH : Yeah and why do you think some would not want to

X : I don’t know some wouldn’t want to talk about it because they’re ashamed maybe because I don’t know, I don’t know

EH : Yeah

X : And it’s really personal this type of thing (Interview Student 1ES May 16, 2011 emphasis mine) 92

Despite expressions like this that parallel the teachers’ concerns over breaching the private sphere and stigmatizing students, when asked how students personally would feel or react if asked about their own immigrant background in class, students responded overwhelmingly that it would not bother them at all to be asked and that actually it might be a good thing. As one student put it:

like I was telling you I really like reflections and peoples’ stories so when you tell a story you feel more involved with what the person is saying because you know it’s true and that somebody lived that, it’s not a fairy tale [...] so I think I would teach with these reflections and

92 EH: Ouais et est-ce que ça arrive jamais pour uh en parlant de de ce sujet que les profs uh demandent aux élèves de raconter leur propre histoire uh

X : Ah franchement c’est très rare c’est très rare
EH : Familiale
X : C’est très rare quand même
EH : Et uh si t’étais prof est-ce que tu ferais ça
X : Après je sais pas je sais pas si les élèves ils voudraient bien, si ils voudraient pourquoi pas mais après certains peut être que ça rentre dans leur intimité donc je sais pas si ils aimerait bien exposer ça mais pourquoi pas si y en a qui voudraient essayer pourquoi pas
EH : Ouais et pourquoi est-ce que tu penses que y en a qui veulent pas
X : Je sais pas y en a qui voudraient pas en parler peut être qu’ils ont honte peut être je sais pas je sais pas
EH : Ouais
X : Après c’est très personnel ce genre de chose
first-hand accounts rather than just do a regular history lesson so yeah I think it would be better with peoples’ stories and like I told you I’m a little bit, I could talk about my mother for example or my uncles and aunts That’s how I would lead my class ... (Interview Student 1 ES April 29, 2011)\(^93\)

Other students spoke about how sharing their own experiences could help break down stereotypes about immigrants. When asked why she thinks teachers are hesitant to talk about immigration in class, one student mused that teachers probably worry that the discussion might degenerate into conversations about other things, that there is a lot of prejudice against immigrants. But later in the interview she said that by sharing her own story of immigration she could counter stereotypes that people have of immigrants always being a certain way, or coming to France in a certain way, indicating that her parents’ story does not fit the stereotypical image (Interview Student TS May 6, 2011).

When talking about the teaching of immigration history, and particularly the use of students’ own family background, students and teachers expressed similar goals and concerns, notably, the goal of breaking down commonly held negative stereotypes about immigrants, and the “sensitivity” of the topic at hand. However, teachers and students approached and understood these goals and concerns in very different ways. As the student mentioned above illustrates, students often stated

\(^93\) “ben Bah comme je l’ai dit j’aime bien les réflexions et les histoires des gens donc uh quand on raconte une histoire vécu en fait on se sent plus préoccupé par uh par ce que la personne raconte parce qu’on sait que c’est vrai et ça a été vécu c’est pas un conte de fée où on dit bon tout c’est bien passé non y a eut des aléas donc je pense que je ferai je parlerai plus de ces réflexions des témoignages des gens plutôt que de faire un cours en dix-neuf cent quelque chose voilà quoi donc je pense ce serait plus avec des témoignages des gens et uh bon comme je l’ai dit je suis un peu concernnée uh je pourrais parler de ma mère par exemple ou de mes oncles et tantes Donc voilà c’est comme ça que je pense que je ferai le cours”
that by sharing their own story, they could help to dispel stereotypes, whereas, teachers usually claimed that teaching students the “facts” through statistics and historical documents was the best way to do away with persistent stereotypes so prevalent in the media and on the streets.

Both teachers and students referenced the sensitivity of the topic of immigration in France. However, a significant gap between teacher and student understanding of stigma became apparent. Teachers (mostly white) worried that by singling out students to talk about their family background and thereby labeling them as “of immigrant descent,” they would be broaching very sensitive, personal issues that could stigmatize those students perceived to be of immigrant descent, labeling them as not really French, as unequal or different. Students (majority non-white) placed the sensitivity of the subject on French society as a whole and were less concerned about themselves or their fellow students being singled out or identified as something other than French. No student I spoke with associated talking about immigrant background in class with national identity. Some did, however, worry about inequality, although not in the way teachers did. Some students expressed concern that those students who did not have an immigrant background to share would not be able to participate in the discussion or activity, but they did not express any fear that this difference would stigmatize the students in question.

Thinking back to the “pedagogical reversal” that troubles teachers so much, I decided to ask all the students I interviewed, how they would teach a lesson on immigration history, “if you were the teacher.” While some struggled at first to
answer this question, seeming insecure, as if I had just asked them to take a difficult oral exam, most students regardless of their own ethnic or immigrant background, indicated that they would in some way incorporate students’ family histories and experiences in their lesson. As one student responded, “I think I’d ask students, well I’d try to ask students of different nationalities to talk a little about their experience, to talk about their adjustment to France, I think I’d talk a bit about all that and then after I guess you have to see there are lots of things” (Interview Student 1 ES May 16, 2011)\textsuperscript{94}

In the spring of 2011 a social science teacher at Lycée X did a unit on the sociology of immigration with her class. She took them to visit the CNHI and near the end of the semester she gave them an assignment to pretend to be a sociologist and to interview an immigrant. In keeping with her strong feelings that she should not ask students to address their own family history of immigration in the school space, she did not require the students to interview a family member or even somebody they know. Rather, she gave the students two options: they could interview a real immigrant or they could invent the interview if they were not able to interview an actual immigrant. Of the 32 students in the class, thirteen conducted real interviews and twenty conducted fake interviews. I was not able to interview all of the students and ask why they decided which approach to take, and knowing high school students, I would guess that the decision often came down to motivation

\textsuperscript{94} Je pense que je demanderais aux élèves ‘fin j’essaierais de demander aux élèves quand même de diverses nationalités de raconter un peu leur expérience de dire comment ça se déroule leur adaptation en France je pense parler un peu de tout ça et voilà après après faut voir un peu y a plein de choses quoi.”
and time. However, the teacher shared all of the students’ final papers with me, so I was able to read and analyze them.

From a pedagogical perspective I would argue that an assignment to invent an interview and interviewee has merit in a creative writing class (and some of the fake interviews were quite creative) but not so much in a social science class. The fake interviews were a bit all over the map in terms of their content, but several common strands emerged and merit discussion. First, the students’ invented immigration stories often reflected current media hype surrounding immigration. This assignment was due in May of 2011, just months after the Arab Spring erupted and immigrants and refugees moving from Tunisia and Libya via the Italian island of Lampedusa made front-page news almost daily in France. Several other fake interviews recounted extreme stories that mirrored the evening news and hyped media attention, including “interviews” with an Iraqi chased by the Israeli secret service, a founder of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and a Romanian living in a Parisian squat raided by the police.

The second common thread among the fake interviews was that they were full of inaccuracies. Many included incorrect statements regarding procedures for and the ease of obtaining visas and immigration papers and others contained unrealistic immigration stories, such as it only takes four days for an immigrant from South Africa crossing the Sahara on camelback to reach France. If the teachers’ main goal in addressing immigration in the classroom is to break down stereotypes, an assignment to invent an immigration story would only be useful if the stereotypes and inaccuracies that students write about are highlighted and exposed
as such in class. The real interviews on the other hand contained rich data and contradict the commonly held statements by teachers that students do not want to expose their own family immigrant background in the school setting. While the immigrants in the fake interviews were primarily from the countries most stereotypically associated with immigration to France (North and West Africa) the real interviews revealed family histories from Sri Lanka, India and Vietnam in addition to Algeria, Morocco, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Spain and Portugal. Almost all of the real interviews were conducted with family members, mostly grandparents. One included several old family photos of her grandfather’s family in Morocco. Clearly these students did not feel ashamed of their family’s immigrant history, nor did they choose to closet that history in the private sphere.

The Private vs. Public Sphere Argument

As discussed in the sections above, throughout my fieldwork, when asked if they ever draw on the personal experiences of students and their families, teachers’ answers were most often a strong “no,” immediately qualified by an explanation that it is not the teacher’s role or place to probe the personal life of the students, but of course if the students were to volunteer the information themselves, then the teacher would be happy to incorporate that into the lesson. Teachers often frame the issue in terms of the role of the teacher and express the belief that to ask a student about his or her family’s immigrant story would be to intrude into the student’s private life. Many teachers I spoke with likened asking students to talk about their immigrant background to other private matters considered
inappropriate for a teacher to probe or discuss in the classroom setting, such as the marital status or salary of the students’ parents. As one CNHI staff member/teacher put it when I pushed her to explain why it would be bad to ask students to talk about immigrant background:

...but you can’t tell students, it would be lying to them, that we’re going to study immigration history and we’re doing that by looking at your personal history, it’s just not the way [...] when you study salaries etc. you don’t ask students to bring in their parents’ pay check, I mean really, you have to distinguish between things that are private and the content of a lesson. You just can’t mix the two!

(Interview CNHI staff April 8, 2011)\(^{95}\)

The wall erected between public and private spheres in France is generally considered to be part of the national mentality. Journalists refrain from writing about the personal lives of politicians, and one rarely shares salary figures even with close friends. In recent years, scholars such as Joel Ramon (2006) have reexamined this private/public divide, arguing that a new “fundamentalist republican” position has developed that envisions an “absolute division between private and public” and that views the school as a place that should be devoted entirely to “reason and the universal” (cited in Guénif-Souilamas ed. 2006 p. 75). Ramon associates this republican fundamentalism with what he refers to as “a new combat laïcité.” In relation to the French republican school, laïcité is most often associated with the law banning “ostentatious” signs of religious belonging (e.g. the Islamic headscarf) in the public school classroom. However, the notion of laïcité in France expands well

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\(^{95}\) “...mais on peut pas dire aux élèves ce serait leur mentir on va travailler sur l’histoire de l’immigration et puis on passe par votre histoire personnelle c’est, c’est pas le cas donc [...] quand on travaille sur les revenus etc. on demande pas aux élèves d’apporter le bulletin de salaire de leurs parents quand même donc il faut distinguer ce qui relève du privé et de, du, du contenu du cours faut pas mélanger les deux...”
beyond the scope of religion. As Roy (2007) puts it, French laïcité is not just the political separation of church and state, but also exists as an ideology or philosophy that “implies a conception of values, of society, of the nation, and of the republic” (p. 16). Roy further argues that this philosophy “has imbued the teaching profession and school textbooks since Jules Ferry and has become the consensus view of the Left” (p. 16). In one interview when I asked the teacher whether or not students in her class ever talk about their own immigrant background, the response was a quick, firm “no” followed by an assertion that she never asks them about this because she adheres to the “principles of laïcité” (Interview Social Science Teacher March 2011). This statement is significant on two counts. First, it reflects an assumed, immediate association between immigrants and religion, and secondly it is a prime example of republican rhetoric not aligning with daily practice in the classroom. This same teacher spent a great deal of time with her class on the topic of immigration and often proudly shared student work with me where students had interviewed a parent about their experience immigrating to France. This type of contradiction between teachers’ statements and their own practices or the realities in their classrooms highlights how two clear-cut sides do not define this debate. Almost every teacher I spoke with expressed or identified with more than one side of the issue, sometimes acknowledging, sometimes unaware of their contradictory positions. It was rare that a teacher did not contradict her or himself on this matter. As the teacher cited above continued to reflect on the issue, she said:

I understand that there is a debate because I have the debate in my own head. Sometimes I would like to, it’s easy to [ask students to talk about their family history in regards to immigration] but at the same time I really believe in the principles of laïcité, well I adhere to this
principle, I must be one of the dinosaurs…” (Interview Social Science Teacher March 8, 2011)\textsuperscript{96}.

This teacher laughs about perhaps being one of the few remaining teachers (a dinosaur) who adheres to the principle of laïcité, but this could not be further from reality. Almost all the teachers in my study clearly stated that family immigration history belongs to the private sphere in France – to be equated with divorce and family finances. However, teachers’ contradictory behavior and hesitations in relation to the topic indicate that the taboo surrounding a discussion of students’ immigrant backgrounds in the classroom does not fully stem from the public/private divide. Not once did I hear teachers debating the merits of asking students to discuss their parents’ income as a teaching tool in an economics lesson. Nor did teachers waiver over whether or not to have students interview their parents about their divorce and report back to the class.

Socio-economic status and parental marital status are not analogous to immigrant background. Marital (and extra-marital) affairs are not \textit{relegated} to the private sphere in France, but rather they are \textit{protected} from public scrutiny by society tacitly allowing them to remain in the private sphere, as the lack of media attention paid to the sexual misconduct of so many French politicians in the pre-Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK) scandal era demonstrates. When the DSK affair first

\textsuperscript{96} “Je comprends qu’il y a débat parce que moi même j’ai un débat dans ma tête là dessus (sourire) ... C’est à dire que effectivement il y a des fois où j’aimerai bien uh c’est facile de faire ça uh en même temps uh vraiment je crois aux principes de laïcité ’fin j’adhère à ce principe je dois faire partie un peu des dinosaures mais uh”
broke in May 2011, the *New York Times* interviewed a French journalist in New York on the issue:

‘All journalists knew he had a special behavior with women,’ said Marion Van Renterghem, a reporter for *Le Monde*. ‘I was not so much surprised because I knew that he had this vice, but it was flabbergasting because why did all we journalists, considering what we knew about him — why did we never write a line about this?’

She added: ‘There is this very strong tradition in France that you don’t have here, in Anglo-Saxon countries, is not to speak about private life. This is very, very sacred, so we are all embarrassed to talk about and to write about these things.’

It is only when something is perceived to be negative, in someway taboo, however that it is labeled “private” and considered off limits in the public sphere, as President Sarkozy’s very proud and public May 2011 announcement of the very private news that his wife was pregnant demonstrates. Journalists were not the least bit embarrassed to write about this private matter. To the contrary, French society has grouped immigrant and ethnic origin with other taboo aspects of “private” life, as if an immigrant past is necessarily a trait to be hidden from public scrutiny and downplayed in the public sphere at all times. Teachers see it as their professional role to protect students assumed to have a taboo immigration background from public classroom scrutiny, just as journalists take it upon themselves to protect errant politicians from public media scrutiny.

To further examine this comparison of immigrant background with family income, the latter arguably standing as a proxy for social class, it is important to

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note that while social class divides French society in ways comparable to and often intertwined with immigration (and by extension race, ethnicity and religion), social class is a relatively acceptable difference to flaunt within French society, as numerous working-class public figures such as José Bové, and endless public demonstrations by labor unions demonstrate. In contrast, non-European heritage (race and ethnicity) and non-Christian religious belonging are consciously and unconsciously understood by large segments of the French population to be threats to national “secular” identity and culture, taboo markers of difference to be downplayed or hidden at all times. The contradictions surrounding this issue for teachers highlight the impossible bind in French society today that results from attempts to validate difference within an increasingly diverse population, all while continuing to relegate immigrant background (or stigmatized difference) entirely to the private sphere of the home, and as a consequence, out of the publicly projected national identity.

Stigma, Imposed Identity and Symbolic Violence in the Classroom

Many teachers perceive the act of asking students to talk about their own immigrant background in class as imposing a non-French identity on them or stigmatizing them as non-French; in other words, an act of what Bourdieu (1970) refers to as “symbolic violence.” Bourdieu points to the unequal power relations involved in any act of teaching or pedagogy, arguing that, “All pedagogic action (PA) is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (p. 5 emphasis in original). In the case of teachers refraining
from asking students about their background, symbolic violence functions in the inverse where the unsaid is equally, if not more powerfully, internalized as a stigma resulting in the non-recognition or validation of the student’s identity.

Goffman (1963) posits that, “the area of stigma management, then, might be seen as something that pertains mainly to public life...” (p. 51). By maintaining the classroom as a public sphere where intimate sharing is seen as taboo, teachers (and many students) unwittingly further existing societal taboos that students such as visible minorities must constantly manage in the classroom. Yoshino (2006) takes Goffman’s argument about stigma management a step further and argues that “covering” or downplaying one’s differences in order to assimilate better into the mainstream of society is a “hidden assault on our civil rights” (p xi), and that the perceived need to assimilate is caused by underlying racism, homophobia, sexism or other fears and hatreds held, sometimes unconsciously, by majority and minority members of society.

Taking the French ban on religious symbols in the public space of the school, and specifically the Muslim headscarf as an example, for Yoshino, the threat to French Muslim girls’ civil rights does not stem from the French State’s legal ban of the headscarf in school, but rather from the widespread beliefs (rooted in racism, Islamophobia and sexism) that girls should not wear a headscarf. The school, as a public space becomes the vehicle for imposing dominant societal beliefs or as Yoshino would argue, assimilating students to a certain norm. Likewise, the widespread belief rooted in persistent racist colonial mentalities that non-white immigrants are not truly a part of the French nation, not part of the French
collective national identity, leads teachers paradoxically to believe that they should not ask students to highlight their different backgrounds within the public space of the classroom out of fear that this will stigmatize the student as non-French. By excluding this type of classroom discussion, this attitude in turn perpetuates a very narrow conception of French identity that increasingly excludes large segments of the population. One teacher I interviewed nicely articulated how students cover their immigrant identity in the classroom:

When you are of immigrant origin, in France it is understood that it’s better to hide this and to live with it in the private sphere, not to show it off in daylight in the public sphere, so it’s normal that students no matter what languages they speak at home, they have trouble participating orally and they have trouble expressing their feelings about these languages uh they have trouble seeing them as a benefit (Interview Foreign Language Teacher, September 30, 2010).98

Yoshino (2006) argues that forced assimilation is “the symbolic heartland of inequality – what reassures one group of its superiority to another” and forcing a minority group to cover their differences is another way of pushing them “into second-class citizenship” (p. 107). This view sheds much needed light on the tensions that arise from the French universalistic approach to equality in a pluralistic society. Lewis (2003) in her study of race in schools further suggests that while the color-blind ideology is often couched in terms of equality and universality, where it “understood all to be equal members of the human race” (p. 32), in fact the ideology “stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial inequality

98 “quand on vient de l’immigration on a plutôt tendance en France à faire comprendre qu’il vaut mieux cacher ça vivre avec dans la sphère privée mais pas l’étaler uh au grand jour dans sur la sphère publique donc c’est normal quand on a un élève quelles sont les langues que tu parles à la maison uh il est du mal à participer à l’oral il est du mal à dire ses sentiments sur ces langues là uh et il a du mal à voir ça comme une richesse.”
in daily life through accusations such as ‘playing the race card’ or ‘identity politics’ (p. 33). In French schools and society, just as the dominance of Christianity hides behind the ideology of secularism, the dominance of “white” citizens or those perceived to be “white” is cloaked by the universalistic ideology of a color-blind citizenship and citizenry.

In this chapter I have argued that the omnipresence of the family immigration history debate within the education community, and the taboo surrounding the issue, parallels the societal discourse and sentiment surrounding immigration, national identity and laïcité and points to deeper tensions within French society surrounding notions of identity and difference. While on the surface, teachers primarily present the issue in terms of pedagogy, their professional role, and private versus public space, further probing elicits teachers’ deeper concerns over stigmatizing students perceived to be of immigrant descent. Furthermore, strong contradictions exist between what many teachers and CNHI staff espouse as correct classroom etiquette in this matter and the reality of their daily discourse and practices.
CHAPTER VI
RACE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: TERMINOLOGY, AMALGAMS AND WHITENESS IN FRENCH SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY

“[A] monochromatic view of “national identity” leads some to doubt the nationality of their compatriots, or to fear immigration as destroying an identity they want to remain immutable.”

- Thuram, Durpaire, Diallo, Cheb Sun and Blanchard in their Appeal for a Multicultural and Postracial Republic, 2010

Introduction

Before delving into a discussion of race in France, it is important to re-emphasize that neither the category nor the term “race” are typically used in French social scientific research, a reflection in and of itself of deeply held beliefs in French society (Bleich 2000). I use the category of race in my study with the awareness that as an American researcher whose understanding of race is shaped by the American social context of both my upbringing and academic training, it was impossible for me to adopt color-blind vision in my observations and analysis. As I self-consciously tried to categorize the demographics of the students I observed in

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99 Author translation of: “une vision monochrome de l’identité national conduit certains a remettre en doute la nationalité de leurs compatriotes, ou a appréhender l’immigration comme un facteur de destruction d’une identité que certains voutraient immuable” The original text does not have page numbers. The work can also be accessed online at http://www.achac.com/file_dynamic/Appel_pour_une_republique_multiculturelle_et_postraciale.pdf (Accessed 11/30/2013).
schools and classrooms I was keenly aware that I could not consistently do so. There were often a large number of students who I could not place into clearly delineated racial categories. In my field notes I would label them as “Mediterranean” or “Mixed” with a question mark since many of the students of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, North African, Middle Eastern, and mixed heritage were indistinguishable in terms of “race” to my eye. I understand race to be a socially constructed category that varies with time and place as it is the product of diverse historical, social and political contexts. Like Amanda Lewis (2003) I understand that despite the fluidity and social nature of race, racial categories “are potent social categories around which people organize their identities and behavior and that influence people’s opportunities and outcomes” (p. 6) in multiracial societies such as France and are, therefore, worthy of study.

At the outset of my research I broadly defined cultural diversity as broken down into the components of race, language, religion and social class. However, through my investigations of immigration and French national identity construction, I found that race holds a unique position in this landscape of difference markers in French society. In this chapter I focus on the role of race in white French teachers’ perceptions of and interactions with students of color to examine teachers’ understandings and constructions of national identity. I choose to focus on race rather than other important aspects of culture and identity, such as religion, language or social class, for two primary and interconnected reasons.

First, race is the only aspect of cultural and national identity to which French society publicly claims to be completely blind. Public efforts have been directed to
level the playing field or address concerns surrounding inequities for women, homosexuals, the poor, artists and religious minorities, all of whom are officially recognized as groups within French society, but no such initiatives are allowed to exist on the basis of race in France. Second, in French public school space, which is my primary unit of analysis, language is controlled and censored, headscarves and yarmulkes removed, and free lunches provided to poor students, but skin color and other “physical traits,” a term I often heard used as a proxy for race in France, are not radically altered to mitigate difference and assimilate to dominant French cultural norms.\textsuperscript{100} Race, like language, religion and social class, plays a powerful role in shaping institutional structures and the concept of national identity that those structures, such as schools, perpetuate within French society. However, unlike the other aforementioned components of identity, the very existence of race is officially denied. I argue that this denial through color-blind, republican ideology puts state and social actors, such as teachers and students in a contradictory bind where they are expected to internalize and promote the republican ideals of a color-blind society, all while operating within a highly racialized reality. I contend that this tension only furthers teachers’ and students’ avoidance of controversial issues in the classroom and reinforces existing conflations of immigrants and racial minorities as well as the common sense understanding of whiteness as a neutral non-entity.

\textsuperscript{100} Hairstyle is an exception, as racial minorities often straighten curly hair, dye darker hair, etc. to better assimilate to white racial norms. See Yoshino (2006) for a discussion of covering racial identity through hairstyle. To the best of my knowledge there is no French law regulating students’ hairstyles in schools.
The Unique Place of Race

Before turning to the teachers in my study and the unique relationship between race and national identity, it is instructive to briefly examine the relationships between national identity and social class, language, and religion in order to place race within the larger context of cultural diversity within French schools and society. Sitting in the back of high school classrooms I often began my observations with a visual scan and survey of the students in the room, noting my perception of the racial breakdown as well as the gender breakdown of students in the classroom. There is no doubt that within the classes I observed, religious, linguistic and social class differences existed as well as racial ones. However these differences were not readily apparent to me from classroom observation alone, nor were they typically revealed throughout the duration of the class. The following section explores how and why these three markers of identity and difference (social class, language and religion) are downplayed or “covered” in the school setting and in French society at large.

Social Class and National Identity

There are most certainly visual markers (independent of race) of social class in French society. I spent a lot of time at New York University’s Paris center on rue Passy in the wealthy 16th arrondissement, and often found myself waiting in line at the boulangerie with groups of teenagers from nearby schools during lunch time or after school. I soon came to recognize a distinctive look, particularly among the boys, of these children of Paris’ wealthy elite. A certain wind-swept, yet stylized,
haircut, button-down shirt, jeans and loafers. None of the boys in my two school
sites (or the majority of schools I visited) dressed like this. I purposely chose
schools that drew students from a relatively small range of socio-economic
backgrounds where most students lived in nearby lower-middle to middle class
communities. Short hair, athletic pants and sneakers were the common uniform for
boys in these schools regardless of their ethnic background or race. In one SES class
I observed, the teacher gave a lesson on the “bourgeoisie” in France, asking students
what boys’ names are most common among the bourgeois class in France. The
students didn’t know the answer and joked that it was “Mamadou.” The teacher
laughing along, indicated that Mamadou is probably one of the most common names
in the heavily immigrant northern Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, but that the
bourgeois like to name their sons Louis and Henri after French royalty. Throughout
this lesson, the teacher clearly identified the bourgeois as an “other” both to herself
and to her students, but nonetheless, an “other” within the confines of French
society.

There is no doubt that social class divides French society, erects structural
barriers and determines access to, and quality of, education. This has been the case
historically, as secondary education and later certain academic tracks within
secondary education have been and remain to a large extent reserved for the elite,
allowing this social class to maintain their hegemony and the existing social
hierarchy (Prost 1968). As Bourdieu and Passeron famously argue in their seminal
1964 work, Les héritiers, those students who achieve the highest success in school
are those who have inherited a certain cultural capital, which, ironically, they learn
at home and which cannot be acquired in the classroom. Bourdieu and Passeron further argue that, “social origin is, of all the factors, the only one that extends its influence to all areas and to all levels of a student’s schooling experience” (p. 23). In historically racialized societies such as France, where a colonial past engrained a racial hierarchy into notions of self and the other, it is difficult to disentangle race from social origin. This is where an examination of national identity is instructive.

In her comparative study of working class men in France and the United States, Lamont (2000) examines identity construction among white French and North African immigrant men, with a particular eye to the role of race and class. Lamont argues that because French republicanism places a strong emphasis on nationality, white workers cling to their French nationality as one of their only high status characteristics, using it to construct boundaries between “us” and “them” since a lack of French nationality grants a lower status to immigrants. I argue that when it comes to national identity, all white social classes in France are included in the “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson 1991) while those not perceived to be white are excluded to varying degrees. From the revolutionary peasants to the contemporary factory worker on strike, the image of the white working class is very much engrained in the collective image of France both at home and abroad. During the 2009-2010 national identity debate, not once did I hear or read an official or layperson question whether the poor, the middle class, or the bourgeoisie were compatible with French identity as was questioned time and time again in regards to Muslims. In France, disparity in socio-economic status is fully assumed by the
government and the public as a societal ill that is addressed and combated by and for the nation.

**Language and National Identity**

Like social origin, in the school classes I observed, the presence of linguistic diversity was minimal; although many students may speak additional languages at home, students were almost all native French speakers and French was the sole language in the school setting. Even outside the classroom, as I wandered the halls, waited in the cafeteria lunch line and rode the bus packed with students after school, I rarely heard students speaking to each other in anything but French. Language has long been addressed explicitly in debates over French national identity. Since 1635 the Académie française has carefully defined which words can be considered “French” and which “foreign” words should not be used. Since the Third Republic, national unity in France was in great part forged through the French language with schools acting as a primary vehicle for the assimilation of “peasants into Frenchmen” (Weber 1974). Through school and other local records, Weber shows that most of the French population was illiterate in the late 19th century and a significant percentage of the population did not speak French as a “mother tongue,” but rather spoke local languages. It was then slowly through legislation (Guizot 1830s, Ferry 1880s) that teachers took on a higher status and missionary role to teach the French language and civilization of the State. The civilizing mission of French teachers and particularly the use of the French language in this endeavor persists today. Language policy and language education policy in contemporary
France continues to eschew perceived “foreign” linguistic influences and adaptations, to push heritage language learning outside the national confines of the public school,\textsuperscript{101} and to promote a standard use of the French language as a crucial component of national identity.

\textbf{Religion and National Identity}

Finally, religion (or lack thereof) and the French state have an equally long and extremely bloody history. Like the French language, over the past century, laïcité has become the official position of the secular French State, and acceptance of laïcité is widely considered a prerequisite for full national belonging. Religious differences are almost impossible to gauge through classroom observation alone. Since the French public schools ban students from donning “ostentatious signs” of religious belonging, there are few visual cues for religious affiliation or belief. During my ten months of fieldwork in French high schools, I only twice saw a student slip her headscarf off just before entering the school grounds. On one rare occasion in a class where only three students showed up due to a scheduling mishap, the discussion broke from the teacher’s lesson and two students, one Muslim and one Christian, entered into a heated discussion on their own religious beliefs. After the class the teacher apologized to me and emphasized that this was

\textsuperscript{101} Beginning in the 1970s France signed bilateral agreements with several major sending countries of immigrants to France to form after school classes to teach immigrant children about their language and culture of origin. For example, agreements were signed with Tunisia (1974), Morocco (1975) and Algeria (1981). This program, \textit{Education de Langue et Culture d’Origine} (ELCO) offered classes taught by teachers recruited by and paid by the partner country and sent to France to teach for four to five years. These classes are reserved only for those students from or with parents originally from the partner country, are set up by function of parental demand, and can either be held during or outside of regular school hours (Masthoff 1998; Caubet 2001; Akinci and De Ruiter 2004).
not a regular class I had observed. I sensed he was embarrassed by what I had witnessed. I thought it was one of the most interesting history classes I had observed to date at the school, and one of the few where I heard students passionately engaged in debate and critical thinking, as opposed to passively reciting what they think the teacher wants to hear.

Religion is a taboo topic for the public school in France, and like family immigrant background, it is not a topic on which teachers routinely solicit student input or experience in the classroom. Like other differences in French society, any non-Catholic or non-secular belonging is covered, downplayed and silenced. While today France officially welcomes members of all religious faiths that adhere to France’s state sanctioned secularism, it is not uncommon for politicians and other public figures to openly question the place of Islam and practicing Muslims within France today in a manner not unlike anti-Semitic attacks in France’s not-so-distant political past (Benbassa 2004).

There are very vocal segments of the population that believe France has always been and should remain an officially Christian nation. I attended two public debates in Paris that were part of the controversial national identity debate launched by President Sarkozy in 2009. One was held at the exclusive Cercle Foche club and the other at the prestigious Louis Le Grand High School in the Latin Quarter. At both events members of the audience expressed views that French national identity should exclude non-Christians and/or immigrants. At one of the events, a woman from the audience introduced herself as a member of the Mouvement national républicain (MNR), an extreme right political party with ties to
the National Front. To a packed auditorium full of Parisians from all walks of life and Louis Le Grand high school students, she chastised earlier speakers (mostly Ministry of Education officials who spoke of the importance of civic education and learning the French language) for implying that the French nation began with the Republic, and overlooking the true birth of the nation with the baptism of Clovis in the year 496.102 (Field notes, Lycée Louis le Grand, January 12, 2010). This woman was espousing beliefs commonly held by the far right in France. The MNR’s web site includes a page devoted to national identity, which states: “The submersion of France by people coming from other civilizations and the rise in power of Islam in our country is making us lose our identity and will be fatal to us.”103

From the extreme right to the intelligentsia, and the mainstream media, social class, language and religion are all explicitly discussed and publicly debated in association with national identity. This is not the case when in comes to “race” in France.

Race and National Identity

While exploring potential school sites during my initial pilot study, I wanted to gauge the ethno-racial diversity of student population in various schools and, because French schools and the French government do not collect or maintain any

102 Clovis was a 5th-century king who united various Frankish tribes and was the first Christian king to rule Gaul. After many previous refusals to abandon his pagan beliefs, he converted to Catholicism and was baptized on Christmas Day, 496.
records or statistics on the racial breakdown of the students, I had to get creative.

Since I was unable to personally visit every school in Paris, I visited the Facebook pages of schools I was considering so I could view student photos. I found that many school pages actually posted official class photos. I soon discovered, however, that the Facebook method was not always necessary. While visiting a potential school site in Paris I asked a teacher about the “diversity” of the student body.

Keenly aware that I should not use racial terms, I did not specify racial diversity, but rather employed one of the standard French proxies for racial diversity. I said I was looking for a school with a mix of students of immigrant descent and students not of immigrant descent. The teacher responded that her school was indeed very diverse and promptly produced the “nominoscope” or class pictures of every class section for me to browse the names and photos of the students so I could see for myself. Clearly this teacher thought I would be able to determine the diversity of the student population in terms of immigrant background through a scan of student photos, essentially providing me with a visual census of the student body. Inherent in this act was the assumption on the part of the teacher that “diversity” meant diversity based on physical appearance, since one could hardly gauge linguistic or religious diversity by looking at headshots of students taken at a secular public school.

Racism without “Race”: Taboo Terminology

During a history lesson on colonialism, the teacher explained how by the end of the 19th century, European societies began to question and debate the ethics of
their colonial empires, and that the idea of a “superior race” was used by some Europeans to justify the colonial enterprise. She then qualified this statement by explaining that “at the time the concept of race existed, but now you must absolutely not use this concept; otherwise you are racist” (Classroom Observation November 16, 2010).

One of the greatest paradoxes of color-blind French republicanism is the insistence that the term “race” is in and of itself racist and should not be used (Bleich 2000). While there is validity to the Foucauldian claim that discourse produces knowledge (Foucault 1975) and that the terminology we use is simultaneously reflective of how we view the world and powerful in its ability to shape our views of ourselves and of others, there is also power in the unsaid, in the rendering a word taboo. Just as family immigrant background has been relegated to the private sphere, “race” and racial terminology have become taboo in post-World War II France and are now appropriated only by a few far-right extremists and rogue academics (often those such as Francois Durpaire who have studied or worked in Anglophone countries) in the public sphere. During a lecture for teachers as part of a workshop at the CNHI, French scholar Christophe Bertossi referenced this Anglo-French divide when it comes to using racial terminology. When describing his recent research on two subsets of citizens within the French Military, Bertossi paused and then said that one group was made up of “when I give this talk in English it’s easy, I say the white soldiers.” The other group was made up of descendents of post-colonial immigrants. (Field Notes February 8, 2011) In the social-scientific community, “[t]o work on racism implies envisaging the concept of
'race', which encounters the French intellectual hostility with regard to reifying categories (Liauzu, 1999; Calvès, 2002 cited in Amiraux and Simon 2006 p. 203).

It is one thing if a word and its pejorative meaning is erased from the general vocabulary, but in the case of “race” in France, the word is being censored from public, scholarly and, to a lesser extent, private discourse, while the concept of race and racial difference is still strong. Throughout my interviews, teachers used a myriad of proxies when describing what we both understood to be essentially racial and ethnic descriptions of students. These included terms and phrases ranging from “diverse,” “of various geographic origin,” “a social and cultural mix” and “a little color in the class” to “Gaulois” a term that, if taken literally, would exclude all those who could not trace their heritage back to the Bronze Age Celtic inhabitants of modern-day France. In the quasi-formal setting of the recorded interview, teachers self-censored, clearly sticking to politically correct non-racial proxy terms such as the first few cited above. However, in informal conversations and observations, white teachers freely used racial terminology with each other and with me.

Color-blindness is not unique to France. In her ethnographic study of a white, suburban school in the United States, Amanda Lewis (2004) found the “simultaneous existence of color-blind discourse as the explicit racial logic/talk side by side with pervasive color-consciousness in both talk and action” (p. 638). I found the same to be true in French schools and society at large. In classrooms teachers refrained from using racial terminology, but in the teachers’ lounge and over lunch teachers frequently referred to students (and occasionally to fellow teachers when referring to a non-white teacher who was not within earshot at the time) using
racial terms. In racialized societies such as the United States and France that are “based on ideals of equity but are rife with vast inequality, ideology is essential for people to live with the pervasive contradictions” (Lewis 2004 p. 632). Keaton (2006) expands on this point within the French context, arguing that with the contradiction between stated national ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity and citizens’ lived experiences of racial discrimination, “discrimination, as a social problem, is frequently subsumed in issues of social inequality and immigration, or conflated with xenophobia. In other words, people of color are supposedly discriminated against because they are ‘immigrants’ or feared foreigners, not necessarily because they are African or Asian or ‘black’” (De Rudder, Poiret, and Vourc’h 2000). This shifting of discrimination from an issue of race or ethnicity to an issue of immigration or foreignness, only reifies the amalgams between French and white and foreign and non-white, and allows the existing structural racism to continue through claims that discrimination is not based on “race.” These claims are only strengthened by the societal taboo placed on the use of racial terminology.

One example of the insistence that the very use of racial terminology is in itself racist occurred very publicly in February of 2011. Eric Zemmour, a very controversial, conservative commentator and journalist was found guilty of provoking racial discrimination, in part based on his response during a television appearance to a question about racial profiling104 in identity checks made by police. Zemmour exclaimed: “Why are people stopped 17 times? Why? Because most drug traffickers are black and Arab, that’s just how it is.” The public prosecutor

104 In French the term for racial profiling “contrôle au faciès” does not use racial terminology, but rather translates literally as “based on appearance”
(Procureur de la République) who requested Zemmour’s hearing on this charge of provoking racial discrimination is quoted in the press as saying, in regards to the remark about drug traffickers that, unfortunately, Zemmour resorted to employing the “old stereotype that associates immigration with delinquency.”

The prosecutor’s remark illustrates just how deeply entrenched the view of Arabs and Blacks as “immigrants,” in other words people outside of French national identity, remains in French society. Zemmour’s remark did not explicitly reference immigrants, and he was not charged with provoking discrimination against immigrants. He used terminology (Arabs and Blacks) perceived to be race-based and therefore taboo and this is why he was charged with provoking racial discrimination. I would guess that if he (or anybody else) had said that many drug traffickers are immigrants or that they live in certain neighborhoods in the banlieue, i.e., had he used any other common proxy term for non-white minorities, nobody would have batted an eyelash, let alone requested a judicial hearing.

The president of the anti-racist organization, SOS Racisme, one of the groups leading the charge to bring Zemmour to trial, also equates racial discourse with racism. Interviewed in a Le Monde article on the Zemmour affair, Dominique Sopo lamented that Zemmour sees reality through “racialized glasses”. Zemmour’s remarks were racist, but it was not his racism, but rather the unapologetic use of racial terminology that caught the attention of the public and caused such outrage.

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Bleich (2000) in his study of color-blind policy and the antiracist movement in France, argues that in large part due to the fallout from Vichy and the rise of the National Front in the early 1980s, French policy makers and academics alike have rejected the categorization of minorities, particularly racial minorities, and rather focused on fighting hate speech and “intentional racism” (p. 66). The Zemmour affair is a prime example of this antiracism trend. Bleich also posits that this focus on racist speech or incitement of racism often results in the public turning a blind eye to issues of actual discrimination and indirect racism. I argue that this extreme political correctness surrounding racial terminology perpetuates the notion that non-whites are foreigners and only white people are truly French. Because people are hesitant to describe non-whites in racial terms, an amalgam between immigrants or foreigners and racial minorities has developed as the population resorts to using terms of nationality to define difference, thereby excluding non-whites from the already narrow conception of Frenchness.

A Powerful Amalgam: Immigrants and Racial Minorities

Hargreaves (2007) traces the prevalent and pernicious amalgam between immigrants and ethno-racial minorities in great part to the post-World War II labor market and resulting migratory flows where most unskilled workers, referred to in popular discourse as “travailleurs immigrés,” hailed from non-European countries. As a result Hargreaves points out, “immigrants as a whole had come to be seen essentially as people of color” (p. 25). Amalgams such as the one between "Arabs and Blacks" and "immigrants" referenced above, remain prevalent in the media and
public discourse. The power of this amalgam and the associated terminology is starker when compared to the Anglo-American context.

In March of 2011, glancing at the Yahoo.fr news headlines, I came across one that read “une série télé sans immigrés,” or a television show without immigrants. Intrigued, I followed the link only to find that this was about controversial remarks made by Brian True-May, the director of a long-running British TV show, Midsomer Murders. True-May was suspended from his post and later resigned from the show after stating that he did not put “ethnic minorities” on the show because, “it wouldn’t be a [traditional] English village with them.” I dug further in the British press, which was filled with articles bashing True-May over this “race row” and his racist refusal to include “blacks and Asians” on the show. As this incident illustrates, the British, like the French and other European nations, are also struggling to accept racial and ethnic minorities as part of their “traditional” as well as contemporary conceptions of national identity. However, the fact that the British speak of “minorities,” in other words British citizens with some marking of difference, allows some space for people labeled as minorities to be considered part, albeit often a marginalized part, of contemporary British identity.

In France these same people are referred to as “immigrants” as if the French grandson of an Algerian immigrant (and former colonial subject) is less French than


Marie Curie or Nicolas Sarkozy. I found this racial amalgam, so prevalent in the media, to be equally present among the teachers in my study. In most of my interviews, when talking about their experiences teaching in schools in the banlieues, most teachers described the students there as being "issues de l’immigration" even when further probing revealed that the students in question were most likely second, third, or fourth generation French. The following interview excerpt illustrates how one teacher, when asked to describe the immigrant background of her students, reluctantly did so in quasi-racial terms, using proxies in lieu of explicit racial terminology but still clearly equating non-white with immigrant background:

EH: And are most of the students in these schools, the middle schools where you taught before, were they immigrants themselves or the second generation, or both?

X: It’s never clear. We don’t have any information on that, but obviously they are 80% children of immigrants and not immigrants themselves. [...] 

EH: And here at this school?

X: It’s difficult to say, it’s just that for me it’s visual, there is less color actually it’s a visual sort of thing and there’s less color in my class. That’s it. Beyond that, if they are of immigrant origin, probably not so much because there is less color, that’s it.  

109 Marie Curie was a Polish immigrant to France, born Marie Skłodowska. President Sarkozy’s father was a Hungarian immigrant.  

110 Original quote:  
EH: Et est-ce que la plupart des élèves dans ces établissements, les collèges où vous étiez avant est ce qu’ils étaient immigrés eux-mêmes ou deuxième génération, enfin c’est mélangé…

X: C’est jamais clair. On n’a pas d’information là-dessus mais évidemment c’est des enfants à 80% enfants d’immigrés et pas immigrés eux-mêmes […]

EH : Et ici c’est beaucoup moins?
This teacher, and so many others I spoke with, seemed to overlook immigrants of white or European origin when speaking to me about the students in their classes. Often when describing the non-white students in their classes, white teachers vacillated between using racial and racial-proxy terminology, intermixing racial or color-conscious terms such as “noir,” ethnic terms such as “maghrébin” and nationality terms such as “immigrants.” When I asked one teacher to explain what she meant by “a very mixed class” she replied:

Well for example in one class with about 30, 35 students there will be, I don’t know, 5 or 6 Magrebins uh 5 or 6 Africans a few Asians un something like un one or two Armenians then something like that and maybe some Antilleans but well I’d say about half of the class is “white” (in quotes) and the other half immigrants, well not actually immigrants but descendants of immigrants or those that come from the Antilles (Interview History Teacher April 27, 2011).111

Descriptions like these often resulted in teachers catching themselves giving contradictory responses to my questions. When asked to compare the students in her previous school with the students in her current school, the first teacher quoted above immediately responded that they are completely different, exclaiming, “here it’s not at all the same population.” She then went on, thinking out loud, comparing the two groups of students, saying the two groups are equally unmotivated when it

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X : C’est difficile à dire, c’est juste pour moi c’est visuel c’est moins coloré en fait ça se traduit par quelque chose de visuel y a moins de couleurs dans ma classe. Voilà. Après est-ce qu’ils sont d’origine immigrée probablement moins puisque y a moins de couleur, voilà.

111 “dans une classe de 30, 35 élèves, il doit y avoir 5-6 petits magrebins, 5-6 africains, quelques asiatiques, qch comme ça quoi, deux armeniens fin… peut-être des antillais. La moitié des blancs et l’autre moitié des immigrés, fin pas d’immigrés, descendants d’immigrés, ou des gens qui viennent des Antilles”
comes to their studies, that their writing ability differs, but that can be explained by the fact that one school was a middle school and the other a high school. Finally, she paused and said:

there is something that struck me that here there are fewer students of immigrant origin and so I only have one or two black people (person of black color) in each of my classes and that for me makes a big difference, the fact of no longer having as much cultural diversity (pause) no not cultural, but diversity” (Interview History Teacher, March 14, 2011 emphasis mine).

I then asked her how this changes things for her as a teacher, and stumbling over her words, she replied that having students of “immigrant origin” in her class does not change the classroom environment, but that there’s something she just can’t put her finger on. She then concluded by questioning herself, “does it change how I am with them [students], I don’t believe so. I hope not, I don’t think it does but then I know that there must be something since I told you there was a difference, but I don’t know what kind of difference.” (Interview History Teacher March 14, 2011)

Keaton (2006) talks about the existence of this very narrow conception of Frenchness, and how “franco-conformity and belief in the ‘common culture’ are

\[112\] X: …ici c’est pas du tout le même public uh c’est des élèves uh toujours pas très motivés, pas très travailleurs comme c’était déjà le cas avant mais pour moi la grosse différence c’est que bah d’abord c’est que c’est le lycée et uh c’est que c’est des élèves qui savent rédiger, qui savent écrire qui savent faire des phrases uh et puis quelque chose qui m’a frappé aussi c’est qu’ici y a pas de populations, y beaucoup moins de populations d’origine immigrée et donc uh je dois voir une personne de couleur noire par classe ou deux et ça pour moi ça fait une grosse différence en fait de ne plus avoir autant de diversité cult…, pas culturelle mais de diversité. Voilà. 
EH : Et comment enfin, comment ça change, est-ce que ça change enfin votre métier? 
X : Uh l’expérience en classe, du fait qu’ils soient pas d’origine immigrée? ça change pas grand chose. Non ça change pas grand chose pas spécialement c’est pas pas différent uh. (long pause) Je peux pas mettre des mots là-dessus je sais pas si ça change quelque chose uh, (pause) Moi je m’étais habituée à avoir des classes avec beaucoup de diversité uh, c’est moins le cas, est-ce que ça change ma façon d’être avec eux, je crois pas. J’espère pas, je pense pas mais voilà je sais certainement puisque je vous le dis il doit y avoir un changement mais je ne sais pas de quelle nature, voilà.
entrenched in the education system and in teachers’ minds” (p. 108). This narrow conception of French identity among (mostly white) teachers does not include people who do not look French, and to a large extent this means people who are not white.

As a white woman who speaks fluent, mostly unaccented French and who does not fit the predominant non-racial stereotypes of Americans (overweight, wearing sneakers, loud in public, etc.) I was often perceived to be French, to the extent that once, having forgotten to validate my ticket on a short train trip from Paris to Fontainbleau, I had to convince a skeptical train operator that I was indeed foreign and therefore did not know that I had to validate the ticket. He looked at me like I was trying to pull a fast one on him until my non-white, American friend who was sitting in the row behind me on the train said something to me in English. My non-white friends (American and French alike) were never in this situation. When traveling with Asian-American friends in France on various occasions, I witnessed persistent racial slurs and ignorant, race-based questions assumed my Korean-American friends, who were also studying for a year in France, came from similar socio-economic backgrounds to me, dressed in comparable ways and spoke French as fluently if not better than I, were repeatedly assumed to be Japanese tourists. While I usually “passed” as French, my friends spent their time trying to prove their American identity.

Perhaps the most striking example of this inability to fully identify or accept non-white people as truly French comes from another teacher interview. When asking a (white) history teacher why she was interested in teaching about
immigration, she noted that she had a personal interest in the topic because her husband is “métissé” or of mixed race. She went on to explain that her husband was “born in Senegal to a French father and to a mother who is French but black”\(^{113}\) (History Teacher Interview March 11, 2011 *emphasis mine*). This short remark encapsulates how deeply entwined race and national identity are. She does not feel the need to specify the race of her husband’s father because it is implied and she assumes that I (as another white person?) would also understand that “French father” means *white* French father. When it comes to the mother though, she qualifies the statement that she is French with an explanation of her non-white race.

In their analysis of the “racial question” in contemporary France, Didier and Eric Fassin (2009) argue that it is common for people to use the “vocabulary of immigration” to describe the reality of French minorities, for instance speaking of the need to integrate populations who are French and who are distinguished not so much by their culture, as by the color of their skin (p. 10).

The amalgam between immigrants and racial minorities is not confined to white France. Minorities are keenly aware of their perceived difference, and while some internalize the societal gaze that views them as not fully French, others consciously fight these perceptions. At a seminar on comparative race studies in France and the United States hosted at NYU’s Paris center, I was introduced to a French doctoral student and joined her and an older French woman in conversation. Through my American racial lens I would describe the doctoral student as black and the older woman as being mixed race or a very light skinned black person. The

\(^{113}\) “né au Sénégal d’un papa français et d’une maman française aussi mais noire”
older woman had spoken during the discussion session of her own (im)migration story, moving to the Métropole from Guadeloupe when she was in high school and about her first experiences with race as a child in Guadeloupe. When the three of us first started talking, the older woman immediately asked the doctoral student where she was from. The student replied a bit indignantly that she is from Paris, France. The older woman said yes, but have your family ever lived somewhere else? The doctoral student sighed and said no, my parents are from Benin. This seemed to satisfy the older woman, who ironically never inquired as to my origin even though I was the only true foreigner among us.

Uncovering Whiteness in a “Color-blind” Nation

Just as non-whites are associated with immigration in French society, whites are disassociated from immigration. As I tried to gain access to mostly white high schools in Paris, I was time and again ignored. I had the impression that the principals of these schools must have thought I was a confused foreigner, as nobody in their right mind would come to study immigration in a school with mostly white, upper-class French students. When asking staff and teachers I met at the CNHI about possible school sites for my study, most of those I spoke with immediately suggested ethnically diverse schools in the “banlieues.” When I said I was also looking for a school “without many students of immigrant descent” (I too adopted this proxy language as I did not dare say “mostly white school”) I received some confused looks (why study immigration in a school where there are no immigrants?)
or responses that indicated that they didn’t think the teachers or principal at those institutions would be interested or open to having me there as a researcher.

Lewis (2004), in her article on whites and whiteness in an era of “color-blindness,” argues that “our very ideas about whether racial groups are ‘social problems’ deserving examination is connected deeply to our ideas about those groups and their location within social hierarchies” (p. 624-5). Likewise, my study of immigration (synonymous with a study of racial minorities in many peoples’ minds) was perceived to be a study of a social problem that did not concern whites in mostly white schools. Lewis (2004) further argues that “a post-civil rights common sense of color-blindness” is a growing, albeit contested, trend and one that makes it difficult to study whites as a group, since they often view themselves as existing outside of racial discourse and categories (p. 623-4). Lewis’ research is based in an American context, but her arguments are perhaps even more salient in France where the “common sense of color-blindness” has been deeply engrained in the national psyche for more than two centuries and has far-reaching policy implications, such as not collecting race-based statistics and not providing preferential treatment in hiring or admissions based on race.

I was not able to study white students as a group, but I had unfettered access to white teachers. White teachers often shared with me that they were horrified to see racism, discrimination or “communitarianism” in their schools. These situations were always in reference to or referenced through the mentioning of non-white groups who stuck to themselves or self-segregated. Over lunch in the school cafeteria one day, a veteran teacher lamented what she perceived to be an increase
in racism in the school over the last ten years. I asked in what way and she
proceeded to tell me about an annual school field trip where the entire student body
goes for a picnic. Last year, she continued, she and other teachers noticed that all of
the white kids were sitting together and all of the black kids were sitting together.
Likewise she said, she often sees black students choosing to work together on school
projects and this too is a sign of segregation and racism. Similarly, during an
interview, another teacher sighed as she described how in one of her classes the
students started self-segregating when they were allowed to choose where to sit in
class, the blacks on one side and the whites on the other. She decided to address the
issue with her class and found that during a discussion of self-segregation, what the
students were interested in was “how my parents would react if I had a black
boyfriend.” These comments indicate to what extent French teachers are not
color-blind, despite professed ideology to the contrary. Furthermore, while these
teachers raise important issues regarding self-segregation among the student body,
their comments reveal a deep-seated mentality of whiteness. This unconscious view
assumes white people to be the norm, race-neutral, and the standard and, therefore,
continues to hinder progress towards racial equality or a post-racial society with a
truly inclusive French national identity. In both of these situations the white
teacher placed the burden of integration on the non-white students, pointing out
groups of black students who chose to work together on a project, but finding
nothing out of the ordinary when groups of white students chose to work together
or date only each other.

114 “comment mes parents auraient réagis si j’avais un copain noir”
Similarly, it was not uncommon for teachers to talk about their non-white students in communalistic language, often decrying how certain groups of students cause problems in class or are at odds with other groups of students in the school. One teacher commented to me that in one of her colleague’s school there were problems because there were too many students from two particular groups, in this case “gens du voyage” or Roma and “maghrébins” or North Africans. As she put it, “when there are too many from one community it becomes dysfunctional because you get clans forming and the clans often clash” (Interview History Teacher April 27, 2011). Teachers only made these comments in relation to ethnic and racial minorities. One time a teacher pulled me aside after class and asked if I had noticed how racist one of the white students in her class was. The girl’s parents were probably members of the Front National the teacher confided in me. The teacher did not identify the student by her race just as I never heard teachers refer to white students as any sort of identifiable group or community. As French sociologist of race, Eric Fassin pointed out, the place where communalism is most evident, but never mentioned, is the French Senate, which is almost exclusively white (and male). Of France’s 348 senators, only a few are non-white.

Yet another example of the pervasive mentality of whiteness among teachers is evident in their informal descriptions of students. On a class field trip I accompanied to the CNHI, as I sat with two teachers in the park eating lunch, we

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115 “quand y a un peu trop d’une communauté qui est présente la ça dysfonctionne parce qu'il peut y avoir des clans qui se forment des clans qui s'opposent etc.”
116 Eric Fassin mentioned this during a talk I attended at NYU’s Institute of French Studies in the Spring of 2008.
discussed the students’ reactions to the museum exhibit and the conversation drifted toward commentary on the students in general. Indicating one group of four girls standing a few yards away from us, the teachers spoke of one girl in particular whom they both said they enjoyed having in class. Which one is she? I asked and immediately realized I had put the teacher in a situation that might induce her to use racial terminology since the four girls standing there were each of different backgrounds, had similar physiques, and were all four dressed almost identically. The teacher paused as if realizing the bind my question had placed on her, and then said “the black girl with the jean jacket and the short skirt.” She could have stopped at “the black girl” but I sensed that she added the clothing description because she felt uncomfortable using racial terms, yet race was still her primary frame for identifying a non-white student. In contrast to this, when teachers described white students to me they never referred to their race, but rather to other physical traits such as hair color, hairstyle or body type. For these white teachers, white students’ race is neutral, invisible, and not mentioned, because it is the assumed standard against which everybody else is measured.

In the final section of this chapter I turn to another classroom case study from Lycée X, looking this time at a student-driven project on immigration. Through student and teacher interviews, and an investigation of student-teacher interactions surrounding the project, I explore how the terminology, amalgams and whiteness analyzed above play out in a student project on immigration in a school setting.
In the following case study I examine a student-initiated project on immigration and explore how three French students who are perceived by their teachers to be of immigrant descent, approach the topic. Another relatively recent addition to the high school curriculum is the “Travaux Personnels Encadres” (TPE) or “guided individual projects.” First introduced in 1999, the TPE is now mandatory for all “première” students and has become part of the baccalaureate examination, although its weight is relatively small. The National Ministry of Education (MEN) defines the TPE as a project that allows students to conduct individual research and to work as part of a group toward an end goal – a final paper and oral presentation that are graded as part of the baccalaureate exam. The Ministry further stipulates that the TPE must sit at the intersection of at least two disciplines. Therefore, like the exploration project I describe in Chapter IV, the TPE is typically team taught by two teachers, each from a different subject area.

One early November morning in the teachers’ lounge, Mathilde, a social science teacher, informed me that one of the student groups in her TPE class had chosen immigration as its project topic and that I should come talk to the students. As far as she could remember, this was the first TPE group to work on immigration. Mathilde co-taught the TPE course with Julie, one of the history teachers whose courses I regularly observed. Mathilde was a veteran teacher at the school, a feisty, quirky woman who, as I soon discovered, liked to pull me aside and tell me exactly

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what she was thinking, or exactly what she thought I wanted to hear. I was not always able to distinguish between the two. Julie was much younger and more solemn in nature. She had recently received her doctorate in history from the Sorbonne and often lamented to me how difficult it was to find teaching jobs at the university level in France these days. She was clearly ready to escape from what she perceived to be the lower status fallback job of teaching high school as soon as the opportunity presented itself. I perceived both Mathilde and Julie to be white.

The TPE class was held in the school Library. I had missed the beginning of the course, so by the time I came to observe the students had already broken into self-selected groups of three and had begun working on their research projects. In the Library the students were gathered around tables and at computers along the back wall. Mathilde and Julie circulated from group to group. As soon as she saw me, Mathilde took me straight over to a group of students at the computers, announcing that this is the group that is working on immigration and suggesting that we go and sit at a table so I could talk to the students. The students are Aurore, Beza and William, all high school juniors in “première ES” or the social science academic track. We recognize each other from some of the English classes I’ve observed. The two girls, Aurore and Beza are much more animated and talkative than William. As they start to explain their project to me and to discuss amongst themselves how to go about organizing their “plan” or the outline of their paper, Aurore clearly takes the lead. She is well spoken, mature, and tries to keep the group on task. Beza is engaged and opinionated, but often steers the conversation off topic to weekend plans. William is mostly silent. With soft eyes and a baby face,
he seems years younger than the two girls. I perceived all three students to be black.

Between November 2010 and February 2011, I observed four TPE classes, talking with and observing the group with Aurore, Beza and William and also observing the teachers as they worked with “the immigration group” as well as with other student groups in the class on their TPE research projects. In mid-March I was invited to observe the students’ final TPE presentation, which was a graded section of the baccalaureate exam. In April I interviewed Aurore, Beza and William, asking them to reflect on their experience working on the immigration TPE project. Throughout the TPE project I spoke extensively with the teachers involved. I interviewed Julie and regularly observed her history classes and I often ate lunch with and chatted with Mathilde in the teachers’ lounge. Together, these observations, interviews and interactions uncovered several significant disconnects in understandings of race, racism and identity between the teachers and the students, representative of a larger societal disconnect between traditional republican ideology and post-colonial reality.

Through my observations and interviews with the teachers and students involved with this immigration project, I observed how the color-blind (because to talk of race is racist) ideology espoused by teachers places students in a bind as they attempt to uncover and understand the racialized reality in which they live. This disconnect manifested itself primarily with respect to the teachers’ and students’

\[119\] Other student groups chose TPE topics such as the influence of the media on women wanting to be thin, gay rights, Versailles, a comparison of the French and German education systems, and the organic food movement.
differing views of immigrant identity and perceptions of racism. Furthermore, the teachers’ responses to the students’ attempts to address racism and discrimination as part of their project support Lewis’ (2004) claim that a universalistic, color-blind approach stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about racial inequalities in society. I take this argument one step further and find that this form of colorblind ideology among French teachers renders any classroom discussion of race taboo. Just like the taboo surrounding the discussion of family history in the school space, I argue that students have internalized the taboo, yet continue to contest and question it among themselves.

During the TPE class, the teachers circulated from one group to another, often spending about 30 minutes with a group talking through their project outline, research and next steps. During one such session with the immigration group, the teacher, Mathilde grilled the group about their research plan and how they intended to research immigration. Aurore suggested that they interview some immigrants about their experiences. “Where are you going to find immigrants to interview?” Mathilde asked, and when Beza responded that they could just interview people on the street, Mathilde gave me a look and then exasperatedly told the students that they could not possibly know just by looking at somebody if she or he is an immigrant. If you ran into Elizabeth, she exclaimed, taking me as an example, would you assume she was not born in France? The students did not respond. “You wouldn’t stop people on the street in the United States and ask them if they are immigrants would you?” Mathilde continued, turning the question to me. The students remained silent. After all the emphasis made by teachers on the
importance of terminology when it comes to the study of immigration, yet again, here was a teacher confusing “immigrant” and “foreigner.” While the experience of being a foreigner in France gave me much appreciation for what immigrants must experience (including the dreaded medical visit at the French Office of Immigration and Integration – OFII), my privileged academic year of research on a student visa hardly places me in the immigrant category. As a white person who largely covered or downplayed my American identity in public, I was never taken to be an immigrant or a foreigner on the streets of Paris, an advantage that many French citizens do not have simply because of the color of their skin.

After class Mathilde pulled me aside to talk. “You see who chose to work on the subject of immigration,” she said to me with a knowing look. “I’m sure they all have an immigrant background.” Before I could question this statement further, Mathilde exclaimed that she was still incredulous that these students thought they could identify immigrants on the street, as if this implication that they could tell just by looking at somebody whether or not they are French was a form of racism or racial profiling. I found this interesting because, in the case of immigrants in France, like in many other nations, one can often tell just by looking who is French and who is not, and it has nothing to do with race, but has everything to do with appearance. During a coffee break in the teachers’ lounge one day, a pale white skinned, blue eyed, Irish woman, an English teacher at the school who had lived in France for more than 20 years, ranted about how she cannot wear whatever she wants in Paris without people staring at her. The essential difference when it comes to race is that the Irish woman, because of her race, is assumed to be a tourist or a foreigner rather
than an immigrant when she receives pointed stares for wearing her athletic sneakers and baggy sweatpants on the metro on her way to work. Hargreaves (2007) points to this general distinction between “immigrant workers” equated with unskilled “people of color” and “European and other Western residents who were more commonly referred to as étrangers (foreigners)” (p. 25). By questioning the students’ claim that they could identify immigrants on a public street, the teacher may have intended to break down the stereotypical interchange between immigrants and racial minorities, but her color-blind approach only silenced the students and furthered the association between white and French, ethnic minority and immigrant, by implying but not directly addressing race or other factors in determining somebody’s national identity.

Throughout my observations of the TPE immigration project, a similar series of events emerged in relation to the topic of racism and discrimination. Early in their work on the project, the group of students met with Mathilde during class to go through their paper outline. Mathilde asked if they planned to include a section covering the “consequences of immigration” for French society. Beza hesitantly responded that they could do something on the “visibility of immigrants,” for example, the French National Soccer team and prejudices. William added that they could talk about the recent increase in racism. Mathilde quickly challenged these suggestions, stating that there have always been prejudices and questioned whether or not there really has been an increase in racism in French society. As a history lesson it is important to understand that prejudice and racism are not new, but in this context, the white teacher’s remarks only silenced the black students’ attempt
to address racism as part of their project. The teacher had essentially shut down the students’ request to address racism in contemporary French society based on the argument that racism is not unique to contemporary France. This is a classic example of a teacher denying the recognition of difference in the interest of abstract equality for all. Mathilde framed racism as belonging to the greater, historic France, thereby distancing the discussion of racism from the present day and the students’ lives and downplayed the contemporary discussion of racism raised by the students.

Despite this unsettling interaction, the students brought up the topics of contemporary racism and discrimination throughout their work on the project, from these early discussions in class on what to include in the project outline, to my interviews with them after completion of the project. However, racism and discrimination did not play a prominent role in their final paper and presentation. The students did briefly mention the rise of the extreme right FN political party in relation to immigration during their final bac exam presentation, but the final paper they submitted did not include a section or discussion of the topic. During my interview with William, I asked if his group had talked about racism in France in relation to immigration while working on the project and whether or not they had decided to include a section on discrimination in the final paper/presentation. William responded that they had not included anything on discrimination in the end because “it did not really fit with our outline.” When I probed William as to why this was, he added that it would have made them go over the page limit and that “it’s not really an appropriate subject” (Student 1 ES Interview April 29, 2011).
Just as teachers do not encourage their students to discuss controversial or sensitive topics in the classroom, the three students working on the immigration TPE project were not encouraged to address racism and discrimination in their paper and presentation. Based on their interactions with Mathilde, the primary teacher in this case, I argue that the teacher’s subliminal message to the students was that racism, as the students understood it, was not a legitimate topic for this assignment. During my interviews with Aurore, Beza and William, which I conducted well after the students had completed the TPE exam and project, all three of the students brought up the topic of racism and discrimination of their own accord in response to my question about what they learned and what surprised them most during the course of their research on immigration in France. William for example said that he learned that racism is still around, that “it hasn’t changed actually, that it’s not always direct, but indirect, for example giving jobs more often to a white person in France than to a black person…”\textsuperscript{120} William continued pointing out that he was shocked that this was still happening today and that one would make a hiring decision based on “skin color” instead of qualifications (Interview Student 1 ES, April 29, 2011).

The students may have been discouraged from addressing the touchy topic of “race” in their project, but they were not deterred from their original desire to

\textsuperscript{120} Original quote: “le racisme ça a toujours pas enfin c’est pas ça a pas changé en fait ‘fin il apparaît pas sous forme directe mais indirectement

EH : C’est-à-dire uh

X : Bah je uh uh par exemple on va donner plus un travail à un blanc en France que un noir puisque j’avais fait j’avais trouvé sur un site uh comme l’ANPE où ils recherchaient spécifiquement un homme blanc voilà”
interview immigrants "on the street" so to speak. As part of their final oral presentation (a graded section of the baccalaureate exam) the group showed a video they had made of interviews with two immigrants. Aurore and Beza described the interviewees as "the mother of a friend from Poland" and a "newly arrived man in the neighborhood." Just as I was told that only a foreigner could conduct research on this topic in France, only a foreigner can get away with using racial terminology to discuss racial discrimination. One of the interview questions the students asked of their immigrant subjects was, “have you experienced any discrimination in your daily life here in France?” The Polish immigrant replied “more or less no because I am white. I just had trouble at the beginning with language and talking on the phone.” (Classroom Observation March 15, 2011).

During our interview, Aurore told me that her own mother had immigrated to France from Congo and that Beza was born in Cameroun. The students’ decision to interview not their own family, but rather family friends and neighbors, highlights the fine line these students are walking as they study and gain awareness about sensitive subjects within the framework of the republican classroom led predominantly by “color-blind” white teachers. Teachers and students are operating within a shared national ideology and common understanding that certain topics such as race and immigration are taboo and better left behind in the private sphere. Furthermore, topics like immigration by their very nature raise questions about the common sense understandings of French identity and a color-blind society; therefore, when teachers or students try to introduce the topic into the lesson tensions are inevitable.
In this chapter I have argued that the color-blind ideology that is so prevalent in France places race in a unique position when compared with other standard components of cultural identity, namely language, religion and social class. Differences in language, religion and social class figure prominently in public and political discourse, yet race remains taboo to the point that the use of racial terminology is equated with racism. I argue that this common-sense color-blindness in French society reinforces the existing amalgam of immigrants and racial minorities. This conflation further distances non-white French citizens from the collective image of French identity and culture. Furthermore, the color-blind ideology ensures that whiteness, or the common-sense understanding of white, being neutral and the standard against which everybody else is compared, remains deeply imbedded and unquestioned. Addressing immigration in the classroom unsettles the status quo of colorblindness and whiteness as teachers and students grapple to address sensitive subjects within a confining cultural context.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

“To omit controversial subject-matter is to leave out not only an important area of knowledge and human experience but the very essence of what constitutes a worthwhile education”
-U.K. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1998 p. 57

“Unless human beings are able to step out of their culture, they remain imprisoned within it and tend to absolutize it, imagining it to be the only natural or self-evident way to understand and organize human life.”
- Parekh 2006, p. 167

When I first began this research, I knew immigration was an intensely debated and polarizing topic in French public and political discourse, and I understood it was a severely understudied topic in history classes, but it was not until I was immersed in my fieldwork that I came to understand the extent to which immigration is deemed a “sensitive” or controversial topic for educators in France. French national educational research bodies such as the National Institute for Pedagogical Research regularly list immigration, along with colonization, the Algerian war, and the Holocaust as “questions socialement vives” (controversial or lively topics) or “sensitive subjects.” In my interviews with teachers, it seemed that the only topic perceived to be more “difficult” to address in class than immigration, colonization and the Algerian War is the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and this too was perceived to be difficult because of the diversity of the students in the
classroom and their potential allegiances to one or the other side of the conflict. Many teachers admitted to me that they avoid these topics because, depending on the students in their class, the lesson is likely to disintegrate and students to become unruly. As one teacher put it, “I have to acknowledge that when I had the choice last year with my STG\textsuperscript{121} students, the choice between covering Algeria since the war or covering India since independence, I admit that I chose India in order to avoid potential tensions...”\textsuperscript{122} (History Teacher Interview, March 9, 2011). Throughout my fieldwork, teachers described addressing immigration in the classroom as problematic, employing terminology such as “difficult,” “sensitive” and “dangerous.” Many teachers like the one quoted above chose to avoid the topic entirely out of fear of student reactions to such a controversial and politically charged issue. Other teachers chose to address the topic but did so only from a distanced perspective, one that unwittingly works against the teachers’ goal of breaking down stereotypes and against the CNHI goal of incorporating immigration into the collective identity of the nation.

My research on the CNHI and in schools leads me to conclude that in France the topic of immigration is particularly sensitive and controversial for teachers, because, as a subject of study, the topic challenges teachers in three significant ways. First, it brings to the surface previously buried aspects of national history. Second,

\textsuperscript{121} STG stands for “sciences et technologies de la gestion” or science and technology of management and is a professional track in high schools. Students usually go on to a two-year technical degree program after high school.

\textsuperscript{122} “je dois reconnaître que quand j’avais le choix l’année dernière avec des élèves de STI uh donc on avait le choix entre l’Algérie depuis la guerre, non c’était en STG on avait le choix entre depuis l’Algérie depuis la guerre d’Algérie et... depuis la guerre d’Algérie incluse et d’autre part l’Inde, l’Inde depuis l’indépendance j’avoue que j’ai choisi l’Inde uh pour éviter les tensions potentielles...”
it threatens to destabilize the teacher-student power dynamic within the classroom. And, finally, immigration as a topic of study questions common sense understandings of national identity and the role and nature of schooling in diverse societies.

**Uncovering a Difficult Past**

Studying immigration raises uncomfortable questions about French history that until recently have been shrouded in silence. The brutalities, rather than the glory, of French colonization, the multifaceted realities of the Algerian War as it was fought on both sides of the Mediterranean, and discrimination, both historically and in the present day, are but a few examples. In an August 2010 article published in *Le Monde*, noted historian of immigration Patrick Weil argues that “we are no longer in Renan’s time when it was necessary to forget past divisions in order to build the nation” and that in today’s France, adults are able to hear conflicting memories and interpretations of national history (“Les quatre piliers de la nationalité” in *Le Monde*, August 8, 2010). Adults may be able to hear these conflicting memories, but teachers remain reticent to share these conflicts with the nation’s school children.

Teaching about such historical issues is rendered more complex and all the more sensitive when the past still exerts influence on today’s students and teachers. In this respect France is not alone. Teaching immigration history in France is in many ways comparable to teaching about the Holocaust in Germany, where collective memory is still fresh, or slavery in the United States, where memory has faded with the passing generations, but institutional racism still structures the
classrooms, sometimes shared by and sometimes segregating descendants of slaves and slave owners. Many nations have tried to sanitize their history curriculum to erase crimes of the past and bolster national identity. In Japan, for example, history textbooks have repeatedly come under fire for their treatment of Japan’s colonial past and specifically for omissions of Japanese atrocities committed during World War II (Friedman 2013).

Weil (2004) argues that teaching such historical traumas is important for understanding how different members of the same society have differing memories of common histories, and learning about others is essential for “the French to feel like they all belong to the same community of citizens”123 (p. 21). While most would not argue with this view, France, like most heterogeneous societies, still struggles to find a balance between a common, inclusive national history and a recognition and incorporation of differing memories and perspectives that make up that history. How these historical events and differing memories are addressed in the classroom continues to pose challenges for teachers and remains controversial among the public in France and other nations, and merits further research.

Uncovering Power Relations Within the Classroom

A second challenge arises in that the teaching of immigration history is particularly problematic for teachers in France, because it presents the potential of overturning the power relations and hierarchical structure within the classroom. In

123 Author’s translation from “pour que les Français puissant se sentir appartenir tous a la même communauté de citoyens, chacun doit pouvoir comprendre et donc apprendre un peu de l’histoire des autres.”
Germany the Holocaust would never be omitted from the study of history, nor could one become a history teacher in the United States without having studied slavery and the Civil War. In France however, immigration is still largely missing from history curricula at all levels of schooling and therefore teachers lack a solid knowledge base on the topic. French history teachers are for the most part extremely well educated in their discipline, many holding doctoral degrees in history, so to not be well versed in a topic is rare, and most likely unsettling. This is why the CNHI views teacher training as well as scholarly research as fundamental components of their mission to incorporate the history of immigration into the history of France. The staff realize how understudied the topic is and aim to make the CNHI a center for inquiry and exchange on the topic so as to bring it out of the shadows of history and into both public and scholarly light.

Not only does the CNHI Education Department view immigration as a topic that has been understudied and therefore not taught (i.e. avoided) by many teachers, but the staff also expressed a strong concern regarding what they perceived to be inappropriate pedagogies used by some teachers when addressing immigration in the classroom. These concerns largely centered around teachers asking students to address their own family immigrant background or history as part of a lesson or assignment. Many students have personal experiences with immigration, and while a child-centered pedagogy would welcome soliciting student input and stories as part of the educational experience, the French education system is extremely teacher-centered. History education, in particular, has retained its traditional by-the-book lecture method of instruction in which students write down
word-for-word what the teacher says in class. In the history classes I observed, most of the questions students raised were not content-based, but rather were clarification questions, asking the teacher to repeat what s/he had just said so to be sure they had copied it down properly. Within this pedagogical context, asking students to share their personal knowledge or experience, especially in an area where the teacher is not in a position to evaluate the student’s claims, leads to Falaize’s “pedagogical reversal” whereby the student becomes the teacher and the teacher the student. This role reversal presents a serious challenge to the teacher’s intellectual authority within the classroom space. When this is combined with the threat of disorderly student behavior during a heated discussion on controversial topics, a threat to the teacher’s physical and professional authority is added to the mix. Many teachers spoke of not wanting to ask students to talk about their own immigrant background because it is not within their role as a teacher to do so. I argue that doing so would also require the students to step outside of their assigned role as passive learners. These role reversals undermine the traditional teacher-student power dynamic, and teachers, not wanting to put themselves in a vulnerable position, often avoid the topic.

**Uncovering Common Sense Understandings of Identity and Schooling**

The final reason the topic of immigration proves so difficult for French teachers is that, by its very nature, it challenges republican common sense understandings of national identity and of what is appropriate within the public space of the classroom. For most of the teachers in my study, to talk about
immigration is to talk about integration, and to talk about integration one must address politically and personally sensitive issues such as religion and race, which are not supposed to exist within the space of the republican school.

The dominant republican model aims, with good intention, but failed results, to minimize, if not ignore, differences among students. Immigration and the more recent increased visibility of difference among immigrants and their descendants challenges the legitimacy of the republican model, specifically its narrow conception of Frenchness (Keaton 2006) and its universal approach to equality and national identity formation. Events over the past few decades, from the 1989 headscarf affair to the 2005 youth riots, highlight the significant backlash against the staunch denial of difference in the face of real inequalities. State and social actors, such as teachers and students are often at the center of these events and find themselves in a contradictory bind where they are expected to internalize and promote the republican ideals of a color-blind society, all while operating within a highly racialized reality that perpetuates social and economic discrimination and disadvantage.

As I examined the case of race in France, I found that the taboo surrounding the use of racial terminology only serves to perpetuate the notion that non-whites are foreigners and only white people are truly French. Because there is a taboo on describing people -- especially non-whites -- in racial terms, a conflation of immigrants or foreigners with racial minorities has developed as the population resorts to using proxy terms of nationality, religion and culture to define ethnic or racial difference. I argue that the belief in color-blind equality leads teachers,
paradoxically, to think that they should not ask students to highlight their immigrant or non-French cultural backgrounds within the public space of the classroom, out of fear that this will stigmatize the student as non-French. Teachers are striving to treat all of their students equally, but this approach only furthers the common-sense understanding that non-whites are “others” within French national identity. It is precisely this perception of an “other within,” the presence of students perceived by their teachers to be of immigrant descent, that poses challenges for teaching immigration history in France today and renders immigration such a difficult and controversial issue for teachers.

Controversial Issues in Theory and Practice

When it comes to addressing controversial issues in the classroom, Stenhouse (1970) points out that, “thought must be given to preserving privacy and protecting students; e.g., illegitimate children, children from broken homes and children of prostitutes should be kept in mind when discussing the family or relations between the sexes” (p. 156). Similarly the teachers I spoke with believed that teachers should not question students on their immigrant background because of the potentially “painful” and “difficult” family histories of students of immigrant descent. Yet most teachers recognized a pedagogical benefit of students being able to connect what they are learning to their own lives, and to sharing their family background as part of a class discussion or lesson, as long as it is of their own accord. Fraser (1963) argues that “[t]o limit the treatment of controversial issues to those in which students happen to express interest spontaneously is as
educationally unsound as waiting to introduce an arithmetic process until pupils have asked for it” (p. 157).

The teachers in this study did not view immigration or other controversial topics as comparable to mathematics and, thus, when teachers did address immigration, they did so from a distanced perspective, with approaches often couched in concerns over the “neutrality” and “objectivity” of the teacher who must treat all students as theoretical equals. The result was an emotionally and politically distanced focus on immigration to other countries, such as the United States or Britain, or an assignment that allowed students to invent an interview with a fictitious immigrant rather than require that they speak with a family member or a real immigrant member of their community. As a result, teachers inadvertently dissuaded students from incorporating their own family history into the learning process and reinforced societal taboos and stigmatization of immigrants and their French descendants as illegitimate topics that should be relegated to the private sphere.

Likewise, distancing in the name of history and objectivity was common practice at the CNHI. I found that the institution confines its message within museum conventions, whereby the visitor is distanced personally, emotionally and intellectually from the exhibits -- in this case, the immigrants were distanced from their personal histories on display. Furthermore, the Education Department confines the roles it ascribes to teachers and students within a similar, distanced perspective, heavily shaped by traditional republican ideology. I argue that this dominant strain of republican ideology firmly structures how the CNHI as an
institution works to incorporate immigration into the collective imagining of the nation (Anderson 2006), creating a paradoxical situation whereby abstract, universalist ideology and discourse is employed to foster recognition of difference and to instill a more inclusive understanding of French national identity.

Here, the theoretical importance of recognition of difference (Taylor 1994; Parekh 2006) and the right to “uncover” (Yoshino 2006) one’s full identity within the public sphere come into play. By refusing to recognize differences among students in a classroom, teachers send the message that students should cover or hide their differences. There is something fundamental to the importance of seeing oneself in history and, by extension, society. While history education alone cannot repair the damage inflicted by centuries of institutionalized racism and inequality that often leave minorities and other oppressed groups feeling invisible, history education is highly representative of how a society deals with minority recognition and rights on a larger scale.

A multicultural population fuelled by immigrants from across the globe forces nations like France to question deeply held assumptions about what was previously understood to be universal or a natural part of culture. Taylor (1994) challenges such assumptions of neutrality and abstract equality taking the example of the Muslim minority in Britain during the 1988 Rushdie Affair, and points out that, "as many Muslims are well aware, Western liberalism is not so much an expression of the secular, post-religious outlook... as a more organic outgrowth of Christianity – at least as seen from the alternative vantage point of Islam [...] All this to say that liberalism can't and shouldn't claim complete cultural neutrality" (p. 63).
Parekh (2006) expands on Taylor’s argument for the importance of social recognition by examining the cultural and material basis for misrecognition, arguing that the politics of culture is integrally linked to power structures of society, and that cultural recognition in multicultural societies requires “appropriate changes in all the major areas of life” (p. 343). Teachers in my study were concerned about misrecognition of students when they spoke of not wanting to stigmatize a student by assuming s/he was of a particular background, but they did not step outside of their cultural context and confines when framing this fear. The assumption that recognition of difference will stigmatize is only valid in a society that values homogeneity and conformity to a narrow cultural norm. It also assumes that this particular difference is negative in that it will produce a stigma. If teachers are unable to step outside of their own cultural framework to examine the messages they send students through their actions and inactions alike, changes such as adding content to textbooks will do little to shift societal norms.

Public school teachers are theoretically in a powerful position, in that they can push societal change forward or reproduce the status quo through their extensive access and influence over a broad cross section of the nation’s youth. My research on teachers and the Education Department of the CNHI in France found that many educators are attempting to effect societal change, such as by debunking stereotypes and changing public perceptions of immigration, but they are doing so within the confines of strict cultural parameters that sometimes work against their own objectives. I found that many teachers and CNHI educators viewed their work on immigration as a reaction to societal changes.
Implications for Future Research

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) argue that, in studying other countries, American social scientists impose American-specific understandings of race and multiculturalism as universals in their work. The same argument is made by and about French scholars. Amiraux and Simon (2006) argue that “[t]he resistance to the development of a genuine sociology of ethnic minorities in France is due to the monopoly of the French integration model as analytical referent.” Furthermore they argue that, “the desire to not abandon the socio-economic divisions in favor of a hegemony of ethnicity leads many authors, such as Loïc Wacquant, to reduce ethnic-racial domination to social inequalities.” P. 201.

I found that, as an American social scientist studying France, I did view race and recognition of race through an American lens, but that this lens was critical in uncovering “common-sense” understandings of difference and how those cultural assumptions play out in the school setting. I contend that culturally external empirical research offers valuable insight into the unconscious workings of any society and provides a useful perspective on why people remain entrenched in and unable to break destructive cycles of behavior. I found that teachers are at the forefront of a common societal question mark in terms of how cultural difference is understood and discussed in the school setting. The study of immigration highlights the tensions raised during this period of cultural questioning, not only in France, but in all pluralistic nations today. As one teacher put it, “we are in a pivotal time here, I think, where we ask all sorts of questions and we haven't found a solution"
In order to begin answering these important questions, more research is needed on education in pluralistic societies and on how teachers’ cultural ideology, such as French republicanism, shapes classroom practice, especially when it comes to teaching about controversial topics that test even the most democratic societies.

\[^{124}\text{“on est dans une période charnière là je pense uh où on se pose toutes ces questions là et on n’arrive pas à trouver de solution voilà”}\]
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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH METHODS: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data Collection

The data collected for this qualitative, ethnographic study is drawn primarily from observations and semi-structured interviews. This primary data is supplemented by content collected from textbooks, curricula, student work and by participant observations as well as informal interviews and observations.

Observations

Observations were a primary method of data collection for this study. I conducted both traditional observations and participant observations. Between January 2010 and May 2011 I conducted 99 formal observations split between the two schools and the CNHI. Additionally I conducted observations of two public debates on national identity and one press conference on the release of a book calling for “a multicultural and post-racial” France. I went on school field trips, attended several academic conferences, a protest march with some of the striking teachers from one of my school sites, and was invited for coffee and dinner with various French researchers in the field. My observations therefore ranged from strictly formal to highly participatory. During formal observations such as classroom observations I was able to take copious notes. Other times I had to rely on my memory. Either way, immediately following each day's observations I typed
up field notes documenting both my observations and commenting on my interpretations and initial analysis of the observation.

I tried to split my time evenly between the two schools and the CNHI, but I ended up spending significantly more time in one school site than in the other. This was due to multiple factors including a friendlier atmosphere in the teachers’ lounge, but also because there were more history teachers and more projects or assignments on immigration that I was invited to observe, and once I was there I ended up staying for the full day. During an average week in the field, I would spend three half to full days in the two school sites, one half or full day at the CNHI, and the rest of my time reading and typing up my field notes. In the two schools the vast majority of my observations were in the classroom. At the beginning of my time in the two schools I sought out history teachers in particular and asked to observe their classes. Some teachers asked that I observe a particular class and others gave me an open invitation to observe any of their classes. Because of this I ended up observing some teachers much more frequently than others, but I was able to observe every history teacher in the classroom at least once at both school sites. When invited to observe a class I typically asked the teacher if it would be okay for me to sit in the back of the classroom. This way I could observe all of the students and take notes in a less conspicuous manner. Sometimes I was seated next to a student and sometimes I was the only one in the back row. I began each classroom observation with a visual scan of the room and the students, noting down my interpretation or best guess at the ethnic make-up of the students. The first time I observed a class most teachers would introduce me to the students, usually just
saying a few words about my research and then launching into their scheduled lesson. I took copious field notes during these observations. In history classes the teachers almost always lectured from a “plan” or precise outline that they either talked through, wrote on the board or put up on an overhead. I did my best to take notes both as if I were a student copying down what the teacher was saying word for word, and also making notes of my observations of the teacher-student interactions, classroom dynamics and anything I found relevant to my research or that struck me as significant.

I took a similar approach to my observations at the CNHI. I kept in close communication with the Education Department staff and asked them to let me know whenever they had a teacher-training workshop scheduled so that I could observe. They were extremely welcoming and invited me to attend any and all of these sessions. In addition they invited me to attend some staff-teacher committee meetings and near the very end of my field work I was invited to be a “silent witness” at one of the Education Department’s bi-annual “comité pédagogique” meetings. This committee meeting was for staff only and was co-chaired by Jacques Toubon and Philippe Joutard, a noted historian and education specialist.

**Participant Observations**

My original intention was to only conduct formal observations, however the more time I spent in the two schools and at the CNHI, the more teachers and CNHI staff expected me to participate and to take an active role in various ways. I realized that it would jeopardize my position as a researcher and my relationship with my
research subjects to refuse these requests. I did not take on any formal role within the schools or the CNHI, however as I became a steady presence in the teachers’ lounges and cafeteria, some teachers, mostly English teachers in both schools, invited me to speak to their classes on various occasions. Sometimes I was spontaneously called upon as an American or native English speaker to weigh in or provide information that even the teacher did not know. Other times I was asked to lead an entire class session on a topic related to my research. These requests made me uncomfortable at first as I felt like for me to lead a class lesson on immigration would be to step outside my role as researcher and observer, and perhaps even unduly influence the data. However these occasions were rare enough so that they did not involve or affect the majority of the teachers and students I interviewed and observed, and they afforded me the opportunity to examine my research topic from a more involved perspective, for example in an English class, teaching a lesson on American immigration history in which I shared some of my own family history, and in a philosophy class, leading a discussion on multiculturalism in France.

**Interviews**

I conducted a total of 44 audio-recorded interviews between January 2010 and May 2011. 30 of these interviews were with teachers and 14 with students. I break the 30 teacher interviews into three main categories: CNHI Education Department staff, teachers from my two school sites, and teachers from other schools in the Paris region.
I include the CNHI Education Department staff in the overall teacher category because they are all teachers by training and profession, and all but two of them were continuing to teach half time during my research period. I used a similar interview protocol with the CNHI staff as I did with the other teachers, so that I questioned them on both their professional roles as classroom teachers and as CNHI staff. I interviewed all five of the CNHI Education Department staff (two successive department heads and three teacher reps) that worked at the CNHI during my time in the field.

At the two school sites I recruited teachers to interview mostly by word of mouth and informal requests in the teachers lounge or after a classroom observation. Near the beginning of my time in each school, one teacher who I had already made a strong connection with sent an email to her colleagues introducing me and explaining that I'd like to observe classes and interview teachers. I also posted a flyer with my request to interview teachers in the teachers’ lounge. The teachers were very busy and hard to pin down to schedule interviews, but for the most part, they were eager to be interviewed and some told me afterwards that my interview was the first time anybody had solicited their experiences and opinions on teaching in this way.
The third group of teachers I interviewed were history teachers that I recruited through word of mouth and announcements sent out by the CNHI and through history teacher online list-serves. In this way I was able to interview a much larger sampling of teachers and visit a wide range of schools in the process. These teachers were all secondary teachers (all but two at the high school level) and taught at a range of academic, technical and professional schools. Teacher interviews averaged 45 minutes to one hour and were usually conducted at the school in an empty classroom, the history teachers’ staff room, or at a café. CNHI staff interviews usually took place at the CNHI, in the library or conference room. In all cases I did my best to ensure we were in a quiet and private space. I let the teachers choose where they wanted to be interviewed, but when some suggested the busy teachers’ lounge, I tried to steer them towards an empty classroom instead.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline Taught by Teachers Interviewed</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History-Geography</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I do not believe that gender played a major role in my research, but it is still important to mention the gender imbalance among the teachers I interviewed. Of the 30, 23 were female. I attribute this both the fact that there were more female teachers in both of my school sites, and also to the fact that I am female and tended
to develop a rapport more easily with the female teachers in both schools, many of whom would invite me to join them for lunch or go out for coffee.

In all of my semi-structured interviews I asked a core set of questions that were the same in all interviews, interspersed with probes and follow-up questions in response to interviewee remarks. I began all of my teacher interviews with a general question asking the teacher to tell me about his or her “parcours professionnel” or career in teaching. This usually led to a discussion of the various schools where they had taught and if it did I asked the teacher to compare the different schools. This usually resulted in a comparison of different student populations. I always followed this with core questions on the teacher’s experience teaching about immigration and the debate over drawing on students’ own family background in the classroom, if this issue had not already come up organically. I also asked what teachers considered to be the “enjeux” in teaching immigration history, or what is at stake and what are the goals. I then asked teachers if they had heard of the CNHI and if so what their experience was there if any with students or the CNHI teacher training activities. I usually ended with a general question asking if the teacher had anything else that they think is important in relation to the teaching of immigration history or the teaching of history in general.

In my interviews with CNHI staff I followed the same semi-structured interview protocol, only instead of asking them if they ever heard of the CNHI, I asked them to tell me about the CNHI, its mission and the role of the Education Department. I then asked them how they personally became involved with and came to work at the CNHI. I asked them questions about teacher training and I
asked them to talk about the teachers and students who come to trainings at the CNHI. Finally I asked questions regarding the CNHI staff’s perceived impact of the CNHI education activities.

I was able to start teacher and CNHI staff interviews during my pilot research and almost as soon as I started work in the field. Student interviews however I was not able to schedule until the last two months of my time in Paris. Because I spent most of my informal time in schools in the teachers’ lounge and eating lunch with teachers, I became very much a part of the teachers’ space in the two school sites. Teacher and student space are strictly segregated in schools. The students are not allowed in the teachers’ lounge and in the cafeteria teachers and students eat in separate areas. Because I am an adult, and because I spent so much time with the teachers in their spaces, students often assumed I was a teacher or a similar figure. On several occasions when observing a class for the first time, before the teacher could introduce me as a researcher, a student would ask if I were an inspector there to observe the teacher. It was only after months of observing multiple classes with the same students, accompanying field trips and through my active participation in some English classes, that the students in the two school sites began to warm up to me, or in some cases notice me. As I became a fixture in certain classes, students would come up to me during break and ask me questions about the United States. Once I had given a presentation in a class, as I walked through the halls, some students would say hi to me in English, and by March of 2011 students would greet me and ask if I were coming to observe their class that day. It was not until I had
built up this rapport and recognition that I was able to approach students about being interviewed.

I recruited students by making announcements in classes I was observing at both school sites. I explained that students under 18 needed to have their parent or guardian sign a consent form, which I distributed to every student in the class. The combination of consent forms signed by a parent and student schedules made it extremely challenging to track students down even when they said they were interested in being interviewed. Usually the student would tell a teacher that they were interested in being interviewed and then the teacher would convey the message to me and help me find the student to arrange a time. Other times the student would approach me after class and let me know that s/he and one or two of his/her friends were interested. On a number of occasions the student forgot to bring the consent form and so we had to reschedule or the student did not show up at the agreed upon time or place. One helpful teacher at Lycée X gave the students permission to be interviewed during class one day, which allowed me to interview several students who I otherwise would not have been able to reach. I conducted all student interviews in the schools, usually in a small room just off of the main school library or in an observation booth in the main hallway that was meant for parent-teacher conferences. In both cases we were in a space that allowed for privacy where other teachers and students were not around and could not interfere. On average student interviews were much shorter than teacher interviews. More so than teachers, I found that being recorded made the students uncomfortable and often I would end the formal interview, shut off the recorder, and then the student
would stay and talk to me a great length. Other times the interviews was short due to time constraints.

During student interviews I followed a semi-structured protocol that included the following standard questions. I started by asking the student to tell me about their “parcours scolaire” or their schooling history, what grade they’re in, what track and why or how they ended up in that particular school. I asked them why they chose the track they are in and asked about their plans after high school. Next I asked them to tell me about their history classes in general, what aspects of history do they like or not like, and often what they think makes a good history teacher. Then I asked them about their experience learning about immigration in history classes. This often led to a discussion of non-history classes since most students said they didn’t talk about it much in history class. Then I asked if teachers ever ask students to talk about their own family history of immigration in class. Since the answer was usually no, I usually followed this up with a hypothetical question of if this were to happen, how would you feel about it. I then asked the students to imagine that they were a history teacher and asked them how they would design and teach a lesson on immigration history in France. Finally I asked students if they had heard of or visited the CNHI and if so, what their impressions were.

Perceived and Self-identified Ethnicity and Immigrant Background Among Teachers and Students

Because my research examines concepts of race, ethnicity and identity, I made note of my perceptions of the ethno-racial identities of the teachers and
students in my study. Since no hard statistics exist on this type of identity in France, the only way to gather this information is to ask people to self-identify. This would have been impossible for me to do in classroom and other school observations. I considered asking the teachers and students I interviewed how they identify themselves, but in the end I decided not to for two primary reasons. One, is that I too felt the pressure of assimilation and the taboo surrounding topics of race and immigration, and I felt that to ask this type of question could potentially threaten my rapport with teachers and students. Secondly, I wanted to see what identity information if any teachers and students would volunteer during the course of a class or an interview. The tables below indicate both my perceptions of teacher and student background, and self-identified identity and immigrant background.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Ethnicity/Immigrant Background</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/European Descent</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghrebin/North African Descent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Sub-Saharan African Descent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian Descent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Descent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Identified Ethnicity/ Immigrant Background</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Additional information provided by teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not self-identify</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>One Jewish, both second generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grandparents immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grandfather immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Identified Ethnicity/ Immigrant Background</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Additional information provided by students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not self-identify</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family has been in France for over 30 years, parents immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>One grandfather from Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Great-grandmother immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parents immigrated and student had spent several years living in Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parents immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congolese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parents immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Moroccan and Pakistani</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parents immigrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Great-grandfather immigrated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Documents

As part of my research I collected a variety of documents including textbooks, curricula, teacher lesson plans, student work and administrative documents from my two school sites. At the CNHI I collected handouts from the teacher training sessions, teacher resources and lesson plans, and books and journals purchased at the CNHI bookstore. Finally I collected political tracts handed out at protests (teacher strikes and national identity debates), education journals and newspaper articles related to my research.

In most of the classes I observed the teacher usually asked a student to loan me his or her textbook so that I could follow along with the class. This gave me the opportunity to examine the textbooks in use at the time of my study and to specifically examine how teachers use specific parts of those textbooks in their teaching. I did not conduct a systematic analysis of textbook or curriculum content,
as that has already been done and merits a separate study in relation to coverage in these texts of immigration. Rather I observed how the textbook was used in class and analyzed specific passages within the context of the lesson at hand.

Data Analysis

While in the field I typed up daily field notes based on my observations. In my notes I paired dates, settings and observations with questions and themes raised by the observations that guided an initial analysis while I was still in the field. I made notes on themes such as the debate over family immigration history in the classroom, as I saw them emerging from my data and adjusted my interview protocol and observations as I went along to further probe these themes.

I conducted all of my interviews in French, but because French is not my native language and in the interest of time, I decided to hire a French doctoral student to transcribe my interviews. I met Kpedetin, a doctoral student in Anthropology at EHESS in February of 2011 and she began transcribing my interviews in March, while I was still in the field. Kpedetin and I met regularly in Paris to discuss our respective research projects (hers was on race in France and specifically beauty standards in relation to black French women) and my interviews. As a young, second generation French woman of African descent who had attended high school in the Paris region and had studied abroad in New York and lived in London, her perspective on my interviews and on my interpretations of them provided a valuable internal, yet external perspective to my analysis. At the end of my time in the field I was invited to present and share my initial findings and
analysis at the University of Paris XIII with scholars Nacira Guénif-Souilamas and Trica Keaton as well as a small group of French, American and Israeli doctoral students conducting research on related topics. This presentation allowed me to tease out several main themes that formed the basis of my analysis and to talk through my research with experts in my area of research.

After leaving the field, I used the Dedoose software analysis program to code and analyze all of my field notes and interview transcripts, over 1200 pages of data in all. In rereading my interviews, field notes and memos on initial themes I developed a list of codes and sub-codes and conducted an initial round of coding in Dedoose. I then refined my code list accordingly and conducted a second round of coding using my full and final code list. Coding in Dedoose allowed me to group excerpts from my data that I had coded together, allowing me to examine a topic such as whiteness among teachers across interviews and observations. I also used the code co-occurrence function in Dedoose to identify which codes tended to overlap, for example “family history” and “taboo” or “republican discourse” and “contractions”. This allowed me to identify themes and points of contestation within the data, eventually narrowing in on the most relevant pieces and structuring my chapters accordingly. Additionally I coded and analyzed the student work I collected by hand since they were mostly hand written documents.

Triangulation of my three data sets, documents, observations and interviews, allowed me to explore the complex interactions between teachers and students in schools today. By triangulating document analysis of the curricula and texts being used by the classes I observed, or the work students produced, with interviews of
teachers and students, I was able to examine how teacher representations and student perceptions of the teaching of immigration history influence how both groups construct views of national identity and belonging.
### APPENDIX B

**LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS**

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Total formal observation hours in School 1: 35

Total formal observation hours in School 2: 91

Total formal observation hours at CNHI: 81.5
My Dedoose codebook contained a total of 178 “parent” and “child” codes. Below is a sample of several main codes and their definitions.

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<td>Discourse or actions in class that have the effect of distancing the topic of immigration from the &quot;imagined community&quot; of the nation, or that distance certain types of students from others based on their background or perceived culture.</td>
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<td>References to the great debate over the use of family history in teaching/learning about immigration and in the school/classroom space.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignments on</td>
<td>Discussion of class or homework assignments given or worked on that involve family history in relation to immigration or related topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Any reference to what it means to be French, to belong to the French nation, or to identify oneself or somebody as French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private vs. public sphere</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reference to what does or does not belong in the public space of a school, particularly in relation to immigration, emotion and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use of term “race” or racial terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relegated</td>
<td></td>
<td>the topic of immigration is often studied outside of the main curriculum in special classes such as exploration and ECJS or not covered much at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Discourse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse reflecting key French republican tenets or ideology (egalitarian, colorblind, abstract, laic, universalist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularist Practice</td>
<td>references to or actions observed that reflect an understanding of differences between students, teachers, etc. in the school space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>Observations of or references to existing inequality in schools, among students or in French society as a whole</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition of difference</td>
<td>References to or understandings of differences as a positive aspect of society or schooling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracking</td>
<td>references to different academic, technical and professional tracks in schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students if prof</td>
<td>Student responses to interview question on how they would teach immigration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on students</td>
<td>Teacher comments on or perceptions of their students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology</td>
<td>Words used to describe teachers, students and other members of French society. Child codes reflect exact use of the following terms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gaulois
- Algérien
- Antillais
- Arabe
- Asiatique
- Assimilation
- Black
- Blanc
- Brassages
- Chinois
- Composition sociale
- Culture
- D'origine
- Dangereux/peur/faire attention/craint
- De couleur
- De souche
- Deuxième génération
- Difficile
- Diversité
- Douloureux
- Défavorise
- Enfant d'immigre
- Ethnicié
- Européen
- Facile
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Français</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gene/timidite/reticence/derange</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hétérogène</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigre</td>
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<td>Intégration</td>
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<td>Issue de</td>
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<td>Juif</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maghrébin</td>
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<td>Marocain</td>
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<td>Minorité</td>
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<td>Mixité</td>
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<td>Musulman</td>
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<td>Métissée</td>
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<td>Noir</td>
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<td>Pionnier</td>
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<td>Privilégiée</td>
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<td>Problème</td>
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<td>Public varie</td>
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<td>Racisme</td>
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<td>Richesse</td>
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<td>Sans papier</td>
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<td>Sensible/délicat</td>
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<td>Stigmatisé/honte</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tabou/interdit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violente/brutalité</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Etranger</td>
<td></td>
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