The political and policy responses to migration-related diversity in the French education system.

Valérie Sala Pala and Patrick Simon, INED

Introduction

In France, the idea of "national education" emerged with the French Revolution. During the 19th century, school became an *"affaire d'Etat"* (Nique, 1990). Education was considered as a key element of the construction of the unitary Republic, and of national identity, culture and language. In this republican project, school was supposed to play a major role in crushing all differences. The aim was fundamentally to build republican citizens by cutting individuals off from their particular local cultures, communities and religions (Déloye, 1996).

Regarding immigration, the education of immigrants' children at the end of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century was not treated through public policies but only through private initiatives. Gradually, the objective of assimilation led to a promotion of equality of treatment, teaching of the French language and compulsory schooling for foreign children[1]. This did not prevent the parallel teaching of "languages of origin", in partnership with the national education system. In the 1920s and 1930s, the possibility was opened of providing foreign children with "courses of language and civilisation" or of "mother languages" with a foreign teacher, outside the weekly school hours. Nevertheless, it is mainly since the 1970s that the presence of children of immigrants at school has been considered as a public issue. From that period until today, the developments of a public policy related to that question (and more largely today to migration-related diversity at school) have been marked by both sharp change and continuity. Overall, the republican concept of cultural difference as a threat to the republican model has impeded the development of a multicultural approach to education in France.

Today, how is this issue constructed and managed within a French society which is more uncertain than ever about its traditional "integration model"? In order to highlight this question, we develop five points in this report. First, we analyse the developments of national policy from the 1960s to the 2000s; these developments reveal the clear illegitimacy of multicultural education within the French republican context today. Second, we show how the question of multicultural education is present (or rather absent) in the contemporary institutional setting of the national education system. Third, we study the way in which multiculturalism and migration-related diversity are treated in the curriculum, with a special attention to the issue of the history of immigration. Fourth, we analyse local educational practices related to diversity. Fifth, we consider the management of Islam and *laïcité* at school as this issue has been highly politicised in France since the beginning of the 2000s, especially in relation to what has been referred to as the "affair of the Muslim headscarf".

---

[1] Cf. 9 August 1936 Act on compulsory primary secular education for French and foreign children.

1. The developments of national policy (1960s-2000s): the illegitimacy of multicultural education within the French republican context

In this first section, we consider the way in which the presence of children of immigrants has been constructed and dealt with from the 1960s onwards[2]. We focus on the official construction of the problem and the official categories of public policy through which the problem has been constructed by the French State (*i.e.* disregarding the practices and categories through which those policies have been implemented on the ground). The official categories that we have to explore are mainly twofold: 1) the way in which groups are defined (for instance as "foreign children", "children of migrants", "children having specific difficulties", etc.) and 2) the way in which the issues are defined and conceptualised (for instance in terms of "integration", "intercultural issues", "multiculturalism", "social exclusion", "territorial inequalities", etc.).

From this point of view, the most striking feature is certainly the absence of anything designed as a "multicultural" or "intercultural" education policy in the French republican context. Françoise Lorcerie and Stéphanie Morel hence define the education policy towards children of immigrants as a "policy nowhere to be found" (2003, p. 219). However, a brief historical perspective shows that this has not always been the case. Schematically, it seems relevant to distinguish between three main periods.

1.1. Between universalism and specific schemes: the difficult emergence of "intercultural" education (1970s)

In France, the 1973-74 crisis marked the official cessation of work-related immigration, while a family immigration developed, transforming the nature of the immigrant population. Work-related immigration was suspended in 1974, while a policy promoting return to the country of origin was developed. On the political agenda, immigration, which until that period was strictly considered as an economic issue, started to be treated as a dimension of social questions such as housing, training, culture, and education. The policy towards immigrants that emerged during that period was underlain by a double aim: the "assimilation" of the immigrants (now that the "temporary" character of their presence was partly questioned), and the maintenance of their cultures of origin in order to favour their reintegration in their societies of origin.

Within that new context, at the beginning of the 1970s, differentialist policies emerged in the education field, introducing a sharp institutional change from the previous period. The creation of educational structures related to a specific public – *i.e.* "the children of migrants"- initiated a real consideration of the cultural difference of the pupils, albeit mainly reduced to the dimension of language. The political support for return to the country of origin led to an action favouring the maintenance of the "cultures of origin". At the same time, the assimilation goal led to a socialisation of foreign children through the teaching of French at school. The criterion used to define the public of that specific policy was nationality. The differentialist educational policy created during that period mainly consisted of two aspects: first a linguistic policy for foreign children, and second a training policy for the teachers coping with this pupil groups.

---

[2] The two main references here are Lorcerie and Morel (2003) and Morel (2002).

Regarding the first aspect, a dual policy was set up. Specific classes were created to teach French to children of immigrants. Initiation classes for foreign children (*classes d'initiation pour enfants étrangers*, CLIN) were experimented with in primary schools in 1970, for children between 7 and 13. They were institutionalised with the creation of integrated "catch-up" courses (*cours de rattrapage intégrés*, CRI) and of adaptation classes (*classes d'adaptation*, CLAD) for young foreigners in secondary school (between 12 and 16). The knowledge of French language was considered as the main element of integration of foreign children. And, in 1975, specific classes were set up for the teaching of "languages and cultures of origin" (*enseignement des langues et cultures d'origine*, ELCO). This teaching was provided by foreign teachers under the double control of the French State and of the emigration State. This policy was based on ambiguous aims as it simultaneously referred to equality of opportunity and to a possible return to the country of origin. Thus it can be said that the double-sided linguistic policy of the 1970s "promotes a double alternative: adaptation or return" (Morel, 2002, p. 65).

The other important aspect of the differentialist educational policy consisted of training the actors of education policy (teachers, school directors, education councillors, course advisors, educational psychologists, etc.) on the specific issue of children of immigrants. Training and information centres for the schooling of migrants' children (*Centres de formation et d'information pour la scolarisation d'enfants de migrants*, CEFISEM) were set up from 1976 to 1984 in each academy (*i.e.* in each regional education district). These CEFISEMs played a great role in sustaining the teaching teams willing to develop intercultural activities.

In order to link this specific teaching with the mainstream curriculum, "intercultural activities" were introduced at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The term "intercultural" entered the official discourse of the French National Education system with the 18 July 1978 circular on the schooling of children of immigrants, which recommended the organisation of intercultural activities in order to recognise the value of pupils' cultures of origin (Lorcerie, 2003a, p. 261). Intercultural teaching was the object of two pilot experimental schemes between 1976 and 1982 but the Ministry of National Education never gave practical instructions for its implementation. The exception was an administrative note of 26 May 1983 about the "raising of pupils' awareness of the problems of the Third world and intercultural relations", which received little attention. Intercultural education then referred to the "dialogue of cultures", the mutual understanding of cultures, the recognition of the value of each culture, the refusal of ethnocentrism, and adherence to a principle of cultural relativism.

During that period, European institutions, which clearly encouraged the development of intercultural education, had a strong influence on French public policy. The "intercultural" approach advocated by French institutions was close to the concept promoted by the European Community and the Council of Europe[3]. During that period, there was thus a specific policy relying on "a real ethnocultural management of the 'schooling of the children of migrants'" (Morel, 2002, p. 14).

---

[3] Cf. United Nations' resolution concerning an action programme for migrant workers and their families, 14 December 1976; Council directive on "the education of the children of migrant workers", 25 July 1977; Council of Europe (1981), *The education of the children of migrant workers in Europe: interculturalism and teacher training* Strasbourg, Council of Europe; Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' recommendation "on the training of teachers in education for intercultural understanding, notably in a context of migration", 25 September 1984.

1.2. Shift to a social and territorial approach: the policy of priority education zones (1980-90s)

In 1981, a major political change occurred with the arrival of a socialist government under the presidency of François Mitterrand. During the 1980s, the general political context was different from that of the 1970s: it was marked by social and economic crisis, the rise of the National Front which legitimised its anti-immigrant stance through a discourse about an essentialised "cultural difference", the rising claims of groups from immigrant backgrounds. Within that new context, "intercultural" did not appear any more as a legitimate category of public policy and disappeared behind social and territorial categories. The intercultural conception was gradually replaced by an approach in terms of social exclusion and territorial inequalities. Differentialist policies were replaced by "one law for all" policies targeting "persons facing social handicaps" or "lacking integration".

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Ministry of National Education announced its intention to change the whole policy regarding the children of immigrants. It ordered a report from Jacques Berque, a specialist of Arabic (Berque, 1985). This report deeply criticised the policy followed since the 1970s, stressing the lack of training of the teachers, the insufficient mobilisation of the administration, and the isolation of specific classes for children of immigrants in schools. It stated the need to revise the concept of national identity which was transmitted at school and which failed to recognise the fundamental contribution of immigrants to the construction of the French nation. It pointed out the cultural ethnocentrism of national education and argued for an opening of the educational system to cultural pluralism. These recommendations were not followed by the governments in the 1980s.

In the second half of the 1980s, a return to one law for all was visible. In March 1986, the Ministry of National Education adopted circulars stating the application of one law to the reception of foreign children in schools, and neutralising the action of CEFISEMs. From that period onwards, the word "intercultural" started to be banished from the vocabulary of French National Education: "the word is judged politically inopportune, as well as the path of transformation that it designates; the Ministry then gives exclusivity to the republican principle of equality" (Lorcerie, 2003a, p. 263). The specific question of the education of children of immigrants was even more marginalised in the institutional system of the education policy than during the previous period. It was supplanted by the emphasis on civic education (from 1987-88) and, above all, by a social and territorial approach to the educational issues.

"Cultural diversity" was less than ever at the forefront of the education policy. If cultural diversity could be mentioned in some schemes as a goal, for instance in a circular of October 1990 on CEFISEMs[4], there was no specific scheme inviting the actors of education to implement this goal on the ground, and helping them knowing how they could do it concretely. In a short time, the intercultural credo was banished from the Ministry of National Education: "Everything to do with teaching French as a foreign language has continued to be supported, but a kind of pressure cooker cover has been put on all other aspects, and

---

[4] In the words of this circular, "The attention given to all pupils in their social and cultural diversity, whatever their origin or their individual or collective characteristics, must be a constant educational and teaching concern, as well as the knowledge and use of the richness provided by the composition of our society".

'intercultural' has become a taboo word. It was not possible any more to pronounce that word at the Ministry of National Education; it was astonishing"[5].

Gradually, social and territorial categories were legitimised as the main categories for addressing the "new social question" (Castel, 1995) and more specifically education issues. The policy towards children of immigrants was integrated into a larger policy patterned by a social and territorial approach, the "Priority Education Zones" (*Zones d'éducation prioritaires*, ZEP). The setting up of those Priority Education Zones[6] was in keeping with the development of a new approach of social policy relying on the concept of social exclusion and on a positive action targeting specific urban territories. It was also in keeping with a rising official discourse on "republican integration" and, in parallel, a refusal of any specific treatment according to ethnic or cultural difference. Specific schemes were seen as bearing a risk of stigmatisation of some groups according to their ethnic origin, and as being in contradiction with the French republican tradition of hostility to the constitution or maintenance of communities within the Republic.

The ZEP policy was mainly based on two principles: 1) territorial redistribution giving more money and resources to the schools facing the greatest difficulties; 2) territorialisation of education policies and mobilisation of all local actors (starting with schools and local governments) through local partnerships. Although the "presence of foreign or non-French-speaking children" was used as a criterion to define the schools classified as ZEP[7] (next to social indicators such as the proportion of educational "backwardness", the proportion of pupils in classes preparing for apprenticeship, the proportion of school drop-outs, and the socio-economic composition of the families), no reference was made to specific schemes targeting children of immigrants. The idea of preserving the diversity of cultures was generally absent from the ZEP policy. This policy consisted of a redistribution of resources more than of new ideas for curricula or teaching practices.

As far as education policy was concerned, the trend was thus in favour of not marking out specific groups, in line with the general development of the policy in direction of immigrants (Lapeyronnie, 1993). The ZEP policy targeted "groups having social difficulties", sometimes designed as "difficult groups", "difficult schools", in "difficult neighbourhoods". There are many examples of this return to one law for all. For instance, the activities of educational support (*accompagnement scolaire*, support provided outside the school hours for pupils facing difficulties) funded by the Fund for social action (*Fonds d'action sociale*, FAS, whose main aim was to fund actions for immigrants and their families) no longer targeted the children of immigrants but all pupils, notably in ZEPs, even if the FAS still made its financing conditional on the presence of a significant number of children of immigrants. In the same way, the CEFISEMs were given the responsibility of supporting the educational teams in ZEPs and were gradually absorbed into new "academic resource centres for priority education".

During the same period, a harsher integrationist discourse towards immigrants or groups from immigrant backgrounds was expressed by the French State (Haut Conseil à l'intégration, HCI, 1993) and by the Ministry of National Education in particular, especially

---

[5] Interview with the person in charge of the schooling of children of immigrants at the Ministry of National Education during that period, quoted by Morel, 2002, p. 72.

[6] The ZEP policy was created at the beginning of the 1980s but it was given more scope from the end of the 1980s.

[7] Cf. Circular n° 81-238 of 1 July 1981, "Priority zones".

on the occasion of the first "affair of the Muslim headscarf", from 1989[8] onwards. In 1990, a report to the Interministerial Committee for Integration restated the ideology of integration in the educational field (Hussenet, 1990). The double reference to "integration" and "social exclusion" thus outlined the framework within which the issue of migration-related diversity at school was or was not defined and addressed. The political consensus around the concept of "integration" led to a refusal of any specific definition of the public. According to the official viewpoint, education policy had to cope not only with children of immigrants but also with all pupils facing "difficulties" at school. Children of immigrants were merely considered as facing more difficulties at school because they disproportionately belonged to disadvantaged socio-cultural groups.

Although ethnic and cultural categories disappeared from the official formulation of the problems, numerous sociological studies have shown the strength of ethnic, cultural and religious categorisations used by the actors in education on the ground during the 1980s-90s and up to the present time (Laforgue, 2005; Lorcerie, ed., 2003; Morel, 2002; Payet, 1995; Poiret, 1996; Perroton, 2003; Rinaudo, 1999; van Zanten, 2001). These studies tend to show that the republican myth, which favours the use of social categories and the denial of cultural categories, leads to an ambiguous assimilation between "pupils having difficulties" and "children of immigrants" and does not, in day-to-day practices at school, prevent the spread of the idea that difficulties at school are the product of a socio-cultural or socio-ethnic handicap. The official silence on migration-related diversity has favoured the unofficial development of ethnic and cultural categorisations in educational practices on the ground.

1.3. Discriminations and segregation, laïcité, postcolonialism: towards new readings of the issue (2000s)

The social/territorial approach still prevails in the treatment of migration-related diversity at school today[9]. However, this approach has been "enlarged" by the emergence of three "new" (albeit not entirely new) framings of the issue: in terms of ethnic discrimination and segregation, in terms of Islam and *laïcité*, and in terms of postcolonialism[10].

The emergence of a reading in terms of discrimination/segregation can be dated back to 1998 and to the development of an anti-discrimination policy paradigm at the national level, first under the left-wing Jospin government. The 1998 report of the High Council of Integration (HCI, 1998) symbolised this shift to anti-discrimination. A whole section of the report was devoted to discrimination and segregation at school, which revealed the importance given to the education field in the anti-discrimination programme[11]. The question of racism and anti-Semitism at school (mainly between pupils or groups of pupils, rather than between pupils and teachers) was also put forward on the national political agenda (Dhume, 2006). However, scientific studies still reveal the limitations of the fight against

---

[8] On this point, cf. our WP2 report.

[9] As time goes by, two kinds of issues or pupil groups are more and more to be distinguished: on one side, the treatment of recently arrived children (especially when they do not speak French); on the other side, the presence at school of children that are considered as having a "different origin", "culture" or religion, often on the basis of their colour or of the immigrant status of their parents (or grand-parents). Most of those children are French and born in France, have been socialised in French schools since an early age, and French is their mother tongue.

[10] *I.e.* the debates around the place acknowledged to immigration and people from the ex-colonised countries within the French national identity and culture; these debates are also linked with those related to the recognition of the discriminations and racism faced by the groups of immigrant background. For the general background, cf. our WP1 and WP2 reports.

[11] Cf. Section 2: "School: the republican model under threat".

discrimination at school (Lorcerie, 2003b), even if specific schemes have attracted media attention, such as the affirmative action scheme set up by the Sciences-Po Paris selective *grande école* (Sabbagh, 2002). The most recent studies continue to provide evidence of the extent of the ordinary mobilisation of ethnic and cultural categories by local actors of education and the strength of discriminatory and segregational processes produced by the educational system (Felouzis, Liot, Perroton, 2005; Laforgue, 2005). The debate on the reform of "school catchment areas" has since 2006 led to an emphasis on the question of social and ethnic segregation at school (Oberti, 2006).

Regarding the framing in terms of *laïcité*, the debate, first developed between 1989 and 1994 around the first so-called "affair of the Muslim headscarf", has been reactivated since 2003. This process of politicisation of the Muslim headscarf (Lorcerie, ed., 2005) led to the 15 March 2004 "law regulating, in application of the principle of *laïcité*, the wearing of signs or clothes displaying a religious belonging in public primary, secondary and high schools"[12]. According to that law, "In public primary, secondary and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothes by which the pupils conspicuously display a religious affiliation is forbidden. The school rules shall stipulate that the implementation of a disciplinary procedure is preceded by a dialogue with the pupil". The law came in force in September 2004. An administrative decree of 18 May 2004 specified its conditions of enforcement[13] by stating that "the prohibited signs and clothes are those by which, whatever they may be called, a person is immediately identified by their religious beliefs, such as the Muslim headscarf, the kippah or a cross of manifestly excessive dimension". More generally, the management of Islam at school has been increasingly considered as an issue those last years (see point 5 below).

During the same period, a third framing emerged in terms of national memory and postcolonialism. Since 2005, a growing debate has developed about colonialism, the "colonial fracture" and the debt of the French State towards the people of the former colonies, in North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the West Indies (Blanchard, Bancel, Lemaire, ed., 2005). In that context, the vote of the 23 February 2005 Act[14] (the Mekachera Act), aiming at the recognition of the contribution of French returnees from North Africa *(pieds noirs)*, triggered a scandal because of its Article 4 asking the official history curriculum to give "the place that it deserves" to "the positive role played by the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa". This article was finally withdrawn after a petition of historians and extensive mobilisation against this rehabilitation of the colonial past (Bertrand, 2006). The newly created National centre for the history of immigration (*Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*), which was designed in the 1990s as a project aiming at recognising immigration as constitutive of French history and national identity, and which opened in 2007, is today leading an examination of the need to teach (and to teach differently) the history of immigration at school (see point 3 below).

To conclude this first section, the historical perspective shows that, except in the 1970s, the issue of migration-related diversity and cultural difference has not been addressed as such by education policy in France. The concept of multicultural education is absent from

---

[12] Loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics.
[13] Circulaire relative à la mise en oeuvre de la loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics.
[14] Loi n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.

the French policy paradigm. It can even be said that, here as well as in other social and policy fields, the reference to multiculturalism and to cultural diversity seems to be – at least at an official policy level – constructed as a negative reference.

Table: Summary. The main developments in national policy (1970s-2000s)

	1970s	1980-90s	2000s
National policy paradigm	"Intercultural" education	- "Social exclusion", "urban problems", "territorial inequalities" - "Integration"	- Ethnic discrimination and segregation - *Laïcité*/Islam - National identity and memory of immigration (postcolonialism)
Identification of pupil groups	- Migrants' children - Foreign children	- Territorial definition of priority education zones (ZEPs), based on different criteria (social criteria and proportion of foreign children)	- Victims of ethnic discrimination - religious categorisation (law on *laïcité*) - Still no desire to specify groups according to "culture"
Institutions	Creation of specific structures: CEFISEM, ELCO, CLIN, CLAD	- Neutralisation of previous specific structures - Local partnerships for Priority education	- No specific structures except for "recently arrived children" (especially French language classes)
Main policy schemes	Promotion of intercultural activities; recognition of the value of cultural difference; promotion of national cultures and languages of "origin"; teaching of French	Priority education zones; Local affirmative action. No specific policy scheme for the management of diversity.	- Fight against discrimination: no specific policy for schools - 2005 law on *laïcité*: shift to a repressive concept of *laïcité* - examination of curricula (towards another concept of national identity)
Multiculturalism?	"Intercultural education"; recognition of the need to recognise the value of the various "cultures of origin"	Multiculturalism as a negative reference; no official policy to tackle ethnic/cultural diversity; "unofficial" ethnic and cultural categories present everywhere in educational practices	Multiculturalism still not a category of public policy; "unofficial" ethnic and cultural categories still present in educational practices; more awareness of these categorisations?

2. Multicultural education in the contemporary institutional setting of the national education system

In this second section, we discuss the way in which the "multicultural" paradigm is today present in the structures and institutions of the French national education system. Although it is obvious that the issue of multiculturalism only has a marginal status within the institutional structure of the education system (cf. first section), several questions can be raised. First, to what extent do education actors define (or not) some groups in specific terms in relation to migration-related diversity? Second, are there (despite everything) some specific structures that are to some extent, and more or less explicitly, devoted to "multicultural education" and to the management of migration-related diversity at school? To what extent do "neutralised", universalistic institutions use policy schemes that refer (again, explicitly or not) to the treatment of cultural and/or ethnic diversity? In this section, we first outline the general institutional background of education policy in France today, second, analyse the way in which the pupil groups are defined, and third, study the institutions that are in charge of the management of migration-related diversity.

2.1. The general institutional background: managing diversity in a context of decentralisation and differentiation of education policies

Until the 1980s, there was no real decentralisation of education policy in France. National education was a matter for the central State, with a participation of the *communes* from 1833 (in charge of the management of primary schools), and of the *départements* from the end of the 19th century (in charge of the training of teachers). The extensive devolution policy engaged in 1982-83 and implemented in the education field in 1985-86 constituted a historical break as it opened the path to a general transformation of education policies. From the 1980s on, the decentralisation of education policy was brought about both by devolution policy and the definition of priority education zones (ZEPs), together with the development of a social/urban policy targeting deprived urban neighbourhoods (*politique de la ville*).

Today, each level of local government is in charge of an education level: primary schools for municipalities, secondary schools for *départements*, and high schools for regions[15]. Local governments are the owners of the schools and have the responsibility for their creation, localisation, equipment and operation. *Départements* and regions also have the responsibility of organising education, sport and cultural activities. The central State keeps the responsibility of teaching questions, definition of the curriculum, training and remuneration of staff, and higher education. Regarding the organisation of the State at local level, the administrative district of the National Education is the academy (*académie*). There are 30 academies in France. The regional education officer (*recteur*) represents the Minister of National Education at the academic level. Within the academy, the Inspector of academy (*Inspecteur d'académie*) represents the regional education officer at the level of the *département*.

The decentralisation of education in the 1980s has mainly concerned the organisational and material aspects of education, while the State still controls the definition of the main policy orientations and goals, the definition of the curriculum and the management of education staff (especially the training of teachers). However, at local level, these representatives of the local State are supposed to be initiators or "animators" more than

---

[15] Cf. 22 July 1983 Act on the sharing of prerogatives between *communes*, *départements*, regions and the State, supplemented by the 25 January 1985 Act organising the decentralisation of education.

"leaders" of local education policy, in the spirit of decentralisation. Moreover, almost all texts relative to ZEPs, school projects or other aspects of educational policies since the 1980s have referred to the notion of partnership between local actors, *i.e.* local governments, local State, school director, education staff, and representatives of school users (pupils and parents[16]), enterprises and voluntary associations (especially those involved in the educational support outside school hours).

The basic element of this decentralised organisation is the school itself. In 1985, secondary schools and high schools became local public educational establishments (*établissements publics locaux d'enseignement*, EPLE), led by a tripartite board made up of representatives of local government (one third), employees of the school (one third) and parents and pupils (one third). This board "sets up, in the respect of existing legislative and statutory rules and of the goals defined by the competent State authorities, the principles of the implementation of teaching and educational autonomy"[17] of the school. Schools define their own "school project" (*projet d'établissement*)[18], which is the support and resources for the autonomy, allowing the schools to organise "contacts and exchanges with their economic, social and cultural environment". The 1989 orientation Act on education made the definition of a "school project" compulsory. This project must help the school take into consideration the specificities of its pupil groups: "One of the major problems faced by each school and educational establishment consists of respecting the national objectives while considering the pupils that it receives in their diversity of social origin, culture, educational level and personal qualities"[19]. Hence the school project "allows the reconciliation of the principle of unity and the principle of diversity"[20]. The idea is that the implementation of the republican principle of equality implies taking into account the social and cultural diversity of the pupils: the school project is the instrument of republican equality "because the latter does not consist of submitting all pupils to the same educational treatment but on the contrary implies a differentiated process in order to take into account the pupils in their diversity, as they are, and to give them an equal opportunity of success"[21]. The autonomy of the schools mainly regards the organisation of classes, the organisation of the school timetable, the opening of the school to its social, cultural and economic environment, and the organisation of optional activities.

2.2. The ambiguous definition of pupil groups

The second dimension of the decentralisation of education policies is related to the setting up of ZEPs from 1981, which brings us to the issue of the definition of the pupil groups and of the criteria used (in terms of nationality, origin, culture, ethnicity, etc.). With the ZEP scheme, we first encounter a geographical criterion, as the policy targets not individuals or groups but geographical (urban or, more rarely, rural) territories characterised by an accumulations of difficulties. The aim of ZEPs is to fight against social inequalities in the educational field by a selective strengthening of the action in the zones with the highest

---

[16] The mandatory representation of teachers and pupils dates back to 1968.

[17] Cf. 22 July 1983 Act on the sharing of prerogatives between *communes*, *départements*, regions and the State, completed by the 25 January 1985 Act organising the decentralisation of education, article 15-5 to 15-9.

[18] The notion was born in Soubré L. (1982), *Décentralisation et démocratisation des institutions scolaires*, report to the Ministry of National Education.

[19] Report appended to the 10 July 1989 Orientation Act on education.

[20] Ministry of National Education, "Plan de modernisation du service public de l'Education nationale", B.O. Spécial, n° 3, 30/5/1991, p. 12.

[21] *Idem*.

rate of educational failure[22]. As we have already seen, the criteria of delimitation of the ZEPs set up in a 1981 circular (cf. section 1) establish a link between belonging to disadvantaged social groups, the number of foreign children and school failure[23]. The first map of the ZEPs was thus similar to the map of immigration (Bourgarel, 1992, p. 24). Finally, behind the territorial definition, the pupil groups are in fact defined in reference to a mix of geographical, socio-economic, and nationality criteria.

Things are clearer regarding the policy in direction of recently arrived pupils (*élèves nouveaux arrivants*, ENA[24]). These children are merely defined by the fact that they have just arrived in France and do not speak French. They are not defined by a nationality criterion: they can be foreign or French[25]. On their arrival, they are dealt with by the Academic centres for the schooling of recently arrived pupils and travellers' children (*Centres académiques pour la scolarisation des nouveaux arrivants et des enfants du voyage*, CASNAV), which replaced the CEFISEMs in 2002. The main official task of these centres[26] is the teaching of French to these recently arrived pupils.

2.3. The institutional structures dedicated to the management of ethnic/cultural diversity: the persisting tension between one law for all and specific policies

As mentioned above, a number of specific structures were created in the 1970s (CLIN, CLAD, ELCO, CEFISEM) but from the 1980s, the trend was rather towards a neutralisation of those structures. Thus, at the beginning of the 2000s, the former specific schemes had become much less specific in nature (Morel, 2002, p. 107-117). CEFISEMs were transformed into academic centres for the schooling of recently arrived pupils and travellers' children (*Centres académiques pour la scolarisation des nouveaux arrivants et des enfants du voyage*, CASNAV) in 2002. Most of them had gradually enlarged their missions during the 1980s and 1990s to children having difficulties at school and disadvantaged children in general. The way they defined their pupil groups revealed some degree of confusion between foreign children, children of immigrants, children attending schools in ZEPs, and for some of them travellers' children (*enfants du voyage*). However, the actions of the CEFISEMs have always been influenced by their past and by the differentialist conception that prevailed in the 1970s. Most educators within CEFISEMs still militate in favour of the right to difference (Morel, 2002, p. 125). They try to influence the dominant representations of the teachers *vis-à-vis* migration-related diversity and to combat the latent racism that they observe in the education system. In practice, their actions remain focused on the issue of immigrants' children and ethnocultural difference. The local influence of the CEFISEM varies greatly according to local policy networks, local policies and the scope they give to the issue of migration-related diversity, but everywhere they have to manage the ambivalence of ministerial instructions, *i.e.* considering immigrants' children but without specifying the pupil group or differentiating the actions.

---

[22] Ministry of National Education, circular n° 81-238, 1st July 1981, "Zones prioritaires".

[23] *Idem*.

[24] Or *élèves nouveaux arrivants en France*, ENAF.

[25] For instance, in 2004-2005 in France, about 25% of "recently arrived pupils" had French nationality, 28% the nationality of a country of the Maghreb, 9% the nationality of another African country, 9% the nationality of a European country outside the European Union, 9% the nationality of an Asian country outside Turkey, 6% Turkish nationality, 5% the nationality of a country of the EU outside France, 3% the nationality of a country of America/Caribbean. Cf. Ministry of National Education (2006), *La scolarisation des élèves nouveaux arrivants non francophones au cours de l'année scolaire 2004-2005*, Note d'information, 06-08.

[26] The missions of the CASNAV are defined by the text of the official bulletin n° 10 of April 2002 and by the 29 August 2003 academic circular 2003-O77.

At present, the only really specific structures devoted to migration-related diversity are the specific classes attended by recently arrived pupils: initiation classes (*classes d'initiation*, CLIN) for children in primary schools and reception classes (*classes d'accueil*, CLA) for children in secondary or high school. These classes are made up of the children recently arrived in France and not speaking French, whether French nationals or not. For 2004-2005, these schemes were attended by 19,400 children in elementary schools (in 1000 CLIN) and 20,600 pupils in secondary and high schools (in 800 CLA)[27]. On their arrival, recently arrived pupils are taken in charge by a reception unit (*cellule d'accueil*) based at the *département* or regional education headquarters. Their level of French and their general school level are assessed. They are then oriented towards a specific class if necessary. In any case, they also have to attend an ordinary class, where they follow the courses which do not require an extensive knowledge of French. In addition, if necessary, they attend a CLIN or a CLA in order to learn French intensively. These schemes are temporary (few children spend more than one year in these classes) and aim at making them able to fully join the ordinary classes as rapidly as possible.

In practice, the initiation classes and reception classes, which are located on the edge of the educational system, are different by being classes in which the teachers explicitly take into account the cultural identity of the children (Morel, 2002, p. 119-124). They are based on the recognition of cultures, individualised teaching, concern for the migration history and the family situation of the children. The mission of the teachers consists of teaching French to these children and socialising them to the rules of the French school through diversified teaching practices relying on an adaptation to the specific situation and problems of each child. The intercultural approach is still visible in these structures: the teachers implement actions of cultural recognition such as the design of artistic or culinary projects, or the organisation of intercultural events. In practice, these classes are marginalised: geographical isolation of the classes, no collaboration with teachers of "ordinary classes", lack of consideration of the teachers having specific classes. This marginalisation seems to reflect the illegitimacy of a differentialist policy today in France.

Although specific structures are officially banished from the republican, universalistic French model of National Education, unofficially, local actors develop strategies of adaptation to deal with the contradictory instructions from the Ministry of Education. The example of mediation and educational support developed at the local level, through networks of specialist voluntary associations supported by the local State, is striking. These associations have a major role in managing some aspects of the interethnic and intercultural relations that are not dealt with directly by education policy. This is the case of the schemes called "relay women" (*femmes-relais*), which can be considered as a form of intercultural mediation. These relay women work, together with the social workers based in schools, in order to develop relations between the school and the families. Chosen from the women who are well integrated in their neighbourhood and possess the "culture of origin", the relay women are interfaces between the education institutions and the families from immigrant backgrounds.

The case of educational support is also interesting. The State promotes actions of educational support (*accompagnement scolaire*), defined as "the various actions aiming at offering, outside the school, the support and resources that the children need for their school success, support that they do not find in their family and social environment"[28]. This support

---

[27] Ministry of National Education (2006), *La scolarisation des élèves nouveaux arrivants non francophones au cours de l'année scolaire 2004-2005*, Note d'information, 06-08.
[28] Cf. Charte de l'accompagnement scolaire, 7 October 1992, quoted in Morel, 2002, p. 59.

focuses on help with homework, giving the pupils the cultural resources to compensate for the deficits of the family and social environment, and "palliating serious linguistic and cultural difficulties"[29]. The partnership with associations providing educational support is based on the idea that educational failure is linked to the socio-cultural milieu, especially for children of foreign origin. Thus, in practice the State strongly relies on some community (secular) associations to provide educational support for the children of the "community" concerned (even if the word community is banished from official public vocabulary in France). For instance, the association Elele, a Turkish community association active in Paris, provides educational support for children from Turkish immigration, in partnership with the local State.

Another point to be mentioned is the representation of migration-related diversity among teachers in the national education system. Some studies show an increase of the proportion of young teachers with immigrant parents or grandparents. This is the case in the academy of Créteil (in which the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis is located). According to the annual study carried out since 2003 by the deputy director of the University institute for the training of teachers (*Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres*, IUFM) of Créteil, 13% of the young teachers in primary schools came from immigration in 2005, compared with 11,5% in 2003[30]. The study is based on the surnames of the newly recruited teachers. 153 new teachers came from immigration in 2003, 183 in 2005 and 239 in 2006, including 80% women. Almost all of them have attended schools in ZEPs. According to the deputy director of the IUFM, this result shows that school is still an instrument of social promotion for some of the persons from immigrant backgrounds.

The reactions of the local actors to the growing migration-related diversity of the teachers show a kind of distrust towards any communitarian reading of that development. For instance, according to the academic inspector of Seine-Saint-Denis, any quota system would be bad and the growing number of teachers from immigrant backgrounds is positive only because it is a positive sign for children from immigrant backgrounds. But he adds that: "In my opinion, if [teachers from immigrant backgrounds] became a majority, especially in some vocational high schools, if the courses were almost exclusively given by French teachers from immigrant backgrounds, we would have an intra-community teaching, and it would not be good. As long as we are within the proportions in the French population, everything is all right." (Interview with the academic inspector, Seine-Saint-Denis). This view is close to the one expressed by the representative of the main teachers' union active in Seine-Saint-Denis: "We should not fall into the trap of having a team of teachers who are the exact reflection of the pupils. …. I would be shocked if there were not more teachers with a foreign origin, but I don't want to have quotas behind it." (Interview with the representative of the FSU, Seine-Saint-Denis).

To sum up this section, what must be stressed is the fact that official policy focuses on two main dimensions: first, action for recently arrived children, which mainly consists of teaching them French; and second, the recognition of "socio-economic" difficulties, which are treated through a priority education zone policy which target territories defined by a mix of (predominantly) social and economic, but also nationality criteria and, in practice, also the criterion of immigration. The recognition of specific features is only admitted in the case of recently arrived children, characterised by a difference in linguistic terms (thus in more

---

[29] *Idem.*
[30] Cf. "13% des jeunes instituteurs de l'académie de Créteil issus de l'immigration", 03/10/2006, website "VousNousIls". The fact that the academic inspector of Seine-Saint-Denis made this study is interesting as it shows his interest in the growing migration-related diversity among teachers.

legitimate terms than ethnic or cultural ones at large, in France), as expressed by the academic inspector of Seine-Saint-Denis: "At the beginning we have to take into account the fact that they have a bad knowledge of the language, for a few months, a few years, but then they become pupils, even if their name is Touré or whatever." This double-sided framing of the question ignores whole aspects of the way in which migration-related diversity may or may not be treated at school. This refusal to recognise the value of cultural difference lies both in the desire not to ethnicise some groups and thus favour discriminatory or segregational processes that would disadvantage the pupils from immigrant backgrounds, and in some representations of cultural difference, communitarianism, that see Islam as a potential threat to the French Republic, its society, identity and values. This also has deep implications for the way in which the national curriculum treats the question of immigration and migration-related diversity.

3. Multiculturalism and migration-related diversity in the curriculum: immigration as a "national unacknowledgeable"

How does the curriculum treat the questions of immigration and migration-related diversity? For a long time, this question remained unacknowledgeable in France. There is clearly today a growing concern for this subject, visible for instance in the number of symposia devoted to this issue in recent years[31]. The recently created National centre for the history of immigration (*Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration,* CNHI) played a major role in developing that concern, together with the National institute for teaching research (*Institut national de la recherche académique*, INRP), which has recently issued an in-depth study of practices in teaching the history of immigration (INRP, 2007).

Current debates and criticisms focus on two points: first, the fact that immigration and the history of immigration are scarcely addressed in the curriculum; second, even when the curriculum does refer to them, the lack of guidelines for teachers on what in practice they can do to transmit knowledge on this difficult subject. This virtual absence of immigration and diversity in the curriculum (or their treatment as a marginal phenomenon, at the periphery of the French national construction) both reveals and encourages the transmission of an ethnocentric conception of French identity. In this section, we consider only the official guidelines (Falaize, 2006), and not the practices developed by teachers in classrooms. We focus on secondary and high schools.

At secondary school (*collège*, 11-15), the history of immigration does not appear as such in the history and geography curricula. The history curriculum is silent on the immigration processes that took place in France and Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries. The question appears in other disciplines: geography and civic education. In geography, the *quatrième* (13-14) curriculum contains a large section on "France, unity and diversity", which can provide an opportunity for the study of immigration (this is confirmed by school books), even if it is not made explicit. In *troisième* (14-15), the curriculum provides for the study of international migration, notably to France. In the history curriculum for *troisième*, which deals with the post-1945 period, the issue of post-war immigration in France is not explicitly mentioned as part of the programme.

---

[31] The Academy of Créteil together with the CNHI, , held an academic conference on 29 March 2006 devoted to the theme "The history of immigration: what teaching and educational challenges?".

At high school (*lycée*, 15-18), immigration is also more present in geography and civic education than in the history curriculum. Migratory processes are again in the geography curriculum of *première* (16-17). But above all, immigration is present in the civic education (*Education civique, juridique et sociale*, ECJS) curriculum, mainly in *seconde* (15-16). The social and political aspects of the integration of migrants may be addressed within one of the major themes of the curriculum, "Citizenship and integration". The issue of citizenship is approached through various notions: civility, integration, nationality, and rights of the citizen. The curriculum also states that these notions must help towards "understanding the sense of citizenship while starting from the experiences of the pupils and their perceptions". Although the issue of immigration is once again not explicitly mentioned, it may be treated within that perspective. The question of integration is even more present in the EJCS curriculum of *première* (16-17): of four themes, the third one is entitled "Exercise of citizenship, Republic and particularism". It precisely evokes the diversity of society and relates it to history. Thus it is mainly in the civic education curriculum that immigration and diversity are present. However, the instructions given to teachers for teaching this civic education are clearly influenced by the republican ideology which treats the pluralism of cultures as a threat to equality and national identity, especially when those cultures are made visible in public (Lorcerie, 2003a, p. 268).

To sum up, there is clearly a lack of guidelines on the history of immigration in the curriculum: "There is no teaching guideline for the history of immigration, there is nothing. We examined existing guidelines. In the curriculum, there is nothing on the history of immigration, except, maybe, in the curriculum of the primary school set up in 2002. […] There is another kind of guideline, which is the school books. And for instance in some civic education school books , we find extraordinary things, for instance this question which, it is suggested, can be asked of the pupils: 'Look at this class. Tell me how you can see the diversity in this class'. I don't know if you realise what it means. It means 'I see that there are some Blacks, some dark skins, some yellow' (I'm saying it this way s on purpose), I don't see how a pupil can give any other answer. It means that one asks the pupil to distinguish according to race and the colour." (Interview with an INRP researcher). Most teachers express the desire to have more precise national guidelines on this issue: "They all talk about the lack of guidelines on the subject." (Id.) Some school books containing long sections on the American melting pot say nothing on immigration processes in France.

This reveals how strongly immigration and diversity are glossed over within the French republican context. The virtual absence of the history of immigration in the curriculum can be explained by the fact that the history of immigration has always been marginalised within the French historian community. This derives from the ethno-national vision of the French national construction propagated by the dominant academic history schools (as shown by Noiriel, 1988). "Generally speaking, history and geography teachers and inspectors, in fact the entire disciplinary community of historians and geographers in France, operate on 'unstated assumptions' [*impensé*, cf. Foucault]. This means the nation-state, history Braudel-fashion, and anything else is out of line." (Interview with a researcher of the INRP).

As a consequence of the absence of official national guidelines on teaching the history of immigration and more generally the educational practices related to diversity, the actors on the ground (starting with the teachers) develop their own practices and categories to deal with migration-related diversity and "cope" with the situations related to diversity that they face on a day-to-day basis.

4. Educational practices related to diversity and multiculturalism

4.1. The lack of teaching tools or recommendations

Even during the 1970s, when an emphasis was put on the need for intercultural education, the actors of education lacked the teaching tools to implement such a conception of education. In practice, this lack of teaching resources or recommendations could even allow space for stereotyped perceptions of cultures and cultural differences in educational practice (Lorcerie, 2003, p. 262). From this viewpoint, the situation is not so different today. In the training of teachers, the question of cultural difference is mainly subsumed in the more general issue of schools or children "having difficulties". The question is generally included in training courses related to "particular situations, difficult situations". However, specific courses are also provided, albeit to a lesser extent. They are provided by the CASNAV (ex CEFISEMs) and focus on themes such as intercultural issues, Islam and *laïcité*, language issues, etc. These courses often aim at changing the way in which the teachers see immigrants' children, since many of them, even with the best intentions, can develop an essentialised vision of cultural difference, or even (consciously or otherwise) exclusion practices which disadvantage these pupil groups.

Conversely, the demarcation of the ZEPs has been accompanied by the definition of priority pedagogic measures, *i.e.* "specific solutions" to the difficulties faced by the pupils in these schools. The ZEP policy is explicitly differentialist, contrasting with the French tradition of unitary and centralist national education. It takes into account the social characteristics of territories, schools, and pupils. Under the ZEP policy, the point is not only to consider the diversity of territories and schools, but also to individualise the teaching relationship and to adapt to the pupil (Morel, 2002, p. 42), which implies taking into consideration their specific social and personal characteristics: "their singularity, *i.e.* its margin of difference relative to the others, is acknowledged"[32]. The differentiation of territories and pupils goes along with a differentiation in teaching. In the absence of national guidelines, the question of cultural diversity may be addressed by local actors through specific schemes such as "local educational projects".

4.2. Diversity, integration, discrimination… The views of the actors on the ground in education

The interviews give some indications of how national and local actors define some educational issues in terms of "diversity", "integration", or "discrimination", etc. The first point of interest is the distance that most of them express *vis-à-vis* the notions of diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural difference. This distrust is particularly visible in the words of the academic inspector of Seine-Saint-Denis: "As far as I am concerned, I consider that there are as many cultures as persons. This is the school of the Republic: the cultural offering of school is to give all access to all cultures. But I think there is a danger in taking into account particular cultures. I distrust anything that exalts difference. The 'multi' means that I identify groups. As far as I am concerned, I identify persons. An Algerian person may be Christian, atheist, a teacher… I think it is nationalism to say that there is a Moroccan culture, etc. The French school must present a culture that is the French culture, if we are here it means that we accept French nationality, the French language, French culture… School has always tried to privilege common values, and not difference." (Interview with the school inspector of Seine-

---

[32] Orientation Act on education n° 89-496 of 10 July 1989.

Saint-Denis). According to an INRP researcher who did a research project on the practices in teaching the history of immigration, the view that cultural difference is positive and should be recognised as of value is by contrast frequent among teachers today. The reference to multiculturalism is frequent in their discourse, in a positive way. Teachers take it for granted that there are specific cultures (such as Malian, Spanish, Maghrebin culture, etc.). They use numerous categories referring to the ethnic or cultural origin of their pupils: "There are 35,000 categories used by teachers: from an immigrant background, Muslim, from a Maghreb immigrant background, Maghrébin, Algerian, Tunisian, Arab…" (Interview with an INRP researcher).

The second striking feature is the difference in the way the various actors recognise or evaluate the extent of the discrimination and segregation processes produced by the educational system. From this viewpoint, the discourses of the school inspector of Seine-Saint-Denis and the representative of the local teachers' union are opposite. According to the former, discrimination and segregation are not produced by the education system but by other sectors of the society (especially housing): "I think that in Seine-Saint-Denis, it is first town planning which must progress. The key issue is first housing; second it is work. And the school takes those who reside there. If high-rise estates *(cités)* are ghettos, then the school is a ghetto. […] But the basic problem that we have to solve is a social problem. Social segregation is linked to housing. There is a social segregation, but which is not the intention of education actors. It is the effect of the society. […] I do not think that we are discriminating in our schools. And what I have not said is that there is discrimination also among the youths themselves." By contrast, the representative of the teachers' union in Seine-Saint-Denis stresses the "social selection" produced by the education system, for instance through the differentiated course choice advice given to the pupils according to their social or ethnic origin, or through the selection of the pupils by the schools. He considers that reform of the school catchment system is one of the main battles for his organisation in the future.

5. Islam and *laïcité* at school

5.1. Islam and laïcité *in public mainstream schools*

The French system of secularism, widely referred to as *laïcité*, did not find itself in conflict with Islam until the end of the 1980s. The "affair of the Muslim headscarf" started when the headmaster of a secondary school in Creil (near Paris) decided to exclude three girls wearing a Muslim headscarf on the principle of *laïcité*. When in November 1989 the *Conseil d'Etat* (the highest administrative court in France) stated that "the wearing of the headscarf is not contradictory to the values of the secular and republican school", it encouraged a liberal reading of *laïcité* which concluded that the 1905 Act on the separation of Church and the State (usually called "law on *laïcité*") sought to respect freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. According to this reading, only proselytising and the disruption of school activities could warrant school exclusions, and head teachers were advised to assess the situations on a case-by-case basis.

The issue re-emerged fifteen years later when, in July 2003, President of the Republic Jacques Chirac set up the "Commission of reflection for the implementation of the principle of *laïcité* in the Republic", known as the "Stasi Commission" after its chair. Following the commission's main recommendations (Stasi, 2004), the government adopted the 15 March 2004 Act stating that "in public primary, secondary and high schools, the wearing of signs or

clothes by which the pupils conspicuously display a religious affiliation is forbidden." This act was supplemented by an administrative regulation on 18 May 2004, according to which "the prohibited signs and clothes are those by which, whatever they may be called, one is immediately identified by his or her religious beliefs, such as the Muslim headscarf, the kippah or a cross of manifestly excessive dimension". The Muslim headscarf, unlike the Christian cross, was thus considered to be a conspicuous religious sign.

The adoption of this 2004 Act was the result of an intense process of politicisation and media coverage of the "Muslim headscarf" (Lorcerie, 2005; Tévanian, 2005). It did not come from a "social demand" but arose from the political sphere itself, strongly relayed by the media. The public and media discourse reduced the debate to a "clash of civilisations" between an enlightened West and a backward, dangerous, and sexually oppressive Muslim culture. Gender equality was the second dimension of the controversy. The headscarf was often reduced to a sign of the subordination of women in "Muslim cultures". The position in favour of the law combined a classic Orientalist racism with feminist stances on the necessary protection of young women against patriarchal traditions. In that regard, the debate on *laïcité* has fostered a sharp return of assimilationism and formed part of an increasing rise in Islamophobia (Geisser, 2003). Alongside the "affair of the Muslim headscarf", other issues were set up in the media and the political agenda. In its report (Stasi, 2004), the Stasi Commission made a series of recommendations, especially in respect of the accommodation of food and the recognition of Yom Kippur and Eid al-Adha as holidays in all public schools.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, there has been provision in school canteens of an optional alternative meal to pork dishes, and more recently Jewish and Muslim minorities have sought the provision of kosher or *halal* food. These demands have been met with a strong "republican" hostility towards adapting the common framework to meet the specific needs of religious groups. In France, internal rules for canteens are issued by local authorities. They follow general guidelines which give primacy to the principle of neutrality. In practice, different approaches are implemented. A recent decision of the Lyons city council to launch the "complete meal without meat" has been understood as a compromise between the proponents of *laïcité* and the pupils who do not eat pork, *without* accommodating the provision of *halal* meat. To be implemented from September 2008, the decision was taken after discussions between the local representatives of the main religions, the main secular organisations, and the city council.

Some Muslim organisations have lobbied for more accommodation of food rules and criticised some practices of and resistance from public institutions. In 2004, the Villefranche-sur-Saône city council sent a letter to all Muslim parents to remind them that "all children must eat of each served dish, even in a small quantity". Some families reacted, saying that only families labelled as "Muslims" by local authorities had received this letter. Muslim organisations such as the National Council for Muslim Worship restated that the demands for *halal* food in schools were legitimate and complained about the narrow interpretation of *laïcité* evident in such attitudes. The official position of the Ministry of National Education consisted of stating that, although canteens were not obliged to provide substitution meals in order to take into account specific religious requirements, they were invited to propose diversified meals for health reasons.

One of the most liberal recommendations of the Stasi Commission was the proposal to include the feasts of Eid al-Adha and Yom Kippur in the already long list of holidays in public schools. This has not been acted upon. President Jacques Chirac clearly rejected the

idea as he announced, on 17 December 2003, his decision to promote an act banning the wearing of the Muslim headscarf in public schools. He justified his stance by saying that the school calendar already counted numerous holidays. Nonetheless, he stated his wish that no pupil would have to apologize for being absent during a religious holiday, and that no important school event such as exams would be organised on such days. This recommendation of a passive tolerance is currently variously understood at the local level and depends on the willingness of school authorities and the strength of religious communities.

5.2. The debate on the creation of Muslim schools

In France, private schools are attended by more than 2 million pupils *i.e.* 17% of all pupils, more precisely 13% of the pupils in primary school, and 21% of the pupils attending secondary or high school. Almost all these private schools are under contract with the State. The "contract of association" was created by the 1959 Debré Act and at that time involved only Catholic schools. These private schools under contract with the State must respect the national curriculum. Their teachers are paid by the State. These schools also receive a grant from the local authority, proportionate to the number of pupils. Today, about 95% of the private schools under contract with the State are Catholic. However, many Jewish schools have also passed a contract with the State and teach about 26,000 pupils. Some schools are also open to all faiths. Still, only one Muslim school has been state sponsored to date: the Taalim-al-Islam primary school, located in the French overseas territory La Réunion, which opened in 1990. The private Muslim schools in existence are located in Aubervilliers, near Paris (*L'école de la Réussite*, a secondary school, opened in 2001), Lille (the Averroes high school, created in 2003), and Décines, near Lyons (the Al-Kindi secondary and high school, opened in 2007). A contract with the State for these schools is expected in a near future, in order to consolidate their financial basis. It would also offer a formal recognition of the legitimacy of a Muslim school system, among the other faith schools.

Each new Muslim school project is subject to intense debate. As for mosques, public funds may not be used to build these schools, and the contribution from international donors is interpreted as an intrusion of fundamentalist networks into French Islam. But in a context of a strong republican reaction against a liberal conception of *laïcité*, some Muslim organisations consider that faith schools are an appropriate answer to a new social demand. The creation of the first Muslim high school, Averroès, in Lille, offers a good illustration of the symbolic and practical role played by these schools. As stated on the school's website, "the idea of creating a private Muslim high school was born in 1994 following the exclusion of 19 veiled girls from the Faidherbe high school in Lille. The Al Imane mosque, located in South-Lille, then called the leaders of Muslim organisations to come together to cater for these girls". The school was refused permission from the State authorities three times before being allowed to open. At its opening in 2003, 83 pupils, mostly girls, were enrolled. In the same way, the project of creating a secondary and high school in Décines, near Lyons, faced several refusals from the local State authorities. Finally, the High Council for Education (*Conseil supérieur de l'éducation*) took a decision against strong opposition from the local representative of the Ministry of Education, who was using issues such as the security of the building to refuse authorisation. The Al-Kindi school finally opened in 2007. Today it counts 200 pupils, attending mixed classes. The school's website presents the creation of the school as triggered by a context of a "crisis of the public school", crisis in terms of school performance but also because of a "focus on a too narrow conception of *laïcité*". The reasons why some parents want to send their children to Muslim schools are not only the expectation

in religious education and the right to wear the Muslim headscarf, but also the most classic reasons for avoiding public schools, such as performance, security, and discipline.

In the political and media debates, the creation of Muslim schools is not only linked to the theme of *laïcité* (the paradox being that the existence of Catholic schools is rarely considered as a threat to that principle today) but also to the theme of fundamentalism and communitarianism. In 2004, the Bureau of Investigation of the Interior Ministry (*Renseignements généraux*, RG) issued an alarming report on the growth of communitarianism in the French *banlieues*, pointing out the role of Muslim schools and mosques[33]. The debates here focus less on official Muslim schools than on the supposed development of "clandestine structures" which "are multiplying".

Conclusion

The management of migration-related diversity at school reveals the ambiguousness of the French republican, universalistic "model of integration". In the name of an abstract principle of equality, this model tends to consider any evidence of community and ethnic difference as a threat to the universalistic republic. "Multiculturalism" then functions as a "contrary" policy model. After a short period of promotion of intercultural education in the 1970s, multiculturalism almost disappeared from the design of French education policy. The official definition of the pupil groups and the institutional structure are such that whole dimensions of the question of migration-related diversity at school are not explicitly addressed in France. However, there is a gap between official national policy and unofficial education practices developed by local actors, as well as a gap between the republican myth of formal equality and the evidence of developing ethnic discrimination, segregation and stigmatisation within the French education system. Within a society in which social, ethnic and racial hierarchies are strongly constructed, actors in the education system (teachers, school administration, pupils, local government and local state, etc.) can hardly escape from the strength of these hierarchies and categorisations. The latter are not only based on ethnicity but more and more on religion, as shown by the developing concern for "managing" the presence of Islam within French "secular" schools.

The consequences of this policy framing are twofold. First, some aspects of the problems faced by children from immigrant backgrounds at school are not recognised and addressed. In particular, the way in which they face ethnic or cultural categorisations, stigmatisation, but also discrimination and segregation processes, even within the education system, is not fully recognised. The school itself continues to propagate an ethnocentric conception of national culture and identity, thus denying the fundamental contribution of immigrants to the construction of the French nation, in the past and present. Second, this policy framing leaves local actors (such as teachers or schools directors) to "cope" with the difficult situations that they daily have to face. The silence of official public policy creates a vacuum that is filled by "grass-root practices" on the ground. The lack of guidelines and training makes it difficult for actors to develop appropriate answers to these situations and to build educational practices likely to create equality and a common sense of identity among the pupils. It is certainly this burning issue of creating effective equality for pupils in French schools that should attract the attention of policy makers today.

---

[33] Cf. *Le Monde*, "RG alarmed at development of community enclaves", 6 July 2004.

References

Academic references

Bertrand R. (2006), *Mémoires d'empire. La controverse autour du 'fait colonial'*, Paris, Ed. du Croquant.

Bancel N., Blanchard P., Lemaire S. (ed.) (2005), *La fracture coloniale. La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*, Paris, La Découverte.

Castel R. (1995), *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale*, Paris, Fayard.

Déloye Y. (1996), *Ecole et citoyenneté. L'individualisme républicain de Jules Ferry à Vichy: controverses*, Paris, PFNSP.

Felouzis G., Liot F., Perroton J. (2005), *L'apartheid scolaire. Enquête sur la ségrégation ethnique dans les collèges*, Paris, Seuil.

Geisser V. (2003), *La nouvelle islamophobie*, Paris, La Découverte.

Laforgue D. (2005), *La ségrégation scolaire. L'Etat face à ses contradictions*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

Lapeyronnie D. (1993), *L'individu et les minorités*, Paris, PUF.

Lorcerie F. (2005), « Les professionnels de l'école et l'incrimination du voile », in Lorcerie F. (ed.), *La politisation du voile. L'affaire en France, en Europe et dans le monde arabe*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

Lorcerie F. (2003a), « Revisiter l''éducation interculturelle' », in Lorcerie F. (ed.), *L'école et le défi ethnique. Education et intégration*, ESF-INRP, p. 261-272.

Lorcerie F. (2003b), « La non-lutte contre les discriminations dans l'Ecole française », *Hommes et migrations*, n° 1246, novembre-décembre, pp. 6-16.

Lorcerie F. (ed.) (2003), *L'école et le défi ethnique. Education et intégration*, ESF-INRP.

Lorcerie F., Morel S. (2003), « Une politique introuvable. La scolarisation des enfants d'immigrés », in Lorcerie F. (ed.), *L'école et le défi ethnique. Education et intégration*, ESF-INRP, p.219-227.

Morel S. (2002), *Ecoles, territoires et identités. Les politiques publiques françaises à l'épreuve de l'ethnicité*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

Nique C. (1990), *Comment l'Ecole devint une affaire d'Etat (1815-1840)*, Paris, Nathan.

Noiriel G. (1988), *Le creuset français*, Paris, Seuil.

Oberti M. (2006), « Homogénéiser ou différencier et spécialiser les contextes scolaires? », in Lagrange H., Oberti M. (ed.), *Emeutes urbaines et protestations*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, p. 147-176.

Payet J.-P. (1995), *Collèges de banlieue. Ethnographie d'un mondes scolaire*, Paris, Méridiens-Klincksieck.

Poiret C. (1996), « Le recours à l'ethnique et au communautaire dans le champ scolaire », in *Familles africaines en France : Ethnicisation, ségrégation, communalisation*, Paris, CIEMI-L'Harmattan, p. 281-326.

Rinaudo C. (1999), « Les usages scolaires de la catégorisation ethnique », in *L'ethnicité dans la cité. Jeux et enjeux des catégorisations ethniques*, Paris, L'Harmattan, p. 99-115.

Sabbagh D. (2002), « Affirmative action at Sciences-Po », *French Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 20, n° 3, Fall, p. 52-64.

Tévanian P. (2005), *Le voile médiatique. Un faux débat : « l'affaire du foulard islamique »*, Paris, Raisons d'agir.

Zanten (van) A. (2001), *L'école de la périphérie*, Paris, PUF.

Institutional / administrative sources

Berque J. (1985), *L'immigration à l'école de la République, Rapport au ministre de l'Education nationale*, Paris, La Documentation française.

Bourgarel A. (1992), « Immigration et ZEP », *Cahiers pédagogiques*, n° 309, décembre.

Conseil de l'Europe (1981), *L'éducation des enfants de travailleurs migrants en Europe : l'interculturalisme et la formation des enseignants*, Strasbourg, Conseil de l'Europe.

Dhume F. (2006), *Racisme, antisémitisme et communautarisme. Manifestations publiques et significations sociales à l'école*, Rapport au FASILD, ISCRA-Est.

Falaize B. (2006), « Présentation de la place de l'histoire de l'immigration dans les programmes scolaires en histoire, géographie et éducation civique », Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, Institut national de la recherche pédagogique (www.inrp.fr).

Hussenet A. (1990), *Une politique scolaire de l'intégration*, texte présenté au Comité interministériel à l'intégration, Paris, janvier 1990.

Haut Conseil à l'intégration (HCI) (1998), *Lutte contre les discriminations : faire respecter le principe* d'égalité, Paris, La Documentation française.

HCI (1993), *L'intégration à la française*, Paris, 10/18.

INRP (Institut national de la recherche pédagogique) (2007), *Enseigner l'histoire de l'immigration à l'école* (coordinated by B. Falaize), Lyon, INRP.

Ministère de l'Education nationale (2006), *La contribution de l'éducation prioritaire à l'égalité des chances des élèves*, Paris, Ministère de l'Education nationale (http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/35/7/3357.pdf, 16 June 2008).

Stasi B. (2004), *Commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République : rapport au président de la République*, Paris, La documentation française.

Vallet Louis-André, Caille Jean-Paul (1996), Les élèves étrangers ou issus de l'immigration dans l'école et le collège français. Une étude d'ensemble, *Les Dossiers d'éducation et formations*, Paris, Ministère de l'Education nationale, n° 67.

Methodology

The fieldwork is based on interviews with actors at the national level and local level.

The case study was developed in the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis (93), in the Eastern suburbs of Paris.

1) Exploratory phase:

- exploratory interview with a school course advisor, Academy of Versailles (June 2007)

- interview with the key researcher Françoise Lorcerie

2) Interview phase:

National policy level:

- a researcher at the INRP (interviewed on 27/9/2007)

- a member of the CNHI (4/10/2007)

- a general inspector of national education, initiator in 2002 of the "national committee of reflection and proposals on *laïcité* at school" (20/02/2008)

Local policy level (Seine-Saint-Denis):

- Academic inspector (interviewed on 20/9/2007)

- Head of the secondary schools department, *Conseil general* of Seine-Saint-Denis (*département*) (8/10/2007)

- Head of the main teachers union of Seine-Saint-Denis, FSU (20/9/2007)

List of abbreviations

CASNAV   Centres académiques pour la scolarisation des nouveaux arrivants et des enfants du voyage

CEFISEM   Centres de formation et d'information pour la scolarisation d'enfants de migrants

CLA   Classe d'accueil

CLAD   Classe d'adaptation

CLIN   Classe d'initiation

CNHI   Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration

CRI   Cours de rattrapage intégrés

ELCO   Enseignement des langues et cultures d'origine

ENA(F)   Elève nouveau arrivé (en France)

EPLE   Etablissement public local d'enseignement

FAS   Fonds d'action sociale

FSU   Fédération syndicale unitaire

HCI   Haut conseil à l'intégration

INRP   Institut national de la recherche pédagogique

IUFM   Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres

ZEP   Zone d'éducation prioritaire