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Chapter 11: Protecting French: The View from France

Claudine Moïse

France's ideological position is clear, affirmed since the Age of the Enlightenment and strongly advanced by the Revolution of 1789. From a social contract perspective, the *nation* rests on the political willingness of individuals to live in a society from which flows a common cultural vision. The Revolution of 1789 imposed a unique citizenship, indifferent to distinctiveness and, consequently, to minority groups. The fight for the French language and French cultural values then allowed for the reproduction of the dominant ideology and asserted the legitimacy of the Republic as nation-state. But today, the two oft-brandished sections of the Constitution, section 1 'La France est une république indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale' [France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic], and section 2, 'La langue de la République est le français' [The language of the Republic is French], are largely challenged by values that are considered as threatening, i.e. multiculturalism and multilingualism.

We will see in this chapter how French is construed as an endangered language. The French language was constructed throughout the centuries around the unification of the state and territory. The discourse on language has contributed to the construction of the nation-state, and political authorities have always tried to maintain, until the 1990s, the values attributed to French in order to achieve national cohesion and international influence. Fears of seeing the language undermined and corrupted are not new. It is a matter of fighting against the heterogeneous forces perceived as threatening for the public space and for the construction of national order, forces that could run counter to power and the reproduction of the dominant elite. Today, however, the protection strategies used both inside and outside the territory are wearing out and numerous political crises and

ideological tensions (for ex., the legislation which prohibits Muslim girls from wearing a veil in public schools and the elimination of dialectal Arabic from the school curriculum), inintelligible pour les non initiés indicative of the social changes caused in part by globalization, seem to be moving from the field of language to that of cultural identity.

(A) The French language, foundation of the Republic

(A1) The historic making of a social body

The link that has been established between language and power, since the Carolingians and the division of Charlemagne's empire between Charles the Bald and Louis the Germanic into a Francophone part and a German one, is particularly ancient. Very early on, French was used to ensure centralization and state control of the territory. With the reign of Louis XIV, which was followed by that of the Age of Enlightenment, of reason and of universalism, the French language – like the arts or dance for other areas –served the political in a way which was both understood and expected. Social control and public order were dictated by words and the body. The codification of the language (what is correct and what is not), begun in the 16th century, intensified throughout the 17th century. A distinctive sign of social belonging, the right way of speaking, devoid of dialect or social variation, drew marked boundaries. Standardized language still defined correct behavior as a means of recognizing various groups, more specifically the elite, the king's court, which was exposed to the public sphere. If, from 1500 to 1660, it was the language spoken by the people of the 'better world', (Lodge 1997), and if it hunted down dialectal features under the pretext of precision and rigour, French became, in the Age of Enlightenment, from Louis XIV to the Revolution, the language of clarity and reason, an ideology set as

Commenté [LD1]: Est-ce plus compréhensible avec ces détails?

unshakeable dogma, a language legitimized by the dominant classes for the dominant classes. Rational order as expressed through language was also called upon in the defense of the natural order of words while the inversion of the subject was brandished as belonging to the domain of passions and emotional disorder, an old quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns from Descartes to Condillac. Thus, right from that time, reason's primacy over the sensual saturated? Maybe permeated – the consciousness of the French, and, from control of the body to the restraint of the word, the model of propriety and excellence began with the disciplined mind. Civility, as advocated in the 17th century, most likely helped to move away from the religious civil wars and to rebuild the social body (Merlin-Kajman, H., 2003); but it was also a form of sociopolitical domination by the political body and it defined contours of the public space, keeping out any variations or other languages.

We know how, afterwards, the French Revolution and the third Republic used the French language to build citizenship, how an egalitarian, unifying and homogeneous public space was defined, how language, through the school system as reproducer of republican values, espoused secular values. The nation-language became sacred and its authority rested on the 'French genius', worthy of divine power (Balibar 1995: 288). Secularism became a religion and was relayed by the sacred book, the French language dictionary.

Ainsi, le monolinguisme institutionnel semble bien avoir pris rang et fonction de religion d'Etat, par déplacement du sacré, dans le temps que l'Etat se laïcisait.

Religion monothéiste, qui reconnaît un seul dieu : la langue française ; religion du Livre (LE dictionnaire, tenu, contre toute évidence, pour infaillible et immuable) ; religion prosélyte, comme toutes les religions du Livre : on sait l'ambition

internationale du français, le messianisme quasi constitutif de cette langue et l'ardeur diplomatique en la matière (Cerquiglini 2003). **Dire ici p-ê qui est BC** **puisque ça devient pertinent plus tard** Bernard Cerquiglini, directeur de l'Institut national de la langue française, chargé du rapport au Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de la Recherche et de la Technologie du rapport sur les langues de France d'avril 1999

Thus, institutional monolingualism seems to have taken up rank and function as state religion, through the displacement of the sacred, while the state was secularizing itself. A monotheistic religion, which recognizes only one god: the French language; a religion of the Book (THE dictionary, held, against all evidence, as infallible and unchanging); a proselytizing religion, as are all religions of the Book: the international ambition of French, the near-constituent messianism of this language and the diplomatic ardour in the matter are all well known.

To these secular virtues, one must add the moral and civic values attributed to the French language (Gadet 2003: p. 21): the public space was to be built in French, the long hard road to learning how 'not to make mistakes' became a distinctive sign and an force for empowerment. Access to 'correct French', through the idea of democracy, via equality and meritocracy, contributed to the reproduction of the elite.

(A2) The invention of universalism

National homogeneity – beyond the citizen's social and political contract – manifests itself through an universalist ideology, as advocated by Rivarol (1783) in his essay on the

universality of the French language which, in 1783, won the Berlin Academy of Science and Literature Prize, and as carried by a language worthy of thought and reason, a pure, structured and civilizing language. When Alexandre Dumas' ashes were transferred to the Panthéon, many newspapers dedicated articles to this national writer. Above comments by Jean Dutourd, of the Académie française, and by Denise Bombardier, high priestess of beautiful French, one of these articles, published in the July 25, 2002 edition of Paris Match, declared 'Dumas est la preuve que l'on peut être d'origine africaine, devenir français, et maîtriser mieux que personne notre langue.' ['Dumas is proof that one can be of African origin, become French and master our language better than anyone.'] (p.7). As if one has to be French to master the French language, as if the French language could not belong to Africans. In short, as if French were a possession of France and capable of civilizing¹, an old hymn of the colonial empire brought back to life from time to time through media discourse. French and the values it holds are a possession of France and a civilizing issue; it is only recently, as we shall see, that the question of regional varieties – such as the metropolitan French variety, diverse varieties from other Francophone regions, post-colonial varieties or languages of immigration – is raised. In fact, the sought-after purity echoes the fear of the multiple and the fear of complexity so dear to Edgar Morin (2004), a fear linked to strangeness in a need to reproduce a homogeneous social body favourable to the national elite which takes strength in its self-legitimacy. If there is any democracy in the French language, inside and outside of national boundaries, there are always some citizens who are more equal than others. Within the colonial empire, where universalist and civilizing ideas were meant to be spread through the French language, the languages of the concerned countries were foreign languages. The code of nativeness, established in Algeria in the 1830s and abolished only in 1945, introduced a specific legal

system for natives. Areas of daily life, like dress codes or the banning of traditional holidays, could be subject to particular offences and special violations.

(B) Feelings of threat and political resistance

Even if the reality of languages lies in the multiple, the centralizing building of the national order has crossed the centuries against all heterogeneous forces, constantly reaffirming its unifying republican strength in the French language.

(B1) The theme of threat

Threat metaphors have been perpetuated from one century to another since complaints were made against Italian borrowings in the 16th century, and they are still numerous today in books on the correct use of the language or in readers' columns. The purity image of a disappearing homogeneous language is an old fear; this fear concerns the integrity of the language, the system itself, and often leads to political decisions regarding corpus and statusⁱⁱ, as means to recover the affirmation of an identified, identifiable and unified social body. The 17th century was characterized by the search for a common language, a classical language, through dictionaries and the Académie, and the hunting down of provincialisms and borrowings (Wionet 2005). The late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the implementation of compulsory, free and secular schooling, witnessed the blacklisting of regional demands and liberation movements, such as Félibrige in Provenceⁱⁱⁱ. These opposition forces were later rejuvenated in the regional minority movements of the 1970s.

Let us now take a look at some recent actions and protective reactions of the 1990s with respect to language. There was, in 1989, an attempt made to reform spelling. Although the proposed changes were very limited, reactions were numerous, highly critical and impassioned. These were not so much about how the language itself works, but more about larger themes of national protection, 'de défense de la patrie ou de l'âme du peuple' ['the defense of the homeland or the soul of the people'] (Eloy 2000: 101). There was the 1994 Toubon law, which related to the 'usage of the French language,' especially in advertising, work contracts and instruction manuals, and was in fact a measure against anglicisms, symbols of linguistic impurity. Although the law was criticized by the Constitutional Council in the name of freedom of expression, it was highly symbolic of the state's affirmation, with the establishment of the European Union and the advent of globalization, of the need to defend the French fact and national unity. There was also a certain media coverage of the decisions made by the terminology commissions which were put in place in government departments in the 1970s and which reaffirmed the use of French and unborrowed neologisms as a way to legitimize once again the merits and values of the French language.

The main focus of the fears of losing and undermining the language was nevertheless on the school system as reproducer of the national ideology. The theme of the language crisis in education appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, and is still alive today. We still hear people speak about the poor quality of French and its degeneration, exemplified by the lack of vocabulary among young people and their deficient spelling skills. After cutting budgets for artistic activities in 2003, the department of education reinforced the teaching of grammar at the primary level. In October 2004, following a major national debate on the

future of the school system, the commission chaired by Claude Thélot (2004) submitted a report in which it insisted on the need for a 'common core'.

Pour éclairer des orientations possibles, le socle commun des indispensables pourrait comprendre les fonctions primordiales suivantes : lire, écrire, maîtriser la langue et les discours, compter, connaître les principales opérations mathématiques, s'exprimer (y compris en anglais de communication internationale), se servir de l'ordinateur, vivre ensemble dans notre République (p. ii).

To shed light on potential directions, the common core of essential tools could include the following key functions: reading, writing, mastering the language and discourses, adding, knowing mathematical operations, speaking (including in international English), using computers, living together in our Republic.

This once again reasserted the primary role of the school in learning to master French and the Republic's values. In her time, Nicole Gueunier (1985) researched what the term 'crisis' covered and had suggested the following: deprofessionalization, linguistic insecurity of the middle classes, population explosion in the schools and media influence. In short, French, more visible and present in the social space which had been invested by a certain idealized standard associated with the elites whose legitimacy was now threatened, was displaying greater variations which could give rise to fears of seeing the language of reference undermined.

(B2) A loss of benchmarks and power

The age-old discourse on language and the threats it faces is very much present at times of crises and social transformations. The language crisis 'n'est qu'un aspect particulier d'un phénomène plus vaste : celui d'un effondrement des valeurs' [is but a specific aspect of a wider phenomenon: that of the collapse of values] (Klinkenberg 2001: 110). As Gadet has shown (2003: 21), the discourse on language protection gets more strident during political moments of social debate: in the 1900s (clash of two models of society, passage d'une société rurale à une société industrielle possible d'être plus précis? Quels deux modèles?), in the 1930s (economic crisis, threat of war), in the 1960s (persistence of school failure, decline of the international status of French, loss of the colonial empire). I would add the 1990s (Maastricht Treaty, globalization). The republican model is confronted with the collapse of the past grandeur of a conquering nation and of its world influence; it also feels threatened from the inside by various groups, especially immigration groups, which challenge the established social stratification and their own invisibility in the public space. It is then a crisis of conscience or confidence (Klinkenberg 2001: 109) which affects all majority languages; French, for its part, tries to counter the malaise by becoming a unifying and esthetic element in a world which has lost its benchmarks.

At this stage of our reflection, it is interesting to look more closely, among other things, at a recent form of protection strategy, which has shown once again how, through lively debate and legal argumentation, the French state has tried to protect the French language against the varieties that exist on its own territory.

Commenté [LD2]: Il faudrait que Claudine précise pour que je puisse traduire.

(B3) The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: an example of a protectionist strategy

The objective of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is to recognize, essentially as heritage property, regional languages within member states. It was signed by France on May 7, 1999; this led to a general outcry and exacerbated the passions in a cult of the nation. The Minister of the Interior, J.-P. Chevènement, talked of the balkanization of France. The Constitutional Council, to which the case was referred on May 20, 1999 by the Head of State, declared publicly on June 16 that the commitments made by France under the Charter were contrary to several fundamental principles, namely the indivisibility of the Republic. To move toward the ratification of the Charter, French authorities had to accept a constitutional review. Although the concrete commitments (i.e. those sections which were signed) did not infringe on the constitutional standards, the preamble to the Charter, along with section 7, which was of a constraining and general nature, were judged (Décision 99-412, 1999) to be contrary to the Constitution 'en ce qu[ils confèrent] des droits spécifiques à des groupes de locuteurs de langues régionales ou minoritaires, à l'intérieur de territoires dans lesquels ces langues sont pratiquées' [in that they conferred specific rights to groups of regional or minority language speakers inside territories in which these languages are practiced] (Décision 99-412, 1999). These provisions were contrary to the 'principes constitutionnels d'indivisibilité de la République, d'égalité devant la loi et d'unicité du peuple français' [constitutional principles of indivisibility of the Republic, of equality before the law and of the unicity of the French people] (Décision 99-412, 1999). The Council argued that these three principles 's'opposent à ce que soient reconnus des droits collectifs à quelque groupe que ce soit, défini par une communauté d'origine, de culture, de langue ou de croyance' [were opposed to the recognition of collective rights to any group, as defined by a community of origin, culture, language or belief] (Décision 99-412, 1999). Who would have dared to engage in a discussion on the indivisibility of the Republic? The provisions of the Charter were also contrary to the rule established by section 2 under which 'la langue de la République est le français' [the

language of the Republic is French'] (Décision n°99-412, 1999). Now, according to the members of the council, 'la Charte tend à reconnaître un droit à pratiquer une langue autre que le français non seulement dans la vie privée mais également dans la vie publique' [the Charter tended to recognize the right to practice a language other than French not only in private life but also in public life'] (Décision n°99-412, 1999). The media themselves understood to what extent these decisions were motivated by ideological considerations Au secours! Je ne trouve pas la façon de mettre ça pour que ça soit facile à comprendre, peut-être parce que je ne comprends pas très bien la phrase.

Peine perdue : la timidité du texte volontairement consensuel, qui visait à donner satisfaction aux régionalistes tout en calmant les ardeurs jacobinistes, n'a pas convaincu les gardiens de la loi fondamentale. Lesquels se sont livrés à une gymnastique juridique pour le moins contestable : les arguments du Conseil pour censurer la ratification de la carte ressemblent plus à un manifeste idéologique qu'à un exercice de droit. (Vallaëys 1999:6)

It was of no use: the timidity of the voluntarily consensual text, which was intended to satisfy regionalists as well as to calm jacobinist ardours, did not convince the guardians of the constitution. The latter engaged in somewhat questionable legal gymnastics: the arguments of the Council to suppress the ratification of the Charter looked more like an ideological manifesto than a legal exercise.

On June 23, 1999, the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, made public his refusal to engage in a constitutional review process in the matter. Thus, in the name of the high principles of indivisibility of the nation, of private/public separation, of the non-

recognition of groups, the Charter could not be ratified. It must be noted that the authors of the Charter had always taken care not to undermine the prerogatives of member countries. Thus, in spite of phrasing whose ideological scope was felt to be weak, the objections raised showed to what extent France could be disturbed about its language. Fortunately, and in spite of the perceived threat against the state's uninlingualism, the Charter was signed by the President of the Republic^{iv} and 75 languages were recognized as languages of France (metropolitan France, departments and overseas territories). Bernard Cerquiglini's *c'est ici que l'identité de BC devient pertinent, légitimé par sa position institutionnelle*, pirouettes to justify its signature and make up the list of recognized languages are well known. In addition to the languages 'without territories' that he preferred to call 'historical languages', Bernard Cerquiglini (1999) revisited the concept of territorial languages, but in the end from a political rather than a linguistic perspective.

Ce désir d'une assise géographique des langues régionales [...] s'oppose en outre aux principes républicains français, qui tiennent que la langue, élément culturel, appartient au patrimoine national ; le corse n'est pas la propriété de la région de Corse, mais de la nation [...]. Le vrai territoire d'une langue est le cerveau de ceux qui la parlent.

The desire for a geographic basis for regional languages runs against the French republican principles which state that language, a cultural element, belongs to the national heritage: Corsican does not belong to the region of Corsica, but to the nation [...]. The real territory of a language is the brain of those who speak it.

Even though he lent himself to an ideological discourse, even though he used arguments that were more political than sociolinguistic (Moïse 2000), we can be thankful to the author for having drawn a complete and precise sociolinguistic landscape of the languages found on the French territory^v, and for having admitted into the languages of France^{vi} the 'non-territorialized' languages related to France's national history, which are not official languages of other countries, languages not of migrants but of French citizens, i.e. Maghrebian Arabic, Western Armenian, Berber, Yiddish, Romani, Judeo-Spanish.

This lengthy ideological debate about the Charter is especially interesting as it revealed the different threats evoked against national unity: the obliteration of the French language by regional languages, the loss of purity, the break-up of the republican cohesion, the interpenetration of the public and private spheres. One of the foundations of the French model is the 'neutralisation' de l'espace public ['neutralization' of public space] (Semprini 1997: 109), a neutralization which has been given a particularly rough ride these last few years. According to this principle, cultural, religious and ethnic differences are only expressed in private space. The public space is for the expression of citizenship by citizens detached from their distinctiveness, from their cultural identity; secular, free, brotherly citizens, strongly bonded together in their republican commitments. The public space is therefore considered the space for the political, the space assigned to common affairs, and the separation of private and public guarantees 'le dépassement des intérêts individuels ou de groupes, elle est le lieu de débat démocratique, du déploiement de la raison, de la mise en forme et de l'application du droit' ['the surpassing of individual or group interests: it is the place for democratic debate, for reasoning, for the development and application of the law']. (Wieviorka 1997: 21). Equality is therefore inherent to this model, rational and necessary; it is shaped and becomes tangible thanks to the social

contract between citizens, a symbolic act which marks everyone's agreement with the Republic's values. A rally beyond differences. The law, 'expression of the general will', under section 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (August 26, 1789), is the gatekeeper and guarantor, a way of maintaining in public reality the ideological and social order. But everything falters when equality, as decreed by the holders of the dominant power, is questioned by those who feel wronged by it, when access to their own recognition, through their language among other things, is denied. If the contentious forces, particularly around regional languages, were very much present before the events surrounding the Charter, especially in the 1970s, all dominant certainties wavered in the late 1990s, and it seems that the vested national power was no longer so clear-cut. There are many reasons for these changes and they are strongly linked to the ideological upheaval brought about by globalization as well as by North-South relations.

Commenté [AD3]: référence en biblio

(C) The years 2000: crystallization of the crisis of the French Republic

With the end of the previous century, the opening up of Europe, globalization and new tensions with the South, symbolized by September 11, power struggles changed and greatly undermined the French conception of nation. Among other things, in France, these world changes shifted the open debate on language to more cultural issues. Though not completely absent, the French language is indeed no longer in the forefront, it is no longer at the heart of the debates, and has become part of cultural tensions, as we shall see. Fears are no longer driven by the omnipresence of English, by regional languages nor by spelling, in short by the preservation of a homogeneous language, but by the cultural links with Mediterranean countries, often identified and stigmatized through their religion,

indeed through dialectal Arabic. Nonetheless, debates on language or culture, or on culture through language, always refer to challenging of the dominant and unifying ideology. France's domestic crisis has crystallized over these last few years around its colonial past through its immigrant populations that have established themselves on its territory since the 1950s. The French identity and language are now challenged and the 'republican model' no longer seems to build a unified citizenry in the public space. The airtight separation between the two spaces, private and public, is an ideological construct which no longer has any great hold on reality. The France that is experiencing an identity crisis from a world perspective – loss of its political and cultural pre-eminence, decline of the French language, weak influence of the Francophonie – seeks to reassert, both inside and outside, its national specificity and uniqueness. The hardening of its universalist vision, and thus of the separation of the private and the public and the withdrawal into a national ideological identity, reflect the fear of an opening onto certain world values, those which, for example, make it a political necessity to recognize differences in order to counteract the standardization and negation of individuals by the economic. We will now see which events have led to societal changes and consequently to changes in the prevailing discourses.

(C1) The social crisis

At the time I finished writing this paper, the Parisian suburbs were in flames. Burnt cars and ransacked schools, violent outbreaks and provocations against the public order were reminiscent of the 1981 car 'rodeos' in the Lyon area, events which launched important political measures aimed at the country's cities, the 'suburb measures,'^{vii} which did nothing

to prevent the 1990 crisis nor, once again, the explosion of the neighbourhoods. Events and authors bear witness to the social crisis that France has been going through for over twenty years and the failure of the social measures taken these last few years with regards to housing, integration or education for example (Maurin 2004). Multiple social and economic factors, often interrelated, have contributed over time to the worsening of life situations in the suburbs and to exclusion phenomena. The establishment of these peripheral urban areas – between major highways as is sometimes the case in the Parisian region or in territorialized dead ends, like the ‘Northern neighbourhoods’ of certain provincial cities – and the confining architecture of the buildings often contribute to the isolation of their inhabitants (Vieillard-Baron 2001: 145). The desertion of peripheral neighbourhoods by the middle classes, through individualized access to property, has left the most underprivileged populations among themselves. Everything seems to show that a great social proximity to the neighbourhood (this being true a contrario for the bourgeois classes and neighbourhoods of city centres) promotes the reproduction of failure (or success) (Maurin 2004). The economic changes of the last few years, such as the entry into globalization and the shift from a commodity-based economy to a service-based one, requiring higher qualifications, have left by the wayside, on the one hand, the ‘immigrated workers’ who came to France to find work and, on the other, the younger ones who are failing school and are the first to be hit by unemployment and insecurity.^{viii} The generalized pauperization of these neighbourhoods,^{ix} which affects the old immigrated population as well as more recently arrived ones, is relayed by violence, especially among younger people, by the disintegration of social links between inhabitants, by the parents’ feelings of guilt, and by the media’s *mises-en-scène* (Boyer & Lochard 1998). Negative

representations of these neighbourhoods and their inhabitants can only generate racism, on the one hand, and feelings of injustice, on the other (Mucchielli 2002).

Although they reflect increasing forms of exclusion and banishment, the 'suburb malaise'^x and the 'social rift'^{xi} are also telling of the political and national ideological crisis, and the social changes underway show how the French nation remains frozen in the rigidity of its 'abstract universalism' (Khosrokhavar, F., 1996).

(C2) The breach of the social contract

Social and economic changes are also causing a breach in the contract between nation and citizens. The return on equality traditionally guaranteed by the social contract is no longer honoured etc is no longer honoured – as political integration can only be achieved through economic and social integration – and resentment, frustration and bitterness keep on growing. Of course, part of the population whose parents were immigrants from North Africa has succeeded in its social development and partakes of the new configuration of France^{xii}, particularly through the arts (Moïse 1999, 2004; Caubet 2004a-). Of course, social links in the suburbs are maintained through many citizen associations and actions. Of course, women 'prennent place parmi les actrices d'une société réconciliée avec sa diversité' ['are taking their place among the actors of a society reconciled with its diversity'] (Guenif-Soulimas 2000: 370). Of course, our Minister responsible for the promotion of equal opportunities, Azouz Begag, was raised in the slums of Lyon and remains an example of the school-based integration and a model of success. However, one can also point to dereliction in the suburbs, the parallel economy, an unemployment rate which is well above the national average, marginalization, discrimination for access to

jobs or housing (Mucchielli 2002), and the submission of women, all of which are emphasized in numerous life stories (Amara 2003; Guerfi 2004; Méliane 2003). For many, neither equality nor the promise of social progress that could justify integration, renunciation and sacrifice are any longer persuasive. Equality often remains a right of the majority. In countries claiming to draw from a universalist ideology, equality is a formal, administrative equality belonging to the public space and, consequently, only partly illusory. Inequality exists from the moment that it is felt socially and individually, that it is central to the building of the self or the group, and that it stems from subjective feelings of marginalization or exclusion. Granting public equality does not take into account the daily discriminations, the setting of distances, the marginalization processes. In the absence of recognition, particularly of that which should have been granted to previous generations, namely to the fathers who through their work took part in the building of France, rebellions and the assertion of differences speak to idleness, the loss of benchmarks, the feelings of injustice and the inequalities experienced. Rebellions and demands are again rising in the public space, and the assertion of a collective identity makes it possible to break the isolation and marginalization in order to impose its one's existence. From the demands for more visibility of minorities in the audio-visual field through quotas to the 'Indigènes de la République'^{xiii} movement or the 'veil affair', the French Republic has been challenged because it can no longer fulfill its contract of insuring equal opportunities and economic and social integration. How then can people be asked to let go of a part of themselves in the public space, of their singularity when this same public space, marked by too many biases, seems to be closed to the social progress of minority groups? When the children of North African immigrants have so little access to political representation,^{xiv} when they are too often branded according to their origin or religion, when they are an electoral non-

entity and therefore not part of the French public space? And when positive discrimination, which exists in France without being named, does not yet seem to be sufficiently motivated to be efficient. In education, the Zones d'Education Prioritaire^{xv} (Priority Education Zones) allows more resources from the state for lesser performing colleges and recruitment incentives in certain large schools like Sciences politiques, but the results are not equal to expectations.

(D) A shifting of the feeling of threat, from the linguistic to the cultural

With this new landscape and with the social and identity malaise which is rocking France, the feeling of threat faced by the French language now involves immigration languages, particularly Maghrebian Arabic. At the same time, it seems that linguistic issues (regional languages and secularity at the beginning of the century) have always underlain cultural and religious questionings as if linguistic issues have always been the seismographs of crises and tensions in the established order. Today, however, the most visible components of these tensions are related to cultural issues... even if, once again, the linguistic refers back to the cultural.

(D1) New linguistic practices and vitality of Maghrebian Arabic

'Urban' or 'youth' speech refer to particular practices influenced, in particular, by Maghrebian Arabic. This speech or those speeches that are contrary to the standard norm, the one conveyed by the school system, have been largely described from a lexical perspective (Goudailler 1997; Merle 1986; Binisti 1998, among others). This urban speech

would seem to be a language constructed from the high variety, French, and would be functionally differentiated to replace the ethnical languages which have disappeared, have become useless or are confined to the family environment (Calvet 1994). That is not to say that these ways of speaking – and such is the fate of any linguistic variety – comprise lexical characteristics that are far from the standard models. These creations stem from semantic processes such as borrowing from Arabic [être fellèh = être nul from fellah = peasant], Occitan or African languages (Binisti, N., 1998) or metonymy [airbags = breasts] (Goudailler 1987). Other lexical processes found are formal effects, like the use of verlan [Il a kécla (claqué, or blew, in verlan) tout son gencaille, sa race ! (Gencaille, a hybrid word mixing argent and caillasse/caille = money) (quoted by Caubet 2001a, p. 740)] or apocopes and aphaereses [plème for problème, lèz for balèze, tasse for pétasse, zic for musique (quoted in Goudailler 1997)].

From another standpoint, the urban speeches, those at the margin or at the periphery and different from the more standard varieties, refer to various language functions which are already well identified, such as cryptic and playful functions. The identity function of these speeches remains no doubt stronger today. Through linguistic assertion of their differences, young people are trying to ‘overcome the stigma’ (Billiez 1992), which often catches up with them.

If suburban speakers remain for the most part stigmatized, some of their linguistic practices are making their way in society. It is easy to see that lexical borrowings, from zarma to khalouf, which come from Maghrebian Arabic, called darja, are numerous and commonly used among the young (Caubet 2004b; 2005). We therefore find ‘des lexèmes sans cesse renouvelés mais également une intonation générale du français, des emphatisations très influencées par l’arabe maghrébin, adoptées par des jeunes quelle que soit l’origine de

leurs parents' ['lexemes that are constantly renewed, but also a general intonation of French, words that are emphasized under the influence of Maghrebian Arabic and adopted by the young whatever their parents' origin']]. (Caubet 2004b: 42). This influence of Maghrebian Arabic over French accounts for the vitality of practices in France.

Lors du recensement de 1999, une enquête 'famille' a été menée par l'INSEE et l'INED. 380000 adultes de plus de 18 ans ont été interrogés sur la transmission familiale des langues. A la question : 'quelle(s) langue(s), dialecte(s) ou patois vous parliez, quand vous aviez 5 ans, votre père et votre mère', un adulte sur quatre a répondu que ses parents lui parlaient une autre langue que le français. Pour 23.000 d'entre eux, il s'agissait de l'arabe, maghrébin pour l'essentiel, puisque la question portait sur la transmission familiale. A partir de ces réponses, on est arrivé au chiffre de 1.170.000 adultes à qui l'un des parents parlaient arabe, auxquels il convient d'ajouter les moins de 18 ans. Le Secrétaire d'état aux affaires étrangères, Renaud Muselier, lors d'un colloque à l'Université d'Austin au Texas^{xvi}, a donné des chiffres très intéressants, en disant que, sur 4 à 5 millions de musulmans en France, 70 % étaient originaires du Nord de l'Afrique, soit entre 2,9 et 3,5 millions de personnes, auxquels il faudrait ajouter environ 400.000 juifs et les pieds-noirs. (Caubet 2004a:142)

In the 1999 census, a 'family' survey was conducted by INSEE and INED. 380,000 adults over 18 years old were questioned on the transmission of languages in the family. To the question: 'in which language(s), dialect(s) or patois did your mother and father speak to you when you were 5 years old', one out of four adults said that

their parents spoke to them in a language other than French. For 23,000 of them, it was Arabic, mostly Maghrebian, since the question dealt with family transmission. From these responses, it was calculated that there are 1,170,000 adults to whom one of the parents spoke Arabic, to which the under 18 year-olds should be added. At a symposium held at Austin University, Texas, the State Secretary to Foreign Affairs, Renaud Muselier, provided very interesting numbers, saying that, out of 4 to 5 million Muslims in France, 70% were from North Africa, i.e. between 2.9 and 3.5 million people, to which approximately 400,000 Jews and pieds-noirs should be added.

Similarly, it cannot be denied how much artists who have ties with the Maghreb (Caubet 2004a, 2004b; Moïse 1999, 2004) are contributing to the richness and the transformation of the French cultural and linguistic landscape (as is claimed by the protagonists themselves, and despite all 'metis', 'traditional' or 'authentic' labelling), thereby asserting a contemporary plurality of expression. They are imposing, without hammering it in, a new conception of French society. While remaining faithful to all the general principles of national community, they are imposing, by the acknowledgement of who they are and not by any deliberate political action, subtle changes in the representation of the French identity and in linguistic practices; they are perhaps opening a new avenue by shaking up the homogeneous French nation, which sees its old defense models profoundly weakened.

(D2) New fears, new resistances

But the fight of the central state persists, in spite of it all.

(D2.1) Dialectal Arabic in the baccalauréat^{xvii}

In February 2001, the optional Maghrebian Arabic exam was abolished by Jack Lang, Minister of National Education, while there were 10,000 students registered with a 72% pass rate. Aside from international pressures to promote classical Arabic, now the sole Arabic language at the baccalauréat level, Maghrebian Arabic was perceived as confined to an ancestral identity. But this was both a linguistic and ideological distortion. Darja is in fact the language of neutrality, the language of family and personal stories, the language which told of the meeting of communities (Jews, Arabs, pieds-noirs), free of religious, pan-Islamic or pan-Arab representations which are carried by the sacred language, that of the Koran, Classical Arabic. This exam recognized not only a culture of the family and a precise identity, but also the richness represented by this type of linguistic transmission, as well as cultural element of a diverse France. It promoted pride and institutional recognition. Classical Arabic, a distinct language from Maghrebian Arabic, is mostly unknown by students and to offer them only this language to learn is, once again, to assign them to an identity, a religious one among others, and to references far removed from their practices. This school situation can only give rise, because of a certain contempt which permeated the process, to reactions of shame, if not of withdrawal and rejection. As if the behaviours condemned by politicians were induced by their own decisions.

(D2.2) The Bénisti report

In October 2004, a preliminary report by the parliamentary commission on domestic security, chaired by Jacques Alain Bénisti, member for Val-de-Marne, was submitted to

the Prime Minister. This report would require professionals to report to the Mayor ‘all persons with social, educational and material problems’. But, far from any educational prevention purpose, this project focused on repression and punishment as ways of penalizing social exclusion. Many educational measures were mentioned, aimed at both parents and children. Sanctions could be imposed for what is stigmatized as abdication of parental responsibility, school absenteeism by children, or using family languages. What is of greater interest to us here were the language recommendations? In particular, the report stated that

seuls les parents, et en particulier la mère, ont un contact avec leurs enfants. Si ces derniers sont d'origine étrangère, elles devront s'obliger à parler le français dans leur foyer pour habituer leurs enfants à n'avoir que cette langue pour s'exprimer (Bénisti 2004 : 9)

Commenté [AD4]: référence exacte aussi en biblio

only the parents, and particularly the mother, have any contact with their children. If the latter are of foreign origin, the mothers should force themselves to speak French at home in order to get their children used to having only this language to express themselves

And further, that ‘si cette mère persiste à parler son patois l'institutrice devra alors passer le relais à un orthophoniste’ [if the mother persists in speaking her patois, the school teacher will then have to refer the case to a speech therapist] (Bénisti 2004: 9)

Commenté [AD5]: pages

Of course, this report gave rise to much criticism, which in particular highlighted the shortcut between language learning, delinquency and the disqualification of Arabic or

immigration languages. We are in a discourse of deviance, the like of which was also aimed at colonized peoples or women in their time and, although the basis of the arguments has changed little, the social and ideological consequences are new. Groups that had until then remained unobtrusive in the public space are now stigmatized, and we are also witnessing upheavals and world tensions in relation to the rise of the religious. In response to such intentions, a letter, a form of argumentative resistance, was written by the Réseau Français de Sociolinguistique [2006](#) to question once again the shift from the public to the private.

Les rédacteurs du projet préconisent que les parents s'obligent 'à parler le français dans leur foyer pour habituer les enfants à n'avoir que cette langue pour s'exprimer' (p. 9). L'État n'a pas vocation à réglementer les usages linguistiques au sein des espaces privés que sont les familles, même si les témoignages abondent de personnes à qui il a été déconseillé de parler leur langue à leurs enfants, au motif de risques d'échec scolaire.

The project's authors recommend that parents force themselves to speak French at home in order to get their children used to having only this language to express themselves (p. 9). It is not the state's responsibility to regulate linguistic practices within the private space of the family, even if there are abundant testimonies from people who were advised not to speak their own language to their children, for fear of potential school failure.

I would like to point out once again the public oversight over the private (education and language surveillance of parents), the shift of the symbolic and ideological boundary when it serves national interests, and the defense of the dominant prerogatives and the social order.

(D3) The school system in crisis, the nation in crisis

Linguistic tensions are now accompanied by strong cultural and religious tensions, brought to light especially in the school system as reproducer of the social order. Following a series of crises on the wearing of the Islamic veil in schools, between 1989 and today, an act was passed on March 15, 2004 and implemented in September, stating that, in public schools and colleges, signs and clothes that conspicuously indicate a student's religious affiliation are forbidden. Throughout this crisis over the legislation on the wearing of the veil, the debate centered above all on secularism and religion, i.e. the separation of the public and private spaces. The politicians and the media played a significant role in the politicizing process, no doubt more so than the Muslims themselves or the teachers, the first ones concerned by the issue. Although they did not always accept the veil in schools, those who were opposed to the legislation, in particular those represented by the Islam et laïcité commission,^{xviii} were not able to get themselves heard by the government. In reality, therefore, the veil issue revealed less on Islam and the place of religion in our political system and more on how the old community which emigrated from North Africa is treated, on the discrimination it suffers and on the fears it generates. And finally on the 'deviant' citizens themselves, as were the colonized peoples and women in their time, who threaten the reproduction of the dominant elite.

Without going as far as the extreme right's discourse, it can be said that this crisis has replayed stereotypes by its generalizing effect and has demonized Islam through the issues of the submission of women, religious fanaticism and the non-integration to the republican model. Yet, the reasons or motivations for wearing the veil were multiple (Amara 2003: 48) – an identity and origin banner, a teen statement, a guarantee of the freedom of movement in the city and outside – and were not really questioned. But in the face of these reactions, given that it seemed to be difficult to identify those that stemmed from more extreme convictions such as anti-democratic practices or a true belief in the submission of women to the male model, the legislation's goal was to bring back social and national order. Therefore, the veil affair served to trigger a politicizing process (Lorcerie 1995) whereas it probably had more to do with both an identity search, whatever it was, and the school system malaise. Politicians and intellectuals brandished the fear of the religious as well as of the destabilization of the Republic instead of looking more closely at the manifestation of individualities and at education. It was probably more radical, visible and political to reassert the republican principles than to revisit the school system's functioning or the identity question within the French nation-state.

If schools are at the centre of linguistic reproduction, they are also at the centre of cultural reproduction, something that the education system is currently trying to reactivate under the cover of secularity, just like at the onset of public education. The secularity principle, established primarily in schools by the law of 1905, was not put forward as an anti-religious model, but was put forward in an enlightened spirit of tolerance and rationalism. It was not only aimed, in an anticlerical perspective, at the separation of Church and State but was part of an educational project that was more global and universal. The school institution was where a common national culture was reproduced, separate from particular

popular cultures, and constituted the building block of citizenship. Beyond knowledge, schools were engineered as holders of a federative ideology and providers of the learned culture. Contrary to the myth of an ideal era, schools, as implemented under the reign of Jules Ferry, were also inegalitarian, but this inequality emanated from social classes with well-defined boundaries and was admitted by the school; a certain form of social determinism was largely admitted in society, and finally within the school's walls. Although they reproduced inequalities, schools at least seemed not to be causing them or making them worse. The 'republican elite' even made an effort to recruit certain students who met standards of excellence, thereby contributing to social mobility (Dubet 1997). More than an anti-religious statement, secularity represented an education model, partaking of the universalist ideology. Today, through the veil debate, secularity has become stuck in a religious debate and, instead of questioning identity claims, which are sometimes driven by feelings of inequality and non-recognition within the school system, the danger of 'communitarianism' and 'fundamentalism' is brandished. However, schools can no longer insure the reproduction of the citizenship model, as holders of a universal culture. They are part of a world where they play upon meritocracy and profit. They provide access to the spheres of power to the most deserving students or those who have understood various success strategies, which are recognized and facilitated by the social class to which they belong, the most well-off, holder of the expected codes. More than the acquisition of humanistic and republican values, school competition is an affirmed and integrated mode for accessing social mobility for which the dominant classes are the best trained. Furthermore, schools are being mobilized – away from their primary purpose – for school-to-work transition, family mediation, psychological difficulties of children, civility, which weakens them and catches them off guard because they have

always been focused on the transmission of a universal common knowledge while leaving at their doors the private, the intimate, popular knowledge, home languages other than French, if any, and parents themselves. Thus, schools now seem to produce inequalities because they can no longer leave them behind with impunity in the social sphere.

Secularity, which provided this distance between the private and the public, between schools and society, is now subject to social change. The religious issue is one element which is more visible and more ideologically marked than others issues, more than languages themselves (unless, again, it is associated with them, as was the case at the beginning of the 20th century, in a regional language versus Catholicism relationship), but it is a reflection of the changes that the school institution is undergoing in the same way.

(E) Conclusion: impossible change or ideological impasse

It now therefore appears that the national crises surrounding linguistic issues are giving way to cultural or religious ones. But we are still talking about the same thing. Tensions are rising just as power struggles are intensifying and the ideologies in place becoming less flexible: whether it is on the side of the dominant and conservative monocultural assertions, underlaid by the fear and rejection of strangeness, or on the side of identity demands which, from a sign of resistance can become an identity quest in a cult of the lost origin and authenticity, a quest relayed by a social malaise and feelings of non-belonging. These assertions are vigorously redrawing boundaries (who is inside and who is outside) without, for all that, considering other ways of being together. Today, some community members are rejecting a homogeneous package which would still serve the majority and accentuate their own cultural marginalization; they are upsetting the established order, the notion of homogeneity and national unity. To a certain extent, they are pushing each one of

those who are on one side of the boundary to try a possible meeting. Minority groups are asserting the French fact (for the most part, their children are now born in France) while insisting on a wider recognition of cultural and linguistic specificities by challenging of the airtight boundary between the private and the public. Always reminding the groups who are feeling excluded from the French specificity of the nation, of its values of freedom and equality, of its language – without admitting to its rigidity and dysfunction – stigmatizing them because they are undermining the model, and even rejecting it, can only create tensions and blockages.

The old world France, moulded by its language with its sovereign surges and by its universal culture, leaves little room for the recognition of cultural plurality. For this reason, thinking the Nation differently would lead to the break-up of established patterns and would force the doors of imagination, which would be a real modernity challenge. It is probably a matter of accepting and bringing to light, as the basis for the construction of a new society, the conflicts and the words said in the public space, as we do with everything cultural and artistic. Accepting these demands as reflections of the real historical path of France, the violence of the decolonization and immigration processes of the 60s, the children and grand-children of wounded migrants, the daily discriminations and humiliations, the multilingualism. When the old protection reflexes remain fruitless, listening to and considering the social demands of the minority would help to avoid any hardening and would help assert a plural nation.

France will not be able to solve its domestic tensions without questioning the political order and universalism; a political and ideological order which only serves to reproduce the social assets of the dominant group and legitimize the power holders. In the end, it is the whole social functioning that needs to be rethought before the break occurs too

violently from the margins. And before France withdraws into an ideological impasse. It cannot rid itself of this national and linguistic conception that hinders it, while making it also an 'exception'. The French nation is in an ideological crisis and the more it closes its doors to diversity and change because on its abstract universalism, the more it nourishes the demands and dissatisfactions from the margins. It is as if the national neurosis has become a figure of identity and the French language contributes to this neurosis, especially when it is called upon to delineate the public and the private space.

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Notes

ⁱ And along the same lines, the National Assembly rejected in December 2005 a socialist document that wanted to repeal in the Act of February 23, 2005 references in school history books to the ‘positive role of the French presence’ during the colonization period, particularly ‘in Northern Africa’. Following this controversy, the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, removed this section by decree.

ⁱⁱ In language planning, interventions on the corpus of a language, i.e. the system, are opposed to those on the status of a language, i.e. its recognition and prestige, since Kloss (1969).

ⁱⁱⁱ A literary school founded in Provence in 1854 with, as figurehead, the Nobel prize winner Frédéric Mistral, who unrelentlessly worked for the recognition of Provençal through a strong willingness to standardize this language.

^{iv} Caught between the objections expressed and the image that had to be given to Europe of France’s democratic values, the President signed the Charter knowing that it would not be ratified by Parliament.

^v The 1951 Deixonne Act on teaching only dealt with Basque, Occitan, Catalan and Breton.

^{vi} Thus, the Délégation Générale à la Langue Française became the DGLFLF, or Délégation Générale à la Langue Française et aux Langues de France.

^{vii} For a precise history of the urban policies, see the particularly well documented book by Bachmann, C. and Le Guennec, N. (1996).

^{viii} 'De 1974 à 1995, le secteur industriel a enregistré une perte de 430 000 emplois pour la seule région Ile de France, alors même que la croissance du secteur des services ne permet pas de compenser les licenciements d'un personnel peu qualifié et mal préparé à d'autres tâches.' ['From 1974 to 1995, the industrial sector recorded a loss of 430,000 jobs for the sole region of Île de France, while the growth of the service sector has not compensated for the lay-off of workers who are little qualified and ill-prepared to take on other tasks.'] (Vieillard-Baron 2001:153).

^{ix} Although one must remain cautious and always conduct alternate studies on urban changes to also draw attention to the wellbeing of certain territories where social and civic work is paying off...

^x This expression has been repeatedly used by the media.

^{xi} This formula was extensively used by the 1995 presidential candidate, Jacques Chirac, during his campaign.

^{xii} The October 29-November 4, 2005 edition of *Marianne* (no 445), a weekly magazine, ran this headline: 'Enquête : immigration, intégration. Quand Fadila et Ahmed incarnent la France qui réussit.' [Special report: immigration, integration. When Fadila and Ahmed personify the France which succeeds]

^{xiii} In the face of numerous difficulties, children of immigrants, the 'Indigènes de la République' [natives of the Republic], supported by French intellectual figures, are denouncing discrimination as measured against the colonial ideology which is still alive in France. They are also telling of the humiliations sustained by their fathers, and of the non-recognition of the French government's responsibilities at the time of the colonization and the war of Algeria. This would also be a way of avenging their wounded honour. 'Derrière la normalisation apparente des relations, il reste le souvenir très vivant des guerres coloniales, en particulier de la guerre d'Algérie, et d'un renversement de domination qui n'a pas encore été accepté par tous' [Behind the apparent normalization of relations, there remains the vivid memory of the colonial wars, in particular the war of Algeria, and of a domination reversal which has not yet been accepted by everyone] (Vieillard-Baron 2001: 165). Today, the debate is lively and historians (see in this regard Histoire, 'La colonisation en procès' No 302, October 2005) are warning us about the danger of decontextualizing the situation while forgetting to consider the current socio-economic factors and the international situation (Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Irak war) to reactivate a past history.

^{xiv} Certain events, such as the 'Marche pour l'égalité des droits dite Marche des Beurs' in 1984, the 'Ni putes ni soumises' movement of 2003, the publishing of a list of 'motivés' during the municipal elections of Toulouse, led by a group of Toulouse artists among whom were Zebda, represent a political conscience on the move but without any patent electoral representation.

^{xv} 'Le classement en Zep offre un surcroît de moyens aux établissements sous forme de postes et d'heures supplémentaires d'enseignement, l'un des objectifs étant de réduire la taille des classes. Au total en 1998 et 1999, le supplément de ressources allouées aux Zep

représentait environ 1,2% du total des dépenses pour les activités d'enseignement. L'effort est toutefois saupoudré sur une telle quantité de zones et une telle masse d'enfants qu'au total les ressources allouées pour un élève de Zep sont à peine 8% à 10 % supérieures à celles allouées à un élève hors Zep' [The ZEP classification provides institutions with additional means in the form of extra teaching positions and extra hours, one of the goals being the reduction of class sizes. In 1998 and 1999, the total additional resources allocated to ZEPs represented approximately 1.2% of the total teaching expenditures. The effort is however spread over so many ZEPs and so many children that the total resources allocated for one ZEP student are barely 8 to 10% higher than those allocated to a non-ZEP student.] (Maurin 2004: 64)

^{xvi} Language and (Im)migration in France, Latin America, and the United States: Sociolinguistic Perspectives, September 25-26, 2003.

^{xvii} For this whole question, see Caubet (2001b; 2004c).

^{xviii} The goal of this commission initiated in 1997 by Michel Morineau and Pierre Tournemire within the Ligue de l'enseignement was to conduct, through discussion and knowledge sharing, a detailed analysis of the issue of the presence of Muslims in French society to search for avenues that would lead to their harmonious integration in the intangible framework of secularism and its political philosophy.