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► **To cite this version:**

Milena Doytcheva. Diversity as Immigration Governmentality: Insights from France. Social Sciences, 2021, 10 (7), pp.237-256. 10.3390/socsci10070237 . hal-04150969

HAL Id: hal-04150969

<https://hal.science/hal-04150969>

Submitted on 4 Jul 2023

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Article

Diversity as Immigration Governmentality: Insights from France

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the ambiguous connections between immigration, diversity politics, and white supremacy in twenty-first century France by considering them both theoretically and empirically. It offers to elucidate the ways in which the recent growth and expansion of the diversity framework in Europe and France have gone hand in hand with the unfolding of particularly repressive migration policies, hostility towards migrants, and outright institutional racism. Drawing on qualitative longitudinal data on corporate diversity policies, based on semi-structured interviews ($n = 86$), the article also relies on secondary data analysis from other policy domains (migration, education, urban development), favoring a globally comparative lens. First, I engage with some major trends of the recent reinvention of diversity at the EU level, underscoring the ambiguous effects of Europeanizing antiracism and nondiscrimination in a reverse sequence; second, I critically revisit the ways in which this European reinvention, combined with the legal universalization of equal opportunity, has given rise to the articulation of “white diversity” conceptions; then I explore their even more problematic nexus with governing migration. Finally, I call for a critical scrutiny of how universalized and thoroughly individualized notions of diversification may emerge as instrumental in upholding hegemonic whiteness, in the fields of race relations as well as international migration.



Citation: Doytcheva, Milena. 2021. Diversity as Immigration Governmentality: Insights from France. *Social Sciences* 10: 237. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10070237>

Academic Editors: Pawan H. Dhingra and Tanya Golash-Boza

Received: 21 March 2021
Accepted: 8 June 2021
Published: 22 June 2021

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Keywords: diversity; immigration; governmentality; white supremacy; white normativity; EU; France

1. Introduction

This article aims to examine the ambiguous connections between immigration, diversity politics, and white supremacy in the twenty-first century by considering them both theoretically and empirically. It offers, in particular, to elucidate the ways in which the recent appeal of the diversity framework in Europe and France has gone hand in hand with growing hostility towards migrants and the unfolding of particularly repressive policies on migration. While on the one hand, political leaders and institutional actors have shown increasing concern for racial justice and equal opportunity within historically color-blind settings, on the other hand, these same actors are also actively engaging in ostracizing immigrants (and their descendants); criminalizing and illegalizing migration; and containing undesirable Others in the figures of Muslims, European Roma, and more broadly migrants from the Global South. It is the features of this striking paradox that this paper endeavors to address, under the terms of what I frame as “white diversity”, to argue how, despite its enthusiastic reception, the diversity framework has been increasingly wielded by socially powerful and mostly white groups at the expense of immigrants but also, more broadly, of racialized and disenfranchised communities, in French and European settings, as well as on a global scale (Berrey 2015; Makoni 2012; Mayorga-Gallo 2019; Doytcheva 2020a).

In this paper, then, I endeavor to explore how the political, social, and organizational processes of “whitening” (Gans 2012) that occur within purportedly race-conscious and diversity-labelled procedures and frames connect, resonate with, and even set the stage for new patterns of immigration governmentality. From this perspective, the intensive boundary-setting and boundary-maintenance work that accompanies the ubiquitous

and ever-broadening deployments of diversity (also termed “generic” or “global”, see [Doytcheva 2009, 2010](#); [Clarke 2011](#)) should be understood in light of the contemporary “punitive border complex”, invested in the “management” and control of migration ([Hall 2017](#); see also [Mattelart and Hargreaves 2014](#)); for they both rely, I will argue in this paper, on tiered and hierarchical notions of desirable, acceptable, and profitable otherness—which ultimately act to uphold structures of hegemonic whiteness ([Lewis 2004](#)).

The nexus between policies on diversity and policies on migration seems rather underexplored in literature so far, as the former are usually framed as a response to the social and political facts of pluralism, multiculturalism, racism, and enduring inequalities, while the latter are mostly considered in light of questions related to nation-building, sovereignty, citizenship, and assimilation. Their analytical distinction, or even willful decoupling, has been still further emphasized within French color-blind settings, insofar as it purportedly allows scholars, social movements, and public actors alike to advance a distinctive minority-focused agenda (including but not limited to migration); and whose significance is otherwise repeatedly denied from a so-called Republican, i.e., universalistic and individualistic, stance. However, race politics and structures of hegemonic whiteness undoubtedly intersect those of immigration governmentality, as this Special Issue aims to timely elucidate. Concepts such as white and sexual nationalism or homonationalism ([Puar 2007](#); [Bilge 2012](#)) already meaningfully attest to this relation by highlighting the ways in which “gender equality” and “sexual democracy” have become a means of Western immigration and integration governmentality ([Fassin 2010](#)).

This paper also intends to provide a modest contribution to such perspectives, building in particular on the hypothesis of diversity as immigration governmentality through a European and globally comparative lens. To do so, I draw conceptually on Foucault-inspired ([Foucault 1980, 2007, 2008](#)) theoretical framework that offers to construct diversity as a *dispositif* of governmentality under late neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, while a well-established strand of critical diversity literature frames diversity first and foremost as a “language” ([Ahmed 2007](#)) or, under an early-Foucauldian approach, as a “discourse”, in recent work I have engaged with the multiple connections and interlocking frames of ideational, scholarly, and practical diversity concepts ([Doytcheva 2018, 2020a](#)). Framing diversity as “a happy talk” ([Bell and Hartmann 2007](#)) about society “without oppression” ([Andersen 1999](#)), or as an ideology ([Embrick 2011](#); [Mayorga-Gallo 2019](#)), actually illuminates to a lesser extent its performative force, or how routine deployments, workings, and arrangements impact a variety of scales and social activities—from the most individual, those of subjectivity, to organizational, macrosociological, and political ones.

Building on a Foucauldian approach to governmentality, the *dispositif* should be considered instead as the network or “system of relations” that exists between “the said as much as the unsaid”, “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions” ([Foucault 1980](#), p. 190). Instead of being merely a “language”, a “trope”, or a “discourse”, the *dispositif* or apparatus, which happens to be an “apparatus of security” under neoliberal rule ([Foucault 2007](#)), embodies the network to be established between linguistic, extralinguistic, and nonlinguistic phenomena; these links are instrumental to how a power, not based upon classical conceptions of sovereignty and dominance, manifests itself and is structured and exercised. From this perspective, the *dispositif* or apparatus is a “formation”, with a “strategic function” that responds to historical needs ([Foucault 1980](#), p. 190)¹.

Considering diversity as a *dispositif* helps bring together ideational, as well as actual social and technological fields, which are often siloed in academic discussions ([Doytcheva 2018, 2020a](#)). According to [Matejskova and Antonsich \(2015\)](#), what such a perspective helps account for in the first place is the “commonplace at-oddness and contradictoriness of practices, policies, uses, and deployments of diversity.” However, from my position here, such analytical perspective should also be more strongly moored to critical race and critical whiteness theories, emphasizing—instead of mere “contradictoriness”—the pervasiveness

and historical depth of racist structures and power relations in white organizations (Ray 2019; Bonilla-Silva 2004); CRT highlights in particular the ability of racialized systems to produce everyday, organizational, and structural dominance based on “epistemologies of ignorance” and other “epistemic maneuvers” by hegemonic whiteness to hamper social change (Mueller 2017; Mills 1997; see also Golash-Boza 2016). Moreover, with these theoretical backgrounds, the critical approach I advocate for pays particular attention to the intertwining of scholarly and practical articulations of diversity: by reviewing its policy applications first, I raise methodological and epistemic questions about diversity as immigration governmentality, and in particular its superdiversity turn.

Methodologically, I draw on a qualitative, longitudinal approach to diversity policies in France, based on different surveys I conducted between 2006 and 2017, which I connect to other primary datasets on migration policies, as well as to secondary research. Based on a comprehensive multi-actor and multisite approach—including European, national and local components—the research design targeting diversity policies offers to confront institutional commitments and other aspirational policy statements by diversity actors and stakeholders with the practical outcomes of active diversity-making processes; while addressing these issues over the medium term, i.e., the decades 2000s and 2010s.

In what follows, first I trace the recent (re)invention of the diversity rationale in Europe (EU) and France in the context of newly enacted antiracism and antidiscrimination legislation and against the backdrop of long-lasting assimilationism, and firm political commitment to color-blind universalism (especially in France). Drawing on a literature review and primary data from interviews with corporate and political leaders and diversity actors, I analyze how this recent rearticulation has given way to processes quite parallel to those observed decades earlier in the United States: namely, reframing antiracism and civil rights ideals through for-profit, “diversity management” rationales for organizational policymaking.

Next, I argue for a critical examination of this delayed, yet enthusiastic, reception of the diversity frame by the EU, in the light of an enduring rejection of multiculturalism but also the unfolding of highly securitized policies on migration. I highlight two salient features, which are: first, the gradual deracialization of antidiscrimination, particularly in the workplace, and second, the ambiguous connections that these policies and their leaders and spokespersons hold with the politics of (repressively) “managing migration”². The corporate social movement in favor of workplace diversity, which emerges as more concerned with branding and achieving social capital than racial justice, boasts goals that might range from “protecting security” to the “ending of immigration.” Hence, the hypothesis of diversity as immigration governmentality, which this article seeks to further assess.

Finally, in the discussion section, I challenge the ways in which the diversity framework has also become a master narrative in scholarship on “global migration”, stressing through the concept of superdiversity in particular notions of “diversity’s diversification”, or how variables of race and ethnicity intersect with a wide range of discrete categories, such as age, legal status, gender, address or occupation, to produce an ever-increasing number of highly scattered and individualized trajectories in migration. Here again, I draw on fieldwork with diversity leaders and professionals to demonstrate how the almost unlimited expansion of the diversity space and diversity politics bears the risk of obscuring racist structures and power relations while reinforcing white normativity (Ray 2019; Dhingra 2020; Mayorga-Gallo 2019; Doytcheva 2020a; Garbes 2021).

2. Europeanizing Antiracism and Nondiscrimination: Context and Research Questions

In the early 1990s, decades after civil rights and race relations legislation in the US and the UK, respectively—as well as the prohibition of sex discrimination in the 1957 Treaty of Rome—the European Union sought to commit to antiracism and nondiscrimination in order to build a communitarian, legal and policy framework for equal opportunity. Willing to address issues of minority and migrant integration and citizenship—for which it did not yet have specific competencies—it made a pledge to support nondiscrimination and

“valuing diversity”, two concerns that fell at the core of that moment’s political view. For the first time, article 13 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty granted the Union regulatory powers “to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.” Implemented by two Council Directives, respectively referred to as “race” and “employment”³, the principle of equal treatment was gradually transposed into national laws. Until that moment, the vast majority of Member States, and in particular those with so-called “continental law” systems had rather modest, if any, legal provisions against discrimination, mostly enforced through criminal proceedings, as in the case of France (but also Belgium, Portugal, and Finland, among others).⁴

On the one hand, the EU’s commitment to nondiscrimination stemmed directly from efforts spanning the 1980s to address xenophobia and hostility towards migrants, while on the other hand, the “Europeanization” (Favell 2000; Guiraudon 2009) of these concerns was fueled by a strategic move undertaken by NGOs and “experts” lobbying in Brussels, who in the early 1990s repositioned themselves on antidiscrimination claim-making.

As early as 1984, in parallel with the first electoral advances of the far-right⁵, the European Parliament launched a committee to inquire into “the rise of fascism and racism”. Known as the Evrigenis report (Evrigenis 1985), its work pointed to “the rise of more or less diffuse feelings of xenophobia”, particularly in regions of immigration. However, Evrigenis argued, such feelings should not be equated with racism, which he defined as an “aggressive and deliberate hostility against immigrant communities”; rather, they were thought to translate into “an attitude of mistrust and intolerance”, a “discriminatory behavior”, which manifested itself on a daily basis. A few years later, the Committee issued a second report (Ford 1991), while several NGOs campaigning before the Commission started calling for a legislative action.

Created in 1986 and funded by the EU Parliament, the Migrants Forum of the European Community (MFEC) served by then as the main NGO platform vis-à-vis the EU Commission (Favell 2000). Designed to gather representatives of the most important migrant communities and “give them an office” in Brussels, the Forum was dominated by Turkish and Moroccan delegations, with a strong transnational dimension, focused on postnational citizenship claim making. However, the postnational agenda toward extending European citizenship to third-country nationals—and thus building a more hospitable concept of belonging and integration beyond nationalistic stands—came to a dramatic end in the wake of 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Intended to pursue not only economic but also political unification, the Treaty established a European citizenship for the first time. Nevertheless, deriving strictly from national citizenship, this communitarian citizenship was only granted to those who already held the nationality of a Member State—thus triggering a shift among migrant activism and claims making.

Against the backdrop of moving political landscapes, the Forum lost its leadership to the Migration Policy Group (MPG)—a small independent organization, led by Dutch and UK euro-actors and drawing on a network of legal activists and experts. Focused on minority rights, the MPG brought together an NGO coalition known as the “Starting Line Group”, which gained prominence in EU arenas and started to campaign for legislative measures against discrimination. However, according to Belgian legal scholar De Schutter (2001), the shift undergone from postnational citizenship to nondiscrimination was not only the outcome of such clever negotiations; falling at the intersection of economic and political fields, concerns about nondiscrimination also strongly embodied the current EU’s political vision—prone to blend *laissez-faire* economic liberalism with (soft) social justice aims.

The Europeanization of antiracism and nondiscrimination was thus marked from the start, I would argue, by two major trends: first, patterns of universalization, stretching the application of nondiscrimination well beyond historically minorized and disadvantaged communities to cover an ever-growing number of “social precariousness” situations; and second, its rather swift reframing through the notion of “diversity management” (European Commission 2003, 2005)—understood as less coercive and more flexible and effective—in a

logic of “mimetic isomorphism” (Di Maggio and Powell 1983), with the path first set by US and multinational firms.

Indeed, although antiracism was core to the emerging EU framework for equal opportunity, the path eventually followed by European authorities, then by national actors alike, was that of universalizing the right to nondiscrimination by providing within the same legal framework, and in an undifferentiated manner, for a variety of prohibited grounds of discrimination⁶. Their numbers, however, swiftly increased, demonstrating a logic of categorical inflation: there were initially 6 in article 13 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty (i.e., “sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation”); then 17 protected categories in the 2000 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; 12 in the 2001 French law “on the fight against discrimination”, which was the first to transpose the novel EU legislation; and up to 25 under current French law⁷. But was this universalist story of gradually expanding protections really one of progress?

According to feminist legal scholar Clarke (2011), reflecting on antisexism and gender equality being sublimated into issues of “liberty” or “dignity”, in both recent cases and research, such assumption should be vigorously called into question. Drawing on Iris M. Young’s classic critique of the ideals of universal citizenship, Clarke identifies two major trends associated with what she refers to as “the universal turn in protections”. On the one hand, universalization brings “dissolution” when, by trivializing the most serious harms, generic norms and standards are liable to water down protections, due not least to the increase of costs. On the other hand, the universal turn conveys “assimilation” as so-called status-neutral solutions are shown to favor those “whose lives are patterned in the mold of the privileged” and majorities, or who somehow “approximate the [dominant] norm” (p. 1246). According to my field observations, the proliferation of categorical distinctions indeed dilutes racism and whitens the space of diversity politics based on hierarchical notions of difference and (in)desirable otherness and good/bad diversity binaries, to which I return in the next section.

2.1. Managerializing Civil Rights and Antidiscrimination: A Reverse Sequence

The second move initiated by the Commission (European Commission 2003, 2005) was an invitation to reframe the new antidiscrimination law through the concept of diversity management. By so doing, EU officials and national actors alike followed in the footsteps of US and multinational firms, which, from the mid-1980s onwards, started transitioning from antidiscrimination and affirmative action, in particular, towards managerial values. Coined by Edelman and colleagues (Edelman et al. 2001), the concept of “managerialization of law” sought to address these managerial constructions of law (and especially of civil rights law), underscoring how they enable organizations to dissociate their efforts from legal ideals by asserting that “diversity is directly valuable to organizational efficiency and important in its own right” (p. 1591), rather than being a mere translation of social justice goals under civil rights law.

Construed at first as “old wine in new wineskins” (Kelly and Dobbin 1998; see also Dobbin 2009; Oudghiri and Sabbagh 1999)⁸, for-profit and market-based articulations of diversity soon attracted far more critical accounts of their productive and solely “meritocratic” vision; the alienating and dehumanizing impact it produces on minorities, and the risk of an additional cycle of race violence it entails (Alon 2015; Berrey 2015; Warikoo 2016; Berrey et al. 2017; Kehal 2019; Thomas 2020). Such questioning and critical receptions were amplified even further within the EU and French settings where, from my position here, the framework of managerialization only applies imperfectly—partly for historical or, say, sequential reasons, and partly for more political and institutional ones.

Indeed, while in the United States, where the concept of managerialization was coined, employment civil rights litigation has been a core, though not exclusive, instrument to achieve greater opportunity for over five decades⁹, it was in the lack of any prior legal commitment to enforce antidiscrimination that the diversity rationale, and in particular its “business case”, entered European social and political fields. This is what I term the

reverse sequence of Europeanizing antidiscrimination, which in my hypothesis has proven critical to the subsequent expansion of whitening diversity concepts. Of course, this is not to give an unapologetic vision of US and global policies, for which the same research underlines the limits of only relying upon rights-based litigation to effect social change (Berrey et al. 2017). My focus here is more about sociological understanding and the need to think of these processes critically, both contextually and dynamically—as their effects can go beyond mere “managerialization”, or at least the way it has been thought of in the US.

This was especially the case in France where, absent any prior strategy to bolster rights-based litigation, privatized and market-based governance forms prevailed from the beginning. Translating into measures such as charters and other texts of voluntary commitment, including codes of conduct and even quality standards (Doytcheva 2020b), the deployment of French diversity policies illustrated in a compelling way what Bonilla-Silva (2004) terms the “abstract liberalism” frame of color-blind racism: namely, the idea that “force should not be used to achieve social policy” (Bonilla-Silva 2004, p. 76) and that economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism, privatized and market-based governance) should be used instead. Bolstering the dominance exerted by economic actors through self-referential, provisional, and revocable procedures, where they sit as “both judge and jury” (i.e., are themselves in position to validate the “responsible” nature of their actions, see Alaktiff and Doytcheva 2018), such mechanisms have colluded with the legal universalizing of nondiscrimination to nearly completely dismiss issues of race and ethnicity from corporate diversity spaces.

2.2. Research Design, Sample, and Data Collection and Analysis

To shed light on these questions, I draw here on primary and secondary research. First, I have collected extensive primary data through qualitative, longitudinal research on French corporate diversity policies—placed within their larger EU environment and context—based on three surveys I conducted between 2006 and 2014 (2006–2008, 2011, and 2014, respectively). Relying mainly on in-depth sociological interviews ($n = 86$), conducted face-to face and fully transcribed and analyzed¹⁰, the research design also included ethnographic work, based on participant observation at diversity-dedicated forums and meetings, such as job fairs, professional meetings, conferences, and seminars; it was complemented by a documentation study, based on analysis of grey literature (official reports, practical guides), and communication materials, such as brochures, booklets, flyers, and internet sites; and a media coverage review of the mediatization of these topics over the period 1997–2007. Overall, based on a multi-actor, multisite, and multitemporal approach, the main objectives of the research design included: (1) confronting companies’ commitments and policy statements with the materiality of their diversity work and (2) addressing these concerns over the medium term, i.e., the decades 2000s and 2010s, from the inception of the corporate diversity social movement to the present.

In this study, I also proceed to connect this extensive qualitative dataset to a smaller one, based on research I conducted between 2009 and 2016, as part of several collaborative research projects, on the politics of securitization and exclusion targeting Romani migrants across Europe and France (see in particular Bessone et al. 2014). With this lens, I focused on a historical review and analysis of French and global migration policies in the 21st century, also complemented by secondary data from a literature review.

I also extensively use here secondary research and data analysis in order to bring into conversation bodies of scholarship on diversity politics across specific space and time locations and policy domains. From this perspective, migration, education, employment, or urban development offer valuable sites of observation towards a globally comparative approach to the ubiquitous applications of diversity as a *dispositif*. Finally, I use an extensive literature review to map out the conceptual and analytical fields related to what has been consistently referred to as a “diversity turn” in academia—namely its theoretical/ideational articulations—focusing in particular on dynamics of epistemological innovation encap-

ulated by neologisms such as “superdiversity”, “multiculture” and “post-race.” (see especially [Doytcheva 2018, 2020a](#)).

3. “Capital-D Diversity” and “Corner Strategies”—Deploying Diversity in White Organizations

As mentioned above, political and institutional commitment to diversity in France went hand in hand from the beginning with a preference for “flexible means” in a prevailing climate of low regulation and resistance to additional “constraints” (see also [Alaoui and Doytcheva 2010](#)). Within a broader trend of manifest support at the EU level for “soft law approaches” to economic and employment policies, this translated into a series of voluntary and self-regulatory measures, including charters, codes of conduct, labels and quality standards. As we will see in this section, even though such initiatives explicitly distanced the law to for-profit and market-based rationales, they nevertheless, and in the same movement, opportunistically followed it by embracing very large and universalized notions of diversity—also called “global” and “capital-D diversity” in this context.

Launched in 2004, the Diversity Charter was a flagship project in the field. Sponsored by *L’Institut Montaigne*, a “liberal think-tank” in the French, mostly economic, sense of this term, the charter broadly commits managers to “reflect the diversity of French society, particularly in its ethnic and cultural dimensions.”¹¹ The initiative was backed up by two high-profile public reports (also sponsored by *L’Institut Montaigne*) on “the left-behind of equal opportunity” ([Sabeg and Méhaignerie 2004](#)); and the “challenge” raised by “visible minorities” in their access to corporate employment ([Bébéar 2004](#)). Drawing on the powerful personal and political networks of the institute’s President—AXA CEO Claude Bébéar, dubbed “the godfather of French capitalism” ([Doytcheva 2020b](#))—the initiative received support from other CAC 40 leaders, as well as the center-right French government under President Chirac. It has since been emulated by other texts of voluntary commitment, also prompted by companies, such as the “Parenthood Charter” (*Charte de la parentalité*), promoted by L’Oréal in 2008, and the LGBT Charter, sponsored by Accenture in 2013¹². At the EU level, despite recurring domestic criticism about their open and nonprescriptive nature, French initiatives were met with quite an enthusiastic response, with the [European Commission \(2014\)](#) setting up a “Diversity Charter Platform” as of 2010 to bring together national initiatives that have emulated the French text across Europe (e.g., Finland, Sweden, Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland).

As early as the mid-2000s, these procedures embraced universalized—also termed “global” or “inclusive”—notions of diversity, mixing issues of race, sex, gender, health, age, and disability to achieve equal opportunity. Even though, in their efforts, institutional diversity players and stakeholders explicitly distanced the law ([Doytcheva 2010](#)) and putative bureaucratic constraints to for-profit and market-driven regimes, the assumption of the “legal universality” of nondiscrimination instantly pervaded their diversity work. In France, the Charter’s initial focus on “visible minorities”—which borrowed inspiration from Canadian policies—was soon to be abandoned. As the initiative’s audience increased and it gained broader support, notably rallying personnel professional organizations, it also had to confront skepticism, and even outright defiance, particularly over issues of representation and affirmative action targeting race.

This was particularly the case at AFEP (*Association Française des Entreprises Privées*)¹³ meetings, where some twenty CAC 40 companies were convened to discuss the Charter’s text. As a series of discussions made clear, “ethnic” or “racial” qualifiers of diversity were perceived as the source of important “embarrassment” and “discomfort”, while generic forms showed much more consensus, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts, taken from among many others:

For us, what is diversity today? It means including all the human profiles that exist within a society. Men, women, big, small, fat and so on. And being able to integrate them into the company. Period. (Human Resources Director, large distribution company)

The seniors, in the same way as the overweight or people of foreign origin. Diversity in our company means diversity in its broadest sense, and that includes workers with disabilities. (Human Resources Officer, telemarketing company)

When we talk about diversity, it is the mixing of all cultures, and it really is diversity in the broadest sense of the term. (Human Resources director, distance selling company, PPR Group)

In the mid-2000s, French grassroots diversity initiatives were thus marked by a twofold movement (Doytcheva 2009, 2010). First, it stemmed from a rationale of *deategorization*, following the path set by EU and French legislations towards the legal universality of nondiscrimination; yet, second, in the context of an almost unlimited expansion, “tactical choices” were discretionarily endorsed by companies as to the ways of categorizing diversity and discrimination. Although formally “global” or “inclusive”, these choices turned out to rely on highly selective tactics. Wielding a language of “priorities”, social actors engaged with, as if from a menu, only a few items and status categories, which they considered “socially meaningful” or “high priority”.

By exploring their regimes of justification, I show three main tenets or frames used to selectively categorize diversity: first, a strategic reasoning, predicated on the “most numerous categories” (i.e., sex and age), which are expected to “trigger” diversity action plans; second, a participatory approach, based on civic legitimacy, and according to which, since these are voluntary commitments—or even “recreational” (*récréatif*) as spelled out by one interviewee—they should “speak to employees”, perhaps “touch their heartstrings” (*toucher leur corde sensible*, a compassionate logic which benefits disability); finally, knowledge and expertise, which often happened to be a self-expertise (based on brainstorming, internal polls, satisfaction surveys) and actually allows downplaying racism, commonly framed as a “lower priority” concern that needs to be “boosted” and, therefore, “should follow” or will be “the next to come up” (*doit suivre*). This is what a Human Resources director at one large company, in charge of their internal diversity policy, termed the “corner strategy” (*stratégie du coin*):

I thought I was going to embrace [diversity] all at once. I was thinking: “We’re going to deal with the problem of sexual discrimination, we’re going to deal with the problem of discrimination based on origin, social or ethnic origin, we’re going to deal with the problem of workers with restricted mobility. And in fact, I realized that it wasn’t working out. Because the will of mine was not necessarily the will of others. So, in order to move the subject forward, we tried to make a corner strategy (*stratégie du coin*), that is, to take one action and this action we took it on disabled workers.

Talking about “global” or “capital-D diversity” has thus been effectively coupled with *à la carte* diversity tactics. Although selective, these latter *à la carte* tactics soon emerged as being overwhelmingly white: deprioritizing race and racism at first, then eventually solidifying into more binding visions about “good” and “bad diversity” (Doytcheva 2009, 2015; see also Lentin and Titley 2011; Bhopal 2018); with the latter, such as racial and also faith diversity, being almost completely removed from corporate plans.

Based on longitudinal analysis (Doytcheva 2015, 2018), commitments to diversity have thus moved from *comprehensive* to *selective*, and ultimately to *normative* or *prescriptive* concepts. The path, and the constructions of diversity it involves, were eventually “normalized” by the setting up of a Diversity Standard in 2008 (the Diversity Label)—monitored and accredited by the national standards organization, which translates into *normalization* in French¹⁴. Today, certifiers in charge of monitoring the Label overtly discourage applicant organizations to include race and ethnicity in their diversity “package” (see Alaktiff and

Doytcheva 2018), by which they achieve certification. Borrowing from Foucault's (2007, p. 64; see also Doytcheva 2020b) understanding of normalization, against the backdrop of voluntarism and lack of institutional constraints, the outlines of grassroots experimental procedures, launched by companies in the early 2000s, have "serve[d] as the norm", or at least have provided an "operational basis" for the "study of normalities" from which has been inferred a (white) diversity norm.

"The Immigration Wolf and the Diversity Lamb"¹⁵

However, not only was diversity on its own exempted from too close a link to migrant communities and populations, but another concern was soon raised, suggesting a significant yet unexplored nexus between diversity's whitening normalizations and the politics of repressively governing migration. In the French setting, it was premised on the specific timing of the diversity agenda, which emerged as tightly entangled with processes of *securitizing* migration in the early 2000s.

Indeed, even though it would be possible to find some evidence of diversity being articulated by so-called progressive and left-wing forces¹⁶, its agenda neatly gained prominence from 2002 onwards, in parallel with the process of "political alternation" and the coming to power of the right. In the beginning of the 2000s, and the aftermath of 9/11, these were also the times of the "war on terror", marked by the global emergence of particularly repressive policies on migration. According to securitization theory and the "Copenhagen School" (Eroukhmanoff 2018), securitization is the process by which political issues are constituted as extreme "security issues"—e.g., framed as "dangerous", "menacing", or "threatening"—which allows power in turn to move them "beyond politics" and to take actions overriding law, based on the premises of Agamben's "state of exception". Targeting Muslims, migrants from the Global South, and other racialized groups, such as the Roma in Europe, these policies and the period as a whole have been more broadly construed as the ending of the "differentialist turn" that spanned the late part of the century, followed by a "return of assimilation" in Brubaker's (2001) terms.

In France, Nicolas Sarkozy's political career, starting at the Ministry of the Interior in 2003 before his accession to country's supreme leadership in 2007, bears clear evidence of this trend. With the creation of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration and National Identity in 2007, securitization was brought to a historic high. First targeting Roma migrants, Muslim citizens, and refugees and migrants from the Global South¹⁷, the process further translated into a string of freedom-curtailing measures, commonly construed as "state xenophobia" (Le Cour Grandmaison 2008).

Nonetheless, securitization, surveillance, and control over migration (somehow) appallingly coalesced in Sarkozy's agenda with the objectives of "promoting diversity" (*promotion de la diversité*) and, in particular, those advanced by think-thanks, employer-led organizations, and other business interest groups sticking to laissez-faire economic liberalism, as outlined above. In 2008, taking the initiative to establish a "Diversity Commission" chaired by Simone Veil—a leading postwar political figure and a Holocaust survivor—Sarkozy brought up the possibility of constitutional reform, with the stated aim to allow these subjects to be displayed more assertively, both politically and institutionally; by notably breaking the deadlock of "indivisibility" and colorblindness, which is embedded in art. 1 of the French Constitution. Despite the not completely unexpected failure of his reformist push¹⁸, heralding diversity while actively outlawing and illegalizing migration raised legitimate suspicion about the political appropriation of these goals, not to say an outright weaponization of the one against the other—what Eric Fassin (2008) termed "the immigration wolf and the diversity lamb" (*le loup de l'immigration et l'agneau de la diversité*, see also Bernardot and Doytcheva 2010). In the very words of some diversity leaders among my respondents, "valuing the diversity" of French society by for instance "recruiting talent wherever it is", helps protect against the economic necessity, and the risks it entails, of resorting to new labor immigration (see also Section 4 below).

Exploring the genealogy of diversity policies in French audio-visual media, [Mattelart and Hargreaves \(2014\)](#) show how these policies focus not only on the integration of minorities but also, and no less importantly, on the “protection of security”. The authors trace back the origin of this ambivalence in France to the early 1970s and the politics then grounded in “interculturality”, which boast a twofold objective: contributing to the social promotion of immigrants, on the one hand, while maintaining them “in the knowledge of their culture of origin with a view to a possible return”, on the other. Against the backdrop of chasing “illegal aliens” and in light of recurring demands for “chosen immigration”, for many observers, the call for active diversity making has taken on the form of a threat or a danger.

Indeed, a racialized good/bad diversity binary directly points to the governmentality of migration, insofar as this latter governmentality is the focus of a long-cemented transpartisan consensus in France. According to historian [Weil \(1995\)](#), originating in the 1980s, this consensus arose as a result of concessions made by so-called republicans, both left- and right-wing parties, to the anti-immigration and white supremacist agenda raised by *Front National*. By its virtue, the assumption was made that even though it was the duty of French state to actively sponsor migrant integration, it should only be done on the condition of strictly enforcing border control and severely punishing undocumented migration. However, with the diversity rationale, this political bargain potentially reached a fracture point: a particular diversity concept was needed to achieve such a balance.

4. Diversity to Assimilate? Diversity as White Normativity

It was then against the backdrop of the purported “failure” and hastily announced “death”¹⁹ of liberal multiculturalism ([Lentin and Titley 2011](#); [Doytcheva 2020a](#)) that the diversity rationale was mainstreamed in European and French debates. Based on media coverage analysis of the three major national daily outlets (*Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*) over the period 1997–2007, it is noteworthy that the term first made a “discourse event” in a very particular context: namely, the release by the Stasi Commission of their *Laïcité* report ([Stasi 2003](#)), recommending the prohibition of religious symbols, and in particular Muslim headscarves, in public schools. In the opinion of the Stasi Commission, the display of religious symbols within school grounds had to be prohibited in the name of secularism, whereas the “diversity” of the student body should be otherwise valued and promoted by, for instance, introducing into the school calendar holidays appropriate to each mode of worship. However, only the repressive component of the report was enshrined into law; while the Commission’s statements foreshadowed the thorough ambivalence, not to say a core contradiction, of diversity’s upcoming institutional and political trajectory—emerging against the backdrop of a hostile and globally restrictive environment towards migrants and within a broader context of curtailing fundamental freedoms²⁰.

In this context, not only have political and institutional appropriations of the diversity framework shown themselves barely hospitable to migrant communities, but another disturbing feature was to surface soon, in the form of a heavily assimilationist approach. “White normativity” (see also [Ray 2019](#); [Dhingra 2020](#); [Garbes 2021](#)), or the propensity to grant advantage to individuals whose lives approximate the dominant norm, thus appears as the second main tenet of white diversity, alongside downplaying race and ethnicity. As such, white normativity is indeed reminiscent of what [Clarke \(2011\)](#) identifies as the second risk behind the universal turn in protections, namely assimilation, and the advantage status-neutral solutions give to lives that are “patterned in the mold of the privileged” groups.

Indeed, while on the one hand the corporate social movement in favor of workplace diversity asserted commitment to laissez-faire economic liberalism in employment policies, their positions on political and cultural issues appeared much more conservative and restrictive. For instance, some of my interviewees, not so rare or isolated, did not hesitate to directly refer to the “opportunity” created by diversity to “control” and, ultimately, reduce migration, insofar as, in their view, “valuing the talents and competencies of French

society wherever they are” would ultimately make it possible to reduce the economic need for, as well as the alleged “risks” of, resorting to new immigration. Based on field observations, this hostile and restrictive approach to migration, which embodies a long-standing assimilationist tradition, was ultimately most strongly demonstrated in the French case with regard to religion and Islam.

Despite freedom of conscience being an integral part of fundamental rights and a core component of the EU’s legislation on equal treatment and nondiscrimination, faith diversity is hardly targeted by companies, nor is it even fully admitted, or only on the condition of being rendered invisible through discrete and segregated spaces (Doytcheva 2021). In French settings, this trend amounts to a particularly extensive reading of *laïcité* principles, which has been termed “axiological” (as opposed to legal), but also “disciplinary”, “invasive”, or “combat secularism”. In the wake of 2004 French legislation banning religious symbols in schools²¹, such conceptions have expanded far beyond educational grounds to span a variety of fields.

However, re-embedding combat *laïcité* into allegedly diversity-driven arrangements and procedures becomes all the more appalling considering how these latter procedures emerge as consistently permeated by (white) Catholicism. This was notably the case in northern France, where I conducted fieldwork and where social Catholicism still very tangibly displays its “humanistic values” among employer-led, social patronage organizations, which are among the most proactive towards diversity’s agenda. But this is also true on larger national and global scales. It is what one of my interviewees—who also happens to be the one reporting on “corner strategies”—defined as the “catho-bobo”²² diversity concept: “But, certainly, on a more personal level, if you like, what is diversity for me? It’s the mirror of humanity; it’s . . . Christian justice, it’s humanism, a positive, and procreative crossbreeding (*métissage*)!”

Based on fieldwork, I ideal-typically elaborate three main figures or forms of engagement that the surge of enthusiasm for diversity among the French *patronat* has revealed. While (1) the “business case” rationale is widespread and *passe-partout*, its pragmatic approach, functional to the corporate world, actually overlaps with deeper *raisons d’être*, which happen to be also much more political. Among them, a certain vision or inspiration (2) originates in social Catholicism, which has been a key historical factor in employers’ social commitment, particularly in the north of France, over the last century. Reminiscent of colonial history and memories, as well as of some feeling of personal guilt or responsibility, (3) yet another form of engagement appeals to notions of solidarity or “indebtedness”—which however remain hierarchical and paternalistic—pushing towards a commitment and desire to “help” people with whom they once shared the “colony experience”:

In the spring of my life, the French Republic sent me on a trip [smiling] to Algeria for thirty months. And in the autumn of my life, the GrandL. Committee [a regional Areopagus of business and political leaders] offered me the opportunity to help take care of these young people. I did behave well in Algeria, but not all members of the French army did so [. . .] And that’s still such a shame for me as a Frenchman . . . That’s one reason why I’m here to help these young people from immigrant backgrounds. (diversity “coach”, volunteering for one dedicated business network, M/+70 years old, retired)

In the case of Islam, these last two figures or forms of engagement, say Christian and postcolonial, converge to account for a particularly contentious politics on religion within nonetheless diversity-labelled procedures and arrangements. But while this problem is typical of France, it is not only a French one. In his fascinating essay on diversity as a means to “deradicalize” US campuses in the 1970s, legal scholar Asad Rahim (2020) convincingly makes the case for two competing conceptions coexisting among university authorities then: the first, based on a deeper commitment to racial justice and equality, was epitomized by the University of Michigan, while the second, drawing on Harvard’s broader vision that Rahim terms “catholic”, articulated the larger goal of bringing “intellectual diversity” to college campuses. Ultimately, it was that latter vision that prevailed in Powell’s opinion,

and subsequently in the Supreme Court decision on the case, that famously assumed race was a “plus factor”²³—in what came to be considered as diversity’s founding act.

5. Discussion: From Super- to White Diversity?

Since the early 2000s at least, diversity has also increasingly become a master narrative in the study of global migration. Furthermore, assumptions about “the diversification of diversity” (Hollinger 1995), which should be first traced back to political and legal development in the US post-civil rights era, have gained attention and legitimacy far beyond the context of racial integration and affirmative action. They have become a key lens to address global migration, in both policy and research. At the intersection of scholarship on migration and multiculturalism, while explicitly targeting 21st century global mobilities, the framework of superdiversity in particular—also referred to as hyperdiversity in urban contexts—consistently operationalizes both hypotheses this study set out to assess, namely, diversity diversification in its relation to immigration governmentality.

In this final section then, in order to examine the ambiguous connections between immigration, diversity politics, and white supremacy, I will proceed by recentering the lens at the theoretical level. I will argue how universalized and thoroughly individualized notions of difference may emerge as instrumental in upholding hegemonic whiteness, in both the areas of race relations as well as international migration. By so doing, I also aspire to bring into conversation bodies of critical scholarship across these fields. Critical diversity scholars have consistently drawn attention to the ways in which political and social articulations of diversity are not only obscuring racist structures and power relations, but also play an active role in their reinforcement and institutionalization (Zanoni et al. 2010; Berrey 2015; Warikoo 2016; Berrey et al. 2017; Thomas 2020; Mayorga-Gallo 2019; Doytcheva 2020a, 2020b). On the other hand, (super)diversity as immigration governmentality aspires to enter public policy and not only research (Meissner and Vertovec 2015). Between these two, a common space for critical reflection should aim at recoupling these investigations, which may have been strategically dissociated as well.

In what follows, I begin by recalling the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the superdiversity framework, before revisiting three main points of criticism of diversity as immigration governmentality, namely (1) its romanticized vision, which evades power and inequality in a global, yet more-than-ever, asymmetrical world; (2) its implicit contribution to a Eurocentric and “Westernizing” lens; and (3) the hidden nexus behind diversity diversification and the contemporary punitive border complex. As a conclusion, I argue that framing “global diversities” as the new paradigm for international migration should require further scrutiny and attention.

Coined by Vertovec (2007; see also Meissner and Vertovec 2015; Vertovec 2019) in a much-cited essay, the concept of superdiversity builds on the hypothesis of 21st-century “new migrations”; characterized by processes of intensified diversification, these brought about “a level and kind” of heterogeneity and complexity of an unprecedented scope:

Britain can now be characterized by ‘super-diversity,’ a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade. (Vertovec 2007, p. 1024)

Originally based on data collected in the London area, the new theoretical framework is nevertheless increasingly conceived of and articulated through a multisite approach (Meissner and Vertovec 2015); originating in academia, it is also in the process of moving forward into the field of public policy. According to authors, the reasons for this appeal should first be found in the evolving patterns of global migration: whereas in the past, it involved a large number of people, leaving from and going to just a few countries, contemporary flows exhibit much more various origins and destinations. This “diversification of

diversity” yields superdiversity, which also highlights the conjunction of race and ethnicity with a range of discrete categories, such as age, address, legal status, and occupation, to produce a wider spectrum of differentiations. Of course, these variables are not new in migration studies, nor are many of their correlations, but “the emergence of their scale, historical and policy-produced multiple configuration” (Vertovec 2007, p. 1026) is theorized as raising “unprecedented challenges for both policy and research”. In particular, it calls for conceptual and methodological innovations that move “beyond the ethnic group” as “unit of analysis” (Berg and Sigona 2013) towards a deeply pluralized lens.

Against the backdrop of the multicultural backlash that shaped the 2000s decade, the new approach purported to allow scholars to acknowledge a wider range of differences and similarities between and within groups than conceptual predecessors, such as ethnicity and race did (Berg and Sigona 2013). On the one hand, within migration studies, a (super)diversity approach has been hailed as bringing an end to identity-based theories and politics (e.g., Neal et al. 2017; Aptekar 2019; for a critical approach, see Back and Sinha 2016; Sealy 2018), meant to have prevailed before²⁴. On the other hand, superdiversity has been ambitiously hypothesized to “hold the potential” to do in migration studies what intersectionality did in gender studies or to conceptualize the relations between multiple processes of categorization and inequality (Berg and Sigona 2013, p. 349; see also Humphris 2015).

However, from decolonial, critical race, and critical diversity positions, narratives focused on the “diversification of diversity” and the multidimensional approach it should entail “contain a powerful sense of social romanticism” (Makoni 2012, p. 193; Ndhlovu 2016), an enchanted and superlative (Back and Sinha 2016) vision of the difference among differences, which ultimately brings about an illusion of equality in a yet highly asymmetrical world. This critique seems particularly relevant since the imperative to explore “social patterns that are not necessarily marked by perceived inequality” (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, p. 557) forms yet another remarkable feature of the super/hyperdiversity framework.

Moreover, such trends emerge as even more powerful in contexts driven by a search for homogenization (Makoni 2012). As I have argued in previous work, besides claims to novelty, unprecedentedness, and radical change, the “turn to diversity” belongs to a broader academic field of conceptual and methodological innovation, also delineated by neologisms such as “multiculture” and “postrace” (Doytcheva 2018, 2020a). Despite their specific time and space locations, superdiversity, multiculture and postrace exhibit a set of shared assumptions that could be summarized around (1) the individuation end equating differences; (2) the stretching of their significance beyond historically disenfranchised communities to an ever-growing number of scattered-diversity situations, which should be equally acknowledged and protected, from the position of unbounded pluralism, and regardless of real disadvantages between groups (see also Cooper 2004).

On the global scale, diversity as immigration governmentality has been rightly criticized for ironically reinforcing eurocentrism by favoring an “Westernizing” lens. As pointed out by Aneta Pavlenko (2018), the process that transforms “a newly coined word into a fact on the ground” needs much deeper scrutiny and critical attention. While Pavlenko readily acknowledges that she is a sociolinguist not a migration scholar, she also considers that “a very brief look at world-wide migration reveals a few inconvenient truths”: (1) the intensity and diversity of migration have not increased worldwide but only in Western Europe; (2) migration does not necessarily increase ethnolinguistic diversity, but it did increase it in Western Europe; and (3) the rise in the number of languages spoken is particularly tangible there because of the low European linguistic diversity, while the centers of such diversity are primarily located in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. The “uncomfortable answer” suggested by Pavlenko to explain what she calls an intellectual “Westernization” of global migration is that many academics, including but not limited to sociolinguists, reside in the countries affected by those “new migrations”. Summing up the “age of superdiversity” into efforts towards “academic branding”, Pavlenko makes

the case against practices designed to add value into the increasingly corporatized and competitive environment of contemporary research.

Others scholars have criticized the perceived poor understanding, if not intentional neglect, of the nexus between the processes observed here/now towards diversity's diversification and bordering practices of surveillance and control over migration, or what [Hall \(2017\)](#) calls "the punitive border complex" (see also [Back and Sinha 2016](#)). While at first superdiversity-friendly in her capacity as an urban anthropologist, Hall has recently taken a much more critical stance. Accordingly, the superdiversity concept should be more strongly moored to a "brutal migration milieu" and what she terms "the liberal paradox", framed as "the deep discrepancy of how Western capitalism both refutes and requires migration" ([Hall 2017](#), p. 1562). Such politics of contradiction—and the ethos of subordination it entails—are very thoroughly invested in the contemporary fortification of the European punitive border complex, which also emerges as what is actively producing the "diversification" of people across space. Hence, contemporary processes of diversity making should be reconnected to those structures and their effects, which rely heavily on discrimination, before and after the border complex. Other migration scholars have timely criticized "the misleading conflation of economic globalization and immigration", which leads to overselling the "global" in migration studies, while failing to call into question how globalization and immigration have become entangled in the popular imagination and political discourses alike ([Castañeda and Shemesh 2020](#)); and how migrations are shaped by power dynamics and relations that are primarily rooted into locally and territorially determined configurations.

Ironically then, while advocating a thoroughly multidimensional approach, diversity as immigration governmentality appears to be "politically one-dimensional" ([Back and Sinha 2016](#), pp. 520–21), while its "insouciant treatment of racism" works largely through omission and erasure.

Drawing on European and French articulations of diversity, seized in their ideational as well as actual social and political aspects, this paper set out to uncover the ways in which processes of diversity diversification, based on extremely pluralized definitions, instead of intersectionality, have fueled patterns of competing inequalities. On the one hand, competing inequalities result in the colonization of diversity's territories by majorities and socially (more) powerful groups, in a logic of whitening normalization. While on the other hand, against the backdrop of a repressive and punitive environment, not only did diversity exclude migrants, but it has been ever more instrumentalized by right-wing and conservative forces, including for the purpose of securitizing migration.

To shed light on these mechanisms of diversity as immigration governmentality, my account has stressed the intertwining of knowledgeable and practical articulations of the diversity paradigm. Drawing on Foucauldian conceptualizations of power-knowledge and normalization as key power technology under late neoliberalism, I have highlighted the emergence in French settings of "normalized" diversity concepts that re-embed whiteness and white normativity into purportedly race-conscious procedures and frames. I frame this as the main outcome of two intersecting, yet distinctive, trends: first, the enforcement of generic norms, based on, second, market-driven and privatized governance forms—quite consistent with laissez-faire economic liberalism within [Bonilla-Silva's \(2004\)](#) color-blind racism frames.

Neoliberalizing equal opportunity through quality management and standardization (see also [Hirschman and Bosk 2020](#)) thus accounts for reinscribing racist structures and power relations within the very spaces considered as spaces of resistance or even redress. Hence, while superdiversity has attracted interest and attention, based on the premise that it "normalizes" the significance of "global diversities" in migration studies and beyond ([Wessendorf 2014](#)), from my position here, and borrowing from Foucault's words, such normalization operations appear far less than desirable indeed. On the one hand, normalization eschews issues of social justice and equality in favor of security, or otherwise competitiveness and circulation-framed concerns; on the other hand, drawing on social

constructions of normality, it upholds rather than subverts hierarchical thinking and practices while conveying palatable, acceptable, desirable—considered “normal”—figures of otherness. This is ultimately how hegemonic whiteness is being negotiated and reinforced at both borders and boundaries.

Funding: This work was supported by the University of Lille as part of its Interdisciplinary Research Programme “Theories and Politics of Recognition: A Sociological-Philosophical Exchange” (TheoPOL, 2019–2021, coord. M. Doytcheva). The author also acknowledges support from Institut Convergences Migrations (Collège de France-CNRS) under grant n° ANR-17-CONV-0001.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 Such an approach might also be compared to what [Thomas \(2020\)](#) frames as a “regime”: “a set of meanings and practices that institutionalizes a benign commitment to diversity.”
- 2 *Gestion de l’immigration*, a popular expression in political and public debates that actually conveys notions of control over migration and, above all, of “reducing” it.
- 3 Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin; Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.
- 4 The criminalization of racism and discrimination goes back in France to the ratification in 1971 of the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and, before, the legislation against the rise of antisemitic propaganda in the 1920s. However, criminal liability for discrimination in French law had translated into a very small number of cases, with an average of about ten convictions per year, and even less in employment cases ([Latraverse and Doytcheva 2018](#)). The novel European legislation, then, was designed to enhance civil proceedings and make the litigation of employment discrimination more friendly to plaintiffs and courts.
- 5 See for instance, the *Front National* (FN) at the municipal elections of 1983 in France and the European elections the next year.
- 6 Promoted by the “Starting Line” coalition, the approach received support by EU officials within a working group set up to reflect on the Treaty’s reform as early as 1995. Referred to, in hindsight, as a “diversion strategy” ([Guiraudon 2009](#), p. 18), it arguably sought to neutralize resistance against and deflect attention from immigrant communities who had “not always enjoyed the greatest sympathy”: “The Starting Line Group understood it could bring together in a coalition other European lobbies such as the European Disability Forum and divert part of the attention of immigrant populations who did not always enjoy the greatest sympathy”. The European Women’s Lobby, the European Disability Forum, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) Europe, in addition to the European Migrant’s Forum and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) are among the largest such NGO platforms.
- 7 French law n°2001-1066 of 16 November 2001, amended by French law n° 2008-496 of 27 May 2008 on provisions for adapting to community law in the field of the fight against discrimination. The enlisted categories, which are not strictly the same across statutes and legal branches (e.g., administrative vs. civil or criminal law), notably include: sex, family status, physical appearance, surname, health condition, disability, mores (*moeurs*), sexual orientation, age, political opinions, religious beliefs, union activities, genetic characteristics, pregnancy, residence or address, language, social precariousness, and “actual or perceived affiliation or non-affiliation with an ethnic group, nation or race”.
- 8 i.e., underscoring their tactical use by diversity officers to create room for maneuvering vis-à-vis the judiciary and the federal administration but without significantly disrupting policies towards women and minorities, shaped by the antidiscrimination legislation of the 1960s and the case law of the 1970s (see in particular [Dobbin 2009](#)).
- 9 See on this [Berrey et al. \(2017\)](#). Initiated in the 1960s, the commitment to litigation was further reinforced, with a significant increase in the number of lawsuits in the 1990s, before declining in the following decade.
- 10 The stratified sample of diversity practitioners and stakeholders breaks down as follows: (1) companies and company professionals (managers, personnel professionals, diversity officers $n = 25$), (2) business and political leaders, key business and professional networks, public officials ($n = 18$), (3) diversity intermediaries and experts, including public and private workforce intermediation ($n = 25$), and (4) “diverse candidates”, referred to as “candidates from diversity” in French (*candidats issus de la diversité*), i.e., a workforce trained and monitored through these schemes ($n = 18$). Constructed and updated incrementally, the four relatively autonomous, yet connected, datasets have been fully transcribed and analyzed, favoring a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method, aimed at considering discourse as social practice at the interface of structures of cognition and action.

- 11 Built around six points, this short text of commitment can for instance be endorsed online, without further formalities cf. <https://www.charte-diversite.com/charte-de-la-diversite/> (accessed on 15 September 2020) It has been emulated since then by other initiatives, also prompted by companies, such as the “Parenthood Charter” (*Charte de la parentalité*), promoted by L’Oréal in 2008, cf. <https://www.observatoire-qvt.com/charte-de-la-parentalite/presentation/> (accessed on 3 April 2021), and the LGBT Charter, sponsored by Accenture in 2013, cf. <https://www.autrecercle.org/page/1-autre-cercle> (accessed on 3 April 2021).
- 12 In 2008, these initiatives were supplemented by the setting of a state-owned Diversity Standard (the Diversity Label), whose attractiveness has however decreased since then—with about 100 accredited organizations in 2017 versus more the 300 in 2013 (Doytcheva 2020b).
- 13 French Association of Large Companies <https://afep.com/en/> (accessed on 1 April 2021).
- 14 French Association of Normalization (*Association Française de Normalisation*, AFNOR) <https://certification.afnor.org/ressources-humaines/label-diversite> (accessed on 28 March 2021).
- 15 According to Fassin (2008).
- 16 Under the socialist government of Lionel Jospin in the late 1990s, that was the case of the Minister of Justice, Elisabeth Guigou, among other personalities.
- 17 See among many others—such as quantified deportation targets, bone testing for minor asylum seekers, and DNA testing for family reunification candidates—the so-called “Roma sequence” (Bessone et al. 2014), which in the summer of 2010, led EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding to threaten France with legal action over mass forced evictions of European Roma migrants, which she compared to Vichy France’s treatment of Jews: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/14/roma-deportations-france-eu-disgrace> (accessed on 20 December 2020).
- 18 The Committee issued an unfavorable opinion regarding the opportunity of a constitutional reform to bolster the objectives of racial justice and equity (Veil 2008, p. 53), considering that means were already available to achieve such objectives. It should be noted that a successful reform of this type had already been done in 1999, enshrining sex into the Constitution as a legitimate distinction among the French people and thus paving the way for parity laws in politics.
- 19 See the statements by Nicolas Sarkozy in France: http://www.liberation.fr/france/2011/02/11/sarkozy-estime-que-le-multiculturalisme-est-un-echec_714298 (accessed on 15 September 2020), Angela Merkel in Germany: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany-multiculturalism-failures> (accessed on 15 September 2020), and David Cameron in the UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference> (accessed on 15 September 2020).
- 20 Another instance of such an ambivalent or conservative approach is to be found in Jacques Chirac’s 2002 electoral address (which also embodies the first appropriation of the term by a right-wing political personality), who, in a debate opposing National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen at the second turn of the French presidential election, famously stated: “France, as a country, finds its grandeur in its diversity and its refusal of communitarianism” (my translation; see *Libération*, 27 April 2002 and *Le Figaro*, 27 April 2002); see also Chirac’s discourse at the release of the Stasi report on 17 December 2003: <https://www.elysee.fr/jacques-chirac/2003/12/17/discours-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-sur-le-respect-du-principe-de-laicite-dans-la-republique-paris-le-17-decembre-2003> (accessed on 3 April 2021).
- 21 French Law 2004-228 of 15 March 2004 regulating, in accordance with the principle of laïcité, the wearing of religious symbols or clothing in public schools.
- 22 “Bobo”, for the contraction of bourgeois-bohemian, is commonly used pejoratively in France to underscore the “hypocrisy” and a kind of presumed “disconnectedness” of a certain, often Parisian and also deemed “liberal”, elite; its conjunction here with the epithet “catho” is rather oxymoronic and further enhances the oddness of some public diversity figures and leaders.
- 23 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). According to Rahim, “Instead, [Powell] embraced Harvard’s more catholic vision of diversity, where race was merely ‘a plus factor’ in service of a larger goal of attaining intellectual diversity on college campuses.” Harvard described its vision in an appendix that elite universities jointly submitted to the Court; according to it, focusing only on racial diversity “would hinder rather than further attainment of genuine diversity” on campuses (quoted in Rahim 2020, p. 33).
- 24 See for instance as an illustration the evocative title of a British think-tank report: “You can’t put me in a box: Super-diversity and the end of identity politics in Britain” (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah 2010).

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