

# FRANCE'S LOST EMPIRES

FRAGMENTATION, NOSTALGIA,  
AND *LA FRACTURE COLONIALE*



EDITED BY  
KATE MARSH AND NICOLA FRITH

# After the Empire: The Francophone World and Postcolonial France

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# France's Lost Empires Fragmentation, Nostalgia, and *la fracture coloniale*

Edited by Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith



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## Contents

### Acknowledgments

vii

Introduction: Territorial Loss and the Construction of French Colonial Identities, 1763–1962

1

*Kate Marsh*

### Part I: Nostalgic Reflections on France's First Overseas Empire

1 “Remember Saint Domingue”: Accounts of the Haitian Revolution by Refugee Planters in Paris and Colonial Debates under the Restoration, 1814–1825

17

*Yun Kyoung Kwon*

2 A Celebration of Empire: Nostalgic Representations of *l'Inde française* in Chocolat Suchard's Colonial Collecting Cards of the 1930s

31

*Kathryn Dale*

3 De Gaulle and the “Debt of Louis XV”: How Nostalgia Shaped de Gaulle's North American Foreign Policy in the 1960s

43

*Olivier Courteaux*

### Part II: Narratives of Loss: Decolonization under the Fourth and Fifth Republics

4 Between History, Memory, and Mythology: The Algerian Education of

55

Albert Camus

*John Strachan*

5 Alexandre Arcady and the Rewriting of French Colonial History in

69

Algeria

*Sophie Watr*

- maire.fr/elections-presidentielles-2002-ville-carnoux-en-provence.html (accessed August 30, 2009); "Vote sur Carnoux-en-Provence: Présidentielles 2007," <http://www.annuaire-maire.fr/elections-presidentielles-2007-ville-carnoux-en-provence.html> (accessed August 30, 2009); "Élection présidentielle 2007," <http://www.france-politique.fr/election-presidentielle-2007.htm> (accessed August 30, 2009).
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36. The association website does, however, give a detailed breakdown of the 194 members registered in 2004. See <http://www.racinepiedsnoirs.com/statistiques.html> (accessed August 16, 2009).
37. For further details see: <http://www.racinepiedsnoirs.com/publivre.htm> (accessed August 16, 2009). A copy of the brochure is held by the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine (BDIC) at Nanterre.
38. Calandra, "Carnoux-Racines," 12.
39. *Ibid.*, 12.
40. "La Cité des pieds noirs," June 6, 2000.
41. For the full text of this proclamation, see "L'oi no. 99-882 du 18 octobre 1999 relative à la substitution, à l'expression 'aux opérations effectuées en Afrique du Nord', de l'expression 'à la guerre d'Algérie ou aux combats en Tunisie et au Maroc,'" <http://legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000578132> (accessed February 2, 2009).
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## CHAPTER 10

# *La République postcoloniale?* Making the Nation in Late Twentieth-Century France \*

Emile Chabal

### Is There a Postcolonial Nation?

In contemporary Francophone studies, the nation has become a rather unfashionable concept. We are invited to break down, deconstruct, or look beyond the nation-state.<sup>1</sup> It is seen as a compromised point of reference, one that represents the culmination of a narrative that excludes not only the colonial and the postcolonial, but everything at its margins. We are told that it is the nation that has provided the framework for the multitude of universalist and exclusionary ideologies that have emerged in modern French politics: "republican," "liberal republican," "Jacobin," "revolutionary." Since the majority of such ideologies take as their reference point the primacy of the nation, their contradictions can only be revealed by a careful criticism of the nation itself.<sup>2</sup> In the context of France, there are good grounds for such skepticism. The nation has continued to be canonized in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries with a tenacity that few other European nations can match.<sup>3</sup> This has limited our gaze to a restricted number of narratives, historiographies, and teleologies. In particular, it has pushed to the margins France's colonial experience, which has been so central to its history. Even major recent French historiographical projects (such as Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoires*, 1984–93) have failed to provide a reflexive analysis of France's national identity.<sup>4</sup> There can be little doubt that a postcolonial turn, in its French form, is long overdue.



Yet, as this chapter will argue, the nation persists. It remains both a point of political reference and a conceptual placeholder. Attempts to decenter or deconstruct it must not lose sight of the fact that it is a seductive and self-sustaining discourse. This does not mean rejecting the disruptive narratives of, say, the colonial encounter; but it does involve recognizing that disruptive narratives are, more often than not, deployed or marginalized within the existing framework of the nation. By looking at "neo-republicanism"—the political language that has represented, since the 1980s, the most consensual interpretation of the contemporary French nation—this chapter suggests that today's paradoxes of universalism and the turn to nostalgia are not simply consequences of France's fledgling postcolonial consciousness. They are part of a process of reflection at a time when the French national narrative has been challenged both at home, by the realities of French society, and in the wider world, as part of a changing geopolitical map.

After a long period when other shibboleths—such as *grandeur* or the proletariat—held sway over the language of politics in France, the term "republicanism" returned in the 1980s. The collapse of Communism and the Marxist intellectual consensus, the fragmentation of the political left, the triumph of liberal democracy, the problematic integration of immigrant communities, and the threat of the *Front National* irrevocably altered the French political landscape. Although various political controversies of the past thirty years, such as *l'affaire du foulard*, *la crise d'intégration*, and *les banlieues*, have been the subject of intense and often partisan disagreement, there is a growing acceptance that "republican" ideals have extensively informed these debates.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1980s, politicians and intellectuals have increasingly called upon what they see as France's republican tradition to justify a wide range of political actions. For instance, opposition to the wearing of *signes religieux* in state schools was framed in terms of its incompatibility with the concept of *la laïcité républicaine*. Or, in a very different context, the notion of a *pacte républicain* was resuscitated in the mid-1990s by Chirac in order to oppose the *Front National* and denounce its "un-republican" platform.

The resurgence of an explicitly republican discourse that advocates and defends a "strong" notion of the *République* has been termed a "neo-republican" revival by a number of scholars and commentators both inside and outside France. Its proponents include academics, public intellectuals, political philosophers, journalists, and active politicians who, since the 1980s, have often noisily defended an explicitly "republican" agenda in the press, on television, or at party conferences. Prominent, but seemingly incompatible figures, such as the Socialist politician, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, historians, such as Maurice Agulhon and Henri Guiano, public intellectuals, such as Alain Finkielkraut and Régis Debray, or the former head of SOS-Racisme, Harlem Désir, are just some of the more famous names to have been associated with this neo-republican turn. Despite the fact that these figures appear to have little in common, their active and public commitment to a "republican" agenda makes them the heart of today's "neo-republican" revival.

However, if the words "Republic" and "republican" have passed into the consensual vocabulary of French politics since the 1980s, they remain flexible and complex concepts that bring together several contradictory political strands. For instance, those neo-republicans who have defended the principle of *laïcité* have drawn from different historiographies depending on whether they see *laïcité* as an institutional construct that minimizes social conflict or as a "transformative" principle that represents progress towards a more rational society.<sup>6</sup> Thus, rather than seeing it as a clearly-defined political tradition, it is more fruitful to treat republicanism as a political space of languages, symbols, and histories on which political actors can draw. It offers a political vocabulary that is relatively stable, while being recognizable and adaptable to a variety of different circumstances. What is described here as "neo-republicanism" is simply the most recent incarnation of a well-established language of politics in France.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of this chapter will look closely at precisely this question of political language. The focus will be on three terms that have developed alongside, and in conjunction with, the recent neo-republican consensus: *la fracture sociale*, *l'intégration*, and *la laïcité*. The development and spread of these three terms allows us to understand how contemporary France has dealt with emerging postcolonial narratives that have profoundly affected French politics. *La fracture sociale*, *l'intégration*, and *la laïcité* are significant concepts because they demonstrate some of the ways in which the French national narrative—most commonly expressed in a form of neo-republicanism—has absorbed a number of key postcolonial challenges, such as the rise in immigration and the battle for colonial memory. The moments in which these three terms gained importance and the reasons for their (re)emergence as key themes in public debate are, therefore, of crucial importance in understanding France's postcolonial turn.

### Dividing the Nation: *La Fracture sociale*

There is no satisfactory translation for the term "fracture sociale" in English. The English term "social fracture" is vague, while the more precise "inequality" suggests a primarily economic phenomenon. Yet, despite the difficulties of translation, the term "social fracture" is a good starting point for an examination of contemporary French politics since it highlights the ways in which politicians, intellectuals, and public figures have conceptualized the socio-economic challenges that France has faced in the late twentieth century.

The enthusiasm with which French politics adopted the word "fracture" to describe the ills of the nation is in itself revealing. A fracture implies a breakdown, dissolution, or disintegration of the body politic. As has already been suggested, the language of neo-republicanism has reinforced the tendency of French republicanism to stress the unity of the nation. While the idea of a *fracture sociale* appears at first sight to show the extent to which the concept of the

nation has been undermined in contemporary French politics, it simultaneously demonstrates the continuing relevance of a language of national unity. For instance, there is little talk of a *fracture nationale* since the implication of any kind of fracture for the nation is taken to be self-evident.

At the same time, the specific context in which the term "fracture sociale" emerged tells us a great deal about why a neo-republican turn occurred in the late twentieth century. The first use of the term was attributed (incorrectly) to the geographer, Emmanuel Todd, but it came to prominence in the 1995 election campaign, when Jacques Chirac called on a "discipline républicaine" to counter the threat of the *Front National*.<sup>8</sup> A *Front National* success, which would eventually take place in 2002, gave Chirac the political legitimacy to invoke the traditional rallying cry of the *République*: that the Republic was in danger. It was not only in danger from the far right. Alongside the threat from Le Pen, there was a growing sense of insecurity. In particular, rising unemployment and unrest in France's *banlieues* had once again brought to the fore issues of social exclusion, racism, and spatial segregation. Employing an analytical term that was emerging at the same time, Chirac grouped these numerous *malaises* under the term "fracture sociale."

The success of the phrase was immediate. After Chirac won the election, variants of the term "fracture sociale" began to appear regularly across a variety of media.<sup>9</sup> For example, the sociologist, Michel Wieviorka, in his work on the strikes of 1995, used it to describe the kind of social divisions that had led to the confrontational politics of the strikers.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, well-known figures, such as the writer, Azouz Bégag, were talking of a *fracture ethnique*.<sup>11</sup> Others, particularly those on the losing left, denounced the growing *fracture politique*, the most important aspect of which was the right's neglect of "la souveraineté populaire."<sup>12</sup> As the millennium approached, the term appeared to have lost none of its urgency. When asked in a 1997 opinion poll, the overwhelming majority of respondents claimed that *la fracture sociale* had either remained as bad as it ever was or had worsened.<sup>13</sup> Within a few years, this term, along with the constellation of socio-economic problems associated with it, had become common currency. By 1999, the French had, according to another opinion poll, become the "most morose" of western European nations, something that the then head of the French polling organization IPSOS, Pierre Giacometti, attributed to the continuing fracture.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout Chirac's presidency (1995–2007), the expression "fracture sociale" featured in political discourse. On the right, figures such as the historian, Henri Guiano, used the concept to suggest France was going through a "moral and intellectual crisis."<sup>15</sup> On the left, the term was employed both to undermine Chirac's policies and to understand Jospin's failure in the 2002 presidential election. Not surprisingly, the riots in the *banlieues* of 2005 and the rejection of the European Constitution in the same year saw the idea coming to prominence once again. For example, an editorial in *Le Monde* in late 2005 suggested that *la fracture sociale* had not been addressed, and that both the right and the left were responsible for the "déchirure du pacte républicain" in the *banlieues*. Once

again, the crisis of the nation-state provided the backdrop to a discussion of the nation's fractures.<sup>16</sup>

The term "fracture sociale" has continued to feature prominently in political and academic discourse surrounding contemporary France. Scholars of France's colonial history coined the term "fracture coloniale" to describe the initial suppression and subsequent resurgence of France's colonial memories at the turn of the twentieth century, while commentators on contemporary France, such as Pierre Rosanvallon, have continued to use the term "fracture sociale" to describe France's social problems.<sup>17</sup> In spite of claims in 2001 that the term "fracture sociale" had been replaced by that of "insécurité" in the electoral vocabulary, there are few signs that the earlier concept has passed its political sell-by date: editorials in *Le Monde* in 2007 and 2008 again invoked the various fractures—"sociales, scolaires, ethniques, urbaines"—to explain the worsening state of the Parisian *banlieues*.<sup>18</sup>

The continuing relevance and use of the term "fracture sociale" has no doubt been connected to a marked sense of "declinism" that has characterized the last two decades of French politics.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it comes as no surprise that those most strongly associated with French "declinism," such as Nicolas Baverz, have shown a great deal of concern with the "fragmentation" or "disintegration" of the nation-state.<sup>20</sup> More than simply a response to crisis, however, the term "fracture sociale" also captures the importance of two contemporary political phenomena: first, the spread of a language of neo-republicanism; and, second, the concomitant and enduring presence of the nation as a reference point in French politics. In some cases, the link was made explicit—as was the case when Blandine Kriegel coined the term "fracture républicaine"—, but, in the majority of cases, it was simply assumed that national integration could repair *la fracture sociale*.<sup>21</sup> The zeal with which France's political and intellectual classes took to this term in the mid-1990s and subsequently adapted it to different contexts suggests that it provided a convincing way to conceptualize social problems. It brought together in one idea the fear of fragmentation and the continuing pre-eminence of the nation-state.

### Repairing the Nation: L'Intégration

One of the clearest responses to the perceived threat of the disintegration of the body politic is *intégration*, a word that has now become synonymous with the neo-republican revival. Though a renewed emphasis on *intégration* predates the emergence of the term "fracture sociale" in French political life, its ultimate goal of unity brings back many of the same themes as *la fracture sociale*. While outside observers have mainly focused on the implications of *intégration* for France's "ethnic minorities," this limited analysis conceals its wider connotations. Rather than simply assume that *intégration* is referring solely to the integration of immigrants, this section shows how it has been posited as a solution

to a wide variety of social problems and, in particular, to those associated with *la fracture sociale*.

The reports of the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (HCI), set up by the French government in 1989 (also the year of *l'affaire du foulard*), provide a means of understanding the multiple meanings of the term "intégration."<sup>22</sup> At the time, the HCI was seen to be a positive, state-driven response to the perceived crisis of integration. Over the past two decades, its reports, along with its eclectic and changing composition, have made it an important indicator of the various official meanings of integration.

The HCI's definition of integration is quite explicit:

Le terme d'intégration (généralement référé à la situation des immigrés installés de façon durable dans le pays d'accueil) désigne à la fois un processus et les politiques qui ont pour objet de faciliter sa mise en œuvre. . . . Le processus . . . est celui d'une participation effective de l'ensemble des personnes appelées à vivre en France à la construction d'une société rassemblée dans le respect de principes partagés (liberté de conscience et de pensée, égalité entre homme et femme par exemple) telles qu'elles s'expriment dans des droits égaux et des devoirs communs. . . . Mener une politique d'intégration, c'est définir et développer des actions tendant à maintenir la cohésion sociale.<sup>23</sup>

This extended definition captures some of the key dimensions of the term "intégration." In the first instance, it emphasizes its strongly political aspect—there is a sense of contractual agreement in the idea of "principes partagés." If *intégration* is something that depends on a certain "cohésion sociale," that "cohésion" is above all political in nature. The unity of the body politic is the implicit assumption behind any *politique d'intégration*, for no integration can take place without a united society in which to integrate. The consequence of such a conceptual framework is that,

l'intégration n'est pas destinée aux seuls Français issus de l'immigration et concerne tout individu qui participe à l'espace civique. . . . L'identité nationale se vit à travers de valeurs partagées: il ne suffit pas de naître sur le sol français pour se sentir Français. Pour s'associer, chacun de nous doit faire un effort pour oublier ses seules particularités et retrouver ce qu'il a en commun avec les autres.<sup>24</sup>

This is a "strong" form of citizenship and one that passes through the state. It could also be described as a total form of citizenship, insofar as it brings together the social (*insertion sociale*), the economic (*exclusion*), and the "ethnic" (*origine*) under the specifically political notion of *intégration* founded on a "pacte républicain". This "pacte," to which both citizen and state are subservient, constitutes the "lien social," the collapse of which has brought about *la fracture sociale*.<sup>25</sup>

This notion of total citizenship has deep roots in, and is of central importance to, French history, but is often forgotten by those attempting to unravel the

discourse surrounding immigration in France.<sup>26</sup> This being the case, any discussion of *intégration* cannot limit itself (as it might in the Anglo-American world) solely to "ethnic minorities," a concept that remains taboo in France and for which no statistics exist.<sup>27</sup> The idea of *intégration* is intimately connected with a wide range of other social and economic processes, which are seen to undermine the unity of the nation: unemployment, spatial inequality, difficulties in France's educational system. . . . Crucially, it is the whole body politic that is deemed to be under threat.

It is noticeable that, since 1995, the HCI's reports have articulated an increasingly sophisticated conceptual framework in an attempt both to respond to criticism directed at its monolithic republican universalism and to present a coherent ideological justification of the concept of *intégration*.<sup>28</sup> The result of this increasing conceptual clarity has not, however, given rise to a questioning of the assumptions behind *intégration*. If anything, the HCI's conclusions have become more militant in tone. For example, the Conseil argued in 2002 that,

Il faut maintenir la tradition républicaine française, dans sa version laïque et contractualiste, mais en opérant une catharsis de sa dimension refoulée organique que représentent l'assimilationisme. . . . La désintégration menace toujours la République. C'est un combat constant à mener et l'autorité politique doit toujours être vigilante à ce sujet.<sup>29</sup>

Quite apart from the difficulty of distinguishing between "assimilation" and "intégration"—a problem that the HCI has tried to address<sup>30</sup>—the claim that the *République* is under threat has, since its inception, been used as a rallying cry. No threat appears more dangerous than that of "désintégration," which in French carries the double meaning of the "disintegration" of the state and the "failure" of its citizens to integrate. By the same token, a call for vigilance on the part of an "autorité politique" places a heavy burden on the state. Thus, *intégration* requires the active participation of both the state and its citizens, a position consistent with the HCI's recommendations. A surprising exception was the unwillingness of the HCI in 2000 to recommend a ban on the headscarf in schools, despite the heated debates that accompanied that issue.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that the HCI's approach to the notion of integration draws heavily from the highly political language of republicanism and posits a much more "total" conception of citizenship than that commonly found in the Anglo-American world. Integration is not simply something that concerns immigrants, but becomes the responsibility of every citizen. As a result, "ethnic" exclusion is seen to be only one part of a "crisis of integration" that has much wider implications for French society.

Moreover, the HCI's definition of *intégration républicaine* has become common currency in French political discourse. In one of its own reports, the HCI uncovered the powerful hold of a "rhétorique républicaine" in the public and private sectors, which made managers and civil servants reluctant to talk about the problems of racial or ethnic discrimination. In the majority of cases,

employers used a republican language of color-blind integration to minimize the role of job discrimination and explain away the need for various forms of "positive discrimination."<sup>32</sup> Within the academy, the HCI's definition of integration has been validated by a growing body of work, most notably by figures such as the philosophers, Dominique Schnapper and Pierre-André Taguieff.<sup>33</sup>

Even amongst France's limited "ethnic" elite, the language of republican integration has pride of place. On the left, the Togolese politician, Kofi Yamgnane, and the president of SOS-Racisme, Malek Boutih, have both stressed integration as the primary means for immigrants to surmount their social and political disenfranchisement.<sup>34</sup> Yamgnane, for instance, argued in 1995 that "l'intégration ne peut se faire que sur les valeurs de la République. . . . L'intégration que nous proposons se veut positive, mobilisatrice car elle est le ciment de la cohésion sociale."<sup>35</sup> On the right, the deputy of the RPR and UMP, Rachid Kaci (of Kabyle origin), founded *La Droite Libre* in 2002, which describes itself as "libérale et républicaine."<sup>36</sup> Kaci's right-leaning interpretation of republicanism stresses a strong discourse of republican integration alongside Gaullist nationalism and hostility towards economic interventionism. Even the French Muslim community more generally appear to be strongly attached to the political contract implied by *l'intégration républicaine*—in a recent survey, the Pew Global Research Centre found that French Muslims were much more likely than their European counterparts to value their "French" identity and demonstrate a willingness to "adopt French customs."<sup>37</sup>

The fierce debates surrounding "multi-culturalism" have further strengthened the republican consensus regarding integration, although this has often been little more than a defensive argument designed to show the merits of a "French model" in the face of Anglo-American criticism.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, beyond its purely defensive character, the fears that multi-culturalism could bring about the fragmentation of French society have been entirely consistent with the revival of both a republican language and the unifying notion of integration. In 1989, for example, the outspoken neo-republican intellectual, Alain Finkelkraut, deplored the fact that "la nation disparaît au profit des tribus. . . . [e]l l'unité culturelle cédera la place à la juxtaposition de ghettos."<sup>39</sup> A decade later, his fellow neo-republican, Danièle Sallenave, argued that opposition to the development of regional languages "c'est s'opposer à une division de la communauté nationale, qui est une 'communauté de citoyens' et non pas une juxtaposition de groupes, ethniques, linguistiques, religieux. . . . c'est forcer le droit français à se mettre à l'heure du communautarisme et du différentialisme."<sup>40</sup>

These arguments have often been relied on the construction of an artificial dichotomy between *le communautarisme*—a dystopic reading of multi-culturalism—and *l'intégration républicaine*. *Le communautarisme* is seen to be the culmination of the logic of multi-culturalism, a fearful descent into isolated and discrete communities that would run counter to even the most flexible definition of *intégration*. These fears have partly emanated from the right. Journalists and commentators, such as Christian Jelen (an editor at *Le Point*) and Joseph Macé-Scaron (a regular contributor to *Le Figaro*), have denounced "la

tentation communautaire" in increasingly hyperbolic terms.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, by the 2002 presidential election, this same fear of multi-culturalism and of its dangerous "communitarian" logic had found a home on all sides of the political spectrum, from Jean-Pierre Chevènement's left-wing republicanism to Philippe de Villiers's defense of a rural France in opposition to a specifically Islamic *communautarisme*.

It might be tempting to argue, as some have, that France's political and intellectual classes are making a concerted shift to the right.<sup>42</sup> There can be little doubt that there is a strong element of reactionary cultural nationalism in the critique of multi-culturalism. However, it seems more accurate to describe this critique as yet another example of the growing neo-republican consensus among the elite. It is this consensus that has allowed the notion of integration to play such an important part in contemporary French politics. It can be seen not only as a reply to an Anglo-American "multi-cultural" paradigm, but also as a response to immigration, one that has developed further France's heavily political conception of citizenship.

### Protecting the Nation: *La Laïcité*

A central part of today's discourse surrounding *intégration* focuses on religion. In the context of French history, this is hardly surprising. Religious divisions were the most enduring feature of the so-called "guerre des deux France." Until very recently, religious affiliation heavily determined political affiliations. One of the most sustained battles fought by the Third Republic was against the hegemony of the Catholic Church. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religion was seen as one of the most significant threats to the unity of the nation.<sup>43</sup>

To forget this history is to risk making contemporary discussions of secularism a mere by-product of France's attempts to accommodate its Muslim minorities. Though the religious divisions that divided modern France have, to a large extent, been erased, the legacy of its religious battles remains potent, especially when the unity of the nation is in question. Put simply, *intégration* is not possible without a resolution of the potentially divisive effects of religion. For neo-republicans, this resolution comes in the form of *laïcité*. The focus here is not, however, on how this term has been used historically, but rather on its importance for many neo-republicans and the ways in which it has been absorbed into discussions surrounding the unity of the nation. It considers how neo-republicans have dealt with another important postcolonial challenge: that of absorbing religious difference, in this case, the threat of Islam.

So central is *laïcité* to the neo-republican credo that it has been suggested that it belongs alongside the other three words that form part of the French republican motto: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.<sup>44</sup> However, such a strong position need not be taken to see the intimate relationship between the *République* and



*laïcité*, a relationship that has been strengthened in the neo-republican consensus of the late twentieth century. For many neo-republicans, *laïcité* is a fundamental and relatively uncontroversial principle. For example, the openly neo-republican intellectual, Régis Debray, has staunchly defended the central role that *laïcité* occupies in republican conceptions of the nation.<sup>45</sup> The same is true of Jelen, whose defense of *laïcité* and denunciations of multi-culturalism come across as a thinly veiled form of Islamophobia.<sup>46</sup>

A more subtle defense of the concept can be found in the work of the academic, Henri Peña-Ruiz, *khâgne* teacher at the Lycée Fénélon and *maître de conférences* at Sciences Po. As a specialist on *laïcité*, Peña-Ruiz argues that the Republic needs *laïcité* to defend its principles:

La laïcité consiste essentiellement à faire du peuple tout entier, sans privilège ni discrimination, la référence de la communauté politique. Celle-ci mérite, des lors, son nom de République, chose commune à tous: nul credo oblige, nul privilège clerical.<sup>47</sup>

In this definition, *laïcité* appears as an incontrovertible republican axiom. Even so, contemporary French politics—and, in particular, the legacy of colonialism—is never far away. Another article by Peña-Ruiz explicitly ties together the question of *laïcité* with a reference to France's postcolonial memory. Under the heading "les remords de l'ethnocentrisme," he argues that "[La colonisation] fut détestable en effet. . . . Mais faut-il se "rattraper" en se prosternant désormais devant ces cultures, sans égard à ce qui en elles mérite critique ou au contraire éloge ciblé?"<sup>48</sup> This is a succinct example of how a neo-republican has dealt with the postcolonial implications of *laïcité*. Peña-Ruiz suggests that colonial guilt has led to a fragmented multi-culturalism with a potential for a religious pluralism that would be contrary to the principles of *laïcité*. Colonial guilt is, therefore, unproductive and potentially dangerous to the *République*. The "fait colonial" is pushed aside in favor of the wider republican narrative of *laïcité*.

This same intimate relationship between nation and *laïcité* can be located in what was perhaps the most sustained, and certainly the most public, discussion of the idea in recent French history: *L'affaire du foulard* in 1989. The events surrounding the expulsion from a *lycée* of two female students for wearing a headscarf, and the extended public and legislative debates that followed, have been extensively analyzed.<sup>49</sup> What is of interest here, however, is how a historical legitimacy for *laïcité* was constructed during this period. While religion has always been a disruptive narrative in modern French projects of nation building, *laïcité* as a solution has not always been considered to be the incontrovertible principle it appears today. As will be argued, the reason for its centrality in contemporary French politics is due to an elision between *nation*, *laïcité*, and *intégration*. Such an elision has been facilitated by the growing neo-republican consensus—by making the *République* and *laïcité* coterminous, neo-republicans

have made any attacks on the latter appear to be a veritable affront to the integrity of the nation.

This finds its clearest expression in the report of the Commission Stasi, which was set up in 2003 to resolve the question of whether or not there should be legislation prohibiting the wearing of religious signs in French schools. Both Peña-Ruiz and Debray were members of the Commission, which also included twenty academics and specialists on religious affairs and *laïcité*, many of whom had been actively involved in the debate surrounding Islam and religion since the 1980s. The Commission's conclusions eventually became legislation, but the Commission and its report remain interesting from a number of different perspectives.

From a purely historical point of view, the Commission's report tells us a great deal about the assumptions of contemporary republicanism. The opening sentence of the *préambule* alone is deeply revealing: "La République française s'est construite autour de la laïcité."<sup>50</sup> Historically, such a statement is debatable. If the battle with the Catholic Church was an important part of modern French history, particularly in the period 1880–1914, relations between the state and the church were not always viewed through the lens of *laïcité*. By substituting discussions surrounding religion under the banner of *laïcité*, the report situates itself firmly within the framework of the Third Republic and its complex *combat laïque*.<sup>51</sup> Even then, as Baudérot has pointed out, the 2004 legislation on "signes religieux ostentatoires" was the first in French history to contain the word *laïcité*.<sup>52</sup>

Even in the chronology it proposes, the Commission's report suggests that *laïcité* was a progressive republican project. The crowning glory of the *combat laïque* is taken to be the legislation separating church and state in 1905. This law is placed within a historical teleology, beginning with Article 10 of the "Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme" of 1789 on religious freedoms, then the "laïcisation" of the civil service in 1792, and, finally, the educational legislation of 1882 and 1886.<sup>53</sup> What is revealing is not so much the factual accuracy of this chronology—there is no doubt that the aforementioned dates were vital moments in defining the relationship between the church and the French state—but rather how *laïcité* becomes exclusively associated with the Republic.

The historiography of *laïcité* becomes clearer still if we look at the report of the HCl that followed a few years after that of the Commission Stasi. In its propositions for a "charte de la laïcité dans les services publics," it laid out a history of the idea, beginning with the Revolution.<sup>54</sup> Its assessment of 1905 was that,

La loi de 1905 a correspondu à la consolidation de la République qui était encore l'exception française au cœur d'une Europe monarchique et impériale. Elle a prolongé et conforté la politique laïque de la troisième République qu'on avait cru achevée après les lois scolaires de Jules Ferry de 1882 insistant l'enseignement primaire gratuit obligatoire et laïque. . . . Objet d'étonnement

pour le monde, la loi de séparation a suscité des émulés et fait nature des imitations.<sup>55</sup>

These excerpts capture in brief some of the most important historical premises of neo-republicanism. They demonstrate that the “politique laïque” has become a “pierre angulaire du modèle républicain” (an expression used in both the Stasi and HCI reports) and one that was born in the Third Republic. The HCI report provides a detailed pre-history of church–state relations, but the point of departure remains the late nineteenth century and the institutionalization of the Republic through the school.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, the HCI’s report made clear that its remit extended to the application of *laïcité*, thereby reinforcing the existing relationship between *intégration* and *laïcité*. The two have now been made officially coterminous to an extent unprecedented in French history. While both *intégration* and *laïcité* have had a long history, their marriage in contemporary France has created a new version of the republican synthesis that has, for the past century, been used as a consensual reference point in French politics.

### *La République postcoloniale: A Contradiction in Terms?*

Paradoxically, it is just as France is beginning to come to terms with its colonial legacy that it has achieved its most coherent and widely accepted definition of the nation. Although the focus here has been on the most active proponents of neo-republicanism, the connections made between *la fracture sociale*, *l’intégration*, and *la laïcité* have now been generally accepted in contemporary France. In their discussions of the *République*, the small, elite, and vocal group of neo-republicans have often reflected a much more consensual and “banal” republicanism, which has become the overwhelming interpretation of the nation in contemporary France.

This increasingly cohesive definition of the nation has two important implications for our understanding of France’s postcolonial condition. First, it suggests that disruptive postcolonial narratives, such as immigration, can only be absorbed within the context of a “mature” nation with a well-developed national narrative. A French national narrative has, of course, existed for some time, but it was vigorously contested, until 1945, by various counter-revolutionary and right-wing movements and, until the 1970s, by a strong Communist bloc. Although neo-republicanism has written into modern French history the story of an ever-expanding republican consensus, this did not become apparent until the Fifth Republic. It is only with the ultimate consolidation of a neo-republican national narrative in the past three decades that France finally has something akin to a consensual interpretation of the nation and it is within this context that France has begun its “postcolonial turn.” Before France could begin the complicated process of understanding its status as a “postcolony,” it had to put some of

its *guerres franco-françaises* to rest—and none was more fiercely contested than the fight over the definition of the nation.

The second important consequence of neo-republicanism is that the ways in which the French interpret emerging postcolonial narratives will be heavily defined by national priorities; the nation will remain the overarching reference point. While this last point is perhaps rather obvious, it is important to recognize not only how the nation has been undermined and redefined by its colonial (and postcolonial) “periphery,” but also how it has interpreted and adapted itself to these disruptive narratives. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, France has continued to absorb—some might say, deflect—postcolonial questions with remarkable success. *La fracture sociale*, *l’intégration*, and *la laïcité* are three concepts that have made it possible to incorporate manifestations of the postcolonial, such as the presence of Islam, into an existing national narrative. They have also opened up a debate about the contours of contemporary French society. At the same time, France’s postcolonial challenges appear to have encouraged the emergence of a sharper and clearer definition of the nation than before, one that is built on French history and draws from the well-worn political language of republicanism. This should serve as a reminder that, even if Francophone postcolonial studies challenges the legitimacy of this reformulated national narrative, the latter remains an extremely potent paradigm.

### Notes

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1. Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, *La Fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme des héritages coloniaux* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005); Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds., *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003); the special edition of *FPS* entitled “France in a Postcolonial Europe: Identity, History, Memory,” special issue, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* 5 (2007); Max Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and Citizenship in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992).

2. For instance, Dubois and Conklin challenge some republican narratives in Laurent Dubois, “*La République méisée: Citizenship, Colonialism, and the Borders of French History*,” *Cultural Studies* 14 (2000): 15–23; Elizabeth Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights—A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa,” *The American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 419–42.

3. Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l’oubli* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and François Vergès, *La République coloniale* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003).



4. Critics of Nora's project include Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 906–22; Perry Anderson, "Dégringolage," *The London Review of Books*, September 2, 2004, 14–16.
5. Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration* (London: Macmillan, 1998); François Furet, Jacques Julliard, and Pierre Rosanvallon, *La République au Centre: La fin de l'exception française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1988); La Documentation Française, *Les Cahiers Français*, no. 336: *Les valeurs de la République* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2007); Hugues Jallon and Pierre Mounier, *Les Enragés de la République* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999).
6. These two different interpretations of the *République* are discussed in Emilie Chabal, "Uses and Abuses of History: Memories of the République in Late 20th-century France," in *Historicising the French Revolution*, ed. Tim Blanning and others (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 168–89.
7. Historical analyses of the French republican model include Claude Nicolet, *L'Idée républicaine en France: Essai d'histoire critique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982); Serge Bernstein and Odile Rudelle, eds., *Le Modèle républicain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); Maurice Agulhon, *République, Tome 1: 1880–1914* (Paris: Hachette, 1990); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
8. Emmanuel Todd, "Rien ne sépare les enfants d'immigrés du reste de la société," *Le Monde*, November 12, 2005.
9. For a multifarious interpretation of the "fracture sociale", see Claude Julien, "Brève radiographie d'une fracture sociale," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, June 6, 1995.
10. Michel Wievorka, "Le sens d'une lutte," in *Le Grand Refus*, ed. Alain Touraine (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 250–55.
11. Bruno Causse, "Intégration: M. Chirac face aux fractures sociale et ethnique des banlieues," *Le Monde*, October 14, 1995.
12. Jérôme Lébre, "Vers une fracture politique," *Le Monde*, September 20, 1995.
13. The poll revealed that 48 percent of respondents thought that the "fracture sociale" had not improved, while 42 percent thought that it had worsened. Only 5 percent felt that there had been any improvement; "Scepticisme des français sur la 'fracture sociale,'" *Le Monde*, April 17, 1997.
14. "La France: Pays de la fracture sociale," *Le Figaro*, June 23, 1999.
15. Henri Guiano, "L'opinion et les responsables politiques: Comment en est-on arrivé à cette crise générale de la confiance? La fracture morale," *Le Figaro*, November 4, 2000; Henri Guiano, "La crise actuelle n'est ni technique, ni économique, ni sociale. Elle est intellectuelle et morale. Plaidoyer pour le principe d'autorité," *Le Figaro*, June 18, 2001.
16. "Fracture urbaine," *Le Monde*, November 8, 2005.
17. Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire, *La Fracture coloniale*; Pierre Rosanvallon and Thierry Pech, "Introduction," in *La nouvelle critique sociale*, ed. Pierre Rosanvallon and Thierry Pech (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 16.
18. "Banlieues, la fracture," *Le Monde*, October 26, 2007; "Banlieues, la rage," *Le Monde*, June 17, 2008. In an interview in March 2002, the sociologist, Robert Rochefort, claimed that the term "insécurité" had replaced that of a *fracture sociale*; Robert Rochefort and Emmanuel Todd, "Interview avec Robert Rochefort, Emmanuel Todd: Le thème d'insécurité a pris le relais de la fracture sociale," *Le Monde*, March 10, 2002.

19. Michel Wievorka, ed., *Le Printemps du politique: Pour en finir avec le déclinisme* (Paris: Laifont, 2007).
20. Nicolas Baverz, *La France qui tombe* (Paris: Perrin, 2003).
21. Blandine Kriegel, "Non à la fracture républicaine!" *Le Figaro*, April 23, 2002.
22. The Haut Conseil à l'Intégration is a governmental body that was set up under the prime minister, Michel Rocard, in 1989. Henceforth, the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration will be referred to as HCI.
23. The HCI includes a glossary of terms on its website under "Mots de l'intégration," [http://www.hci.gouv.fr/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=19](http://www.hci.gouv.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=19) (accessed August 1, 2009).
24. HCI, *Le Contrat et l'intégration* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2003), 104.
25. HCI, *L'Affaiblissement du lien social, enfermement dans les particularismes et intégration dans la cité* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1997).
26. Pierre Birnbaum, *La France imaginée: Déclin des rêves unitaires?* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).
27. Centre d'analyse stratégique, *Colloque sur les statistiques ethniques* (Paris: Centre d'analyse stratégique, 2006); Hervé Le Bras, *Le Démon des origines: La démographie et l'extrême droite* (Paris: Aubé, 1998).
28. HCI, *Le Contrat et l'intégration*, 104–22.
29. *Ibid.*, 111–12.
30. The report devotes a small section to differentiating between "assimilation" and "intégration": "le concept d'intégration a une résonance mathématique quand celui d'assimilation renvoie à une fonction biologique. . . . Sans doute l'assimilation est-elle perte irréductible de soi. . . . L'assimilation est en outre connotée négativement dans l'expérience historique française: Avec la notion d'intégration, on affirme au contraire le respect de toutes les cultures composant la République française, à condition que les lois communes soient reconnues et acceptées"; *Ibid.*, 111–12.
31. HCI, *L'Islam et la République* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2000), 6–8.
32. HCI, *Les Parcours de l'intégration* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2002), 15–20.
33. Dominique Schnapper, *La France de l'intégration* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); Pierre-André Taguieff, *La République enlisée: Pluralisme, communautarisme et citoyenneté* (Paris: Syntes, 2005).
34. Even *Le Monde* was surprised to find Malek Boutih's "discours ultrarépublicain" on integration in agreement with the philosophical justifications of the self-proclaimed "neo-conservative" Catholic philosopher, Chantal Delsol, during a debate in 2002; Nicolas Weil, "Entre Malek Boutih et la philosophe Chantal Delsol, un accord presque parfait sur l'intégration," *Le Monde*, November 15, 2002.
35. Kofi Yamgnane, "Exclure l'exclusion," *Le Monde*, August 14, 1995.
36. R. Kaci, *La République des tâches* (Paris: Syntes, 2003).
37. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns about Religious and Cultural Identity," July 6, 2006, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=254> (accessed August 1, 2009).
38. Cécile Laborde, "The Culture(s) of the Republic: Nationalism and Multiculturalism in French Republican Thought," *Political Theory* 9 (2001): 716–35.
39. Alain Finkelkraut, "La nation disparaît au profit des tribus," *Le Monde*, July 13, 1989.
40. Danièle Sallenave, "Partez, briseurs d'unité," *Le Monde*, July 3, 1999.

41. Joseph Macé-Scaron, *La Tentation communautaire* (Paris: Pion, 2001); Christian Jelen, *Les Cassseurs de la République* (Paris: Pion, 1997). Also see the televised debate in 2003 on this subject involving Macé-Scaron, alongside Yves Calvi, Michel Valls, Michel Wieviorka, and Catherine Wintol de Wenden. *C dans l'air*, France 5/La Cinquième, March 28, 2003.
42. Daniel Lindenberg, *Le Rappel à l'ordre: Enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).
43. The literature on this is vast. For an overview, see Robert Tombs, *France 1814–1914* (London: Longman, 1996).
44. UMP deputy, Franck Marlin, proposed unsuccessfully that the French motto be changed to "liberté, égalité, fraternité, laïcité"; Proposition de Loi Constitutionnelle, no. 1343, January 13, 2004, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/propositions/plon1343.asp> (accessed August 1, 2009).
45. Régis Debray, *La République expliquée à ma fille* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 42–51.
46. Jelen, *Les Cassseurs de la République*.
47. Henri Peña-Ruiz, "Oser réaffirmer la laïcité," *Libération*, April 23, 2004.
48. Henri Peña-Ruiz, "Culture, cultures et laïcité," *Hommes et Migrations* 1259 (2006): 7.
49. See, for instance, Alain Renaut and Alain Touraine, *Un Débat sur la laïcité* (Paris: Stock, 2005); Jean Baubérot, Alain Houziaux, Doumia Bouzard, and Jacqueline Coste-Lacoux, *Le Voile, que cache-t-il?* (Paris: Ouvrières, 2004); Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (London: Princeton University Press, 2007); Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
50. Bernard Stasi, "Commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de la laïcité dans la République: Rapport au Président de la République," December 11, 2003 (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2003), 9.
51. For instance, after 1918, the legislation of 1905 was not applied to Alsace-Lorraine, an anomaly that still exists today; Jean Baubérot, *L'Intégrisme républicain contre la laïcité* (Paris: Aube, 2006), 197–210.
52. Jean Baubérot, *Laïcité 1905–2005, entre passion et raison* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 178.
53. Stasi, "Commission de réflexion," 8–14.
54. The Commission Stasi had recommended that a "charte de laïcité" be drafted and the HCI were given that job; HCI, *Projet de charte de la laïcité dans les services publics* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2007).
55. HCI, *Projet de charte de la laïcité*, 14.
56. It is worth noting that both the HCI and Commission Stasi reports mention the *République's* ambiguous approach towards *laïcité* in the colonies and Alsace-Moselle. Interestingly, however, the Stasi report refused to recommend a change in the status of institutional religion in Alsace-Moselle, suggesting instead that classes in Islamic religious studies should be offered alongside other faiths, a position that sits awkwardly with the Commission's firmness towards religious symbols. The Commission also recommended that religious holidays for all religions be included in the French working calendar. Both proposals were dropped by Chirac when the law was implemented.

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