

## WRITING THE FRENCH NATIONAL NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY\*

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ABSTRACT. *With France currently in the midst of a fierce public debate over its identité nationale, now is a very appropriate time to revisit one of the most controversial questions in modern French history: the definition of the nation. Taking a wide range of French and foreign authors from a variety of disciplines, this article shows how debates around the national narrative in France have developed in the past twenty years, as the country's intellectual class has come to terms with, amongst other things, the 'post-colonial turn', and the disintegration of Marxism.*

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There is a lingering nostalgia in most interpretations of contemporary French intellectual life. Those commentators – French or foreign – who grew up in the shadow of the Sartrean politics of engagement, or who cut their teeth in the ideological melting-pot of 1968, find today's politics limp. Some have railed against the triumph of a hegemonic, neo-liberal 'pensée unique'.<sup>1</sup> Others have bemoaned the apparent absence of ideas amongst France's intellectual class, accusing them of descending into a world populated by 'nouveaux réactionnaires' who offer up little more than a 'pensée tiède'.<sup>2</sup> And, not for the first time, commentators have pronounced the death of the French intellectual.<sup>3</sup> The overall picture that emerges is of a country whose intellectual class – and even its entire intellectual system – is in crisis. The French university, now widely seen as far

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'pensée unique' was first coined in 1995 by left-wing journalist Ignacio Ramonet. I. Ramonet, 'La pensée unique', *Le nouvel observateur* (Jan. 1995).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'nouveaux réactionnaires' comes from a short pamphlet by Daniel Lindenberg. The pamphlet caused a media storm as almost all the intellectuals branded as 'néo-réacs' (including Pierre-André Taguieff and Alain Finkielkraut) rejected the accusation. D. Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l'ordre: enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires* (Paris, 2002). See also J. Birnbaum, 'Rétrocontroverse; 2002: les intellectuels réactionnaires sont de retour', *Le monde*, 26 Aug. 2007. For 'la pensée tiède', see P. Anderson, *La pensée tiède: un regard critique sur la culture française* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> On this, see for instance 'La fin des intellectuels?', *Esprit*, Mar. 2000. Or, in a more polemical vein, R. Debray, *IF (Intellectuel Français): suite et fin* (Paris, 2006).

behind its Anglo-American counterparts, is said no longer to produce original ideas, while French intellectuals have been delegitimized by their media-hungry persona and competition from 'experts'. Worse still, French ideas appear irrelevant to a changing world. Seen from this perspective, it is perhaps hardly surprising that both those who have participated in French intellectual life since 1968, or looked to it for inspiration, have found themselves viewing the past with nostalgia.<sup>4</sup>

On closer inspection, however, a rather different picture emerges. France is quite clearly neither on the verge of meltdown, nor in danger of becoming an intellectual wasteland. Rather, the language of crisis, which has been so central to French politics in the past three decades, has been deployed by intellectuals in an attempt to energize French intellectual life.<sup>5</sup> Claims that, say, the French education system, France's integration of immigrants, or even the European project are in crisis have provided ample opportunity for debates that have involved a wider range of personalities than ever before.<sup>6</sup> This last point is significant. For it is not so much that French intellectuals have lost their role; their ranks have simply been swelled by a variety of new figures.<sup>7</sup> On TV shows such as *C dans l'air*, radio broadcasts such as *Répliques*, or in the pages of *Le Monde*, an ever-growing number of 'intellectuals' tackle the significant issues of the day. Moreover, many of the issues that today engage France's intellectual class concern a far greater proportion of French citizens. It may have been possible to accuse France's post-war intellectuals of indulging in little more than parochial, self-regarding, and potentially 'irresponsible' Marxist navel-gazing.<sup>8</sup> But today's *cause célèbres* are of relevance to all.

There are few better examples of a contemporary issue that engages France as a whole than the interpretation of the nation. Whereas in contemporary Britain there has been only a very limited discussion of what might constitute a 'national narrative', the last thirty years have seen France's intellectual and political

<sup>4</sup> This nostalgia is dealt with expertly in S. Audier, *La pensée anti-68: essai sur une restauration intellectuelle* (Paris, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> The bible of French 'declinism' is the popular essay N. Baverez, *La France qui tombe* (Paris, 2003). For the language of crisis, see S. Hoffmann, *Decline or renewal? France since the 1930s* (New York, NY, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> On the meanings and functions of the word 'crise' in contemporary French politics, see E. Chabal, 'La République postcoloniale? Making the nation in late twentieth-century France', in K. Marsh and N. Frith, eds., *L'Inde perdue: historicising the fracture coloniale* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> On the changing role of the French intellectual, see J. F. Sirinelli, *Comprendre le XXe siècle français* (Paris, 2005); J. Howarth and P. G. Cerny, eds., *Elites in France: origins, reproduction and power* (London, 1981); J. Jennings, ed., *Intellectuals in twentieth-century France: mandarins and samurais* (London, 1993); D. Drake, *Intellectuals and politics in post-war France* (London, 2002). A comparative perspective can be found in S. Collini, *Absent minds: intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Aron was the most vocal critic of post-war French left-wing thought. His famous attack in 1955 was R. Aron, *The opium of the intellectuals*, trans. D. J. Mahoney and B. C. Anderson (London, 2001). More than forty years later, Tony Judt echoed Aron's accusations of irresponsibility in T. Judt, *Past imperfect: French intellectuals, 1944-1956* (London and Los Angeles, CA, 1992).

classes grapple, quite openly, with the contemporary definition of the nation.<sup>9</sup> The visible lack of integration of migrants, greater European unification, and the eruption of colonial memory have all challenged France's conception of itself. This post-colonial predicament has been made very public above all by the *affaire du foulard* (headscarf affair), an issue that kept France (and its intellectual class) firmly in the international spotlight for almost twenty years.<sup>10</sup> Far from disappearing into irrelevance, the world watched – and passed judgement on – France, as it argued over the place of the *foulard* in public life.

But the *affaire du foulard* was only one part of a continuous discussion about the future of the French nation, and it would be a mistake to reduce a large debate to a single issue. Behind the *affaire* were numerous other questions. What is the role of religion in public life, and must *la laïcité* (secularism) be a constituent part of French citizenship? Can France hold on to its long-established principles of citizenship at all? How can France incorporate its colonial legacies, and the new calls for recognition on the part of black and North African communities? What, if anything, is meant by the idea of the 'Republic'? Can it still be a useful frame of reference for an understanding of the nation? Not surprisingly, it is not only 'intellectuals' who have been providing answers to these questions. They have been joined by historians, political scientists, sociologists, and journalists, all of whom have offered their (sometimes extremely influential) opinion. Some have chosen to defend certain 'republican' principles – though they are not always in agreement about what exactly these principles are – while others have chosen to attack the neo-republican consensus that has been emerging since the 1980s.

The aim in this article is to explore this debate from three different perspectives. First, I look at 'neo-republicanism'. I address recent publications by three figures – Pierre-André Taguieff, Dominique Schnapper, and Alain Finkielkraut – who have openly defended the Republic for a variety of

<sup>9</sup> There have been some varied attempts to do this in Britain: for instance, L. Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992); J. Paxman, *The English: a portrait of a people* (London, 1998); or, from a comparative perspective, R. Tombs and I. Tombs, *That sweet enemy: the British and the French from the Sun King to the present* (London, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Much ink has been spilled in this debate, which erupted in 1989. Readers are directed to some of the following reflections on the subject. For a short (and critical) overview of the period 1989–2003, see P. Bernard, 'Le foulard islamique: loi ou pas loi?', *Le monde*, 28 Nov. 2003. Other perspectives on the debate include F. Khosrokhavar, 'Une laïcité frileuse', *Le Monde*, 19 Nov. 2003; F. Lalem-Hachilif and C. Chafiq-Beski, 'Voile, la crise des valeurs', *Libération*, 16 Dec. 2003; A. Renaut and A. Touraine, *Un débat sur la laïcité* (Paris, 2005); J. Baubérot, A. Houziaux, D. Bouzar, and J. Costa-Lascoux, *Le voile, que cache-t-il?* (Paris, 2004); F. Khosrokhavar, 'L'universel abstrait, le politique et la construction de l'islamisme comme forme d'altérité', in M. Wiewiorka, ed., *Une société fragmentée: le multiculturalisme en débat* (Paris, 1996); J. W. Scott, *The politics of the veil* (London, 2007); C. Laborde, 'The culture(s) of the Republic: nationalism and multiculturalism in French Republican Thought', *Political Theory*, 29 (2001), pp. 716–35; and J. Baubérot, *L'intégrisme républicain contre la laïcité* (Paris, 2006). See also the 1989 manifesto that originally provoked such civic debate – E. Badinter, R. Debray, A. Finkelkraut, E. de Fontenay, and C. Kintzler, 'Prof's, ne capitulons pas!', *Le nouvel observateur*, 2 Nov. 1989 – and the Stasi Commission's report on the wearing of *signes religieux* in schools in 2003. *Commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République: rapport au président de la République* (Paris, 2003).

(occasionally contradictory) reasons. Quite distinct in approach, style, and intellectual influences, their work nevertheless gives a good overview of the ways in which a modern conception of the nation has developed since the 1970s. Their notoriety and the wide reach of their ideas also make them particularly useful studies of how the nation has entered and circulated in public debate. Second, I focus on a selection of books by figures who have cast doubt on the validity, pertinence, and legitimacy of France's renewed attachment to republicanism. Some have emphasized the importance of colonial memory (the Association pour la connaissance de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine (ACHAC) group of historians); others have defended a strong conception of 'difference' (Michel Wieviorka); still others have been interested in 'ethnic' histories or the history of racism (Pap Ndiaye, Gérard Noiriel). But all of these figures have challenged the assumptions of neo-republicanism, even if they have sometimes disagreed amongst themselves. Finally, I look at two recent interventions from outside the Hexagon: Jim House and Neil Macmaster's study of the repression of Algerian demonstrations in Paris in 1961, and Cécile Laborde's discussion of the *affaire du foulard*. These views from outside have complemented and contributed to the wider debate surrounding interpretations of the nation in France.

The selection of works is deliberately eclectic. It brings together conceptually 'rigorous' books meant for an academic audience with those directed at a more general public. This might appear, at first, paradoxical: different audiences imply different agendas and priorities. However, the aim here is to explore the development and circulation of an idea, namely the nation. For this, a wide range of texts is required in order to demonstrate the multifarious ways in which the nation has emerged and been reinterpreted in various contexts. The goal is to make clear the breadth of discussion. In an age of the mass media, expanding intellectual engagement and mass politics, it is no longer adequate to limit oneself to the close study of a specific academic 'school' or individual if one is to gain a full appreciation of a political idea as contested as that of the 'nation'. It is highly significant, for example, that many of the issues addressed by the authors discussed below have frequently been part of a broad public debate, drawing in the opinions of France's large and literate middle-class. Definitions of the nation have clearly been of concern to a significant proportion of French citizens. Indeed, rather than talk of decline, I suggest we see in the vigorous contemporary (re-)writings of the French national narrative, the reconfiguration and expansion of the French political space beyond the categories of right and left. And, as has so often been the case in modern French history, to understand the disagreements over the definition of the nation is also to understand the political engagements of the future.

## I

The idea of the Republic – in its French incarnation – has existed at least since 1789. But the presence of a 'republican' discourse in French politics has ebbed

and flowed in relation to the Republic's political fortunes. It is only towards the end of the nineteenth century that republican ideals and political values slowly came to be institutionalized as part of the complex and fragmented process of nation building that took place under the Third Republic. By the end of the Second World War, however, the Republic was in poor shape. Plagued by crippling political instability, the Third Republic had given way to the Pétainist reaction. By 1945, republicanism as an ideal was tarnished by its association with a pre-war political regime that had been fractious and insufficiently strong to prevent the horrors of Vichy. In post-war France, the Republic continued in name but few post-war politicians and intellectuals explicitly invoked the language of republicanism. De Gaulle – though in many ways bringing to the forefront some classic republican themes such as political unity – rarely explicitly used the concept in his political rhetoric, while those on the political and intellectual left remained contemptuous of the ‘bourgeois republic’.<sup>11</sup>

But, after a long period when other shibboleths – such as *grandeur* or the proletariat – held sway over the language of politics in France, the idea of the Republic returned after 1980. 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. While various political controversies of the past thirty years – *l'affaire du foulard*, *la crise d'intégration*, *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>12</sup> Paradoxically, it was not a new philosophy that emerged to face these new perceived threats. It was a resurrected version of republicanism – often referred to as ‘neo-republicanism’ – which once again found a home across the political spectrum.<sup>13</sup> If we are to understand the intricacies of the debate surrounding France's national narrative, we must begin with those who have been instrumental in this resurgence of republicanism.

Pierre-André Taguieff, Alain Finkielkraut, and Dominique Schnapper have all sought to defend a particular republican vision. Their approaches have been quite different but their conclusion has been the same: that France will ultimately

<sup>11</sup> Audier sees neo-republicanism as a ‘captation néo-gaulliste de la tradition républicaine’. Audier, *La pensée anti-68*, p. 347.

<sup>12</sup> There is now a vast literature on the history of the République, which represents a considerable body of scholarly work. See for instance C. Nicolet, *L'idée républicaine en France: essai d'histoire critique* (Paris, 1982); S. Berstein and O. Rudelle, eds., *Le modèle républicain* (Paris, 1992); M. Agulhon, *République, 1: 1880–1914* (Paris, 1990); S. Berstein, ‘Le modèle républicain: une culture politique syncrétique’ in S. Berstein, ed., *Les cultures politiques en France* (Paris, 1999); and P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire, 1: La République* (Paris, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> For an outsider's perspective on this new consensus, see the strongly argued but stimulating A. Favell, *Philosophies of integration* (London, 1998). For an insider's perspective, see F. Furet, J. Julliard, and P. Rosanvallon, *La République du centre: la fin de l'exception française* (Paris, 1988); H. Jallon and P. Mounier, *Les enragés de la République* (Paris, 1999); and La Documentation Française, *Les cahiers français*, no. 336: *Les valeurs de la République* (Paris, 2007).

benefit from a revival and defence of a ‘republican’ concept of the nation. Crucially for our purposes, the high public profile of all three figures – in the media and through their essays – make them an excellent starting-point for any discussion of neo-republicanism. At the same time, their very different intellectual trajectories can tell us much about the changing face of the French intellectual.

I turn first to Pierre-André Taguieff who, in many ways, embodies a newer type of intellectual. A product of the ‘new’ university in Nanterre, and a child of the *gauchiste* atmosphere of 1968, he has followed the path of a career academic, rather than of the literary intellectual.<sup>14</sup> He now teaches at Sciences Po Paris, and is a member of the influential Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po. He has also, since 2002, been a member of the Cercle de l’Oratoire – a think-tank created to support the war in Iraq and combat French anti-Americanism.<sup>15</sup> Taguieff’s earlier works dealt with French anti-Semitism, and the development of the anti-racism movement, but it was in the mid 1990s that he began to write on the future of the Republic.<sup>16</sup> His work has become increasingly outspoken and polemical, not least in his recent 600-page attack on Daniel Lindenberg’s concept of the ‘nouveaux réactionnaires’ entitled *Les contre-réactionnaires* (2008).<sup>17</sup> However, while *Les contre-réactionnaires* touched on a number of key themes in Taguieff’s work – in particular, his growing suspicion of a conformist French ‘anti-fascism’ on the left – his last book devoted solely to the question of the nation was *La République enlisée* (2005).<sup>18</sup> In it, he developed an idea essential to an understanding of the neo-republican revival: the fear of national fragmentation.

For Taguieff, the most important reason to defend France’s unitary and unified concept of the Republic is that it is increasingly under threat from ‘communautarisme’ or, what he prefers to call, ‘multi-communautarisme’.<sup>19</sup> This, alongside the ideologies of cultural relativism and cosmopolitanism, has led to a dangerous disintegration of the nation. He claims that France must protect a republican conception of the nation in order to restore the ‘civic bond’ and defend against ‘tribalization’.<sup>20</sup> There is also an attack on Anglo-American multicultural models: Taguieff argues that France is in danger of descending into an

<sup>14</sup> There has been some, very limited, interest in Pierre-André Taguieff’s work outside France. See for instance C. Flood, ‘National republican politics, intellectuals and the case of Pierre-André Taguieff’ in *Modern and Contemporary France*, 12 (2004), pp. 353–70.

<sup>15</sup> A list of members of the Cercle de l’Oratoire can be found at [www.lemeilleurdesmondes.org](http://www.lemeilleurdesmondes.org). The Cercle also produces a journal entitled *Le meilleur des mondes*.

<sup>16</sup> See especially, P.-A. Taguieff, *La force du préjugé: essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris, 1987); idem, *Fins de l’antiracisme* (Paris, 1995); and idem, *Sur la nouvelle droite: jalons d’une analyse critique* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> P.-A. Taguieff, *Les contre-réactionnaires: le progressisme entre illusion et imposture* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> P.-A. Taguieff, *La République enlisée: pluralisme, communautarisme et citoyenneté* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

<sup>20</sup> ‘La première de ces conditions est le sentiment de coappartenance à une communauté méta-communautaire, dotée d’une identité méta-identitaire: la nation, où s’inscrit et s’épanouit, dans la modernité, ce qu’il est convenu d’appeler le principe civique.’ *Ibid.*, p. 115. References to ‘tribalization’ can be found on pp. 64 and 169.

“‘anglo-saxonisation’” des rapports sociaux’.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the issue of ‘la menace islamo-terroriste’ looms in the background, and the implication is that a breakdown in social relations will make space for militant Islam.<sup>22</sup> A staunch defence of the Republic appears to be the only way to navigate a treacherous middle-ground between the hegemony of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ world, and the wave of Islamic terrorism. The Republic is invoked as both a protection against outside threats, and a way of combating internal fragmentation.

Despite Taguieff’s prolix, polemical, and sometimes rather opaque presentation, a number of important points emerge from his defence of the Republic. There is, for instance, a clearly stated, if not always clearly argued, link between consumer society, the atomization of social relations under capitalism, and the unravelling of the nation. Here, Taguieff betrays his intellectual roots in a post-1968 situationist critique of consumerism.<sup>23</sup> This critique is, today, associated with France’s extreme left, but, in the case of Taguieff, it pushes him instead to defend the centrality of the nation as a counter-weight to consumer society.<sup>24</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Taguieff’s work has been placed amongst those of other ‘nouveaux réactionnaires’, whose journey from left to right has been well documented. However, this is to simplify the issue. Not only does Taguieff deny that he has taken a partisan political position – he is sometimes described, confusingly, as a ‘libéral social conservateur’ – but he also represents something more complex.<sup>25</sup> He is an intellectual who has used a defence of the Republic to bring together a traditional anti-capitalist language of the left, with many of the traditional concerns of the right (critique of *progressisme*, immigration, the ‘Islamic threat’, etc.). Behind the apparent ‘depoliticization’ or ‘rightward drift’ of French intellectual life actually lies a complex synthesis of ideas from both sides of the political spectrum, united in a defence of the nation.

If Taguieff represents a new generation, Alain Finkielkraut embodies an older style of intellectual engagement. A literature graduate of the *École Normale Supérieure*, he came to prominence in the late 1970s as one of the *nouveaux philosophes* (alongside Bernard Henri-Lévy, André Glucksmann, and Pascal Bruckner). These young, attractively dressed and media-savvy intellectuals became famous for their biting and polemical attacks on Communism in the wake of the French translation of Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelego*.<sup>26</sup> Disliked in the academy for their lack of intellectual rigour, and for exploiting their connections in the world of television and publishing, the *nouveaux philosophes* were rapidly discredited. But they nevertheless made plain the extent to which the role and status of the French intellectual had changed: now the intellectual could (and would) be judged by a much larger media audience.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>23</sup> See especially *ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>24</sup> On this, see the excellent analysis in Audier, *La pensée anti-68*, pp. 331–49.

<sup>25</sup> G. Weyer, ‘Taguieff’, *Le Figaro*, 11 Dec. 2004.

<sup>26</sup> The most in-depth historical treatment of the *nouveaux philosophes* and French anti-totalitarianism is M. S. Christofferson, *French intellectuals against the Left* (Oxford, 2004).

Since the late 1970s, the *nouveaux philosophes* have, to some extent, gone their separate ways. Only Finkelkraut has developed a long-standing interest in the fate of the nation: he was, for example, one of the signatories of the famous 1989 petition defending the right of a headteacher in Creil to expel students for wearing the headscarf, and he sat on the influential Commission de la Nationalité in 1987.<sup>27</sup> Today, he is one of the most prominent neo-republicans and he has continued to defend the Republic in his books, essays, and on his influential radio talk-show *Répliques*. While he shares a number of ideas in common with Taguieff, the locus of Finkelkraut's neo-republicanism is different. It is not the fear of fragmentation that drives Finkelkraut's defence of the Republic; it is the principle of *laïcité*.

He demonstrates this amply in a recent transcription of almost twenty years of conversations with his fellow *normalien* and *soixante-huitard*, Benny Lévy, entitled *Le livre et les livres* (2005).<sup>28</sup> What emerges from these interviews is Finkelkraut's deep commitment to *laïcité*. When he argues that 'contre le djihadisme et contre le progressisme, je ne vois de réponse ou de salut que dans la préservation d'un espace *laïque*' there are echoes of Taguieff's attack on *progressisme* and his fear of militant Islam.<sup>29</sup> But Finkelkraut's vision is much more indebted to a form of cultural elitism that passes through the French school. It is the school – *l'école de la République* – that creates the 'espace *laïque*' necessary for the construction of a rational, progressive society.<sup>30</sup> Insofar as the *école laïque* is an integral part of the Republic, the latter needs to be defended against the threat of multi-culturalism. The Republic elevates the role of reason. Multi-culturalism, and its ideological alibis (e.g. post-modernism, relativism), do not.<sup>31</sup> Thus, while the Republic is required for the enlightenment of the individual and the stability of society, multi-culturalism is to be condemned as a dangerous celebration of difference.<sup>32</sup>

This conclusion can be found in many of Finkelkraut's other texts and interviews that deal with the future of the French nation.<sup>33</sup> What is noteworthy about the conversations with Lévy is the role of Judaism. Both thinkers engaged more and more with their Jewish heritage after their involvement in *gauchiste* revolutionary movements of 1968.<sup>34</sup> Both were influenced by French-Jewish

<sup>27</sup> For the ensuing debate, see n. 10 above.

<sup>28</sup> A. Finkelkraut and B. Lévy, *Le livre et les livres: entretiens sur la laïcité* (Paris, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> In Finkelkraut's words: 'l'école est essentielle à la laïcité ... parce qu'elle est le lieu par excellence de la médiation, du détour, de l'hétéronomie bienfaisante'. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Finkelkraut's most sustained attack on *le progressisme* is in A. Finkelkraut, *La défaite de la pensée* (Paris, 1987). English edition: *Undoing of thought* (London, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, N. Rachlin, 'Alain Finkelkraut and the politics of cultural identity', *Substance*, 76–7 (1995), pp. 73–92.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, A. Finkelkraut, *Imparfait du présent: pièces brèves* (Paris, 2002), or the opinions he has often expressed on these subjects on his radio show *Répliques*, many of which have been collected in a set of transcriptions entitled *Qu'est-ce que la France?*, ed. A. Finkelkraut (Paris, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Before his religious 'conversion', Lévy was the leader of the infamous left-wing revolutionary group Gauche Prolétarienne.



philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas.<sup>35</sup> However, while Finkielkraut developed his identity as a ‘secular’ Jew in his defence of *laïcité*, Lévy chose the path of orthodox Judaism, eventually moving to Jerusalem in 1997.<sup>36</sup> The result of this schism is that, in discussion, Lévy can easily reject the principle of *laïcité*, while Finkielkraut is, time and again, forced to reconcile his Judaism with a strong version of *laïcité*, which severely limits religious expression in the public sphere. Much of Finkielkraut’s work in the 1980s attempted to show how the post-Holocaust Jew could not – indeed should not – withdraw into a particularist identity and, in these interviews, Finkielkraut rejects Lévy’s assertion that, without religion, the ‘social bond’ will disintegrate.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, he clearly becomes increasingly sympathetic to Lévy’s position with each successive encounter.

This tension in Finkielkraut’s thought remains unresolved. But an appreciation of the role of his Jewish identity is vital to understanding his commitment to neo-republicanism. Indeed, given that all three of the figures discussed in this section have Jewish origins (though only Finkielkraut’s Jewish identity plays any significant role in his work), one might argue that neo-republicanism is a continuing attempt on the part of Jewish intellectuals to negotiate a place for themselves in France’s intellectual space, as they have done since the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> This is a rather limited view of Finkielkraut’s contribution to the debate surrounding the nation but it at least focuses attention on the complicated relationship between the reaffirmation of French-Jewish identity and the resurgence of republicanism in contemporary France.

Her background notwithstanding, Jewishness has played no part in Dominique Schnapper’s defence of the Republic. The daughter of the most important non-Marxist intellectual in post-war France, Raymond Aron, Schnapper made her name through a series of books on citizenship, the Other, and the sociology of the nation.<sup>39</sup> A highly successful career academic, with a doctorate in sociology and a position at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) since 1980, she nevertheless embodies the intellectual involved at the highest levels of decision-making: she has sat on a number of government commissions, and is currently a member of France’s highest judicial body, the Conseil Constitutionnel (since 2001). This commitment to public service extends to her work; a number of

<sup>35</sup> They both explicitly acknowledge their debt in *Le livre et les livres*. For the context of their ‘Lévinassian turn’, see J. Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine: Jewish intellectuals in France since 1968* (London, 1990). On Lévinas, see S. Moyn, *Origins of the other* (London, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> On the different trajectories of post-1968 French Jewish intellectuals, see Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine*, especially pp. 83–103. <sup>37</sup> Finkielkraut and Lévy, *Le livre et les livres*, p. 135

<sup>38</sup> Taguieff, though of Jewish origin, does not consider himself a Jew, while Schnapper, though author of an important overview of Jews in contemporary France, does not consider her Jewishness significant to her work. D. Schnapper, *Juifs et israélites* (Paris, 1980). On the accommodation of Jewish public figures through the twentieth century see Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine*; J. Birnbaum, *Les fous de la République: histoire politique des juifs d’état de Gambetta à Vichy* (Paris, 1992), and for a different perspective, T. Judt, *The burden of responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron and the French twentieth century* (London, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> On this, see especially D. Schnapper, *La communauté des citoyens: sur l’idée moderne de nation* (Paris, 1994); and idem, *La relation à l’autre: au cœur de la pensée sociologique* (Paris, 1998).

her books are essentially textbooks designed for a wide market. This is true of her most recent summary of the sociology of the nation, *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration?* (2005).<sup>40</sup> It is a clear, cogent, and well-argued look at the sociological dimensions of the term 'integration' published in the popular and accessible Folio collection. At the same time, it also reveals another key aspect of neo-republicanism, which was only implicit in Taguieff and Finkelkraut: the primacy of political (or what we might call in English 'civic') integration.

In keeping with the book's didactic purpose, the first section deals with the uses of the term 'integration' in Anglo-American and French sociological theory. More relevant for our purposes is the second section, which looks at the integration of a particular society as a whole. Schnapper makes plain the theoretical foundations of a (French) model of 'integration' and argues that the political process of nation-building is the most effective response to the (dis)integration of the national community. As she puts it, the integration *of* a society is as important as integration *to* that society – in other words, that the integration into society of any external element (such as foreigners) can only take place when each constituent part of that society is integrated into a whole. In short, that the integration of different classes, sexes, ages, or regions, is as significant as the integration of 'ethnic' and 'foreign' communities. Significantly for our purposes, the integration of society relies on political foundations: Schnapper emphasizes citizenship, which rests on a political consciousness of the citizen, and the understanding of political rights and responsibilities. Unlike Finkelkraut, who closes in on the school and literary *culture*, Schnapper sees integration – political and national integration – as the primary reason for defending the Republic.

This difference no doubt has much to do with Schnapper's long-standing interest in the integration of migrants, which began with her early work on Italian immigrants in France. Since the 1980s, she has become more outspoken in her defence of a neo-republican conception of citizenship (which she calls a 'républicanisme tolérant') as the best response to France's increasingly public *crise d'intégration*.<sup>41</sup> As Schnapper puts it herself: 'la citoyenneté fonde la légitimité politique, c'est aussi la source du lien social. Vivre ensemble, ce n'est pas participer à la même Église ou être ensemble sujets du même monarque, c'est être citoyens ensemble.'<sup>42</sup> In this definition, republican citizenship forms the basis of the political community – a community in danger of fragmenting under pressure from the unravelling of social bonds.

It is true that Schnapper remains more sensitive than her fellow neo-republicans to the changing meaning of concepts. Where Taguieff and Finkelkraut have a strong tendency to make words such as 'integration' and 'multi-culturalism' into trans-historical concepts, Schnapper provides us with a

<sup>40</sup> D. Schnapper, *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration?* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> See especially Schnapper, *La communauté des citoyens*; and D. Schnapper, 'La République face aux communautarismes', *Études*, 2 (2004), pp. 177–88.

<sup>42</sup> Schnapper, *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration?*, p. 132.

genealogy of these terms, and an extensive empirical framework (e.g. surveys) on which she bases her conclusions. Her introduction – which is a short history of the term ‘intégration’ in French thought – is a particularly concise presentation of the debate surrounding the meaning of ‘l’intégration’.<sup>43</sup> In the end, however, this reflexivity does not modify Schnapper’s conclusions, which follow those of the dominant neo-republican paradigm.

Is it possible, then, to identify the key elements of this neo-republicanism? Despite their differences, there are a number of common themes in the work of Taguieff, Finkelkraut, and Schnapper. There is a strong commitment to *laïcité*, as well as a firm belief in the continuing legitimacy of the nation as the primary organizing framework of the contemporary world. In all three thinkers, we find a fear of ‘fragmentation’ and an instinctive scepticism towards ‘multi-culturalism’. Particularly in the case of Schnapper, this results in a strong emphasis on the need for ‘political’ and ‘civic’ solutions to the problems of national integration. For Finkelkraut, on the other hand, the answer lies in the school and a rather rarefied interpretation of ‘culture’. In both cases, unity of the nation and national community is the ultimate aim.

Such a position is, of course, hardly surprising in the context of modern France. Neo-republicanism falls in line with the many previous incarnations of French republicanism since the Revolution, all of which have stressed national unity, and the primacy of political citizenship.<sup>44</sup> What is unusual in these three thinkers is the context in which their republicanism has emerged – a post-Communist Europe facing the post-colonial challenge of immigration.<sup>45</sup> Concerns for the future of Jewish identity, the threat of Islamic terrorism, a *gauchiste*-inspired critique of consumerism, a historical attachment to France’s political citizenship, all of these demonstrate that neo-republicanism is not simply a reactionary throwback to an outdated form of French nationalism. It belongs firmly to the continuous rewriting of the French national narrative in the twenty-first century. More than a political idea, neo-republicanism is a language, an organizing framework, that has allowed the French to understand their changing place in the contemporary world, and has made it possible for some to defend one of the most highly developed and clearly articulated concepts of the nation in the modern world.

## II

The neo-republican defence of the nation has not gone unchallenged. Although it has found a consensual home amongst France’s political and intellectual classes (on both sides of the political spectrum), there have also been a growing number of dissenting voices. These can be divided into three broad categories. The first

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–25.

<sup>44</sup> An excellent overview of republicanism – and other French political traditions – is S. Hazareesingh, *Political traditions in modern France* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> On these changing European contexts, see T. Judt, *Postwar* (London, 2005).

attacks neo-republicanism for its lack of empirical sophistication: its normative prescriptions, it is argued, simply do not reflect the sociological realities in France. The second accuses neo-republicans of imposing a highly limiting, and quasi-colonial, notion of citizenship on post-colonial migrants: in particular, it is claimed that the neo-republican, colour-blind model of integration denies the racial and ethnic stigmatization of minorities in France. The third seeks to delegitimize – or, at the very least, contextualize – a historical ‘republican model’ by exposing the extent to which it was implicated in France’s colonial crimes.

These dissenting voices do not simply reflect divisions within the academy. They are an indication of the broadening of French intellectual life. What might appear at first to be a merely academic disagreement over the writing of the national narrative reflects, as I will argue, a broader conflict between France’s more traditional academic system, and previously marginalized organizations, groups, and intellectual movements. However, even within the academy, there has been a sustained critique of neo-republicanism, emanating primarily from sociologists. One of the most prominent amongst them is Michel Wieviorka. Like Schnapper, he has a dual vocation, both as an academic and as an ‘expert’, whose opinion is sought by the government and non-governmental organizations. In his capacity as an academic, he teaches at the EHESS, and runs the influential research group Centre d’Analyse et d’Intervention Sociologiques (CADIS). His research has focused primarily on social movements, globalization, identity politics, difference, and multi-culturalism.<sup>46</sup> Over time, he has become one of the sociologists most associated with a defence of multi-culturalism, and a critique of the neo-republican conception of the nation. This has led him both to be sceptical of legislation that has adopted an obviously neo-republican position (such as the law banning the wearing of the headscarf in 2003), and argue that a neo-republican perspective is ‘outdated’ and obscures the reality on the ground.<sup>47</sup>

This somewhat controversial stance has not prevented him from being consulted as an ‘expert’. It was in this capacity that Wieviorka was called upon in February 2008 by the minister of higher education, Valérie Pécresse, to draft a report on ‘diversity’, which was published in paperback the same year as *La diversité: rapport à la ministre de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche* (2008).<sup>48</sup> It is noteworthy that, of the team Wieviorka assembled to help him complete the report, half were members of CADIS, and the report’s intellectual orientations

<sup>46</sup> See for instance M. Wieviorka, *La différence: identités culturelles: enjeux, débats et politiques* (Paris, 2001); idem, *La démocratie à l’épreuve: nationalisme, populisme, ethnicité* (Paris, 1993); and idem, *Le racisme: une introduction* (Paris, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> See for instance Wieviorka’s support for ethnic statistics in the census in M. Wieviorka and P. Lozès, ‘Contre les discriminations, unissons-nous!’, in *Le monde*, 12 Feb. 2008, or his critique of ‘nationalist’ and neo-republican interpretation of French national identity in M. Wieviorka, ‘La “désacralisation” de l’identité française’, *Le Figaro*, 11 June 2004.

<sup>48</sup> M. Wieviorka, *La diversité: rapport à la ministre de l’enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (Paris, 2008).

were evidently set by Wieviorka himself.<sup>49</sup> For this reason, it provides an excellent introduction to an alternative reading of the contemporary nation. Unlike neo-republicans, who continue to emphasize the primacy of a unified, political nation, the report makes the case for ‘diversity’.

The authors of the report explicitly accuse neo-republicans of creating false dichotomies, and polarizing an otherwise delicate discussion surrounding the question of ‘diversity’ in France.<sup>50</sup> Instead of focusing obsessively on multiculturalism or *communautarisme*, the authors suggest that the term ‘diversity’ is more appropriate to contemporary French society.<sup>51</sup> ‘Diversity’ allows for the incorporation of ‘difference’, a key term in Wieviorka’s sociology.<sup>52</sup> An appreciation of differences within a society is, the report argues, essential for an understanding of contemporary France. By minimizing the importance of difference, neo-republicans limit their conceptual framework. Indeed, the report goes so far as to say that the ‘cadre de l’État-nation est épuisé’.<sup>53</sup> Such a claim is an indication of the distance travelled: from a neo-republican defence of the unified nation to an alternative reading of the nation as fragmented, stratified, and differentiated.

Given their respective positions, it should come as little surprise that Taguieff and Finkelkraut have been openly critical of Wieviorka in recent years.<sup>54</sup> Of course, the sociologist has replied in kind, memorably branding Finkelkraut a ‘républicano-communautariste ... [qui] pète les plombs’ after the philosopher claimed that the 2005 riots in Paris were provoked by an ‘ethnic-religious revolt’ on the part of Arabs and blacks.<sup>55</sup> Beyond the confrontations, however, lies a more significant point about policy orientation. The report on ‘diversity’ recommends, for instance, the adoption of the European charter on regional languages, which directly undermines a neo-republican conception of the relationship between language, culture, and citizenship.<sup>56</sup> It also recommends that French school and higher educational curricula pay more attention to the implications of cultural studies and anthropology in understanding France’s post-colonial character.<sup>57</sup> This last point is significant, for it exposes one of the most

<sup>49</sup> The team consisted of the following members: Giulia Fabbiano, Yvon Le Bot, Jocelyne Ohana, Alexandra Poli (all at CADIS), Richard Beraha (president of the association Hui Ji), Hervé Le Bras (at the EHESS and the Institut National d’Études Démographiques) and Catherine Wihtol de Wenden (at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique and the Centre d’Étude et de Recherche International).

<sup>50</sup> The report launches a strong attack on neo-republicans: Wieviorka, *La diversité*, pp. 55–8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 74–5.

<sup>52</sup> See especially Wieviorka, *La différence*.

<sup>53</sup> Wieviorka, *La diversité*, p. 43. <sup>54</sup> See for instance Taguieff, *La République enlisée*, p. 295.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Il [Finkelkraut] est ce que j’appellerai un “républicano-communautariste”. Bien entendu, cette position est intellectuellement indéfendable, donc il pète les plombs.’ ‘Interview avec Michel Wieviorka: l’affaire Finkelkraut’, *Le nouvel observateur*, 25 Nov. 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Schnapper, for example, opposed the signing of the European charter on regional languages on the grounds that it would lead to a proliferation of languages that would undermine French citizenship. See Schnapper, ‘La République face aux communautarismes’, pp. 185–6. She also deals with this and other subjects at length in a radio interview. France Culture, *A voix nue* (broadcast 6–10 Apr. 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Wieviorka, *La diversité*, pp. 98–100.

important lacunae in the neo-republican position – and one which has come under increasing scrutiny since the 1980s.

Be it in politics or in the academy, France has been slow to acknowledge the post-colonial turn.<sup>58</sup> There are many reasons for this: the slow penetration of Anglo-American theory into the French academy, the almost complete absence (until recently) of monuments and museums devoted to the colonial project and a general silence surrounding the Algerian War. At the same time, there can be little doubt that the resurgence of republicanism has also played a major part in pushing aside (post-)colonial memory. Of the three authors mentioned above, only Schnapper makes some mention of the consequences of colonialism, in her case to emphasize how it has led to the greater stigmatization of immigrants. Neither Taguieff nor Finkelkraut engage in any meaningful way with the consequences of the colonial encounter for their neo-republican reading of the nation: if anything, their use of words such as ‘tribalization’ or the ‘Islamic menace’ carry strong neo-colonial connotations. But this attempt to minimize the significance of colonialism has not gone unchallenged. The three books discussed below each deal with a different aspect of France’s colonial memory: the battle for colonial memory, the contours of a ‘black’ identity, and the stigmatization of minorities. Together, they are a strong reply to a neo-republican reading of the nation that seeks to play down the connection between Republic and colonialism.

The ACHAC is a group of academics who, since 1989, have produced a large number of books, exhibitions, journals, and educational material on France’s colonial and post-colonial history.<sup>59</sup> Initially greeted with some scepticism by mainstream academia, ACHAC’s attempts to draw out the relationship between republicanism and the colonial project in books such as *La République coloniale* (2003) soon pushed them to the heart of the contemporary debate surrounding the nation.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Wiewiorka and other critical sociologists, who have emphasized neo-republicanism’s incompatibility with present-day French society, ACHAC’s approach has sought to undermine the neo-republican construction of an ostensibly benevolent, colour-blind, and egalitarian Republic.

One of the ACHAC’s most recent publications, edited by Pascal Blanchard and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson is called *Les guerres de mémoires: la France et son histoire* (2008).<sup>61</sup> The book brings together twenty-four essays by a wide variety of academics. The theme – the battle for French memory – is broad in scope: the essays tackle not only the question of colonial memory, but problems of national memory as a whole. They cover everything from slavery and immigration, to the

<sup>58</sup> An important impetus for France’s (academic) post-colonial turn has come from outside France. See, for instance, C. Forsdick and D. Murphy, eds., *Francophone postcolonial studies: a critical introduction* (London, 2003), or a recent issue of the journal *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* entitled ‘France in a postcolonial Europe: identity, history, memory’, 5 (2007). Another earlier approach to these questions is M. Silverman, *Deconstructing the nation: immigration, racism and citizenship in modern France* (London, 1992).

<sup>59</sup> See [www.achac.com](http://www.achac.com) for a history of ACHAC, and an up to date list of publications and activities.

<sup>60</sup> N. Bancel, P. Blanchard, and F. Vergès, *La République coloniale* (Paris, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> P. Blanchard and I. Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les guerres de mémoires: la France et son histoire* (Paris, 2008).

First World War and internet ‘memory wars’. While the quality of the essays is sometimes inconsistent, the underlying theme is clear: France has not resolved many of its *guerres de mémoires*. Moreover, as Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson’s introduction makes clear, there is an ever-growing number of claims for recognition. A purely national framework, they argue, cannot integrate the many conflicting narratives that have emerged, say, from second-generation immigrant groups.<sup>62</sup> Several other essays echo this sentiment; national memory has become ‘fragmented’ or ‘confused’.<sup>63</sup>

The implication is clear: a neo-republican conception of the nation that endeavours either to unite the French behind a common secular culture (Finkelkraut) or a common set of political and civic values (Schnapper) is unlikely to be successful.<sup>64</sup> This is especially true in an age when colonial memory has become ‘omnipresent’.<sup>65</sup> On French TV screens, colonialism, slavery, the crisis in the French *banlieues* and immigration have all become blurred.<sup>66</sup> If neo-republicans have, in general, been sceptical of post-colonialism, post-modernism and cultural relativism, the message that emerges from this set of essays is that France entered that era some time ago, and that it is up to the academy to catch up with reality.

Another reality of contemporary France has been the development of a post-colonial multi-ethnic society. Because of their deep commitment to a unified Republic, neo-republicans have been extremely hostile to claims on behalf of ethnic minorities, such as the *droit à la différence* movement, which brought together some of the non-Communist left and non-governmental organizations like SOS Racisme in the 1980s.<sup>67</sup> Such claims to ‘difference’ (in this instance, ‘ethnic’ difference) appear, in the eyes of neo-republicans, to undermine the unity of the

<sup>62</sup> P. Blanchard and I. Veyrat-Masson, ‘Les guerres de mémoires: un objet d’étude, au carrefour de l’histoire et des processus de médiatisation’, in Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les guerres de mémoires*, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> Olivier Wieviorka argues that memories of the Second World War have become ‘fragmented’ in recent years, while Françoise Vergès contends that the growing number of claims for repentance and apologies for the slave trade have ‘confused’ the historiography of slavery. See O. Wieviorka, ‘Francisque ou croix de Lorraine: les années sombres entre histoire, mémoire et mythologie’, and F. Vergès, ‘Esclavage colonial: quelles mémoires? Quels héritages?’, in Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les guerres de mémoires*.

<sup>64</sup> On the problem of a state-driven project of historical memory, see Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, ‘Les guerres de mémoires’, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Bancel and Blanchard identify three stages of the ‘visibility’ of colonialism: ‘invisible’ (from 1962 to 1992), ‘visible’ (from 1992 to 2002), and ‘omnipresent’ (from 2002 to the present day). N. Bancel and P. Blanchard, ‘La colonisation: du débat sur la guerre d’Algérie au discours de Dakar’, in Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les guerres de mémoires*, p. 138.

<sup>66</sup> I. Veyrat-Masson, ‘Les guerres de mémoires à la télévision: du dévoilement à l’accompagnement’, in Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les guerres de mémoires*, p. 284.

<sup>67</sup> For an overview of this period, see J. Hayward, *Fragmented France: two centuries of disputed identity* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 343–72.

nation, and fuel the flames of *communautarisme*.<sup>68</sup> Even beyond the circle of staunch neo-republicans, this view holds a strong appeal, which is what makes academic and activist Pap Ndiaye's *La condition noire: essai sur une minorité française* (2008) so controversial.<sup>69</sup> His bold and thoughtful book aims quite explicitly to give French blacks a specific 'history'. In so doing, he risks the ire both of a neo-republican camp fearful of *communautarisme*, and an academic environment still strongly indebted to Marxist analyses that privileged the 'social' over the 'ethnic' or the 'racial'.<sup>70</sup> Despite his contentious approach, Ndiaye is adamant that a history of French blacks will not only be beneficial, but is a necessary counterpart to an understanding of 'social' issues such as exclusion.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to those who would characterize French intellectual life as obsessively parochial and inward-looking, Ndiaye shows a strong awareness of Anglo-American historiography and sociology in his approach.<sup>72</sup> This is perhaps inevitable – Ndiaye's background is that of a historian of the United States, and the pre-eminent theories of race have emerged from the American academy. Nevertheless, he makes good use of his non-French theoretical apparatus to give us an insight into such understudied areas as the 'colour line' in the Republic or differences in discrimination according to lightness of skin.<sup>73</sup> Ndiaye sketches a history of French blacks since the eighteenth century, and shows links with American and African movements. He also uses a recent statistical survey of French blacks to build up a more accurate picture of how blacks perceive discrimination and identify themselves in contemporary France.

The result reads as much like a research agenda as a set of firm conclusions. Since the field of 'race studies' is so under-developed in France, Ndiaye has very little previous scholarship on which to build his analysis. One can only hope that *La condition noire* will encourage younger French scholars to look more closely at these issues in future. For our purposes, however, one of the most significant insights comes at the end of Ndiaye's book. While, for instance, Schnapper argues in *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration?* that the children of migrants in France do not live a 'dual culture', Ndiaye maintains that his work on blackness demonstrates the extent to which French blacks experience a sense of 'double belonging'.<sup>74</sup> Here

<sup>68</sup> See for example Taguieff's critique of the *droit à la différence* movement in Taguieff, *La République enlisée*, pp. 97–102.

<sup>69</sup> P. Ndiaye, *La condition noire: essai sur une minorité française* (Paris, 2008). Ndiaye is a committee member of the Conseil représentatif des associations noires (CRAN). The CRAN is one of the first non-governmental organizations in France to promote a specifically 'ethnic' agenda. It brings together other associations that support blacks in France, and campaigns on a number of issues of relevance to the black community: for instance, in favour of the recognition of discrimination, in support of 'ethnic' statistics (currently banned in France), and for greater awareness of black histories.

<sup>70</sup> He discusses these problems in Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, pp. 38–54.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance the attack in Anderson, *La pensée tiède*.

<sup>73</sup> Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, pp. 83–9 (on the 'colour line'), pp. 108–10 (on lightness).

<sup>74</sup> Schnapper uses the term 'double culture' (Schnapper, *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration?*, p. 117), and Ndiaye uses the expression 'double appartenance' (Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, p. 362). Significantly, both use contemporary statistical surveys to support their opposite conclusions.



lies a key difference. For neo-republicans, the nation is – and should be – the primary source of belonging. For Ndiaye, and others (such as Wiewiorka) committed to alternative readings of contemporary France, multiple identities are inevitable.

The final author in this section sits uncomfortably with the others. Gérard Noiriel began his career as a thoroughgoing social historian, committed to a (non-Communist) history of the French industrial classes.<sup>75</sup> He only became involved in contemporary discussions surrounding the nation with the publication of his path-breaking *Le creuset français* in 1988.<sup>76</sup> Noiriel's volume opened up the history of immigration in France. By tracing the history of immigration in modern France, and showing how, empirically, France was as much a country of immigration as the United States, he brought the issue to historiographical prominence. The book's immediate success and its conceptual novelty served at first to obscure Noiriel's almost complete lack of interest in the ways in which the colonial encounter shaped and modified France's perception of immigration. Noiriel's reading was strictly through the lens of 'sociohistoire': it concentrated heavily on the 'empirical' facts of immigration, and relations of power inside French society. It left to one side questions of 'identity', 'discourse', and 'belonging'. Paradoxically, this strict 'social' approach, and some of his later essays denying, for instance, the double identity of second-generation immigrants, made his work popular with neo-republicans.<sup>77</sup> He himself now acknowledges this and, in an effort to correct this image, he has written a book specifically on racial discourse in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France entitled *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France: discours publics, humiliations privées* (2007).<sup>78</sup>

This vast 700-page volume brings together a number of Noiriel's interests – the history of nationality law, the history of immigration, and the problem of racism – although the approach remains resolutely that of 'sociohistoire'.<sup>79</sup> In his analysis, the discourse surrounding race, ethnicity, and immigration remains dependent on the contexts in which this discourse may have emerged. If few can doubt Noiriel's immense knowledge of his field, his emphasis on a 'sociohistoire' of racial discourse still allows him to hold to the claim that, when understanding state policy and popular perceptions of immigrant populations, there was nothing exceptional about France's colonial experience. There were merely different contexts, which led to the stigmatization of minorities – be they Jewish in the late nineteenth century, Italian in the interwar period, or North African in the 1980s. France since the 1970s has seen an 'ethnicization' of the immigrant question, but in his view this is a response to the politics of 'anti-racism' on the non-Communist

<sup>75</sup> See for instance, G. Noiriel, *Longwy: immigrés et prolétaires* (Paris, 1984).

<sup>76</sup> G. Noiriel, *Le creuset français* (Paris, 1988).

<sup>77</sup> 'Les jeunes 'd'origine immigrée' n'existent pas', in G. Noiriel, *État, nation, immigration: vers une histoire du pouvoir* (Paris, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> G. Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France: discours publics, humiliations privées* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>79</sup> On 'sociohistoire', see Noiriel, *État, nation, immigration*; and idem, *Sur la crise de l'histoire* (Paris, 1996).

left, and the construction of ethnic identity in the French media.<sup>80</sup> For Noiriel, questions of identity politics and France's post-colonial turn are not simply irrelevant but potentially dangerous.

Nevertheless, I have chosen to include Noiriel in a section devoted to critics of neo-republicans, not only because he has explicitly tried to counteract his neo-republican image with this book, but also because he represents the penetration of new conceptual frameworks into the French academy. While still indebted to the Annales school of social history and above all to Michel Foucault, Noiriel has been relatively open to outside influences.<sup>81</sup> Yet unlike Schnapper, who used her wide knowledge of other conceptual frameworks to reinforce her commitment to a neo-republican analysis of the nation, Noiriel has been willing to use his eclectic influences to challenge some of the historiographical orthodoxies surrounding the neo-republican conception of the nation. Despite his rather virulent hostility to ACHAC and their notion of a French 'fracture coloniale', he represents a compromise – between what we might describe as a 'natural republicanism' born of his intellectual influences, and a post-colonial turn that has nevertheless made slow progress in France's intellectual world.<sup>82</sup>

### III

Any survey of France's recent attempts to (re)write its national narrative must include the view from abroad. As foreign historians of France have been fond of pointing out, a number of important historiographical innovations have come from outside – for instance, in the study of the French Revolution (Richard Cobb) or the Vichy regime (Robert Paxton). With the high profile of the *affaire du foulard*, foreign interventions have remained just as important in discussions of the contemporary nation, and we have already seen, for instance, the importance of foreign scholars in France's post-colonial turn. It is therefore appropriate that I close this historiographical survey by looking at two books written by outsiders, which examine and comment upon the tension between (neo-)republicanism, colonial memory, and immigration in very different ways.

To describe Cécile Laborde as an 'outsider' is perhaps something of a misnomer. Trained in France, she completed a doctorate in politics at Oxford, and has worked in Britain ever since. It is perhaps this dual heritage that allows her to provide such a wide-ranging and capacious overview of contemporary republicanism in her *Critical republicanism: the hijab controversy and political philosophy*

<sup>80</sup> See especially Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France*, pp. 590–680.

<sup>81</sup> On Noiriel's influences see G. Noiriel, *Penser avec, penser contre: itinéraire d'un historien* (Paris, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> He strongly attacks the notion of *la fracture coloniale* in these (revealing) terms: 'Le faiblesse de ce type d'analyse fait le jeu de ceux qui, dans le camp d'en face, cherchent à réhabiliter la colonisation. Attribuer les problèmes sociaux qui touchent aujourd'hui les jeunes des quartiers populaires en invoquant rituellement "l'imaginaire colonial" interdit en effet de comprendre le fonctionnement *actuel* des relations de pouvoir, et le rôle que jouent les professionnels du discours public dans la construction des stéréotypes.' Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France*, p. 681.

(2008).<sup>83</sup> Her central ‘case study’ is the hijab controversy (*affaire du foulard*) and she uses this as a springboard from which to develop her critical republican perspective. Much of the book is, in fact, a summary of the arguments that relate to the hijab controversy. She identifies three themes: the question of ‘liberty’, which she takes to mean the debates surrounding *la laïcité* (secularism); the question of ‘equality’, where she focuses on feminist supporters and critics of the hijab ban; and the question of ‘solidarity’, where she looks at the case for and against a French republican ‘model of integration’.

Though her exposition of the theoretical foundations of these three dimensions of the hijab controversy is exhaustive, the book is normative in both argument and intent: Laborde’s aim is to build a ‘critical republicanism’, which will rehabilitate core republican values while, at the same time, remain sensitive to the criticisms of critical theorists and sociologists. Significantly, Laborde opposes the ban on the hijab.<sup>84</sup> However, she is not willing to endorse a radical multi-cultural agenda. For her, many of the normative goals of republicanism – such as colour-blind integration or a national conception of citizenship – remain prescient and valuable. The problem, instead, lies in their abstract formulation. Critical republicanism aims to defend the goals of republicanism, but make them more responsive to actual social realities.<sup>85</sup> This reformulation rests on a principle of ‘non-domination’, which she borrows from Philip Pettitt.<sup>86</sup>

In its intellectual approach – heavily informed by Anglo-American liberal theory, as well as French republican debates – and its rigorous presentation of each side of the hijab debate, the book belongs to a British tradition of analytical political theory. Moreover, it provides an excellent English introduction to the theoretical challenges posed by French republicanism. At the same time, Laborde’s book aspires to a French tradition of political essay – the likes of which we have already seen in the work of Finkelkraut, Schnapper, and Taguieff. By (quite explicitly) side-stepping the ‘anthropological’ or ‘contextual’ dimensions of French republicanism, and arguing against its exceptionalism, she follows many neo-republicans in giving French republicanism universal aspirations and elevating it to the status of a potentially trans-historical political philosophy.<sup>87</sup> Inevitably, this means that a number of contextual nuances fall by the wayside. For instance, few of the French figures whose work she discusses are given biographies or situated in their political and institutional networks.<sup>88</sup> More seriously,

<sup>83</sup> C. Laborde, *Critical republicanism: the hijab controversy and political philosophy* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> She argues that ‘secularism, properly understood, does not require pupils to remove signs of religious allegiance; female emancipation is not assisted by the prohibition of cultural symbols; and civic solidarity depends not on cultural conformism but on social equality and the politics of participatory inclusion’. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>86</sup> On this, see P. Pettitt, *Republicanism: a theory of freedom and government* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Laborde, *Critical republicanism*, p. 25.

<sup>88</sup> For example, even small details, such as the fact that *laïcité* expert, Jean Baubérot, was the only member of the Commission Stasi to abstain from the final vote to endorse the Stasi report, are left out. See *ibid.*, pp. 67–9.

her attempt to reconstruct the theoretical clash between republicans and multiculturalists underplays the eclectic influences that have made neo-republicanism such a powerful political language in the past three decades.

Of course, she acknowledges many of these potential deficiencies early in her book.<sup>89</sup> Her approach is not 'contextual' in the sense employed by intellectual historians. It is meaningless, therefore, to demand a type of analysis that was patently not part of Laborde's initial project. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the tension between the highly contextual nature of the neo-republicanism that grew from the hijab controversy, and neo-republicanism's universal aspirations is itself a peculiarly French problem. It is a shame that Laborde's bold attempt to combine the normative prescriptions of French republicanism and Anglo-American analytical theory does not address this problem for it raises a number of questions about the translation of concepts and meanings between France and Britain. Even in a work with a normative goal, there is room for a discussion of the ways French and Anglo-American political philosophies have understood and misunderstood each other since the 1970s.

Where Laborde focuses her attention on neo-republicanism directly, Jim House and Neil Macmaster's book *Paris 1961: Algerians, state terror and memory* (2006) speaks to France's post-colonial turn.<sup>90</sup> Both historians have a history of analysing the consequences of France's colonial encounter, and here they turn their attention to one of the most controversial examples of state violence in twentieth-century France: the police repression in October 1961 of anti-colonial protests by Algerians in Paris.<sup>91</sup>

The first half of the book, which deals with the events before and during the suppression of the demonstrations, has already aroused some controversy. House and Macmaster claimed that the most significant French historian of 1961, Jean-Paul Brunet, under-estimated the number of deaths caused by police violence. They also intimated that he was something of an 'official historian', whose privileged access to archives meant that he had a vested interest in reading the police records literally (and therefore uncritically). Brunet reacted strongly to this allegation, accusing House and Macmaster of misreading their source material.<sup>92</sup> Paradoxically, however, this controversy lent credence to the argument in the second half of House and Macmaster's book, namely that memories of 1961 are not only alive, but also an important window into understanding post-colonial memory in France.

The second half of *Paris 1961* traces the suppression of the memory of 1961 by leftist organizations, the French state and the newly independent Algerian state. It

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> J. House and N. Macmaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, state terror and memory* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>91</sup> Macmaster's most significant earlier work dealt with Algerian migration to France in the twentieth century. N. Macmaster, *Colonial migrants and racism* (London, 1997).

<sup>92</sup> See J.-P. Brunet, 'Police violence in Paris, October 1961: historical sources, methods, and conclusions', and the reply J. House and N. Macmaster, 'Time to move on: a reply to Jean-Paul Brunet', *Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), pp. 205–14.

shows how memories of 1961 went ‘underground’, and only emerged again in the 1980s with new organizations and social movements, often instigated by second-generation immigrants seeking to reclaim their place in French history. Nevertheless, it was only in 2001 that there was some recognition on the part of the French state, which erected a plaque to 1961 amidst calls for a state apology.<sup>93</sup> Since then, House and Macmaster argue, there has been a process of ‘widening’ and ‘re-inventing’ memory as new generations take over the heritage of 1961.<sup>94</sup>

The connections between this reading of 1961, and the approach adopted by the members of ACHAC is clear: both highlight the multi-faceted or, to use the authors’ words, ‘multi-vocal’ dimension of colonial memory.<sup>95</sup> In addition, House and Macmaster, like their French counterparts, stress the relevance of memory for contemporary readings of the nation. As they succinctly put it, ‘if some racialised colonial and post-colonial groups within the French polity question elements of Republicanism, they do so based upon their lived experiences of this political model, which has treated them with profound ambivalence’.<sup>96</sup> Republicanism, which in the eyes of neo-republicans represents a living and relevant historical model, here appears shot through with contradictions. House and Macmaster’s stimulating book makes clear that France’s national narrative will have to be rewritten in the light of its post-colonial memories.

#### IV

Few other European countries have gone through such explicit efforts to define and redefine the conceptual parameters and responsibilities of the nation in the past three decades. Using republicanism as a historical and theoretical starting-point, an ever-expanding group of public figures, from historians to philosophers, have argued over the essential components of France’s national narrative. The debate has often carried with it strongly political overtones. Yet the polemical nature of the debate has simultaneously encouraged a whole generation of scholars to tackle issues such as immigration and colonial memory that were hitherto absent from the French academy. These new priorities also reflect the changing character of France’s intellectual class. In the past, intellectual legitimacy was most often the preserve of those, like Sartre and Aron, who had attended France’s elite schools. But today’s opinion-formers now include a wider range of journalists and academics, many of whom have begun to tackle issues of general importance. So, for instance, academics such as Noiriel and Taguieff, who were not products of France’s *grandes écoles*, can command large audiences for their scholarly works dealing with such topical issues as anti-racism, the far right or immigration.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, as I have already suggested, today’s intellectual class

<sup>93</sup> House and Macmaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 318.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>97</sup> Taguieff graduated from the Université de Paris X in Nanterre, which was founded in 1970. Noiriel graduated from the Faculté de Lettres at the Université de Nancy.

have influential roles in government and non-governmental organizations and commissions. With the notable exception of Aron, such political influence was a distant dream for the post-war *intellectual engagé*.

The line between academic and political engagement, always more porous in France than elsewhere, has been further dismantled in the past three decades, and nowhere is this more evident than in discussions surrounding the future of the nation. The battle for the Republic has mobilized history, political philosophy, and sociology. It has left an indelible mark on contemporary French attitudes to citizenship, immigration, European integration and colonial memory, and it has directly influenced legislative practice, for instance, in the 2003 law banning headscarves in schools, or the 2001 *loi sur la parité*, designed to increase the number of women in politics.<sup>98</sup> It has also been politically ecumenical. Indeed, one might say that one of the primary reasons for nostalgia on the part of the older generation is that today's political engagements no longer appear to follow well-worn divisions between right and left: as we have seen, the debates over the national narrative, and neo-republicanism itself, have transcended a number of political cleavages. For some, this is a step backwards, away from the heavyweight political engagements of the past, towards a bland politics of consensus. But this overview suggests that the dichotomies of partisan engagement have finally given way to a more complex and diverse synthesis of ideas. This can only augur well for the future of intellectual life in France.

<sup>98</sup> The use of republican language in the *parité* debate is discussed in the excellent J. W. Scott, *Parité! L'universel et la différence des sexes* (Paris, 2005).