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The Success of France's Youth:

Children of Algerian Descent in the Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory research is to elucidate the connection between the institution of the French educational system and its function as a vehicle of integration for the children of immigrants. Focusing on those of Algerian descent, this paper asks if and how the educational system is failing this particular demographic. By contextualising colonial France in Algeria, this paper shows the connection between history and the educational institution as it relates to contemporary French culture. This paper argues that the French educational system, although well established, does not recognise nor meet the needs of the multi-ethnic classroom. By identifying integration as a key player, this paper explores the relationships between citizenship and integration and how perceptions of both concepts are produced and reproduced in the school system. This paper notes the need for a shift in the current discourse for the "second generation" from one of "immigrants and immigration" to a more precise discourse on ethnic minorities.

In every country that receives significant numbers of immigrants, the question of the "second generation" usually becomes highly significant; France is no exception. It has experienced high levels of immigration over the past 50 years, and the children and grandchildren of these immigrants are now an important part of French society. Immigration is not a new subject and has been the focus of many debates over the past two decades. The social and economic attainment of the children and grandchildren of immigrants has become a political issue and it has taken precedence in the media. On a more significant level, this attainment will have a durable impact on France as a whole. Nowhere has their presence led to more debates than in the educational system, in fact, the schools have become equal grounds for political and religious debates alike.

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate preliminary findings of the connection between the institution of the French educational system and its function as a vehicle of integration for the children of immigrants, more specifically Algerian descent. This paper questions whether the educational system is failing this particular group in terms of integration, in other words, socially, economically and culturally. Recognising these issues have many facets including history and how culture is perceived in France, this paper will primarily focus on the classroom and how the school as an institution is a vehicle to integrating France's students with Algerian roots.

I will contextualise colonial France in the latter years and will describe and relate it to the current relationship it has with Algeria. Secondly, I will focus on the history of the educational system, its goals, and how it relates to the present day French culture. Lastly, the paper will discuss the relationship between citizenship and integration of the children with Algerian roots, how citizenship is linked to the educational system and the multi-ethnic classroom. This research will define and discuss integration in terms of how the educational system functions in an ethnically diverse environment. Identifying integration as a key player in the success or failure of the students in the educational system will reveal the family effect and cultural effects on these children.

Historical Context at a Glance

The importance of history lays at the root of France's immigration trends and its policies regarding assimilation and integration. The impact of large scale immigration was further magnified by family reunification and the emergence of a "second generation" of French born children. This is the group of interest for this paper because of their historical and contemporary importance in the development of France and the challenges posed to institutions such as the education system.

The issues concerning immigrants and their children derive from a combined history of colonialism, political agreements, wars and integration ideologies. However, from the beginning of the Third Republic in the 1880s, immigrants and immigration became a social and political issue in the public sphere (Schor 1996: 13). Immigration trends until the early 20th century in France included groups such as Italians, Poles, Belgians and Spaniards; later came the Portuguese, North Africans followed by the Turks, and others (Schor 1996: 5). During the Second World War, many immigrants engaged in forced labour and xenophobia took the spotlight as a social and political issue as foreigners and Jews were identified by the Vichy regime as problematic (Schor 1996: 167). After the regressions made during the Second World War, France maintained its colonial control in Algeria while experiencing a drastic flux in immigration to support the booming economy of the "trente glorieuses" (Tribalat 1995 : 18, Schor 1996: 192). However, it was after Algeria's independence in 1962 and throughout the seventies where their immigration to France peaked (Tribalat 1995: 18). The motivation for immigration was mostly for economic reasons, especially in the case of the Algerians who were leaving a country exhausted of its resources. However, it is important to note that in 1930 France's immigrant population represented 7% of the total population and in large part the immigrant population became French citizens during the interwar years (Schor 1996: 81). In fact, in 1930, France had become the number one country in the world, surpassing the United States, in accepting immigrants (Schor 1996: 6). At the same time, any potential social issues arising around the fact that immigrants were contributing to the nation's economy were overlooked (Sayad 1999: 31). The assumption from the host society that immigrant workers will always be available and willing to work under any condition was and arguably is still present in our perceptions of the

immigrant.

The historical significance of immigration in France is often forgotten when examining the issues on the "second generation" and how "minorities" are integrated into that society. In terms of numbers, Algerians have been one of the largest (at time the largest) groups immigrating to France from the 1970s to present day. The 1970s in many ways marked the end of the migration of the first generation of Algerians and other North African immigrants. Over the following decades, their children emerge as an increasingly important segment of French society. For the purpose of this paper, the children of one or two foreign or immigrant parents are treated as the same demographic in this paper. Additionally, it is important to reiterate the preferred group of children studied are those with Algerian roots, however this analysis includes and accepts the grouping called 'North African' because of the fluidity of these terms in the current literature and because the majority of these groups is of Algerian decent. Accepting a more general, overarching definition of students with Algerian roots allows for a broader scope for information.

Often, the Algerian "second generation" is referenced as immigrants, foreigners and Algerians and we inaccurately fall into a discourse of immigrants and immigration rather than treating this group in terms of minorities in a French secular society. The school system has the potential to mark a difference in how students with Algerian roots are different from their foreign origins.

The School System at a Glance

The Durkheimian perspective on the purpose of the educational system is to prepare young adults with the accepted and appropriate skills for a functional, successful adulthood. This approach to teaching would warrant the successful integration of the young adult from school into a productive individual within France. It is also possible to interpret Durkheim's educational ideology as a means of assimilating individuals into society. For Durkheim, the emphasis is on collectivity, and how society imposes the way in which the individual lives.

Another key actor in the creation of France's universal, secular education during

the 1880s is Ferdinand Buisson. He explains the school's role is to train and eventually make individuals transform society. According to Buisson, the Republic consists of the 'utopias of yesterday', and transforms them to today's ideals in preparation of tomorrow's reality. Buisson's perspective is a progressive point of view (Maury 1996: 35) and allows for more of a dynamic, timeless approach to education as a player for society's overall functional needs including the multi-ethnic classroom on a global and local scale. The importance of institutions and their methods to train individuals transform society as a whole. Relating this to the French case, the efforts to maintain "French culture" through laws and practices like laïcité may be impossible because the country in fact transformed when it accepted immigrants in vast numbers. We are therefore left with issues of whether the changes from immigration are recognised for their French born children in institutions such as the school system.

The French educational system is unique compared to other European Union countries and Canada. Administratively, France is divided into 30 'academies' covering the 'départements' representing the regions in the country. Each academy is an administrative constituency or district headed by an appointed rector (Ministère de l'Education Nationale). Although the system is centralised, the departments have administrative responsibilities such as the partial management of certain personnel in the school, the allocation or appointment of students, *la vie scolaire* including the students' experiences within the institution and the organisation of exams and competitions (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale).Traditionally, the lycée (high school) has had a national responsibility to reproduce the nation's middle and top management, as well as make future leaders (Lewis 1985: 72); the production of an elite class was the objective of the school system (Barrère 1998). However, from the mid 1960s as the pupil population drastically increased, syllabuses started to change and new courses such as economics, social sciences and technical options were introduced to better accommodate the general population and the changing world (Lewis 1985: 76). In 1981, Savary, then French Minister of Education recognised problems within the system and attempted a new approach to the system and created the educational priority zones (zones d'éducation prioritaires or "les ZEP") (Lewis 1985: 48). The ZEPs were implemented as an effort to help the more depressed areas of the country where 'failure' turned into a cyclical pattern

(Lewis 1985: 49). The criteria for 'depressed' areas included underachieving pupils, violence, absenteeism and a high concentration of immigrants (Lewis 1985: 49). Here, the government considered social and economic characteristics before creating the ZEP. Placing aside evident problems of the ZEP in terms of stigmatism and labelling, changes have been made to this well established institution. Although a detailed discussion on the positive and negative aspects of the ZEP is beyond the scope of this paper, this is an example illustrating the possibilities of change in the educational system. It is an old, centralised system with heavy historical ties, but change can occur and is possible within that system.

The nature of the centralised French school system also relies heavily on bureaucracy and democracy. The term democracy in the context of the French administration refers to the power deriving from the central government (Halls 1976: 38). However, the management of schools shifted from a heavy reliance on the ministry to a more autonomous approach in the administration (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale). Today, as part of the department responsibilities, the lycée manages the organisation of classes, a break down of hours taught and an outline of the institution's economic and social environment (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale). Furthermore, the public's relatively positive attitude toward their school system may derive from the weight the institutions have placed on equality; another tradition of the French schools. The law laïcité as described below, emphasises the importance of equality and stresses that all are treated the same and will therefore have the same experience and level of education. Theoretically this law is sound and appears to have great possibilities in achieving a certain level of education and respect in a multi-ethnic setting. However, in practice, this law emphasises the differences in students and does not consider equity. An institution designed for the integration of its pupils into the rest of society should consider the issues around equity and consider and contextualise its students. However, these considerations may challenge the country's educational system as it stands in relation to integration, citizenship and nationalism.

Integration, citizenship and nationalism

<u>Integration and Assimilation</u>

The term integration is problematic and much discussed in the social sciences. As a term used by the elite to achieve their own interests, "integration" has become divisive in nature. Also, being an unclear term it has become yet another loaded concept complete with negative connotations focusing on difference (Noiriel 2005: 9). However, the term "integration" can reflect a variety of quotidian activities such as economic, social, cultural and political activity. For lack of a better word, I will refer to integration in social terms while touching on the importance of economic standing. I am consciously avoiding "culture" as a means to an end for "integration"; the debate of cultural integration can easily fall into ethnocentric value judgements with a primary focus on an immigrant population. Cultural integration in the French context for French born children of immigrant parents would inaccurately treat this demographic as immigrants. Education is used as an example of social integration via test results, academic success in a streamed system and lastly the eventual entrance into the workforce.

According to Tribalat (1995), the term integration has become consecrated and its familiar partner in the integration discourse, "assimilation" provides an imagery which is a throw – back to colonial France. However, depending on space and time, assimilation varies in definitions and explanation of outcomes. Assimilation could be interpreted as radical where an individual's identity completely disappears in a new society (Grange 2005: 42). It can also refer to the changing towards something that is more similar to the majority, conformity and an irreversible process (Grange 2005: 42). On a less radical note, assimilation also explains the decline of "particulars" pertaining to groups through the mixing of populations, as a result their behaviours will change (Tribalat 1995: 13). Using Tribalat's definition of assimilation best suits France's integration policy of not only immigrants, but of all inhabitants.

<u>What is Citizenship?</u>
Depending on the country, citizenship has judicial implications including specific rights and responsibilities such as voting. Children with Algerian lineage but born in France are legally French citizens. However, this paper will refer to the social aspect of citizenship;

according to Barrère (1998), citizenship has become the implicit solution to a crisis in the schools' roles in French society. Citizenship is used to clarify the "collapse of the authority of the teachers" while it pushes for a true democratic institution as it recreates the effect of the student in the establishment (Barrère 1998: 652). Most importantly, the citizen is a member of a recognised collectivity who identifies with a Nation. Barrère notes how this essential condition of citizenship brings us to identifying "who is in" and "who is out" (Barrère 1998: 652). Barrère refers to four other characteristics of the citizen. She explains how the citizen possesses rights, meaning the necessary rights for an individual to have freedoms such as speech, beliefs and social freedoms including economic and social well-being. She explains how the citizen is a social actor who participates in public life. Citizens have groups of peers and a youth culture, and a form of public and public life teachings (done in the schools and on the streets) (Barrère 1998: 654-657). This becomes problematic for children of immigrants who are not a part of the immigrant population yet are not considered to be "French". The recognised collectivity, it can be argued, is the "second generation" collectivity. However, this term alone tends to have negative connotations and also excludes the third and fourth generations born in France. The children with Algerian origins do not fit into Barrère's four supporting characteristics of citizenship; this group is excluded in an in-depth discussion on citizenship.

Although the French educational system plays a role in creating and maintaining citizens, there are conflicts in terms of the system and democracy; there is conflict between individual rights (as seen from laícité) and the collectivity. The French educational system practices equality to a fault, and is leaving behind those students who do not fit into the strict framework of what is officially considered a good citizen, or French.

To break down the relationship between school, democracy and citizenship, it is important to understand the paradoxical nature of these issues. Under the concept of democracy, French schools are occupied with equality to the extent that the structure of the system becomes unequal because it does not consider the differences in social production and the autonomy of the individual (Barrère 1998: 660). The system accepts students on the premise all pupils are a type of blank slate and easy to configure. The

system creates as democratic in nature problematises the individual rights by not considering the students' different social backgrounds in the classroom. This form of assimilation in the classroom is historical as it follows the Durkheimian belief that assimilation is good and strives for the betterment of French life. The connection to citizenship lays in the fact that those students who do not fit the "French" mould as such, are not perceived as being French; they tend to be forgotten students, or students who "fall through the cracks" and are not active participants in the school.

When further probing into the notion of equality in the schools, we can argue that equality as defined by the French school system, perpetuates inequalities amongst the students. Khamès (1993) and Derderian (2004) illustrate that xenophobic tendencies are related to policies created by and applied to specific institutions; disabling the full participation of individuals. The ability of full participation reflects how the State either helps or hinders the collective integration process. For example, French school attendance has become obligatory and increasingly longer. Here lays the responsibility of representing values perceived as being collective and in a social hierarchy while contributing to the homogenisation of the country (Bordes-Benayoun 2007 : 62). A system organised to value the equal treatment of its pupils misses numerous other variables in a student's life which may help or hinder their success in academics.

The organisation of the school system is based on egalitarianism, participation and it was also structured to assimilate students (Lelievre 2000: 8). This assimilation is based on the French model focusing on the value of the individual, the formal, legal and political equality of all citizens (Lelievre 2000: 8). However, the current educational system in France is not helping students' needs of social mobility and is neither the answer to France's current socio-economic issues of families with Algerian origins. In fact, Pierre Bourdieu believes that French schools as presently organised are not liberating institutions but rather they are reproducing inequalities and elitism through the reproduction of social 'acts' which are taught as natural (Halls 1976: 165). However, it is arguable that schooling brings a better equality of "democratisation" to the overall society (Halls 1976: 165). The French example illustrates how "democratisation" plays a role to universalise historical norms "of a learned culture" (Halls 1976: 165). This learned culture originates from the social élite whose emphasis on high culture has (according to

Castel and Passeron) mitigated against the success of educational reform (Halls 1976: 165).

Contextualising the Student

Given the above description of the French school system, this paper also establishes how the student fares in French schools in recent decades and whenever possible I will focus on students with Algerian origins. To better contextualise the student, I will draw on three major themes affecting their school experience. The familial effect on students, the values of the system including laïcité and the structure of the French educational system will be considered for analysis.

Integration through the school system in general is not easy for young people in France, especially for those with Algerian roots. High drop out rates and high percentages of unemployment amongst the children of immigrants are reflected in studies showing their difficulties in the educational system and in their apparent lack of professional gains. However, it is important to note the overall 'second generation' as a group has shown social mobility compared to their parents' experience living in France (Simon 2003: 1092). Despite difficulties, students with Algerian roots often have higher literacy and educational backgrounds than that of their parents'. The evidence of such social mobility shows the school system is not completely failing the students. However I argue the schools as primary socialising institutions could better integrate its students into French society, especially those with Algerian origins. In fact, this paper probes into the issues of why those of French-origins tend to perform better than their peers of Algerian descent even if they are both socialised in the same institution at the same time? For those children whose parents are Algerian, the experience is different from their French origin peers' experience because of underlying issues the school system formulates such as nationalism and citizenship. The presence of young people with Algerian origins is challenging France's perception of national identity, citizenship and institutions such as the school system.

In general, young people are known to have a magnified perception of discrimination and admit to being ostracised in their schools, by their peers (Galland 2006: 154). Studies have identified a variety of ways young people are ostracised;

according to Galland (2006), one young person out of four with a non European background has experienced poor treatment because of their origins (Galland 2006: 151). It is important to note that boys with North African roots feel particularly stigmatised in France while their sisters tend to be less stigmatised (Gallard 2006 : 151). Stigmatism for boys is clear as seen in the media on violent outbreaks in France. However, stigmatism or creating the 'Other' is also presented in the recent reinforcement of the laïcité law which focuses primarily on girls with North African roots who wear the hijab.

Those with a non – European lineage not only experience difficulties at school, but also during the first years after their schooling (Tribalat 1996). The transition to the working world is difficult for all French youth because of the economy. The state of the economy plays a key role in this lack of transition; however the beginnings of the "work life" tends to be more difficult for those with Algerian roots, especially for the young men (Tribalat 1995: 176). The differences between the young men with Algerian roots and their sisters are important to note because of their levels of education and the work obtained once they leave school.

Citizenship and Laïcité

The educational system needs to reflect its pupils and in France, it has yet made a shift to better accommodate the multiethnic classroom. Social groups have the ability to sustain themselves through renewal (Dewey 1916: 11). This renewal is focused on the young population of any group in question by means of "educational growth" (Dewey 1916:11). In a similar vein, the Republican tradition of the school unites the Nation. Its role is to develop and promote talent for society (Barrère 1998: 651). The training and production of good citizens has its origins in the French school system and assures the training of the civic "moral" of the citizen (Barrère 1998 651). Briefly, there are many opinions regarding Durkheim's "moral", however, it refers to the idea there is a sense of non religious obligation in a given society. Since Durkheim, there have been uncountable definitions and interpretations of 'moral'. For example, Ferdinand Buisson believes 'moral' should have absolutely no connection to schools or any educations (Maury 1996: 18-19). Jules Ferry, on the other hand held the belief for a laïque "moral" in order to separate religion and the state (Maury 1996: 18-19). Coupled with the lacing of

citizenship in the discourse and the lack of consensus of the meaning of "moral", laïcité has become one of the most pressing issues in the French school system.

The French laic system is one which does not recognise religion; it takes pride in its efforts for an egalitarian, gender neutral and equitable system. This practice has been successful in the past; French society enjoyed a system which provided their children the same method of schooling throughout the country. Following the ideology that all are equal and thus treated equally, the French educational system has been successful in building a sense of nationalism with citizens playing key economic and social roles for the functioning of the country. However, such a system in practice today also creates problems as it focuses on the absence of religious symbols and therefore creates hostility amongst those who do not fit into the homogeneous grouping of French society. The 'Conseil d'État[1]' from November 27th 1989, confirmed and clearly identified the following exclusive principal of laïcité: « *Le port de signes ou tenues par les- quels élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit* » in the schools and public scholarly establishments (Lorcerie 2005: 75). It is argued, this principal helps to ensure the equality of treatment of pupils. Noted in the Stasi commission, the laícité law maintains a "moral" obligation to ensure equality between men and women (Beaubérot 2006: 256), and therefore it is logical to forbid the headscarf. This debated question is reflected in the Debré commission, as it notes how many professionals in the schools were divided on the issue (Lorcerie 2005: 74). Also, amongst those schools mostly affected by the enforcement of the laïcité law are not in agreement with the sanctioning of students. However, the government and other decision – makers did not consult with students nor include them in debates and therefore it is essential we not assume students are either for or against laïcité (Lorcerie 2005: 93).

Many of Jules Ferry's contributions from 1881 remain in contemporary France. What we refer to today as laícité was his goal to secularise France. As opposed to other European Union countries where secularism is within a context of recognising religious pluralism, France maintains a complete separation between public space and religion affiliation; a space where there is a shared moral vision within the nation (Lelievre: 2000:

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[1] Conseil d'État counsels the government on a variety of issues pertaining to legislative or administrative reforms.

7). To reiterate, the equal treatment in school or lack thereof is not considered at the level of the individual. This is in line with the tradition of the school system of its focus on the collective. In a centralised system, it is impossible to consider the individual and accepts there are students 'falling through the cracks' of the system. An example of the school system failing students can be found in the hijab debate.

The full laïcité debates and the wearing of the headscarf is a complex sociological phenomenon, a rich discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper however, I will outline key concepts and arguments for a better understanding of how laïcité relates to the French school system and how it in fact has created hostility because of its focus on the absence of any religious symbols.

Laïcité in the name of egalitarianism has ignored the backgrounds of students and has negatively effected students' school experiences. The experience includes their success in the classroom as well as their social success in better integrating into the rest of their communities. It is difficult to integrate when there is a constant presence of difference surrounding the school yard. As the school system is not organised to acknowledge and address the individual, but the collective, the importance lies in the construction of inequality in the name of equality. The difficulty of achieving in school for students coming from a lower socio-economic background has been established, this coupled with a renewed focus on difference via religious symbols can only hinder students in general. However, the Conseil d'État is transparent in their view that the wearing of the headscarf is a political – religious sign that is an obstacle of integration (Lorcerie 2005: 80). On the other hand, it can be argued that the emphasis on difference in fact hinders students' integration in the schools and later into the workforce.

Luc Ferry[2], the former minister of education (2002-2004), believes there is a need in restoring "republican sanctity". His attitude on pupil's attire in school is reflected in his actions as minister seeking to forbid all religious and political signs in schools. He plays an important role in the French law on *Secularity and Conspicuous Symbols in School* (Lorcerie 2005: 80). This general concept of protecting schools of a collective identity imposed by the "headscarf affair" has turned to an affair of girls and education, a

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[2] Luc Ferry is mostly known for the law on "French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in school".

concept of interpersonal relations, and an education that is no longer regarded as French (Lorcerie 2005: 80). The current discourse on the wearing of the headscarf coupled with the above mentioned 'affairs and concepts' is also described as a type of war brought through laïcité by those oppressors behind North African girls who happen to be Muslim, making them cover their hair in schools (Lorcerie 2005: 80). Here, young Muslim girls with Algerian roots or otherwise, are viewed as pawns in a type of battle against the establishment. Others in the Ministry of Education with Ferry such as Claude Durand-Prinborgne recognise their apparent ethnocentrism but believe the headscarf corresponds with the "feminine condition". Duran-Prinborgne believes we can justify an intervention and that this phenomenon has a direct relationship with religion, sexuality, and a personal dimension associated with adolescents (Lorcerie 2005: 84-85). Laïcité has successfully stigmatised boys and girls alike in the school system. Reinforcing the laïcité law also reinforces France's perspective on women, especially those who happen to be Muslim and their male counterparts. This aspect of the school system is value centric and leaks down from the ideology of education and egalitarianism to the school grounds. Laïcité as an enforcer of egalitarianism pushes for a form of assimilation, changing an individual's values taught in the household towards the prescribed civic standard. A result of this approach is the identification of the 'Other' and the changing of real or perceived ethnic identities including cultural traditions. A prime example is the emphasis on the absence of religious symbols in French institutions.

Although laïcité stresses the headscarf as a main issue in the school system, it is important to address how this concept of equality or result of inequality effects both boys and girls in the system. It seems the essentialist approach to laïcité alienates large groups of boys and girls whose roots may come from North Africa or other historically Muslim countries. These students are automatically perceived as "the Other" whether they agree or disagree with the law in question. Having to address and question their own religious, moral and social beliefs, is not evident during such a time in a student's life. One possibility of the lack of success in the classroom could derive from the lasting effects of stigmatism coupled with being forgotten in a system which stresses egalitarianism more than the student.

Another example of how the emphasis on equality based on laïcité creates

inequalities amongst pupils is exemplified in 2003-2004 when the school and its professionals played a paradoxical role in the politicisation of the hijab (Lorcerie 2005: 73). The school became the heart of the hijab "problem" and it became the example of the 'ultra-laïque's' platform in order to conceive a solution to ban the headscarf (Lorcerie 2005: 73). Unfortunately, the objectification of schools in its relation to laïcité law is being used for political opportunism and ultimately at the cost of students' education (Lorcerie 2005: 75).

Girls are being forced to challenge their religion at an early age and some choose their religion above education. Having to make these choices at a young age does not complement an egalitarian society which promotes educational equality between the sexes. This system in contemporary France refuses to identify the problems of trying to obtain a collective identity in such a diverse society. The prohibition of religious signs by this law is more cyclical in nature because it does not regulate problems in the schools (Lorcerie 2005: 94). In fact, it appears to be a solution for a problem that does not exist in the schools. With or without the reinforcement of laïcité, students and staff know who have North African roots, who observe certain religious days and who are the "believers". Those students mostly affected by laïcité would continue to be considered foreign and not French; however laïcité legitimises the stigmatisation against children of immigrants and it reinforces the accepted practice to identify the 'Other'. Although it touches on gender roles, Laïcité is not the only issue to consider for the differences between male and female students are at an international and national level. Girls are doing better in school on a global scale, however, this is clearer in the French context and the difference is even more evident when examining the students with Algerian origins.

Gender Differences in the System

Students' success depends on how well they utilise their resources, even if the resources are limited. Although difficult to measure, the amount of times a student fails is important to consider when addressing a successful academic experience. In France, when students fail a class, they have to repeat that entire academic year; meaning, all the classes at that level. Almost two thirds of students with Algerian origins have had to repeat a year in elementary school; this is compared to the national percentage of 40%

failure at the elementary level (Tribalat 1995: 146). When looking at the numbers of graduation or the years spent in school, researchers have probed further into the numbers and consider the frequency of repeating a year. The boys and girls of Algerian descent tend to have a higher rate of repeating a year at 1,4 compared to the national level of 1, 08 for the boys and 0,96 for the girls (Tribalat 1995: 145). Therefore, the amount of years in the school system is not an indicator of success. However, a year count could reflect the value of education in the household and pressures the parents and students alike apply to achieve certain goals. Additionally, if students do not do well in elementary school (collège), they are automatically streamed into either a 'professional' or 'technical' school. The purpose of these schools is to provide students trade or industry skills (e.g. learning how to cast plastic for boats and airplanes). In many cases, the parents coming from Algeria are unable help their children obtain their desired results in school (Tribalat 1995 : 146). In general, students with weak grades tend to follow the less desirable technical stream. Also, the boys are leaving school a little earlier than their sisters (at the age of 16), but in general terms, girls with immigrant roots are very similar to that of the national numbers. About ten years ago, less than one fourth of students with immigrant origins obtained their high school diploma, compared to the national rate of 36% of boys and 44% of girls (Tribalat 1995 : 148). The French Ministry of Education offers different, more contemporary results of the same demographic, revealing the school is not completely failing the students but improvement is still needed. Therefore we must also consider the social class and the aspirations of the parents to better understand how these students fit into the bigger picture of the school system.

Family Influence and the School System

Depending on where the family comes from, the degree of literacy from that country often affects the level of value placed on education "educational baggage" which can further be probed into the family's eventual problems of adapting into the French lifestyle (Tribalat 1995: 23). For example, weak or strong, those coming from European countries tend to have some educational background. This is not the case for those born in Algeria or Morocco; 41% and 31% of male immigrants have never been to school. For women,

45% have never been to school (Tribalat 1995: 23). These numbers may prove to be paradoxical because of the valuation of education for both girls and boys coming from Algerian or North African origins. The trends outlined in works from the Ministry of Education and more contemporary works tend to hold the perception that those with a higher value of education come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. An explanation of this may be found from Algeria's colonial past where the value of education is more of a cultural phenomenon and less of a class issue. In many cases, foreign parents see the obtaining of a high school diploma as a concrete measurement of integration (Brinbaum et al 2005: 60)

Considering the socio background of a student's family should not be forgotten, however many scholars such as Tribalat places an emphasis on their learning a second language. In many cases, parents whose mother tongue is different from that of their host country tend to place a high value on their children's learning and maintenance of their 'mother tongue'. Often, parents believe the learning of their language and the host country's language is better for their children's learning process in the school. However, some researchers believe this is not always the case or a factor of success throughout their academic careers (Tribalat 1995: 152). In fact research often shows how bilingualism tends to have an effect on the child's learning process in the negative sense and is regarding as being more of a 'handicap' than an advantage (Tribalat 1995: 137). The full debate regarding the learning of language is beyond the scope of this paper, however, this perspective of learning two first languages may be irrelevant for adolescents. The counter argument to the language debate stipulates that beyond the cultural implications of learning a different language in the home, researchers have found specific cognitive advantages including problem solving and the ability to process information (Genesee, 2007: 5). Considering the growth of the infant, studies have shown a delay in the learning process of 2-3 months. This delay is lost at the infant stage and studies show there is no evidence of children becoming confused as they are raised in a bilingual environment (Genesee, 2007: 5-6). The current debates focus on infants does not provide information regarding long term negative effects. Therefore, considering a 'language barrier' for "second generation" students as an explanation for their weak school results is not a viable variable.

The educational background of a parent on the other hand is a feasible area to consider. In the case of Algerian immigrant families, it is not uncommon that many parents living in France never had the opportunity to go to school. Given this context, it is even more uncommon for women to have been educated (Tribalat 1995: 138). In the case of these same immigrants in France, those coming from a more traditional household where the mothers are the caregivers and spend most of their time with their children, compared to the fathers, there is not a parent that could help this child in his or her homework from an early age until the end of the child's academic career.

In addition, the Ministry of Education's studies have found that depending on the family origins, scholarly pursuits differentiate. Young people with North African origins tend to accommodate the ambitions of their parents, they tend to take more of the professional and technological curriculum (Brinbaum et al. 2005 : 53). However, in more general terms, children with foreign born parents tend to have positive aspirations for succeeding in school because of the value of education within the household. This has become apparent in France based on qualitative studies from the 80s and 90s (Brinbaum et al. 53). In fact, 14% students with Algerian origins stay in school until they are about 23 years old, this is comparable to their peers with French origins (Tribalat 1995: 145). On the other hand, their peers with Portuguese origins remain in school for less amount of time (6% stay in school until the age of 23). These numbers illustrate a distinction between groups of students with varying backgrounds. Therefore, there is an apparent correlation between the values of education deriving from the family, which effects the French born children's results in school. Having support in the household to pursue a certain level of education is only one part of the story. Despite the familial support to do well, students of Algerian descent continue to be slightly below the national numbers. This indicates a problem in the system and relates back to the fact that the laic approach to teaching is problematic.

Socio-economic Considerations

This consideration is deliberately placed as the last point of discussion. Explaining differences and similarities between groups of the same socio-economic

backgrounds is acceptable in cases where the group in question is relatively homogeneous. To measure the working class from Algeria to the working class in France are not fairly comparable because of the economic and historical implications. Therefore, to analyse and compare children whose parents may come from a completely different type of "working class" is a complex issue. Recognising the possibility of such a distinction between groups, this paper provides an overview of certain socio-economic considerations for further analysis.

Research has shown the value of education in the home affects the student/child more than the actual education of their parents. An 'educogenic' family will be more ambitious and motivating to their children (Halls 1976: 163, 165). This may reflect what Bourdieu describes as 'cultural capital' as ethos is shifted from generation to generation (Halls 1976: 165). The literature also suggests those students coming from the working classes and those coming from households with immigrant parents do not fare as well in school (Simon 2003: 1102). Researchers consider factors such as living standards and socio-economic backgrounds to explain educational attainment (Halls 1976: 163). Studies have found a correlation between those children of industrial workers and a more frequent failure rate or 'grade repeat' (Hall 1976: 163). Students coming from an Algerian background tend to be a part of the demographic in which their parents are industrial workers. Many parents who migrated to France before and during the Algerian war did not have an opportunity to obtain a formal education. The literacy rates of these adults tends to be low, however, the Ministry of Education stipulates that often those students coming from an Algerian background, have parents who have high expectations for their children's academic pursuits. The lack of opportunity for parents or grandparents coming from Algeria could be an explanation as to why this demographic has a high value of education. In general, the Ministry has concluded that those students with immigrant parents have higher academic goals than their fellow students with French born parents from the same social background (Brinbaum et al. 2005: 53). Although the family's aspirations are relatively high for their children's education, many students are being left behind in a system that no longer works.

As mentioned above, treating students as a homogeneous group is problematic because of the students' various socio-economic backgrounds. This Durkheimian

approach to education is challenging because his theory was never intended for a multi-ethnic classroom and the French educational system cannot maintain such a valuation on sameness. The actors have since changed and thus the system needs to be altered to accommodate difference.

Conclusions

This paper situates the multi-ethnic context of the children of Algerians and other immigrants in France. By contextualising the children and grandchildren of immigrants in the educational system, we have a better understanding of arguably one of the most important institutions in France and how it relates to citizenship and nationalism. The implications of citizenship and nationalism in the school system have historical significance, affecting all students in the educational system. French education and its educational system have been a source of national pride, however, the values of laïcité reveal a flawed system failing the students. The implications laïcité have on France's perceptions of citizenship and nationalism forget the children of immigrants who are not considered "French" nor who are considered "immigrants". In addition, laïcité elucidates the gender differences in the educational system revealing a gap between the success of boys and girls. The preliminary findings described above show the importance of familial support, yet this is not enough. For all students to be better integrated into French society, the educational system has to make a shift to accommodate the multiethnic classroom. This is just a part of a larger picture of how children of immigrants are perceived in countries which received and continuously rely on a large amount of immigrants.

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