“La République est Une et Indivisible”: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation in Post-War France

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“Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.” (Renan, 1942:37)

“In modernity, the myth of homogeneity becomes nothing other than a narrative cultural members fashion for themselves in fabricating a binding identity.” (Goldberg, 1997:74)

“Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent …political destiny, are a myth. Nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures, that is a reality.” (Gellner, 1983: 16).

Abstract:
France maintains an ideology of republican universalism where national membership is defined primarily in the realm of the political and the legal. Race and ethnicity have been held as alien to the provision of French citizenship. By drawing on the history of Maghrebi immigration to France and analyzing political and media representations of Maghrebi settlement in the contemporary period this essay will reveal that a deep sense of race is engraved into national borders, defining who might become a French national. The language around “nation” and “national culture” supported the metonymic elaborations which give race and racism their contemporary meanings.

Keywords: France, race, ethnicity, racism, nation, Maghrebi immigration.

Résumé:
La France maintient une idéologie d'universalisme républicain dont l'appartenance nationale est définie principalement dans le domaine politique et juridique. On croit que les considérations ethniques et raciales n’influencent pas l’intégration à la française. En s'appuyant sur l'histoire d'immigration maghrébine en France et en analysant les représentations politiques et médiatiques de gens issues d'immigration maghrébine à l’époque contemporaine, cet article révèle qu'un sens profond de la race est gravé sur les frontières nationales, définissant l'acquisition de la nationalité française. Le discours de «nation» et de «culture nationale» fournit les élaborations métonymiques qui donnent à la race et au racisme leurs significations contemporaines.

Mots-clés : France, race, ethnicité, racisme, nation, immigration maghrébine

Political and media reactions to the North African immigration waves of 1960s and the later mass arrivals as part of family reunification plans during the 1970s and 1980s offer an extensive space for exploring the multiplex ways in which the discourses
of “nation,” “national culture,” “nationhood,” “patriotism,” and “Frenchness” were developed into a series of arguments about “race” in postwar France. In political and media discourse immigration was elevated to the status of a problem, set in the realm of the catastrophic (Taguieff, 1985). Problems related to the economic crises of the early 1970s (e.g., mass unemployment, problems in housing, and decreased social welfare) supplied a discursive platform for focusing popular resentment against North African settlement. However, it was in the sphere of identity and culture, that is “identity politics,” and the position of immigrants vis-a-vis the “national community,” that immigration had its most profound impact as a basis for a populist agenda of exclusion and anti-immigrant mobilization. A populist discourse hinging on notions of “a nation at war,” “endangered national culture,” and a “national community” jeopardized by the intrusion of an “alien stock,” emerged, allowing groups and political parties traditionally labeled as extremist and fascist to atone their political programs to a post-1945 anti-fascist and liberal political environment.

How these ideas have spilled over strict lines of party ideology and echoed by French parties on the left and the right alike, an essential feature of the ideological phenomenon known as “new racism” (Gilroy, 1987), will be the object of analysis in the last section of this essay. Race and ethnicity, I shall argue, have been accepted by the French left and right alike as explanations of France’s national decline and as analytical categories for rendering present-day national crisis intelligible. Thus the rise of populist nationalism as a novel discourse of racialization in postwar French politics will be explored below as an ideological self-refashioning tactic for parties across the spectrum of French politics in a time of waning political representativeness, a reduced role of the institutions of liberal democracy and a widespread post-1945 anti-fascist climate.

However, the resultant racialization of political life in France has appeared in different forms and phases and has involved a variety of irreducible discursive “encodings and decodings” as Hall puts it (1980, p. 22). In this essay, I examine how the racial categories deployed by political discourse around the entry and exist of immigrants in the wake of the North African immigration waves of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and the debates over dual nationals reflected this nationalist (re)turn in postwar and contemporary French politics. However, another significant development in the history of representations of Maghrebi settlement, but beyond the immediate scope of this essay, is the role of the language of law and order and the racialized discourse around Maghrebi lawbreaking in reinventing “race” and “nation,” and supporting new racial categories in the period after immigrants from the Maghreb

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1 Case in point is the October 1977 statement by Lionel Stoléru, the Secretary of State in charge of manual workers under Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, in which he established a correlation between migrant influx and the rise in the number of the French unemployed. Stoléru’s statement was part of a formal plea for anti-immigration legislation and a limit on foreign worker contracts. See Molaic-Minnaert (2009, pp. 13-14). The correlation was established more implicitly by Nouvelle Droite ideologue Alain de Benoist: “The slogan ‘an immigrant = unemployed’ […] is perfectly absurd. But it is equally absurd to argue that there is no relationship between immigration and unemployment (which would mean that the labor market does not depend in any way on the existing manpower volume),” See Benoist (n.d. pp. 18-19).
ceased to arrive in mass.

The National Community versus Alien Cultures

The rise of the extreme right as a strong contestor of vote in France in the mid-80s marked a seismic shift in the postwar French political landscape. The remarkable success of *le Front National* (*FN*) in garnering mass popular support despite constant attempts by other parties to marginalize it raises a number of interesting questions about the nature and the ideology espoused by these radical right parties. One tendency in the literature equates these parties with traditional extreme-right and inter-war ultranationalist groups which lacked a consistent ideological framework and rather pursued a post-modern strategy of appealing to popular prejudices and anxieties. In this view the radical right turned upon a set of issues such as immigration, economic crisis for focusing xenophobic sentiments. However, this position leaves out an essential feature of the contemporary radical right—its ability to marshal itself into an ideological bloc that can compete in the world of ideas (Betz, 2002). The *FN* evinced a considerable rhetorical prowess in countering accusations of racism and xenophobia so long lodged against it by other right and center-right parties. The massive electoral success of the *FN* which would have been hardly possible otherwise was significantly the result of its ability to incorporate racialized notions of “nation” and “national culture” into robust mobilization strategies that did away with the biological and cultural hierarchism of traditional extreme right and fascist groups. The differentialist and ethno-pluralist arguments of the French extreme right group known as *la nouvelle droite* (the new right), mainly those propounded by the conservative anthropologist Alain de Benoist (n.d.), were essential to achieving this task, allowing the *FN* by the mid-80s to gain mainstream prominence as the most die-hard and vociferous mouthpiece of popular resentment with national decline.

Arguments about “national preference,” “the right to difference,” “our own people first,” and “preserving our culture” entered the grammar of *NF* racism and supplied what Solomos and Back (1994) have elsewhere called “the metonymic elaborations” that give race and ethnicity their new meanings. The process in which these ideas have been articulated into a consistent and integrated racial doctrine is described here as “populist nationalism,” yet it has also been variously described as “differentialism” (Taguieff, 1985), “exclusionary populism,” “differentialist nativism,” “reactionary tribalism,” “ethnocentric liberalism,” “holistic nationalism” (Betz, 2002), “ethnic absolutism” (Gilroy, 1993) or what Martin Barker has more famously christened as the “new racism” (Barker, 1981).

The New Right and Populist Nationalism

Although there is a tendency to associate populist nationalism in France with the *Front National* which stands as the quintessential embodiment of the new discourse articulated into a rigorously competitive program of electoral politics, its progenitors are the group of ideologues that came to be known as *la nouvelle droite*. Founded by Benoist in 1968, *the nouvelle droite* was a radical right movement¹ adopting a steadfast

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¹ Many a time have the movement ideologues rejected this label; for instance, Benoist’s success to achieve respectability in leftist and liberal intellectual and political circles enabled the movement to present itself as leftist, a point I want to save for a later discussion.
non-conformist stance that was opposed to egalitarianism, republicanism, capitalism, colonialism, and Christianity. This made the new right into a curious ideological syncretism with a strong political appeal. The party jettisoned Gaullism’s (named after Charles De Gaul) pro-Churchism, but revived its nationalist legacy. It rather espoused an illiberal and pagan political legacy which distinguished it from counterrevolutionary conservative Anglo-Saxon rightist traditions and the interwar radical right movements (Collins, 2013; Tamir, 2014).

Reflecting the larger “anthropological turn” of the 1970s the new right perceived of the need to return to the “origins” of politics and society as a preliminary step in understanding the digression of Western civilization. Instead of letting go of their old ideas and adapting to the new realities of postwar capitalism, the postwar extreme right espoused a thoroughly pessimistic and self-serving philosophy of history that prophesied the end of civilization and the exhaustion of history, clichés derived from the philosophical traditions of la fin de siècle mainly Friederich Nietzsche and Carl Schmitt. In Benoist’s anthropological theory the answer to the disintegration of European civilization, ripped apart by communism, totalitarianism, liberalism and an alien Judeo-Christian tradition was to be found in the rediscovery of the continent’s true origins in the primitive cultural and social structures of a “lost” pagan Indo-European tradition or “the primitive stock,” to borrow from 19th century ideologue Hippolyte Taine’s phraseology (1887:146). The cultural heritage of Indo-Europe refracted to a distinctively late-capitalist environment specifically fashioned his theory of absolute ethnic cultures and the definition of political community that derives from it (Collins, 2013).

The version of politics that derives from differentialist view (albeit the new right established itself more as an intellectual current than a contender in the political arena) emphasizes a culturally homogenous political community whose members are long-standing citizens. Citizenship is attained by the principal of enracination, that is, “the lifelong immersion in the same community” (Collins, 2013:93-94). Thus, although civic participation is emphasized, with vote being the token of popular consent and the harmony of the governing and the governed, foreigners and immigrants are not equally entitled to civic parity. They are exempt on the basis of their ethnic differences from sharing in the national community. This nativist offensive, which sought to do away with the social-liberal consensus, championing a racially homogenous national community, was summed up by le Club de l’Horloge as “the National Preference” (1985).

The reason immigration is a problem for France, or the “immigration problem” (le problème de l’immigration) as Benoist would have it, appears in what he calls the disjunction between “the increasing number of arrivals and the increasing cultural distance between immigrants and the host society.” This argument hinges on the presumption that unlike the interwar settlements, postwar immigrants were culturally distant in that they were mainly “extra-European” (n.d.:18).

In a similar vein, in a television program on immigration entitled Les Dossiers broadcast on Antenne 2 on 14 January 1975, Herve de Fontmichel, Mayor of Grasse drew a distinction between “Italians, Spanish, Portuguese, perfectly welcomed immigrants from the Mediterranean and Arabs” to argue that “other civilizations [emphasis added] pose problems: It is not a question of whether or not they acquire
the French nationality or they fit. It is a transitory migration that must be properly welcomed, but it is necessary that immigrants conduct themselves properly [emphasis added] on the French land" (as cited in Gastaut, 1997:23). While foregrounding the so-called cultural gap, Fontmichel’s statement is also a prefiguration of the more recent debates on the relation of Maghrebi immigrants to the French law enforcement institutions that started to gain currency in the 1980s, but is pivotal to the racial discourse today. Cultural markers that Maghrebi communities bear, which are extended to include their so-called culturally inflected disposition toward breaking the law, are held as proof of their non-assimilability. The assimilability of immigrants is predicated on their ascribed status in a cultural (and racial) hierarchy of social being with those of European, and thereof white origins, exclusively allowed to share in the national community.

The new right is quick, though, to distanitiae its differentialist stance from the overtly xenophobic views entertained by the traditional radical right. Thus, rather than openly contested, immigration is represented as antithetical to the “natural” and “primitive” arrangements in which groups and societies are structured from times immemorial. Benoist writes:

Nothing is anthropologically more normal and more fundamentally legitimate than preserving one’s identity, living among one’s own people [emphasis added] in an ancient and familiar manner. It is not clear why the immigrants would escape the rule and be the only ones willing, in all circumstances, to maximize their economic resources, although the price is the worst uprooting. (n.d.:26)

Benoist further counterbalances the racial overtones of his argument by recasting immigration as an “identitarian fatality” not only for France but also, assuming an unmistakable paternalistic air, for immigrants. Where the role of economic hardships in immigrants’ countries of origin is acknowledged, immigration is presented as a wrong alternative, a “forced uprooting…a form, among others, of deportation or auto-deportation…a disintegration of their habitus [emphasis added]” (p. 24). The right to preserve our homogeneity, the racial kith and kin, is thus projected outwards to define otherized racial groups that are, by virtue of presumed absolute ethnic barriers, assigned to distinct geographies of belonging. Immigration, thus, only complicates the economic adversity of those who undergo its process into an “identity crisis.” This differentialist otherizing discourse is conveyed here through such terms as “Maghrebi community,” “Muslim community,” “Arab culture,” politically acceptable terms that are as yet contextually intended to reify cultural differences and cast ethnic groups as fixed mutually exclusive social formations.

This so-called legitimate, primordial, and sub-rational preoccupation with preserving one’s identity is also central to nouvelle droite’s rationalizations of popular discontent with immigration as articulated through the rise of populist xenophobic movements. For instance, Benoist invokes this nativism in his attempt to account for what he views as the “failure” of multiculturalists and liberals to pierce into the “concrete causes behind Le Penist protestation”. Although he is critical of the FN and squarely rejects liberals’ and leftists’ labels that slot his movement under the same rubric, Benoist is quick to share Laurent Fabius’ observation that “the National Front raises the right questions, but supported the wrong answers.” He warns against what he calls “inept historical comparisons” that equate the FN with the fascist leagues and other radical right paramilitaries of the interwar era. The failure to understand these sub-
rational and primitive dynamics of society implicitly driving Le Pen’s cause, Benoist argues, has led to a tendency among liberals, leftists and radical leftists to dismiss any attempt to discuss immigration, even those made beyond the FN as a “le Penist game,” a “rise of fascism, or racism, if not a return to Vichy …the bad penchant of people …a rarely rigorously defined populism” (p.14).

The Nation at War: The Front National and the Rhetoric of Invasion

In the fashion of la nouvelle droite, the National Front conceived of immigration as a threat to France’s racial integrity. Le Pen’s military history as a sergeant in l’Algerie Coloniale, supported potent metaphors whereby the image of France as a “nation in decline” and a “nation marked by tension” was played up in the Frontist racial discourse. The NF sloganeering in this period drew heavily on this military register. In his bid for presidency in 1988 le Pen declared his desire to “defeat immigration.” He likened his party to a “resistance army” waging a “liberationist struggle” (Le Pen, 1989a). Similarly, in a demonstration led by Le Pen following the death of an Avignon inhabitant who also was a FN supporter murdered by an Algerian, le Pen denounced what he viewed an “increasing insecurity” as a result of Maghrebi settlement. He called the woman a “martyr of a foreign invasion” (Le Pen, 1989b). In a visit to Lyon in 1989 le Pen expressed his contentment for being “in the capital of resistance to the Islamic occupation” (as cited in Schor, 1997:129). On another occasion, he remarked that “when one is not able to defend his identity, its territory, its culture, it is the other that comes to impose his by force, sometimes with guns [emphasis added]”, sometimes with hoofs (1988a).

Le Pen’s history as a sergeant in the French army during both world wars offers an extensive repository for his “invasion maghrébine” rhetoric. In a statement delivered in Montpellier on March 5, 1988, Maghrebi settlement was made analogous to German assaults: “If immigration is to continue,” Le Pen objects, “why did we lose 13 million men in 1914-1918 and 600,000 in 1939-1945 to stop the German immigration?” (Le Pen, 1988b). Another NF figure added that the contemporary situation is even worse than the war period: “I come from a family that has always resisted invaders. This time the invader is even more devious than during the war” (as cited in Schor, 1997:122). Likewise, in his commentary on Muslim settlement from North Africa, Jean-Yves Le Gallou of Club de l’Horloge invoked a World War imagery; “We must fight against the establishment of Islam in France. The main danger to the West is no longer the USSR, although it must be paid heed to; it is Muslim expansionism [emphasis added]” (1997:128).

The war analogy provided a discursive basis for linking France’s conflicts on the borderline and abroad with the domestic conflicts associated with ethnic settlement. The “border” imagery, with all the connotations that borders carry in the French political history (e.g. the border determinations, territorial contestations and crossing patterns attendant to France both as a world colonial power and as an object of Nazi colonial desire) was funneled into the FN anti-immigration discourse and to official framings of the entry and exit of immigrants in this period. Stemming this “foreign invasion” was conceived through drawing the national borders against the inflows of immigrants.

The impoverished projects and neighborhoods on the outskirts of major French cities known as les banlieues were equally central to the invasion narrative of the FN
in the wake of the immigration waves of the 1970s and 1980s. The moral panics around these peripheral areas were galvanized, especially during the “hot summer riots” of the early 1980s, by the image of second generation Maghrebi young males (stereotypically presented as their only dwellers) as violent, hyper-masculinized invading mob, an “enemy within.” Common projections of the banlieues in this period, and well through the 1990s and 2000s, ranged from “la banlieue qui flambe” (suburbs caught in flames), “la banlieue poudrière” (powder-keg suburbs), to “territoires perdus de la République” (lost territories of the republic), all of which were rooted in a myth of France as a nation torn by war. The banlieues were further depicted by Le Pen as “no-go areas for the French people,” playing haven to a “clandestine army,” an “inside colony” (Le Pen, 1978). This warfare repertoire featured prominently in crime-related media, metropolitan police and other law-and-order agencies reports to forge a racialized image of young Maghrebi banlieusards as “an enemy within” (Agzar, 2016).

In the argumentative space of populist nationalism, social cohesion is conceivable only within homogeneity. Nationality is posed as the primary criterion for social division and perception, leading to what Pierre-André Taguieff aptly calls “a homogenizing and a consensual reduction of the social to the national” (Taguieff, 1985:189). The framing of autochthonous and immigrant cultures in polarized “nationalistic” terms recasts them as mutually exclusive social formations, drawing the borders of the “nation” along racial lines. This exclusivist and ethnically absolutist view of ethnicities as bearers of alien, incompatible and even antagonistic cultures, is used to vindicate the banishment of Maghrebs from more substantive meanings of nationhood and national community, ascribing them the status of separate nations. The absolutist premises sustaining the populist ideology of postwar French racism have also significantly appeared in the debates surrounding dual nationality.

Policing Identities: Dual Nationality

The public controversy around the status and the multiple allegiances of dual nationals is a significant, yet overlooked, area where the contradictions between “race” and “nation” in the French model of integration and politics have been thrust into stark relief. Traditionally dual nationality was avoided in France and viewed as getting in the way of citizenship as an exclusive contract between citizens and the state. Until 2009 France refused to liberalize its dual nationality policies, now accepting citizens with two passports (Simon, 2012). Although the current French naturalization law does not require renunciation of one’s nationality, dual nationals have historically been the object of official hostility. Like the populist depictions of postwar mass immigration waves, the polemics dual nationality has engendered have articulated around populist myths of a “homogenous nation” and the “ambiguous” status of ethnic identities vis-à-vis the national community.

The concern over immigrants’ plural belonging, or “hyphenated identities,” emerged under different guises in France and not a single time did it result in discriminatory policies. The issue was officially made the topic of national debate in 2009 when Sarkozy’s government launched “le Grand débat sur l’identité national” (the Great Debate on National Identity) with the aim of codifying what it means to be “French.” Two years before, Sarkozy’s government created the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development which set as its mission “promoting national Identity” (Valluy, 2008; Simon 2008). For immigrants and their descendants,
the debate, which cut across party lines, also suggested the overriding doubts constantly cast upon their loyalty to France. The Great Debate suggested that, for more than a century after Renan’s “que’est que une nation?” speech, “Frenchness” was still an ambiguous concept that defied clear-cut definition.

In the autumn of 2010 conservative radicals issued a parliamentary amendment opposing dual nationality. Although the amendment failed to become policy, the concern surrounding it rekindled later on in the spring of 2011 and in the summer of 2014. This time, the debate over dual nationality and the myth of France as “homogenous nation” linked to it appeared beyond the formal venues of immigration legislation and party politics in the field of sports and leisure culture. Officials in the French National soccer team opposed dual-national players who chose to play for their home teams instead of the French one in the World Cup Tournament in Brazil. Successful attempts made by the Algerian Federation to make the FIFA change its eligibility rules for under-21 bi-national players brought the fold of the Algerian team many French-Algerian players, some of whom were born and raised in France (Hernandez, 2014). The resultant national line-up which, in 2014 led Algeria to qualify for the World Cup finals was pathetically dubbed by the center-left quality daily Le Monde as “the other French team” (2014). The controversy sparked by these incidents, however, was not unprecedented. Concerns over French soccer players’ multiple national allegiances have a long history in the French soccer culture, some of which date back to the political antagonisms associated with l’Algerie Française.

The national unease surrounding the loss of high-profile French players who were also Algerian nationals during the Algerian War of Independence (1958-1962) is a significant historical background for analyzing the more recent debates on bi-national players. Two months before the 1958 World Cup, colonial French-Algerian players Mustapha Zitouni and Rachid Mekloufi, together with twelve other Algerian players who were expected to represent France in the world tournament, left France to Tunisia to join the team for the Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front) known as Equipe FLN in support of the Algerian war of independence. The Equipe FLN was the brainchild of Mohamed Boumezrag, who played professionally in France and who first conceived of the political potential of sports as another front for Algerian liberationist struggle. Boumezrag’s idea of a FLN team was fully endorsed by the FLN leader Ahmed Ben Bella who later became the first president of independent Algeria (Ross, 2014; Nait-Challal, 2008).

Unsuccessful pleas were made by the French Federation in retaliation urging the FIFA to sanction teams that faced the Equipe FLN. Players theoretically covered by the French military service rule, including Mekloufi, were sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison for desertion (Ross, 2014). In Britain this is analogous to the public malaise surrounding Decathlete Daley Thompson’s refusal to hold the British flag at the Commonwealth Games in September 1982. Thompson’s act was interpreted by some as evidence of his “partial commitment to “Britishness” (Gilroy, 1987).

A cultural politics of race and national belonging, both under and after colonialism, has therefore mediated sporting provision and participation in France. The exclusion/inclusion of dual national players highlights the significance of sports as a key area in cultural politics capable of perpetuating institutionalized forms of racism and underlines the pervasiveness of nation and race politics to broader cultural
venues. The play and display of North African athletes in the French official discourse has been contingent on their commitment to an exclusive French identity. As media framing of the Algerian team suggests, the athletic talent of North African players, whether or not they choose to play under France’s national banner, is projected as the cultural bless conferred upon them by virtue of their Frenchness.

However, it was not dual national players opting to play for Algeria that engendered all of the debate on dual nationality in the French soccer culture. The numerous episodes of police-youth confrontation that customarily erupted in the aftermath of various sports events helped fuel the ongoing polemic on the multiple allegiances of North African immigrants and their descendants. Following the Algerian national team’s victory over Russia in June 2014, which led to a historic qualification for Algeria to the World Cup playoffs, tens of thousands of Algerian youth took to the streets of various French cities in jubilation. What seemed to be processions of ecstatic crowds joyfully spilling downtown and waving Algerian flags morphed into bitter clashes with the police force, culminating in over 74 arrests and several incendiary acts.

Propelled by the ensuing clashes, the extreme right anti-immigration Front National’s leader Marine Le Pen, the successor of the FN founder Jean Marie-le-Pen, made an immediate plea to ban dual nationality, blaming the so-called youth “violence” on lenient nationality laws: “This is the demonstration of the total failure of immigration policy in our country, of the refusal to assimilate by a certain number of bi-nationals. …They must choose: they are Algerian or French, Moroccan or French, they can’t be both” (“Marine Le Pen veut mettre fin à la double nationalité,” 2014). Le Pen’s statement is very notable because it also brings into the discussion on dual nationality law-breaking as another difficulty exclusively associated with North African settlement since the “long hot summer” riots of the 1980s. The image of culturally incompatible Maghrebi youth is particularly reinforced by their fundamental antipathy towards the police, an important theme in the sub-cultural politics of the young beurs in France dating back at least to the early 1980s.

The social protest movements that erupted in the suburbs of key French cities between 1981 and 1983 marked the emergence of the second generation Maghrebi young male as a law and order issue in national politics. The racialized image of the young “beurs” as “lawbreakers” is integral to the new cultural racism of the French new right, but not without support on the left. It helped funnel the discourse on incompatible national cultures which had been at use in depicting the mass entry of immigrants into the racialized projections of banlieue youth in the period after mass immigration. It provided a discursive basis on which law and order could be articulated into a new cultural politics where law is perceived as a cultural achievement and the guarantee of

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1In their review of the common arguments in the sociology of sports and race relations, G Jarvie and I. Reid (2002) observe that sport has been viewed as: “(i) inherently conservative and helps to consolidate patriotism, nationalism and racism […] (iii) as a form of cultural politics, has been central to the process of colonialism and imperialism in different parts of the world; (iv) has contributed to unique political struggles which have involved black and ethnic political mobilization and the struggle for equality for black peoples and other ethnic minority groups[…] (vi) is a vehicle for displays of prowess, masculinity and forms of identity, many of which are racist in orientation.” (p. 212)
cultural homogeneity against the culturally-inflected infractions of an “alien stock.”

In a *Front National* pamphlet entitled “La Double Nationalité: Il faut En Finir” (Dual Nationality: It Must be Ended) Marine Le Pen explicitly imputes the rise in lawbreaking in the French *banlieues* to dual nationality laws (“La double nationalité,” n.d.). For Le Pen Dual nationality made for imperfect, simulated citizens who benefited from the rights France offered, but whose real affiliations lied elsewhere. By bringing the police/youths confrontations to the forefront of the ongoing debate over dual nationality, Le Pen is able to reaffirm the longstanding stereotype of North Africans as a pathological settler community. The pamphlet’s call to “strip bi-nationals engaging in delinquent and criminal acts of their French nationality” is a clear suggestion that their “delinquent” predilections stem from their *other* nationality which is recast as incompatible with (and, by extension, excludable from) “Frenchness.” Thus, not only are these descendants of immigrants *unwilling* to invest fully in their French nationality by conforming to the norms of the French discipline and legality, but also are *inherently unable* to do so, due to their fundamental propensity toward lawbreaking which is explained in terms of their *natural* belonging to an alien dysfunctional ethnic culture.

The young hooligans’ partial commitment to France, their deficient “Frenchness,” is suggested first by their appearance that resonated with the Algerian flags they waved—the flag itself is a potent symbol due to its historical significance as a color of protest, namely its connotations with France’s colonial decline and the urban struggle in many French cities during the Algerian liberation struggle. Nice mayor’s ban on “the ostentatious use” of foreign flags in the eve of Algeria’s match against Germany in the last 16 round of the 2014 World Cup (“Brésil 2014: Avant le Match,” 2014) also cements these meanings and is redolent of the official awareness of the long history of protest and the meanings of national fragmentation expressed through the Algerian emblem. The singing of the Algerian anthem as a soundtrack for the clashes instead of *la Marseillaise* which coincidentally, yet symbolically, preceded the French Independence Day for a few days fuels the existing image of France as a fragmented nation.

The image of diverging and antagonistic national cultures openly acknowledged by Le Pen is also galvanized by the symbolic significance of the locations in which the confrontations took place as well as those from which the rebellious youths emanated. In Paris, where the major confrontations occurred, the throngs of qualification-frenzied youths set off largely from the impoverished *banlieues* of Cliché-Sous-Bois to iconic “national” (and colonial metropolitan) sites, namely the *Champs-Élysées* where they were met by metropolitan riot police with tear gas. The framing of the *banlieues* in media and neoliberal bureaucracy narratives of urban space as alien, secluded areas that do not belong to the system (conveyed for instance by the frequent use of foreign urban space referents such as *slums* and *ghettos* associated the United States) combines with the powerful image of the dissident young *banlieusards* that inhabit them to convey unmistakable meanings of an *alien inquisition*, a “nation within a nation.” Race, metonymically garbed in the language of inherently disruptive alien cultures, supported the fault line separating these warring, irreconcilable national ideals.

In the ideology of populist nationalism immigration is framed in a simplistic either/or-ism whereby the national community has to choose between “being itself and unified or bear the consequences of dissolution, crisis, decadence and death”
(Taguieff, 1985:179). The so-called threat posed by mass immigration was framed in terms of pollutant, inassimilable and pathological ethnic cultures in the political discourse of the *nouvelle droite,* and as an *alien invasion* in the discourse of the *Front National.* Notions of “Frenchness,” “nationhood,” “national culture,” and “national identity” furnished an alternative discursive space in which the contradictions around race and the racial politics of social differentiation were camouflaged. Another feature of populist nationalism in this period, perhaps its more striking property, is its ability to host a convergence between the xenophobic ideologies of the extreme right and the political language of the French left. The conditions that led to the emergence of populist nationalism as a *common* space in the argumentation of the French left and right during the 70s and 80s, and the process in which this carried out to their (increasingly converging) views on immigration will be the focus of the remainder of this essay.

“Ni Gauche, Ni Droit: Français” : The Patriotic Consensus

The populist premises of the *nouvelle droite* helped refashion postwar French extreme right parties into powerful political forces with a massive electoral appeal. However, populist nationalism would not remain the ideological monopoly of the right. Many of its foundational assumptions cut across traditional divisions of party ideology, gaining a solid ground among parties on the left. Profound economic shifts in the 1970s and 1980s, represented by economic crisis, the rise of neoliberal economy, mass deindustrialization, and the proliferation of service sector with no syndical tradition led to the evisceration of the French working class, and with it class politics. As economic policies under deindustrialization ceased to be divisive questions, the French left and right turned to social questions to renovate their political projects and exaggerate their partisan differences. Immigration was a key theme around which the French left and right wings succeeded to orchestrate their partisan ideologies into a consensual discourse of xenophobic patriotism.

The volatile nature of party affiliations and intellectual persuasions during the 1970s and 1980s hosts some curious manifestations of this ideological symbiosis. For instance, the National Front, which was founded on 5 October 1972, brought to the fold of the extreme right scattered fragments that included Catholic fundamentalists, former militant extremists of the 1960s, moderate rightists, but also previously communist and socialist fringes disappointed with “unemployment, insecurity, and moral laxity” (Schor, 1997:117). Le Pen, whose electoral sloganeering hinged on populist themes of delinquency and unemployment as “moral panics” associated with mass immigration, garnering a fine success (36 deputy positions) in the 1986 French legislative elections, swung to the far right wide segments of the working class who felt forsaken by *la gauche au pouvoir* (Masclet, 2004), leading to what Robert Badinter dubbed as “*lepenisation des esprits*” (Tevanian & Tissot, 2015). Le Pen’s phenomenal rise to national politics led many leftist parties to consider the electoral and populist potential of patriotism. By the mid-80s, discourses around “nation” and “national identity,” as areas largely dominated by the extreme right, entered the political lexicon of the French left.

The shrunken appeal of the Communist Party (PC) in the 1970s, marked by political ossification and a *vieillissement culturel* in the context of a thematic renewal (critique of the state, feminism) and a fundamental orientation of many communist local state officials toward rightist xenophobic agendas played to the hands of the Socialist Party (PS) which in 1976 became the leading party of the left. Freshly politicized in the
1968 political environment, the PS emerged as a stalwart proponent of integration and lodged a searing critique of the conservative emphasis on assimilation. The party was opposed to the segregationist policies under Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (1974-1981) and posed as the mouthpiece of immigrant workers. Although the party advocated control of immigration inflow, it rejected the PC’s emphasis on repatriation (Milza, 1985). These progressive integrationist commitments were at the forefront of Mitterrand’s 1981 presidential program which defined as its key objective ensuring new rights for immigrants such as vote, protection against racism, the right to difference (as opposed to the classical republican emphasis on assimilation), and the right to family reunification (Maxime & Maruani, 2014).

The socialist press coverage of the tragic house fire in the city of Aubervilliers in January 1970, which generally marks off the beginning of media treatment of the migrant question in France, exemplifies this emergent interest in immigration in the political agenda of the left and those of its affiliated media. The Combat described the event as “the first image of the year: five dead in a leper shack, the damp walls, the roof is leaking. The first look of the year toward these street sweepers and scavangers” (as cited in Gastaut, 1997:17). L’Express’s (1997) account of the events was used to draw a grimmer and larger picture of the Parisian suburbs:

The house is primarily a warehouse crammed with broken flippers and rotten mattresses. Then it is a courtyard surrounded by high walls where bowls filled with Couscous seemed to fill the floor. A gaping hole, black and bold, opens in a wall. Up in the corner of the old warehouse was built a dormitory with long black corridor, all windows are blocked, crammed with sixty iron bunks. The bedding is of indefinable color and material....Here and there are clean shirts hung on display like trophies. (p.17)

The racialized premises of this account notwithstanding, suggested first by the title “Des négriers dans la ville” (Niggers in the City) but also by the stereotypical depiction of Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan households as repositories of cultural and social decay, it typifies a general interest in placing immigration on the political agendas of the left.

Having garnered a hard success with 51.76 % of the vote which brought François Mitterrand to the Élysée as the first Socialist president of la cinquième république, the newly elected socialist government sought to live up to its egalitarian and progressive promises. A number of measures were taken that included abrogating Barre-Bonnet and l’aide au retour laws, regularizing 130,000 undocumented immigrants, and enlarging family reunification plans. In May 1984, however, under the pretext of curbing the inflow of clandestine immigrants, l’aide au retour law was reintroduced resulting in the deportation of many workers in the automobile industry.

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1 In the run-up to the 1981 presidential race, for instance, Socialist candidate François Mitterrand urged that: “Quant au retour dans le pays d’origine il doit résulter du libre choix de l’intéressé, et pour se passer dans les meilleurs conditions, il doit être planifié en accord avec le pays d’accueil.” (see “Réponses des candidats,” (1981).
sector.¹ These restrictive measures were a source of cleavage inside Mitterrand’s coalition. Vehement criticisms were lodged by the non-communist and moderate left recriminating those policies as antithetical to leftist. The center-left Le Monde Diplomatique, for instance, chided these measures, arguing that “the conflation of ‘immigrants’ and ‘clandestine immigrants’… fuels the xenophobic and racist causes, suggesting in depth, that, after all, it is Mr. Le Pen who is right” (Lemoine, 1984).

The remarkable rise of the National Front in the 1983 municipal elections provides an indispensable backdrop against which this shift in the left’s outlook on immigration can be fathomed. Faced with incessant rightist opposition, led by Jean Claude Gaudin of the RPR (Rassemblement pour la République), and a growing populist concern over a threatened national security, Mitterand's government adopted a security-based agenda that proved very little different from those of its Gaullist predecessors. This fundamental conversion into a politics of “law and order,” or what one Le Monde journalist aptly called the “the hardening of the left” (le durcissement de la gauche) (Vaudano, 2014), significantly placed the left at an ever-increasing distance from the progressive agenda it had put out in elections, eroding the line traditionally separating its politics from that of the conservative camp. Mitterrand reneged on his commitment to extend franchise to immigrants, declaring in 1989 that, as far as immigration was concerned, a “tolerance threshold has been overstepped” (“Déclarations De Mitterrand a Sarkozy 1989,” 2006). This “realist” shift was also poignantly expressed in a 1988 statement by socialist deputy Michel Rocard: “I don’t think we can host all the world’s misery; nor can France remain what it is: a land of political exile” (Deltombe, 2009).

The depictions of the 1981-1983 “race” riots in the left-aligned media also significantly demonstrate this fundamental shift in La Gauche’s outlook on immigration. Le Nouvel Observateur described a Lyon banlieue as “a hideaway for young, angry Arabs, unemployed and more or less delinquent” (as cited in Rinaudo, 1997). Similarly, on 30 October 1980, the historically-communist L’Humanité established a link between insecurity, mass unemployment, and immigration. The paper described a supposedly “difficult cohabitation” issue in Communist-led municipalities in terms of “cultural and social difficulties” aggravated by economic hardships. It stressed that “police and justice must perform their duty via-a-vis our youth and our people [emphasis added]” (as cited in Milza, 1985).

In the communist party, the shift into xenophobic populism is even an older development, some instances of which could be discerned in the early 1980s. Statements by communist officials in the wake of an anti-drug campaign in the commune of Montingy (Val-d’Oise) in February 1981 provide a vivid illustration of how the populist premises of the extreme right, namely the image of Maghrebis as a

¹In one statement, Mitterrand declared: “I have to say that…I have duties; I have to protect the jobs of the French. I have to avoid this sort of exasperation because a lot of people have not reflected enough and have reacted rather instinctively. They have to understand and we have to make them understand. We shouldn’t be in the ranks of hate exploiters; we should put an end to these unpleasant, detestable feelings; but there is this reality…Clandestine workers have to quit France. We will do it decently but correctly, ensuring that justice is respected. But we will do it” (“Document INA,” 1983).
contagious, pathological and anti-social community of settlers, gained currency in the communist discourse on immigration in this decade. The campaign was sparked by drug-peddling complaints lodged against a Moroccan household. Communist mayor Georges Marchais accused the drug peddlers of “spoiling the French youth.” Interestingly, Marchais’ statement turns upon a key discursive strategy which, as I elaborate elsewhere (Agzar, 2016), is a common usage in the populist and media discourse around so-called “ethnic crimes.” The emphasis it places on the ethnic origin of the perpetrators (Moroccan) suggested here alternatively by reference to the nationality of their victims (French) presents white French youths, or the so-called les Français de souche, as the only victims of drug crimes—Maghrebis being invariably perpetrators rather than victims. It also ignores the disproportion between the number of Moroccan immigrants and the minority involved in drug peddling. An even graver ideological outcome of this juxtaposition is that, in depicting the Maghrebi family as non-French, in complete disregard to the fact that many of those called Maghrebi crime perpetrators were practically “French” since they were born and raised in France, it recasts “Maghrebi” and “French” as mutually exclusive categories. It also overlooks the rather contingent aspects of identity determinations and the multiplex processes whereby the expressive cultures of Maghrebi immigrants have intricately overlapped with “Frenchness” and the French national identity, decisively (re)defining what it means to be “French” today.

The manner in which nationalism in the politics of the French left has ambiguously been turned into an exclusionary discourse about race may bear sufficient answers for socialists and communists as to why the banlieues youth remained distant from their representative institutions. For instance, the articulation of the 1980s, 1990s and 2005 riots and the mini-riots that erupted between them around alternative mobilization themes (race, ethnicity, neighborhood, and generation) other than crude notions of social class also coincided with a fundamental preoccupation among the ranks of the French left with the metaphysics of nationhood and patriotism. Asked on their relation to les jeunes des cités, Communist representatives in Grenvilliers (Saint-Seint Denis) replied that this relation “cannot be overestimated … [They] have never been close to us or rarely militated in labor unions such as the CGT, [so] they were not really close to our ideas and we have not been able to meet them and integrate them politically in the labor unions” (as cited in Masclet, 2004).

Conclusion

As a new racism, populist nationalism is racism without races, based not on crude notions of racial inferiority/superiority but on the irreducibility of cultural differences and lifestyles, and by extension, the undesirability of border crossing. In this essay I have attempted to illustrate how the discourses on the entry and exit of immigrants and the debates around dual nationality involved the articulation of racial categories into rigorous cultural panics that favor notions of “nation” and “national culture.” These ideas furnished the terms in which complex racial meanings got to be articulated in this period.

The ability of the racial ideology around “nation,” discussed above as populist nationalism, to cut across traditional party lines is one of its most striking features. I have explored the conditions that led to the emergence of a distinctively leftist xenophobic discourse articulated in nationalistic terms. A comparison of the leftist outlook—including that of the left-aligned media—on ethnic settlement in the 1980s
with that of the 1970s clarifies some contours of this *tournant*. Ideas around nation and nationalism, largely associated with the populism of the new right, seemed to provide an answer to the left’s undermined position, infusing race and racial meanings into class politics. The “crisis of representation” in postwar French politics interestingly concurred with an increased obsession with the metaphysics “nationhood” and “national identity” in the political sensibility and culture of the French left and right.

Lastly, it bears repetition that as social and political constructs, racisms are unstable and may vary according to historical, political and institutional contexts. Thus, one area that begs excavation, but beyond this discussion, is how the racist ideology on Maghrebi settlement has evolved since mass immigration from North Africa came to a halt. For instance, the public discourse around the so-called “ethnic crime” and “Maghrebi lawbreaking” offers an interesting space for exploring how the racial arguments around “nation” have been reinvented in the post-mass immigration era.

An equally interesting area for research may include examining instances in which social collectivities inside France, including those that might be readily identified as “white,” have been forged and imagined along different identity axes that do not coincide with national borders, such as diaspora, ethnicity, region, neighborhood, and gender. These identities have largely escaped the narrative of a homogenous national community. Attending to their socio-political and cultural dynamics might open up new critical horizons for reconceptualizing race and nation in the contemporary juncture.
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