Part 8

Religion, culture, identity, and education

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Cultural diversity, Muslims, and education in France and England:
Two contrasting models in Western Europe

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Introduction

It is widely accepted that European nation-states have not subscribed to a common or overarching response to religious minority diversity (Modood, Triandafyllidou, & Zapata-Barrero, 2006). This appears to be particularly evident in educational settings, and may be explained by the heterogeneity of European education systems, as well as the diverging role that religion assumes within different European nation-states (Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, & Willaime, 2007). The most compelling explanation, however, arguably rests in the diverging "philosophies of integration" that have historically shaped these different nation-states' responses to religious minority diversity (Favell, 2003). Indeed, one of the best illustrations of this continuing differentiation may be found in the contrasting interactions between religious diversity and education in France and England.

It is has been argued that the presence of migrant and post-migrant children in France has challenged a model of French republicanism which seeks to educate its future citizens by abstracting them from their cultural, including religious, particularities (Déloye, 1994). This is because the French education system has historically set out to construct a unitary French Republic, one that is characterized by a high degree of uniformity in its *public* identity, culture, and language. It is unsurprising then to learn that the development of multicultural educational policies in France has very effectively been resisted (Lorcerie, 2003; Morel, 2002), though,

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paradoxically, racial categories clearly operate in schools, where processes of discrimination and segregation are plainly evident (Laforgue, 2006; Payet, 1999; Rinaudo, 1999; Van Zanten, 2006). Conversely, the children of postwar migrants who arrived as citizens of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth (CUKC) have long been recognized as ethnic and racial minorities requiring state support and differential treatment to overcome barriers in their future exercise of citizenship. Indeed, part of the philosophy of integration that this "British multiculturalism" has given rise to frequently emerged from, and therefore attributed great emphasis to, minority particularity in educational policy (Modood & May, 2001). In this chapter we contrast these two national cases by focusing upon examples of "difference" in specific educational accommodation or non-accommodation that have assumed greatest prominence in each country.

These include contestations in France over *laïcité* and the accommodation of Islam and Muslims, especially over the Muslim headscarf, that have emerged in a context marked by an anxiety over the future of the "republican model of integration." Alongside the debates on *laïcité* rest others concerning the development of religious Muslim schools as well as the ways in which "subaltern histories" of immigration and colonialism may or may not be taught. British debates, meanwhile, have long incorporated a dialogue between advocates of antiracist education and multicultural education, with their competing political imperatives and policy implications. While the British approach has historically been marked by a high degree of pragmatic accommodation on the issue of uniforms (including headscarves) and dietary requirements, it is true that this trajectory has been affected by recent policy shifts aimed at a "civic re-balancing" (Meer & Modood, in press; Modood, 2007) that is perhaps epitomized by the introduction of citizenship education, as well as a renewed hesitancy over the issue of religiously specific schools within the publicly funded sector.

The French case: Islam and *laïcité* in public schools

The French system of secularism, which is more widely referred to as *laïcité*, did not find itself in conflict with Islam until the end of the 1980s. This changed when in January 1983 the then prime minister, Pierre Mauroy, problematized the trade union complaints of "Moroccan Muslim" workers during an industrial dispute. At the time, the reference to Islam in an industrial dispute appeared curious, but took a less ambiguous form in the "Muslim headscarf" affair that followed it. This occurred when the school director of a secondary school in Creil (near Paris) invoked the principle of *laïcité* in his decision to exclude three pupils who wore the Muslim headscarf. When in November 1989 the Conseil d'État (the highest administrative court in France) concluded that the wearing of the headscarf is not contradictory to the values of the secular and republican school, it encouraged a liberal reading of *laïcité*. This insisted that the 1905 Act on the separation of the Churches and the State could warrant school exclusions only for proselytism and the disruption of school activities, and school directors were advised to evaluate the situation on a case-by-case basis.

Why, then, did this issue re-emerge 15 years later? Had the wearing of headscarves increased during these years? Were the girls younger and the pressures from their families greater? These are empirical questions that remain unanswered but which were asserted during the decision in July 2003 by Jacques Chirac to set up the Commission of Reflection for the Implementation of the Principle of *Laïcité* in the Republic, known as the Stasi Commission (Stasi, 2004). Following the Commission's main recommendations, the government adopted the March 15, 2004 Act, stating that, "in public primary, secondary and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothes

through which the pupils conspicuously display a religious belonging is forbidden" (LOI no. 2004–228, 2004).

This Act was enforced through an administrative regulation on May 18, 2004 which stated that "the prohibited signs and clothes are those by which, whatever they may be called, one is immediately identified by his or her religious beliefs, such as the Muslim headscarf, the kippa or a cross of manifestly excessive dimension" (Ministerial Regulation, 2004). The Muslim headscarf, contrary to a "discreet" Christian cross, was considered to be a conspicuous religious sign.

It is worth remembering that this Act did not stem from a "social demand" but arose from the political sphere itself, emotively relayed by the media (Lorcerie, 2005; Tévanian, 2005). Indeed, public and media discourses tended to reduce the debate to a "clash of civilizations" between an enlightened West and a backward, dangerous, and sexually oppressive Muslim culture. Gender equality was, thus, the second dimension of the controversy, for by invoking the oppression of women, through a strategic use of references to Afghanistan and Iran, the headscarf was frequently characterized as a sign of the subordination of women in "Muslim cultures." In this way the debate on *laïcité* has fostered a sharp return of assimilationism and contributed to a rise in Islamophobia (Geisser, 2003).

Throughout this process a number of other issues were raised which the Stasi Commission recommended government act upon, not least the accommodation of religiously informed dietary requirements as well as the recognition of Kippour and Aïd-el-Kébir as holidays in all public schools. It is worth noting that, since the beginning of the 1980s, there has been provision in school canteens for an optional alternative meal to pork dishes, and more recently Jewish and Muslim minorities have sought the introduction of kosher and halal food. Such provision has faced strong "republican" hostility against adapting a common framework to meet the specific needs of religious minority pupils. Nevertheless, and despite the centralized organization of France's educational system, internal rules for the provision of food within school canteens are issued by local authorities. This means that, while they follow general guidelines, different approaches can in practice be implemented. For example, a recent decision of the Lyon city council to launch a "complete meal without meat" (O. Bertrand, 2007) has been conceived as a compromise to the proponents of *laïcité* and pupils who do not eat pork *without* accommodating the provision of halal or kosher meat. Due to be implemented from September 2008, the decision was taken after intense discussions between the local representatives of the main religions, the main secular organizations, and the city council.

Some Muslim organizations have lobbied for a greater accommodation of religious dietary requirements and have criticized some practices of public institutions. In 2004, the Villefranche-sur-Saône city council sent a letter to all Muslim parents insisting that "all children must eat of each served dish, even in small quantity." Muslim organizations such as the National Council for the Muslim Cult (read as "religion") restated that their demands for halal food in schools were legitimate and complained about the narrow interpretation of *laïcité* evidenced in such attitudes. The official position of the Ministry of National Education proceeded by stating that, although canteens were not obliged to provide substitution meals in order to take into account religious specificities, they were invited to propose diversified meals for health reasons.

One of the most liberal recommendations of the Stasi Commission was the proposal to include the feasts of Aïd-el-Kébir and Kippour in the (long) list of holidays in public schools. This has not been taken up, for President Jacques Chirac rejected the idea by stating that the school calendar already included numerous holidays. Nonetheless, he stated his wish that no pupil would have to apologize for being absent during a religious holiday, and that no important school event should be organized on such days. The interpretation of this benign tolerance

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is, however, subject to the inclinations of school authorities and the strength of religious communities at the local level.

The British case: antiracist and multicultural education

In 2002, a British Muslim high school pupil was prohibited from attending her school while she wore a jilbab (a full-length gown). Although the pupil maintained that this garb was prescribed by her religion as she understood it, her school considered it be a contravention of its uniform policy, and feared that other pupils too would be subject to undue pressure to adopt "stricter" forms of Islamic dress if it allowed this pupil to wear hers. On first sight, there appear to be striking similarities between this and other salient cases that have arisen over the issue of *laïcité*. On closer inspection, however, the contrast becomes sufficiently great to discourage any simple parallels. For instance, the British school in question had already accommodated uniform changes that incorporated the wearing of, amongst others, trousers instead of skirts, shalwar kameez (a tunic and baggy trousers), and headscarves displaying school colors. Just as importantly, however, the school maintained that these accommodations had been made in consultation with the wishes of local parents and communities.

When a resolution to this case was eventually achieved, four years later through judicial means in the House of Lords (Britain's highest court of appeal), Lord Bingham ruled in favor of the school but stressed that:

> This case concerns a particular pupil and a particular school in a particular place at a particular time. . . . The House is not, and could not be, invited to rule on whether Islamic dress, or any feature of Islamic dress, should or should not be permitted in the schools of this country.
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> (*Begum v. Headteacher and Governors of Denbigh High School*, 2006)

The clear emphasis was, then, on local level pragmatism instead of national level enforcement. Indeed, the jilbab case was settled nearly a quarter of a century after another watershed House of Lords ruling *against* a private school which refused enrollment to an orthodox Sikh boy (who wore long hair under a turban) unless the boy removed his turban and cut his hair (*Mandla v. Dowell Lee*, 1983). The ensuing acceptance that Sikh pupils had the right to wear turbans, because they informed an important part of Sikh identities (mirrored in other spheres beyond education; see Singh, 2005), consolidated the impulse for schools to seek negotiated accommodations of minority differences with a view to incorporating them within the schooling environments. Each case thus suggests that religion has been an important part of the ways in which migration-related diversity has given rise to educational challenges in England. It is perhaps surprising then to note how the most prominent approaches to minority cultural differences, antiracist and multicultural education, have historically had very little to say of religion in education.

For a long time, antiracist education was premised upon the view that education should confront and challenge prevailing societal attitudes and practices marked by racist dynamics (Modood & May, 2001). Throughout the 1980s it was given a sense of urgency in evidence that some minorities were much less likely to achieve the basic qualifications necessary for employment, let alone the social mobility aspired to by their parents (Stone, 1981). Antiracist educators sought to redress these tendencies through an explicit recognition of racism in society, and a greater awareness and sensitivity amongst educators of racial issues, alongside the promotion of

positive images of Black people through the teaching of Black history and promotion of Black role models (Mullard, 1985; Troyna, 1987). It was applied in educational policy when the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), with the support of some left-wing radicals (including the former mayor of London Ken Livingstone), became receptive to its ideas. Indeed, much of what we know as both antiracist and multicultural education has been enacted at the local education authority level. This is because local education authorities (LEAs) are responsible for education within the jurisdiction of county councils and metropolitan boroughs, which includes responsibility for all state schools with the exception of those that apply for and are afforded "voluntary aided status" (and can therefore opt out) under the terms of the 1944 Education Act (a category of further relevance later in the chapter). Because of these and other powers, including section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966, which afforded local author-ities additional funds to support the presence of significant numbers of ethnic minorities requiring language and other access assistance, in many multi-ethnic urban areas LEAs have been able to encourage antiracist and multicultural initiatives in the face of – and at the cost of – Msome vociferous opposition.

This might be characterized as "municipal drift," a further example of which can be found in one of the earliest adoptions of multicultural praxis. This follows Birmingham LEA's intro-duction in 1975 of a new school curriculum "which required that pupils learn about and learn from the great world faiths present in the city" (Hewer, 2001, p. 517). Other LEAs promoted innovations including the provision of halal meat and school uniform amendments. Indeed, the guidelines issued by Bradford LEA professed (a) equality of treatment, opportunity, and services in shared educational settings, alongside (b) an equal right to the maintenance of distinctive identities and loyalties of culture, language, religion, and custom. Both of these positions were set out in its LEA policy statement (City of Bradford Local Administrative Memorandum No. 2, 1982), and it is important to emphasize that both antiracist and multicultural education were diffuse conceptions of educational reform, and to that extent it is difficult to present either as entirely distinct from the other (Troyna, 1987, p. 311).

Teaching religions and "subaltern histories" in the French republican school

There is one great exception to *laïcité* in France: the region of Alsace-Lorraine (in the East of France) has had a special status since its annexation by Germany from 1870 to 1918. Owing to this annexation it was not bound by the laws on *laïcité*, and religious education is thus still compulsory in public schools, with teachers appointed by the recognized Churches (that is the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religions, but not Islam) and paid for by the State. The content of the curriculum is defined by the Churches, and pupils can be exempted if the parents seek it, but attendance is the rule. In practice about half of the pupils in primary schools, two-thirds in secondary schools, and many in high schools do not attend religious education classes. The continuity of this special status in Alsace-Lorraine more than 100 years after the 1905 Act, despite numerous criticisms, reveals the contradictions of the implementation of *laïcité* in France.

At the national level, there has been a growing concern for several years for better teaching of religions in public schools. The idea that religion is a fundamental cultural fact (and not only a belief), and thus that it has to be taught in public schools, was developed between the 1989 Joutard Report (Czajka, Joutard, & Lequin, 1992) and the 2002 Debray Report. During the 1990s, some reforms promoted a better integration of religions into the curriculum, and in 1996 the origin of Christianity was introduced in the history curriculum of the first year of

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high school, while the origins of Islam were omitted. The 2002 Debray Report recommended integrating the teaching of religion into existing disciplines (starting with history, but also languages or arts), and insisted on the necessity of providing specific training to teachers and school directors.

Issues of national identity are highly politicized in France, and in 2007, for the first time since World War II, a Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development was created with the aim of reinforcing and promoting national identity. This is problematic because immigrants, and more generally ethnic minorities, are conceived of as outsiders who are challenging this national identity and therefore should be required to conform to it (Noiriel, 2007). Alongside this, since 2005, a growing debate has developed over the "colonial fracture" and the debt of the French State towards the people of the former colonies, in North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the West Indies (Blanchard, Bancel, & Lemaire, 2005). The adoption of the February 23, 2005 Act (named the Mekachera Act) sought to recognize the positive contribution of French repatriates from North Africa (*pieds noirs*), but triggered a scandal because its article 4 encouraged the official history curriculum to give "the place that it deserves" to "the positive role played by the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa." This clause was finally revoked after much opposition (R. Bertrand, 2006).

Debates on the contemporary consequences of the past are crucial in the educational system and have been reactivated by the opening in 2007 of the National Centre for the History of Immigration (Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration), conceived from the 1990s as a project aiming at valorizing immigration as constitutive of the national history. It is leading on the need to teach (and to teach differently) the history of immigration at school, together with the National Institute for Pedagogic Research (Institut National de la Recherche Pédagogique [INRP]), which recently argued that the history of immigration is absent from the curriculum (Falaize, 2007).

Difference and divergence in England: from multicultural to citizenship education

In England, meanwhile, through an elision of political and cultural identities, antiracist and multicultural education became inherently oppositional educational movements. One outcome was that, where multiculturalism was, somewhat erratically, introduced into multi-ethnic British schools, it was regarded by many antiracist educators as "an instrument of control and stability rather than one of change" (Mullard, 1985, p. 50). A recurring antiracist criticism of multicultural education concerned its alleged lack of politics, which related to the antiracist desire to predicate race equality in education on an overarching, oppositional, political identity. Hence groups such as the All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism (ALTARF), which emerged in the late 1970s, and the publicly funded Constructions of Antiracist Education programs, which developed in the early 1980s through the policies of the ILEA, sought to distance themselves from ethnic or cultural particularity by embracing a singular politics of Black solidarity. In this way they presented their movement as an oppositional pedagogy premised on a political conflict between Black and White interests (Modood, 1988).

The Swann Commission (1985) tried to move beyond this binary logic by promoting and characterizing a multicultural society as one that "values the diversity within it, whilst united by the cohesive force of the common aims, attributes and values which we all share . . . diversity within unity" (Swann, 1985, chap. 1, para. 6). In many respects the tension between antiracist

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and multicultural education are encapsulated in the various dynamics that concerned this report, for, although it was focused upon issues of diversity related to educational settings, its major contribution was that it saw "the issues of ethnic minority children as closely tied up with the basic character of mainstream education" (Verma, 1989, p. 3) and therefore an issue for society as a whole – *just as antiracists had wanted their conceptions of racism to be viewed*. This was nevertheless a limited multiculturalism since it explicitly precluded state support of linguistic pluralism (in terms of "mother tongue" teaching) or the expansion of religious schools, seeking instead to make each matters of private concern. Moreover, its recommendations were not widely adopted, because the Conservative government made radical changes to the autonomy of state schools, previously under greater control of LEAs, with the introduction of the Education Reform Act (ERA) in 1988. This Act required every school to adhere to a curriculum that was centrally defined and *compulsorily* prescribed, and enforced the mandatory testing of pupils at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16 years (with the concomitant publication of school league tables as a measure of school performance and success). The ERA specifically curtailed the powers of the influential Labour-controlled Inner London LEA, which is home to a very large proportion of England's ethnic minority school population.

It is arguable that one policy shift which this earlier centralization has facilitated includes the introduction of citizenship education in England. Citizenship education is a contested idea and set of policies that denote a variety of implications in different contexts (Gutmann, 2003). Its formal introduction into British schools is a recent development, and its late introduction in England, particularly when compared with North America and some European countries, is an interesting anomaly. As Kerr (1999, p. 204) has put it, "the avoidance of any overt official government direction in schools concerning political socialization and citizenship education can almost be seen as a national trait," and indeed can be seen to be paralleled by the equally late adoption in England of the National Curriculum. Similarly, Sir Bernard Crick himself, chair of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) commission into citizenship education, states that:

> We were the last civilised country almost in the world to make citizenship part of the national curriculum. I think we thought we didn't need it being the mother of all parliaments and a model to the world of parliamentary government; I think those ideas lingered on and long past reality.
>
> (B. Crick, personal communication, June 27, 2007)

As his report recommending the introduction of citizenship education put it, part of the groundswell for its recent emergence is undoubtedly a sense of "civic deficit" epitomized by voter apathy amongst young people which the report claims "is inexcusably bad and should and could be remedied" (QCA, 1998, sec. 3., para. 10). To this end the QCA, under the commission chaired by Crick, recommended the implementation of a coordinated national strategy for the statutory requirement for schools to spend around 5% of their curriculum time teaching three interdependent elements of citizenship education. These would be (a) social and moral responsibility, (b) community involvement, and (c) political literacy.

Whilst these reiterate elements of the Swann Commission, they perhaps also constitute a modification of earlier approaches. It is noteworthy that there is no explicit reference to antiracism and multiculturalism, confirming to some that citizenship education represents a disengagement from these issues. Osler and Starkey (2001, p. 293), for example, charge the QCA report with "institutional racism" for demanding that "minorities must learn to respect the laws, codes and conventions as much as the majority" (QCA, 1998, pp. 17–18). This they take

as evidence of a "colonial approach . . . that runs throughout the report" and which "falls into the trap of treating certain ethnicities as 'Other' when it discusses cultural diversity" (Osler & Starkey, pp. 292–293.). Sir Bernard Crick repudiates the view that his committee singled out minorities, saying his committee

> were not willing to give the public the view that the major thrust of citizenship was race relations. We said damn it, it's about the whole population including the majority . . . pupils should learn, respect and have knowledge of national, regional ethnic and religious differences. We were simply taking a broader view. We thought that . . . all our nation's children should receive an education that would help them to become active citizens: all our nation's children.
>
> (Personal communication, June 27, 2007)

This need not be evidence of an assimilatory "retreat" from antiracism or multiculturalism, however, but, as Meer and Modood (in press) have argued, something that might be characterized as a "re-balancing" of broader discourses of antiracism and multiculturalism. Indeed, the entire idea of "citizenship education" is in itself surely evidence of this.

Faith schools in England

The issue that really cuts across the development of antiracism, multiculturalism, and citizenship education is that of state-funded faith-based schooling (Meer, in press). It is worth noting that antiracism has often been stridently secularist and implicitly, if not explicitly, ambivalent or opposed to faith-based schooling, and that the multiculturalism of the Swann Commission expressly ruled out the religious schools sought by recent religious minorities such as Muslims and Hindus (but maintained the status quo in respect of more established Jewish and Catholic state-funded faith-based schools). The Crick Report, meanwhile, did not really engage with the issue of faith schooling because it fell outside its remit.

These discursive dismissals and policy oversights are problematic when we recognize that there are currently over 4,700 state-funded Church of England schools, over 2,100 Catholic schools, 35 Jewish schools, and 28 Methodist schools, dwarfing the 7 Muslim schools, or the single Sikh school or Seventh Day Adventist school. It is also indicative of "a modern society which is widely perceived as increasingly secular but is paradoxically increasingly multi-faith" (Skinner, 2002, p. 172). Of all newer minorities that have mobilized for faith schools, Muslims have perhaps been the most vocal. Beyond the issue of parity, Idreas Mears, director of the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS), provides an insight into why this may be:

> I think a general point which is very important to get across is that the state schools do not handle the meaning of Muslim identity well for the children. In actual fact, the way that general society looks at Muslims is as an immigrant minority-ethnic-racial-group and how young people are made to look at themselves through the teaching in state schools tells them "you are this marginal group/minority group and have therefore got to integrate with the mainstream." So there's a process of marginalization and that often leads to resentment. But in a Muslim school that identity is built upon being a Muslim not an ethnic minority.
>
> (Personal communication, April 1, 2006)

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Indeed, there are several factors informing Muslim mobilization for faith schools. The first and broadest is paralleled by the interest in other religiously informed faith schooling, and stems from the desire to incorporate more faith-based principles into an integrated education system, so that the "whole person" can be educated in an Islamic environment (Association of Muslim Social Scientists [AMSS], 2004; Hewer, 2001). This would *presuppose* faith rather than treating it as something extraneous to education and external to its major objects (Ashraf, 1990). Secondly, and through an interpretation of Islam which posits that "after puberty boys and girls should be separated" (Hashmi, 2002, p. 14), there is a concern to develop "safe" environments for post-pubescent children, and in this regard single-sex schooling undoubtedly appeals (Hewer). According to A. Trevathan, however, this need not be an expression of separatism, since "in many ways the community want their children to be raised in a safe environment but still aspire to what successful people aspire to in the west" (personal communication, March 6, 2006), namely social mobility through education. A third factor concerns the current lack of specialist training in the Islamic religious sciences in conjunction with general education, so that young people might "be educated to serve their communities as potential religious leaders" (Hewer, p. 518). This includes the desire to have more British-trained theologians who can discuss theological issues with a contemporary resonance to the lived experiences of being Muslim in England. Fourthly, in order to impart more accurate knowledge of Islamic civilizations, literature, languages, and arts (both past and present), there is a desire to see more aspects of Islamic culture embedded within the teaching and ethos of school curricula that are otherwise normatively couched within a Christian-European tradition. Finally, there is the concern over the lower educational attainment of Bangladeshi and Pakistani boys in particular, and the belief that greater accommodation of religious and cultural difference will help address this low achievement and prevent further marginalization.

The debate on the creation of Muslim schools in France

We can contrast this situation with the experience of Muslim schools in France. Private schools include around 2 million pupils, that is, 17% of all pupils, more precisely 13% of the pupils in primary school and 21% of the pupils attending secondary or high school. Almost all these private schools are under contract with the State. The "contract of association" was created by the 1959 Debré Act and at that time involved only Catholic schools. These private schools under contract with the State must respect the national curriculum. Their teachers are paid by the State. These schools also receive a contribution from the local authority, proportionate to the number of pupils. Today, about 95% of the private schools under contract with the State are Catholic, though many Jewish schools have also agreed to enroll about 26,000 pupils. Some schools are open to all denominations, yet to this day there is only one state-sponsored Muslim school: the primary school Taalim-al-Islam located in the French overseas territory La Réunion (opened in 1990). The private Muslim schools in existence are located in Aubervilliers, near Paris (L'école de la Réussite, a secondary school, opened in 2001), Lille (the Averroès high school, created in 2003), and Décines, near Lyon (the Al-Kindi secondary and high school, opened in 2007). An agreement of state sponsorship for these schools is expected in the near future, which would also offer a formal recognition of the legitimacy of Muslim schools among the other faith schools.

Each new Muslim school project is subject to intense debate, and the creation of the first Muslim high school, Averroès, in Lille, offers a good illustration of the symbolic and practical role played by these schools. As summed up on the school's website:

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The idea of the creation of a private Muslim high school was born in 1994 following the exclusion of 19 veiled young girls from the Faidherbe high school in Lille. The mosque Al Imane, located in South Lille, then called the leaders of Muslim organizations to gather in order to cater for these young girls.

(Averroès High School, n.d.)

The school was refused permission three times by the state authorities before being allowed to open. At its opening in 2003, 83 pupils, mostly girls, were enrolled. In the same way, the project of creating a secondary and high school in Décines, near Lyon, faced several refusals from the local state authorities. Finally, the Highest Council for Education (Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation) took a decision against strong opposition from the local representative of the Ministry of Education, which was using issues such as the security of the building to refuse authorization. The Al-Kindi school finally opened in 2007. Today it enrolls 200 pupils, attending mixed classes. The school's website presents the creation of the school as triggered by a context of "crisis in the public school," crisis in terms of school performance but also because of a "focus on a too narrow conception of *laïcité*." The reasons why some parents want to send their children to Muslim schools are not only the expectation of religious education and the right to wear the Muslim headscarf, but also the most common reasons to avoid public schools, such as performance, security, and discipline.

Conclusion

Religious minorities in England are increasingly seeking an expansion of schools with a religious ethos in the state-maintained faith sector. On the one hand this marks a continuation of the provisions available to earlier religious minorities, whilst on the other hand the mobilization for Muslim schooling in particular is not premised solely upon the issue of parity, but also upon the recognition of Muslim particularity in pluralizing faith schooling in England. Simultaneously, in the state comprehensive sector, antiracist and multicultural educational concerns have, while sometimes amounting to internally contested debates, had a continuing impact upon educational policy and discourse. These debates have fed ambiguously into the prescribed unity apparent in the recent introduction and mandatory teaching of citizenship education as a core National Curriculum requirement. The case appears to be more conflict driven in France, where the impact of a very rigid conception of *laïcité*, and a sort of assimilationist backlash at the turn of the millennium, have created an environment that is hostile to the accommodation of religion in the education system. Ethnic diversity itself is seen as a threat against republican values. This context makes it quite difficult to teach issues of immigration and national identity at school in a manner that diverges from the framing encouraged by a prevailing ethno-national ideology. Schools are therefore the main agencies in reproducing an exclusive French national identity. The debates around the history of slavery, colonialism, and immigration have challenged the prevailing republican ideology, but their outcome remains ambiguous. To this end, and despite the recent trends, France and England continue to represent two contrasting cases in Western Europe.

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