

Integration of immigrants in France: an historical perspective

Jacques Barou

Summary

For a long time, the integration of immigrants in France appeared to be successful. However, in recent years we have noticed a growing difficulty for migrants and their descendants to find their place in the receiving society, irrespective of the policies implemented by socialist or conservative governments. The so-called French republican model of integration has partly become ineffective. An analysis of the concept of integration as it was defined by Durkheim at the end of the nineteenth century and a look at what the process of integration has been in the recent history shall help us to understand why integration policy has been relatively ineffective. Such policy was developed recently following the partial failure of policies of social integration and cultural assimilation. After becoming effective, the main paths towards integration were seriously weakened by two decades of crisis. The employment market has created a lack of job security and social exclusion. The educational system seems less and less able to convey moral values and common secular rules at the same time as it offers unequal chances of success and social advancement. Growing residential segregation and its ethnic dimension strengthen these negative trends.

However, immigrants and their descendants who enjoy a favourable environment succeed in integrating into society and sharing chief republican values. Thus, the process of integration seems largely independent of integration policy but it remained strongly dependant on the local context and on its economic, social and cultural dimensions

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A paradoxical situation

France has always been a country of immigration. Almost all the descendants of the immigrants who came in the past decades – Poles and Italians before the Second World War, Spaniards and Portuguese in the 1950s-1960s, North-Africans in the 1960s, Asian and West-Africans in the 1970s-1980s – are now French citizens. According to the 2006 census, 25% of French citizens had at least one parent or grand-parent who had been an immigrant to France (INSEE, 2008). At first sight, the integration of the immigrant has been successful.

However, in recent years we have noticed a growing difficulty for migrants and their descendants to find their place in the receiving society, whatever the policies implemented by socialist or conservative governments are. The so-called French republican model of integration has partly become ineffective. Basically it seems to be an economic problem: unemployment is high in France (around 9% in 2010) and particularly high for the less qualified workers, among whom many immigrants (around 30% for Algerian immigrants). But there are also problems of discrimination concerning children of immigrants born in France, even when they are relatively skilled. Black and Arab youngsters are the leading victims of racism when seeking a job and, if they can afford it, when seeking to rent a flat. They have a life of constant frustration and humiliation.

The problem also has urban and educational dimensions. We can notice the persistency of residential segregation obstructing multiethnic cohabitation. The schools settled in these neighbourhoods have very low success rates and many pupils drop out the education system without any diploma. So we can wonder whether in such areas the “republican school” is still able to produce patterns of socialization in keeping with the rules and values of French society. The urban riots of November 2005 can be seen as the most visible sign of the French

failure to integrate its immigrated minorities. Today, the researchers who studied these riots agree to consider they were essentially social and had no religious causes.

At the same time, socio-demographic surveys carried out by the *INED* (National Institute of Demographic Studies) reveal an overall improvement in the living conditions of immigrants and a rising level of education from one generation to the next. Though children and sometimes grandchildren of immigrants are more concerned by unemployment than natives, they are much more skilled and educated than their parents and a significant proportion of them have positions with responsibilities in the economic and the political field. A large part of immigrants are mostly using French and their descendants often no longer speak their language of origin. The way of life and the ambitions of these descendants correspond more and more to those of the other citizens. Furthermore, these surveys show that the immigrants and their descendants share a certain number of common values with the French people and that a significant number of them consider themselves more as citizens of their country of settlement than as members of their country of origin.

These findings are strengthened by the survey published in 2006 by the Pew Research Institute from Washington D.C. It is a comparative study of Muslims in four European countries (France, U.K, Germany and Spain). Firstly it underlines France has the largest Muslim population in Europe (over 5 million).

French Muslims globally expressed the same opinions as Muslims of other European countries about social questions:

Fear of unemployment (84% versus 78% to 83% in the three other countries)

Concerns about their future (38% versus 28% to 48%)

But they differed strongly from the other European Muslims over questions of identity: 42% consider themselves a national citizen first (and not a Muslim first) versus only 7% in U.K 13% in Germany and 3% in Spain.

It seems that Muslims living in France are absorbing the secular ways of their countrymen. A larger majority wanted to adopt national customs rather than being distinct: 78% compared to 41% in U.K, 30% in Germany and 53% in Spain. They agree with the French attitude against “*communautarisme*”, which is sceptical of immigrants’ retreating into and seeking out social solidarity solely within their own ethnic communities.

Thus, there is overall a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, when considered empirically, the integration process works for a large number of immigrants, but on the other hand the normative aspect of the national “model of integration” is rejected by many of them who consider it as a kind of soft assimilation. Politicians and other members of the ruling class often use the word integration as a catchword. So it may be understood as an order to maintain the dominant cultural pattern. This interpretation is far from the real meaning of the concept of integration from a sociological point of view. Thus, it seems necessary to return to the origin of the concept in order to explain both the success of integration of immigrants and its failures.

A concept from Durkheim’s sociology

The concept of integration was firstly elaborated by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), the founder of French classical sociology. Severely criticized during his lifetime, the works of Durkheim are still considered as relevant by contemporary sociologists. His ideas are accepted as the common foundations of empirical work in sociology. The concept of integration is a fundamental one in Durkheim’s theory concerning the social bond. It is present in many of his works from his thesis *La division du travail social*, defended in 1893 to his last book *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (The elementary forms of religious life)* published in 1912. From a general point of view, integration is a process consisting in adding an element to others in order to form a coherent unity. This process answers the

question: how do individuals achieve the prerequisite of all social existence: consensus? The achievement of consensus involves the existence of shared beliefs and practices and the approval of a common purpose. It assumes the existence of a principle of solidarity. Durkheim distinguishes two types of solidarities: mechanical and organic. In the first, individuals differ little from each other. They harbour the same emotions, they hold the same values and they believe the same religion. Society draws its coherence from this similarity. In the second, coherence is achieved by differentiation. Free individuals pursuing different functions are united by their complementary roles. They are interdependent from each other in spite of their differences. For Durkheim, these distinctions are both conceptual and historical. "Primitive societies" and European societies in earlier periods were mechanical. Modern society is organic.

In analysing the nature of contractual relationships as the base of the coherence of modern society, Durkheim discovered that organic solidarity could be maintained only if certain aspects of mechanical solidarity remained. The members of modern society need to hold certain beliefs and sentiments in common. Without these collective beliefs, no contractual relationship based only on self-interest could have any force. If the collective consciousness is too weak, social values will break down. Individuals find themselves without norms in a state Durkheim named "anomie". It is the challenge modern societies have to take up because of their growing heterogeneity. The process of integration will collapse and the social unrest will spread out.

Durkheim illustrated this theory in his well-known survey on suicide (*Le suicide*, 1897). In analyzing statistical data on suicide rates, comparing them with religious beliefs, age, sex, marital status and economic changes, he concluded the rate of suicide was higher among those who are poorly integrated into social groups. To commit a suicide appeared as a symptom of unrest and frustration concerning individuals lacking social support because they did not belong to a well integrated group. Integration is also a feature that characterises a society as a whole. A society is well-integrated if it shows a high degree of coherence and a strong feeling of collective consciousness.

However, he thought the binding character of social bond was to be found in religion. Although he was personally an atheist, Durkheim considered religion as the most efficient way to integrate various individuals into a group marked by a high degree of collective consciousness. He thought that behind religion was society itself and religion's authority was the authority of the society intensified by having been endowed with sacredness. It was the transcendent image of collective consciousness. This concept of collective consciousness, used later by modern anthropology which renamed it "culture", was a permanent concern for Durkheim, not only as a sociologist but also as a citizen involved in the problems of his time. He thought collective consciousness provided both the integration of every individual into society and the coherence of the group itself. At a time when economists underlined growing competition among individuals to satisfy egoist interests and when psychologists described people as mainly prompted by particular impulses, the question of the social bond appeared as a crucial one to maintain the coherence of the society.

In a changing society characterised by industrialisation, urbanisation, rural depopulation and labour migrations, people could lose their orientation. Thus, it was necessary to elaborate new rules and values which could be accepted by everyone to allow a new collective consciousness to emerge.

His main concerns joined those of the public authorities of his time. The leaders of the Third Republic were looking for a new moral order to strengthen the coherence of society. The collective consciousness could appear as a kind of secular religion ensuring the respect of Republican Principles. Only a well elaborated public educational system would be able to spread common values and rules among different individuals who were to live together.

School appeared as the main way to integrate individuals into a coherent society. Logically, Durkheim was appointed in 1902 to a professorship of education at the Sorbonne, and he had a considerable influence on the approach of school curricula.

The role of education

Many researchers agree that national education has been the main pillar of the integration of the descendants of immigrants in France. For a long time, the educational system was successful in providing possibilities of social ascent on the one hand and in conveying the respect of the same moral principles on the other hand. Its role was not only to disseminate basic knowledge but also to form citizens who would respect republican principles.

This dual function was evident to the eyes of a foreign observer. In 1951, Lawrence Wylie, a professor of French civilisation in Harvard, spent one year with his family in Roussillon, a village in Provence. He was very impressed by the efficiency of the educational system and he concluded: "In spite of the apparent rigidity of the curricula, when a child leaves school at fourteen, he has learnt practically all he has to know. He can read fluently. He can write without too many grammatical mistakes. He is able to solve the main arithmetic problems he will meet in his daily life. He has enough notions in History, Geography and civics to stand with regard to his milieu. He is conscious of the moral values held by the society he belongs to."¹ The author was also impressed by the esteem enjoyed by schoolmasters and by the harmony existing between familial education and school education. According to his observations, there was a real consensus among parents and teachers concerning the main objectives of education. Everybody agreed that it was important to know many things and to share values of respect and discipline. Wylie noticed that the best pupils were encouraged by their families and their masters to pursue their studies and that all were particularly well-bred: "In the eyes of an American observer, the children seem incredibly well-mannered....They have above all a proper behaviour in society."²

However, he noticed that the schoolmasters did not take social and cultural differences into account. The son of a poor Spanish immigrant who encountered more difficulties than the children of the leading citizens enjoyed no particular help from the teacher. It was possible to understand why a child had difficulties learning or acquiring self-discipline because of his familial background, but it was not possible to treat him differently. The principle of Republican equality forbade specific treatment.

Behind the success of educational system it was already possible to perceive its faults which were underlined later by sociologists as Bourdieu and Passeron (1964). This system is a way to maintain the existing social hierarchy and it contributes to strengthening the process of social exclusion regarding the most disadvantaged children. Subsequently, the admission of the failure of the school to give children equal opportunities to succeed will explain why public education has partly lost its function of integration.

However, for a long time, the number of children of immigrants who enjoyed a social ascent because of their scholar success was significant enough to hide the role of education in the global maintenance of inequalities. So its function of social and cultural integration was maintained. The acquisition of French culture was attractive because it was linked to social promotion and intergenerational ascent. Many immigrants were illiterate and had no education in their country of origin. French public education was an opportunity for their children and they accepted that their children gradually lost the language of their and adopt French culture.

However we cannot consider the cultural evolution of immigrants' children as the result of a strengthened assimilation systematically associated to a discrediting of their home culture.

¹ L.Wylie, 1979, *Un village du Vaucluse*, Gallimard, Paris, p 97

² IDEM p 109.

They themselves perceived French culture as the common reference in the public sphere and consequently they consider their culture of origin as the dominant reference in the familial and communitarian milieu. François Cavanna, a famous French humorist, is the son of an Italian immigrant. He describes in his autobiography (1978) the daily life in a neighbourhood of the suburb of Paris inhabited by Italian immigrants in the 1930s. He underlines the effectiveness of the school programmes to incite the immigrant's children to share a French identity. He remembers the young Italians considered French history as their own one and adopted the great names of history like Joan of Arc, Louis XIV or Napoleon. He remembers also that they had included in their behaviour an invisible division between the private and public spheres. He mentions the case of two brothers who used to quarrel in their Italian dialect when they were at home and pursued systematically and unconsciously their quarrel in French when they were in the street.

These behaviours evoke Simmel's description of the stranger who is both inside and outside society. They illustrate also his theory of the social circles (1908). Individuals belong to different social circles and from a psychological point of view they are the result of the interactions between these different circles. He agrees with Durkheim when considering that the social division of labour gives much more opportunities to individuals to enrich their personality by developing relations with a larger number of social circles. The purpose of education is to give them the means to enlarge their social networks and not to push them to abandon their primary ones.

If we consider the history of immigrants in France we can observe that their integration is the result of their success in education and in the labour market but is also linked to the resources they could find near their communities.

An invisible process

For many decades during the twentieth century, France received large waves of immigrants, around 300,000 newcomers yearly in the 1920s and in the 1960s. However, nobody seemed worried about their integration. The word, integration was itself rarely used in the press. It appeared rarely in the discourse of politicians. Academics themselves did not refer to the concept of integration about the immigrants. There was no will to develop a policy of integration, probably because there was no need to do so. The process of integration was working by itself. Most immigrants were working in industry or in the building trade and civil engineering. They had been recruited when economic growth was high. They rapidly gained the feeling of belonging to the French working class. Their professional integration insured their social integration and gave them a collective consciousness, thus demonstrating how right Durkheim's and his followers' analyses had been.

They were indeed above all integrated into the working class, which was well organised and took part in French political life through the trade unions and left-wing parties. According to the law, immigrants' children who were born in France automatically became French when they came of age. Various surveys have tended to prove they generally enjoyed a social ascent regarding their parent's condition, essentially because a higher degree of education obtained in public schools (INSEE 2004). Until the end of the 1970s, there was a real phenomenon of intergenerational ascent in the French working class (Verret, 1999) and a large number of immigrants could take advantage of it.

However, some periods of crisis have occurred during the decades of economic growth. The most crucial was the crisis of the 1930s which produced a growth of unemployment and a violent feeling of xenophobia in public opinion and even among the French working class (Schor, 1985). What were the effects of the crisis on the integration of immigrants?

Some of them preferred to leave France because of the economic difficulties and the xenophobic climate. Others were expelled by the government in order to give their employments to French citizens. This was the case with Polish minors in the northern France. Those who had no other place to go relied on their community's solidarity. The Armenians who were refugees from Turkey worked mainly in industry. They developed independent business in handcraft to cope with the decrease in salaried jobs. In their communities, solidarity was still sufficiently significant to support individual and familial initiatives by lending money and giving free help (Hovanessian, 2001). Many small family businesses were created in shoemaking and knitting. Later, some of them became big companies. This case shows the survival of mechanical solidarity in a modern society and its role in the support of integration. Finally, the crisis had been an opportunity for some groups of immigrants by inciting them to join middle classes and to gain a higher degree of social and economic participation.

The 1930s crisis also provoked a political answer to support the integration of immigrants. In 1936, the government of the "Front Populaire" created a Junior Minister Office dealing with the immigrants. Its existence was very brief but it took some important measures to make the obtaining of French citizenship easier (Weil, 1990).

There was no other Ministry in charge of immigration and integration until the mid 1970s, when a new crisis broke out, provoking an increase of unemployment and new difficulties of integration for immigrants.

However, after the Second World War, major changes took place in the recruitment of immigrants. On the one hand, European immigrants, mainly Italians and Spaniards continued to enter France under the same conditions. They gained relatively skilled jobs and their families rapidly joined them.

On the other hand, a specific rule was developed to organise the immigration of Algerian Muslim workers to France. At the time, they had a particular and paradoxical status. They were French citizens, but their social situation was less favourable than that of most foreigners. Many of them were illiterate and unskilled, coming from the poorest rural areas of Algeria. In France they suffered a high rate of unemployment and were often victims of racism. They lived in very poor conditions of housing, frequently in slums.

Aiming to support the development of the rural areas in Algeria, the French authorities decided to encourage a temporary migration of men who would leave their families in their country and would go home some years later with their savings. In France, they would be replaced by other immigrants from Algeria, following the same pattern. This kind of migration was called "*noria*", a traditional water wheel used in Northern Africa (Montagne, 1954) because its objective was not to push the immigrants to settle in France but to help their countries of origin, by sending regular remittances and by coming back with money to invest in local businesses.

This specific organisation did not prevent the definitive settlement of Algerians in France and the coming of their families. However it contributed to delaying it. However, its influence remained after the independence of Algeria and was extended to other African countries. The governments of these countries preferred migrations of workers which produced more transfers of money and more local investments than family migrations, and they did not want their nationals to be too well integrated into French society.

In spite of the official discourses declaring the equality of all the immigrants, we can notice that people from formerly colonised countries received a different treatment than those from Southern Europe and were the target of increased social control. Algerian workers, for instance, were the target of cultural initiatives launched by their consulates through the

network of associations entitled *Amicale des Algériens en Europe*³. The *Amicale* was in charge of controlling Algerian workers' loyalty to the nationalist project of their newly independent country. Activities such as literacy classes, football games or discussions of popular songs were aimed at keeping Algerian workers tied to their community and loyal to the main goal of their stay in France: to work and send money back to their home country in need of foreign currency. The authorities of the country of origin were instrumental in controlling their social and cultural activities. The Algerian consulates, however, along with other official representatives of formerly colonised countries (Mali, Senegal, Morocco and Tunisia) were under close watch by the French State. Suspecting unrest and political opposition, the French government relied on the implementation of social programs in order to compel immigrant workers to live in settlement houses managed by local institutions and to attend literacy classes taught by government run associations.

Such a policy cannot be called an integration policy. Its main objectives were to improve the material situation of the immigrants and to give them possibilities to adapt themselves to life in France. The process of integration by taking part to labour market was not particularly efficient. Many of them had no stable jobs because of their lack of professional qualification. Their unemployment rate has always been higher than average, even during periods of growth. They often held marginal employments in industry and in the services. Thus, they had no particular consciousness of belonging to the working class. Many of them believed they would not spend their whole lives in France and hoped to return to their country of origin with enough savings to create an independent business.

In the mind of the French authorities, in the mind of the governments of their countries and in their own minds, they remained foreigners in France, and the question of their integration was not relevant. The French authorities just offered them possibilities to be more at ease in France and they delegated the social and cultural policies to the consulates and the associations controlled by government of the countries of origin.

Integration, insertion and assimilation

Until the 1980s, there was no real debate about the question of integration among politicians. The French government created a Secretary of State for immigrant workers in 1975. However integration was not its main concern. The Secretary of State was to oversee migration flows, housing issues and cultural matters. No particular change could be noticed in the process of integration.

The immigrants who were well integrated in the labour market became progressively integrated into society. Their feeling they belonged to the working class gave them a social identity, making them feel closer to the common people of France. The immigrants coming from Africa, among them a major part of men living in homes for unmarried men, were considered temporary in France. They spent most of their social life inside their communities. The main contacts they had with French society were contacts with specific social services, sometimes with the trade unions and with militant associations. Those who were living with their families of course had a larger range of relations with French society. However, many of them wanted to go back home to their children. They were encouraged to prepare their return both by the French authorities and by their consulates. Their children provided education in the public schools and follow the same school curricula as all the other pupils. However, they were encouraged to benefit from specific programmes named "*Enseignement des Langues et*

³ Association of Algerians in Europe.

Cultures d'Origine" (E.L.C.O)⁴. These programmes were organised by the French Ministry of National Education in partnership with the authorities of the countries of origin. Their aim was to prepare the immigrants' children for a possible return to the home country. In fact, very few families went back home in spite of the return allowances given by the French authorities under the last government of Raymond Barre (1978-1981). The immigrant's children felt much more at ease in the French educational system than in that of their home country. The programmes "learning language and culture of origin" were severely criticised by education specialists. They forced the immigrant's children to work more than the others. The teachers were appointed by the authorities of the country of origin and they used traditional teaching methods which perturbed the children. Above all, to the mind of many French teachers, such an initiative meant giving special treatment to children of immigrants. It was contrary to the equalitarian principles of the Republican educational system.

Nowadays, the ELCO programmes still exist, mainly because of the pressures of the authorities of the countries of origin, but the pupils with a foreign descent are following them less and less. The failure of such an experiment has strengthened the point of view of those who support the educational system as a central instrument of integration.

The only specific and global policy experienced prior to the 1980s looked like an assimilation policy rather than anything else and it largely failed. It concerned a population with a particularly difficult status. In 1962, at the end of the Algerian war of Independence, the French Army transferred many Muslim soldiers and their families to France. These soldiers, named "*harkis*", an Arabic name meaning auxiliary troops, had fought against the Algerian nationalists. Those who remained in Algeria were slaughtered. The ones who came to France were settled in camps managed by French housing institutions. These camps were often situated in isolated rural areas. Social workers pushed the families to adopt French manners and even to give their children Christian names. The young members of this community were pressed to change their identity. Indeed, they encountered more problems than the children of foreign immigrants, although they were French citizens. Because their parents were generally illiterate, they faced many difficulties at school and they had rare possibilities of social ascent. The distribution of special subsidies, especially in periods of elections, did not push them to gain financial autonomy. The unemployment rate, which was already high among the first generation of these French Muslims, is even higher among their descendants. As they lived often in isolated settlements, they had few opportunities to meet other people. French people often did not know they had French citizenship and they were considered as traitors by the Algerian immigrants. The Algerian Government still today forbids the *harkis* to come back in their native land. The situation of their children and grandchildren is particularly uncomfortable. For a long time, they had been pushed to become culturally French and at the same time they felt socially excluded.

This contradictory situation was particularly difficult to go through, and many researchers have underlined the psychological problems of youngsters belonging to the *harki* community. Consequently, it was not a surprise to find many of these youngsters among the ones who took part in the first urban riots in the eastern suburbs of Lyon at the beginning of the 1980s. Such events contributed to reopening the debate about the future of the children of immigrants in France and to stir up the question of integration. In addition, at the time these riots occurred, a new government dominated by socialists was just taking power. It was the right opportunity to discuss an issue that was gaining in importance in the French context.

⁴ Teaching home language and culture

Constructing an integration policy

The first urban riots took place in areas with many large buildings of public housing, many jobless people and a high rate of juvenile delinquency. These areas harboured concentrations of all the social problems produced by the economic crisis. Immigrant families were numerous in such places, but no researcher considered these areas as ethnic ghettos. People from different origins lived there and no community was dominant. Academics and politicians agreed that the problem was above all a social one. In 1982, a new policy was created in order to improve the daily life of the inhabitants of the areas concerned by social unrest. This policy did not target any specific group but the whole area. The purpose was to make these districts similar to any other district and to give their inhabitants the possibility to enjoy the advantages of living in a well-ruled city. The objective was to make all their negative aspects disappear: poor architecture, lack of public facilities, unemployment, delinquency, violence, poor performances at school and so on. Called "*Politique de la Ville*", this policy has been underway for thirty years, irrespective of the governments in power. It may be considered as the hard core of integration policy. However, according to the Republican principle of equality, it never underlines the origin or the ethnic appurtenance of the inhabitants of the concerned areas.

At the same time, the public authorities decided to define a model of integration corresponding to the new context. In 1990, the government created a "High Council for Integration", whose members were academics, politicians, militants and important persons of immigrant descent. One year later, the Council published a book resulting from numerous discussions and hearings of specialists

This definition of a French model of integration in 1991 reflects the evolution described above. First, it rejects the experience of assimilation connected to the post colonial period and to the failure of the policy concerning the *harkis*. Second, it takes a step against the 1970's model of insertion that asserted that immigrants could maintain their cultural identities within French society, which was associated with a policy of return. It is defined as such: "Integration is not a middle-way in between assimilation and insertion but a process where the active participation in the national society of varied and different elements is encouraged"⁵. The latest definition given by the High Council for Integration in 2005 operates in the same framework: "Neither assimilation, nor insertion, integration refers to the participation of all French people, not only French people of immigrant origins"⁶. The republican myth of citizenship has been called upon extensively to justify the definition of the French model of integration (Favel, 1998). As a result, there is a major discrepancy between a political discourse holding to the principle of equality justifying that few efforts should be made to acknowledge diversity, and administrative officials, local authorities and social workers who have resorted to specific treatment when faced with diverse issues related to immigration.

The High Council had simply forgotten that the ways that allowed for participation of immigrants in national society had been in crisis for a long time. Firstly, the changes in industrial methods abolished many unskilled employments and created a much lower number

⁵ « L'intégration n'est pas une voie moyenne entre l'assimilation et l'insertion, mais un processus spécifique, par lequel il s'agit de susciter la participation active à la société nationale d'éléments variés et différents » HAUT CONSEIL A L'INTEGRATION. *Pour un modèle français d'intégration*. Paris : La Documentation française, 1991.

⁶ « L'intégration n'est pas l'assimilation ou l'insertion, mais la participation de tous, et non seulement des Français issus de l'immigration, à l'espace public de la communauté nationale » HAUT CONSEIL A L'INTEGRATION. *Bilan de la politique d'intégration 2002-2005*. Paris : La Documentation française, 2005

of skilled jobs, involving a degree of education and professional qualification the immigrants rarely had. Consequently, many immigrants can just live on social benefits and precarious jobs. They can only convey a poor cultural capital to their children. At the same time, the representative organisations of the French working class have lost their influence in the social and political fields. The French Communist Party, which for a long time was the standard bearer of the working class, has been considerably weakened. Today, French workers express their dissatisfaction by voting for the extreme right wing. The divisions have never been so hard between French workers, among them a large number of persons of immigrant descent and immigrants more recently settled in France. They cannot feel a collective consciousness of belonging to the working class and they prefer to withdraw into their ethnic or religious communities.

The educational system is no longer able to ensure a relative equality of chances of success to every pupil. There is a growing disharmony between school education and the family education implemented by parents belonging to traditional cultures of Africa. In particularly deprived areas, performances at school are much poorer than average, discipline is no longer applied and the school cannot convey moral values or common rules allowing for cohesion in local society. Illegal and even criminal activities appear to some youngsters as the most profitable way of earning money. The state of “anomie”, particularly feared by Durkheim is on its way to becoming reality.

Conclusion

The cases mentioned below are extreme. However they prove the inability of integration policy to succeed when ways of ensuring the coherence of the society are partly weakened by economic and social changes. It is always necessary to prevent the breaking up of social norms produced by such changes. This was the purpose of integration policy. However, integration policy was probably developed too late and has not found the right ways to succeed. Its failure is particularly dramatic in its most emblematic field, the deprived areas policy.

External aspects of these districts have been considerably improved. However the process of residential segregation has increased in France over the last decades in spite of various social and urban policies initiated to counter this phenomenon. It concerns not only the underclass but also the upper middle classes. To live in an area inhabited by people belonging to high or low social capital gives you access to good or bad education. To live here or there is linked to the stakes of social reproduction. Social segregation increasingly has an ethnic dimension because of difficulties related to sharing the same environment with different groups in an atmosphere of conflicts. Today, real ghettos exist in France (Lapeyronnie, 2008). People are seeking to build an order governing their relations by using values existing in the dominant local culture or subculture. Consequently, the future of people will depend on the social resources existing in their surroundings. In some areas, the relationship can be only governed by violence and those living in such places cannot hope to find any social advancement. The question of integration has no meaning for them. People living in a place mainly inhabited by persons sharing only social difficulties will develop social behaviours which are too different from those which determine relations in society as a whole.

To the contrary, people who live in an area where they can encounter diverse components of society as a whole can enjoy opportunities to assimilate dominant cultural codes and to share values opening up possibilities for them to achieve social advancement. We can observe this phenomenon even among immigrants who have recently settled in France, such as Sub-Saharan Africans (Barou et al, 2011). Thus, the process of integration seems largely independent of the integration policy but it remained strongly dependant on the local context and on its economic, social and cultural dimensions.

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